

Scaffolding Advanced Writing through Writing Frames

Sara Salehpour¹, Nasrin Hadidi Tamjid^{*2}, Biook Behnam³

^{1, 2, 3} Department of English, Tabriz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tabriz, Iran

**Corresponding author: nhadidi@iaut.ac.ir*

.....
Received: 2015.6.1

Revisions received: 2016.6.29

Accepted: 2016.7.11
.....

Abstract

Mastering writing has always proved an almost insurmountable barrier to EFL learners. In an attempt to alleviate problems advanced EFL learners have with writing, this study aimed at investigating the effect of scaffolded instruction through writing frames constructed from extended prefabricated lexical bundles. 40 female advanced English students, selected out of a population of 65, were randomly assigned into experimental and control groups. The participants of both groups were assigned a writing pre-test prior to any instruction, and a writing post-test following the twenty-session scaffolded instruction in both groups. The results revealed that the participants in the experimental group outperformed their counterparts in the control group as a result of the writing frames they were provided with. Overall, it is concluded that scaffolded instruction through writing frames can be a useful means of helping advanced students to improve their writing quality.

Keywords: writer's block, negative transfer, zone of proximal development, lexical bundles, extended prefabricated lexical bundles

پرتال جامع علوم انسانی

Introduction

Generally, a majority of EFL learners labor under the misconception that mastering writing in the foreign language is a major hurdle almost impossible to overcome. What, first and foremost, poses grave challenges to EFL learners is the complexity and difficulty residing in writing, necessitating “control over a number of variables such as content, format, sentence, structure, vocabulary and spelling simultaneously” (Nunan, 1989, p. 36). Compounding EFL learners problems regarding writing is the dearth of suitable learning strategies in writing resulting in low motivation for students (Lo & Hyland, 2007). It is also worth noting that the prewriting stage, which should be persistently capitalized on, is usually slighted and taken for granted. More importantly, “most writing textbooks tackle the writing process beginning with the drafting stage as the first stage in writing” (Mogahed, 2013, p. 61), seemingly oblivious of the crucial importance of what Huff and Kline (1987, cited in Ziad, 2011, p. 78) call the “wellspring of composing”, allocating time and attention to which can substantially alleviate the problem of “writer’s block”, i.e, “momentary lapses writers are tormented by while writing” (Capital Community College Foundation, 2006, cited in Mogahed, 2013, p. 61).

Another problem which makes the ability to write more burdensome is the prevalence of negative transfer in writing which stems from the incompetent knowledge of collocational patterns and lexical bundles, a tricky area which remains highly demanding for EFL learners. What particularly caught the researchers’ attention was the prevalent feeling of apathy among advanced students when it was noticed that their writing skill had stagnated over time and lagged behind other skills. The thing that most appealed to the researchers was the way these students were tormented by writer’s block, groping for appropriate words, lingering on each structure, wavering over word choice. What the researchers’ deep probe into their predicament detected as the major problem was not for lack of trying but rather for the need for someone to put them on the right track and steer their course. Hence, this study, underpinned by Vygotsky’s notion of Zone of Proximal Development (ZDP), underscores the role played by the mediator or more knowledgeable other, namely the teacher in case of this work.

As Vygotsky (1987) puts it, “what the child is able to do in collaboration today he will be able to do independently tomorrow” (p. 211). Inherent in Vygotsky’s message is the notion of scaffolded instruction which refers to the sort of help provided by a teacher or peer to facilitate learning (Lipscomb, Swanson & West, 2012). Through scaffolding the teacher facilitates students’ transition from assisted tasks to independent performances providing the learner with sufficient guidance until the process is learned, and then gradually removes the supports in order to shift the responsibility of performing the task to the student (Palincsar, 1998).

Scaffolding has been referred to as “a process by which a teacher provides students with a temporary framework for learning; done correctly, such structures encourage students to develop their own initiatives and motivations; once the students could develop knowledge on their own, the framework would be dismantled”. (Mulatsih (2011, as cited in Rezvani, Saeidi& Behnam, 2015, p. 5)

McKenzie (1999) deems efficiency and momentum to be the significant features of scaffolding in the context of classroom learning. Such instruction, being structured and focused, thereby virtually excluding the possibility of potential glitches and flaws, provides a fertile ground for efficient learning since more time is available to be spent on learning and discovering. Furthermore, the transparency of instruction and directions eliminates the possibility of the learners’ deviating from the main purpose of the work.

