
THE EFFECT OF FLIPPED INSTRUCTION ON DEVELOPING PARAGRAPH WRITING ABILITY OF EFL LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

The present study was an attempt to examine the effect of flipped instruction on writing ability by Iranian intermediate EFL learners. To perform this study, 132 Iranian EFL learners studying English in Safir Language Institute in Tehran were selected. They took the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) and 74 intermediate-levels were non-randomly assigned into two equal groups (one experimental and one control group). Then, the whole population of the present study was asked to write a descriptive paragraph to show their writing ability before the treatment sessions. During the treatment, in order to implement flipped instruction to the experimental group, video lectures were recorded ahead of time by the researcher and uploaded for public viewing on Telegram and Instagram. On the other hand, the learners in control group received the institute instruction of paragraph writing. In other words, they did not receive any flipped instruction on paragraph writing. Having finished the treatment, the whole population was supposed to write a descriptive paragraph to show their writing ability after the pre-designed instructions. Data were analyzed through a series of paired and independent samples t-tests. The obtained results revealed that flipped instruction did have statistically significant effect on developing writing ability of Iranian intermediate EFL learners. In other words, flipped instruction was more effective than conventional instruction in improving the EFL learners' paragraph writing ability.

Keywords

EFL, flipped instruction, writing ability, quasi- experimental design.

1.Introduction

The process of communication by the use of English is primarily based on the main skills of a language (i.e., speaking, listening, reading and writing). Learning language skills have important roles in learners' communication in the real world (Brown, 2007). Among skills of English language, writing is considered as a vital component in language learning. Writing is very important for students how to learn it and how to use it. It is obvious that for students, writing is a means of recording and reformulating knowledge and developing ideas. It may also be a means of personal discovery, of creating, and of self-expression. According to Richards and Schmidt

(2010), "writing is viewed as the result of complex processes of planning, drafting, reviewing and revising and some approaches to the teaching of first and second language writing teach students to use these processes" (p. 641). Writing ability is one of the four main skills of learning a language. This important ability is the way to put words together to convey the meaning through those words. Writing is claimed to play an important role in one's intellectual development and career preparation (Gere, 1985). Öz (2006) stated that "writing is the written expression of thoughts, desires, emotions, and schemes; and this requires skill rather than knowledge" (p. 251). So to speak, writing is a skill that serves individuals' communication needs as well as their learning. As

writing skills of students develop, they begin to apply their knowledge to the written expression more and more easily and go beyond what they have learnt (Raimes, 1983). According to Dyson (1995), writing is not merely an individual activity but a process which requires social interaction.

Writing is a problematic skill among the four language skills for language students. According to Luchini (2010), writing skill is a challenging task because it necessitates a wide range of cognitive, interpersonal, and linguistic strategies of which EFL students are mostly unaware. Langan (2005) argued that writing is a very complex skill including different stages and sub-processes including discovering and developing a thesis, organizing, revising, and editing what is written to have an effective, error-free piece of writing. Similarly, EFL/ESL writing is regarded as a difficult, complex and challenging process (Alsamadani, 2010). Writing is a vital ingredient in critical thinking instruction, since it stimulates greater self-reflection and the taking of broader perspectives than does oral expression (Wade, 1995). According to Wade (1995), appropriate written assignments can promote classroom writers to boost their active learning. According to White and McGovern (1994), writing is a self-critical one. It lends itself to the kind of introspection that would prompt learners to reflect on their understanding, and to communicate their feelings about what they know, what they are doing, what they are struggling with, and how they are experiencing their learning.

