



Improving Reading IELTS Scores: Completion vs. Selection Tasks

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ABSTRACT

The present research was an attempt to investigate whether the two task types of completion and selection have different impacts on the improvement of the reading skill of Iranian EFL learners measured in the reading section of the IELTS exam. To achieve this goal, 60 students in six classes studying English at the lower intermediate level in a language school in Tehran sat for an objective placement test. Thirty learners in three of the classes were randomly assigned as the completion group and the other 30 in the other three classes as the selection group. Comparing the placement means of the two groups using a *t*-test, the researchers made sure that they were equal and belonged to the same population in terms of language proficiency level. The general module of an IELTS test, the reading section of which was to be used as the reading pretest, was also conducted at the onset of the study. The results of the IELTS as a whole and the reading section in isolation were also subjected to the comparison of means which again indicated that the two experimental groups enjoyed the same level of language proficiency in general and reading skill in particular. During the 22 sessions of treatment in about three months, each group worked on only one type of reading tasks of selection or completion. As a posttest, another full version of the IELTS test was administered to both groups. Analyzing the results of the reading section indicated that the completion group had a higher reading performance than the selection group. It was concluded that completion tasks can be more effective than selection tasks in improving the reading scores of IELTS candidates.

Key words: reading skill, the IELTS test, task-based language teaching and testing, selection reading tasks, completion reading tasks

Introduction

In recent years, communicative language teaching has viewed the problems of learners when developing their reading skill from a new angle. Although reading can occur for the mere objective of reading and understanding, in authentic situations most reading activities take place because the reader is expected to do something. In real-life activities which involve reading, the individual is expected to read, comprehend, and further get involved in the process of doing something which is definitely not as simple as the comprehension of a text. Oakhill and Garnham (2001) argue that reading is a pervasive and vital activity in everyone's life since people read for pleasure, to acquire new language or skills, to keep up with current events, and to navigate this complex world. Ur (1996) maintains that in order to develop lifelong readers, it is necessary for teachers to teach learners how to apply the reading skill strategically to acquire meaning from different types of texts in different real-life settings.

However, what has to be noted is that in real life, reading does not happen as an isolated activity; it is always done within a social context for a specific reason, and typically together with other skills. For example, we might read our notes to prepare ourselves for a presentation, a timetable to catch a specific flight, a manual to

work with our new I-Pad, or an article to write a review on. We sometimes read in order to socialize with our friends like reading their emails or read in order to organize our daily life matters such as finding the shortest route to a certain destination. Many times we find ourselves reading for pleasure such as reading a novel or browsing the internet. In most of these situations, we do employ our social as well as our linguistic skills. Hence, the teaching of reading inevitably calls for the integration of other skills and components.

Ellis (2003) argues that the integrated-skill approach exposes English language learners to authentic language and challenges them to interact naturally in the language as they rapidly gain a true picture of the richness and complexity of the English language used in communication. Moreover, he adds, this approach stresses that English is neither just an object of academic interest nor merely a key to passing an examination; instead, English becomes a real means of interaction and sharing among people. The other advantage of this approach is that it allows teachers to track students' progress in multiple skills at the same time.

Many scholars such as Nunan (2006), Mennim (2003), and Skehan (1998) consider Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) capable of simulating real life activities in the classroom

with more or less the same communicative effect. In fact it can be claimed that the integration of skills is usually observed in all the three stages of presentation, practice, and production highlighted in the communicative language teaching approach.

Task-Based Language Teaching

TBLT refers to an approach in English language teaching which uses tasks as the core unit of planning, instruction, and evaluation (Richards and Rodgers, 2001). Nunan (2006) defines a task as a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammar knowledge to express meaning, and in which the aim is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate the form. As he notes, the task should have a sense of completeness and be able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right with a beginning, middle, and an end. TBLT, Richards and Rodgers (2001) contend, is based on several principles that formed part of the CLT movement from the 1980s: activities that involve real communication are essential for language learning; activities in which language

is used for doing meaningful tasks promote learning; and meaningful language supports the learning process. It is believed that engaging learners in tasks provides a good context for improving the learning processes through the input and output crucial for acquisition. Nunan (1991) also refers to TBLT as a facilitating factor in foreign/L2 learning. In TBLT, syllabus content and instruction processes are selected with reference to the communicative tasks which learners will (either actually or potentially) need to engage in outside the classroom and also with reference to theoretical and empirical insights into those social and psycholinguistic processes which facilitate language acquisition. Skehan (1996) states that a task-based approach ensures that the participants are actively involved in the learning process, and they are taking kinds of decisions that they need to take in the classroom. He thinks task-based learning has grown in importance enormously and has asserted itself as a facilitating factor in SLA.

