Enhancing Written Performance in EFL Context: Using Grammar- Focused and Vocabulary- Focused Pre-tasks and Task Repetition

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Abstract

The dominant purpose of this paper is to investigate the impact of grammar-focused and vocabulary-focused pre-tasks and task repetition on Iranian EFL learners' written performance. Grammar-focused and vocabulary-focused pre-tasks are said to promote learning and prepare students to complete the tasks more effectively. Task repetition is also suggested to help improve learners' performance in TBLT settings. Forty-five intermediate adult male learners participated in this study. They were randomly divided into two experimental and one control groups. In order to collect the data needed for this piece of research first a demographic questionnaire was used to collect the students' personal information. Then English writing proficiency test was run to make sure that the participants were homogeneous. And finally, IELTS written tasks were employed to measure the participants' written performance. Different statistical procedures such as Pearson's correlation, One-Way ANOVA, post-hoc tests, and paired sample t-tests were employed to analyze the collected data. The results of data analyses indicated that 1) the participants enjoyed the same level of English writing proficiency prior to the implementation of the study, 2) the experimental group learners performed significantly better than the control group learners in terms of foreign language writing, and 3) task repetition had a significant influence on learners' written performance. It was concluded that both grammar-focused and vocabulary-focused pre-task activities have a significant and positive influence on Iranian EFL learners' L2 writing performance. Task-repetition was also concluded to have a positive influence on students' writing performance. The results of this research have clear implications for Iranian foreign language teachers and researchers to employ grammar-focused and vocabulary-focused pre-tasks in their endeavors.

Key words: *grammar-focused pre-task activities, vocabulary-focused pre-task activities, non-focused pre-task activities, task repetition*

1. introduction

During the past decade, teachers of English as a foreign/second language (EFL/ESL) have become increasingly   interested in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT).). In communicative language teaching the focus is on helping learners to apply their language knowledge in a communicative way. For this

purpose, instructors must make efforts to simulate real life in the class and design appropriate plans (e.g. according to learner`s age) to help students to dominate on components of the target language and acquire it as a whole. In addition, the teachers must free themselves from any restriction to text books in CLT settings because they can use their inspiration and imagination to improvise a variety of practices which help learners to deal with unforeseen, unanticipated situations more confidently.

Task based language teaching (TBLT), as an offshoot of CLT, is a teaching approach which is based on using interactive and communicative tasks for planning and delivering instruction (Skehan & Foster, 1997; Nunan, 2004). The theories that related to TBLT mention the fact that in this approach learning is more fundamental than language itself. However, the main focus of TBLT is on language, language performance and language acquisition and covers all four skills.

There are three phases in TBLT; namely, pre-task, task, and post-task phases. Pre-task which is the main concern of the present research occurs before doing the task. It may include different activities and works before doing the task. These activities prepare students for completing the task more effectively and their main purpose is to promote learning (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Task repetition is another concern of this study. Several studies confirm that by repeating the task, learners' production will improve in some way, for example the outcome may become more complex and students may become more fluent. Repeating the task can be done in the same condition that the task was conducted or the condition can be changed.

The third phase of a task is the post-task phase or post-task activity through which the teachers can accomplish three main pedagogic goals (Ellis, 2009):

1. repeating the task,
2. encouraging reflection on the process of task performance, and
3. encouraging the focus on forms, especially the ones that are problematic for students.

According to Larson-Freeman and Anderson (2011), a pre-task phase typically begins a task sequence during which the teacher can introduce the students to the language they will need to complete the task. Tasks are meaningful activities through which the learners can see how the tasks are related to their real lives. And finally post-task phases take place to reinforce learning or to address any problems that may have arisen.

EFL researchers, educationalists, methodologists, and syllabus designers have carried out numerous studies on CLT and TBLT (Ellis, 2003, 2001; Skehan, 2003; Foster & Skehan, 1996; Crookes &Gass, 1993; Fotos& Ellis, 1991; Long & Crooke, 1992; Long, 1985; Nunan, 1989, 1997; Prabhu, 1987).

In the study presented by Sogutlu and Veliaj-Ostrosi (2016), the effectiveness of direct grammar instruction and indirect conscious-raising tasks on the development of explicit knowledge is compared. The participants were 60 high school learners in the age range of 14-16 that were divided into two experimental and one control group. Results reaped out of pretest, immediate posttest and delayed posttest revealed that both direct instruction and conscious-raising tasks have effective role in developing students' explicit knowledge.

