

Collaborative vs. Individual Task Planning and Iranian EFL Learners' Writing Performance

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Abstract

This study was intended to compare collaborative and individual task planning effects on Iranian EFL learners' writing performance. Therefore, a group of 90 upper intermediate EFL learners were placed in three groups of Collaborative Task planning, Individual Task planning, and Control. In the experimental groups, participants were asked to do task planning collaboratively and individually. The first writing assignment was the pretest and the eighth one was the posttest. A rating scale which includes five equally weighted criteria for rating; namely, Organization, Content, Grammar, Mechanics, and Style as well as the Total score was used. After making sure about the inter-rater consistency, data were analyzed using one-way ANOVAs to examine the effects of task planning on EFL writing performance. Results indicated that task planning produced better writing performances in the experimental groups, when considering Total scores. Furthermore, the treatment was effective in Organization and Style. Nevertheless, it had no significant effects on Content, Grammar, and Mechanics. Results are in line with previous research on collaborative writing and task planning. However, the study was different because it made a distinction between collaborative and individual task planning. This study has practical implications for classroom practices and language teachers, and theoretical implications for a better understanding of sociocultural theories of second language learning.

Key words: collaborative writing; task planning; sociocultural theory of second language

Introduction

The sociocultural theory of second language acquisition, mainly based on the work of Vygotsky (1978), has encouraged collaborative writing activities. As Doboia (2012) indicated attentions have been shifted from brainstorming and peer review activities to encouraging tasks which require collaboration throughout the completion of the task (e.g., Storch, 2005; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2007; Wigglesworth & Storch, 2009). It should be noted that sociocultural theories of second language acquisition (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006) have indicated that learners' collaboration in pairs or groups encourages second language development because more experienced learners help the less experienced ones by providing the scaffolding they require within their zone of proximal development.

More specifically, Swain (2000) pointed out that as long as writing is concerned, collaboration makes learners think about their language-related problems when they are working on their writing tasks (see also Ohta, 2001). This is because as indicated by the social constructivist theories of second language development, language learning, as a part of human development in general, originally has a social nature. In fact, in such theories, interpersonal relationships are emphasized over intrapersonal ones. According to the sociocultural theory of

development, it is the more experienced member of the community (an expert) who is supposed to support the less experienced ones (the novice, a child- for example). SLA researchers have pointed out that this can also happen in a second language writing classroom (e.g., Kim, 2008; Nassaji & Tian, 2010; Shehadeh, 2011; Swain & Lapkin, 2001).

While most studies have focused on what language learners think about collaborative writing (e.g., Storch, 2005), it seems that this has been a research variable in just a few SLA studies (e.g., Shehadeh, 2011) and more research is required to shed light on different aspects of collaboration in second language writing. Shehadeh, for example, used a holistic rating scale to measure participants' content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. He concluded that collaborative writing improved learners' content, organization, and vocabulary, but not the other two dependent variables, namely grammar and mechanics. His participants also found the experience, i.e., collaborative writing an enjoyable one.

In a similar, but with a very limited scope (nine pairs and five individuals), Storch (2005) examined the effects of collaborative writing among a group of second language learners in Australia. Storch concluded that in addition to having a positive attitude towards the experience, pairs produced better texts in terms of some dimensions of fluency (Housen, Kuiken, & Vedder 2012) grammatical accuracy and complexity as well as task fulfilment. She maintained that this collaboration helped learners to share their resources and support each other by providing feedback, which is one of the main objectives of social constructivist views of second language development. One criticism of the study, although the results are so illuminating, is that the small sample size jeopardizes the external validity of the study and generalization of the results to other language learners must be done with care.

Nevertheless, in a later study Storch and Wigglesworth (2007) made up for this shortcoming and investigated the efficacy of collaborative writing among a much larger sample (72 second language learners including 24 pairs). Results supported Storch's (2005) conclusion and showed that pairs produced more accurate sentences than individuals. They maintained that the experience provided participants with an opportunity "to interact on different aspects of writing" (p. 172).