Scaffolded instruction is underpinned by Lev Vygotsky’s (1978) idea of the zone of proximal development (Lipscomb, Swanson & West, 2012). Vygotsky proposes that a learner’s developmental level comprises two parts namely the “actual developmental level” and the “potential developmental level”. The zone of proximal development is “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

Previous research (e.g. Cudd& Roberts 1989; Bereiter&Scardamalia, 1985) suggests that framing structures can be efficiently utilized to prompt and scaffold children's non-fiction writing. According to Wray and Lewis

(1997), writing frames, comprising “varied vocabulary of connectives and sentence beginnings” which help extend students’ repertoire, provide an “overview of the writing task” (pp. 12). More importantly, they add that a writing frame is a vital ingredient in improving self-esteem and motivation as it casts aside the fears of how to put pen to paper by providing them with a rough outline of the writing task. Similarly, writing frames, as Hyland (2007) puts it, “provide something of the prompting missing between a writer and blank sheet of paper, assisting writers to envisage what is needed to express their purposes effectively and to anticipate the possible reactions of an intended readership” (p. 159).

On the other hand, lexical bundles which are referred to as “a prominent component of fluent linguistic production, central to the creation of academic discourse and a key factor in successful language learning” (Hyland, 2008, p. 4), can facilitate communication (Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992), contribute to naturalness in language use (Millar, 2009, as cited in Allen, 2009) and in turn create more native-like sentences (Nation, 2001). However, “misuse of formulaic language has been shown to be a potential source of communication difficulties” (Millar 2009, cited in Allen, 2009, p.106), creating barriers to effective communication (Karami, 2013). Hence, one of the areas most susceptible to interlingual transfer is collocation and multi-word sequences, especially where the first language does not correspond with the target language in terms of collocational patterns. Previous studies (e.g., Altenberg & Granger, 2001) show that familiarity with patterns that diverge from those in L1 diminishes the risk of negative transfer.

Another virtue of prefabricated bundles is presented by Nation (2001) who points out that “by having chunks of language in long-term memory, language reception and language productions are made more effective” (p. 321). Hinkel (2004) comments that teaching chunks may be a means to facilitate students’ development of L2 accuracy and fluency “that leads to production and subsequent automatization” (p. 39).

A number of studies have been undertaken to investigate the impact of scaffolded writing through teaching lexical bundles and writing frames. In a case study to investigate the impact of scaffolded writing on emergent

writers, Bodrova (1998), who compared the samples of unassisted and scaffolded writing from a group of 34 kindergartners, found that scaffolded writing did produce more advanced writing compared to the level of writing the children produced when unassisted. Schwieter (2010), who investigated second language writing development through scaffolding in the ZPD, found that scaffolding writing techniques and feedback debriefing sessions within the ZPD effectively develops writing skills in second language learning when contextualized through a writing workshop involving the creation of a professional magazine designed for an authentic audience.

The efficacy of scaffolding has also been underscored by the findings of the study by Panahzadeh and Gholami (2014) who provided upper-intermediate female learners with planned preemptive focus on form through linguistic scaffolding. The results revealed that linguistic scaffolding proved to be advantageous to and beneficial in enriching learners' lexical repertoire which in turn led to improvements in their oral production. In another study, corroborating the positive influence of scaffolding, Amirghassemi, Azabdaftari and Saeidi (2013), who explored the effect of scaffolded versus non-scaffolded written corrective feedback on EFL learners' written accuracy on English articles and past tense, concluded that the group who benefitted from scaffolded corrective feedback outperformed the other groups in the correct production of past tense. However, the results revealed no significant differences among the four groups in the study in terms of their accuracy in the use of articles in their compositions.

The work of the Nuffield Exeter Extending Literacy (EXEL) project suggests that the use of writing frames is one strategy which can help children use the generic structures of recounts, reports, instructions, explanations, persuasion and discussion until they become familiar enough with these written structures to have assimilated them into their independent writing repertoire. Additionally, the findings of a small scale classroom study conducted by Saunders (1998, cited in Adderly, 2000), provide evidence that the use of writing frames can be a significant factor in improving children's writing. In another study, Adderly (2000), who attempted to investigate how writing frames can be used to improve the standard of boys' writing, concluded that the use of writing frames

alongside teacher modeling improved the standard of boys' report writing. The organization and layout of the text and the boys' use of vocabulary and sentence construction showed the most improvement. Furthermore, the findings of a case study conducted by Cottingham and Dabron (1999) revealed that writing frames encouraged more analytical writing in students across the ability range. In another study, Lewis and Wray (1995) used writing frames with children throughout the primary and lower secondary years and across the full range of abilities, including children with special needs. They reported that working with the teacher to collaboratively construct the text through shared or guided writing, learners brainstorm ideas, plan an outline, and draft a piece of writing for a particular purpose in a specific form.

