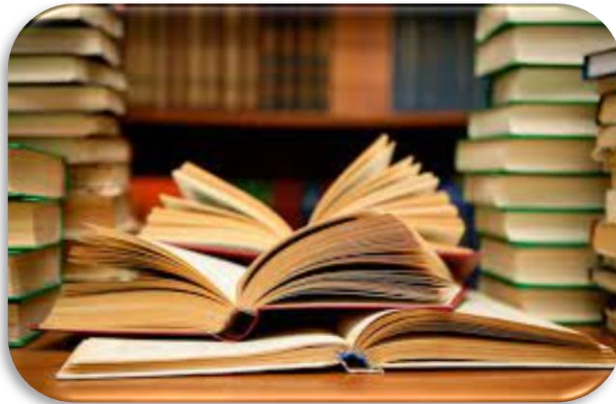**Research Paper**

Effect of Consciousness-raising via Vocabulary Input Flooding on Iranian Intermediate Learners' Writing Fluency

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore the impact of consciousness-raising via vocabulary input flooding on Iranian intermediate learners' writing fluency. To this purpose, 80 EFL learners were selected as intermediate participants through a language proficiency test (OPT), and randomly divided into an experimental group and a control group, each including 40 intermediate male and female learners. The treatment for the experimental group lasted 13 two-hour sessions in which the participants were exposed to consciousness-raising tasks via vocabulary input flooding. the control group received no treatment and just followed the conventional teaching procedures. At the end of the treatment, a writing test was administered for both groups, and the collected data was analyzed using paired-samples *t*-test The results of data analysis showed that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group in writing fluency. This finding might have theoretical and pedagogical implications for language teachers/learners, curriculum designers, ELT policy-makers, and stakeholders.

Keywords: Consciousness-raising; Intermediate Learners; Vocabulary Input Flooding; Writing Fluency

بررسی تأثیر افزایش آگاهی از طریق سیل ورودی واژگان بر روانی نوشتاری زبان آموزان ایرانی متوسط

این مطالعه با هدف بررسی تأثیر افزایش آگاهی از طریق سیل ورودی واژگان بر روانی نوشتاری زبان آموزان ایرانی متوسط انجام شد. برای این منظور ۸۰ زبان آموز زبان انگلیسی از طریق آزمون مهارت زبان (OPT) به عنوان شرکت کنندگان متوسط انتخاب و به طور تصادفی به دو گروه آزمایش و کنترل هر کدام شامل ۴۰ زبان آموز دختر و پسر متوسط تقسیم شدند. روش انجام برای گروه آزمایش ۱۳ جلسه دو ساعته به طول انجامید که در آن شرکت کنندگان در معرض وظایف افزایش آگاهی از طریق ورودی واژگان قرار گرفتند. گروه کنترل هیچ روش انجامی دریافت نکرد و فقط از روشهای آموزشی مرسوم پیروی کرد. در پایان انجام روش، آزمون نوشتاری برای هر دو گروه اجرا شد و داده‌های جمع‌آوری‌شده با استفاده از آزمون t زوجی مورد تجزیه و تحلیل قرار گرفت. این یافته ممکن است پیامدهای نظری و آموزشی برای معلمان / زبان آموزان زبان، طراحان برنامه درسی، سیاست گذاران ELT و سهامداران داشته باشد.

کلمات کلیدی: افزایش آگاهی; زبان آموزان متوسط؛ سیل ورودی واژگان. روان نویسی

INTRODUCTION

Writing is often considered as the most difficult skill to be mastered because of its complexity. The difficulty is seen in generating and organizing ideas and the mastery of the different aspects of writing such as grammar, spelling, word choice, punctuation, and so on. Researchers in the area of second/foreign language learning) are now in agreement that L2 proficiency, in general, and writing proficiency, in particular, are multi-componential in nature, and that their principal dimensions can be adequately, and comprehensively, captured by the notions of complexity, accuracy and fluency.

Skehan and Foster (1997) define writing complexity as, "Learners' capacity to use more elaborate and complex target like language" (p. 230). According to Skehan (1996), complexity is "the stage and elaboration of the underlying inter language system" (p. 46), which utilizes complicated and structured inter-language (Skehan, 1996). Writing accuracy refers to "the extent to which the language produced conforms to the target language norms" (Skehan & Foster, 1997, p. 232). Skehan (1996) also defines accuracy as a characteristic concerning "a learner's capacity to handle whatever level of inter-language complexity s/he has currently attained" (p. 46); that is, how similar produced language is to the target language. Finally, fluency is defined as "the number of words produced in a specified time frame, together with lexical frequency, irrespective of spelling and content, provided that the writer's meaning is readily understandable" (Fellner & Apple, 2006, p. 19).