In a case study examining the effects of corrective feedback on second language learners writing, Storch and Wigglesworth (2010) followed a three-session experiment. Session 1 was intended to encourage participants to produce a text based on a prompt. In this session, learners were required to work in pairs and were encouraged to provide direct and indirect feedback. In the following sessions, participants were asked to revise and rewrite the text based on the feedback they received. In Session 3, learners were given the same graphic prompt they had on the first session and were asked to write a text, but this time individually. Results showed that learners were affected positively by the feedback they received in pairs. In addition, the study positively changed their attitudes towards the experience as well.

Effects of tasks and task planning have been research variables in a large number of studies in EFL/ESL contexts, taking a plethora of aspects into account, such as measuring the three dimensions of second language proficiency (e.g., Bygate, Skehan, & Swain, 2001 and Ellis, 2003, among others) and examining the effects of feedback and collaborative dialogue on second language development (e.g., Storch, 1999; Swain & Lapkin, 2001). Swain (2001), for instance, decided that collaborative tasks are communicative in nature. This is because they require learners to be involved in activities that are mostly focused on meaning rather than form. This way, learners write a text which is the direct consequence of pair or group work. Similarly, Doboia (2012) pointed out collaborative writing results in a better performance than individual tasks.

The study

The study was mainly intended to examine and compare the effects of collaborative and individual task planning on Iranian EFL learners' writing performance taking Brown and Bailey's (1984) scale into account. The scale includes "five equally weighted criteria for scoring, Organization, Content, Grammar, Mechanics, and Style" (Brown & Bailey, p. 21). Therefore, the following research questions were posed:

1. Does task planning (individual and collaborative) affect Iranian EFL learners' writing performance?
2. In case the answer to the first question is positive, what type of task planning (individual and collaborative) has a more significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' writing performance?
3. Following Brown and Bailey's (1984) scale, what aspects of EFL writing are more significantly affected by task planning?

Method

Participants

Participants of the study were 90 EFL learners who were learning English in a language institute in Isfahan. They were all native speakers of Persian, which is an SOV language with a writing system that is completely different from English (in Persian, they write from right to left). These participants were selected based on their availability and were placed in experimental and control groups after taking the placement test, i.e., Oxford Placement Test (Allen, 2004). Both male and female learners participated in the study. Attempts were made to include an equal number of each gender, so that gender could be controlled, although gender was not a variable in the study. Since the study was intended to investigate the impact of collaborative and individual task planning on upper-intermediate EFL learners, it was essential to conduct a placement test to make sure that participants were homogenous. After the placement test, the 90 participants who were of higher proficiency than the others were randomly placed in two experimental and one control groups.

In one of the experimental groups, Collaborative Task Planning (CTP), participants (N = 30) were supposed to work together to do the planning before they actually started writing. In the second experimental group, Individual Task Planning (ITP), participants (N = 30) did the planning individually. Finally, in the Control group, participants (N = 30) were not asked to do the planning (although they were taught the planning as a part of their instruction, but no emphasis was made). Furthermore, to test the homogeneity of variances for the placement scores, the Levene test was conducted. The results indicated that the difference was not significant and that the participants were quite homogeneous ($p = .85$). This helped the researcher to run the inferential statistic ANOVA to see whether there was a significant difference among the participants. Table 1 presents the results of the analysis.

Table 1. One-way ANOVA for the Placement Test Scores

	Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Between Groups	3.02	2	1.33	.189	.754
Within Groups	425.13	87	8.45		
Total	441.65	90			

ANOVA results showed that there was no statistically significant difference at $p > .05$ level among the three groups: $F_{(87, 2)} = .189$, $p = .754$. In other words, the participants of the CTP group ($M = 119.58$, $SD = 2.85$), the ITP group ($M = 117.98$, $SD = 2.53$), and the Control group ($M = 117.21$, $SD = 3.21$) were completely homogeneous in terms of the level of proficiency.

