

EFL Learner's Evaluation of Writing Tasks in Iran's TOEFL and IELTS Preparation Courses in Light of the Process-oriented Approach

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to analyze EFL writing tasks in two of the most popular English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) exam preparation courses in Iran, namely IELTS and TOEFL. Having collected the criteria of writing task appropriateness in light of the process-oriented approach to writing instruction, we asked 60 learner participants to rate EFL writing tasks in 3 IELTS and 3 TOEFL preparation classes based on a checklist previously gathered and validated. The findings produced significant differences in terms of several features of writing task appropriateness. An observation process was conducted of the actual task performance in the target classes to explain the significant differences between the two groups. A two-sample t-test was later employed to evaluate the differences between the mean scores of ratings in the two groups while the p-level was set at .05.

Keywords: EFL Writing Tasks, Task Evaluation, Process-oriented Approach, IELTS Courses, TOEFL Courses

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1. Introduction

1.1. ESOL Exam Preparation Courses in Iran

Cambridge ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) works with thousands of stakeholders in developing, administering, making and validating different types of examinations within a consistent but evolving frame of reference (Milanovic, 2009). It offers the world's leading range of exams for learners and teachers of English, taken by over 3 million people in 130 countries (Experts in Language Assessment, 2009).

Two of the most popular of these exams around the world and in our country are the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) and IELTS (International Language Testing System). Candidates pay huge amounts of money so as to prepare themselves for these exams either by taking up private lessons or attending preparation courses. Significance of tasks and task analysis is even more important for these candidates since the tasks involved in these courses, as suggested by Oxford (2006), are high-stake tasks producing high levels of anxiety on the part of learners. Therefore, any attempts to analyze and enhance the quality of such instructional courses especially the writing skill is likely to be rewarding.

Moreover, the problem that the researcher has faced through personal experience once as a candidate and now as an instructor of these courses is the disquality of writing tasks in these classes from several aspects which seems to lie partly in the nature of tasks and partly in the teachers' role in task management. Concerning the quality of tasks, it seems that most of writing tasks in these classes do not even comply with the general features of task appropriateness. On the teachers' side, provision of a checklist comprised of

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the criteria of writing task appropriateness could be of great benefit to make up for their lack of competence to analyse tasks, adapt or even design them.

Research on L2 writing has grown exponentially over the last 40 years. During the late 1980s and the early 1990s, second language writing began to evolve into an interdisciplinary field of inquiry (Matsuda, 2003).

1.2. Writing Process Approach and EFL Writing Tasks

In the history of language teaching, there have been numerous approaches to writing instruction among which are the product-based versus the process-oriented approach (Holmes, 2006). The product approach is characterized by single-draft think→plan→write linear procedures. Process writing mainly criticizes the once-off correction, and the use of target product models of writing (Bruton, 2005).

According to Trupe (2001), instructors who incorporate such attention to process, in the realm of writing instruction, have the opportunity to intervene in the students' writing process at any stage they are involved in. Students who are asked to spend more time on a writing assignment will think more about their topic, retain more information, and develop more powerful insights. Furthermore, students' writing skills need practice in order to develop and such development is not achieved unless sufficient time and attention is being devoted. The effective intervention would, therefore, result in better products.

Once the awareness is raised of the significant roles that wisely-devised writing tasks can play in EFL classes, we should also like to know, first of all, what the features of appropriateness for these tasks are and then try to analyze a sample of these tasks in a group of EFL courses held in Iran which are going to be introduced as follows.

2. Review of the Related Literature

EFL or ESL writing tasks can be analyzed from two main aspects. Not only do they have to comply with certain *general* qualities of appropriateness, but they also need to obey certain specific features of writing *procedures* to function as effectively as possible. What follows is a review of what the researchers, theorists and practitioners have gained and proposed to date with respect to tasks, task analysis, L1 and L2 writing tasks and other related areas.