As mentioned above, writing fluency is the number of words a writer is able to include in his/her writing within a particular period of time (Wolfe-Quintero, Inagaki & Kim., 1998, p. 14). In the current study, writing fluency was operationalized following Wolfe-Quintero, et al (1998) as the number of words produced within the specified amount of production time based on consciousness-raising through input flooding.

A consciousness-raising activity is basically another term for a grammar activity, or as Thornbury (1999) defined it, it is a smart term for what was once called grammar presentation. Consciousness-raising tasks are designed to raise the learners' language awareness (Roza, 2014). The immediate aim of these tasks is to help learners notice something about the language that they might not notice on their own. They are typically asked to reflect on it, usually by talking to peers. Consciousness-raising tasks can help build their conscious knowledge and understanding (their L1) of how the language works grammatically, socially, and culturally. It is an attempt to isolate a specific linguistic feature for focused attention. Smith (1981) uses the term "consciousness raising" (CR) to refer to any kind of grammar focus utilizing varying degrees of 'explicitness' or overt rule stating and/or 'elaboration' or inductive presentation. Ellis (1993, 2000, 2003) uses the term specifically to mean a grammar focus activity that does not require the learners to produce sentences in the target language right away, but simply aims to foster noticing. CR "involves an attempt to equip the learner with an understanding of a specific grammatical feature – to develop declarative rather than procedural knowledge of it" (Ellis, 2002, p. 168). For consciousness raising, "Activities are provided to make learners aware of certain linguistic features in the input, without necessarily requiring them to produce them" (Richards, 2002, p. 158).

Regarding the importance of consciousness-raising tasks, some studies have been conducted at national and international levels. Fotos and Ellis (1991) compared two groups of college students in the Japanese EFL context. One group was instructed with the direct CR tasks (teacher-fronted grammar explanations) and the other group received the indirect CR tasks (consciousness-raising tasks only). The

results indicated that both groups progressed significantly on grammaticality judgment tests. In another study, Fotos (1994) examined the effects of direct CR tasks with the indirect CR tasks in the Japanese EFL context again. The results indicated that there was no significant difference between the two groups. In another study, Alcon-Soler (2005) compared the effects of explicit versus implicit CR instructional tasks on English requests. Results of the study demonstrated that both tasks were effective; however, the participants in the explicit CR group gained better results than their counterparts in the implicit CR group. Concerning the effectiveness of CR tasks, Takimoto (2006) examined the effectiveness of two types of CR instruction, namely CR task only and CR task with reactive explicit feedback. The study was on English polite requisite forms and compared the performance of the two treatment groups with that of the control group. The results showed that the instruction was effective for the participants in both instructional groups, and that they outperformed the learners in the control group. Regarding the between-group differences, the findings revealed that both instructional approaches were somehow equally effective in improving the participants' English polite request forms. O'Brien (2015) explored the impact of developing a CR approach in error correction at the sentence level to improve students' proofreading ability. Test results indicated a significant improvement in student performance as a result of structured input (especially prepared grammar material) and the focused instruction (teaching that focuses on each specific grammar point identified as problematic). In another study, Tajeddin and Hosseinpur (2014), investigated the effectiveness of deductive, inductive, and L1-based CR instructional tasks on EFL learners' acquisition of the request speech act during a seven-week-instruction period. The results of this study showed that by administering written DCT to 140 EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners, instruction had a significantly positive effect on the learners' acquisition of the request speech act. This comparison showed that the learners who were receptive of the L1-based awareness-raising tasks, were more successful than inductive task group learners. Moradkhan and Sohrabian (2009) investigated the impact of grammatical CR tasks on the improvements of Iranian high school female students' knowledge of grammar. The results showed that the use of CR activities could be a very effective method in enhancing the grammatical knowledge of EFL learners. Behrouzi and Kazemirad (2012) examined the effect of CR tasks on the syntax acquisition of Iranian elementary EFL learners. To do so, Cambridge Key English test (KET) was administered to 85 elementary level learners at a language institute in Tehran. The results of data analysis showed that the experimental group who worked on a sequence of CR tasks outperformed the control group on the post-test. Concerning the effects of CR activities on the L2 production and reception, a study was carried out by Nosratinia and Roustayi (2014) in which the reading and writing skills were taken into consideration. They stated that "As a way of teaching grammar, CR tries to provide a language environment for learners to discover grammatical features on their own in order to develop their capability in writing" (p. 205). The results revealed that grammar CR tasks led to improvements in overall L2 writing and reading skills.