Instruments

In order to conduct the experiment and collect the required data, the following types of materials were employed:

The Oxford Placement Test

In order to choose homogeneous participants and place them in the relevant groups, the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was used. The developer of the test (Allen, 2004) has noted that Oxford Placement Test has been designed to assess general knowledge of the key language as well as the receptive and productive skills and gives insight into what level students are. It is believed that the OPT is a valid and reliable test and a highly effective instrument in grouping students into appropriate levels. Nevertheless, it was essential to measure the reliability of the test for those who participated in the study. Results indicated that the test was highly reliable ($r = .792$) and that participants were completely homogeneous.

The Textbook: Zemach & Rumisek (2005)

In addition to the placement test, participants were given a textbook which was taught during the course. The textbook was Zemach and Rumisek's (2005), "Academic Writing: From paragraph to essay". The book consists of 12 units. In Units 1-7 students become familiar with the structure and types of paragraphs. Units 8-12 familiarize learners with the organization and features of an essay. In addition, students will learn about certain important characteristics of writing, particularly planning and brainstorming, organization, mechanics of writing, as well as cohesion and coherence. It should be noted that all the experimental and control groups were required to study the book and do the exercises.

Brown and Bailey's (1984) Categorical Scoring Instrument

Brown and Bailey's categorical scoring instrument is a kind of rating scale to evaluate students writing skills. This scale was used to rate students' writing performances. The scale includes "five equally weighted criteria for scoring, Organization, Content, Grammar, Mechanics, and Style" (p. 21). It is essential to mention that they used regression analysis and generalizability theory to ensure the reliability of the instrument.

Procedure and Data Collection

In order to do the experiment and implement the treatment the following procedure was followed. First, the placement test was conducted with 137 Iranian EFL learners in eight classes. These participants were taking the writing course in a language institute in Isfahan and were of the upper-intermediate level. The course was a part of their curriculum in the institute and students were supposed to pass the course in order to be given the diploma of the institute. These EFL learners had been learning English for a minimum of two years and had passed most of the courses of the institute.

From among the 137 EFL learners who participated in the placement test, 90 EFL learners were randomly placed in one control and two experimental groups. It is imperative to mention that due to limitation concerning the class, participants were placed in more than one

class. In fact, the class size was 15-17 students. Participants of the three groups had exactly the same treatment, except for the independent variable, i.e., individual and collaborative task planning. In fact, they were given the materials (Zemach & Rumisek, 2005) at the beginning of the course. Each session, they covered one chapter of the book along with exercises and assignments which were checked and scored by the instructor. At the beginning of the course, participants were made familiar with different ways of planning and brainstorming, namely listing, mapping or clustering, and free writing. Then, they were given instruction on the organization of the paragraph (Unites 1-7) and the structure of the essay (8-12). It is essential to mention that some extra materials were sent to learners during the course. In addition, they were familiarized with some important issues in paragraph and essay writing, namely cohesion and coherence, punctuation, and mechanics of writing.

As mentioned, the treatment for the all groups was the same except for the independent variable. On the second session, participants were made familiar with different ways of brainstorming and planning (listing, mapping or clustering, and freewriting). Nevertheless, during the course, they received different emphasis on how to use these methods of planning. Participants of the experimental groups were required to do the planning before they wrote their assignment. However, learners in the control group were not asked to do it and it was something optional for them. It should be noted that the teacher informally asked them whether they had used planning or not in order to omit those who did it in the control group. Not surprisingly, no student in the control group did any planning before they started to write the assignment.

In the CTP group, participants were asked to do the planning in groups of two or three before they actually started to write. In fact, the teacher required them to collaboratively work together and plan what they wanted to write later. Of course, they did not have to write about the same ideas, but they had to work together to prepare their plan. It should be noted that this was done in the second language and learners exchanged their ideas and shared what they had in their mind about the topic. It is essential to reiterate that although they worked together, they were asked to keep their own ideas and try to benefit from the positive ideas of the more experienced members of the group. In the ITP group, the same procedure was followed except that participants were asked to do the planning individually.