2.1. General Components of Writing Tasks

Nunan (2004) divides the basic components of tasks in general into goals, input and procedures which are supported by roles and settings. To start with, we need to regard the goal and rationale of the task. As suggested by Nunan (2004), goals may relate to a range of general outcomes or may directly describe teacher's or learner's behavior. Among the necessary qualities of goals, he underlines their clarity to the teacher and learner, task appropriateness to the proficiency level of learners and the extent to which the task encourages learners to apply classroom learning to the real world. As Jones and Shaw (2003) also pinpoint, writing tasks need to give all learners opportunities to perform to their utmost. Moreover, teachers should simultaneously eliminate variations in ratings which can be attributed to the task rather than the candidates' respective abilities especially in EFL performance tests.

As for the characteristics of task input, Nunan (2004) is in favor of employing a combination of authentic material and pedagogically written input. Given the richness and variety of these resources, teachers are enabled to apply authentic written texts that are appropriate to the needs, interests and proficiency level of their students. Sometimes the input is gathered from

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reading sources and students are required to select, organize and connect from source texts as they compose their new text (Segev-Miller, 2004). However, this is not the case in ESOL exam preparation classes where the input is provided either by the teacher or the textbook. Whoever provides the input, at any rate, should bear in mind that providing learners with samples of target language use before starting the task, as Muller (2006) suggests, enables learners to use it as a scaffold to which they can later add their own ideas.

In an attempt to engage learners' interest, as favored by advocates of process writing approach, the teacher can provide stimulating topics and deploy activities which help the students to express their ideas on them and to develop tasks where they have a more genuine purpose to write and a stronger sense of the audience (Holmes, 2006). As suggested by Massi (2001), through making conditions more authentic than the ones in traditional classroom tasks, an awareness of audience, purpose and intentionality will be reinforced. As recommended in the Annenberg (2007), in the selection of topics, attempts should be made to interest learners of their age, sex, educational level, field of study and cultural background. Furthermore, the topic needs to be something about which students have some sort of knowledge. In writing tasks this can be done by choosing tasks that allow learners to capitalize on their prior experience. Teachers can devise class activities that develop and expand students' schemata (Ferris and Hedgcock, 2005).

Concerning task instructions, the first and primary characteristic is clarity and conciseness. The level of the perceived clarity of the instructions can be culture-related. That is, we should not expect that the same instructions be perceived by eastern learners as clear as the western audience. In any particular context in which the task is used we need to be convinced that they are clearly-defined for the learners and cannot be easily misinterpreted. The instructions

should also indicate the amount of time allowed for writing and the approximate number of words and length of the expected response (Annenberg Media, 2007). In terms of timing, for instance, the teacher can elect to allow the students to complete the task in their own time or can set time limits. If the emphasis is on accuracy in a task performance, it has to be ensured that students are working at their own speed. However, if they intend to encourage fluency or in case they prefer to simulate the real exam condition (as it is usually the case in ESOL exam preparation courses), teachers had better set a time limit (Ellis, 2006).

2.2. Specific Components of Writing Procedures

As described by the MIT writing and communication center (1999), writing is a process which can involve at least four distinct steps: *prewriting*, *drafting*, *revising*, and *editing*. The commonalities among the procedures suggested by the main figures of this approach all include the stages of brainstorming, planning, writing the rough draft, editing, proofreading and publishing the final draft (Ozagic, 2004). What follows is an introduction of the procedures involved which are further complemented by the participants' roles and also the setting where the writing task performance takes place.

2.2.1. Pre-writing

This stage includes anything the writer does before writing a draft of one's document, such as thinking, taking notes, talking to others, brainstorming, outlining and gathering information (MIT center, 1999). When students spend time thinking about the writing process, they will be able to plan their strategies more effectively (Purdue University Writing Lab, 2007). Sasaki (2000)

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conducted research investigating writing processes adopted by less-skilled and more skilled EFL learners. The results revealed that in pre-writing stage, the expert writers spent a longer time planning a detailed overall organization while novices spent a shorter time creating a less global plan. Furthermore, studies such as the one carried out by Ojima (2006) attested to the fact that concept mapping as a form of pre-task planning was associated positively with the overall quality of the writing product during in-class compositions.

