Effects of Competency-Based Approach on Enhancing Complexity, Accuracy, and Fluency of Writing among Iranian Upper- Intermediate Pre-Service Teachers

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Purpose: This study aimed at investigating the effect of competency-based approach on enhancing complexity, accuracy, and fluency of writing of pre-service teachers.

Methodology: To this end, an Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) was administered to 100 Iranian pre-service teachers studying at Farhangian University, of whom 40 upper-intermediate learners were selected and assigned to an experimental group (n = 20) and a control group (n = 20). The selected participants were both male and female and aged from 19 to 22. Both selected groups were then given a writing test as the pre-test. Subsequently, the experimental group received the competency-based treatment and were proposed to some real-world issues and there was no time limit. However, the traditional styles used for improving the writing skill of the subjects in the control group and a specific time limit was considered for the subjects to do the job. After that, a writing post-test and an attitude questionnaire were delivered to the participants. The obtained data was analyzed using one-way between group analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) and one-sample t-test.

Findings: The results indicated no significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores of the control group, whereas, the post-test scores of the participants in experimental group were significantly better than their pre-test scores especially regarding complexity.

Conclusion: The findings suggest that the teachers should take competency-based approach into consideration in their target language classes to have a more fruitful educational process.

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1.   Introduction

Writing serves as a means of communication, however, as the analysis of the results of student work shows, the level of learners in this regard is typically poor. Text created by learners seems to be an only written reflection of their oral speech that can be the evidence of students' transformation of their speaking to writing.(Begibaeva,2020) The ability to write meaningful sentences and paragraphs which are easily understood by a reader can be considered as a cognitive process (Hosseini, 2012). The process of writing involves a number of steps: setting goals, generating ideas, organizing information, selecting appropriate language, making drafts, reading, reviewing, revising, and editing (Hedge, 2000). Writing skill as accompanied by speaking skill can be considered as the two productive skills used by the interlocutors in order to communicate their ideas (Cohen, 2011). Moreover, writing is often considered as an inseparable component of academic life (Mallia, 2015). However, mastery of this skill seems to be a demanding process. As it has been observed by the researcher and his colleagues, during the past decades, the undergraduate English teaching students (to be teachers) and even the graduate ones seemed to lack the writing skills required to be successful communicators during the process of studying the courses and after graduation. Whatever the reasons, the point worth noting is that most of the English teaching students, who are going to be the future English teachers, do not possess the necessary skills to communicate effectively in a written format. Different scholars have provided various factors in order to measure the acquisition of different dimensions good production (Ekaningrum et al., 2017; Ellis, 2008; Skehan, 2003; Pallotti 2009). Complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF) are among the measures being applicable for nearly all dimensions of language production (Pallotti 2009). Accuracy is arguably the most straightforward and internally consistent construct of the CAF triad (Housen & Kuiken 2009; Pallotti 2009). Accuracy (or correctness) refers to the extent to which an L2 learner's performance deviates from a norm. Such deviations from the norm are traditionally called errors. Complexity has been generally defined as the use of more challenging and difficult language. Ellis & Barkhuizen (2005) defined complexity "as the extent to which learners produce elaborated language "(p.139). Wolfe- Quintero, Inagaki, & Kim (1998) defined complexity as "a wide variety of both basic and sophisticated structures and words are available to the learner" (p.69). Skehan (2003) defined complexity as 'challenging language' and Ellis (2008) defined complexity as 'the capacity to use more advanced language'. Therefore, the use of a wider range of more *complex* grammatical structures and vocabulary, determines the complexity of a text. Finally, fluency means fewer instances of repair and faster production. Unlike the other two points which were mostly concerned with structural properties of language, fluency deals with smoothness, easy understandability, and native-likeness of a text.