Based on the importance of writing in the process of second/foreign language learning, the present study was designed in order to explore the effect of flipped teaching on Iranian EFL learners' writing ability. In order to improve language learners' achievement in second/foreign language (L2) learning, using technology should be taken into consideration by teachers and educators. The use of technology seems to be an indispensable part of educational settings and language teaching is no exception. English language teachers seem to be increasingly using new technologies to make their lessons more attractive. Video, one of those technologies, is an effective teaching tool if/when used properly (Hartsell & Yuen, 2006; Shephard,

2003). Teachers all over the world have been using videos to support their instruction. Video lectures which seem different from using videos in the classroom is not a new concept; however, the technology used in the production, editing and distribution of these videos are easier for the teachers with the rapid developments in technology (Whitley-Grassi & Baizer, 2010).

Among the available and seemingly various useful instructional methodologies and strategies for teaching writing, flipped instruction was selected. According to Whitley-Grassi and Baizer (2010), flipped instruction is an educational model in which the usual lecture and homework components of a course are upturned. Short video lectures are viewed by learners at home before the class session, while in-class time is devoted to exercises and projects. The video lecture is often seen as the key component in the flipped approach, such lectures being either created by the teacher and posted online or selected from an online source. While a prerecorded lecture could surely be a podcast or other audio format, the ease with which videos can be accessed and viewed today has made it so ubiquitous that the flipped model has come to be identified with it. The notion of a flipped classroom draws on such concepts as active learning, student engagement, hybrid course design, and course podcasting. The value of a flipped class is in the repurposing of class time into a workshop where learners can ask about lecture content, test their skills in applying knowledge, and interact with one another in hands-on activities. During class sessions, instructors function as coaches or advisors, encouraging students in individual inquiry and collaborative effort (Shephard, 2003).

2. Literature Review

The simplest definition of the flipped classroom is given by Lage et al (2000), "inverting the classroom means that events that have traditionally taken place inside the classroom now take place outside the classroom and vice versa" (p.32). The notion of a flipped classroom draws on such concepts as active learning, student engagement, hybrid course design, and course

podcasting (Whitley-Grassi & Baizer, 2010; Shephard, 2003). The value of a flipped class is in the repurposing of class time into a workshop where students can inquire about lecture content, test their skills in applying knowledge, and interact with one another in hands-on activities. During class sessions, instructors function as coaches or advisors, encouraging students in individual inquiry and collaborative effort. A flipped (or inverted) classroom is a specific type of blended learning design that uses technology to move lectures outside the classroom and uses learning activities to move practice with concepts inside the classroom. Richer, open-ended problem-solving experiences can be conducted within the classroom environment to allow for more engaged pedagogies (Kellogg, 2009; Strayer, 2012). Although the potentials for the flipped classroom are great, there exist inherent challenges that must be addressed. Relying on previously viewed instructional videos promotes the risk of students attending class with significantly different levels of engagement. This risk is irrelevant in a conventional classroom as the material is assumed to be totally new to students, but if the class work requires knowledge from a previous activity such as watching an online video, this risk seriously jeopardizes students' success in class (Novak, 2011). Lage and Platt (2000) studied the flipped classroom using an undergraduate economics class. Students were given multiple methods of learning major concepts outside the classroom; students could read a textbook, view a PowerPoint presentation, or watch a video lecture online. The goal was to allow students to choose the learning methodology that best fit their individual learning style. Lage and Platt found that students enjoyed the flipped classroom more than the traditional classroom. Large and Platt concluded that students were more positively geared toward the flipped classroom. In an inverted classroom, students generally enjoy working together and learn from having other students explain concepts in different ways. Students are more comfortable asking questions in class because of the many opportunities for one-on-one interaction with the instructor. This interaction is beneficial in two ways: the student is able to resolve any confusion

immediately, and the instructor is able to monitor performance and comprehension. Marcey (2011) studied a flipped classroom similar to this study at California Lutheran University. Two sections of an undergraduate introductory Biology lecture course were run in parallel; one section was taught using the traditional method, with lectures delivered during class, readings assigned in a textbook, and access to lecture graphics/slides provided via the online syllabus. The flipped section lacked both required reading assignments and in-class lectures. Instead, students were assigned online cinematic lectures for viewing outside of class. In class, students were broken into small groups and engaged in active learning assignments. The material covered was the same for both sections and assessments of learning were identical quizzes and examinations. The flipped-class students performed significantly better on all tests and quizzes.