In the foreign language setting of Iran, the use of TBLT and reading tasks have attracted enough attention in the last few years. Shafizadeh (2004) conducted a research to explore the impact of reading tasks on the reading comprehension performance of Iranian high

school students. He suggested that reading tasks can improve the reading skill of Iranian EFL learners, particularly through the interest that they invoke in learners. Tavakoli (2004) investigated the impact of task-based reading materials on Iranian EFL learners' attention span. She tried to understand if using different types of reading tasks led to higher recalling and remembering of the reading materials and increased learners' attention span or not. It was concluded that the use of reading tasks was significantly effective with EFL students and attributed to the effectiveness of using reading tasks on their attention span. Another researcher (Alinejad, 2004) attempted to investigate the effect of task-based reading activities and text-based reading activities on the improvement of Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension. The selected reading comprehension tasks were reading a passage and completing a table, completing charts or diagrams, and making classified lists from unclassified ones. The findings of this study verified the importance of using TBLT as an effective way to achieve a good command of the reading skill.

Task-based Reading in the IELTS

The use of tasks in language assessment seems to be more challenging. Taskbased reading tests require candidates to perform reading activities

which simulate interactions they will have to engage in outside the test situation. For example, in order to obtain a driving license, it is necessary to demonstrate one's ability by actually driving. Most people would think it odd if such a license could be obtained simply by taking a pencil and paper test. Some argue that taking a multiple choice pencil and paper test for evaluating one's reading ability would be as odd (Brown & Hudson, 2002). In the past few decades, large-scale English proficiency testing has been dominated by two test batteries: the Cambridge exams, sponsored by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES), and the TOEFL from Educational Testing Service (ETS). Nevertheless, the IELTS as one of the instruments administered by UCLES was quicker in responding to the need of task-based testing.

The IELTS test was introduced in 1989 to assess candidates' readiness to study or train in English, and is now used worldwide. The expanded use of the IELTS test in recent years is the result of the increase in the number of international students taking part in English-speaking universities and also the increase in the number of universities requiring IELTS band scores as a prerequisite. The IELTS is intended to measure both academic and general English language

proficiency and includes four sections, called modules. All test-takers are administered the same Listening and Speaking modules. The general training modules measure test-takers' readiness to work in English language environments, undertake work-related training, or provide language ability evidence for the purpose of immigration. The academic modules measure test-takers' academic readiness to study or receive training in English at the undergraduate or graduate level.

The reading section of the IELTS may be of two types: academic reading and general training reading. The academic module of the IELTS is designed to assess the readiness of candidates to study through the medium of English and is widely used as a selection tool by universities and other educational institutions. It consists of 40 questions and lasts for 60 minutes. There are three reading passages with a total of 2000 to 2750 words. The texts have been written on topics of general interest taken from magazines, journals, books, and newspapers. They deal with issues which would be of interest to candidates entering undergraduate or postgraduate courses. The texts and tasks become more difficult as the candidate works through the paper. At least one text contains a detailed logical argument, and

one text may contain nonverbal materials such as diagrams, graphs, or illustrations. If technical terms are used in a text, a simple glossary is provided. The questions may appear before or after a passage. All answers must be entered on an answer sheet during the 60-minute test. No extra time is allowed to transfer answers. The general training reading module consists of 40 questions and lasts for 60 minutes. There are three reading passages with a total of 2000 to 2750 words. The texts have been written on topics of general interest taken from notices, booklets, advertisements, official documents, newspapers, instruction manuals, leaflets, timetables, books, and magazines. The texts and tasks become more difficult as the candidate works through the paper. The first section – social survival – includes tasks which are mainly concerned with retrieving and providing general factual information. The second section – training survival – focuses on the context of training, for instance on the training program itself or on welfare needs. This section involves a text or texts of more complex language with some precise or elaborated expression. The third section – general reading – offers a more extended piece of prose with a more complex structure. It is likely to be a descriptive or instructive piece and will be on subjects of

general interest.