Nowadays, there are a large number of teaching and learning techniques and programs designed in order to help EFL learners improve these three factors in their production (Comas-Quinn, et al 2009). Competency-based approach to language teaching (CBALT) can be considered as one of these techniques. As mentioned by Richards and Rodgers (2001), this approach deals with the things "the learners are expected to do with the language" (p.141). The CBALT was an attack to structuralist approaches to language teaching which emphasized knowledge about language structure, the outcome of which was that language learners tended to acquire huge amount of information or knowledge about language even when such knowledge was not applicable to effectively use language in real-life situations. The CBALT tried to overcome this shortcoming to propose a model of teaching language that emphasized the acquisition of competencies that facilitated effective communication out of the classroom. (Nsai & Jude,2021)

According to Green and Harrington (2021), some schools are making learning student-centered by developing learning competencies. Rather than moving through lessons and units together as a class and measuring progress based on seat time or time spent on a topic, in a competency-based classroom, learning experiences are designed so that students' progress on their own pace. Progress is measured based on demonstrating mastery of standards or competencies, and students don't move onto the next topic until they've demonstrated mastery of the previous one. It is about designing learning in a way that allows students to move forward when they are ready while providing extra time and support to those who are not.

The major focus of this approach is on the outcome and output of learning which can result in the survival of the language learners in different educational and occupational contexts (Richards and Rodgers, 2001). Therefore, it seems effective to work on the effect of competency-based approach on enhancing complexity, accuracy, and fluency of writing among pre-service teachers.

Review of the Related Literature
The Importance and Components of Writing

Writing skill is a complex cognitive skill, because it needs the learners to employ proper intellectual skills, cognitive strategies, verbal information, language rules, and apposite motivation (Kagan & High, 2002). Talking about this complex skill becomes more complicated when it involves producing sentences in a different language (Troyka, 2010). Some researchers think that writing maybe just using or reproducing graphic symbols something that has been read or heard before in written form (Pincas, 1992). However, writing can be defined more than the production of those symbols, just as forming a speech is more than the production of sounds. Those graphic symbols have to be organized well according to some principles to form word, words to form sentences and sentences to form paragraphs and essays as well (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Therefore, writing seems to be an important aspect of language learning.

Conducting research on written second language (L2) performance and its components has a long tradition in the history of second language acquisition (SLA) (Baba & Nitta, 2014). The first attempts in modern SLA research started from 1970s and the works can be divided into two main trends (Housen & Kuiken, 2009). The ones conducted: (a) based on mean length of utterance (MLU) which was considered to be an established index of development (Mandal, 2009) and measured the performance of the participants based on their meaningful utterances or written texts; (b) based a pedagogical perspective, which were more classroom-based research into L2 performance focusing on accuracy and fluency (Larsen-Freeman, 1997).

Skehan (1989) also added complexity to the second proposed trend and introduced the triad of complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF) as the three fundamental dimensions of L2 performance and proficiency (Housen & Kuiken, 2009). To date, the early definitions proposed for CAF are still applied for general proficiency. Complexity deals with the size, richness, elaborateness, and diversity of L2 performance. Accuracy is concerned with the error-free and target-like use of language. Fluency refers to the smooth and easy production of speech with as few pauses, hesitations, or reformulations as possible.

During the past recent decades, a large number of research works, conducted on second language performance, have used CAF measures to assess L2 performance (Johnson et al., 2012; Housen & Kuiken, 2009). Moreover, some scholars have also maintained the significance of taking CAF into account in SLA research, for instance, Johnson, et al. (2012) stated that "the primary reason for measuring L2 CAF is to account for how and why language competencies develop for specific learners and target languages, in response to particular tasks, teaching, and other stimuli, and mapped against the details of developmental rate, route, and ultimate outcomes" (p. 557). Johnson, et al. (2012) also considered CAF dimensions to be able to characterize different levels of L2 performance. Pallotti (2009) also mentioned that in comparison to less proficient L2 users, proficient language learners: (a) use a wider range of complex grammatical structures; (b) produce more error-free utterances; and (c) produce a text faster with fewer instances of silence.

In order to help EFL learners improve written language production, a large number of teaching and learning techniques and programs have been proposed (Comas-Quinn et al., 2009). Competency-based approach can be considered as one of these techniques to improve complexity, accuracy, and fluency in writing. This approach is a teaching approach concerned with the language learning outcomes (Chang, 2007). This approach is mainly focused the ultimate learning outputs rather than the process. Therefore, based on this approach, at the first step, a clear set of learning outcomes are developed, and then some conditions, opportunities, instruments, and assessment methods are developed around the arena of the set goals that enable and encourage the learners to achieve those essential outcomes (Docking, 1994). Some experts (Baines

& Stanley, 2006; Caniels, 2005; Jang & Kim, 2004; Jorgensen, 2005; Kaslow, 2004) believe that since competency-based approach offers teachers an opportunity to revitalize their education and training programs, quality of assessment can be improved, and the quality of teaching and students learning will be enhanced by the clear specification of expected outcomes and the continuous feedback that competency-based approach can offer. Therefore, it seems to be interesting to work on the effect of this approach on an important aspect of language learning such as writing and an intrinsic facilitator of learning such as students' attitude toward learning.