In order to examine the impact of task planning, i.e., the independent variable, on Iranian EFL learners' writing performance, the dependent variable, participants of the study had to write several writing assignments during the course. For the first writing, on the first session, they were supposed to write about "Friends". This was followed by several other topics which they were requested to write one paragraph about. The topics were 'the most important concern in life', 'the role of technology in life', 'jobs', and 'music'. In order to collect the required data, the first assignment was considered to be the pretest. On the 8th session and in order to examine the effects of the independent variable on writing performance, participants were asked to write a problem-solution paragraph on "Violence on TV and its effects on children", which was used as the posttest.

Results

Results of the pretest

In order to examine the impact of task planning, i.e., the independent variable, on Iranian EFL learners' writing performance, the dependent variable, participants of the study had to write several writing assignments during the course. The first one was considered to be the pretest. As mentioned before, Brown and Bailey's (1984) scale was used to rate participants' assignments for Organization, Content, Grammar, Mechanics, and Style. What follows is the detailed results of

each component along with the total score which represents participants' overall writing performance. To achieve this goal, six one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted.

Organization

Table 2 below presents the results of data analysis for pretest organization:

Table 2. One-way ANOVA for Pretest Organization

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.27	2	.13	.114	.893
Within Groups	102.13	87	1.17		
Total	102.40	89			

ANOVA results showed that there was no statistically significant difference at $p > .05$ level among the three groups: $F_{(87,2)} = .114$, $p = .893$. In other words, there was no difference among the participants of the CTP group ($M = 8.27$, $S = 1.08$), the ITP group ($M = 8.20$, $S = 1.16$), and the Control group ($M = 8.13$, $S = 1.01$) in Organization of the pretest. The results ensured that any possible effects that happened during the experiment would be the result of the treatment.

Content

Table 3 presents the results of data analysis for pretest content:

Table 3. One-way ANOVA for Pretest Content

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3.82	2	1.91	1.444	.242
Within Groups	115.17	87	1.32		
Total	118.99	89			

ANOVA results showed that there was no statistically significant difference at $p > .05$ level among the three groups: $F_{(87,2)} = 1.444$, $p = .242$. In other words, there was no difference among the participants of the CTP group ($M = 7.90$, $S = 1.30$), the ITP group ($M = 7.97$, $S = 1.07$), and the Control group ($M = 7.50$, $S = 1.07$) in Content of the pretest.

Grammar

Table 4 presents the results of data analysis for pretest grammar:

Table 4. One-way ANOVA for Pretest Grammar

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.42	2	.21	.166	.848
Within Groups	110.97	87	1.28		

Total	111.39	89
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ANOVA results showed that there was no statistically significant difference at $p > .05$ level among the three groups: $F_{(87,2)} = .166$, $p = .848$. In other words, there was no difference among the participants of the CTP group ($M = 16.53$, $S = 1.07$), the ITP group ($M = 16.60$, $S = 1.13$), and the Control group ($M = 16.70$, $S = 1.18$) in Content of the pretest.

Mechanics

Table 5 presents the results of data analysis for pretest mechanics:

Table 5. One-way ANOVA for Pretest Mechanics

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.96	2	.48	.421	.658
Within Groups	98.83	87	1.14		
Total	99.79	89			

Similarly, ANOVA results showed that there was no statistically significant difference at $p > .05$ level among the three groups: $F_{(87,2)} = .421$, $p = .658$. In other words, there was no difference among the participants of the CTP group ($M = 7.90$, $S = .96$), the ITP group ($M = 7.87$, $S = 1.01$), and the Control group ($M = 7.67$, $S = 1.21$) in Mechanics of the pretest.

Style

Table 6 presents the results of data analysis for pretest style:

Table 6. One-way ANOVA for Pretest Style

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2.42	2	1.21	1.374	.259
Within Groups	76.70	87	.88		
Total	79.12	89			

ANOVA results showed that there was no statistically significant difference at $p > .05$ level among the three groups: $F_{(87,2)} = 1.374$, $p = .259$. In other words, there was no difference among the participants of the CTP group ($M = 7.83$, $S = 1.05$), the ITP group ($M = 8.07$, $S = .78$), and the Control group ($M = 7.67$, $S = .96$) in Style of the pretest.