Due to the importance of consciousness-raising in developing and improving different skills of L2 learning, this study attempted to examine the impact of consciousness-raising through input flooding on EFL learners' writing fluency. It should be mentioned that previous studies have not addressed this impact; they have mostly taken into consideration the effect of consciousness-raising tasks for grammar

learning (Behrouzi and Kazemirad, 2012; Moradkhan and Sohrabian, 2009; O'Brien, 2015) without considering the role of input flooding of vocabulary.

Based on what was stated above, the present study could fill the gap in the literature by providing evidence regarding the impact of consciousness-raising through vocabulary input flooding on EFL learners' writing fluency. The following research question was, thus, posed:

Q1: *Does consciousness-raising through vocabulary input flooding statistically affect the writing fluency of intermediate EFL learners?*

METHOD

Research Design

In order to address the research question, the present study employed a pre-test-treatment-post-test design to find out the impact of consciousness-raising via input flooding on vocabulary development in writing fluency among Iranian EFL learners. In fact, the current study utilized a true-experimental design. According to Creswell (2008), there are many definitions of experimental research, but they all share several obligatory features:

a. a dependent variable and at least one independent variable,

b. cause-and-effect relationship between these two variables while eliminating or controlling all other possible confounding factors,

c. an experimental group and a control group,

d. appropriate selection and assignment of subjects, and

e. replicability.

The independent variable here included instructions based on vocabulary input flooding and the dependent variable was learners' writing fluency.

Participants

The present study was conducted with 120 Iranian EFL learners from three language institutes (i.e. Kanoon Zaban Iran, Zaban Sara, and Gooyesh) in Tehran, Iran, during the 2020 academic year. Based on Morgan's (2005) categorizations, in which the minimum sample size for an experimental design is 30 participants per group, the participants were selected as intermediate participants through a language proficiency test (OPT), and randomly divided into two experimental and control groups, each including 40 male and female learners. To ensure relative external validity, the students were randomly assigned to each group, ranging from 18 to 35 years old. Table 1 below summarizes the demographic information about the participants of the study.

Table 1
Specifications of the Participants

Number of Participants	40 (Experimental Group)
	40 (Control Group)
Age Range of Participants	18-35 years old
Gender of Participants	Both male and female
Native Language of Participants	Persian

Instruments

The data collection tools used in the present study are explained in what follows.

Oxford Placement Test (OPT)

In order to check the level of general language proficiency of the participants at the beginning of the study and find out a homogenous sample, an Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was utilized. The OPT used in this study was Allan's (2004) version. It is divided into two main sections (Listening Test and Grammar Test), each of 100 items. The first section is primarily a test of reading and listening skills, and of vocabulary size. The second section is a test of grammar, vocabulary, and reading skills. The two sections of the test produce a total score out of 200. The test has 200 items for which the highest score is 200. Based on the standard of the test itself, and since the items of the test are time-consuming, the allotted time is 200 minutes. This test was selected because it was inexpensive, easy to administer, and easy to score objectively.

Writing Pre-tests and Post-tests

In addition to OPT, researcher-made writing pre-tests and post-tests were utilized. The aim of the pre-test was to determine whether participants were homogeneous in terms of English language writing fluency. The test consisted of three topics for each of which the participants were supposed to write 300 words. The topics were selected from the writing sections of OPT samples. Wang and Liao's (2008) writing scoring rubric was used as the scoring criteria. This rubric consists of five subscales: *focus*, *elaboration*, *organization*, *convention*, and *vocabulary* (each with five levels). The raters assessed the participants' performances on the writing pre-test and post-test based on the description of each of the aforementioned subscales. Wang and Liao's scoring rubric covers all areas of L2 writing. More specifically, this rubric was selected due largely to its compatibility with the objective of the present study. To ensure its validity, the tests were also piloted on by 15 EFL learners with the same characteristics of the main participants of the study. The results of the pilot study were utilized to select the appropriate topics based on the students' level of proficiency. There was no difference between the topics of the writing pre-test and post-test.