In order to conduct a research work in this area, there is a need to have a review of the literature to gain some background information about the proposed concepts. As a result, the following part deals with some of the most recent studies conducted on the effect of competency-based approach on enhancing writing among different types of EFL learners.

Experimental Studies Conducted on the Effect of Competency-Based Approach on Language Learning

Wong (2008), in a study on the pre-service teachers of Chinese in a Hong Kong tertiary institute, worked on the effect of competency-based teaching on general English improvement of the participants. A group of 70 pre-service teachers were selected to participate in the mentioned research work. Two questionnaires were proposed to the intended participants and 10 students were interviewed in order to extract further responses on the preferences for English learning and the reasons underlying those preferences. The results revealed that the participants in the competency-based group held strong preference for learning English.

Rainwater (2015) in his study carried out some interviews with faculty members and students at three colleges supporting new competency-based courses and programs to better understand faculty and student perspectives about the early phases of implementation. Some of the faculty members found that competency-based approach improved their instruction quality. In the same vein, students embraced opportunities to improve their learning process while meeting career and life goals.

Saadi et al, 2016) carried out an experimental work on how competency-based approach is conceptualized by teachers working in Iranian context of language learning and how effective it has been with Iranian foreign language learners. In order to achieve the objectives of the study, 35 teachers of Iranian Azad University were selected and provided with the questionnaires to express their ideas about competency-based language teaching (CBLT). The obtained results revealed that Azad University was almost successful in the application of the principles of CBLT in English courses. Most of the respondents rated the items positively indicating that most of the objectives concerned with CBLT have been achieved to an acceptable level according to the participants' viewpoints.

Vail (2018), in one of the recent works conducted in this area, tried to explore the effectiveness of self-paced study in comparison with traditional fixed- paced learning in a competency-based education program for Korean learners. Nine South Korean English students participated in the study and they were split into two groups of self- and fixed-paced study using a Competency Based Education model. The findings demonstrated that the participants who were underperforming their peers in the fixed-paced study improved and outperformed their peers after taking a self-paced program and could answer on average 20% more accurately on questions posed to them about the material and about themselves in English.

As it was apparent in the mentioned studies, most of the students conducted on the effectiveness of competency-based approach were concerned with teachers and students' viewpoints or general language achievement. Therefore, it seems that there is a great need to work on the effect of this approach on more precise components of a language skill during the process of learning. Moreover, most of the research conducted in this area were concerned with EFL learners and the effect of this treatment on potential language teachers of the educational system was mostly put into shadow. Thus, it is a good idea to have a research on the effect of competency-based approach on pre-service teachers who are getting to be prepared to lead a class.

Research Questions

Based on the gaps provided in the literature, the following research questions were proposed in this study:

1. Is there any significant difference between pre-service student teachers who receive instruction through Competency-Based Approach and Traditional Product Approach regarding their writing fluency in Farhangian University?

2. Is there any significant difference between pre-service student teachers who receive instruction through Competency-Based Approach and Traditional Product Approach regarding their writing accuracy in Farhangian University?

3. Is there any significant difference between pre-service student teachers who receive instruction through Competency-Based Approach and Traditional Product Approach regarding their writing complexity in Farhangian University?

4. What are Iranian pre-service teachers' attitudes toward using Competency- based approach?

2. Methodology

Participants

The participants, in this study, were chosen carefully out of the Iranian EFL pre-service teachers studying at Farhangian University, Yazd. In order to have a homogeneous selection of the participants, an Oxford Quick Placement Test, as an indicator of proficiency level, was administered to 100 candidates. Out of all the candidates tested, 40 students were labeled as upper-intermediate pre-service teachers due to the scores obtained in Oxford Quick Placement Test (the ones scoring more than 40). Since the study was conducted to explore the effect of competency-based approach on the writing skill of the participants, the selected teachers were divided into 2 groups (20 participants in each group), experimental and control. It is worth mentioning that the selected participants were aged from 19 to 22. Considering gender, there were both male and female participants performing in each group.