2.2.2. Draft-writing

The draft-writing stage, also known as *drafting*, involves writing the *rough draft* or *first draft* and comes when learners put their ideas on paper or computer screen by organizing them in sentences and paragraphs. Walsh (2004) calls draft a quick write-out where the writers do not worry about the form or mechanics. As described by the MIT center (1999), the draft tends to be writer-centered; it is you telling yourself what you know and think about the topic. In case the writer has had sufficient pre-planning and organization, the drafting stage can be both a gratifying and efficient experience. Writers should not feel forced to write chronologically. Sometimes the conclusion can be an easier place to begin with than the thesis statement. With each writing assignment, students will be able to find a personal system that works best for them (Purdue University Writing Lab, 2007).

2.2.3. Revising

Revising is the process of reviewing the paper on the ideal level. This process may involve changes such as the clarification of the thesis, the reorganization of paragraphs, and the omission of extra information (Purdue University Writing

Lab, 2007). Much of the recent research into the process writing is monopolized by a focus on revision, whether individual or peer. Elbow (1998) cautions us against the counter-productive effect of premature revising.

Frankenberg-Garcia (1999) stands in favor of providing student writers with pre-text feedback- in other words, before the draft is completed. In terms of the positive impact of feedback, Lee and Schallert (2008) argue that establishing a trusting relationship between teacher and students may be fundamental to the effective use of feedback in revision.

The results of a study conducted by Paulus (1999) revealed that while the majority of revisions that students made were surface-level revisions, the changes they made as a result of peer and teacher feedback were more often meaning-level changes than those they made on their own. Another study carried out in a Chinese context by Miao. et al. (2006) compared teacher and peer feedback in writing revision. Their results showed that more teacher feedback is incorporated and leads to greater improvement, but peer feedback appears to bring about a higher percentage of meaning-change revision.

2.2.4. Editing

After improving the quality of content in the revising stage, writers need to take care of mechanics including corrections of spelling, grammar, punctuation, and so forth. This is the last step before publishing the final product. It is called *proofreading* as well which deals with “how you write” (MIT center, 1999).

Three kinds of feedback can be given to the students in this stage: teacher, peer and self editing feedback. According to Stanley (2003), good writers must learn how to evaluate their own language to improve through self-editing their own text, looking for errors, and structure. This way, students will become better writers. However, for a beginner student who starts writing essays, self

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editing is most probably difficult. On the other hand, teachers can provide more guidance during editing and/or proof-reading with the student to set an example (Ozagac, 2004).

2.2.5. Publishing

After asserting that the final draft is produced and has been checked for surface level mistakes besides the content and general organization, it is time to publish it. As suggested by Gardner and Johnson (1997), learners can do this by reading out their written pieces loud for the whole class or for their peers in groups or pairs (cited in NCREL, 2004). Advantages include receiving feedback on their completed works immediately after they have been produced.

Moreover, the hearers, actually including the peer learners as well as the teacher, could point out issues which might be a common source of problems for other learner writers as well. Therefore, such feedback issuing can act to the benefit of not only the writer but also the whole class.

2.3. ESOL Exam Preparation Research

In terms of assessing the quality of IELTS preparation courses, mention can be made of Rao et al.'s (2003) investigation of the impact of attending these courses on learners' performance on the general writing test module. Their findings revealed that there was significant gain in the scores of candidates in the writing module. They also highlighted the influence of several factors such as time, motivation, anxiety and the nature of the skill itself on the candidates' performance during the preparation program and in the actual IELTS exam. In a similar vein, a more recent work, conducted by Mickan and Motteram (2008), attempted to find the typical features of pedagogy in IELTS preparation classes.

Following a period of observation, they reported an eclectic approach that covered information about test format, test tasks, awareness-raising of the sections of the tasks, practical hints and strategies for doing the test tasks.

As far as the TOEFL is concerned, a strong research program called ETS (Educational Testing Services) has, to date, conducted and reported more than one hundred research and reports of the 40-year history of this exam. A typical study which evaluated the writing skill prototype tasks in this exam was Lee and Kantor's (2005) work which, among other things, examined the impact of the number of tasks on the reliability of writing scores based on the integrated and independent tasks and concluded that the increase in the number of tasks would maximize the score reliability. Another study, in conjunction with other studies field-testing writing prototype tasks for the TOEFL, was carried out by Cumming et al. (2004) to assess the content validity, perceived authenticity and educational appropriateness of these prototype tasks. In a later research, Cumming et al. (2005) cast a comparing look at the written discourse in independent and integrated prototype tasks of the newer generations of this internationally popular test.