Zhu-Xiu (2016) in his study aimed to examine the necessity and feasibility of integrating TBLT and FFI in English teaching to avoid extremities in Chinese EFL context. It was found that TBLT is effective only when it is combined with form-focused instruction in a communicative context.

In a study presented by Çelik (2015), the effectiveness of Form-Focused and Meaning-Focused Instructions in EFL Teaching was examined. Participants were divided into a control group and an experimental group. Control group received form-focused instruction and the experimental group received meaning-focused instruction. The results showed that both meaning-focused instruction and form-focused instruction are effective in improvement of grammar, reading and vocabulary. Even though meaning-focused is more effective than form-focused instruction, without form-focused instruction the abovementioned skills cannot be achieved.

Tai (2015) studied the writing development in syntactic complexity, accuracy and fluency in a content and language integrated learning class. It was indicated that syntactic accuracy and fluency of the participants improved over time but no development was found in their syntactic complexity.

Spadaet. al. (2014), in his study examined the different effects that isolated and integrated FFI have on L2 learning. The participants in this study were divided into two groups, each receiving 12 hours of instruction one isolated FFI and the other integrated FFI. The results of this study showed that both types can contribute positively if form and meaning be combined together.

In one study, White (2014), did a research using a mixed-methods inquiry into how vocabulary is attained and improved by adolescence. The sample was of New Zealand secondary schools. Essays, which were written by students, were examined for some lexical richness characters; first lexical variation, second lexical sophistication and third, lexical density. Quantitative results showed that the older students were, the more lexical richness they had in their essays.

In the study presented by Pishadast (2015), the effect of an integrated model of form-focused and task-based instruction on Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary learning and retention was examined. 60 participants who were elementary EFL learners of junior high schools were selected based on their performance on a proficiency test. For treatment the experimental group received form-focused task-based vocabulary instruction and control group received traditional and methods of vocabulary instruction. The results proved the great impact of form-focused task-based instruction impact on learners' vocabulary learning and retention.

Pakbaz and Rezai (2015) studied the possible impacts of task repetition with follow-up consciousness-raising practices to promote the complexity and accuracy of EFL learners' written products in instant and hold-up post-tests. To conduct the study, 60 lower intermediate learners whose proficiency levels was determined by Oxford Quick Placement Test, took part in the study. There were two groups; the experimental group and the control group. The outcomes indicated that using consciousness-raising activities resulted in more accurate writing production in the repeated performance. However, these activities didn't lead to a more complex written product.

The study presented by Ebrahimi et al. (2015), examined the effectiveness of focus on form and focus on forms on teaching conditional sentences. The participants in this study were 90

female students. Students' proficiency was homogenized by an OPT test and a pretest was administrated to determine their level of knowledge. The participants were divided in to two experimental and one control groups. A placebo task was given to the control group and the two experimental group received instruction on conditional sentences one through FonF and the other through FonFS. A posttest was administrated. The FonFS instruction proved to be more effective than FonF instruction in teaching and learning conditionals.

NateghiMoghadam and Gholami (2015) examined the effect of post-task activity on EFL learners' writing fluency, complexity and grammatical accuracy. This study showed that post –task activities positively affected EFL learners' production in terms of accuracy, fluency and complexity in experimental group. Post-task activities provide a condition in which learners can make a balance between performing fluency, accuracy and complexity. Teachers' role is to draw students' attention to both language-as-form and language-as-meaning.

Salimi and his team (2014), examined the effects of focus on form on EFL learners' written task accuracy between two different proficiency levels (intermediate and advanced). Participants of this study were 60 learners of an institute and they were randomly assigned into two groups of high and low proficiency. Each group was also assigned into two subgroups, one with FOF and the other without FOF. Teaching these groups last 15 sessions while one subgroup of each group received FFI while the other subgroups did not. A narrative task was administrated as a posttest to collect data. Results showed that FFI had a considerable effect on accuracy of high proficient learners.

To the best knowledge of the researcher, no study thus far has examined the effect of these two variables on EFL learners' written performance. Also, a whole host of previous studies have focused on spoken language. Written performance, that seems to have been neglected to a great extent, has recently attracted TBLT researchers' interest (Byrnes &Manchón, 2014; Kuiken&Vedder, 2008, 2012; Ong & Zhang, 2010). Therefore, the present study attempts to fill these gaps in the field of teaching English as a foreign language in an Iranian Educational setting.