Furthermore, the studies conducted by Howarth (1998), and Nesselhauf (2003) indicated that learners' lack of knowledge of chunks and bundles inhibited the learners' writing performance. In the same line, Pang (2010) concluded that it will be advantageous to explicitly raise students' awareness of lexical bundles and have them practice using them in communicative writing activities. Additionally, the findings of the study by Kazemi, Katiraie and Rasekh (2014) indicated that the bundles were of significant help to the students' writing ability and that students attribute great importance to lexical bundles.

However, taking into consideration the perennial problem of "writer's block" (Mogahed, 2013, p. 60) and drawing upon the findings of previously undertaken studies regarding the beneficial effects of teaching lexical bundles and writing frames, the current study seeks to remedy the problem posed by the insufficient knowledge of multi-word units, namely, negative transfer, pinpointed as an impending factor most likely to inhibit writing performance, and also to ascertain whether providing advanced students with writing frames which are constructed through pre-teaching extended prefabricated lexical bundles in the pre-writing stage can possibly bring about changes in the writing performance of them or not.

However, as it was mentioned earlier, varied writing frames can be provided to cater for the needs of learners at different levels. Writing frames with only a few prompts and more challenging vocabulary can satisfy the

needs of those learners with more experience and expertise in writing longer texts, but those to whom a blank sheet of paper conjures up dread. Such writing frames with more challenging structures, collocations, lexical bundles and also extended bundles can come in handy for students who are planning to sit language proficiency tests such as IELTS and TOEFL, since rather than teetering in indecision and wavering over word choice, they have at their disposal a frame equipped with extended bundles to begin, maintain and conclude their writing. It appears from the aforementioned investigations that so far most attention has been paid to the use of writing frames for struggling writers mostly children. To the best of the authors' knowledge, the case of writing frames for advanced learners has not been given great attention by the researchers in the past, and this motivated the present study. Hence, this study is an attempt to investigate the effect of scaffolded instruction through writing frames on advanced students' writing performance. To serve this purpose, the following research question was formulated:

1. Does scaffolded instruction through writing frames improve advanced EFL learners' writing performance?

Method

Participants

The participants in the study included 40 female advanced English graduates of Goldis language institute in Tabriz, aged between 24 to 32, preparing to sit IELTS language proficiency exam.

Instrumentation and Material

Initially, in the present study, two sections of a proficiency test were used to ensure the homogeneity of the participants for the study. This test encompassed two sections of the structure part of a TOEFL test: multiple-choice questions (15 items) and error-recognition items (25 items). The maximum possible score for this test was 40 for 40 items on the test.

Having been chosen for the study, the participants in both experimental and control groups, prior to any instruction, were assigned a writing task employed as the pre-test which was selected from Task 2 writings of

Cambridge IELTS Tests. The subsequent instrument following the twenty-session instruction was another writing task similar to the one employed as the pre-test, this time assigned as the post-test of the study. The scores of both pre-test and post-test were out of 30 (based on Barron's scoring checklist for TOEFL iBT writing). The main reason behind using Barron's checklist was the scorers' familiarity with and expertise in using the checklist owing to the high frequency of its use through 12 years of their teaching experience.

The participants in both experimental and control groups, during the pre-writing stage, made good use of *'Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary'* to look up words and domain-specific collocations. The instructor also had access to *'Longman Exams Coach'*, *'Longman Dictionary of Contemporary Dictionary'*, *'Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary'* and *'Cambridge Advanced Learner's dictionary'*.

Procedure

Initially, to ensure the homogeneity of the participants in the study, two sections of a PBT TOEFL test were administered to 65 advanced EFL students. Based on the results, 40 students were selected for the study. The participants were randomly assigned in two control and experimental groups, each including 20 participants. Prior to any treatment, the participants in both groups were assigned a writing task, selected out of Task 2 parts of Cambridge IELTS Tests, the scores of which served as the data for the pre-test.

Stage 1: In both experimental and control groups, running for 20 sessions through 10 weeks, the weekly treatment involved choosing a topic lying within the students' interest to heighten their motivation to write. Even though the present study was mainly targeted toward writing development, during each session, prior to writing, some practice on speaking skill was provided with the aim of internalizing the chunks, stimulating the students' schemata regarding the topic through brainstorming, and generating related vocabulary. Furthermore, a large collection of key words and phrases that might have skipped their attention was reintroduced to equip them with some relevant background to facilitate writing. Simultaneous with teaching

relevant vocabulary regarding each topic and providing the students with useful prefabricated bundles, the teacher drew students' attention to the relevant collocations and restrictions on how different words can be used together.

