The Effect of Teaching Paragraph Writing in L1 on Iranian Adult EFL Learners' Writing Ability

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Abstract

Despite the importance of writing in ESL/EFL contexts, too many youngsters do not learn to write well enough to meet the demands of school or the workplace. The present study strives to probe into the effect of teaching paragraph writing styles in the first language on the wiring proficiency of Iranian EFL learners. To conduct the study, a quasi-experimental design was used. The participants of this study were 40 male and female language learners learning English as the foreign language at the Oxford language institute in Bojnourd in the Northern Khorasan province of Iran who were divided into experimental and control groups. There was no treatment for the control group, but the experimental group received the treatment in which four types of paragraphs-descriptive, explanatory, contrastive, comparative- were taught in participants' first language (Farsi). After the treatment, a simplified English proficiency test focusing mainly on English writing skill was used to assess the effectiveness of the treatment. Independent t-test results showed a significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups on the posttest of writing ability. As for the gender differences, the results of the independent sample t-test revealed that there is a statistical significant difference between writing proficiency of Iranian males and females EFL learners in terms of making use of first language text structure knowledge. The implications of the study are discussed.

Keywords: Paragraph writing, Writing ability, Language transfer, Iranian adult EFL learners

1. Introduction

Second language writing, as a field of study, has come of age (Hyland, 2015). Formal studies on L2 writing started from (Hinkel, 2002). The extensive literature on L2 writing in 1980s and 1990s led to the emergence of L2 writing as an interdisciplinary field of study (Matsuda, Canagarajah, Harklau, Hyland, & Warschauer, 2003). Writing is considered as one of the most difficult skills to acquire for L2 learners. This is because good writing requires the mastery of cognitive, sociological and linguistic aspects of language. (Zimmerman & Reisenberg, 1997). L2 writing instruction is also a challenging job for language teachers. (Barkaoui, 2007). In the last decades, L2 writing research has focused on studying the composing process of L2 learners. (Cumming, 1998; Hayes & Flower, 1986; Krapels, 1990; Silva, 1993). Drawing on studies on L1 composition process, l2 writing researchers have attempted to investigate various aspects of L2 writing process in different contexts and for different participants. (Sasaki, 2000).

Each of the existing theoretical orientations focuses on a different aspect of L2 writing and conceptualizes the composing process in a different ways (Barkaoui, 2007; Cumming, 2001; Hyland, 2002). Text-oriented research focuses on the textual features of the writings of L2 writers such as orthographic, morphological, lexical, syntactic as well as discourse properties of the texts. For instance, one of the competencies that L2 writers have to acquire is a working knowledge of the different patterns of text organization (e.g., description, narration, argument) (Cumming, 2001).

L2 writing instructors are cognizant of the types of challenges that a writer might face when trying to compose in the L2 (de Gennaro, 2006). L1 rhetorical competence is believed to have positive influence on L2 writing. This is because it is well known among scholars that L1 literacy development shares a common underlying proficiency with L2 literacy. L2 learners possess educational, cultural, and linguistic experiences that might help the transfer of skills to second language learning (Zainuddin & Moore, 2003). Hence, the impact of learners' mother tongue on the target language is one of the most important issues in second or foreign language instruction.

A number of studies have attempted to deal with the effect of learners' L1 writing competence on their present L2 writing. These studies have raised awareness on the importance of the learners' L1 educational and literacy background (Johns, 1997; Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2002, 2008; Liebman, 1992; McKay, 1993), have increased our understanding of learners' L2 writing practice and activities of similar educational backgrounds (Brown & Yamashita, 1995; Gosden, 1996), and have shown us the effect of the mode of instruction on the writing process (Akyel & Kamisli, 1996).

If a composing competence exists, it could naturally be evoked in both L1 and L2, and there would be a high correlation between these two types of writing. Hence, the role of L1 writing ability on L2 writing has been explored by studies on L2 writing process and product. However, recent studies on writing have come up with inconclusive results. For example, Cumming (1989) illustrated that those learners who had "writing expertise" in L1 (French) wrote significantly better in L2 (English) compared to those who did not have such expertise

and they exhibited their expertise in types of writing. However, Carson, Carrell, Silberstein, Kroll, and Kuehn (1990), studying the quality of L1 and L2 writing of Chinese and Japanese students reported no correlation for the first and only weak correlation between writing in the two languages for the second groups of students. Similarly, Pennington and So (1993) investigated Singaporean college student' writing and did not find a clear relationship between L1 and L2 writing.

