INVESTIGATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SUMMARIZING, NOTE-TAKING, AND OUTLINING ON LEXICAL AND GRAMMATICAL WRITING ACCURACY OF UPPER ELEMENTARY EFL LEARNERS

(Recibido el 03-02-2018. Aprobado el 16-05-2018)

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Abstract. This study investigates the effect of summarizing, note-taking and outlining on lexical and grammatical writing accuracy of upper elementary EFL learners. To achieve the purposes of the study, 67 female students were selected from 93 female students based on their performance on an Oxford placement test and were assigned to three different experimental groups. Two parallel forms of the same test with the same content were devised. At the beginning of the study, the first form was administered to evaluate the existing lexical and grammatical writing accuracy of the students. The same content was taught by the teacher to the three groups throughout the 4-sessions of treatment. Each group received three different types of treatments (summarizing, note-taking, and outlining) with the same material. The three groups received the second form of the test as their posttest. SPSS software was used for statistical analysis. The results revealed that there were significant differences between pretest and posttest of the learners’ lexical and grammatical writing accuracy in the experimental groups, but the experimental group which received note-taking treatment outperformed summarizing and outlining groups in the lexical writing accuracy and the group which received summarizing treatment outperformed note-taking and outlining groups in the grammatical writing accuracy. In other words note-taking and summarizing affect the Iranian upper elementary learners’ lexical and grammatical writing accuracy respectively. Generally, the findings provide support for English teachers to use note-taking to enhance learners’ performance on lexical writing accuracy and also it is recommended to give learners summarizing assignments to improve their grammatical writing accuracy. Additionally textbook writers and syllabus designers can use the findings of the study to write more fruitfully to the learners. The results also work for students who want to find a creative way for self-study to improve their lexical and grammatical writing accuracy.

Keywords. Summarizing, Note-taking, Elementary EFL Learners.
1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the most complex and conventionalized skills. Its importance becomes clearer when teachers try to provide activities in order to help students to achieve their goals and intrinsically motivate them to improve their writing. Writing fosters students’ ability to explain their thoughts and convey their intentions into visible ways. Poor writing may cause a lot of problems; it may lead learners to misunderstand the sentences and the words (Hayes, 2006).

The language quality should be emphasized in writing because lexis and grammar are not separable from meaning, and writers finally will be evaluated based on their writing quality (Hinkel, 2006). Being a skillful writer requires sufficient knowledge of lexicon and grammar (Conboy & Thal, 2006; Dionne et al., 2003) because lexicon and grammar are tied with each other and we cannot separate them. Over the last ten to fifteen years, vocabulary has been considered a component of language proficiency, both in L1 and L2 language acquisition. Knowledge of words is now considered the most important factor in language proficiency and school success, partly because of its close relation with text comprehension. Without knowledge of words, understanding sentences or texts is not possible (Laufer, 1992).

Accuracy plays an important role in the writing process that happens at the last stage of writing process which is the editing stage (Flower & Hayes, 1931). Linguistic proficiency is another important aspect which refers to writing accuracy. Good and poor writers differ significantly in their linguistic proficiency. Lack of grammatical and lexical knowledge may result in poor writing, so writers need to pay more attention to semantic and syntactic aspects of a language. According to Goulden and Nation (1990) an individual’s knowledge of a word should involve both receptive and productive knowledge, all involved features in knowing a word, which contains forms, meaning, and usage. Qian (2002) describes vocabulary as understanding the meaning of the word and the extent to which this knowledge is accessible, but this meaning disregards other features of lexical awareness such as spelling, pronunciation, and syntactic characteristics. He stated the first comprehensive meaning of vocabulary knowledge, which not only contained the syntactic and morphological characteristics but also other features, such as word frequency.

Grammar is another component of a sentence. Poor grammar knowledge results in poor writing. Improvement of grammar could have an important effect on quality of writing, so teaching grammar should be more emphasized (Gahl & Garnsey, 2004). Assigning learners to different types of activities can engage them emotively and cognitively and also increase their potential for writing. Through these activities, they find various strategies to improve their writing. Supplying students with some activities and providing them with sufficient feedback can help them to improve their lexical and grammatical writing accuracy (Chandler, 2003).