As an example, in the case of the topic entitled "Why do we need music?", the first step included engaging the participants in the discussion so as to elicit key ideas and develop a general image of the intended topic. Some of the emerging phrases included:

important role, numerous advantages, crucial element, positive effect, rapid pace of modern life, reminds us of old memories, brings back memories, relaxes us, makes us happy, helps us to forget our problems, great importance, come to conclusion that

Stage 2: This was what the participants of the control group solely benefited from. The process carried on for 20 sessions. Subsequently, the participants of control group were assigned a writing task as the posttest of the study similar to the one administered as the pretest. However, the treatment in the experimental group further developed as having compiled adequate phrases, bundles and collocations; the teacher, in a collaborative effort with students, went on to paraphrase what they had come up with through the process of bringing to their attention more sophisticated terms and expressions, synonymous with or equivalent to what they had already produced, in particular those bearing higher lexical density and complexity. For instance the above-mentioned terms changed to the following:

indispensable role, benefit enormously, vital ingredient, profound and inspiring effect, serves as a distraction from, stresses and strains of frantic pace of life, evoke/stir emotions, stimulate us physically and emotionally, revive memories, ease tension, soothe nerves, uplift spirits, heal emotional traumas, paramount importance, inescapable conclusion

In so doing, the content of the writing was agreed on and the assembled bundles were ordered in a proper sequence based on, for instance, which words will go to the introduction, body and conclusion paragraph, or which ones will be used to give reasons or examples were decided upon.

Furthermore, through activating students' schemata, what already resided in their vocabulary knowledge began to surface which contributed substantially to bringing out the best in the students. More importantly, not only this awakened students to the fact that as an advanced student they have a wide range of vocabulary at their disposal but also enlightened them as to the creative and delicate nature of writing.

Stage 3: Nonetheless, what sets this study apart from the previously carried out ones is the way it takes a further step, shifting the emphasis away from clichéd lexical bundles to a bunch of more sophisticated sentences. The specific treatment of which the control group was deprived involved engaging the participants of the experimental group in the process of constructing longer chunks of language comprising the already collected lexical bundles and collocations in order to heighten the lexical density and consequently the complexity of the writing text. In other words, rather than placing the emphasis upon a string of clichéd lexical bundles, this approach to writing aimed at stimulating students to put together appropriate bits and come up with extended chunks of language, incorporating them into their writing. The process of putting together the assembled bundles to come up with extended chunks of language was steered under the tight control of the teacher and commenced with the introduction of sentences used for the initiation, maintenance and conclusion of the writing task which in turn led to the emergence of a writing frame for different types of writing topics. A sample writing frame is provided below:

(Writing frame for the importance of technology, mobile phones, music, ...)

.....is widely believed/perceived to play a/an cardinal/pivotal/indispensable/prominent role in
 The pervasiveness ofin today's world accentuates/highlights/underlines the extent to which every facet of human life benefits from

What makesa vital ingredient ofis the far-reaching and profound effects it has on.....What is more, it can incomparably facilitate/accelerate/speed

up.....eliminating the need to Mention must also be made of the Nevertheless, the most remarkable attribute which makes.....stand out as a crucial element in everyone's life lies in the unprecedented opportunities it affords people, adding color, excitement, variety and novelty to their life.

Finally, in the light of all the above-mentioned merits we come to the inescapable conclusion thatis an inseparable thread of life's rich tapestry without which the image of the world would be irremediably distorted / holds a tremendous significance in today's world, dearth of which would bring about dire consequences for everyone.

Thus, all advanced students had to allocate their time to, is the appropriate placement of already assembled bundles and collocations in the frame to provide a sense of coherence in the text.

Apart from the extended bundles cited above various writing frames emerged through the collaborative efforts of the teacher and students, some of which have been fully introduced in the Appendix.

Finally, after twenty sessions, a writing task similar to the one administered as the pretest was assigned to both groups. In order to reduce the scorer unreliability, two different scorers both teaching advanced writing courses were asked to score the students' writings.

However, what merits mention regarding the teacher preparation for this course is the spontaneity of the whole instruction by virtue of the 12-year teaching experience of the instructor. That is, no preparatory work was done in the linguistic domain. Nevertheless, prior to the collaborative construction of the frames in classroom, the instructor committed time to the layout and organization of the frames, in so far as the frames met the standards and demands advanced writing makes of students.

Design

The present study had a quasi-experimental pre-test post-test design with a control group intended to estimate the effect of the independent variable, i.e., pre-teaching extended prefabricated lexical bundles through writing frames on the dependent variable of the research which is writing performance.

Results

The data obtained from the PBT TOEFL test were analyzed by means of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 16 (SPSS, 16). An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the scores of the experimental and control groups on the PBT TOEFL test, taken to ensure the homogeneity of the participants in both groups. Table 1 illustrates the results.