The items may appear in the following formats:

1. Multiple choice
2. Short-answer questions
3. Sentence completion
4. Notes/summary/diagram/flowchart/table completion
5. Choosing from a 'heading bank' for identified paragraphs/sections of the text
6. Identification of the writer's views/claims-yes, no, not given
7. Identification of information in the text-yes, no, not given, true, false, not given
8. Classification
9. Matching lists/phrases

As it can be seen, the above item formats categorize reading tasks of the IELTS to two types of completion and selection. Completion tasks, including formats 2, 3, 4, and 8 above, are productive and need readers to create the correct answer. However, selection tasks with item formats of 1, 5, 6, 7, and 9 are receptive and require the readers to choose the correct answer from the alternatives given.

The researchers of the present study

believed that a comprehensive knowledge of the nature and performing mechanism of these two task types would benefit both teachers and learners. As a result, the following question was raised:

Do reading tasks of completion and selection have different impacts on the improvement of the reading skill of Iranian EFL learners measured through the IELTS test?

Method

Participants

The participants of the present study were originally 65 lower intermediate students of an IELTS preparation course in a language school in Tehran. There were 48 female and 17 male learners in the sample and their age range was between 20 and 42. Because of the limitation of the number of students in each class, the researchers conducted the study in six classes all of which were taught by one of the researchers in two consecutive terms during fall 2008. The students were going to take part in the IELTS exam after finishing the Interchange and Passages series. To ensure that the subjects were at the same level of general proficiency and reading skill, the researchers utilized the piloted versions of an objective placement test and the IELTS test. Out of the 65 students, only 60 made

it to the very end of the study. The other five either had more than three absentees during the term and hence could not take part in the final exam or missed the posttest.

Instrumentation

The instrument utilized in the present study included (a) a re-standardized norm-referenced placement test as the primary means of evaluating the participants' language proficiency level, and (b) two IELTS tests as pre- and posttests of the reading skill.

1. The placement test, consisting of 70 multiple choice items (20 listening, 20 reading and 30 language use), was adopted from the book *Interchange Passages Placement and Evaluation Package* written by Lesley, Hansen, and Zukowski/Faust (2005). Although the test is claimed to be standard, the process of re-standardization was performed. The objective placement test is supplemented with a writing section during which testees are required to choose one topic from three and develop a piece of writing in 20 minutes.

2. Two versions of an IELTS exam (the general module) were selected from Cambridge series 5 and 6 published by Cambridge University Press (2006-2007). They too were piloted for the purpose of re-standardization which entailed item analysis and

reliability calculation of the objective sections of listening and reading as well as the inter-rater reliability of speaking and writing sections.

As for the scoring, the objective section of the placement test was corrected based on the key provided in the package. Similarly, the writing and speaking performance of the participants were evaluated based on the profile provided in the package which places the learners from a minimum of 1 to a maximum of 12. In the IELTS tests, the 80 multiple choice questions of listening and reading (40 each) were corrected using the provided key which simultaneously transforms the scores to a 0 to 9 scale, with half marks. The speaking and writing sections were scored by two raters based on the guidelines offered by Cambridge University Press. The scores of these two sections are also on a 0 to 9 scale.