Instruments

Three different tests were employed in this study in order to collect the intended data. Moreover, an attitude questionnaire was used in order to identify the participants' attitude toward the applied approaches.

First, an Oxford Quick Placement Test was used in order to identify the participants' proficiency level. This test is developed by Oxford University Press in corporation with Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate in order to determine EFL learners' proficiency level. The designers have considered 30 minutes for attempting the items proposed. Thus, in this research, the candidates were supposed to finish the test in half an hour. In order to select the intended participants, the candidates scoring more than 40 were placed at upper-intermediate level and chosen for the treatments.

Besides, a writing proficiency pre-test was constructed by the researcher and administered to all the participants to test participants' writing before the treatment. The writing tasks were adapted from the general English textbooks of the university. The tasks were categorized in four sections. At each part, the students were provided with a topic and the learners were asked to write a composition about it.

In the writing post-test, the same writing compositions as pre-test were adopted from the general English textbooks. The items had some changes in order to be a bit different from the pre-test topics. The aim of the writing post-test was to analyze if the students made any improvement after the provision of treatments. It is worth mentioning that the validity and reliability of the writing tests were approved.

Finally, an attitude questionnaire was prepared to be delivered to the participants to explore their attitudes towards using competency-based approach. The intended questionnaire was developed by Alanazi and WalkerGleaves (2019) and it was composed of 20 five-point Likert-type items working on the participants' attitudes towards using competency-based approach. In order to elicit the participants' views, five point, four points, three points, two points, and one point were designed for answers totally agree, agree, neutral,

disagree, and totally disagree, respectively. The reliability of this questionnaire was calculated using Cronbach's alpha (r = .80).

Procedure

The study was conducted in Farhangian University according to the course timetable provided by the educational officials. The pre-service teachers participating in this study were chosen carefully out of about one hundred namely upper-intermediate Iranian candidates studying English at the mentioned university. It was highly attempted to avoid any inequality in the selection process. Thus, in order to prepare equal conditions for each and every candidate, an Oxford Quick Placement Test, as an indicator of proficiency level, was administered to the candidates. Since the major focus of this study was on upper-intermediate candidates, the ones scoring more than 40 were chosen to participate in this research project. Then, the selected participants were divided into 2 groups (experimental and control).

Following the ethics of research, the researcher orally informed the instructors and officials of the University of the General Purpose and procedure of the study. Then the writing pre-tests were administered. The participants in both groups were supposed to write a paragraph composed of about one hundred words about each of the topics provided in the pre-test. Then, the needs of the pre-service teachers participating in competency-based group were identified through need analysis. Then, the teacher explained the tasks the participants needed to accomplish. All the students were expected to learn the same writing strategies and discourse principles. The teacher created lessons and activities that helped the students accomplish the prescribed tasks. The tasks developed for improving the writing skill of the participants all mimicked the real-world activities. For example, in one session the participant were taught to work on job application forms, in other sessions different sections of an article, a resume, and a biography were instructed. The point worth noting is that unlike the traditional method in which one topic is provided to the students at a specific time and all the students are supposed to figure it out and do it in a specific amount of time, in competency-based classes, the students could go on in their own pace and no one urged them to finish a text as soon as possible. Even, if they felt that they needed more time to work on the topic at home, the teacher would provide the necessary guidelines. Finally, the students were evaluated on their ability to perform the designated task. However, the instructors working with the control group were supposed to teach the course according to the traditional styles used for improving writing skill of the subjects.

In the control group, the participants were taught the intended strategies and principles and they were asked to write some sentences containing the proposed principles. As an example, they were asked to write five sentences containing cohesive markers. At the end of the term (actually at the end of the treatment), the participants, in both groups, were supposed to do the writing post-tests. The writing compositions of the post-test were the same as the four tasks provided to the participants at the pre-test. The items did not change, because the researchers wanted to see the improvement of the students on writing and they did not want some marginal factors such as unfamiliarity with the topic interfere with the participants' performance. Moreover, the attitude questionnaire was provided to the students participating in the experimental group. The writing post-tests also included four topics with the same level of difficulty. After that the papers were corrected by the instructors and researcher.