Total

Table 7 presents the results of data analysis for pretest total:

Table 7. One-way ANOVA for Pretest Total

Sum Squares	ofdf	Mean Square	F	Sig.
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Between Groups	18.16	2	9.08	1.543	.220
Within Groups	511.90	87	5.88		
Total	530.06	89			

Like the previous components, a one-way ANOVA was conducted with the group as the independent variable and Total scores as the dependent variable. The results showed that there was no statistically significant difference at $p > .05$ level among the three groups: $F_{(87,2)} = 1.543$, $p = .220$. In other words, there was no difference among the participants of the CTP ($M = 48.43$, $S = 2.40$), the ITP ($M = 48.73$, $S = 2.52$), and the Control ($M = 47.67$, $S = 2.35$) groups in Total scores of the pretest.

Results of the Posttest

As mentioned before, participants of the study had to write several writing assignments during the course. Participants' 8th writing was considered as the posttest. What follows is the detailed presentation of the results based on Brown and Bailey's (1984) scale, taking Organization, Content, Grammar, Mechanics, and Style into account, along with participants' total performance. Therefore, six one-way ANOVAs were conducted with the group (CTP, ITP, and Control) as the independent variable and scores on each component as the dependent variable.

Organization

Table 8 presents the results of data analysis for posttest organization:

Table 8. One-way ANOVA for Posttest Organization

	Sum Squares	of <i>df</i>	Mean Square <i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	
Between Groups	96.62	2	48.31	29.802	.000
Within Groups	141.03	87	1.62		
Total	237.66	89			

Results showed that there was a highly statistically significant difference at $p > .05$ level among the three groups: $F_{(87,2)} = 29.802$, $p < .001$. In other words, one or more of the groups, namely the Collaborative Task Planning (CTP) group ($M = 16.63$, $S = 1.13$), the Individual Task Planning (ITP) group ($M = 15.23$, $S = 1.45$), and the Control group ($M = 14.10$, $S = 1.21$) had a different performance in Organization in the posttest. As the results of post-hoc Bonferroni indicated, participants of the Collaborative Task Planning group had a better performance compared with both Individual Task Planning and Control participants. Similarly, compared with participants the Control group, Individual Task Planning participants had a better performance in Organization.

Content

Table 9 presents the results of data analysis for posttest content:

Table 9. One-way ANOVA for Posttest Content

	Sum Squares	ofdf	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Between Groups	3.47	2	1.73	1.070	.347
Within Groups	140.93	87	1.62		
Total	144.40	89			

ANOVA results showed that there was no significant difference at $p > .05$ level among the three groups: $F_{(87, 2)} = 1.070$, $p = .347$. In other words, there was no difference among participants of the CTP group ($M = 15.60$, $S = 1.19$), the ITP group ($M = 15.93$, $S = 1.44$), and the Control group ($M = 16.07$, $S = 1.17$) in Content of the posttest. In fact, the results indicate that the treatment did not have any effect on participants' performances in Content.

Grammar

Table 10 presents the results of data analysis for posttest grammar:

Table 10. One-way ANOVA for Posttest Grammar

	Sum Squares	ofdf	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Between Groups	1.16	2	.58	.382	.683
Within Groups	131.47	87	1.51		
Total	132.62	89			

ANOVA results showed that there was no significant difference at $p > .05$ level among the three groups: $F_{(87, 2)} = .382$, $p = .683$. In other words, there was no difference among participants of the CTP group ($M = 16.40$, $S = 1.00$), the ITP group ($M = 16.20$, $S = 1.45$), and the Control group ($M = 16.47$, $S = 1.20$) in Grammar of the posttest, i.e., the treatment had no effect on participants' Grammar scores.

