



The Impact of Diary Keeping on Iranian EFL Learners' Writing Accuracy: Past Tense Use across Proficiency Levels

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Abstract

Language is highly context-sensitive and contextual learning of grammatical rules shows how the rules can be used in sentences. In this line, the present study aimed to investigate the effect of diary writing on the correct use of English past tenses among Iranian pre-intermediate and upper-intermediate EFL learners. The study followed a quasi-experimental design with pre-test, treatment, and post-test, in control and experimental groups. To this end, a total number of 80 pre-intermediate and upper-intermediate learners were recruited based on convenience sampling and randomly assigned to the study groups. The results of two one-way ANCOVAs revealed that diary writing had a positive effect on the accurate use of English past tense at the pre-intermediate level but it did not show a significant effect among upper-intermediate learners. These findings can have efficient implications for EFL teachers, learners, syllabus designers, as well as material developers. EFL teachers can make use of diary writing as an effective method to help learners have a better grasp of English past tenses. Course designers and material developers are advised to have the results of this study under advisement and find a way to incorporate diary writing tasks in their curriculum to help learners get a better understanding of English tenses.

Keywords: grammar teaching, journal writing, learner diary, verb tense, writing accuracy

Introduction

Grammar is often considered to be the most important aspect of language around which other aspects of language such as vocabulary and pronunciation revolve. Brown (2007, p. 420) defines grammar as “a system of rules governing the conventional arrangements and relationship of words in a sentence”. It is what connects aspects of language. Larsen-Freeman (2003) suggests that grammar is one of the three interconnected dimensions of language which by giving us the forms and structures of language makes the work of the second and the third dimensions, semantics and pragmatics, easier. As Brown (2007, p. 420) points out about three dimensions, “Grammar tells us how to construct a sentence. Semantics informs us about the meaning of words and finally, pragmatics assists us in determining the appropriate meaning and interpretation received from an utterance”.

Grammar, as Abdu and Nagaratnam (2011) put it, should be seen as one of the many resources language learners are equipped with to communicate. However, students encounter quite serious difficulties as long as EFL grammar instruction is concerned decontextualization is thought to be the main source of the problem (Kapur, 2009). Grammar presentation in the textbooks is decontextualized, having little or no resemblance to its use in real-life situations (Baleghizadeh & Farshchi, 2009). They fail to give an authentic context. Even some textbooks fail to reflect the nonverbal communication elements such as body language, gestures, and emotions.

According to Ellis and Larsen-Freeman (2009, p. 523) “the most widely practiced traditional approach to grammatical instruction has been portrayed as the three Ps- present, practice, produce”. Collentine et al. (2009), hold a critical view of the three Ps model, highlighting the disadvantages of the traditional approach. Their criticism entails students’ failure in applying their knowledge of grammar while communicating. Learners, simply, do not understand the function of grammar rules in a sentence.

The best solution to this problem is to teach grammar in context because it shows how the rules can be used in sentences. This helps learners in understanding how grammatical rules are correctly used in sentences. Since language is highly context-sensitive, decoding the intended meaning behind a single word or phrase is very difficult if not impossible in the absence of context (Thornbury, 1999). The pivotal role of the teacher in teaching

grammar is reflecting “what the language means and how it is used, and must also show them what the grammatical form of the new language is and how it is said and written” Harmer (1991, p. 56). Therefore, context-based teaching of grammar helps learners to understand how the language system works which, in turn, enhances the communication skills of the learners. Students need to get familiar with the way native speakers use the language which is best done by presenting the new language in context (Harmer, 1991). One possible means of teaching grammar in a meaningful context is writing meaningful contents. While there are various means of writing for language learners, one of the most authentic and favored ones is keeping a learner diary. A diary is a tool for recording events, feelings, thoughts, and ultimately insights. When writing diaries, writers tend to address themselves, or another real or even imaginary person and share their concerns. Since the ultimate aims of diary keeping is recording what goes on in the heart and mind of its writer, the main focus is on meaning and conveying the message. Therefore, diaries provide language learners with the authentic task of writing for meaning with no deliberate attempt at accuracy. Taking the advantage of diary keeping as a highly contextualized writing in foreign language learning programs, the present study aimed to investigate the potential effect of diary writing on foreign language learning and more particular on the accurate use of verb tenses in learner writings (SETIAWAN, 2019).