Note-taking is one of the writing activities which facilitate learning from text (Wilson, 1999). It is one of the most complex skills in which learners need to comprehend the context either spoken or written and then they can try to select and record the appropriate information which will help them to comprehend. Finally, they could produce the written form (Piolat, Olive & Kellogg, 2005). Note taking should not only be considered a source of providing recorded information, but also can be used in academic contexts. If students could manage their process of learning from text, they could meaningfully manage their writing difficulties (Blanton, 1994).

We can consider note-taking as a kind of transcription in which we use some techniques such as shortening words and using substitution symbols, by activating external memory for later use. The effect of note-taking on the quality and quantity of the learned material is completely approved. Outlining is an effective way in order to enhance writing performance. It can be considered a strategy which effectively improves the quality of writing. This kind of strategy involves the writer in the process of writing cognitively. In order to outline a text, the main idea should be extracted and supporting sentences should be taken into consideration as well (Kellogg, 2008).

Geiser and Studley (2001) and Alber-Morgan, Hessler, and Konrad (2007) believed writing well is a substantial issue for learners and has a significance role for success in the wide range of positions and occupations. For high school students, writing abilities are among the best indicators of success or failure in an educational course and also this ability determines their success in their future occupation.

Samway (2006) studied the role of everyday writing without teacher reflection on the writing of native
speakers of English in Grades 1 and 2. His findings showed significant progress in both grade levels in all aspects of the language such as size, lexis, spelling, and syntactic. It was also revealed, where English was educated as a non-native language, it was not at all specified whether students’ writing could expand with assignments which completely emphasized on output.

Jafari (2012) examined the effect of teamwork along with gender on the writing accuracy of EFL learners. The participants of the study were divided into two experimental and control groups. The experimental group was asked to write in a collaborative manner and the control group was asked to write individually. After participating in four essay writing sessions, they were asked to write on the same subjects and genre. The results showed that the collaborative writing group outperformed the students in the individually writing group. Results also revealed the females outperformed males in the same collaborative group.

Nation (2001) stated, knowing a word was basically knowing the form of a word. Yet, vocabulary understanding might move away from this basic concept. He also stated that acquiring a foreign language basically and greatly was reliant on vocabulary knowledge and vocabulary knowledge was the most fundamental procedure of progressing learners’ knowledge. Vocabulary learning has received great consideration in ESL/EFL studies because the lexical capability is one of the required abilities for L2 and foreign language learners. It means vocabulary knowledge determines a number of learners’ commands over a foreign language.

2. METHODOLOGY

The participants of this study were EFL learners from an English language center in Tehran, Iran. They were 93 female learners ranging from 13 to 17 years old. In order to homogenize the groups and to achieve the goals of this study, the Oxford Placement Test was given to the participants. This proficiency test helped the teachers to determine the level of their students. 67 upper elementary participants, whose scores were within one standard deviation from the mean, were selected.

The researchers randomly divided them into three experimental groups; 24 students for the summarizing group, 23 students for the note-taking group, and 20 students for the outlining group.

To evaluate the learners’ progress on lexical and grammatical writing accuracy, after the treatment sessions, two teacher made tests were devised. The parallel forms of the tests used in the pretest were given to the participants as the post-tests. At the end of the treatment phase, the parallel forms of the tests used in the pretest were given to the participants as the post-test to evaluate the participants’ performance on the lexical and grammatical writing accuracy. The data were collected and then the scores were analyzed to determine the effect of treatments on the three groups.

For statistical analysis, SPSS statistical software was used.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics is provided to present the sample data because the researchers have taken into consideration different variables of the participants. The mean and SD of the learners on the lexical writing accuracy and grammatical writing accuracy for the three groups and their pretest and posttest scores are presented in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summarizing</td>
<td>Lexical</td>
<td>Grammatical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accuracy</td>
<td>Accuracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean/SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarizing</td>
<td>12.54</td>
<td>1.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note-Taking</td>
<td>13.39</td>
<td>1.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlining</td>
<td>12.45</td>
<td>2.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexical</td>
<td>8.83</td>
<td>1.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammatical</td>
<td>8.56</td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean/SD</td>
<td>15.72</td>
<td>1.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarizing</td>
<td>12.83</td>
<td>1.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note-Taking</td>
<td>11.52</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlining</td>
<td>9.75</td>
<td>2.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 1 suggests, the mean score of the learners’ lexical writing accuracy who were taught through summarizing, note-taking, and outlining strategies in their pretest were 12.54, 13.39, and 12.45 and their scores for their posttest rose to 15.12, 16.47, and 13.85, respectively. It means that the summarizing and the note-taking groups had approximately the same performance on their posttest but the note-taking group outperformed the other two groups. The outlining group did not show a dramatic change from the pretest to posttest.

