

along with it, to learn how to learn in their own individual holistic way. It may be the case that learner autonomy is best achieved when among other things, the teacher acts as a facilitator of learning, a counselor, and as a resource. In as much as the success of learning and the extent to which learners tap into their potential resources in order to overcome difficulties and achieve autonomy are determined by such factors as learners' motivation, their desire to learn, and the beliefs they hold about themselves as learners and learning per se.

The pedagogical implications for language teachers emphasize the philosophy behind group work, that learning is enhanced when it is more like a team effort than a solo race, and that it is during interaction with peers that learners enhance their risk taking abilities and all their anxieties are taken away.

It is manifest that changing some negative beliefs and attitudes is bound to facilitate learning. Attitude change is assumed to be brought about through exposure to a persuasive communication between the teacher and the learners.

Learners should be reminded that almost any change, good or bad includes some risk. Risk is essential to progress and failure is often a key part of learning. Students should realize that it is okay to trust others and rely more on others, and in doing so, they open their minds to new experiences.

Unfortunately, Iranian EFL learners are not accustomed to working and learning together, although it is a philosophy that fits today's globalized world. Perhaps this problem results from the shortcomings of available materials in providing the EFL learners with ample opportunities as far as collaborative learning and risk taking with the language are concerned. Therefore, one of the responsibilities of material designers is to take care of the aforementioned issue.

It is a fact that no researcher can ever claim that the results of his or her study can be applied to all possible cases. The aim of every researcher is to come to a conclusion that could be put to experiment in other fields of study.

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Table 6: *t*-test for paired samples (both groups- post-test)

Mean	13.7814	14.3481
Variance	6.0915	5.4510
Observations	27	27
Df	26	
P (T<=t) one-tail	0.1481	
t Critical one-tail	1.7056	
P (T<=t) two-tail	0.2963	
t Critical two-tail	2.0555	

Table 6 obviously proves the homogeneity of the experimental and control group in post-test, since the *t*-observed is smaller than the *t*-critical.

The results revealed that none of the obtained *F*-values exceeded the critical *F* at the .05 level of significance, and as the *t*-test for paired samples show the calculated *T* value did not exceed the *T*-critical value.

Throughout this research, it was mentioned that it is necessary to deal with writing as a communicative activity that needs to be encouraged and nurtured during the language learners' course of study. The study was a search for the effectiveness of group work risk taking on the analysis of composition test. The researchers tried to answer a basic research question, which dealt with the relationship between group work risk taking and EFL writing. From the results obtained in this analysis, it can be concluded that risk taking via group work does not have any significant effect on the Iranian EFL learners' writing ability.

Discussion, Implications, and Applications

Statistical findings of the study did not indicate a great amount of difference between the performance of the students in the

experimental and control groups.

This therefore does not prove the superiority of group work risk taking in writing over individual writing. At the same time, it does not reject it.

On the basis of the achieved statistical results of the study, two points should be considered. First, the results were in favor of the null hypothesis. Second, learners who took the treatment in this study achieved remarkable progress as far as risk taking in writing is concerned, although this progress did not lead to a significant change in their writing performance.

During this research, it was clear that the teacher's role in group writing was that of a guide. She explained the use of roles within the groups and emphasized positive interdependence. It was also the teacher's task to provide a suitable atmosphere for the students to take the necessary risk during group writing. It was obvious that worrying about details like spelling and mechanics, which can dampen the excitement that thinking and writing naturally generates, were less in experimental group, and symptoms of fluency were more addressed in their writings.

Teacher and learner can work towards autonomy by creating a friendly atmosphere characterized by "low threat, unconditional positive regard, honest and open feedback, respect for the ideas and opinions of others, approval of self-improvement as a goal, collaboration rather than competition (Candy, 1991, p. 337).

One of the assumptions underlying this discussion on learner autonomy has been that the teacher has not relinquished his "authority"; rather, that he has committed himself to providing the learners with the opportunity to experiment, make hypothesis, and improvise, in their attempt to master the target language and

influenced by the subjects' penmanship and or neatness of the compositions. After the three raters scored the papers, a total mean score was calculated for each composition. Then, the results were analyzed to estimate the reliability of the scoring procedure.