In language acquisition, accuracy is highly important in understanding productive skills of speaking and writing. Context plays a significant role here giving an understanding of grammar use and providing accuracy both in oral and written skills (Wajnryb & Maley, 1990). Grammatical rules presented in isolated sentences cannot reflect the function of grammatical structures in sentences (McLaughlin et al., 1983). According to Weaver et al. (2001), decontextualized grammar teaching cannot be a practical instruction. Language learning should take place by authentic input at the discourse level or materials stimulating authentic input with sentences in a logical order in contexts that are logical (Hadley, 2006). Context-based grammar instruction acts as a framework connecting to reality in the new language (Anderson, 2005) enabling learners to form accurate structures and to use them to communicate their intended meaning (Nunan, 1998).

Facing grammatical conventions in different contexts, learners will be able to master and apply them correctly (Anderson, 2005). According to Larsen-Freeman (2003), teaching grammar can be effective and useful if learners are given the opportunities to "encounter, process and use instructed forms in their various form-meaning relationships so that the forms become a part of their interlanguage behavior" (p. 53).

Agreeing on the importance and efficiency of context-based grammar instruction, teachers, however, have not come up with an effective method of teaching yet. Using a diary to teach grammar can be an effective way to counterbalance this shortcoming among learners. The main reason for this is the importance of writing and developing written pieces in EFL learning. However, while there is a high variety in text type, diary keeping is one of the best in writing education. It provides an opportunity for learners to experience the joy of meaningful writing while performing a pivotal task in EFL learning (Yüce, 2020). Therefore, it may be both interesting and encouraging for learners to take the matter of language components, including the grammar, into their own hands by composing different authentic texts about their own experiences within a real context of their lives.

Considering the etymology of the word, 'diary' comes from Latin and has the word 'diarium' as its origin in which 'di-' stands for 'day' in today's English and its suffix 'arium' or its more recent equivalent suffix 'ary' means 'in connection with or pertaining to'. A diary is a means of recording students' thoughts, learning experiences, challenges, and fears in a notebook, or any other source on daily basis. A diary is both an account and a record of their learning experience. It can also result in developing insights in its writer. Bailey (1990, p. 21) has defined it as follows, "a first-person account of a language learning or teaching experience documented through regular, candid entries in a personal journal and analyzed for recurring patterns or salient events". For years, diaries have been considered as an instructional tool in educational programs including EFL teaching and learning. With the salient role of the writer in diary keeping, diary writing tasks encourage learners to not only produce a form of linguistic written content, but also to be critically reflecting their life as well as learning experience. This makes diaries a potential tool for enhancing both cognitive development and metacognitive awareness resulting in learner autonomy (Dincel & Savur, 2019). Therefore,

diaries are part of the learner-centered approach in which learners are responsible for their own learning. For McDonough and McDonough (1997) diaries are a means for autonomous learning because the student writing the entries is in control of his/her writing with no focus on grammar and the mechanics of writing.

Since diaries merely focus on the content rather than the language, they are usually meaning-focused and allow the learners to send a message on a topic of their interest with little or no attention to its language as a system. Similarly, teachers read the diaries to respond to the message with no attempts in correcting grammatical errors. Therefore, learners focus on the message without worrying about accuracy (Bagheri & Pourgharib, 2013), and diaries turn into a meaning-focused tool of interaction between teachers and learners regardless of their textual or linguistic structure. Diaries shift the attention of its writers and readers from textual level to discourse-level with attention to fluency in sharing the message. As Douglas Brown (1994) puts it fluency is “saying or writing a steady flow of language for a short period without any self or other correction at all.” A focus on fluency rather than accuracy enhances learners’ self-confidence, decreases their writing apprehension (MacGowan-Gilhooly, 1991), and helps them to generate more ideas (McDonough & McDonough, 1997; Rubin, 2003).

Diary writing also advances self-reflection on learning because diaries are both retrospective and introspective reflecting the learner’s previous experiences with language and learning (Bailey, 1983; Porter et al., 1990). Providing opportunities for language learners to act as discourse community members, diaries make real writing for meaning and getting responses from teachers as a real audience possible (Porter et al., 1990). As “important introspective tools”, diaries have also proved to be helpful in language research (Nunan et al., 1992) eliciting valuable knowledge about learners such as providing researchers with participants’ voices and thoughts (Bailey et al., 1996) and providing language teachers with helpful data on the learning processes (Peterson, 2012).