Concerning the problems referred to above, and the significance of TBLT in teaching English as a foreign/second language, the researcher posed the following research questions and research hypotheses:

RQ1. Does grammar-focused pre-task activity have a significant effect on EFL learners' written performance?

RQ2. Does vocabulary-focused pre-task activity have a significant effect on EFL learners' written performance?

RQ3. Does un-focused pre-task activity have a significant effect on EFL learners' written performance?

RQ4. Does task repetition have a significant effect on EFL learners' written performance in these three pre-task conditions (grammar-focused, vocabulary-focused, and un-focused pre-tasks)?

2. Methodology

2.1. Design

The design used in this research was a quasi-experimental one in that the participants were not randomly selected. There were three groups as below:

- Experimental group I (EG$_I$); who focused on grammar points. This group received the treatment (X$_I$) and a test after the treatment (T), they repeated the same test after two weeks,
- Experimental group II (EG$_{II}$); who focused on vocabulary items. This group received the treatment (X$_{II}$) and a test after the treatment (T), they repeated the same test after two weeks,
- And control group (CG) who did not focus on either grammar points or vocabulary items. This group also received the same tests as EG$_I$ and EG$_{II}$ at the end of the course.

EG$_I$	X$_I$	T	
EG$_{II}$	X$_{II}$	T	
CG			T

Figure 1: Design of the Study

The type of pre-task planning (grammar-focused vs. vocabulary-focused pre-tasks and task repetition) are independent variables of this research. EFL learners' written performance is the dependent variable.

2.2. Participants

Forty-fivestudents with the age range of twenty-six to thirty-two participated in this study. They were preparing themselves for an IELTS academic test in a private language institution in Zanjan. According to the placement test of the institution they were placed in intermediate level and were studying "*Get Ready for IELTS*" series. Since the participants were candidates of IELTS academic test and were familiar with the test format, they were given an IELTS academic written test to check their current level of writing proficiency. Those participants whose scores fall ±1 above the standard deviation and ±1 below the standard deviation were selected as the statistical sample for this research.

The selected participants were randomly divided into three groups i.e. two experimental and one control groups each containing fifteen IELTS students. Experimental Group I (EG$_I$) or grammar-focused group focused on forms in their pre-task writing activities. Experimental Group II (EG$_{II}$)) or vocabulary-focused group concentrated on vocabulary items in their pre-task writing activities. And finally, Control Group (CG) or non-focused group did not focus either on grammar or vocabulary items in their pre-task activities.

2.3. Instruments

In order to carry out this piece of study, the researcher used several instruments. The details of these instruments are as follows.

2.3.1. Demographic Questionnaire

Prior to the research, to make sure that all the students shared a similar English background, the researcher developed and administered a demographic questionnaire in which learners' personal information as well as the information about their prior L2 knowledge were collected (see appendix B).

2.3.2. IELTS Writing Proficiency Test

To ideally ensure about students' homogeneity in terms of their L2 writing proficiency level, an IELTS academic writing test was administered (See appendix C). The rationale behind using an IELTS writing test was that it was a world famous standard test of English proficiency and it was in line with the objectives of this study as it tested students' writing ability through two different tasks.

2.3.3. IELTS Writing Performance Test

Another academic IELTS writing test was administered to check the learners' performance in the three groups. The main aim of this test was to check the possible differences among three groups after the pre-task activity was provided. The rationale behind choosing the academic IELTS composition test was that participants in these classes were all preparing themselves for an actual IELTS test and also the whole term syllabus was designed for preparing students for this test. The same test was repeated after two weeks to see the impact of task-repetition on Iranian IELTS candidates' written performance. Academic IELTS writing test consists of two compulsory tasks. In task 1 the candidates are required to describe graphs, bar charts, pie charts and diagrams or a combination of these. A diagram will normally relate to a process, the working of an object, or changes in maps over time. The candidates are expected to summarize the information by describing the main features, making comparisons where relevant.In task 2 the candidates are supposed to present an argument or discuss a problem based on a given topic. In the response the candidates may be asked to 1) express an opinion, 2) give views about two different opinions, 3) discuss advantages and disadvantages, 4) give a solution to a problem by suggesting measures, or 5) discuss causes of a problem and suggest solutions. In addition they are always asked to give reasons and include any relevant examples from their personal knowledge and experience (McCarter &Whitby, 2007).

