

An Investigation of the Effect of Journal Writing on EFL Learners' Oral Production

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ABSTRACT: Learning to speak foreign language requires more than knowing its grammatical and semantic rules. Speaking a language is especially difficult for foreign language learners because effective oral communication requires the ability to use the language appropriately in social interaction. This paper examines these aspects, so that teachers can more effectively help adult learners developing their abilities to communicate in target language. The aim of the present study was encouraging students to write about whatever they liked and what they wished to write about special subjects. The participants of this study were 30 female students in intermediate level who were selected by proficiency test from two classes of Abrar language institute in Gorgan, Iran. They had registered in a speaking- writing course. The students considered themselves as poor writers and found writing difficult. These students were not able to communicate ideas while they were familiar with the rules of paragraph writing and language form. All subjects were pre-tested for homogeneity, and then the experimental group was treated with journal writing in 8sessions. Following the treatment, a post-test was administered to the groups. Descriptive statistics and T- test indicated that there was a significant difference between two groups. Moreover, the results displayed that dialogue journal writing could encourage students to communicate more effectively with their teacher and classmates, also participants improved in writing as far as communication to each other.

Key words: Dialogue journal writing, Communication, Speaking, Motivation

INTRODUCTION

Journaling in its different shapes is a means for registering individual thoughts, experiences, and to develop gradually insights. (RogHiemstra, 2002). In ESL students it is difficult to use second language outside of the classroom. Some learners are in fear of speaking because they are worried about their lack of proficiency, so all four language skills must be considered in the classroom integrated with each other. Learning collaboratively is the one which provides the maximum opportunities for student to interact (Starnes, 2012).

Dialogue journal writing is a collaborative activity (Staton, 1988). German (2001) investigated the students carried on private written conversation with the teacher for an extended period of time. Barkly, Cross, &Major(2005)believed that dialogue journals provide the opportunities to students to make copy their thought, connect course work to their personal experiences, and ask each other different questions. Considering journal writing, they express their thoughts and feeling via writing for learning language and also social skills(Ira Progoff et al.,1997).Seeing the value of personal writing in enhancing growth and learning, Christensen(1981) expressed how diary can be used as a learning tool for adults and how journaling can improve various aspect of personal health(Bruce, 1998).

As Williams (2000) reports, EFL and ESL students have problems in writing fluency and spelling and they cannot use vocabulary Journal writing involved in resource level, and a control level. And the linguistic knowledge of students involved and the process of journal writing begins by students. Elbow believed that in journal writing students can write freely and uncritically. To become effective writers, ESL students need to generate "comprehensible output". Journal writing is systematic way of recording thing as the writer develops ideas on specific topic or event. It encourages students with drawing, song/poetry, maps to make journal writing help students in the field of psychology, literature, teacher education, sociology, etc. (Dyment&O'connek, 2003).

Journal writers get their thought on the paper quickly without thinking about the fact that the form is correct or not. The teacher is a facilitator in this class (Krashen, 1998).As Yinger (1985) also maintains that journal writing allows students to improve their writing by1)focusing on process rather than products,2)emphasizing expressive and personal aspect. Journal writing makes a relation between students and teachers

and allows teachers to glimpse of what goes on the mind of students. AS Milynarczyk's (1998) studies, journal writing is free writing without focusing on form or organization. Dialogue journal writing is an effective approach to integrating reading and writing instruction to become an essential part of beginning literacy instruction. The use of electronic mail as dialogue journals in literature discussion is used as a strategy to develop independent reading skills among children through cooperative learning (Cress & Sullivan, 1998).

All the languages have different dialect; language variation and origins. The environments affect the dialect of the person. As Labod (1972) stipulates, many instructional programs to write and read was failed, because of environment dialect. The affective program to teach the African American learners to write and to read is focusing on the gap between those who are succeeding and those who have difficulties. A teacher must understand the child speech varieties that child use and understand the child perception of his/her language (Adger, 1997).

Jenk (2003) indicated that the writing process is categorized in a five-stage sequential pattern (prewriting, drafting, revising, editing and publishing). For EFL learners writing is a very important skill. One of the methods that we can teach EFL writer is self-monitoring and self-editing. Speaking and listening, reading, and writing can provide students with the ability to communicate ideas through collaboration, discussion and presentation. Speaking is almost universal and has a strong innate component; but writing is a skill that has been recently focused pedagogically. The same set of sentences seems to be acceptable in written or spoken language, the mechanism is the same but differs in output.