Flipped classroom instruction was proposed as a part of a blended learning wherein a shift of paradigm is occurred from the role of students as mere receivers of knowledge and teachers as providers of knowledge to a new role wherein students have control over 'time, place, path and/or pace' (Staker & Horn, 2012) and are engaged in active learning (Hamdan, Mcknight, Mcknight, & Arfstrom, 2013) and teachers are supporters of learning (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). The idea of flipped classroom, first known as inverted classroom emerged by using video lessons in chemistry classrooms by Jonathan Bergmann and Aaron Sams (2012). During their classes, they used recorded class lectures and provided them online so that students can watch and review the materials more easily (Bergmann & Sams, 2012).

The most commonly cited creators of the flipped model are Jonathan Bergmann and Aaron Sams when they flipped their high school chemistry classes in 2007" (The Flipped Classroom, 2011). Though not commonly practiced before, some of the fundamental concepts of the flipped classroom have been around since the 1990's (Lage, 2000). Bergmann and Sams (2007) flipped their classes and found

that their students' test scores improved. They began spreading their findings and developed a non-profit organization to assist other teachers in the process of flipping their classrooms. In only a few short years, their website, flippedlearning.org, reported that they grew to have over 22,000 registered users who are actively flipping their classroom.

The flipped learning is rooted in socio-constructivist theories of education and active learning, but also includes and values educational media for content delivery. According to Hamdan et al., (2013), the flipped classroom approach has progressed from key researchers in the field of study such as King (1993), Mazur (2009), Lage, Platt, and Treglia (2000), Baker (2000), Tenneson and McGlasson (2006), Strayer (2007), Khan (2012), and Bergmann and Sams (2012) who have based their flipped classes on theories of active learning, blended learning, differentiated instruction, and community inclusion, seeking to synthesize these theories in the flipped learning.

Eric Mazur played an important role in the progress of concepts influencing flipped teaching through the development of an instructional strategy he called peer instruction. Mazur published a book in 1997 outlining the strategy entitled, *Peer Instruction: A User's Manual*. He found that his approach which moved information transfer out of the classroom and information assimilation into the classroom allowed him to coach students in their learning instead of lecture.

In 1993, Alison King published "From Sage on the Stage to Guide on the Side". In the article, King focuses on the importance of the use of class time for the construction of meaning rather than information transmission. While not directly illustrating the concept of "flipping" a classroom, King's work is often cited as an impetus for an inversion to allow for the educational space for active learning.

Lage, Platt and Treglia published a paper entitled "Inverting the Classroom: A Gateway to Creating an Inclusive Learning Environment" (2000) which discusses their research on flipped classrooms at the college level. In their research focusing on two college economics courses, Lage, Platt, and Treglia assert that one can leverage the class time that becomes available from the

inversion of the classroom (moving information presentation via lecture out of the classroom to media such as computers or VCRs) to meet the needs of students with a wide variety of learning styles. The University of Wisconsin-Madison deployed software to replace lectures in large lecture-based computer science course with streaming video of the lecturer and coordinated slides.

Perhaps most recognizable contributor to flipped classroom is Salman Khan. In 2004, Khan began recording videos at the request of a younger cousin he was tutoring because she felt that recorded lessons would let her skip segments she had mastered and replay parts that were troubling her. Salman Khan founded Khan Academy based on this model. For some, Khan Academy has become synonymous with the flipped classroom however these videos are only one form of the flipped classroom strategy.