Procedure

The present study, due to the lack of randomization fell into the category of quasi-experimental researches with a pretest-posttest nonequivalent-groups design which is usually the only feasible one in classroom experiments "when experimental and control groups are such naturally assembled groups in intact classes" (Best & Kahn, 2006, p. 178). The first step in this research was to re-standardize the tests to be used in this study. In

so doing, the objective placement test and the two IELTS tests were administered to 30 lower intermediate learners studying in an IELTS preparation course at a language school in Tehran. The learners had the same characteristics as the target participants. In the placement test, among 70 items, 58 with ideal facility and discrimination indexes ($.35 < IF < .7$ and $ID > .7$) were selected and 12 poor items were deleted. The reliability of the test after item analysis measures was statistically satisfactory ($r = .605$). The inter-rater reliability of the speaking and writing sections of the placement test turned out to be .73 and .72, respectively.

Regarding the listening and reading sections of the IELTS tests, item analysis reduced seven items in the reading section and seven in the listening section of the pretest version. Similarly one item in the reading section and eight in the listening section of the posttest version had to be discarded. The reliability of both versions of the IELTS reached .67 after item analysis. As the last step in the re-standardization process, the inter-rater reliability of the speaking and writing sections of the pretest IELTS were determined to be .75 and .73, respectively. The reason behind checking the markings of the two raters of the study only for the pretest was that their consistency over one round of scoring papers and interviewing would be an indication of their general agreement to evaluate based on the IELTS system of scoring.

For the main study, 60 students in six classes studying English at the lower intermediate level

of the IELTS preparation course in the same language school sat for the objective placement test. Thirty learners in three of the classes were randomly assigned as the completion group and the other 30 in the other three classes as the selection group. Before instruction, the researchers had to ensure that the participants in the two groups belonged to the same population in terms of general proficiency as well as the reading skill per se. The re-standardized objective placement test was administered first. Comparing the placement means of the two groups using a *t*-test showed that they were equal and belonged to the same population in terms of language proficiency level, which based on the guidelines provided by Lesley et al. (2005) was recognized as the lower intermediate level. Next, the general module of a re-standardized IELTS test the reading section of which was to be used as the reading pretest was conducted. The results of the IELTS as a whole and the reading section in isolation were also subjected to the comparison of means which again indicated that the two experimental groups enjoyed the same level of language proficiency in general and reading skill in particular. In this way, any future change in the performance of the learners could be attributed to the received treatment. The instruction was given over 22 sessions which were held three times a week over the time span of almost three months. Each session lasted 90 minutes, 30 of which were allocated to working on reading tasks. Learners in each group worked on only one type of task type and the related items. At the end of the instructional period, another IELTS exam was conducted with the aim of determining which task type had a greater impact on the improvement of the reading scores of the participants in the IELTS test.

Results

The re-standardized placement test, including the speaking and writing sections, was administered to the two groups of the study to evaluate their

proficiency level. It is worth mentioning that the possible maximum score on this test was 94. The descriptive statistics of the two sets of scores are presented in Table 1:

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewness	Kurtosi			
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error			
Experimental Group 1 (Completion)	30	28	34	62	47.37	1.356	7.425	55.137	.126	.427	-.763	.833
Experimental Group 2 (selection)	30	29	30	59	46.50	1.442	7.899	62.397	-.311	.427	-.767	.833

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Placement Test

The first step was to check the normality of the two distributions which was computed through dividing the statistic of skewness by the standard error of each of the two groups. The results were .295 (.126 / .427) and .728 (.311 / .427) in the completion group (CG) and the selection group (SG), respectively. With both

values falling within the range of -1.96 and +1.96, the assumption of normality for the use of parametric tests was observed. The next step was to compare the two groups of the study and make sure they were at the same level of proficiency. An independent samples *t*-test was due here (Table 2):

	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
Experimental Groups	Equal Variances Assumed	.198	.658	.438	58	.663	.867	1.979	-3.095	4.829

Table 2. Independent-Samples t-Test for the Placement Scores of the Two Experimental Groups

As Table 2 indicates, with $F(1, 58) = .198, p = .658$ (two-tailed), it was found that the variances between the two groups were homogeneous and the results of the t -test with the assumption of homogeneity of the variances had to be considered. Examining the mean difference of 0.867 with $t(58) = .438, p = .663$ (two-tailed) revealed that the difference between the two groups was not significant at the outset of the

study and it was concluded that the two groups belonged to the same population in terms of proficiency level. The two groups were further evaluated using a re-standardized version of the IELTS exam the reading section of which was to be used in isolation as the pretest of the dependent variable of the study, i.e. the reading skill. The possible maximum score on this test could be 9. The descriptive statistics of the two groups are presented below:

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewness	Kurtosis			
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error		
Experimental Group 1 (Completion)	30	2.3	2.1	4.4	3.027	.1147	.6280	.394	.52	.427	-.188	.833
Experimental Group 2 (selection)	30	1.9	2.3	4.2	3.120	.0975	.5340	.285	.362	.427	-.626	.833

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of the IELTS Pretest

After checking the normality of these two sets of scores (1.17 and .84), a second t -test was conducted to examine whether there was any significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups on their IELTS test. Table 4 summarizes the results:

	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
Experimental Groups	Equal Variances Assumed	.290	.592	.644	58	.522	-.0977	.1517	-.4014	.2061

Table 4. Independent-Samples t-Test for the IELTS Pretest Scores of the Two Experimental Groups

It can be seen in the table that the two sets of scores had homogeneous variances, $F(1, 58) = .290, p = .592$ (two-tailed). With this assumption, the mean difference of -.0977 based on $t(58) = -.644, p = .522$ (two-tailed) was considered due to sampling error which confirmed the findings of the language school placement test. As the focus of this study was on the reading ability of the learners and the researchers were aimed at finding traces of improvement in this skill under the two task

types of selection and completion, the scores of the reading section of the IELTS were investigated separately. The reliability of the reading alone was calculated to be .763. Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics of the IELTS reading pretest.

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewness	Kurtosis			
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error		
Experimental Group 1 (Completion)	30	3.0	2.0	5.0	3.407	.1610	.8820	.778	.108	.427	-1.054	.833
Experimental Group 2 (selection)	30	2.2	2.5	4.7	3.657	.1285	.7040	.496	.089	.427	-1.204	.833

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of the IELTS Reading Pretest

After checking the normality of the reading scores, the means of the two groups were subjected to an independent-samples t -test the results of which can be seen in the following table:

	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
Experimental Groups	Equal Variances Assumed	.877	.353	-1.199	58	.235	-.2473	.2062	-.6602	.1655

Table 6. Independent-Samples t-Test for the IELTS Reading Scores of the Two Experimental Groups

Levene's $F(1, 58) = .877, p = .353$ (two-tailed) proved the equality of variances. Similarly, $t(58) = -1.199, p = .235$ (two-tailed) proved the equality of the means of the two groups in terms of their reading performance on the IELTS.

At the end of the treatment period, the other re-standardized IELTS test was administered to the two groups as the posttest and the scores were closely analyzed to determine the effect of the treatment on the subjects' reading performance. Table 7 displays the descriptive statistics of the IELTS scores of the two groups on the posttest.

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean		Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewness		Kurtosis	
					Statistic	Std. Error			Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Experimental Group 1 (Completion)	30	2.0	2.9	4.9	3.730	.0960	.5260	.277	.469	.427	-.058	.833
Experimental Group 2 (selection)	30	2.2	2.5	4.7	3.430	.0958	.5247	.275	.448	.427	.207	.833

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics of the IELTS Posttest

With the two sets of scores exhibiting normality, another t -test was performed to examine the general English performance of the two groups after the treatment.

	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
Experimental Groups	Equal Variances Assumed	.011	.915	2.13*	58	.038	.2890	.1359	.0169	.5611

Table 8. Independent-Samples t-Test for the Posttest IELTS Scores of the Two Experimental Groups

As is evident in the table above, $F(1, 58) = .011, p = .915$ (two-tailed) confirmed the equality of variances. Nevertheless, $t(58) = 2.126, p = .038$ lead to the conclusion that there was a significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups meaning that the completion

group had generally outperformed the selection group in the IELTS posttest. The magnitude of the difference, however, was moderate (*Cohen's d* = .57). Similar to the reading pretest, the reading section scores of the IELTS posttest were investigated separately. The reliability of

the posttest scores was calculated once again results of the IELTS reading test, respectively: and it turned out to be .742. Tables 9 and 10 manifest the descriptive statistics and t -test