Task 1 assesses the candidates' ability to analyze data objectively without giving an opinion, whereas task 2 usually requires a subjective piece of writing on a fairly general topic. The minimum word limit for task 1 is 150 words and the candidates are advised to spend 20 minutes on this part of the test. For task 2 the minimum word limit is 250 words, on which the candidates are advised to spend 40 minutes. There is no upper word limit for neither task 1 nor task 2 and the candidates are advised not to go below word limits as this can probably have a negative effect on their score band. The value of the marks given to each task is reflected in the time. Task 2 carries twice the number of marks as task 1 (McCarter, 2003).One issue of importance in evaluating writing tests is the reliability of the scores obtained. To be sure of the reliability of the scores obtained by the IELTS writing tests, two professional IELTS instructors and raters weighed up all papers. Then, the inter-rater reliability check was run. Results of inter-rater reliability showed acceptable concordance of scores (IELTS writing proficiency test: .91and IELTS writing performance test 0.84).

2.4.Procedure

Three groups of IELTS candidates participated in this study. The first group's (EGI) attention was drawn to the main grammar forms which were used in performing the main task. First a brief instruction was given to the learners (ten minutes was spent for this pre-task) and then they were asked to perform the IELTS writing tasks. The second group's (EGII) attention

was drawn to the key words and phrases that are frequently used in academic IELTS writings. This pre-task phase lasted for ten minutes. After this activity, learners were given sixty minutes to write the main tasks.

The third group (CG), was given ten minutes for planning but no guidance was given to them in terms of which aspect of language to focus on. Then, they were given sixty minutes (which is the standard time allotted for IELTS writing) to perform the main IELTS writing task.After two weeks the participants in these three groups were asked to repeat the same tasks again. The same procedure was repeated and the learners were given sixty minutes to produce their compositions.

Learners' performances in these groups were analyzed and scored based on the IELTS rubric as explained above. Then the performance of these groups in the first phase was compared with the data gained in task repetition phase. In other words, the learners' scores were collected from their first and second performance with a two-week interval and compared to see if there has been any statistically significant improvement.

2.5.Data Analysis

In this study, various statistical analyses were used for different purposes as follows.

1. Pearson's correlation was employed to establish the inter-rater reliability for performance measures.
2. Descriptive statistics like means, standard deviation, range, etc. were used in order to test the underlying assumptions of the statistical procedures used in the study.
3. To analyze the data on English proficiency test a One-Way ANOVA was run using the SPSS 24 software to make sure that the three groups were not significantly different in terms of English proficiency at the outset of the study.
4. A series of One-Way ANOVA tests was run to see if the performance of the participants were significantly different in the writing performance test and the task repetition phase of the study.
5. In order to find out the exact place of the differences between the groups, a series of Post-hoc Scheffe's tests was run.
6. Finally, paired samples *t*-test was run in order to compare the mean scores of the groups in the two performances.

3. Results

The results of the language proficiency test and other tests employed in this research are presented, respectively.

3.1. Results of Writing Proficiency Test (Pre-test)

First of all, an English writing proficiency test was run to check the participants' current level of writing proficiency. One-way ANOVA was run to show whether the participants were at the same level of proficiency or not.

Table 3.1: Descriptive Statistics of Writing Proficiency Test

Scores	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean Lower Bound
EG$_I$	15	43.533	5.19432	1.34117	40.6568
EG$_{II}$	15	44.133	4.65781	1.20264	41.5539
CG	15	44.467	4.24040	1.09487	42.1184
Total	45	44.044	4.62186	.68899	42.6559

The table of descriptive statistics provides information about each group (number in each group, means, standard deviation, minimum and maximum, etc.). It shows that there is a slight difference in the Grammar-Focused group's mean score ($M = 43.53$, $SD = 5.19$), Vocabulary-Focused group's mean score ($M = 44.13$, $SD = 4.65$), and the Non-Focused groups' mean score ($M = 44.46$, $SD = 4.24$). ANOVA was run in order to see if the difference is statistically significant or not.

Table 3.2: Test of Homogeneity of Variances

Scores			
Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
.168	2	42	.846

According to Levene's Test of Homogeneity of Variances Sig. value is .84. As this is greater than .05, we have not violated the homogeneity of variance assumption.

Table 3.3: ANOVA of Writing Proficiency Test

Scores	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	6.711	2	3.356	.151	.860
Within Groups	933.200	42	22.219		
Total	939.911	44			

ANOVA showed that there was not a statistically significant difference at the $p < .05$ level in mean of the three groups [$F_{(2.42)} = .15$, $P = .86$]. The amount of F and also p prove that these three groups were not significantly different at the outset of the study in terms of English language writing proficiency.