In recent research trends diaries are being vastly and increasingly employed to explore various social, psychological, and physiological processes in real everyday context of educational, academic, and occupational settings (Burton

& King, 2004; Daniels & Harris, 2005; Kacewicz et al., 2007; Pennebaker, 2004; Poppleton et al., 2008). They can be valuable introspective tools for obtaining research data on classroom issues and consequently coming up with proper plans to resolve them (Nunan et al., 1992). Diaries are practiced with the purpose of capturing “the little experiences of everyday life that fill most of our working time and occupy the vast majority of our conscious attention.” (Wheeler & Reis, 1991, p. 340). One great advantage diary methodology is the possibility of investigating the recorded events and experiences in their authentic context, which can provide invaluable complementary information to traditional research data (Reis, 1994).

Considering the purpose behind writing a diary, diaries can be of many types Hiemstra (2001) presenting one of the largest classifications, defines nine types of the diary as follows:

1. *Learning journals* reflecting learner’s feelings, thoughts, personal insights, and emotions in a learning experience;
2. *Diaries* reflecting the writer’s feelings on specific time intervals;
3. *Dream book or log* reflecting the writer’s dreams for personal or psychological reasons;
4. *Autobiographies, life stories and memoirs* reflecting memoirs and life stories;
5. *Spiritual journals* reflecting the writer’s reactions to spiritual matters;
6. *Professional journals* presenting a record of the writer’s progress;
7. *Interactive reading log* recording responses to any material being read;
8. *Theory log* that presents the critical reflection of the writer on technical terminology, theory, and knowledge;
9. *Electronic journaling* having a fully or partially electronic version of any of these diary types.

There are a couple of empirical studies on this issue. Investigating the impact of writing a diary on students’ writing as well as their attitudes, Barjesteh et al. (2011) found its positive effect on learners’ fluency and willingness in writing. In another study, Taqi et al. (2015) investigated the impact of writing a diary on EFL learners’ writing as well as their language abilities. It was found that diary writing had a positive effect on learners’ vocabulary retention. Moreover, it was revealed that diary writing had helped

learners with their general grammar and coherence (Ardillah, 2019; Indreswari, 2017; SETIAWAN, 2019).

The purpose of the current study was to investigate whether diary writing in English can improve past tense learning of EFL learners. As there are many different approaches to grammar teaching, it is vital to find out which ones yield better results. Teaching past tense to learners through the conventional deductive approach might help learners get the points, yet they might forget them soon enough, which motivated the researchers to look for a different approach to teaching past tenses to highlight their implications in their daily lives. In this regard, the researcher sought to explore the impact of diary writing on the correct use of English past tense at pre-intermediate and upper-intermediate proficiency levels. The following research questions were raised accordingly:

1. Does diary writing have any significant effect on pre-intermediate EFL learners' accurate use of past tense?
2. Does diary writing have any significant effect on upper-intermediate EFL learners' accurate use of past tense?

Method

Participants

Initially, convenience sampling was used to select the participants of this study from a language Institute in Tabriz, Iran. A total of 53 EFL learners who had signed up for pre-intermediate English courses as well as 72 learners who had signed up for upper-intermediate English classes were selected from intact classes to take part in this study. The learners at the pre-intermediate level had studied English for about almost one year and a half and the learners at the upper-intermediate level had studied English for almost three years.

Instruments

The instrument and materials used for this study included: Cambridge Preliminary English Test (PET) as the proficiency test, two pre-tests on English past tenses, one for pre-intermediate and one for upper-intermediate learners, two post-tests on English past tenses, one for pre-intermediate and one for upper-intermediate learners, and Oxford Living Grammar series for pre-and upper-intermediate levels.

To assess the learners' knowledge regarding English past tenses, the researcher(s) designed and piloted two pretests one for pre-intermediate and one for upper-intermediate learners before their administration. The pretest for pre-intermediate learners entailed 40 multiple-choice items in four parts aiming at simple past, past continuous, present perfect, and past perfect tenses in English. The verb tenses covered in tests and treatment sessions were selected based on their proficiency level and the related course content. There were ten test items for each tense. The validity of the tests was double-checked by two experts while its reliability indexed appeared to be 0.873 by Cronbach's Alpha. The pretest for upper-intermediate learners consisted of 42 multiple choice questions and tried to assess learners' knowledge of simple past, past continuous, present perfect, past perfect, present perfect continuous, and past perfect continuous. There were seven questions for each tense giving a total of 42 test items. The pretests were piloted before their implementations. Five teachers cooperated in giving these tests to their learners. The pilot participants were 15 pre-intermediate and 20 upper-intermediate learners. After the pilot test, the required modifications were applied to the tests. The validity of the test was confirmed by two experts and its reliability turned out to be 0.871. A post-test parallel to the pre-test of each proficiency level was also designed and piloted. The reliability indexes of the post-tests were 0.891 and 0.873 for the pre-intermediate and upper-intermediate groups respectively.