As mentioned before, the purpose of this study was to determine the effect of competency-based treatment on EFL pre-service teachers' writing quality (complexity, accuracy, and fluency). The accuracy, complexity, and fluency of the written texts was assessed. The use of a wider range of more complex grammatical structures and vocabulary, determine the complexity of a written or oral production (Ellis 2003, 2008); accuracy is concerned with the production of more error-free sentences; and fluency means using more words in a unit and fewer instances of repair. To analyze the candidates' written performance, T-units were first measured. T-unit is an independent clause and any associated dependent clauses i.e., clauses that are attached to or embedded within it (McCarthy & Jarvis, 2010). Then the following criteria were taken into account: Fluency: "Average number of words per T-unit"; Complexity: "Average number of clauses per T-unit";

Accuracy: "The proportion of error-free T-units to T-units. Finally, the obtained scores were provided to the analyzer for statistical analysis.

3. Findings

In order to have a plausible interpretation of the results, the collected data was analyzed and explored using SPSS software. The pool of collected data was analyzed using one-way between group analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) and one-sample t-test. First of all, the pre-test scores of experimental and control groups in complexity, accuracy, and fluency of writing were compared and no significant difference was observed between the groups, revealing the homogeneity of all the participants in writing skill.

The first research question in this study was concerned with the effect of Competency-Based Approach on writing fluency of pre-service student teachers. Therefore, the written texts collected from both groups in pre-test and post-test were explored based on the fluency criteria mentioned in the procedure section. It is worth mentioning that all the scores (complexity, accuracy, and fluency of writing) were estimated from 20 to reduce the effect of inequality. A one-way between-group analysis of covariance was conducted to come to the intended results. The descriptive findings are represented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Both Groups on the Fluency Posttests

Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Competency	12.4500	3.31623	20
Control	8.1500	3.13344	20
Total	10.3000	3.85773	40

The results obtained by conducting a one-way between-group analysis of covariance revealed that there was a difference between the post-test scores of control ($M = 8.150$, $SD = 3.133$) ($M = 12.450$, $SD = 3.316$) groups. It seems that the experimental group outperformed the control group on the fluency post-test. in order to discover the significance of the difference between the fluency post-test of both groups Table 2 is provided.

Table 2. Inferential Statistics of Both Groups on the Fluency Post-tests

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	278.692[a]	2	139.346	17.089	.000	.480
Intercept	182.176	1	182.176	22.341	.000	.376
Prefluency	93.792	1	93.792	11.502	. 222	.237
Group	207.585	1	207.585	25.457	.000	.408
Error	301.708	37	8.154			
Total	4824.000	40				
Corrected Total	580.400	39				

According to the numerical findings of Table 2, Sig is .000 which is less than 0.05, so there was a significant difference between the fluency post-tests of experimental and control groups. In other words, the experimental group outperformed the control group on the fluency post-tests.

The second research question in this study was concerned with the effect of Competency-Based Approach on writing accuracy of pre-service student teachers. Therefore, the written texts collected from both groups in pre-test and post-test were explored based on the accuracy criteria mentioned in the procedure section. The results obtained by conducting one-way between-group analysis of covariance revealed that some differences were observed between the performance of experimental and control group. The descriptive findings are represented in Table 3.

Table 3. *Descriptive Statistics of Both Groups on the Accuracy Post-tests*

Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Competency	15.1000	2.86356	20
Control	11.4500	3.13679	20
Total	13.2750	3.49349	40

As it is represented in Table 3, the post-test scores of control group (*M* = 11.450, *SD* = 3.136) were lower than the scores of experimental group (*M* = 15.100, *SD* = 2.863).

The significance of the difference between the mean scores of the two groups can be observed in Table 4.

Table 4. Inferential Statistics of Both Groups on the Accuracy Post-tests

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	133.957[a]	2	66.979	7.246	.002	.281
Intercept	220.812	1	220.812	23.888	.000	.392
Preaccuracy	.732	1	.732	.079	.780	.002
Group	131.817	1	131.817	14.260	.001	.278
Error	342.018	37	9.244			
Total	7525.000	40				
Corrected Total	475.975	39				

Table 4 indicates that Sig (.001) is less than 0.05, this means that the difference between both groups is significant is significant at (p<005). Indeed, the experimental group outperformed the control group on the accuracy post-test thanks to the competency-based approach.