Mechanics

Table 11 presents the results of data analysis for posttest mechanics:

Table 11. One-way ANOVA for Posttest Mechanics

	Sum Squares	ofdf	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Between Groups	3.36	2	1.68	1.784	.174
Within Groups	81.80	87	.94		
Total	85.16	89			

ANOVA results showed that there was no significant difference at $p > .05$ level among the three groups: $F_{(87, 2)} = 1.784$, $p = .174$. In other words, there was no difference among participants of the CTP group ($M = 16.43$, $S = .77$), the ITP group ($M = 15.97$, $S = 1.00$), and the Control group ($M = 16.13$, $S = 1.11$) in Mechanics of the posttest, i.e., the treatment did not make a significant difference in participants' Mechanics scores.

Style

Table 12 presents the results of data analysis for posttest style:

Table 12. One-way ANOVA for Posttest Style

	Sum Squares	ofdf	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	11.02	2	5.51	3.306	.041
Within Groups	145.03	87	1.67		
Total	156.06	89			

ANOVA results showed that there was a statistically significant difference at $p > .05$ level among the three groups: $F_{(87, 2)} = 3.306$, $p = .041$. In other words, one or more of the three groups, namely the CTP group ($M = 16.77$, $S = .94$), the ITP group ($M = 16.10$, $S = 1.71$), and the Control group ($M = 15.97$, $S = 1.10$) had a different performance in Style of the posttest. Results of post-hoc comparisons indicated only participants of Collaborative Task Planning had a better and more significant performance than those of Individual Task Planning and Control groups.

Total

Table 13 presents the results of data analysis for posttest total:

Table 13. One-way ANOVA for Posttest Total

	Sum Squares	ofdf	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	158.60	2	79.30	10.690	.000
Within Groups	645.40	87	7.42		
Total	804.00	89			

Finally, to examine whether there was a significant difference in participants' Total scores, a one-way ANOVA was conducted with the group as the independent variable and Total scores as the dependent variable. Results showed that there was a statistically significant difference at $p > .05$ level among the three groups: $F_{(87, 2)} = 10.690$, $p < .000$. In other words, one or more groups, namely the CTP group ($M = 81.83$, $S = 2.70$), the ITP group ($M = 79.43$, $S = 2.97$), and the Control group ($M = 78.73$, $S = 2.48$) had a different performance on Total scores. Results of post-hoc comparisons clearly showed that participants of Collaborative Task Planning had a more significant performance in their writing.

Discussion

Today's global culture requires a good command of the writing skill in both first and second language to develop personal and professional relations. Needless to say, teaching writing is a complex and time-consuming endeavor in any language. Teaching the writing skill in a foreign/second language is by no means an exception. In fact, EFL/ESL teachers try to find ways to support writing instruction for teachers and learners (Oxford, 2003). One such form of educational assistance is task planning utilized by several researchers (e.g., Doboia, 2012; Johnson, 2011; Shehadeh, 2011). Johnson, for example, indicated that writing researchers believe that planning is associated with more proficient writers who plan effectively before composing compared to novice writers who make no distinction between planning and composing (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987).

The use of task planning has long been introduced to complement traditional writing classes (Ellis & Yuan, 2004; Johnson, 2011). For example, Ellis and Yuan investigated effects of task planning on the written product of a group of L2 writers. They found unstructured pre-task planning to positively impact the writing fluency and grammatical complexity of L2 writers' texts. It is interesting to note that previous studies on planning in L2 writing have focused indirectly on online planning through extensive descriptions of effective L2 writing processes. Such studies provide for a rich description of the writing behaviors of effective L2 writers (Johnson, 2011).

The first research question was intended to examine whether task planning (individual and collaborative) affected Iranian EFL learners' writing performance. Results of one-way ANOVA for 'Total' in the posttest indicate that, generally speaking, collaborative and individual task planning had significant effects on Iranian EFL learners' writing performances. Of course, it should be noted that although there were no significant differences between the two experimental groups, participants of the Collaborative Task planning (CTP) group had a slightly better performance than those of the Individual Task planning (ITP) group. Results of the study are in line with those of Doboia (2012), Kormos (2011), and Ong (2014).