Results

To answer the research question different analyses were conducted. The first analysis was done to determine the reliability coefficients of the tests.

After obtaining reasonably high reliability index, content validity was investigated through discussions among experienced professors.

As the present study was of a true-experimental nature, the correlation between the obtained scores of the pre-test and post-test was estimated through F-tests and t-test.

Table 1: F-test for paired samples (exp-group)

Fo	Fc	Level of significance	df for numerator	df for denominator
1.61	1.97	0.05	26	26

Note: df=degree of freedom Fo=F-observed Fc=F-critical

As it is shown by table 1, F-observed is smaller than F-critical. Therefore, the difference between the variances in pre-test and post-test of the experimental group is not significant.

Table 2: t-test for paired samples (exp-group)

Fo	Fc	Level of significance	df for numerator	df for denominator
1.31	1.97	0.05	26	26

Note: df=degree of freedom Fo=F-observed Fc=F-critical

Table 2 shows that t-observed is smaller than t-critical, therefore the difference between the means in pre-test and post-test of the experimental group is not significant.

Table 3: F-test for paired samples (con-group)

Mean	13.659	14.3481
Variance	7.1609	5.4510
Observations	27	27
Df	26	
P (T<=t) one-tail	0.0977	
t Critical one-tail	1.7056	
P (T<=t) two-tail	0.1954	
t Critical two-tail	2.0555	

As F-observed is smaller than F-critical, the differences between the variances in pre-test and post-test of the control group is not significant.

Table 4: t-test for paired samples (con-group)

Fo	Fc	Level of significance	df for numerator	df for denominator
1.37	1.97	0.05	26	26

Note: df=degree of freedom Fo=F-observed Fc=F-critical

Table 4 shows that t-observed is smaller than t-critical. Therefore the difference between the means in pre-test and post-test of the control group is not significant.

Table 5: t-test for paired samples (both groups pre-test)

Mean	13.7888	13.6592
Variance	4.4256	7.1609
Observations	27	27
Df	26	
P (T<=t) one-tail	0.4114	
t Critical one-tail	1.7056	
P (T<=t) two-tail	0.8229	
t Critical two-tail	2.0555	

Table 5 shows the homogeneity of the experimental and control group, since the t-observed is smaller than the t-critical.

modeled if they are to be acquired. In such an environment cooperative social interaction which produces new, elaborate, advanced psychological processes are fostered. Therefore, rather than engineering situations that encourage plagiarism, misunderstanding and fear, teachers need to offer unconditional trust, which will inspire confidence, motivation, and learning.

Since no empirical study has been reported in which the significance of risk taking as an affective factor is determined in the EFL writing skill, the present study was conducted to find out the impact of risk taking via group work on the EFL learners' writing ability.

Thus, the following research question was posed:

- Does group work risk taking have any significant impact on the development of Iranian EFL learners' writing ability?

METHOD

Subjects

The subjects of this study were 54 adult female students who were studying English as a foreign language at the pre-intermediate level in Branch 13 of Kish Language School. They were assigned into two experimental and control groups according to their obtained scores on an achievement test. The total number of the subjects taking the achievement test was 87.

Instrumentation

Two tests were used in this study:

- 1- A standardized achievement test
- 2- A composition writing test.

The standardized achievement test included four subtests: i.e., structure (24 items), vocabulary (28 items), reading comprehension (18 items), and a composition writing (1 paragraph). The composition writing test was used for gathering the data needed for the pre-test. An issue of significance was the choice of the topic since it was supposed to affect the

students' performance. Thus the "advantages and disadvantages of living in a flat" was chosen as the topic to be given to the subjects. The rationale behind this selection was familiarity with the topic.