Oxford Living Grammar series was used as the textbook to teach grammar in the two groups. Living Grammar series was written by Ken Paterson, [Mark Harrison](#), and [Norman Coe](#) and was published in 2013 by Oxford university press. The books are based on a four-level grammar course that explains and practices grammar in everyday contexts and shows how grammar is used in real-life situations. There are 30 units in each book the first six of which are on tenses and met the requirements of this study. This treatment phase of the study included ten thirty-minute sessions.

Data Collection Procedures

At the outset of the study to assure the homogeneity of the participant EFL learners in terms of their level of proficiency, Preliminary English Test (PET) was administered. The test lasted for 130 minutes. It contained four sections

including reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The reading and writing sections were taken together and they allocated 50 percent of the total score. The listening and speaking sections lasted for 30 and 10 minutes respectively and each included 25 percent of the total score. The total score was out of 100. According to the Cambridge English Preliminary handbook for teachers, those who scored 44-69 percent were considered as the pre-intermediate and those who scored 90-100 were considered as the upper-intermediate participants of the study. After excluding the outliers and homogenizing each proficiency group, the participants in intact classes were assigned as to study groups as two experimental and control groups at pre-intermediate levels, and two experimental and control groups at the upper-intermediate level. Then, for the sake of consistency, only twenty students were randomly selected from among the remaining participants to form equal size groups. In the second session of the study, the participants of all groups were given a pre-test to find out their general knowledge of English past tenses. The participants had 40 minutes to respond to the questions.

In the third session, all the learners were given grammar lessons based on the book *Living Grammar*. At the end of each session, the learners in the experimental groups were asked to write about a past event in their diaries using past tenses they were taught while those in the control groups were just to talk about the event. The participants in the experimental groups were asked to write one diary at home after each session and hand in their work to the instructor the next session. The students were asked to record specific event that happened during the class time, as well as their feelings, moods, and emotions on each session. They were encouraged to write as much as they could for each diary entry in at least 100 words. The instructor read the diaries and provided the learners with written comments on their grammatical accuracy.

After the ten-session treatment was completed all the participants took the post-test.

Design

The present study was a quasi-experimental one trying to shed some light on the effect of diary writing on the correct use of English past tenses among Iranian EFL learners at pre-intermediate and upper-intermediate levels. The

independent variable in this study was the use of a diary to practice past tenses and the dependent variable was the accuracy of past tense use.

Results

This study was designed to examine the effect of diary writing on the correct use of English past tense. To this end, two groups of English learners at two language proficiency levels (pre-intermediate & upper-intermediate) were chosen. The participants of each proficiency level were assigned to the experimental and control groups. All the participants took part in two tests, one before the treatment (pre-test) and another after the treatment (post-test). The descriptive statistics of the test scores are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Test Scores

Proficiency level	Test	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre-intermediate	Pre-test	Control	20	23.30	2.87
		Experimental	20	23.45	2.93
	Post-test	Control	20	26.05	3.66
		Experimental	20	29.35	3.49
Upper-intermediate	Pre-test	Control	20	26.25	2.79
		Experimental	20	24.35	3.20
	Post-test	Control	20	28.55	3.19
		Experimental	20	30.35	3.53

Accordingly, to answer the two research questions two one-way ANCOVAs were run. However, initially, the assumption of the equality of variances was examined using Levene's Test for each proficiency group. Table 2 represents the related data for the pre-intermediate group.

Table 2

Levene's Test Result for Pre-intermediate Level

F	df1	df2	P
10.97	1	78	0.119

As it is demonstrated in Table 2, the assumption of Levene’s test based on the equality of the groups’ variances in writing scores of the pre-intermediate learners was confirmed ($p>0.01$). Since the assumption of the equality of the variance was not violated, the parametric test of ANCOVA could be applied in the analysis of the data. The same analysis was run for the upper-intermediate level group the results of which are reflected in Table 3.