The existing literature on has illustrated that the composing processes used by skilled writers could be described and used for L2 writing instruction. Moreover, the composing processes of unskilled writers could be examined to find the common features and to provide some guidelines for L2 writing instruction. While many studies have shown the similarities between the writing processes of proficient L1 and L2 writers, there is a research gap with respect to unskilled L2 writers and the way their writing processes differ from those of unskilled L1 writers (Raimes, 1985).

According to Meyer, Brandt, and Bluth (1980), foreign or second language learners who are unfamiliar with text organization and paragraph styles in different paragraph genres are at disadvantage because they do not have any approaches in planning texts. According to Hyland (2007), text features have not typically bean dealt with in teacher education programs preparing teachers for L2 writing instruction (e.g. Matsuda, 2003).

L2 writing literature shows that relevant research is lacking. However, recently some scholars have begun to investigate the effects of text structure knowledge on L2 writing (Carrell, 1985; Duke, 2004). As a result, a variety of pedagogical techniques for the teaching of text structure to improve L2 composing processes have been suggested (Crookes, 1986). In line with current research on writing instruction, some ESL writing teachers have tried to include text structure instruction in their writing syllabi (Leki & Carson, 1997). However, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, there is still no empirical evidence indicating that explicit teaching of text structure has a facilitative effect on EFL writing. To fill the existing gap, the present study strives to probe into the effect of teaching paragraph writing styles, as rhetorical structures, in the first language of Farsi on the wiring proficiency of Iranian EFL learners

To address the objectives of the study, the researcher posed the following research questions:

Q1: Does L1 knowledge of writing styles have any significant effect on foreign language (English) writing proficiency?

Q2: Is there a relationship between gender and foreign language writing proficiency?

1.1 Research Hypotheses

Ho1: There is no relationship between L1 knowledge of writing styles and EFL writing proficiency.

Ho2: There is no relationship between gender and EFL writing proficiency.

2. Literature Review

This chapter is devoted to the presentation of theoretical underpinnings of the study as well as

a review of the related literature rhetorical structures of texts. The chapter begins with theoretical accounts of formal schemata and then goes on to talk about issues such as taxonomies of text structure, a review of research studies and findings on text structure awareness as well as a critical evaluation of the status quo of the existing literature of formal schemata.

2.1 Schema Theory

Schema theory was first proposed by Bartlett (1932). Bartlett suggested that human memory works on the basis of schemas which provide a framework for cognitive processes such as understanding, remembering and applying information. Later, Rumelhart (1980) developed the schema concept which described how knowledge is mentally represented and used in the mind. Schema theory explains how background knowledge that learners bring to the learning situation and what the learner tries to learn interact to complete the learning process (McVee, Dunsmore& Gavelek, (2005).

What we typically call prior knowledge comes in many forms: (a) specific knowledge about the topic of the text; (b) general world knowledge about social relationships and causal structures; and (c) knowledge about the organization of the text (Dole, Duffy, Roheler, & Pearson, 1991). Add to that cultural schematic knowledge and the concept of prior knowledge becomes quite complex (Davoudi & Ramezani, 2014; Demir, 2012).

Referring to the significance of schematic knowledge in writing process, Sun (2014) asserts that as a result of developments in psycholinguistics and artificial intelligence, schema theory has attracted the attention of English instructors and has given birth to a new field in English writing research. So, a great number of researchers and scholars have tried to investigate the relationship between the schema theory and writing in order to suggest recommendations to improve learners' writing ability (Sun, 2014).

According to Carrell (1983), readers' mental stores, or schemata, are divided into three main types: *content schemata*, *formal schemata* and *linguistic schemata*, each of which can affect the reading comprehension skill and the text production in return. Formal schemata represent discourse aspects of texts but linguistic schemata center on the decoding features of text construction (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983). Exposure to organizational structures of the text improves the learners' writing skill and the awareness of the text structures along with their own knowledge prepare them to analyze any text on the base of the text structure and their formal schematic knowledge. Familiarity with developing ideas through paragraphs is another factor requiring instruction by the instructors if they ask their learners to write a coherent piece of text, because foreign or second language learners should know how to develop what they are going to say in the form of paragraphs with a logical arrangement and order. So, EFL instructors should attempt to make their learners acquainted with formal and content schemata prior to asking them to them write any academic text.