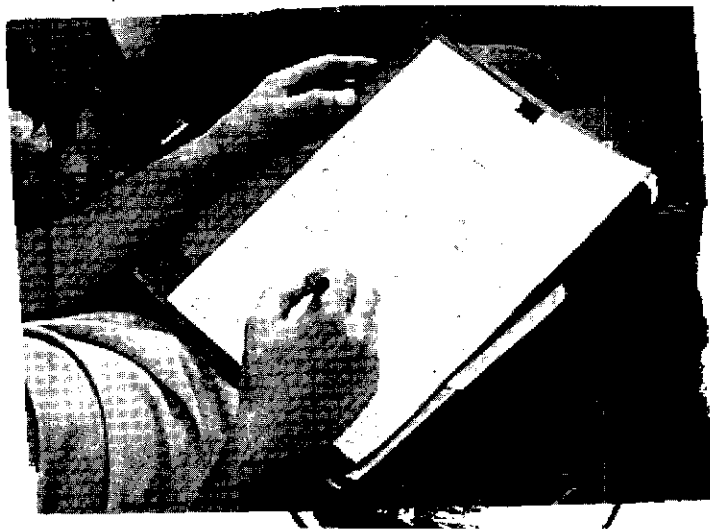
Procedures

At the first stage, an achievement test was administered to 87 subjects. Through item analysis, the least effective items were eliminated. Estimating the reliability and validity, the test came out to be a standardized one. The time allocated to the whole test was 130 minutes.

Of the initial 87 learners, 54 scored within one standard deviation above and below the mean, and consequently they were included in the study as the experimental and control groups. Then the subjects in both groups took a pre-test consisting of composition writing test. Via ten sessions of treatment, the subjects in the experimental group wrote some paragraphs in groups of 3 or 4, utilizing risk taking strategies including quick write and an encouraging atmosphere based on affiliation provided by the teacher, while in the control group the subjects wrote the same paragraphs individually.

After the treatment phase was over, the subjects in both groups sat for the post-test. The scores on the pre-test and post-test were used for the purpose of validation. Due to the importance of the scoring procedure and its impact on the reliability and validity of the study, more attention was paid to the scoring procedure. Generally, one way of decreasing the scoring effect on test results is having more raters. The more the number of raters per paper, the more reliable the scores. In this study, three raters, using the same rating scale, scored the compositions.

In order to guarantee scorer consistency, the raters were selected from the same major background. They were notified not to be



experience how to focus clearly, organize logically, and interpret and present data persuasively.

Obviously much more could be said on this point.

Autonomous learning is achieved when certain conditions obtain: cognitive and metacognitive strategies on the part of the learner motivation, attitudes, and knowledge about language learning. i.e., a kind of meta language.

To acknowledge, however, that learners have to follow certain paths to attain autonomy is tantamount to asserting that there has to be a teacher on whom it will be incumbent to show the way. In other words, autonomous learning is by no means teacher less learning. teachers have a crucial role to play in launching learners into self-access and in lending them a regular helping hand to stay afloat. It is to these instructional situations that we will turn in the next enquiry. i.e., the target language, as well as their motivation and attitude toward language learning in general.

Among the social and affective variables at work, risk taking is deemed to be the most crucial factor in the learners' ability to overcome occasional setbacks or minor mistakes in the process of learning a second or foreign language. In this light, it is necessary to shed some light on learner attitudes.

If learners believe that certain personality types cannot learn a foreign language, and they

believe that they are that type of person, then they will think that they are fighting a "losing battle" as far as learning a foreign language is concerned.

There are substantial links among affective measures and achievement. Several studies have proved the influence of affect on language achievement (Gardner, 1985; Skehan, 1998; Spolsky 1989; Gardner and MacIntyre, 1992; 1993; Damasio, 1994; Arnold, 1999). Although most of the researches cited above support the significance of considering affective factors in the process of EFL learning, they do not work on one of the most crucial factors called *Risk Taking* as much as motivation or self-esteem.

Undertaking a task involves a challenge for achievement or a desirable goal in which there is a lack of certainty or a fear of failure. In other words, we ought to be brave enough to try new approaches or ideas with no predictable control over results or consequences.

Taking increasing risk is part of growing up and becoming an adult. Risk taking is an essential part of the assertion of independence and self-testing behavior that every person goes through. In order to strengthen this ability in learners, focus needs to be taken off of deficiencies and put on strength to build self esteem. The classroom is therefore an environment in which educational goals such as concern for community, concern for others and commitment to the task in hand must be promoted and

INTRODUCTION

In recent years language teaching and learning have undergone a great shift from teacher-centeredness to learner-centeredness. Learners are no more passive recipients of the language. On the contrary, they are active participants who are responsible for their own learning. It is widely believed that effective teaching is a function of relationship rather than of methods. In other words, it is not so much what teachers do; it is how they do it.