Table 1

Descriptive group statistics for the results of the PBT TOEFL test

	groups of students	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
students' scores	experimental	20	31.8500	2.66112	.59505
	Control	20	32.3000	3.54074	.79173

Moreover, an independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the scores of the experimental and control groups on the PBT TOEFL test. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Independent samples t-test for the PBT TOEFL test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower		Upper
students' scores	Equal variances assumed	.047	.454	-.454	38	.652	-.45000	.99041	-2.45499	1.55499
	Equal variances not assumed			-.454	35.27	.652	-.45000	.99041	-2.46009	1.56009

As indicated in Table 2, there is no significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group ($M = 31.85$, $SD = 2.67$) and control group ($M = 32.30$, $SD = 3.54$), which signifies the initial homogeneity of the participants in both groups, $t(38) = -.454$, $p = .652 > .05$.

Similarly, an independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the pretest scores of the participants in the experimental and control groups. Table 3 represents the results of the descriptive analysis and Table 4 shows the results of the independent samples t-test.

Table 3

Descriptive group statistics for the results of the writing pretest scores

	groups of students	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Students' scores	Experimental	20	19.8000	1.98945	.44485
	Control	20	19.4000	2.18608	.48882

Table 4

Independent samples t-test for the writing pretest scores

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
Students' scores		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Students' scores	Equal variances assumed	.239	.627	.605	38	.549	.40000	.66094	-.9380	1.7380
	Equal variances not assumed			.605	37.66	.549	.40000	.66094	-.9383	1.7383

The results, as shown in Table 4, revealed no significant difference between the mean scores of the participants in the experimental group ($M = 19.80$, $SD = 1.99$) and the control group ($M = 19.40$, $SD = 2.19$); $t(38) = 0.61$, $p = .549 > .05$. The mean difference in the pretest scores was 0.326 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -.938 to 1.739.

To minimize scorer unreliability, two independent scorers were asked to correct the papers and the means of the two sets of scores were used as a

base for the analysis of writing scores. Pearson Product-Moment correlation was conducted to determine the relationship between the pretest scores given by scorer 1 and scorer 2 to the participants' writings in the control group, the result of which is shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Pearson Product-Moment correlation between pretest scores of scorer 1 and scorer 2 for control group

		scorer 1	scorer 2
scorer 1	Pearson Correlation	1	.971**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	20	20
scorer 2	Pearson Correlation	.971**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	20	20

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

The same analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between the pretest scores given by scorer 1 and scorer 2 to the participants' writings in the experimental group, as illustrated in Table 5.

Table 6

Pearson Product-Moment correlation between pretest scores of scorer 1 and scorer 2 for experimental group

		scorer 1	scorer 2
scorer 1	Pearson Correlation	1	.907**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	20	20
scorer 2	Pearson Correlation	.907**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	20	20

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

The results in Table 5 and Table 6 revealed that there was a significant correlation between the two sets of pretest scores of scorer 1 and 2 for the

control group $r = .971$, $n = 20$, $p = .000$ and the experimental group, $r = .907$, $n = 20$, $p = .000$.

Finally, in order to compare the writing posttest scores of the participants in the experimental and control groups, another independent samples t-test was conducted, the results of which are presented in Tables 7 and 8 below.

Table 7

Group statistics for the results of the writing posttest scores

	groups of students	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Scores	experimental	20	26.2500	.85070	.19022
	Control	20	21.1500	2.32322	.51949

Table 8

Independent samples t-test for the writing posttest scores

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
								Lower	Upper	
Scores	Equal variances assumed	13.96	.001	9.219	38	.000	5.10000	.55322	3.98006	6.21994
	Equal variances not assumed			9.219	24.005	.000	5.10000	.55322	3.95822	6.24178

As it is evident in Table 8, there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the participants in the experimental group ($M=26.25$, $SD=.85$) and the control group ($M=21.15$, $SD=2.32$). In other words, the difference between the writing posttest scores of the participants in the experimental group and control group reached significant level; $t(38)=9.21$, $p=.00<.05$.

Moreover, the correlation between the posttest scores given by scorer 1 and 2 to both control and experimental groups was calculated. The results are presented in Tables 9 and 10 below.

Table 9

Pearson Product-Moment correlation between posttest scores of scorer 1 and scorer 2 for control group

		scorer 1	scorer 2
scorer 1	Pearson Correlation	1	.964**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	20	20
scorer 2	Pearson Correlation	.964**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	20	20

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Table 10

Pearson Product-Moment correlation between posttest scores of scorer 1 and scorer 2 for experimental group

		scorer 1	scorer 2
scorer 1	Pearson Correlation	1.000	.738**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	20	20
scorer 2	Pearson Correlation	.738**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	20	20

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

As illustrated in Tables 9 and 10, the Pearson Product-Moment correlation between the posttest scores of scorer 1 and scorer 2 for the control group and the posttest scores of scorer 1 and scorer 2 for the experimental group reveals a significant correlation between the two sets of scores.