The third research question in this study was concerned with the effect of Competency-Based Approach on writing complexity of pre-service student teachers. Therefore, the written texts collected from both groups in pre-test and post-test were explored based on the complexity criteria mentioned in the procedure section. Table 5 is concerned with the descriptive results on difference between complexity post-test scores of experimental and control groups.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of Both Groups on the Complexity Post-tests

Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Competency	14.0500	3.70597	20
Control	9.5500	1.79106	20
Total	11.8000	3.66690	40

As it is illustrated in Table 4, there was a difference in post-test scores of the experimental group (*M* = 14.050, *SD* = 3.705) and control group (*M* = 9.550, *SD* = 1.791). Table 6 deals with the results of one-way between-group analysis of covariance.

Table 6. Inferential Statistics of Both Groups on the Complexity Post-tests

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	206.438[a]	2	103.219	12.011	.000	.394
Intercept	226.645	1	226.645	26.374	.000	.416
Precomplexity	3.938	1	3.938	.458	.503	.012
Group	187.567	1	187.567	21.826	.000	.371
Error	317.962	37	8.594			
Total	6094.000	40				
Corrected Total	524.400	39				

Based on the results represented in Table 4, Sig (.001) is less than 0.05, this means that the difference between both groups is significant is significant at (p<005). Indeed, the experimental group outperformed the control group on the accuracy post-test thanks to the competency-based approach.

The last research question was concerned with the participants' attitude toward competency-based approach. Table 7 represents the descriptive findings in this regard.

Table 7. Participants Attitudes toward Using Competency-Based Approach

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean
1. This method of teaching gives me more room to express myself.	0	2	8	22	8	3.90
2. I would like other subjects to be taught by this method.	1	0	3	27	9	4.07
3. Using this method of teaching at the school level is very helpful.	3	3	2	20	12	3.87
4. Using this method of teaching contributes to my personal development.	1	1	4	20	14	4.12
5. This method of teaching was interesting.	0	1	1	25	13	4.25
6. This method of teaching motivates me to succeed.	0	1	4	31	4	3.95
7. I would like to use this method of teaching when I become a teacher.	1	0	1	33	5	4.02
8. I think this method makes learning easy.	3	3	2	20	12	3.87
9. I think using this method is a positive idea.	1	1	5	19	14	4.10
10. I would recommend other students to use this method in their studies.	0	1	2	25	12	4.20
11. I enjoy learning through the skype program.	0	1	4	26	9	4.07
12. I prefer online learning to traditional learning.	0	1	0	28	11	4.22

13. I think working within groups online is really useful.	0	2	2	24	12	4.15
14. I can learn whenever I want.	0	4	4	21	11	3.97
15. I am satisfied in using this method for my learning.	0	3	2	24	11	4.07
16. This method develops self-study.	0	2	7	24	7	3.90
17. This method can be used at any time.	0	0	3	28	9	4.15
18. This method is useful for teaching all skills.	0	1	1	27	11	4.20
19. This method is less boring than the traditional method.	0	1	5	21	13	4.15
20. This method is good for shy students.	0	1	4	27	8	4.05

Looking at the mean scores of each item in Table 7, it seems that all the mean scores were greater than 3.00. These numerical findings indicated that the participants had positive attitudes toward using competency-based approach. All items in the above questionnaire received mean scores above 3.00, which means that the participants concurred with all statements in the questionnaire. As a whole, as mentioned above, the participants agreed with the majority of the items mentioned in the questionnaire. To see if the extent to which the participants had positive attitudes toward competency-based approach was of statistical significance or not, a one-sample t-test was conducted. The results are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. One-Sample T-Test of the Questionnaire

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
VAR00001	31.708	39	.000	3.90000	3.6512	4.1488

As revealed in Table 8, the amount of statistic T-value is 31.708 (t=31.708), df=39 (df=39) and the significance level is 0.000 (sig=0.000) which is less than 0.05. This shows that Iranian EFL learners had a high level of positive attitudes towards competency-based approach.

Discussion
The present study had been undertaken to investigate the effect of competency-based approach on enhancing complexity, accuracy, and fluency of writing among pre-service teachers. To achieve this aim, four research questions were set on the effect of receiving instruction through Competency-Based Approach and Traditional Approach regarding their writing fluency, accuracy, and complexity in Farhangian University.