For example, Ong examined the effects of task environmental factors and task conditions on the frequencies of five metacognitive processes of L2 writers during the planning and writing stages. Her participants reported their metacognitive processes, namely generating new ideas, elaborating new ideas, organizing new ideas, thinking of essay structure, and thinking of language aspects of the task. Results showed that the manipulation of the task conditions had a stronger effect than the planning time conditions on L2 writing. She pointed out that effects of task conditions were significant on the frequencies of generation and organization of new ideas during planning and on the frequencies of elaboration and organization of new ideas during writing. However, the effects of planning time were significant only on the frequency of thinking of language aspects of the task during writing (see also Kellogg, 1990). Her results also showed that EFL writers in the planning conditions engaged in significantly more on-line planning than their counterparts in the control group.

The second research question was posed to identify what type of task planning (individual, collaborative, or no planning) had a more significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' writing performance. Results of statistical analyses for the posttest showed that although both experimental groups had a more statistically significant performance than the control group, there were no differences between the performances of CTP and ITP participants. The results are similar to and different from a number of studies comparing the effects of collaborative and individual learning.

As Doboia (2012) pointed out a number of studies have investigated the benefits of collaborative writing by comparing collaborative and individual tasks. For example, Storch

(1999) scrutinized effects of collaboration on grammatical accuracy across three different tasks: a cloze exercise, a text reconstruction task, and a composition task. Participants were asked to work in pairs and were given an opportunity to discuss their grammatical choices. This caused the task to take more to complete, but produced more accurate written texts than those working alone. Similarly, Storch (2005) examined the effects of collaboration by analyzing not only the written texts produced, but also the nature of the writing process. She compared dyadic and individual performance on a short composition task. Pairs spent more time on the task and produced shorter texts, but these were syntactically more complex and grammatically more accurate than those written individually.

In similar studies, Storch and Wigglesworth (2007) and Wigglesworth and Storch (2009) compared the performance of pairs and individual learners on writing tasks. In both studies, pairs were spent more time to finish the task than individual learners. Results of both studies showed that there were no differences in terms of fluency and complexity, but the texts written in pairs were significantly more accurate than those written individually (see also Kim, 2008; Kuiken & Vedder, 2002; Nassaji & Tian, 2010).

There were some studies which found no differences between collaborative and individual performance. For example, Kim (2008) asked Korean EFL learners to complete a dictogloss task while thinking aloud both in pairs and individually. Results showed that individual learners produced a similar number of LREs as those working in pairs. More recently, Nassaji and Tian (2010) compared individual and collaborative work across two different tasks—a cloze task and an editing task. Results the pre- and posttests did not provide clear evidence of greater knowledge gains for collaboration.

Following Brown and Bailey's (1984) scale, the last research question was intended to see what aspects of EFL writing were more significantly affected by task planning. Results of the statistical analyses showed that participants of the three groups did not have any significant differences in Content and Mechanics in the posttest. Yet, although the treatment had no effects on Grammar in the posttest, participants of the ITP group had a better performance than those of the control group, but not those of the CTP group.

For Organization in the posttest, participants of the CTP group outperformed those of the ITP and control groups. Similarly, participants of the ITP group had a better performance than those of the latter. Finally, as long as Style was concerned, participants of the CTP group performed better than those of the control group in the posttest, but not better than those of the ITP group.

Results are, to some extent, similar to those of Shehadeh (2011) who investigated the effectiveness of collaborative writing in English as a second language. Using a different rating scale, writing quality was determined by a holistic rating procedure taking Content, Organization, Grammar, Vocabulary, and Mechanics into account. Results of his study indicated that the independent variable, i.e., collaborative writing had a significant effect on students' L2 writing. Specifically, the effect was significant for Content, Organization, and Vocabulary, but not for Grammar or Mechanics.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to investigate the impact of collaborative and individual task planning on writing performance of Iranian EFL learners using Brown and Bailey's (1984) rating scale. The scale takes into account components, such as Organization, Content, Grammar, Mechanics, and Style. In other words, the study was intended to compare two methods of

planning writing, namely collaborative and individual to see which one was more effective and which one resulted in better writing among Iranian EFL learners at the upper-intermediate level. Results indicated that planning was effective in some aspects of writing, namely Organization and Style, but not in certain others, namely Content, Grammar, and Mechanics.