The Wisconsin Collaboratory for Enhanced Learning has built two centers to focus on flipped and blended learning. The classroom structure houses technology and collaboration-friendly learning spaces, and emphasis for those involved in the program is placed on individualized learning through non-traditional teaching strategies such as flipped classroom.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

The total sample of the present study included 132 Iranian EFL learners studying English as a foreign language who were conveniently sampled from Safir Language Institute in Tehran, Iran. The female students were all Persian native speakers. The learners varied in age from 14 to 21 years old with the mean age of 17.5. Most of the EFL learners studied English for an average period of 2 to 2.5 years, mainly through private language institutes such as, Shokouh, and Shokouh in Tehran. In order to choose a homogenous sample, Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was administered to the whole population of this study. From the sample, 74 EFL learners who obtained a score between 30-46 on the OPT were considered as the intermediate learners and participated in this study and the others who took high or extremely low scores on the test were excluded. Then, the participants were randomly divided into two equal

groups, namely one experimental and one control groups. Each group consisted of 37 EFL learners.

.Instruments 3.2

In the present study, two instruments were utilized to investigate the effect of flipped instruction on developing paragraph writing ability which is put forth as follows:

3.2.1. OPT

The OPT was administered among participants to estimate their homogeneity level. It is a placement test for homogenizing the whole population of the study as intermediate EFL learners. The test helped the researcher to make sure if all of the participants were in intermediate level of proficiency. The OPT helps language teachers quickly measure a learner's general language ability so they can place him or her into the appropriate level class for a language course. The OPT shows that language learners have mastered the basics of English and have practical language skills for everyday use. After consultation with many teachers to assess the learners' knowledge of language as well as their receptive and productive skills, the placement test was administrated. The OPT was used to measure the learners' general language ability so they could be placed into the appropriate level for the research. It is the test of language proficiency presented by Oxford University Press, Local Examination Syndicate which provides tutors with a reliable and time-saving technique for determining the proficiency level of a learner. This test consists of 60 items in two parts: Part one with the first 40 multiple-choice items and part two with 20 multiple-choice items. The researcher piloted the OPT before the main administration. After piloting the test on 15 EFL learners different from the participants of this study, reliability of the test was estimated through KR- 21 formula as ($r=0.802$).

3.2.2. Writing Scoring Rubric

The pretest and posttest were scored in accordance with the table taken from Testing and Assessment Webinar (2013).

3.3. Procedure

In order to conduct the research study, the following steps were taken:

Step 1: Administering the OPT as Homogenization

In order to homogenize the participants of the study, 132 EFL learners were given an Oxford Placement Test. In other words, to determine the participants' proficiency level and to have homogeneous groups and real-intermediate level students, OPT was administered. This homogeneity test revealed that language learners had mastered intermediate level. The participants had 30 minutes to answer the test's items. After administering the placement test, 74 learners who get the band score of OPT were considered as the intermediate learners since their scores were between 30 and 46. Then, the homogenized students were divided into one experimental group (flipped group) and one control group (traditional group). Each group consisted of 37 EFL learners.

Step 2: Administrating the Paragraph Writing as Pretest

The whole population of the present study was asked to write a descriptive paragraph to show their writing ability before the treatment sessions. Each candidate had 15 minutes to write a paragraph in accordance with the suggested topic by the researcher. The researcher piloted the test before the main administration. After piloting the test on 7 EFL learners different from the participants of this study, reliability of the test was estimated through KR- 21 formula as ($r=0.747$).

Step 3: Treatment for Experimental Group

The treatment sessions for the experimental group lasted 12 sessions. Each session lengthened for 60 minutes. In order to implement flipped instruction to the experimental group, video lectures were recorded ahead of time by the researcher and uploaded for public viewing on Telegram and Instagram. These lectures involved the teacher presenting information with screen capture of a whiteboard lesson. In these lectures, the teacher presented effective instructions for writing a good descriptive paragraph (Khabiri, & Rouhani-Tonekboni, 2009):

Step 1: Decide the Topic of Your Paragraph

Before you can begin writing, you need to know what you are writing about. First, look at the writing prompt or assignment topic. As you look at the prompt, note any key terms or repeated phrases because you will want to use those words in your response.