2.2 L1 Writing vs. L2 Writing

Until the 1980s, L1 research findings and theories were the major foundation for L2 writing instructors, because there was such a belief that theoretical issues and criteria in L1 writing

could be applicable in L2 composing, and the stress was mainly on the similarities between native and non-native writings. For example, Kroll (2003) asserts "for those engaged in teaching second language writing, what is needed is both a firm grounding in the theoretical issues of the first and second language writing and an understanding of a broad range of pedagogical issues that shape classroom writing instruction" (p. 25). Silva (1993) demonstrates that the processes of writing in L1 and L2 is recursive and include planning and revising to develop ideas and ways to express them; hence, the composing process patterns are the main similarity between L1 and L2 writings.

A number of studies have been carried out on transfer and L2 proficiency. Some studies have also been done to investigate the relationship between first language proficiency and English writing in order to identify the potential role of the first language skills and proficiency on second or foreign language skills development. For example, Edelsky (1982) conducted some studies and concluded that according to her findings, depending on the context, any aspects of writing could be transferred from L1 to L2 writing. Kobayashi & Rinnert (2008) showed that participants in their studies were able to transfer writing skills from the first language to the second or foreign.

Haung, Liang, & Dracopolous (2011) believed that a few studies have paid attention to the positive transfer of mother tongue to the second language writing while most of researches have touched upon the negative transfer of the first language the second or foreign language. Likewise, other researches such as Sasaki and Hirose (1996) indicated that an important role can be played by the first language writing expertise in the second language writing. Krapels (1990) indicated that one of the common strategies among second language writes is making use of the first language for thinking, and Cumming (1989) strived to show how and when the first language is used at different levels of second language writing. Schoonen, et al. (2003) found that L1 writing can predict L2 writing proficiency. So, it can be inferred that "transfer" of L1skills to L2 has been viewed in different ways by various experts, and some of them have assumed "transfer" as inhibitive to development of learners' L2 competence.

There is a close dependency on L1 research and research on L2 writing, and L1 models have had a prominent impact in instructing L2 writing and developing L2 writing theories (Hadaway, Vardell, & Young, 2002). Cummins (1979) believed that a similar level of competence is feasible in L2 in case there is an initial high level of L1, and while learning the second language, the learner will not suffer a loss in either language as long as there is development in L1. Bialystok and Hakuta (1994) have the point of view in which second language learning initiates with the first language. It means that linguistic context, on which the assumption about the second language will be based, is provided by the learner's first language.

A great number of studies and inquiries into second language writing have proved that a positive relationship between L1 writing ability and L2 writing ability could be found and literacy skills could be transferred across languages. Numerous inquiries and studies have been conducted in this regard. For example, Carson et al. (1990) came to this conclusion that there is a significant and remarkable correlation between L1 writing ability and L2 writing

ability. Similar results were reported by Carson and Kuehn (1992). Ma and Wen (1999) found evidence that the L2 writing ability could be significantly predicted by L1 writing ability.

In addition to afore-mentioned studies indicating the positive effect of L1 writing ability or literacy on L2 writing ability or literacy, there are some other studies indicating that there is not a positive effect or relationship between first language writing ability or literacy and second language writing ability or literacy; among them it can be referred to Aliakbari (2002) which discussed L2 writing ability did not have any meaningful relationship with L1 writing, and considered L1 writing ability and L2 writing ability as two separate tasks.

Researchers and scholars studying second or foreign language learning and teaching have found much evidence of the first language writing skills, abilities, and strategies transfer to L2 writing (e.g. Lay, 1982; Brooks, 1985; Uzawa and Cumming, 1989; Cumming, 1989, Krapels (1990). Some other researchers proposed that writers will transfer writing ability and strategies from their first language (L1) to second language (L2) and benefit from such transfer (Edelsky, 1982; Jones and Tertroe, 1987; Uzawa and Cumming, 1989; Friedlander, 1990; Carson and Kuehn, 1992; Kobayashi and Rinnert, 1992; Cohen and Brooks-Carson, 2001).