The related body of literature has most frequently focused on the assessment of some testing quality such as the authenticity, reliability and validity of the writing tasks included in these exams. Even when considering the introductory courses, little effort has been made to cast an ethnographic outlook at what really goes on in such classes and how the preparatory tasks are designed, performed and managed in the real class environment. There is a need, therefore, for evaluative research not only to fill the existing gap in the literature but also to take at least one further step to assess and provide suggestions for the sake of writing skill itself which has long suffered negligence compared to other skills especially in the context of Iran. This is what we hope

to achieve through the conduction of this research. The following section presents the steps and procedures taken for this aim.

3. The Purpose of This Research

Based on the aforementioned features of appropriate writing tasks, this research aims to analyze EFL writing tasks performed in two groups of ESOL exam preparation courses, the TOEFL and IELTS. Therefore, the main question we hope to investigate in this study is the following:

- Is there a difference between learners' ratings of EFL writing tasks in IELTS and TOEFL preparation courses in Iran?

The following null-hypothesis is presented accordingly:

There is no significant difference between learners' evaluation of EFL writing tasks in IELTS and TOEFL preparation courses in Iran.

4. Methodology

4.1. Participants and Setting

Six classes representative of the two most popular ESOL exam preparation courses were attended including: 3 IELTS and 3 TOEFL classes. In the target exam preparation classes in Iran, each skill is commonly taught separately and by a different teacher. Each writing session is planned to work on a new topic or type of writing which is expected to appear in the actual exam. The writing material worked on in the TOEFL classes in this study was the course book designed by the central office of the institute (to be taught throughout the country) which consists of writing samples, tasks, elaboration of techniques and exercises. In the IELTS classes, the material consisted of writing samples provided by teachers besides the corrected versions of learners' previous

writing tasks. Learners were assigned a new writing task every session to work on during the class time. So, in both IELTS and TOEFL classes, each session (lasting 1.5 hour) consisted of both theory and practice that is presenting learners with the techniques and strategies of writing and also involving them in the actual practice of writing. The participants were 60 learners consisting of 30 IELTS and 30 TOEFL adult learners of intermediate level. They were 41 girls and 19 boys whose first language was Persian and were all 18 years old or older. All the sample summer classes were attended and observed in the two most professional language institutes of Mashhad, Iran.

4.2. Instrumentation

The criterion was a checklist of 20 items which were divided in two major sections, *task prompt* and *task procedures*, as can be seen in the Appendix. The first section (containing the first 8 items) dealt with the key general features contributing to the appropriateness of writing tasks. The second section which included the remaining 12 items focused on the writing procedures and also addressed the learner and teacher's roles. All the items were supposed to be rated by choosing between four options of 0, 2, 4 and 6. The respondents were not only supposed to do their ratings by selecting among the options, but they were also asked to provide explanatory notes whenever needed. Learners' checklists were accompanied by the translation of the items in Persian in order to guarantee intelligibility of the questions. Translations were provided on the other side of the English version to be referred to in case needed. In the development of the checklist, the instructions provided by Bichelmeyer (2003), Stufflebeam (2000) and Scriven (2000) were adhered to. In order to validate the checklist, the steps suggested by Stufflebeam (2010, personal correspondence) at the Evaluation Centre of Western Michigan University

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were followed. The final version was piloted on an IELTS pre-writing class consisting of 10 learners to make sure of the comprehensibility of questions and also check for the timing.

4.3. Research Procedures

4.3.1. Data Collection

The actual data gathering process was carried out with the researcher's presence in the target classes. Each session was observed from the beginning to the end. The researcher took notes of the following information:

Number of students totally and of each gender, class time, teacher's gender, details of the class environment, teacher-learner interactions, the type of task to be taught or practiced, how the teacher monitored learner's writing practices, what s/he used in class (e.g. use of board, copies, etc.) to teach either structural or technical issues or draw learners' attention to a particular point, her time management, sample provision, teacher's availability to students and any other relevant details which could later be employed in explaining the results. Among the types of observation stated by Denzin and Lincoln (2005), the one carried out in this study was an unobtrusive one (also known as non-reactive) where the subjects are not aware that they are being studied. As far as the explicitness of the purpose of research is concerned, it was decided to adopt the newer view which is, as Potter (2002) describes, in favor of covert methods of research and does not approve of full disclosure of the purpose of any research project in order to impede people from hiding their true feelings or ideas.