Discussion

This research was carried out with the aim of helping advanced students to improve their writing performance which had been suffering and had stagnated over time, giving rise to the frustrating feeling of dissatisfaction with their ability to write effectively and accurately.

The data analysis of the TOEFL iBT test showed that the difference was not significant at 0.05 level which confirmed the homogeneity of the groups in terms of language proficiency prior to the study. To minimize the scorer unreliability, two independent scorers were asked to correct the papers and the means of the two sets of scores were used as a base for the analysis of writing scores. The data analysis of the participants' pretest writing scores revealed no significant difference between the groups. However, the data analysis of the participants' posttest writing scores showed that the obtained P value (.000) is less than 0.05 ($p < .05$) which means that there is a significant difference between the groups, indicating the outperformance of the participants of the experimental group.

The results on the effectiveness of extended prefabricated lexical bundles fashioned into the writing frames for advanced writing reveal that not only does the collaborative construction of longer chunks of language by putting together the bundles assembled prior to the writing stage provide preliminary scaffolding for writing but also it serves as a helpful prewriting activity which in turn improves writing performance. This is consistent with the findings of the study undertaken by Cotton (1997, cited in Mogahed, 2013) which showed that learners who are encouraged to engage in an array of prewriting experiences prove greater writing achievement than those whose experience was devoid of this kind of preparation. Furthermore, the helpfulness of scaffolding writing is also corroborated by the findings of Bodrova (1998), who compared the samples of unassisted and scaffolded writing and found that scaffolded writing did produce more advanced writing compared to the level of writing the children produced when unassisted. Moreover, consistent with the findings of the study by Panahzadeh and Gholami (2014), the results point towards the efficacy of scaffolding in enriching learners' lexical repertoire, thereby improving their writing performance. The findings concerning the efficacy of scaffolding are also in line with what Amirghassemi et.al (2013) concluded, having explored

the effect of scaffolded versus non-scaffolded written corrective feedback on EFL learners' written accuracy on English articles and past tense.

Having equipped the students with a writing frame, the teacher provided a broad outline of the writing task and helped resolve the dilemma of how to begin, maintain and conclude it. Hence, students no longer had to worry about the organization and layout of their writing, nor did they dread how to put pen to paper and how to bring it to an end as they had at their disposal a writing frame, comprising the extended prefabricated lexical bundles. This is in line with the findings of the study carried out by Adderly (2000) who attempted to investigate how writing frames can be used to improve the standard of boys' writing. Similarly, he found that the organization and layout of the text and the boys' use of vocabulary and sentence construction showed the most improvement. Additionally, consistent with the findings of the study by Kazemi, Katiraie and Rasekh (2014) who examined how significant the use of lexical bundles, prevalent in the field of applied linguistics, can be in students' writing materials, the researcher found that the extended prefabricated lexical bundles presented through writing frames led to the outperformance of the participants in the experimental group.

Such extended prefabricated bundles being at students' complete disposal cast aside their qualms about how to shape meaning and prioritize their ideas. Thus, rather than desperately teetering in indecision, students become confident in the knowledge that they will no longer linger over writing, nor will they squander time wavering between words and phrases. Wray and Perkins (2000) back up this stating that such sequences can act as processing short-cuts by being stored and retrieved whole from memory at the time of use rather than being generated anew on each occasion.

An additional consistency the findings of this study bear with previous ones is the reduction of the threats negative transfer poses to the native-like production of advanced students which is in accordance with Bahns (1993) and Nesselhauf's (2003) assertions that collocation and bundle instruction can help students to avoid erroneous forms involving interference by their mother tongue. In other words, by drawing upon the theory of negative transfer, it can be concluded that the outperformance of the subjects in the

experimental group was due to the facilitative effect of the extended chunks, bundles and collocational patterns which formed the writing frames constructed prior to the writing process.

The ultimate results of this study brought home the fact that advanced students' writing performance needs to be fostered when they feel overwhelmed by the unsatisfactory nature of their writing. The thing that particularly caught our attention was the way these learners were groping for words to come up with appropriate sentences relevant to the topic of writing in spite of the wide circle of the lexical knowledge they possessed given the fact that they were all graduates of advanced English courses from an English institute in Tabriz. This inability proved to have placed an obstacle on their way from which the feeling of frustration and apathy stemmed.

In a collaborative teacher-supported atmosphere, the teacher, through brainstorming, activating students' schemata and mutual negotiations to come up with appropriate chunks and extended bundles, provided scaffolds for students in the form of writing frames. This seemed to boost the learners' confidence and morale as whatever included in their writing was the product of their own memory and knowledge and imagination and they found themselves totally involved in the emergence of each sentence. Vacca and Levitt (n.d), who investigated the development in second language writing through scaffolding within the ZPD, likewise, found that through scaffolding writing, students grow in confidence about what they are learning. This is also supported by Bobb-Wolff (1996), who argues that brainstorming and activating learners' schemata can be a useful and enriching tool in the EFL classroom and a means of showing learners that they are collectively capable of generating more ideas to improve their learning process than they believe possible.