The first research question dealt with the fluency of the texts written by the pre-service teachers participating in experimental and control groups. The results revealed that there was not a significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores of control group. On the other hand, the participants working in the experimental group demonstrated a statistically significant improvement in fluency from pre-test to post-test. Moreover, a significant difference was observed between the fluency post-test scores of control and experimental groups.

The second research question was concerned with the accuracy of the texts written by the two groups. The results revealed that there was not a significant difference between pre-test and post-test of control group. However, the participants working in the experimental group demonstrated a statistically significant improvement in accuracy from pre-test to post-test. In addition, the pre-service teachers working in experimental group outperformed the ones in control group.

The third research question took into account the effect of Competency-Based Approach on writing complexity of pre-service student teachers. The results revealed that there was not a significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores of control group. But the participants working in the experimental group demonstrated a statistically significant improvement in complexity from pre-test to post-test. Moreover, the numerical findings showed that the scores of experimental group in post-test were significantly higher than the other group.

Moreover, the last research question, in this study, was concerned with participants' attitude toward competency-based approach. The results that students had positive attitudes towards using this approach in the Iranian EFL context.

As it has been observed in the reported results, competency-based approach can significantly improve different components of writing. This might be due to the fact that competency-based approach effectively focuses on students' use of the language rather than their technical knowledge of it which is mostly emphasized in traditional styles of teaching writing. The results reported that the highest improvement was observed in complexity of the texts. Then the fluency was improved, and accuracy had the least improvement among these three factors. This can affirm the point that competency-based approach is more concerned with the transition of information (rather than grammar and vocabulary); therefore, the participants feel free to express what is going on in their minds. Moreover, competency-based approach encourages the learners to learn by doing the tasks rather than focusing on prerequisite techniques such as grammar and vocabulary which are boring for students. This practical use of writing skill can ultimately result in better performance. The positive attitudes of Iranian students towards using competency-based approach might be due to the possibility that they feel more comfortable interacting in these classes. The other possible reason for showing positive attitudes towards competency-based approach may refer to the students' easier contact with the instructional content compared to students in the traditional classroom. In addition, when the students work on the issues that are handy and applicable in their future occupational context, they will have a more positive attitude toward the new teaching approach compared to the traditional ones.

4. Conclusion

The above-mentioned results can lead to the conclusion that using competency-based approach can improve EFL students' writing ability. In general, the obtained results asserted that this approach is really helpful and effective in improving writing skill. Moreover, the obtained results were in line with the ones obtained by Wong (2008), Rainwater (2015), Saadi, et al., (2016), and Vail (2018). Wong (2008) has conducted a study to work on the language learning of pre-service teachers in China. Saadi, et al., (2016) also worked on the effect of competency-based approach on English language learning of the EFL learners studying in Azad University. Vail (2018), in his study focused on the effect of competency-based approach on language acquisition of Korean EFL learners. All these studies provided some results in favor of the application of competency-based approach in language learning contexts. However, the reviewed studies were mostly concerned with the effect of competency-based approach on general language competence of the EFL learners. The present study was specifically concerned with three components of writing. Therefore, this study is somehow innovative among the studies conducted in this case.

On the other hand, there are few studies concerned with negative effects of competency-based approach. However, a couple studies have mentioned some contradictory results, one of which is reviewed here. According to Hemmingsen (2013), competency-based approach may limit the students in a specific field and they cannot figure out English used in other contexts. However, it should be noted that language learning is a multidimensional but interconnected system; therefore, working on the language not only does not restrict the improvement in other areas of language but it can also confirm satisfactory performance in other contexts. Hemmingsen (2013) also came to the conclusion that competency-based approach may have nothing in common with a positive attitude towards language learning. but the results of the present study showed that

through competency-based approach, students feel less pressure in the classes and they can have a more positive attitude toward learning the language.

Moreover, the present study has some implications for the educators working in the field of language learning. Writing under the competency-based Approach is a final product that has gone through a set of stages that involve students in planning, drafting, and revising. Therefore, the findings of the present study can persuade instructors to integrate competency-based Approach in their classrooms to improve writing ability of the learners. Moreover, the results of the study imply that syllabus designers and curriculum writers can use real-world content in order to make the EFL learners more motivated.

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