As Nunberg (1990) reports, written language appears to use punctuation in some ways that have no equivalent using intonation in spoken language. But it seems that writing and speaking may share some components. Language production involves different levels with fundamental division into conceptualization. According to (Schenkein, Weiner, Labove, and Bock, 1986), findings about syntactic repetition in communication experimentally showed that speakers are eager to repeat syntactic structure through speaking. (El-Koumy & Abdel Salam, 1998) believed that Egyptians frequently find themselves face to face with foreigners, so speaking foreign language has become a vital skill for students to communicate. Because Egyptian classrooms are too crowded and students don't have enough chance to speak. They find a new method for developing speaking skill through writing, which is used in EFL classrooms. As Myers (1998) reports, speaking and writing develop reciprocally and directly affect each other. As Shuy (1981) argues, both oral and written languages come from the same source which is communicative competence. As Magnan (1985) notes, writing is a form of communication, and communication is the most possible form of writing".

Dialogue writing allows writers to use the full range of available language functions, or "speech actions". Complaints, questions, promises, challenges, directions are all part of dialogue writing. The problem of the study was to determine the effect of dialogue journal writing on EFL students speaking skill. Nowadays speaking English as a foreign language is a vital skill for Iranian learners. Speaking is forgotten in our schools and universities. Because the teachers have to cover a great deal of courses in a limited time so learners don't have enough chance to communicate with each other. The courses only based on reading and writing, so listening and speaking are ignored. The significant of this study try to find a new method for developing the speaking skill through writing.

The Purpose of this Study

There have been many studies regarding the role of journal writing in helping students to become more motivated and this research is going to have a different and innovative view to the subject. The purpose of this study is to investigate how journal writing affects the students speaking skill. Allowing students to write freely without any limitation and investigating how their speaking skill promotes.

Research Questions

This research- regarding the aim and questions-is based on these hypotheses:

1. Does journal writing have any effect on EFL learners' speaking?
2. Does journal writing have any effect on EFL learners' motivation in language learning?

Limitation

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of journal writing on EFL speaking skill. Students in this study weren't in the same age. This study was done with the students of different age but they are in the same level of proficiency in English language. Lack of time was another problem of this study, spending more time could surely make better and careful result. And participants were selected from one of the English language institute in Gorgan. Considering the Institute's facilities and students' level of language proficiency the results may be different in different cities and institutes.

Literature Review

There are differences and similarities between speaking and writing. A large number of studies view speaking and writing as similar forms (Mangelsdorf, 1989). As Mazzie (1987) points out there are some differences between speaking and writing. As Shuy (1987) argues that Children first develop perceiving dialogue with the world around. Writing dialogue journals is one way of utilizing dialogues in the classroom. Self-monitoring techniques have been recommended by Chinese EFL researchers and educators for achieving a better peer evaluation and teacher responses in Chinese teaching environments (Wang, & You, 2004).

Students enjoy dialogue journal writing as their teachers participate in authentic dialogues which improve communicative aspect of writing. Dialogue journal not only open a new phase of communication, but it also provide another context for language and literacy development. Students have the opportunity to use English in a safe and non-threatening atmosphere in interaction with proficient English speakers (Peyton, 2000). Morel (2010) investigates the effectiveness of correcting written language errors of seven deaf and auditory impaired children from 7-11 years old using dialogue journals for ten weeks. The study found that writing dialogue journals motivates them to write and to take risks in expressing themselves through writing. Email dialogue journal can develop writing abilities and can start communication skills, so dialogue journal writing enhances both learners writing and speaking skills (Rafiza & Adelina, 2004).

According to (Barba & Gonzales-Bueno, 1993, 1998), to implement dialogue journal writing activity, educators should consider the language proficiency and maturity level of the students. Holms and Moulton (1995) examined the effectiveness of dialogue journal writing among adult ESL university students. Therefore, teachers should be alert of different proficiency and maturity levels of learners who come from different age and social background. Journal writing different from diary journal synthesize our thoughts and emotion instead of recording what has happened in our life (Snyde & Lidquist, 2010). As Adams (2001) describes, journal writing comes from the perspective of psychotherapy. The best thing about journal writing was to utilize in writing and progress writing skills by putting into practice vocabulary and grammar in context (Castellanos, 2008).

Previous Studies

Peyton (2000) states that students enjoy dialogue journal writing as their teachers participate in authentic dialogues and it improve communicative aspect of writing. Peyton added Dialogue journal not only as a new channel of communication, but also as the provider of another context for language and literacy development. Speaking and writing develop and affect each other (Myers, 1987).