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean		Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewness		Kurtosis	
					Statistic	Std. Error			Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Experimental Group 1 (Completion)	30	2.8	2.7	5.5	4.334	.1493	.8180	.669	.224	.427	-1.006	.833
Experimental Group 2 (selection)	30	2.5	2.5	5.0	3.927	.1284	.7032	.494	.020	.427	-.926	.833

Table 9. Descriptive Statistics of the IELTS Reading Posttest

	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
Experimental Groups	Equal Variances Assumed	.001	.969	2.124	58	.038	-.4077	.1919	.0234	.7919

Table 10. Independent-samples t-test for the IELTS Reading Posttests of the Two Experimental Groups

As Table 10 demonstrates, with the variances assumed equal through the Levene's test, $F(1, 58) = .001, p = .969$, the test of equality of means once again proved the superiority of the completion group over the selection group, $t(58) = 2.124, p = .038$. With more or less the same t -value as in the IELTS scores, the same *Cohen's d* value of .57 was calculated for the effect size indicating a moderate effect.

As a final investigation, the researchers attempted to compare the gain of the two groups over the instructional period. For this purpose, two paired t -tests had to be conducted. Tables 11 and 12 capture the descriptive statistics and paired t -test results of the completion group.

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean		Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Experimental Group 1 (Completion)	30	3.0	2.0	5.0	3.407	.1610	.8820	.778	.108	.427	-1.054	.833
Experimental Group 2 (selection)	30	3.0	2.6	5.6	4.334	.1453	.8180	.669	.175	.427	.227	.833

Table 11. Descriptive Statistics of the Completion Group in the IELTS Reading Pretest and Posttest

	Paired Difference					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Sig.	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Experimental group 1	.9270	.7377	.1347	1.0055	.4545	5.920**	29	.000

Table 12. Paired t-Test for the IELTS Reading Pretest and Posttest of the Completion Group

As it can be seen, the participants in the completion group showed a statistically significant increase in their IELTS reading scores from the pretest ($M = 3.407$, $SD = .882$) to the posttest ($M = 4.334$, $SD = .818$), $t(29) = 5.920$, $p = .00$ (two-tailed). The eta squared statistic ($\eta^2 = .547$) indicated a large effect size. The findings in Tables 13 and 14 show that over the same period of time, the participants of the second group also made a statistically

significant improvement in their IELTS reading scores from the pretest ($M = 3.657$, $SD = .704$) to the posttest ($M = 3.927$, $SD = .703$), $t(29) = 2.703$, $p = .00$ (two-tailed). Nevertheless, the eta squared (η^2) statistic of .20 being still a large effect is far smaller than that of the completion group.

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean		Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Experimental Group 1 (Completion)	30	2.2	2.5	4.7	3.657	.1285	.7040	.496	.089	.427	-1.204	.833
Experimental Group 2 (selection)	30	4.0	2.0	6.0	3.927	.1539	.7032	.494	.231	.427	.283	.833

Table 13. Descriptive Statistics of the Selection Group in the IELTS Reading Pretest and Posttest

	Paired Difference					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Sig.	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Experimental group 2	.2767	.5606	.1023	.4860	.0673	2.703**	29	.000

Table 14. Paired t-Test for the IELTS Reading Pretest and Posttest of the Selection Group

To recap, the present study was an attempt to investigate whether selection and completion reading tasks have different impacts on the reading performance of Iranian EFL learners on the IELTS test. Based on the obtained results, the performance of the subjects in the completion group was significantly better than that of the selection Group.

Discussion

The current study was an attempt to explore the effectiveness of two types of reading tasks (i.e. completion and selection) on the IELTS

reading scores of 60 Iranian lower intermediate EFL learners. The formulation of the following null hypothesis facilitated the process:

There is no significant difference between the IELTS reading mean scores of the group instructed with selection tasks and the group instructed with completion tasks.

After taking part in a re-standardized placement test, the subjects were randomly divided into two groups. A re-standardized IELTS test was also administered to make sure that the subjects

belonged to the same population in terms of general proficiency and reading skill. During the treatment, the subjects of each group worked with one type of completion or selection reading tasks. At the end, another re-standardized IELTS test was administered and the two experimental groups were compared regarding their reading skill.