3.2. Results of Writing Performance Test

The L2 writing performance test was run to see if the participants in first experimental group and the second experimental group who focused on vocabulary differed from the learners in control group who did not focus on either grammar or vocabulary. The following tables show the results of statistical analyses.

Table 3.4: Descriptive Statistics of Writing Performance Test

Scores					
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean
					Lower Bound
EG$_I$	15	57.5333	5.5532	1.43383	54.4581
EG$_{II}$	15	60.5333	5.57887	1.44046	57.4439
CG	15	49.9333	5.62478	1.45231	46.8184
Total	45	56.0000	7.08070	1.05553	53.8727

The table of descriptive statistics provides information about each group (number in each group, means, standard deviation, minimum and maximum, etc.). It shows that there is a slight difference in the mean score of the three groups. ANOVA was run in order to see if the differences are statistically significant or not.

Table 3.5 Test of Homogeneity of Variances

Scores			
Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
.010	2	42	.990

According to Levene's Test of Homogeneity of Variances Sig. value is .99. As this is greater than .05, we have not violated the homogeneity of variance assumption.

Table 3.6: ANOVA of Writing Performance Test

Scores					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	895.600	2	447.800	14.353	.000
Within Groups	1310.400	42	31.200		
Total	2206.000	44			

ANOVA was conducted to explore the impact of the treatment on learners' degree of improvement in L2 writing, as measured by writing performance test. The ANOVA showed that there was a statistically significant difference at the p < .05 level in mean of the three groups. [F (2.42) = 14.35, p = .00.] The amount of F and also p prove that these three groups were significantly different in their writing performance. But the important question here for this study is: where exactly do these differences lie? To answer this question, post hoc tests must be run. "Scheffe" was used as the post hoc test in this study.

Table 3.7 Post Hoc Tests of Writing Performance Test

Multiple Comparisons					
Dependent Variable: Scores					
Scheffe					
(I) Posttest	(J) PostTest	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval
					LowerBound
EG$_I$	EG$_{II}$	3.00000	203961	348	8.1759
	CG	7.60000*	2.03961	002	2.4241
EG$_{II}$	EG$_I$	3.00000	2.03961	348	2.1759
	CG	10.60000*	2.03961	000	5.4241
CG	EG$_I$	7.60000*	2.03961	002	12.7759
	EG$_{II}$	10.60000*	2.03961	000	15.7759

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The results of Scheffe's test indicated that the post-test results of Grammar-Focused group and Vocabulary-Focused group did not differ significantly (*sig* = .34). As for the Non-focused group, there was a statistically significant difference (*sig* = .00) between the L2 writing performance of this group and the other groups.

3.3. Results of Task Repetition

The writing performance test that was administered at the outset of the study was run for the second time after a-two-week time period. The rational for repeating the same test was to see if the participants scores improved in the task repetition phase of the study or not. Hence, the results of this test was compared with the results of the first performance. The results of statistical analyses and comparisons for this test is provided in the tables below.

Table 3.8: Descriptive Statistics of Task Repetition

Scores					
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean
					Lower Bound
EG$_I$	15	72.8000	6.7949	1.75445	69.0371
EG$_{II}$	15	68.7333	6.4083	1.65462	65.1845
CG	15	52.3333	6.1489	1.58765	48.9282
Total	45	64.6222	10.94675	1.63184	61.3335

The table of descriptive statistics provides information about each group (number in each group, means, standard deviation, minimum and maximum, etc.). It shows that there is a slight difference in the Grammar-Focused group's mean score ($M = 72.68$, $SD = 6.79$) compared to the Vocabulary-Focused group's mean score ($M = 68.73$, $SD = 6.40$). Meanwhile, Non-Focused group's mean score ($M = 52.33$, $SD = 6.14$) seems to be lower than the other groups. ANOVA was run in order to see if the difference is statistically significant or not.

Table 3.9 Test of Homogeneity of Variances

Scores			
Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
.063	2	42	.939

According to Levene's Test of Homogeneity of Variances Sig. value is .93. As this is greater than .05, we have not violated the homogeneity of variance assumption.

Table 3.10 ANOVA of Task Repetition

Scores					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3521.911	2	1760.956	42.247	.000
Within Groups	1750.667	42	41.683		
Total	5272.578	44			

ANOVA was conducted to explore the impact of the treatment on learners' degree of improvement in L2 writing, as measured by the task repetition test. The ANOVA showed that there was a statistically significant difference at the $p < .05$ level in mean of the three groups. [$F_{(2.42)} = 42.24$, $p = .00$.] The amount of F and also p prove that these three groups were significantly different in the task repetition phase. But the important question here for this study is: where exactly do these differences lie? To answer this question post hoc tests must be run. "Scheffe" was used as the post hoc test in this study.