At the end of the class time, when the task performance was over, the checklists were distributed among learners and a brief instruction was provided on the purpose of the analysis and how they were expected to do the rating.

They were also asked to include any further comments wherever they felt it was needed on the related items. Moreover, learners were ensured that their identity would be kept unknown especially to their teacher. Participants were not under pressure for time; however, almost all of the ratings were done between 10 to 15 minutes.

4.3.2. Data Analysis

Two-sample t-test was employed in this research to evaluate the differences in means. As the two samples consisted of different sets of individual subjects, the unpaired or independent-samples t-test was employed to assess the significance of the difference between the means on each and every item of the checklist. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was utilized for this aim, setting the alpha level at 0.05.

5. Results and Discussion

The research question addressed learners' ratings in two groups of ESOL exam preparation courses: Group 1 (IELTS) and Group 2 (TOEFL). Table 4-1 demonstrates the related findings which make the comparison possible:

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Item	Raters in 2 groups	N.	Mean	SD	Sig. (2-tailed)	p.
1	IELTS	30	4.97	1.016	0.776	n.s.
	TOEFL	30	5.05	1.026		
2	IELTS	30	4.97	1.016	0.777	n.s.
	TOEFL	30	5.05	1.026		
3	IELTS	30	1.81	.946	0.122	n.s.
	TOEFL	30	1.37	.955		
4	IELTS	30	4.97	1.140	0.687	n.s.
	TOEFL	30	4.84	1.015		
5	IELTS	30	2.00	1.155	0.060	s.
	TOEFL	30	1.47	.905		
6	IELTS	30	4.84	1.003	0.728	n.s.
	TOEFL	30	4.74	.991		
7	IELTS	30	4.26	.999	0.345	n.s.
	TOEFL	30	4.53	.905		
8	IELTS	30	5.03	1.016	0.319	n.s.
	TOEFL	30	4.74	.991		
9	IELTS	30	4.19	1.078	0.199	n.s.
	TOEFL	30	4.58	.902		
10	IELTS	30	4.52	1.458	0.167	n.s.
	TOEFL	30	5.05	1.026		
11	IELTS	30	4.45	.995	0.531	n.s.
	TOEFL	30	4.63	.955		
12	IELTS	30	3.81	.792	0.066	s.
	TOEFL	30	4.21	.631		
13	IELTS	30	3.81	.946	0.691	n.s.
	TOEFL	30	3.68	1.204		
14	IELTS	30	4.84	1.128	0.319	n.s.
	TOEFL	30	5.16	1.015		
15	IELTS	30	3.81	.946	0.393	n.s.
	TOEFL	30	3.58	.838		
16	IELTS	30	1.55	.850	0.027	s.
	TOEFL	30	2.11	.809		
17	IELTS	30	4.45	1.121	0.563	n.s.
	TOEFL	30	4.63	.955		
18	IELTS	30	5.10	1.350	0.644	n.s.
	TOEFL	30	5.26	.991		
19	IELTS	30	4.60	1.070	0.266	n.s.
	TOEFL	30	4.95	1.026		
20	IELTS	30	.00	.000(a)		
	TOEFL	30	.00	.000(a)		

As it can be seen in the table, among the features in Task Prompt section which comprised the first eight items of the checklist, item 5 produced a significant difference between the raters' evaluations. This item explored the extent to which the *topic* of writing was familiar to learners and was related to their background knowledge. Although the respondents' ratings of this item were low in both groups, yet Group 1 (IELTS) obtained a higher mean score of rating than the other group. According to the class observations, in the TOEFL classes the students were required to work on *essay writing*. In the IELTS classes, however, students were engaged in writing *paragraphs of comparison and contrast* as well as *letter writing*. The length of the required writing task was more in the TOEFL classes and the topics of the essays were more technical. As it was observed, students spent more time even on planning and organizing their ideas before starting to write the main draft. This could have also affected their lower rating of this item.