Table 3
Levene’s Test Result for Upper-intermediate Level

F	df1	df2	P
10.97	1	78	0.112

As shown in Table 3 the results of the analysis revealed no significant difference in the variances of the study groups at the upper-intermediate level as well ($p>0.01$). Therefore, to analyze the data of this level a one-way ANCOVA was used.

To answer the first research question addressing the effect of diary keeping on the Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners’ correct use of past tense in writing a one-way ANCOVA was run. Table 4 presents the results of the ANCOVA test for the writing scores of the study groups at the upper-intermediate level.

Table 4
One-Way ANCOVA of Pre-intermediate Level

Variables	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.	Eta squared
Pre-tests	466.24	1	488.24	3842.48	0.000	0.98
Groups	17.34	1	17.34	131.07	0.000	0.76
Error	6.96	78	0.14			

In ANCOVA, the pre-test scores are under statistical control. This means that the effect of the same variable scores was removed from the writing skill scores in the two groups and the groups were compared based on the

remaining variance. As indicated in Table 1, the writing post-test scores of the learners in the pre-intermediate experimental group ($X=29.35$, $SD=3.49$) were higher than those of the control group ($X=26.05$, $SD=3.66$). The results of the ANCOVA in Table 4 reflect that this increase was statistically significant, $p<0.05$, $F=131.07$, $\text{Eta squared}=0.76$. Therefore, diary writing proved to be 76% effective in improving the participants' writing ability.

The second research question aimed to find out whether diary writing had any effect on the accurate use of past tenses among upper-intermediate EFL learners. The descriptive statistics of the upper-intermediate level were also presented in Table 1. However, another one-way ANCOVA was run to compare the post-test scores of the two study groups at this proficiency level. The related data are shown in Table 5.

Table 5
One-Way ANCOVA of Upper-intermediate Level

Variables	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.	Eta squared
Pre-tests	466.24	1	355.23	3842.48	0.000	0.75
Groups	17.34	1	19.37	131.07	0.390	0.07
Error	6.96	78	0.14			

As previously shown in Table 1, the writing post-test scores of the learners in the experimental group ($X=30.35$, $SD=3.53$) were higher than those of the control group ($X=28.55$, $SD=3.19$). However, the results of the ANCOVA in Table 5 show that this increase was not statistically significant, $p>0.05$, $F=131.07$, $\text{Eta squared}=0.07$. The value of the effect size appeared to be only 0.07 which is a small effect size according to Cohen (1988) guidelines because only seven percent of the variance in writing scores of the upper-intermediate group can be attributed to the writing of diaries. Therefore, the control and experimental groups did not perform much differently and the treatment was not statistically effective at the upper-intermediate proficiency level. This finding indicates that diary writing did not have a positive effect on the accurate use of past tense among the participant upper-intermediate EFL learners.

Discussion

The main aim of this research was to find out whether diary writing has any effects on the correct use of past tenses in English at two proficiency levels: pre-intermediate and upper-intermediate. After checking the normality of the obtained scores, the researchers investigated whether the participants had made any significant improvement from the pre-test to the post-test at the pre-intermediate level. Then, the same analysis was done for the upper-intermediate group. The results of the analyses indicated that the experimental group in the pre-intermediate level, unlike the control group had advanced in the past tense use. This means that diary writing during the treatment sessions had been effective in the learners' correct use of past tenses. However, that was not the case for the upper-intermediate group. Therefore, it can be concluded that raising awareness can be effective at lower levels. The main aim of this research was to find out whether diary writing has any effects on the correct use of past tenses in English within two proficiency levels: pre-intermediate and upper-intermediate. After checking the normality of the obtained scores, the first stage investigated whether the students had made any significant improvement from the pre-test to the post-test in the pre-intermediate level. Then, the same analysis was done for the upper-intermediate level proficiency group. The results of the analyses indicated that the experimental group at the pre-intermediate level, unlike the control group, had advanced in past tense use. That means diary writing during the treatment had been effective in the learners' correct use of past tenses. However, that was not the case for the upper-intermediate proficiency group. Therefore, it can be concluded that raising awareness can be effective at lower levels.

The result of the current study is in line with the theoretical ideas of the scholars, such as Agrawal et al. (1990); Bailey (1983, 1990); Porter et al. (1990) regarding the importance of writing who believed writing is an important strategy to learn new aspects of a language and it is fundamentally linked with learning. Moreover, the results of this study support Lillo-Martin (1985); Lush (2002) who believed that writing could give a chance to learners to realize where and when to use appropriate grammar.