3.2. Testing the first research hypothesis

In order to test the first null hypothesis, the assumptions of ANCOVA were checked. Preliminary checks were made to ensure that there
was no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, homogeneity of variances, homogeneity of regression slopes, and reliable measurement of the covariate.

Table 2. Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for Lexical Writing Accuracy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Partial Eta Squared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corrected Model</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>121.04</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30.336</td>
<td>17.114</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15.104</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15.104</td>
<td>15.104</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>76.889</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>76.889</td>
<td>76.889</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grouping</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>41.000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20.500</td>
<td>7.400</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>2.524</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>121.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. R Squared = .439 (Adjusted R Squared = .433)

The results of this one-way analysis of covariance could be presented as follows:

A one-way between-groups analysis of covariance was conducted to compare the effectiveness of summarizing, note-taking, and outlining on lexical writing accuracy. The independent variable was the type of activities (summarizing, note-taking, and outlining), and the dependent variable consisted of the posttest scores of the learners on the lexical writing accuracy test. The participants’ scores on the pre-test were used as the covariate in this analysis. Preliminary checks were conducted to ensure that there was no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, homogeneity of variances, homogeneity of regression slopes, and reliable measurement of the covariate.

Finally, considering the effect of pre-test there was a significant difference among the groups on lexical writing accuracy test scores. The partial eta squared indicates a very large effect size. There was a strong relationship between the pre-intervention and post-intervention scores on the lexical writing accuracy test, as indicated by the partial eta squared value of .30.

In order to have more investigation on the issue, the researchers used a one-way ANOVA to see the possible differences among the post-test performances of the treatment groups in lexical writing accuracy. In other words a Post-hoc test was conducted to find out the precise location of the differences between summarizing, note-taking, and outlining in EFL learners’ lexical writing accuracy.

Table 3. Tukey Post hoc tests for one-way ANOVA for the post-test scores of lexical writing accuracy

The multiple comparisons among the three groups are presented in Table 4.3. As it is clear in Table 3, the results indicated that there is a significant difference between note-taking and outlining. However, the difference between summarizing and note-taking, and summarizing and outlining groups were not statistically significant.

3.3. Testing the second research hypothesis

The covariate which was the pre-test was measured prior to the treatment. Therefore, the scores on the covariate were not influenced by the treatment. The researchers checked the internal consistency which was a form of the reliability of the scale by estimating Cronbach’s alpha. Correlations among the covariates were not checked because there was one covariate in this research and the researchers checked the reliability of it. The researchers also checked the linear relationship between the post-test and the pre-test for all the groups.

Table 4. Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for Grammatical Writing Accuracy

As it can be seen in Table (4), a one-way between-groups analysis of covariance was conducted to compare the effectiveness of the three different treatments to see the effects on the participants’ grammatical writing accuracy. The independent variable was the type of instruction (summarizing, note-taking, and outlining), and the dependent variable was the post-test scores of the participants. The participants’ scores on the pre-test were used as the covariate in this analysis. Finally, considering the effect of the pre-test there was a significant difference among the groups on the grammatical writing accuracy test scores. The partial eta squared indicated a very large effect size. There was a strong relationship between the pre-test and post-
test scores on the grammatical writing accuracy test, as indicated by the partial eta squared value of .53.