Among Task Procedures items, the null hypothesis was rejected for the two items: 12 and 16. The former investigated learners' role in *revising* stage. This item was rated satisfactorily high in both IELTS and TOEFL classes. However, it was rated significantly higher in TOEFL classes than IELTS. According to observations in TOEFL classes, students were allowed more time to produce their texts. Two-third of the class time was devoted to actual writing in the observed TOEFL classes. This could have affected their performance. Here, it seems that learners who had more time to be engaged in writing spent more time on revising as well as editing. When they faced time limitation, they prioritized editing the surface level structure to revising at the meaning level. Now, further research is required to check for the causality of time in preference for attending to form or meaning.

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Item 16 which addressed learners' role in *editing for punctuation*, was rated low in the both courses. However, it was significantly lower in IELTS than TOEFL classes. According to class observations, one of the teachers in TOEFL classes used the board to remind learners of the required punctuation of conjunctions in texts. This could have affected the students' rating of the related item. As we can see, the role of teacher in drawing learners' attention is important. A question is in place here: Does the same teacher teach writing differently in an IELTS and a TOEFL class? That is, can we attribute every difference merely to the structure of these classes or to the fact that the teacher in one class has simply been better than the one in another? Deciding on this matter is hard when your access to adequate representative classes of each type is restricted. What is aimed in this study is not to ignore the impact of many intervening factors such as the effect of teacher, atmosphere and else, but I reckon, there is an outer factor stronger than these just mentioned, which heavily influences the different structures of these classes. The nature of IELTS classes in Iran is noticeably more rushing and stressful than the TOEFL classes. Every teacher who has experienced teaching these courses in this country can approve this. TOEFL courses are more extensive in Iran than their intensive IELTS counterpart. This can to some extent explain why learners in TOEFL classes spend more time writing in class than IELTS students. But again this does not exempt teachers from managing class time more efficiently so that learners can have sufficient time writing on their own. We have a number of suggestions for teachers who teach these courses.

6. Concluding Suggestions

According to the results, the null hypothesis was rejected in terms of one general quality of task appropriateness and two aspects of writing procedures.

Based on the quantitative findings:

1. The mean scores of ratings for *task authenticity* (item 3) were low in both IELTS and TOEFL classes. This shows that the raters found little relationship between what they were learning in class and how it could be applied in the real world. Now, we are well aware that in these courses, teachers are bound to work on a limited number of pre-established topics which will appear in the real exam. However, this can be to some extent soluble. Teachers can still try to explain and justify why learners need to learn those specific types of writing and how useful that would be in their prospective life in the L2 society. Moreover, whatever topic the learners are supposed to learn, the teacher should make the appropriate adjustments so that none of the writing procedures is ignored or simply omitted.
2. According to the findings, learners' *familiarity with the topic* (item 5) distinguished IELTS and TOEFL courses and rejected the null hypothesis. However, the mean scores of ratings show that the quality of this feature was low in both courses. This requires compensation by teachers. They need to help learners through eliciting their previous experiences in English or even their first language. For instance, in case of letter writing, they can first ask students about how they write a special type of writing in Persian, or whether they have ever written a letter in English and if they can guess about the level of formality in such letters.
3. Students' attempt at *revising* their texts (item 12) was rated significantly higher in TOEFL classes which also rejected the null hypothesis to

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distinguish between the two groups. This feature was not rated low in IELTS classes; however, it can still be improved if teachers draw students' attention more to the higher-order concerns such as the clarification of thesis or reorganization of paragraphs.

4. As the obtained results show, learners' *edition of punctuation* (item 16) distinguished the two groups; however, the mean scores of ratings show that this feature was very low in both IELTS and TOEFL courses. Teachers are recommended to emphasize more on the mechanics of writing. They need to inform students that how a poorly-edited writing, especially in terms of punctuation, can convey the wrong meaning or how it could reduce their overall score in the prospective exam. That is not meant to scare the learners, but simply to be consciousness raising.