After World War I to 1960, other theories such as Chomsky's *Generative Transformational Grammar* and *Eclecticism* emerged. By the rise of *Humanistic psychology*, grammar instructions were de-emphasized; the focus was on pragmatics, L2 instruction and communicative competence. Learner-centered classrooms, explorations, cognitive styles, attitudes and motivation and group dynamics are some of the characteristics of this era.

Having a look at the language learning evolution through the years, one can realize that cognitivism and effectivism are getting more worthy, and the trend of language learning is changing its status from a purely mechanic act to a humanistic one. From another perspective, it is a truism that one of the most important spin-offs of more communicatively-oriented language learning has been the premium placed on the role of the learner in the language learning process. It goes without saying, of course, that this shift of responsibility from teachers to learners do not exist in a vacuum, but it is the result of a concatenation of changes to the curriculum itself towards a more learner-centered kind of learning.

Among all the language skills, writing involves the simultaneous practice of a number of different abilities.

Writing teachers have long acknowledged students' writing problems and provided individual feedback to their students. Even so,

many ESL/EFL students find written comments problematic because they may prove very difficult for them to comprehend them and act accordingly.

The most important factor in writing exercises is that students need to be personally involved in order to make the learning experience a lasting value. In recent years various approaches have been proposed by EFL scholars, process approach being the most prominent of all. Within this approach the focus has shifted from the end product to the various stages the writer goes through such as brainstorming, drafting, revising, etc. During these stages students are provided with necessary feedbacks, probably cognitive or affective, from the teacher's part or other peers. A positive affective response is imperative to the learner's desire to continue attempts to communicate, and the teacher must create a classroom environment that helps the writer progress in his work.

Almost any classroom organization works if students are free to write, confer, or rewrite.

Regarding the importance of collaboration, Pica, Lincoln and Linnel (1996) state that participation in interaction can play a theoretically important role in the learning process by assisting language learners in the need to obtain input and feedback that can serve to modify and adjust their output in ways that expand their current interlanguage capacity.

Collaborative writing provides students with an authentic audience, increases students' motivation for writing, enables students to receive different views on their writing, helps students learn to read their own writing, critically and assists students in gaining confidence in their writing. It also helps them consider different ideas about their topics and develop and clarify these ideas.

By sharing their ideas with a community of knowledgeable and critical others, students

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The Impact of Group Work Risk Taking on the Iranian EFL Learners' Writing Skill

چکیده

عمده ترین تلاش مدرسان نگارش، خصوصاً در زمینه ی آموزش زبان خارجی آن است که کلاس نگارش را چنان خوشایند و جذاب سازند که انشانویسی به ابزار مؤثری در امر آموزش تبدیل شود. این تحقیق تأثیر ریسک کردن در خلال کارگروهی را بر پیشبرد توانایی نگارش به زبان خارجی در زبان آموزان را بررسی کرد. نتایج تحقیق نشان داد که اختلاف قابل توجهی بین عملکرد گروهی افراد و نگارش انفرادی بدون اعمال روش های ریسک کردن وجود ندارد. دستاوردهای این تحقیق به طور کلی در امر آموزش زبان خارجی و به ویژه نقش کارگروهی در یادگیری زبان حائز اهمیت است. نتایج این بررسی برای طراحان منابع آموزشی که به نگارش به عنوان ابزار ارتباطی می نگرند نیز، کارآمد خواهد بود.

کلید واژگان: تندنویسی، ریسک کردن، عوامل احساسی، کارگروهی، نگارش.

ABSTRACT

The major concern of writing teachers in general and foreign language writing teachers in particular is to make composition classes more pleasant so that writing changes its status from being marginalized into an effective means of learning.

This study verified the impact of risk taking via group work on improving Iranian EFL learners' writing skill. The findings revealed no significant difference between the performances of group optimal risk takers and individual non-risk takers. The findings have significant implications for EFL teaching in general and EFL cooperative learning in particular, the outcome of this investigation can also be practicable for EFL material designers who look at writing as a means of communication.

Key Words: affective factors, group work, quick write, risk taking, writing.