Table 3.11 Post Hoc Tests of Task Repetition

Multiple Comparisons						
Dependent Variable: Scores						
Scheffe						
(I) TaskRepetition	(J) TaskRepetition	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	Lower Bound
EG$_I$	EG$_{II}$	4.06667	2.35747	.238		-1.9159
	CG	20.46667*	2.35747	.000		14.4841
EG$_{II}$	EG$_I$	-4.06667	2.35747	.238		-10.0492
	CG	16.40000*	2.35747	.000		10.4175
CG	EG$_I$	-20.46667*	2.35747	.000		-26.4492
	EG$_{II}$	-16.40000*	2.35747	.000		-22.3825

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The results of Scheffe's test indicated that the post-test results of Grammar-Focused group and Vocabulary-Focused group did not differ significantly (*sig* = .23). As for the Non-focused group, there was a statistically significant difference (*sig* = .00) between the L2 writing results of this group and the other groups in task repetition phase.

3.4.Results of Paired Samples Tests

As mentioned earlier, in order to investigate the impact of task repetition on EFL learners writing performance the writing performance test was repeated after fifteen days. In order to see if the mean scores of the participants in the three groups were significantly different the paired samples test was run in the SPSS. The results are as follows.

Table 3.12: Descriptive Statistics of Paired Samples

			Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
G$_I$	E	Written Performance	57.5333	15	5.55321	1.43383
		Repeated Performance	72.8000	15	6.79496	1.75445
G$_{II}$	E	Written Performance	60.5333	15	5.57887	1.44046
		Repeated Performance	68.7333	15	6.40833	1.65462
G	C	Written Performance	49.9333	15	5.62478	1.45231
		Repeated Performance	52.3333	15	6.14894	1.58765

The table of descriptive statistics provides information about each group (number in each group, means, standard deviation, etc.). It shows that there is a difference in the mean score of the groups. Paired Samples test was run in order to see if the differences are statistically significant or not.

Table 3.13: Paired Samples Test

			Paired Differences			
			Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
						Lower
G$_I$		Written Performance – Repeated Performance	-15.26667	1.53375	.39601	-16.11603
G$_I$		Written Performance – Repeated Performance	-8.20000	1.14642	.29601	-8.83487
G		Written Performance – Repeated Performance	-2.40000	.98561	.25448	-2.94581

A paired-samples *t*-test was conducted to evaluate writing performance of the groups in the task repetition phase. Table 4.13 above shows that the mean increase in writing scores for Grammar-Focused group is (-15.26), for Vocabulary-Focused group is (-8.20), and finally for Non-Focused group is (-2.40). This means that the participants who focused on grammar in their pre-task activity improved more than the other learners, and the participants who focused on vocabulary items in their pre-task activity improved more than the non-focused learners. In other words, the mean score of the participants who did not focus either on grammar or on vocabulary improved the least.

Table 4.14: Paired Samples Test Continued

		Paired Differences	t	df	Sig. (2 tailed)
		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference			
		Upper			
EG$_I$	Written Performance – Repeated Performance	-14.41731	-38.551	14	.000
EG$_{II}$	Written Performance – Repeated Performance	-7.56513	-27.702	14	.000
CG	Written Performance – Repeated Performance	-1.85419	-9.431	14	.000

As table 4.14 demonstrates, there was a statistically significant increase in mean of scores from writing performance test to task repetition test in Grammar-Focused group, t (14) = -38.55, p >.0005 (two-tailed), and Vocabulary-Focused group, t (14) = -27.70, p >.0005 (two-tailed), and Non-Focused group, t (14) = -9.43, p >.0005 (two-tailed). These results indicate that there was a statistically significant increase in writing performance test scores from the first performance to the second (repeated) performance in all three classes.

4. Discussion

Research question one investigated the effect of grammar-focused pre-task activity on Iranian EFL learners' written performance. The results of data analysis indicated that grammar-focused pre-task activity had a significant and positive influence on the participants writing ability. Hence, the first null hypothesis of the study was rejected.

Research question two investigated the effect of vocabulary-focused pre-task activity on Iranian EFL learners' written performance. The results of data analysis indicated that vocabulary-focused pre-task activity had a significant and positive influence on the participants writing ability. Hence, the second null hypothesis of the study was rejected.