The rejection of the null hypothesis at the end of the treatment was an indication of the fact that the two task types of completion and selection influenced the reading skill of the two samples of the study to different degrees. The completion group significantly outperformed the selection group. Several factors may have contributed to this better performance.

While producing an answer to an item, the learner inevitably activates a greater portion of his/her linguistic and non-linguistic background knowledge. In other words, the learner has to pay attention to both content of the language to be produced as well as its form. During this process, the learner's *monitoring* (Krashen, 1985) is constantly functioning since the requirements of time, focus on form, and knowledge of the form are present. The *output hypothesis* of Swain (1985) also supports this finding that having output is as important as receiving comprehensible input.

Another reason for the advantage of the completion group could be that unlike selection tasks where the learner simply selects the best option to do the task, in completion tasks the learner, relying on his/her conception of what is known and what is wanted, has to create several possible solutions and then select the most efficient one. As a result, the learner's involvement in the task is deep and genuine

which in long run results in a more skillful reading and extraction of the most relevant pieces of information. This finding can be viewed and interpreted from one more angle. Contrary to the widely accepted belief that language learners are usually better in receptive skills than in productive ones, few studies such as the one done by Keyvanfar (2005) have proven otherwise. In her research on the performance of a large number of Iranian IELTS candidates, she found that task-based listening and reading tasks are more difficult than speaking and writing tasks which are conducted in the familiar forms of interview and essay/letter writing, respectively. Here, the argument can be that the subjects in the completion group subconsciously underwent a more pleasant and rewarding experience as they produced language while the selection group may have just experienced the frustration underlying receptive tasks

.Conclusion

With the significantly higher performance of the completion in the IELTS reading posttest, it was concluded that completion tasks which entailed some degree of language production enhanced the learning process of language learners and boosted their reading skill.

The findings of this research somehow confirm the findings of similar researches which one way or another have investigated the impact of production on language learning. Oded and Walters (2001) investigated the assignment of different tasks on creating different types of processing. In their study, they focused on two completion tasks, writing a summary of a text

and listing the examples in a text. Text comprehension was measured by performance on a set of comprehension questions. The qualitative processing required in selecting the main ideas and organizing them in a summary was expected to lead to greater comprehension. The task of listing details was an irrelevant or distracting task for overall comprehension. The main purpose of the study was to examine the extent to which tasks involving processing differences make differences in performance on comprehension. The findings revealed that extra processing required in the writing of a summary of main points helped learners to have a better encoding of the text which in turn helped learners to perform better on subsequent comprehension tasks. The researchs with results similar to our conclusion concluded that tasks involving production should be viewed as an instrument of learning rather than one of testing and they can help less skilled learners to better extract meaning elements from the text. These are in line with the conclusion of the present study.

Besides theoretical contributions, the present research can have some practical applications for different parties involved in the business of ELT. Teachers should have a new evaluation of what tasks are and what they can do. Based on the findings of this research, it can be said that reading tasks can be as effective in teaching as they are in testing. Furthermore tasks that involve production improve production and comprehension both. Teachers are also suggested to use other types of tasks as teaching devices in their classes. Other tasks

would also be beneficial in teaching reading because they make reading more pleasant and interesting. Tasks also teach learners that in order to be successful in reading it is not enough to have a good knowledge of vocabulary. It is important to know how to use the known words and guess the unknown ones to accomplish the task.

Teachers of test preparation courses can make benefit of different types of tasks depending on the test they are preparing their students for, their level, and the duration of their course. Based on the findings of the research, teachers teaching IELTS courses should emphasize completion tasks more than the selection ones since they yield better results in similar conditions.

Test makers similarly can employ different tasks for different testing purposes based on the type of processing that each task may entail. As explained earlier, a reading task which superficially only assesses the reading skill of testees can also measure their production, reasoning, problem solving, and social skills. In fact, tasks can be seen as the best means of evaluating communicative competence in an integrated fashion.

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