In order to investigate more on the issue, the researchers used a one-way ANOVA analysis to see the possible differences among the post-test performances of the treatment groups in grammatical writing accuracy. In other words, a Post-hoc test was conducted to find out the precise location of the differences between summarizing, note-taking, and outlining in EFL learners’ grammatical writing accuracy. The results are as can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5. Tukey Post hoc tests for one-way ANOVA for the post-test scores of grammatical writing accuracy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(1) grouping</th>
<th>(2) grouping</th>
<th>Mean Difference (I-J)</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval</th>
<th>Lower Bound</th>
<th>Upper Bound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summarizing</td>
<td>Note-taking</td>
<td>1.00000</td>
<td>.00000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note-taking</td>
<td>Outlining</td>
<td>-0.3333</td>
<td>.00000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note-taking</td>
<td>Outlining</td>
<td>1.00000</td>
<td>.00000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*pThe mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The multiple comparisons among the three groups are presented in Table 4.5. As it is clear in Table 4.5, the results indicated that there is a significant difference between the summarizing and note-taking groups, and also between the summarizing and outlining groups (p<.0005). Furthermore, the difference between the note-taking and outlining groups were not statistically significant (p>.05).

4. DISCUSSION

In the data analysis two research hypotheses were tested. The first hypothesis concerned the effect of summarizing, note-taking, and outlining on the upper elementary EFL learners’ lexical writing accuracy. The second research hypothesis dealt with the effect of summarizing, note-taking, and outlining on the upper elementary EFL learners’ grammatical writing accuracy.

The analysis reported by the researchers, showed that the first null hypothesis was rejected. In fact, the upper elementary EFL learners made a significant improvement in their lexical writing accuracy when they were taught through note-taking. However, there was no significant difference between the summarizing and the note-taking groups and between the summarizing and outlining the groups on their performance on the lexical writing accuracy as well. That is, it can be concluded that summarizing and outlining have no significant effect on the learners’ lexical writing accuracy.

Regarding the second research hypothesis, there was a significant difference between the summarizing and the note-taking groups and also between the summarizing and the outlining groups in the EFL learners’ grammatical writing accuracy in the posttest. The EFL learners, who were taught through summarizing, outperformed the note-taking and outlining groups. Therefore, it can be concluded that the second research hypothesis was also rejected. It was found that summarizing had a very important role in increasing the learners’ grammatical writing accuracy. As the result of the study showed, there was no significant difference between the test performances of the learners when they were taught through note-taking and outlining.

All in all, it can be concluded that outlining had the least effect in the improvement of both the lexical and grammatical writing accuracy of upper elementary EFL learners. The results also revealed that note-taking had the highest effect in the improvement of lexical writing accuracy of upper elementary EFL learners. On the other hand summarizing had the highest effect in the improvement of grammatical writing accuracy of upper elementary EFL learners. The findings are to some extent in line with some previous research studies in this area.

In this study, summarizing enhanced the learners’ grammatical writing accuracy more than note-taking and outlining. There are other research studies which are in line with the results of this study. For example, in a research Aida (2014) used summary writing as a tool to teach the students grammar. She asserted that the students had difficulty in their writing due to lack of vocabulary and grammar knowledge. According to her findings students will improve their writing when they summarize reading texts, because in this way they will be familiar with their learning process.

The other research by Shabkheir (2012) showed summarizing model essays meaningfully affected EFL learners’ writing by increasing all aspects of writing particularly grammar, mechanics, fluency, and form in comparison to the control group who only read model essays and could enhance their vocabulary knowledge. He asserted that teachers could persuade learners to summarize model essays to improve their writing which would definitely result in improvement of all aspects of their writing especially grammar. He claimed when students read texts they try to get enough knowledge from the reading and they will acquire grammatical rules as well.

King (1992) asserted that when students use their own words to summarize a text, a connection creates between learners’ prior knowledge, existing knowledge, new information, and also their
experience. This kind of summarization is completely different with the old form of summarization that exists in most summary writing instructions, in which students only choose, erase, and change existing sentences. Being actively involved in such productive self-questioning and summarizing exercises, the learners will be able to create their own clarifications to get meaning of the text. In fact, these students built a better understanding of the text which enhances their performance on the writing.

The study by Kellogg (1988, 2008) indicated outlining provide learners with support for reading and writing. Outlining could be considered an effective way to improve writing quality but the result of our study revealed outlining had the least effect on the lexical and the grammatical writing accuracy of EFL learners. It is noteworthy to mention that the current study’s results revealed that outlining had effect on the learners’ lexical and grammatical writing accuracy but in comparison to the summarizing and note-taking, it had the least effect on the learners’ performance.