The existing literature on L2 writing research is limited in several ways. First, they investigated mainly highly proficient ESL/EFL (e.g., Arndt, 1987). Second, even though some studies explored the writing of 'skilled'' versus 'unskilled' learners, virtually no studies was conducted on 'novice' versus 'expert' learners. Moreover, many previous studies have employed cross-sectional designs and only few studies have been longitudinal in nature while the combination of these two approaches to L2 writing is crucial for building a more comprehensive and dynamic model of L2 writing process (Sasaki, 2000).

3. Method

3.1 Participants

The participants of this study were 40 male and female language learners learning English as a foreign language at Oxford language institute in Bojnourd, a city in Iran. The participants of the study were at upper-intermediate level of proficiency and their age range was from 19 to 25. All of them were native speakers of Persian and had learned English for more than 3 years in foreign language institutes. The reason why institute language learners at the level of upper-intermediate of proficiency were selected was that they had passed at least 18 semesters learning English as a foreign language and were assumed to have enough knowledge and experience to write academic paragraphs and modified texts. A Preliminary English Test (PET) was administered to the participants in order to determine their level of general English proficiency, and on the basis of the results of PET, 40 students were selected.

3.3 Sampling

For sampling, PET test was first administered to three intact upper-intermediate classes consisting of 50 EFL learners. Then, on the basis of PET scores, 40 EFL learners were

selected as the research participants. The sample comprised male and female upper-intermediate English language learners who were randomly assigned to two groups (one experimental and one the control group). Each group consisted of 20 participants who were equally divided in terms of gender.

3.3 Design of the Study

On the basis of the nature of research questions posed in the study and in line with the purpose of present study which was investigating the effect of teaching academic paragraph writing styles in Persian (participants' first language) on Iranian EFL learners' writing skill, the researcher decided to select a quantitative method to conduct the current study. The present study employed a quasi-experimental design to conduct the investigation providing as much control as possible for the extraneous variables under the existing situation.

3.4 Research Instruments

The present study employed the following research instruments: (1) Preliminary English Test (PET) as the pre-test, (2) Academic Writing Proficiency Test as the post-test. The research instruments are discussed in detail below.

3.4.1 Preliminary English Test (PET) as the Pretest

In order to evaluate the participants' English proficiency before the treatment, the researcher administered a preliminary English test as the pretest. The preliminary English test used in the present research was the test designed by the University of Cambridge, ESOL Examinations. One of the most valuable international tests to assess English language learners' general proficiency is the PET test, because its main goal is measuring learners' English language proficiency. One of the most important reasons for the PET test popularity is its diagnostic property in language proficiency. PET test has been tested by many researches and studies for its reliability. Fulcher & Davidson (2007) expressed that a great number of scholars, researchers, and English language experts have checked the reliability and validity of PET test in their studies and researchers (Xing and Fulcher (2007).

The allocated time to take the test was 1 hour and 30 minutes. The test consisted of four main parts assessing participants' reading comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, and writing. Among 35 questions of reading section, 25 items were especially related to reading comprehension, and 10 questions evaluated participants' grammar and vocabulary proficiency. The writing section of this examination was composed of three subcategories the first part of which had 5 questions each one having a free space to be filled according to the source sentence concept by no more than 3 words. The second subcategory of the writing section required the participants to write a postcard to their friends and perform the 3 requests of the part in their letters. The third part of the writing section was answering to one of the questions (7 or 8) in a 100 words text about one of the prepared topics.

3.4.2 Academic Writing Proficiency Test (post-test)

The post-test of the present study consisted of two main parts. The first part focused on evaluating participants' ability and proficiency in recognizing different paragraph writing

styles and the second part assessed the participants' ability in producing such paragraphs. In the first part of this test, the researcher designed a recognition-test evaluating the participants' ability to recognize the style of the four provided paragraphs and selecting the appropriate choice among the multiple choices provided for each sample paragraph. The second section of the post-test offered a production test requiring the participants to compose a paragraph on presented topics.

3.5 Materials

As teaching materials for the treatment for the participants of the experimental group, the book of "Academic writing from paragraph to essay" written by Zemach and Rumisek (2005) was selected as the sourcebook from which a handout in the form of a pamphlet was provided explaining required technical concepts and terminologies such as paragraph definitions, paragraph subdivisions (like topic sentences, supportive ideas, and concluding sentence), different styles of academic paragraphs (like description, explanation, contrast, and comparison styles), and also a sample text for each type of paragraphs and concepts.