Step 2: Develop a Topic Sentence

Before writing a paragraph, it is important to think first about the topic and then what you want to say about the topic. Most often, the topic is easy, but the question then turns to *what* you want to say about the topic. This concept is sometimes called the controlling idea.

Step 3: Demonstrate Your Point

After stating your topic sentence, you need to provide information to prove, illustrate, clarify, and/or exemplify your point.

Step 4: Give Your Paragraph Meaning

After you have given the reader enough information to see and understand your point, you need to explain why this information is relevant, meaningful, or interesting.

Step 5: Conclude

After illustrating your point with relevant information, add a concluding sentence. Concluding sentences link one paragraph to the next and provide another device for helping you ensure your paragraph is unified. While not all paragraphs include a concluding sentence, you should always consider whether one is appropriate.

Step 6: Look Over and Proofread

The last step in good paragraph writing is proofreading and revision. Before you submit your writing, look over your work at least one more time. Try reading your paragraph out loud to make sure it makes sense.

The teacher's face might be visible on screen with talking to the students. The style of the videos varied based on the teacher's time limits and preferences for a specific lesson. The first video of each unit was broader in the content that was covered to give an overview of what was going to be studied in the unit. The students were notified of which videos to watch by the teacher announcing it in class, as well as posts on the whiteboard and on the class calendar online. Students in the flipped class were required to watch the video lectures at home before coming to class the next day.

At the beginning of class, the instructor led a class discussion, beginning with answering any questions the students had. The instructor was careful not to simply review the material in the video lesson again. The purpose of the discussion

was not to give a complete review of the topic covered but to get feedback on what was not understood, or to give deeper explanations. Students then completed their "homework" in class in groups or partners with the teacher available for help, as well as perform demonstrations of the concepts taught in the video.

Step 4: Treatment for Control Group

Similar to the experimental group, the treatment sessions for control group lasted 12 sessions. Each session lasted 60 minutes. The learners in control group received the institute instruction of paragraph writing. In other words, they did not receive any flipped instruction on paragraph writing. Each session, the learners were asked to write a paragraph based on the suggested topic by the researcher.

Step 5: Administering the Paragraph Writing as Posttest

Having administered the treatment sessions, the whole population of the present study was supposed to write a descriptive paragraph to show their writing ability after the pre-designed instructions. Each candidate had 15 minutes to write a paragraph in accordance with the suggested topic by the researcher. The researcher piloted the test before the main administration. After piloting the test on 7 EFL learners different from the participants of this study, reliability of the test was estimated through KR- 21 formula as ($r=0.795$).

3.4. Design

The ultimate purpose of the current study was to explore the possible effect of flipped instruction on paragraph writing ability of Iranian intermediate EFL learners. In other words, the present study sought to examine the effects of flipped instruction (i.e., the independent variable) on enhancing paragraph writing ability of Iranian intermediate EFL learners (i.e., the dependent variable) via pretest and posttest system. There were two groups in the research study. Hence, it was a quasi-experimental research (non-randomized experimental design) because no random sampling method was used. In this regard, Mackey and Gass (2005) mentioned that "randomization is usually viewed as one of the hallmarks of experimental research. Design types

can range from truly experimental (with random assignment) to what is known as quasi-experimental (without random assignment)" (p. 146).

3.5. Data Analysis

Having collected the raw data from administering the OPT and writing assignments, they were analyzed by the use of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 23 software.

The descriptive data consisting of the mean, the standard deviations and the standard error of means were used to assess the experimental and control groups' paragraph writing ability after the treatment sessions. Moreover, test normality of data using both graphical and numerical methods was run. At last,

a series of paired and independent samples t-tests were used for inferential statistics.

4. Results

In order to carry out the statistical data analysis, the data related to pretest and posttest was classified. Moreover, in order to test the hypothesis of the present study, a series of paired and independent samples *t*- tests were used.

4.1. Reliability

The reliability of the tests (i.e., QOPT, the pretest and posttest) were estimated based on scores from 15 participants similar in characteristics to target participants. All the instruments used in this study demonstrated reasonable degrees of reliability.