These findings are also in line with that of Yoshihara (2008) who obtained similar results through dialog journal writing on intermediate learners' grammatical fluency. According to him, writing and dialogue journal writings make knowledge construction and sharing possible, therefore, enhancing writing abilities in terms of content, lexical usage, grammar, and writing confidence. These findings also confirm those of Puengpipattrakul (2009) who investigated the role of diary writing and grammatical accuracy among undergraduate learners and concluded that diary writing helped raise learners' awareness of grammatical accuracy. Moreover, learners' self-confidence in the use of verb tenses as well as their self-motivation to reflect their grammatical accuracy was improved greatly.

The results of this research are also in line with the findings of Rokni and Seifi (2013) who investigated the effect of dialog journal writing on intermediate EFL learners' grammar knowledge and concluded that using dialog journal writing improved grammar proficiency of the EFL learners. The results are also congruent with that of Taqi et al. (2015) who investigated the impact of diary keeping on advanced EFL students' language abilities in general and writing ability in particular and concluded that diary writing helped learners with their general grammar and coherence.

The most likely explanation for the profound effect of diary writing on pre-intermediate learners is that grammar is best learned through context rather than in isolation (Collentine et al., 2009). Contextualized grammar learning helps learners to recognize the ways grammatical rules are used in real sentences. However, in educational settings grammar is very often presented out of context (Nunan, 1998). Isolated decontextualized sentences are presented to be internalized in exercises through repetition, manipulation, and grammatical transformation. The result is formal, declarative mastery of the grammar with no ability in using the language for communication because the systematic relationships between form, meaning, and use are left unnoticed by the learners. Keeping a diary, as an interesting and motivating learning task, helps learners develop their knowledge of grammar through an optimal, contextualized, and meaningful use of the intended structures. When writing in their diaries, learners performed a focus-on-meaning authentic task, with great attention to convey their intended message, rather than a focus on

writing accuracy. This results in the best method of learning grammar which is, as previously discussed, contextualized use in real sentences.

The second reason why pre-intermediate learners did better while the upper-intermediate learners did not benefit much from this experiment relates to what educational psychologists call a learning plateau in which there is no further progress after rapid initial progress (Xu, 2009). EFL learners moving from the intermediate level of language proficiency to the advanced level experience this plateau having zero improvements in their learning (Richards, 2008; Shormani, 2014). On the learning curve, learners record considerable improvements followed by a zero slip progress (Rowntree, 1982) resulting in anxiety which impedes further efforts in progressing in learning (Yi, 2011). This tough period is fortunately temporary as a transition phase in advancing the proficiency level (Shormani, 2014) and can be overcome by certain pedagogical procedures (Richards, 2008; Yi, 2011). Having into account what has been given above, one could deduce that the learners in the upper-intermediate levels had already learned simple past tenses in English once they were in pre-intermediate or intermediate levels. Hence, there remained little to master about past tenses, and diary writing did not have much means of adding new knowledge to their already rich bank of information regarding English past tenses.

The findings of this study have main implications for EFL students and teachers as well as syllabus designers and material developers. Diary writing could be one way to encourage learner autonomy (Porto, 2007). Learners can get away from the boundaries set by authors and try to delve into the world of writing and grammar based on what they see fit themselves. Since diary writing provides learners with an abundance of freedom to write about what they want, learners are less likely to feel pressured about finishing a direct task. Paying particular attention to the message they aim to convey in their writing, learners are provided with the best means of learning grammar subconsciously. EFL teachers can make use of diary writing as an effective method to help learners have a better grasp of English past tenses in authentic and contextualized language production. Furthermore, considering the formal atmosphere of the educational setting within schools in Iran, and the general reluctance of Iranian EFL learners to learn grammatical structures, it

would be a liberating means to ask learners to undertake diary writing to understand English past tenses better via different tasks such as assignments or homework. When it comes to developing curricula for students, material developers are constantly involved in finding new materials and instructional objectives to be added to the curriculum. Hence, course designers and material developers are advised to have the results of this study under advisement and find a way to incorporate diary writing as an innovative and favored task in their curriculum to help learners get a better understanding of various language structures including verb tenses in English as a foreign language.

Declaration of interest: none

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