Conclusion

So far, numerous studies have been carried out attempting to explore the effect of various types of pre-writing activities on writing performance. Moreover, the use of writing frames has been previously investigated by some researchers, most of whom have primarily concentrated on the utilization of such frames for children and struggling beginners. Literature

reviews indicate that no research has been found to have focused on writing frames for advanced learners. What is more, a careful study of the aforementioned investigations reveals that no previous research has simultaneously examined the usefulness of extended prefabricated lexical bundles and writing frames. Hence, as an attempt to fill this gap and present a pretty novel approach to scaffolding writing through writing frames, the present study was undertaken so as to determine the extent to which pre-teaching extended prefabricated lexical bundles through writing frames for advanced students can contribute to the improvement in advanced writing performance.

This research confirms evidence that providing advanced EFL learners with a skeleton outline prior to the writing stage, namely, a writing frame constructed from a set of extended lexical bundles, can improve their writing performance which is indicated by the outperformance of the participants in the experimental group. Such scaffolded instruction for writing in the form of writing frames fosters a positive attitude towards prewriting stage and prewriting, prompting teachers to utilize such prewriting activity so as to allay advanced students' concern and fussiness over how to initiate, maintain and conclude their writing.

References

- Adderly, S. (2000). *Investigating the teaching of writing frames: Raising standards in boy's writing*. A research project funded by the Teacher Training Agency as part of the Teacher Research Grant Scheme. London: TTA publications.
- Allen, D. (2009). Lexical bundles in learner writing: An analysis of formulaic language in the ALESS learner corpus. *Komaba Journal of English Education, 1*, 105-126.
- Amirghassemi, A., Azabdaftari, B., & Saeidi, M. (2013). The effect of scaffolded vs. non-scaffolded written corrective feedback on EFL learners' written accuracy. *World Applied Sciences Journal, 22*(2), 256-263.
- Bahns, J. (1993). Lexical collocations: a contrastive view. *ELT, 47*(1), 56-63.
- Bereiter, C., & Scardamalia, M. (1985). Children's difficulties in learning to compose. In G. Wells & J. Nicholls (Eds.), *Language and Learning: An Interactive Perspective* (pp. 33-54). Basingstoke: Falmer Press.
- Bobb-Wolff, L. (1996). Brainstorming to autonomy. *Forum, 34*(3), 38-52.

- Bodrova, E. (1998). Scaffolding emergent writing in the zone of proximal development. *Literacy Teaching and Learning*, 3 (2), 1-18.
- Cottingham, M., & Dabron, J. (1999). *What impacts can developments in literacy teaching have on teaching and learning history?* A research project funded by the Teacher Training Agency as part of the Teacher Research Grant Scheme. London : TTA publications.
- Cudd, E.T., & Roberts, L. (1989). Using writing to enhance content area learning in the primary grades. *The Reading Teacher*, 42(6), 117-119.
- Hinkel, E. (2004). *Teaching academic ESL writing: Practical techniques in vocabulary and grammar*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Hyland, K. (2007). Genre pedagogy: Language, literacy and L2 writing instruction. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 16 (2007), 148-164.
- Hyland, K. (2008). As can be seen: Lexical bundles and disciplinary variation. *English for Specific Purposes*, 27, 4-21.
- Karami, M. (2013). Exploring effects of explicit vs. implicit teaching of collocations on the writing performance of Iranian EFL learners. *Journal of Language Learning and Applied Linguistics World*, 4(4), 197-215.
- Kazemi, M., Katiraie, S., & Rasekh, E. A. (2014). The impact of teaching lexical bundles on improving Iranian EFL students' writing skill. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 98, 864-869.
- Lewis, M., & Wray, D. (1995). *Developing children's non-fiction writing: working with writing frames*. Leamington Spa: Scholastic publications.
- Lipscomb, L., Swanson, J., & West, A. (2004). Scaffolding. In M. Orey (Ed.), *Emerging perspectives on learning, teaching, and technology* (pp. 1-17). Retrieved June 11, 2007, from <http://projects.coe.uga.edu/epltt/>.
- Lo, J., & Hyland, F. (2007). Enhancing students' engagement and motivation in writing: The case of primary students in Hong Kong. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 16(4), 219-237.
- McKenzie, J. (1999). Scaffolding for success. *From Now On: The Educational Technology Journal*, 9(4). Retrieved April, 2015, from www.fno.org/dec99/scaffold.html.
- Mogahed, M., M. (2013). Planning out pre-writing activities. *International Journal of English and Literature*. 4(3), 60-68.
- Nation, P. (2001). *Learning Vocabulary in Another Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nattinger, J., & DeCarrico, J. (1992). *Lexical phrases and language teaching*. Oxford: OUP.