Research question three investigated the effect of un-focused pre-task activity on Iranian EFL learners' written performance. The results of data analysis indicated that un-focused pre-task activity did not have a significant influence on the participants writing ability. Hence, the third null hypothesis of the study was not rejected.

Research question four investigated the effect of task repetition on Iranian EFL learners' written performance in grammar-focused, vocabulary-focused, and un-focused pre-tasks. The

results of data analysis indicated that task repetition had a significant and positive influence on the participants writing ability. Hence, the fourth null hypothesis of the study was rejected. Similar to the findings of this study Çelik (2015), proposed that both meaning-focused instruction and form-focused instruction are effective in improvement of language skills. He further suggested that meaning-focused is more effective than form-focused instruction. Spadaet. al. (2014), also provided evidence that language learners can benefit the most if both form and meaning are combined in a communicative language setting.

Partially in line with this research project Zhu-Xiu (2016) found that TBLT is an effective approach when it is combined with form-focused instruction in a communicative context. On the other hand, Sholihah (2010/2011), believed that although TBLT can have positive influence on students writing ability, it might have several drawbacks as well. For example employing TBLT strategies may take time in writing classes and teachers may have difficulty controlling group discussions properly.

Othman and Ismail (2008), also agreed that form-focused instruction in a TBLT setting can have a positive effect on EFL learners' language abilities. Similarly, Osuka and Yamamoto (2005) examined the effectiveness of form-focused tasks on grammar teaching and found that students' scores improved as a result of form-focused instruction. Ebrahimi et al. (2015); however, suggested that the focus on forms instruction was more effective than focus on form instruction in teaching and learning conditionals.

Partially consistent with this study Pishadast (2015) found that form-focused task-based instruction had a positive impact on learners' vocabulary learning and retention. Also Salimi and his team (2014), agreed that form-focused instruction had a considerable effect on accuracy of high proficient EFL learners. Comparing implicit and explicit form-focused instruction Parviz and Gorjian (2013), found that it is better to teach grammar directly rather than provide grammar points indirectly through an implicit form-focused instruction. Considering the form-focused/meaning-focused dichotomy Zohrabiand Rezaie (2012), suggested that if classrooms are completely meaning-focused, some linguistic features may not develop very well. In other words, they emphasized that form-focused instruction works better than meaning-focused language teaching.

As regards the impact of task repetition in this paper, Indrarathne's (2013) study revealed that the participant showed increased performance in fluency, accuracy and complexity in their written language output, especially in accuracy. It was concluded in this study that task repetition may develop the written language output in terms of accuracy, complexity and fluency and moreover task type repetition may also positively influence the performance of a similar task later. On the other hand, Pakbaz and Rezai (2015) concludes that using consciousness-raising activities resulted in more accurate writing production in the repeated performance. However, these activities didn't lead to a more complex written product. Also Azimzadeh (2014) found that task repetition had a great effect on the improvement of the learners' oral production in terms of fluency and accuracy.

Studying the impact of pre-task and online planning conditions on complexity, accuracy, and fluency of EFL learners' written production Ghavamnia and her team (2012) concluded that that the pre-task planning group outperformed the online planning group by producing more complex and fluent writings. Furthermore, Ghavamnia, Tavakoli and Esteki (2012) agreed

that while the pre-task planning has a positive influence on producing more complex and fluent essays, the online planning can have a positive effect on accuracy of EFL writers.

Keeping all this in mind, it may be discussed here that both grammar-focused and vocabulary-focused pre-task activities can have a positive influence of EFL learners' written performance. Meanwhile, task repetition may play a positive role in improving learners' writing ability.

5. Conclusion

There are four broad conclusions that can be drawn from the results of this study. The first conclusion being; grammar-focused pre-task activity has a significant and positive effect on Iranian EFL learners' written performance. It may be inferred that neither communicative approaches nor grammar instruction alone can help improve L2 writing skills. The form-focused instruction can be considered as an activity that can help meet the needs of EFL learners in their writing endeavor. As Ellis (2012) mentioned, form-focused instruction is an approach that combines form and meaning and which doesn't downplay either traditional or communicative approaches. It is suggested that form-focused instruction entails traditional approaches and communicative approaches to teaching grammar features (Ellis, 2012). In this approach focus on form is incorporated into communicative context, so students are expected to develop their language skills.