Barjesteh, Vaseghi & Gholami (2011), by emphasizing on diary writing, that is a free writing where students can write freely without fear of being evaluated, pave the way for planning a communicative course of writing and can have a significant impact on EFL learners' attitudes towards writing.

According to Shuy (1981), both oral and written language comes from the same communicative competence. Magnan (1985) notes writing is sometimes the only possible form for speech, and speech is the most possible form of writing. According to Peyton & Syoum (1988), dialogue journal writing is effective in promoting the students' English writing proficiency. In previous studies according to Peyton (1990), dialogue journals benefits students in writing. As Mirhosseini (2009) pointed out that the use of dialogue journals in a language class enables students to view writing as a cognitive, personal and communicative process rather than writing as only a skill-based activity.

Staton (1984) believed that the language communication of children with peers and adults that make them come in contact with each other is the most important factor in developing their reasoning skill. These dialogues, specifically those kinds in which both child and adult participate actively in thinking through a situation or a problem, enable the child to learn to use language to learn about his or her environment.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants

The subjects of this study are 20 female language learners who were selected from intermediate levels Abrar English Language institute in Gorgan, Iran (2012), they are 14-27 years old and regarding language proficiency all are in intermediate level. In order to understand the role and the impact of journal writing on speaking ability, an oral pretest was given to all participants.

Instrumentation

Three instruments were used in this paper as follows:

Background Questionnaire

There was an Individual Background Questionnaire (IBQ); it covered issues such as participants' age, gender, first language status, their parents' socio-educational background and job. Based on this test all of the learners' mother tongue was Persian and learning English was very important for them especially for academic purposes.

Proficiency Test

In order to be assured of homogeneity of control and experimental groups in terms of English language proficiency, a test of NELSON, on 30 students was taken before pretest. It could show us they were in the same level of language proficiency (intermediate). It proved that the test has reliability 0.82.

Oral interview Test

To obtain these purposes, 10 questions were asked through posttest and pretest from two selected groups who were from the same level. Learners were administered a pretest before any treatment. Based on oral pretest the two groups had almost the same score, but after instruction experimental groups demonstrated meaningful differences comparing to control group in post test scores. A proficiency test was administered to determine the students' level of proficiency, the results indicated that they are all in intermediate level. In pretest we asked some oral questions and in posttest too so the items of the test were 10 oral questions.

Treatment

The study was conducted for 10 sessions. At the beginning of the test, the students were asked to take a pretest orally. They wrote journal writing each session, topics of writing were free. After collecting the writings, asking question, providing suggestion, sharing their life experience happened. The teacher comment on the first writing more than those on later writings. After instruction, the students were asked to take a posttest orally again. Finally, the researchers gathered, computed, and analyzed the scores.

Procedure

A proficiency test was used to make sure the two groups were homogenous. In this study, the treatment group comprised 30 students, and received journal writing instruction. In this study the control group received a regular class instruction, but experimental group was instructed to keep a ten journal writing entries during the period of institute term in 10 sessions. They were free to choose their own theme and were not limited in any way on how to conduct journal writing. The two (pretest-posttest) were copied and given for two classes. Oral test were scored and the data were analyzed through SPSS.

RESULTS

The students' overall English oral performance, as shown by their speaking 'scores from the pre- and posttests, is presented in Table 1. The mean scores are 20.40 for the pretests in both group, so there was no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group on the pretests. The mean score was 87.20 for the posttest in group 1 (Experimental group), and in control group (group 2) the mean score was 21.8. Comparing the mean scores of the grades which were obtained between the two tests gained from t-test, the posttest results indicated that experimental group scored significantly higher than control group. So we can observe beneficial effects of dialogue journal writing in this study. It can be concluded that the DJW project promoted the students' speaking proficiency. SPSS version 16.0 for windows was used to compute these descriptive statistics.

Table1. Descriptive statistics on the mean scores of oral test for the experimental and control groups.

	Tests	Experimental group (N=30)		Control group (N=30)	
		M	SD	M	SD
Pretest	1	20.40	1.298	220.40	.828
	2				
Posttest	1	87.20	10.61	21.80	3.40
	2				

Subsequently, independent one sample t-test of dependent samples was conducted to test significant differences between the pretest and posttest, and correlation of the tests. Table 2 report a summary of the measure and significance of oral test.