The obvious matter is that not all the twenty items of the checklist produced significant differences between the two groups. However, what was actually obtained can be of great value to whoever engaged in the target exam preparation courses especially as teachers in Iran. Besides, the checklist can be employed by any EFL writing instructor to evaluate the tasks s/he is assigning to the students in class (not necessarily ESOL preparatory courses) or even in designing new tasks which could be better fitted with the students' needs, proficiency level, available time and other relevant factors.

7. Suggestions for Further Research

A great body of research, worldwide, has addressed international exams at the top of which are TOEFL and IELTS. Success in these exams is among the required conditions to enter English-speaking countries as immigrants or university students. However, this is not the ultimate goal. In some countries including ours achievement in these exams is required for higher-education,

M.S. in some majors and PhD for all majors. Besides, a satisfactory band score of these exams is demanded for certain occupations. Taking these goals in mind, then the type of tasks assigned in these exams could be inappropriate for and incompatible with the needs of learners. The need to pass TOEFL or IELTS to graduate from an Iranian university is evidently different from an American or English university.

The present study evaluated the general structure of tasks and the procedures of writing in TOEFL and IELTS classes in Iran. Further research is welcomed to embrace the political aspects involved as mentioned above and make a complementary evaluation: to what extent are the writing tasks in TOEFL and IELTS (or other well-known international exams such as FCE, CAE, etc.) appropriate to the real needs and demands of Iranian learners who do not wish to leave the country but simply seek to further their education or career inside their homeland?

Abbreviations

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

ESL: English as a Second Language

ESOL: English for Speakers of Other Languages

TOEFL: Test of English as a Foreign Language

IELTS: International Language Testing System

SPSS: Statistical Package for Social Sciences

CGF: Controlled-Guided-Free

ETS: Educational Testing Service

NCREL: North Central Regional Educational Laboratory

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Appendix

Evaluation Checklist of EFL/ESL writing tasks (Students' version)		Ratings			
The course: IELTS <input type="radio"/> TOEFL <input type="radio"/> FCE <input type="radio"/> CAE <input type="radio"/> Age: Sex: MALE <input type="radio"/> FEMALE <input type="radio"/>		Not at all (0)	A Little (2)	Adequately (4)	To a Great Extent (6)
Task Prompt					
1	A. Task goal - Was the overall goal of the task clear and void of ambiguity to you as a learner?	0	2	4	6
2	- Was the task appropriate to your current English proficiency level?	0	2	4	6
3	B. Task authenticity - To what extent did the task help you to apply classroom learning to the real world?	0	2	4	6
4	C. Task topic - Was the topic of the task stimulating and appropriate to your age and educational level?	0	2	4	6
5	- To what extent was the topic familiar to you and related to your background knowledge?	0	2	4	6
6	D. Task instructions - To what extent were the instructions clear and concise?	0	2	4	6
7	- Were the target reader and the features of the expected response (e.g. word/time limits, register) clarified in the instructions?	0	2	4	6
8	- Were any sample texts provided for you either by the teacher or the textbook?	0	2	4	6
Task Procedures					
9	A. Pre-writing - Did you spend time on brainstorming, gathering information or outlining before starting to write?	0	2	4	6
10	- Did the teacher familiarize you with techniques such as listing or clustering the ideas, or ask you to share your ideas in groups?	0	2	4	6
11	B. Draft-writing - Did you go through the second stage of putting ideas into sentences or paragraphs without concern for mechanics such as spelling or punctuation?	0	2	4	6
12	C. Revising - Did you revise your jotted down ideas to make sure of their sensibility and accurateness to the reader?	0	2	4	6
13	- Did you receive feedback on <u>content</u> from the teacher or perhaps a peer in this stage?	0	2	4	6
14	D. Editing - To what extent did you edit your writing for grammar and structure?	0	2	4	6
15	- To what extent did you edit your writing for word spelling?	0	2	4	6
16	- To what extent did you edit your writing for punctuation, before submitting it?	0	2	4	6
17	- Did you receive feedback on <u>form</u> from your teacher in this stage?	0	2	4	6
18	E. Publishing - Did you read out your texts finally to the class or your peers?	0	2	4	6
19	- To what extent was the teacher's feedback on the completed piece of writing motivating?	0	2	4	6
20	* To what extent did the task performance occur outside classroom environment (e.g. in a library or language lab)?	0	2	4	6