3.6 Data Analysis Techniques

In order to statistically analyze the obtained results, several statistical tests were run using the SPSS software (version 20) as follows: First, the data obtained from the pre-test and post-test were checked for normality by Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Second, by means of Levenes' test, the homogeneity of post test results variances was checked. Third, Fisher's test was used to obtain F ratio of data. Forth, different kinds of t-tests like including sample t-test and independent t-test were applied to compute and analyze the results and outcomes of the administered tests.

3.7 Procedure

Six days before the study and in order to have homogeneous participants in both experimental and control group, a standardized English proficiency test (preliminary English test) was administered to a total of 50 participants. Having analyzed the data, 40 participants were chosen as the qualified upper-intermediate level learners, and 10 participants were omitted from the rest of the research procedure because of poor results obtained on the pretest. Having made certain that the participants formed a homogeneous sample, the researcher divided them randomly into two groups. The researcher tried to have equal number of male and female participants in each group. Hence, 10 male and 10 female participants were randomly assigned to the experimental group and the same number of participants with the same gender characteristics was randomly positioned in the control group.

The researcher played the role of the instructor in teaching academic writing with a special focus on the four types of selected paragraph writing styles. Each of the four selected paragraph writing styles was taught in one session for both control and experimental groups to make the research manageable and avoid participants' fatigue. Thus, four sessions were required to carry out the treatment, and in the process of conducting the treatment for the experimental group, the instructor made use of Persian language explanations, and Persian equivalent samples or descriptions wherever required to ensure the participants' full

understanding of paragraph writing styles. The same materials were instructed for the control group, but just in English and without making use of participants' first language (Persian). It means that they were taught the four styles of academic paragraphs in English and the samples they received were just in English.

Having completed the pre-test stage, the participants in the experimental group received the treatment in 4 sessions. As it was explained before, through the treatment, they were instructed the features of each type of academic paragraph and the way to write its different main parts such as (topic sentence, supportive ideas, and concluding sentence) in their first language (Persian) and they were asked to write the prescribed type of academic paragraph in Persian. It should be added that for each session lasting for 90 minutes, one type or style of academic paragraph was selected and all the samples and notes for each type were delivered to the students.

The control group did not receive any instructions in Persian and were not allowed to write anything in Persian. Both control and experimental groups had one session a week on Wednesdays and each session lasted 90 minutes. In all sessions, after giving out the handouts, the researcher, as the instructor, first read a couple of samples of the selected academic paragraph type for that session and discussed its properties, main parts, and application; but in control group all the sessions were held and conducted in English only. In the third phase of each session, after reading the samples, studying and discussing each paragraph's properties, participants were asked to produce and compose a sample for the acquired and learned paragraph type in order to assess their ability in using academic writing styles.

The post-test which was a writing test consisting of two different sections such as recognition and production parts was administered on the sixth session of the study in both control and experimental groups. The post-test was the modified and simulated sample of Cambridge PET test in which the participants were asked to distinguish the style of each paragraph among the four paragraphs provided and select the correct choice among the multiple choices under each paragraph text. Moreover, they were supposed to underline the topic sentence and concluding sentence in each paragraph. As for the production part, the participants were asked to write two styles of paragraphs about the given topics observing all the requirements and properties for an academic paragraph according to the study materials.

4. Results and Findings

4.1 Descriptive Statistics of the Pretest and Posttest Groups in Writing Scores

The first research question sought to find out if there is any significant impact of teaching writing styles in L1 on adult Iranian EFL learners' writing skill. The members of both experimental and control groups participated in the posttest to see the impact of the treatment which was the teaching of writing styles in L1 on the EFL learners' writing skill. Table 4.1 shows the basic descriptive statistics of the pretest and posttest scores of the participants' writing skill for both experimental and control groups. This table illustrates the mean scores, standard deviation, and standard error of mean of the experimental and control groups.