Procedures

Pilot Study

One of the most important parts of a piece of research is "piloting" because it is possible to detect the unforeseeable minute points and problems with the instruments of the main study, and in this way, it prevents "a great deal of frustration and possible extra work later on" (Dornyei, 2007, p. 75). Regarding this point, the researcher designed a pilot study whose main purpose was to allocate the time limit, and to find out the weaknesses of the instruments to be eradicated in their final versions. Participants of the pilot study consisted of 15 EFL Iranian learners. The participants shared similar characteristics with those of the participants of the main study. The participants' individual responses to pre-tests and post-test were analyzed and entered into a database, and were checked for any missing responses and possible signs of misunderstanding by several participants. No signs of missing responses or misunderstanding

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were seen in the final piloting phase of the tests. In addition, based on the expert opinions, some of the writing topics were modified and replaced. In fact, during the pilot study, the reliability and validity of the research instruments were examined.

Main Study

The participants of the current study were selected from intermediate and upper-intermediate EFL learners at the intermediate level of language proficiency. Those test-takers who scored between 120 and 149 on the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) were estimated to be at the intermediate English language proficiency level. The initial intermediate and upper-intermediate learners were given a proficiency test and based on the OPT scoring rubric, the intermediate level learners were selected and divided into two groups each consisting of 40 learners. One of the groups served as the experimental group of the study and received consciousness-raising via vocabulary input-flooding, and the other was the control group. Prior to starting the experiment, the learners in the two groups were given a writing pre-test and the writing fluency of the participants in the two groups were calculated in line with Hasbrouck and Tindal (2006) and Wolfe-Quintero, Inagaki and Kim (1998). Following that, the participants in the experimental group received consciousness-raising via input flooding as treatment in line with Schmidt's (2000) noticing hypothesis and the proposed definition of Schmitt (2002) for input flooding. To this aim, the frequency of the vocabulary items in the reading texts used during the course was increased five times. In other words, learners were flooded with the vocabulary items via different examples and using the words five times in the reading texts.

As for the control group, the learners followed the conventional syllabus and teaching procedures and received a placebo instruction. To this end, the instructor taught writing by giving some predetermined topics, and the students were supposed to choose an optimal topic and write an essay within the allotted time. Then, the instructor rated each essay holistically. After 15 sessions of instruction, the learners in the two groups were given the writing post-test to measure their writing fluency. Finally, the researcher employed appropriate statistical procedures to find answer to the research question.

Data Collection

Putting it briefly, after taking the OPT and the writing pre-test, the learners in the two groups were exposed to the interventions. The treatment was given during 13 sessions, each lasting 2 hours. In the experimental group, the learners underwent the treatment including consciousness-raising tasks via input-flooding. Each session, they were given time to talk and understand the main purpose of the target language structure in their own native language (Persian), and this was followed by teacher's elaboration and explanation. They processed the text for meaning. Finally, a writing post-test was administered to both groups at the end of the instructional period. After the required data were collected, descriptive statistics were calculated (mean and standard deviations), paired-samples *t*-test was employed to analyze the obtained data and find answer to the research question.

Data Analysis

In order to answer the research question of the present study, the collected data were keyed into the SPSS software (Version 22) and different descriptive statistics (e.g. the mean and standard deviation and the

standard error of measurement) were obtained. Furthermore, to ensure the normality distribution of the data set, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test was conducted.

RESULTS

As mentioned above, an OPT was used to determine the English language proficiency level of the participants. Its statistical results are presented in Table 2. As can be seen, the mean OPT score of subjects was 19.69 with a standard deviation of 4.97.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for OPT

N	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Median	Mode
37	19.69	4.97	0.40	-0.32	18.00	19

It was pointed out above that the learners who obtained scores between 15 and 23 were selected to take part in this study.

Improvements form pre-test to post-test

Table 3 below shows the results of paired-samples *t*-test for comparing the writing fluency of EFL learners on the pre-test and post-test in the experimental group. As can be seen, the mean score of the post-test ($M = 9.23$) is considerably greater than that of the pre-test ($M = 5.01$) on the test of writing fluency.

Table 3

Pre-test and Post-test Writing Fluency Scores of the Experimental Group

Tests	Mean	SD	df	t	Sig.
Pre-test	5.01	1.32	14	-8.00	.00
Post-test	9.23	1.34			

The fact that the *p* value under the *Sig.* column was less than the significance level ($.00 < .05$) denotes that the difference between the pre-test and post-test writing fluency scores of the learners in the experimental group was statistically significant, leading to the conclusion that using vocabulary input flooding for purposes of consciousness-raising in language classes would lead to the enhancement of the grammatical fluency of the learners as manifested in their writings. One might speculate consciousness-raising, would bring about improvements in L2 written fluency of language learners. Hence, the pre-test and post-test writing fluency scores of the learners in the experimental group were compared via a paired-samples *t*-test.