Table 4.1: Statistics Related to Piloting of the Instruments of this Study

Instruments	No. of Items	'r'
OPT	60	0.802
Pretest	-	0.747
Posttest	-	0.795

Based on the obtained results from table 4.1, the instruments used in the present study had acceptable range of reliability.

Table 4.2: Normality Test

	Group	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	P	Statistic	df	P
Experimental	Pretest	0.19	37	0.18*	0.99	37	0.11
	Posttest	0.88	37	0.05	0.94	37	0.01
Control	Pretest	0.98	37	0.16	0.94	37	0.14
	Posttest	0.91	37	0.06	0.95	37	0.38

Based on the results shown in Table 4.2, the significance level (sig) of the pretest and

posttest scores of experimental and control groups was greater than the error value 0.05 ($p > 0.05$).

Therefore, it is concluded that the tests' scores had normal distributions.

Table 4.3: Paired Sample t-test for Experimental Group

Paired Differences				t	df	P (2-tailed)
M	SD	SEM	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference			
			Lower	Upper		
PosExp PreExp	4.572	3.350	3.2 4.45	6.31		12.46360.00

Based on the results of Table 4.3, there was a significant difference between the pretest and posttest of experimental group ($t(36) = 12.46, P < 0.05$). The results revealed that flipped instruction did have statistically significant effect on developing paragraph writing ability of Iranian intermediate EFL learners.

Table 4.5: Paired Sample t-test for Control Group

Paired Differences				t	df	P (2-tailed)
M	SD	SEM	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference			
			Lower	Upper		
Post-Con Pre-Con	3.172	5.580	2.25 2.25	4.41		5.14360.06

Based on the results shown in Table 4.5, there was a significant difference between the pretest and posttest of control group ($t(36) = 5.14, P < 0.05$). The results revealed that the conventional instruction (i.e., the treatment for control group) did have a positive effect on improving paragraph writing ability of Iranian intermediate EFL learners. However, the effect was not significant.

4.5. Discussions and conclusion

The obtained results from the data analysis procedure revealed that flipped instruction did have significant effect on writing ability by Iranian intermediate EFL learners. The findings of the present study are in line with Al-Harbi and Alshumaimeri (2016) who tried to apply the

flipped classroom strategy in teaching English grammar to examine its impact on secondary school students' performances, perceptions, and attitudes toward learning English independently. Obtained results revealed that adopting the flipped classroom strategy appeared to play a role in enhancing the students' grammar performances, as the mean score of the experimental group was higher than that of the control group, but this difference was not statistically significant. Moreover, the students' responses to a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews indicated that their attitudes' towards using the flipped classroom strategy in the EFL class were positive.

Similarly, Thaichay and Sitthitikul (2016) investigated the effects of flipped classroom instruction on language accuracy and active learning environment. The researchers found that there was a statistically significant difference in the participants' improved language accuracy, and

their positive attitude toward flipped classroom instruction, particularly in the part of active learning.

The findings of the present study match with Mireille (2014) who the impact of using a flipped classroom instructional method on the writing performance of the twelfth grade Emirati female students was examined. The results showed significant differences between the mean scores in favor of the students in the experimental group. This improvement in the writing performance is attributable to the Flipped Instruction method of teaching. Moreover, students' attitudes towards the flipped instruction proved to be equally positive.

Conclusion

Following the data collection and data analysis procedure, there was a significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores of experimental group in terms of writing ability. In other words, the treatment for experimental group was effective in developing writing ability. On the other hand, there was not a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores of control group in terms of paragraph writing ability. That is to say, the treatment for control group was not so effective in comparison with the one for experimental group in enhancing writing ability of the EFL learners. Moreover, flipped instruction was more effective than conventional instruction in improving the EFL learners' paragraph writing ability. In view of that, flipped instruction did have statistically significant effect on developing writing ability of Iranian intermediate EFL learners.

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