Table 4.1 Descriptive statistics for the participants' writing skills in the pre- and post-phase test

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest	Experimental	20	15,2332	5.50	30.26
	Control	20	15,7733	1.65	2.74
Posttest	Experimental	20	18.9500	2.16	4.68
	Control	20	16.2250	1.55	3.67

Note: N = Total number in a sample. Std = standard

Low means for both the experimental and control group that are 15.23 and 15.77 respectively, reveals that the EFL learners in this study were not that much tactful in writing ability at their pre-test. On the other hand, the achieved data indicate that the mean score of the participants in the experimental group has changed to 18.95 at the post-test. It shows that a substantial gain in writing scores indeed occurred in the experimental group. However, regarding the control group, the mean score at the pre-test was 15.77 that changed to 16.22 at the post-test. Generally, the result of descriptive statistics reveals that experimental group has a higher mean score (18.95) than the control group (16.22) regarding the post test.

Nearly all of the inferential statistics that psychologists use (e.g., *t*-tests, ANOVA, simple regression) rely upon the Assumption of Normality and the assumption of homogeneity of variance. Table 4.2 shows that the distribution of means across samples is normal (p>.05). Thus, the assumption of normality is met.

Table 4.2 Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test of normality

		Pretest	Experimental group	Control group
	N	40	20	20
Normal Parameters[a,b]	Mean	36.7750	15.9500	14.2250
	Std. Deviation	5.09141	1.54664	1.63413
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.101	.163	.132
	Positive	.101	.126	.118
	Negative	-.093	-.163	-.132
	Test Statistic	.101	.163	.132
	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.200[c,d]	.172[c]	.200[c,d]

The other assumption which is the assumption of the homogeneity of the variance was assessed and is reported in the following section.

4.2 The Results of Independent Sample T-test for the First Research Question

In order to find out whether there was any significant difference between the mean scores of

the experimental and control groups, an Independent Samples t-test analysis was run. Moreover, considering the fact that homogeneity of variance is an assumption underlying the independent-sample t-test, Leven's test was utilized to check for the homogeneity of the variances. Table 4.3 reports the results of the independent-samples t-test for the groups' post-test scores. It should be noted that the assumption of homogeneity of variances is met (Levene's F= 2.3, P> .05). The results of the independent t-test (t= 11.03, P< .05) indicate that there is a significant difference between the experimental and control groups' mean scores on the posttest of writing ability.

Table 4.3 Independent T-test for the Posttest of Writing Ability of Experimental and Control Group

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	2.35	.11	11.03	38	.001	1.72500	.50312	.70650	2.74350
Equal variances not assumed			11.33	37.886	.001	1.72500	.50312	.70640	2.74360

Note: F = Fisher's F ratio. Sig=significance =computed value of t test. Df=degree of freedom.

This result provides an affirmative answer to the first research question; therefore, the first null hypothesis is rejected. The results suggest that when EFL learners receive teaching writing styles in L1, they statistically display higher achievement in writing ability than having no special mediation.

4.3 The results of Independent Sample T-test for the Second Research Question

The second research question of this study sought to see whether there is any significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control group based on their gender. Indeed, independent-samples t-test was used to examine the differences between Iranian males and females' adult EFL learners' writing skill in terms of making use of learners' first language in teaching English writing styles. Initially, the mean scores, Standard Deviation and Variance of the male and female participants at the pretest are shown in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4 The Descriptive Statistics for the Males and Females of Both Experimental and Control Group in the Pre-Test

		Gender				
	Female			Male		
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance
Pretest						
Experimental group	15.15	1.49	2.22	14.75	1.65	2.74
Control group	15.35	.98	.96	14.20	2.16	4.68

The means for males and females in the experimental groups that are 16.15 and 15.75 respectively indicate that females perform better at the post test comparing to males and based on the data shown in Table 4.5 below.

Table 4.5 The Descriptive Statistics for the Males and Females of Both Experimental and Control Group in the Pust-Test

		Gender				
	Female			Male		
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance
Posttest						
Experimental group	16.15	1.50	1.22	14.35	1.53	1.74
Control group	15.75	.981	.86	14.00	2.10	3.68

As mentioned, in order to compare the mean scores of the experimental and control groups, an independent-samples t-test analysis was run. Leven's test was also use to check for the homogeneity of the variances. The results are presented in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6 Independent T-test for the Posttest of Writing Ability of Experimental and Control Group Based on gender

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper

Equal variances assumed	2.39	.539	12.50	18	.04	.40000	.70435	-1.07979	1.87979
Equal variances not assumed			12.502	17.811	.04	.40000	.70435	-1.08091	1.88091

Note: F=Fisher's F ratio. Sig=significance=computed value of t test df=degree of freedom.