Grammar-focused instruction is different from traditional teacher-centered grammar teaching. According to Long (1991), the primary purpose of traditional grammar teaching is to teach explicit knowledge of grammar in isolation. On the other hand, the main aim of grammar-focused instruction is to draw learners' attention to form as they arise in lessons whose main focus is on meaning. In Iranian FFL settings, where learners' exposure to English is limited, learning English just through communication tasks without explicit knowledge of grammar is not an easy task to handle. The present study indicates that teaching grammar using form-focused tasks can be effective in filling in the gaps. This way of teaching can help learners develop implicit knowledge, by giving comprehensible structured input and chances to use the target structure in real world communications.

The second general conclusion drawn from this study is; vocabulary-focused pre-task activity has a significant and positive effect on Iranian EFL learners' written performance. As mentioned earlier, the primary function of a task is to elicit meaning towards fulfilling clear communicative objectives with the help of pre-, during- and post-tasks (Ellis, 2003). In recent years the importance of vocabulary learning has been the most important focus in teaching language. As Richards and Renandya (2002) put it, one of the essential parts of communicative competence is lexical competence, hence, learning a foreign language cannot occur without learning the vocabulary of that language. Considering the massive repertoire of vocabulary in a language and the inadequate exposure of L2 learners to foreign language situation, it goes without saying that learning new vocabulary is a difficult job for EFL learners. That is why numerous EFL/ESL instructors have constantly been fascinated a great deal in discovering the most effective methods to learn and instruct foreign language vocabulary items. It is concluded in this study that vocabulary-focused pre-task activities can pave the way to vocabulary enhancement and provide solutions to the above-mentioned problems. In other words, this study found that vocabulary-focused tasks have a positive

influence on the vocabulary learning of the Iranian EFL students. Hence, the findings of this study can provide evidence for the superiority of vocabulary-focused instruction on other forms of teaching vocabulary in improving L2 writing.

The next main conclusion drawn here is that un-focused pre-task activity does not have a significant influence on Iranian EFL learners' written performance. According to Ellis (2004) un-focused tasks are those that may predispose learners to choose from a range of forms but they are not designed with the use of a specific form in mind, while focused tasks aim to induce learners to process, receptively, or productively, some particular linguistic feature, for example, a grammatical structure. Compared to grammar-focused and vocabulary-focused pre-tasks, un-focused pre-task activities does not seem to contribute to EFL learners' written performance in this study.

And finally, the fourth conclusion drawn from the results of the present study is that task repetition has a significant and positive influence on Iranian EFL learners' written performance. Previous studies which were mostly conducted based on oral task repetition provided positive results of language development of EFL learners. The present study, on the other hand, concentrated on the written performance of the learners and indicated that task repetition may increase the written language production. Thus, it could be useful for language teachers to utilize written task repetition in order to increase written language development of their learners. These results are encouraging because they suggest that previous knowledge of the target task can help the learners to build on in their subsequent performance.

5.1 Pedagogical Implications

The present study has a number of implications for EFL teachers and learners. The findings of this study would be of great interest for most language instructors, who are interested in improving the writing performance of students through grammar-focused and vocabulary-focused pre-task activities. The   findings of this research are also useful for curriculum designers and language planners who are designing tasks and focusing on task-based instruction.

In this study the grammar-focused and vocabulary-focused instructions proved to be equally effective in improving L2 writing skills. Therefore, the study clarifies that such pre-task activities have an effective and predictable influence on all aspects of writing performance. These finding justifies the integration of both grammar- and vocabulary-focused pre-task activities in writing courses. These activities clearly promote some aspects of writing performance. So teachers interested in task-based instruction can use them to improve the writing skills of language learners.

5.2 Suggestions for Further Research

Based on the results of the present research project several suggestions can be recommended for future researchers. Future studies need to take a deeper look into the different aspects of TBLT such as pre-task, task, and post-task in a variety of EFL/ESL contexts. Due to practicality issues, this study was limited to male learners only. Future researchers may study both male and female learners' performances comparatively. Intermediate level learners participated in this study. The same study is suggested to be carried out with lower or higher level EFL learners to see if the same results are achieved. The participants in this study were

adult learners of English as a foreign language. A similar study on younger learners' performances might provide very different results. A larger population might also provide more accurate and generalizable results hence, the future researchers can replicate the same study with a larger number of participants. Another important avenue for future research would involve extending the research questions posed here to other tasks, conditions, and contexts. The present study exclusively focused on learner written performance rather than their development. It is advisable for future researchers to consider assessing the learners' level of development in their studies both in oral and written performances.

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