This has been supported by Doboia (2012) who indicated that pair and small group activities constitute one of the most common practices in communicative second language (L2) classrooms, theoretically backed up by both psycholinguistic and sociocultural perspectives on L2 acquisition. In recent years, however, a number of studies have called attention to the benefits of collaborative writing tasks, which require learners to work in pairs throughout the entire writing process (e.g., Storch, 2005; Wigglesworth & Storch, 2009).

Research from a sociocultural perspective suggests that collaborative writing activities push learners to reflect on their language use and work together to find ways to solve their language-related problems (Swain, 2001). This helps them get involved in cognitive activities which are believed to be language-mediated and facilitate the development of linguistic knowledge and higher levels of performance (Donato, 1994; Ohta, 2001; Swain, 2000; Swain & Lapkin, 1998). Doboia provided evidence that collaborative work in the form of dialogues taking place between learners mediates second language development (e.g., Kim, 2008; Swain, Brooks, & Tocalli-Beller, 2002; Swain & Lapkin, 2002).

It is also essential to mention the implications of the study as well. From a theoretical point of view, the study contributes to a better understanding of sociocultural theories of second language development. As Shehadeh (2011) pointed out, in the collaboration and group work has become a common practice in most English language classes and language learners are routinely involved in pair and group work. This has made collaboration central to the language classroom (see also Batstone, 2010; Bygate, et al., 2001; Lantolf, 2000). Theoretically speaking, this trend has been supported by the social constructivist perspective of learning (Vygotsky, 1978), which indicates human development is a social phenomenon. In fact, the advocates maintain that child's development happens when interacting with more competent members of the society, who provide him/her with what is technically called scaffolding. Research has shown that such scaffolding can also occur in an L2 context among peers when working in pairs and groups (e.g., Donato, 1994; Kim, 2008; Nassaji & Tian, 2010; Swain, 2010; Swain & Lapkin, 2002). In particular, these researchers have shown that different types of tasks were successfully accomplished by learners as a collaborative or joint activity, and that such jointly performed tasks enabled learners to solve linguistic problems beyond their abilities.

From a pedagogical point of view, the application of task planning has provided helpful insights for EFL teachers and learners. It is believed that the results of this study can contribute to a better understanding of the process of writing, especially writing as a process. In fact, findings of the study provide further empirical evidence of the usefulness of task-planning in EFL writing. More specifically, it can be used as a pedagogical tool to encourage student collaboration and create a positive social atmosphere in the classroom. Another potential pedagogical implication of this study is the relevance of task planning to the learning and teaching of writing in foreign language contexts. Findings of the study clearly show that task planning can be an important pedagogical tool in the learning and teaching of EFL writing.

Like any other research, the study was not without limitations. First, motivating some students to participate in the planning was difficult at first. That was because most learners were used to starting to write with no planning and brainstorming. Another limitation of the study concerned the time spent to collect the required data. Because the class sizes were small (due to the institute's standards), the data for each group were collected in more than one class. It should

be noted that this limitation was taken care of because only one teacher was responsible for teaching the course and the possible negative effects were minimized.

Finally, several lines of research can be suggested. First, second language researchers are encouraged to use task planning to examine the effects on dimensions of proficiency, namely Fluency, Accuracy, and Complexity (Housen, et. al., 2012), especially effects of task planning can be examined on grammatical complexity among EFL learners. In addition, effects of different types of task planning can be examined on other skills, such as reading and speaking, especially the latter following the works of Ellis (2009).

Another line of research that can be supported by task planning is raising language learners' consciousness with regard to the rhetorical structure of different types of writing, such as descriptive, expository, and argumentative, among others. This can be done by first teaching these types of writing and then asking learners to work together on planning these types of writing. Furthermore, the impact of uptake can be scrutinized as well. This can be done asking learners to write a following assignment based on teacher's comments and the planning they do. Similar studies can be done with other proficiency levels. In fact, the effects of task planning (individual and collaborative) can be examined with other proficiency levels. It is possible that learners at lower levels benefit differently.

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