Table 2. Group Statistics

	group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest	1	15	20.4000	1.29835	.33523
	2	15	20.4000	.82808	.21381
Posttest	1	15	87.2000	10.61131	2.73983
	2	15	21.8000	3.40588	.87939

Table 3. Independent Samples Test

		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
Pretest	Equal variances assumed	1.014	.323	.000	28	1.000	.00000	.39761	-.81447	.81447
	Equal variances not assumed			.000	23.773	1.000	.00000	.39761	-.82105	.82105
Posttest	Equal variances assumed	15.098	.001	22.728	28	.000	65.40000	2.87750	59.50571	71.29429
	Equal variances not assumed			22.728	16.854	.000	65.40000	2.87750	59.32501	71.47499

DISCUSSION

The finding of the present study provide further confirmation for the result of previous studies about the effect of journal writing (Peyton,2000; Myers,1987; Shuy, 1981; Megnan, 1985; Mccarthy,1991; Peyton & Syoum,1988; Staton,1984; Mirhosseini,2009; Liao& Wong,2001; Barjesteh,Vaseghi,&Gholami,2011). As Payton(2000) claims that interactive writing is to develop language and literacy in journal writing. Dialogue journals focus on meaning rather than form and on real topics and issues of interest to the student, teachers do not overtly correct errors. This is the place where students may write freely, without focusing on form. The teacher's response in the journal serves as a model of correct English usage. Peyton (2000) believed dialogue journal writing extends the time that teachers can spend with individual learners. It helps teachers know and understand the backgrounds and life experiences of their students. According to Liao and Wong (2001), this study examines the efficacy of English dialogue journal writing (DJW) on students' writing fluency, reflections, anxiety, and intrinsic motivation, as well as the students' responses to journal writing. The findings showed that the DJW project improved the students' writing fluency; writing performance on content, organization, and vocabulary; reflective awareness of writing and self-growth as learners; and intrinsic writing motivation.

Barjesteh, Vaseghi and Gholami (2011) investigated the effect of diary writing on EFL college students' writing improvement and attitudes .The results showed that diary writing can be a very productive and creative pre writing activity for a writing classroom. Some students expressed their future and imagined it in a perfect way in fact interaction among students and teacher made a discussion and motivated them to ask questions about their future. There are benefits that students can get from dialogue journal writing and it also improves communication aspect of writing. Therefore, journal writing is an important aspect of communication and sharing knowledge with other people. Dialogue journal writing could also help the teacher to know the students better and have opportunities to understand the students well. Students could recognize their mistakes and they could correct themselves in speaking. The role of teacher was monitoring. As Alexander (2005) claims, dialogue journal writing can increase language fluency of adult students. Journal writing helps them to improve their vocabulary and more attention to grammar instruction. Thus, dialogue journal writing promotes active learning. It allowed students to know classmates, teacher and world better. Using authentic or naturalistic source materials, enable learners to manipulate and practice specific features of language, allow students to practice, in class, communicative skills they need in real world and active psycholinguistic process of learning. In our studies the journal writing has effect of speaking and also motivation EFL learners to speak freely without any fear.

Pedagogical Implications

Nowadays journal writing is becoming quite common in schools and universities in Iran although most teachers don't have enough expertise and time. Hence, dialogue journal writing, provided that they are designed appropriately, can be considered as an innovative approach to language learning. It can be concluded that those learners who are more dominant and proficient in dialogue journal writing can benefit more from communication. Journal writing can improve students speaking proficiency as well as writing and give the students more courage to risk to write and speak in social environment without fear. The students in this study were enthusiastic to write whatever in their minds (write freely) and step by step they learned how to organize their mind and how to bring it on the paper. EFL learners, developed awareness of their weakness and strength in speaking. Dialogue journal writing improves opportunities for communication between the learner and teacher and increases communication beyond the restrictions of classroom (Peyton & Reed, 1990). According to Peyton (1998), in written journal interaction, a number of discourse types can happen, in with its own interactional structure.

CONCLUSION

As noted earlier, the aim of this study is investigating the effect of journal writing on EFL speaking. Writing a journal writing encourage students to interact with each other and gain new ideas and recognize their mistakes and develop communication as well as writing. This study emphasizes dialogue journal writing. In conclusion speaking is one of the central elements of communication. In EFL teaching journal writing, so it is an aspect that needs special attention and instruction to provide students with effective proficiency and to improve their speaking, dialogue journal writing also make students' interaction easier with their teachers and parents. As Thomas (2003) believed that students made positive changes in their learning and resolved their problems by reflecting on their personal writing process. Ghahremani-Ghajar & Mir Hosseini's (2005) study showed that dialogue journal writing provided EFL students with critical self-reflective writing ability. Journal writing increases intrinsic motivation to write without fear and speak with self-esteem.

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