It should be noted that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was met (Levene's F= 2.39, P>.05). The results of the independent-samples t-test (t= 12.59, P<.05) reveal that there is a statistically significant difference between writing skill of Iranian males and females EFL learners in terms of making use of first language in their EFL writing. Thus, the second null hypothesis is rejected too. The results could put us on a safe ground to claim that female learners perform better on writing tasks when English writing styles are thought in their first language.

4.3 Discussion

In general, according to the results obtained and presented in this chapter, it can be concluded that teaching writing styles in learners' first language has a positive effect on Iranian EFL learners' writing skill that learn English as the foreign language, so it can facilitate and improve their writing skill positively. The findings of this research are in line with previous researches such as Meyer, Brandt, and Bluth (1980); Cook (1993); Edelsky (1982); Jones and Tetroe (1987); Uzawa and Cumming (1989); Freidlander (1990); Carson and Brooks (2001); Cummins (1979); Wong (1993) and Kobayashi and Rinnert (1992) who believe that the ability in L1 writing may benefit the acquisition of English writing skill in L2.

The difference between experimental and control groups' results in recognizing and performing paragraph writing styles and formal schemata indicates a strong possibility that learners who received the instructions in their first language (Persian), and as a result could recognize and compose the paragraph writing styles, were able to compose and produce paragraph styles and organization more appropriately. In this regard, Zamel (1983) explains that studies and investigations about the second language writing process are connected to the research in the first language composition skill.

5. Conclusion

This research strived to shed light on the issue whether teaching paragraph writing styles in learners' first language (Persian), i.e., different types of paragraphs or rhetorical structures, has impacts on Iranian EFL learners' writing skill. It was found that teaching writing styles in Persian has a meaningful effect on participants' writing skill and also it was proved that there is a meaningful difference between male and female participants' performance on the proficiency of post test, it can be concluded that experimental group participants who received the treatment-instruction in paragraph writing styles in Persian-could get better results on the post-test than the control group participants.

Moreover, the results of this study extend the findings of many studies in this field by comparing males and females' performance in writing test. It was found that the female participants seem to have performed significantly better than the male ones on their writing test. It appears to support the Sunderland's finding (2000) that female students are generally more prosperous in learning language than male learners.

From the findings of the present study, some pedagogical implications can be drawn. In this regard, the most noticeable finding of this study is that making use of language learners' first language to teach them paragraph writing styles and genres can be useful and can positively affect the writing skill of student writers. It is well known that writing skill is one of the four main skills in every language, and as attested by Akhondi, Malayeri, and Samad (2011) and Moats (1994), text features and elements are of great importance in helping learners to locate and organize the text content and information. Thus, without knowing the paragraph writing style, genre, structure of texts, it is not possible to compose academically appropriate paragraphs (Williams, 2007).

It can be inferred from the findings of this research that one of the important pedagogical implications of this study is considering teaching formal schemata and paragraph writing styles in learners' first language in order to make them practically and applicably competent in paragraph writing styles and structures, because acquaintance with the concept of rhetorical relationships of the items such as main idea, topic sentence, supportive ideas, and concluding sentence and also similar concepts in learners' first language may guide them to comprehend and compose expository texts (Ferris, 2003; Ferris & Hedgcock, 2004; Ghaith & Harkous, 2003; McCarthy, 1987; Nagin, 2012). Meyer, Brandt, and Bluth (1980) admit the importance of familiarity and competence in organization and style or genre of paragraphs and texts and believe that foreign or second language learners who are unfamiliar with text or paragraph organization and genre are at a disadvantage because they do not have any approaches in planning the text.

There is no doubt that no study is without it is limitations, and the field of second or foreign language teaching and learning is a really vast and comprehensive domain with unexplored borders and horizons. Further research may wish to consider the followings in an attempt to improve the effects of two items, first making use of learners' first language with the aim of making their perception of paragraph writing styles and organization, and second the importance of competency and proficiency in perception, recognition, and implementation of the structure, genre, schema, and main parts or components of academic paragraph.

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