Table 3

Pre-test and Post-test Writing Fluency Scores of the Experimental Group

Tests	Mean	SD	df	t	Sig.

Pre-test	5.19	0.94	16	-12.00	.00
Post-test	7.47	1.66			

Since the difference between the pre-test (*M* = 5.19) and post-test (*M* = 7.47) writing fluency scores of the learners in the experimental group was found to be of statistical significance (.00 < .05), it could be inferred that using consciousness-raising via input-flooding, significantly improved the L2 writing fluency of the EFL learners.

DISCUSSION

Although using consciousness-raising tasks is a striking issue for many researchers, the impact of using consciousness-raising through input flooding of vocabulary for teaching writing fluency has rarely been investigated. Yet, it is possible to compare the obtained results of the current study with the findings of some previously-conducted similar studies. For example, Arshad et al. (2015) carried out a study to examine the impact of using L1 in consciousness-raising tasks on teaching grammar to the students at beginner and upper-intermediate levels. The results of this study revealed that the use of L1 in a consciousness-raising task can be beneficial for teaching grammar to beginner L2 learners. However, students of upper-intermediate level did not benefit equally from L1 implementation in teaching grammar. The first part of their results is consistent with the findings of the present study, but the second part is against it. The reason can be related to the learners' proficiency level. Overall, both studies claim that the use of consciousness-raising tasks for grammar learning is useful for learners at intermediate level of language proficiency.

Scott and De la Fuente (2008) investigated the use of L1 during the consciousness-raising and form-focused tasks for language learning. Although in this study, the authors did not focus on grammar learning as a precursor of writing fluency, the results support the finding of the current study since their findings can be attributed to the learners' proficiency levels, which was intermediate in their study.

Alegría de la Colina and García Mayo (2009) also addressed the use of L1 in language learning of intermediate learners. They reached the conclusion that these learners benefit from the use of L1 in a variety of ways such as managing the task and discussing grammar and vocabulary, promoting attention and meaning comprehension, faster thinking, and self-regulation. It seems that this study also endorsed the use of L1 for language learning by elementary-level L2 learners. The finding of the present study is in line with their results. Although they did not use L1 for the consciousness-raising task that was the focus of our study, their study indicated that use of L1 in other task types and for variety of purposes can also be influential for language learning.

The finding of the current study also supports that of Ahmadi, Ghafarsamar, and Yazdanimoghaddam (2011) who conducted a study to explore the effectiveness of the consciousness-raising as an input-based task and the dictogloss as an output-based task on the instruction of English requestive downgraders in the Iranian EFL context. The results of the immediate and delayed post -test on the production and perception measures revealed that both tasks had a significantly positive effect on the participants' use of English requestive downgraders.

In a recent study, Barekat and Mehri (2013) made an attempt to investigate the effect of pedagogical intervention on the development of the Iranian EFL learners' pragmatic competence in requestive

downgrades. The study especially compared the effectiveness of C-R activities and C-R with feedback activities. The obtained results demonstrated that the instruction was beneficial for both experimental groups, and that both groups outperformed the control group. However, the participants in the C-R with the feedback group showed a more successful performance than the learners in the C-R group. The results of all these studies demonstrate that C-R tasks provide useful means to merge formal instruction of pragmatic features within a communicative language teaching framework.

Other studies such as Tajeddin and Hosseinpur (2014) and Eslami-Rasekh (2005) also supported the use of L1 in consciousness-raising tasks for learning different aspect of a foreign language, which indicates the usefulness of consciousness-raising task for grammar learning that was focused in the present study. Overall, it can be claimed that the findings of the present study are supported by other research studies in this area.

CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to investigate whether the use of in consciousness-raising tasks through vocabulary input flooding has any significant effects on the writing fluency of EFL Learners. Data analysis results indicated that the participants who were exposed to consciousness-raising managed to obtain significantly higher writing fluency scores compared to others. This finding implies that EFL instructors might benefit from using consciousness raising in order to enhance the writing and (as well as reading) fluency of the learners. In addition, curriculum designers may use this finding to develop and establish the programs and syllabi. Furthermore, this finding may have implications for EFL learners in that if provides them with some insight to comprehend and produce vocabularies which finally enhance their writing fluency. It may also offer a valuable approach to EFL teachers to realize which teaching instruction method is most practical in Iranian EFL context.

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