- Nesselhauf, N. (2003). The use of collocations by advanced learners of English and some implications for teaching. *Applied Linguistics*, 24(2), 223-242.
- Nunan, D.(1989). *Designing tasks for the communicative classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Palincsar, A. S. (1998). Keeping the metaphor of scaffolding fresh: A response to C. Addison Stone's 'The metaphor of scaffolding'. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 31(4), 370-373.
- Panahzadeh, P., &Gholami, J. (2014). The relative impacts of planned preemptive vs. delayed reactive focus on form on language learners' lexical resource. *The Journal of Language Teaching and Learning*, 4(1), 69-83.
- Pang, W. (2010). Lexical Bundles and the Construction of an Academic Voice: A Pedagogical Perspective. *Asian EFL Journal*, 47 (1), 10-11.
- Rezvani, P. (2014). The effect of scaffolding genre-based instruction of humorous narrative texts on Iranian EFL learners' writing performance, motivation for writing, and humorous Writing. An unpublished doctoral dissertation, Islamic Azad university of Tabriz, Iran.
- Rezvani, P., Saeidi, M., & Behnam, B. (2015). The effect of scaffolding genre-based instruction of narrative texts on Iranian EFL learners' writing performance. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 8 (5(1)), 693-709.
- Schwieter, J. W. (2010). Developing second language writing through scaffolding in the ZDP: A magazine project for an authentic audience. *Journal of College Teaching and Learning*, 7(10), 13-45.
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in Society: The development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1987). *The collected works of L.S. Vygotsky*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Ziad, M. A. (2011). Effects of web-based pre-writing activities on college EFL students' writing performance and their writing apprehension. *Journal of King Saud University – Languages and Translation*, 23, 77–85.

Appendix

Samples for Writing Frames

Writing frame for:

Some people believeothers believeDiscuss both views and state your own opinion.(e.g., controversial issues such as death penalty/ gender equality)

.....has provoked/triggered/sparked off a/an intense/fierce/heated/ongoing debate between/among/within....., arousing substantial/considerable controversy to boot. One particularly contentious issue lying at the center of the dispute is..... Although there is growing consensus that, whether toor.....is a highly sensitive issue which has given rise to irreconcilable conflicts between its proponents and opponents as some people still remain deeply divided/split on this thorny/vexed issue. Compelling arguments/ Opposing /Contrasting views abound for and againstin terms of its beneficial and detrimental effects on.....

On the one side of the argument are those who assert/maintain/contend that.....is pivotal/cardinal to given the fact that/in view of the fact that..... On the other side of the argument are those who take a dim view of/take issue with/are dead set against/are implacably opposed to.....declaring/holding that.....

Taking both views into consideration, I am firmly of the opinion that those wholabor under the conception that/are oblivious of What is more, it is beyond dispute that It is also worth bearing in mind thatwhich not only.....but also..... In conclusion,..... .Last but not least, the government/ concerned authorities should not turn a blind eye to/isolate themselves from..... but take preventative measures to alleviate the problems stemming from.....

Writing frame for advantages and disadvantages:

The advantages ofclearly outweigh its disadvantages. What primarily merits mention among its numerous plus points is the privilege granted by.....to More importantly,.....obviates the need toAnother virtue to be extolled is..... .
also gives a distinct advantage over.....alleviating the problems caused byAn additional major upside of.....lies in the unique opportunity it places in the hands of to..... .
 However, although the pros ofcan be a stepping-stone to....., one should never overlook the drawbacks of it as they can present huge stumbling-blocks to

Biodata

Sara Salehpour is a Ph.D. candidate in ELT at Islamic Azad University, Tabriz Branch. She has several years of experience in teaching English in language institutes in Tabriz. Her main research interests include discourse analysis, systemic functional linguistics, ELT and writing.

Nasrin Hadidi Tamjid has a Ph.D. in TEFL. She is an assistant professor who has been teaching at Islamic Azad University, Tabriz Branch for 18 years. Moreover, she is the editor of the Applied Linguistic Journal at this university. She is also an official translator to the justice administration. She has published and presented a number of papers in different international journals and conferences. Her main research interests are alternative assessment, teacher education, second language teaching, and writing.

Biook Behnam is Associate Professor in Applied Linguistics at Islamic Azad University, Tabriz branch, Iran. His current research interests cover Discourse Analysis, ELT and Translation Studies. He has been involved in a wide range of projects in the area of Applied Linguistics and Discourse Analysis as a project leader, consultant and researcher. He has widely presented papers to national and international conferences in North America, Australia, Europe, China, India and South East Asia.