There was the research by Smoliar and Baker (1997) whose findings were to some extent in line with the current research. These researchers believed when learners outline the text, they should read it, comprehend it, and then try to write. These three stages enhance learners’ attention on the text which they are reading. On the other hand, they try to comprehend, meanwhile, they concentrate on existing rules. As a result their reading and writing skills will improve along with each other. It is why they confirmed outlining provides learners with support for reading and writing.

Galbraith and Torrance (2004) also showed outlining can be considered as an effective way to improve quality of writing. They believed outlining is an interaction between thinking and producing text. Because when you outline a text, you read it carefully to extract main and supportive ideas. This is a kind of thinking process which attracts learners’ attention to a text profoundly instead of peripherally. When learners try to create an outline, this thinking process provides them with more accurate writing and in this way, the writing quality enhances. In the current research, the findings showed outlining had an effect on the lexical and grammatical writing accuracy which determines the degree of writing quality. But as mentioned earlier this improvement was not dramatic in comparison to summarizing and note-taking’ effects on the performance of the learners.

Spack and Sadow’s (1983) research findings revealed that the students who imitate model essays before writing had better performance on making structured writing than the control group who did not imitate model essays to write. They asserted outlining had a positive effect on the learners’ grammatical writing accuracy. In their research the learners were asked to pay attention to the grammatical aspects of the essay before they outline it. They also were asked to imitate model essays. But in this current research, the learners were not conscious about the process of learning at all. All the participants of the study were involved in the learning process without knowing what the researchers intended to teach them. In other words the findings of these two researchers were in line with the result of the current study but the procedure of the administration is completely different.

The results of the current study are also to some extent in line with some previous research studies in the area of writing but the applied activities is completely different. In this study the researchers tried to use summarizing, note-taking, and outlining not the other parameters to evaluate their effects on upper elementary EFL learners’ lexical and grammatical writing accuracy. There are other researchers who evaluated the other techniques to improve learners’ lexical and grammatical writing accuracy of EFL learners. For example Sotelo and Bueno (2003) in a research found that dialogue-journaling through e-mail improved first semester Spanish college students’ grammatical writing accuracy but not their grammatical writing accuracy. Mateos et al. (2008) showed google Docs had more effect than face-to-face group activities on 15 year old students’ writing. Additionally González-Bueno and Pérez (2000) found electronic mail and paper-and-pencil technique had no effects on Spanish as second language learners’ lexical and grammatical writing accuracy.

5. CONCLUSION

In the present study, the first null hypothesis was rejected. The learners’ lexical writing accuracy can improve through note-taking. That is, there was a good improvement in the learners’ lexical writing accuracy when they were taught through note-taking. Summarizing and outlining enhanced the learners’ lexical writing accuracy as well but the effect of note-taking was more comprehensive than summarizing and outlining. It could be claimed that summarizing, note-taking, and outlining had positive effects on the learners’ lexical writing.
accuracy. Besides, the summarizing group performed better than the outlining group.

Regarding the second research hypothesis and the effect of summarizing, note-taking, and outlining on the EFL learners’ grammatical writing accuracy, there was a significant difference between the performance of summarizing and note-taking groups and also between summarizing and outlining performance in their grammatical writing accuracy posttest. The learners in the summarizing group outperformed the note-taking and outlining groups. It can be concluded that the second research hypothesis was also rejected.

Generally, the researchers concluded that note-taking has an important role in increasing the learners’ lexical writing accuracy. Regarding grammatical writing accuracy, the point is that by teaching summarizing, their mean scores changed to a high degree. In other words, the performances of the summarizing group were better than the note-taking and outlining groups. This finding calls for the need for summarizing instruction to improve learners’ grammatical writing accuracy.

6. SUGGESTIONS

In line with the findings of this research, several suggestions can be made for further investigation. Among them, the researchers wish to emphasize the following:

1. This study can be replicated with a larger number of participants at different language proficiency levels to compare the results across different levels.

2. The same study can be recommended to investigate by using different passages to investigate the same issues.

3. The same study can be carried out with male EFL learners.

4. The length of the course may be critical in gaining results; hence, it might serve purposefully to conduct a similar research through an extended course of instruction and subsequently investigate the results.

5. Another research may investigate the impact of lexical and grammatical writing accuracy on the reading comprehension of young EFL learners.

A study of similar nature can also be done to investigate whether lexical and grammatical writing accuracy knowledge has any significant effect on the overall language achievement of EFL learners on different levels or not.

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