The Journal of Applied Linguistics Vol. 5, Issue 1
Spring 2012

The Impact of Task-supported Interactive Feedback on the Accuracy, Fluency, and Organization of Iranian EFL Learners' Writing

Zohreh Seifoori
Mitra Zeraatpishe
Saiedeh Ahangari
English Department of Tabriz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tabriz, Iran

Controversy has not been yet resolved among researchers in second language research over the pedagogical efficacy of feedback in enhancing various features of learners' writing skill. Research findings highlighting the significance of interactive tasks and learners' engagement in improving the learning process stimulated the present study, the purpose of which was to explore the effect of task-supported interactive feedback on the accuracy, fluency, and organization of seventy two Iranian English major sophomores at Islamic Azad University-Mashhad Branch. It was hypothesized that engaging learners in both tasks and providing feedback would enhance their writing performance. The participants in three intact classes were randomly assigned to three groups: a control group, with no task (NTG), and two experimental groups: the task-supported group (TG), and the task-supported group with interactive feedback (TFG). Four one way analyses of variance tests were run on the research data indicated that the apparent gain in the task-supported interactive group over the other groups did not reach significance level. However, the TG group outperformed the control group in all three aspects of writing. The findings have pedagogical implications and can be interpreted in terms of socio-cultural characteristics of Iranian students.

Keywords: Task-supported Instruction, Interactive Feedback, Accuracy, Fluency, Organization, Writing

Language pedagogy during the 1960s witnessed an overemphasis on accuracy in all language skills. With the advent of CLT, however, a short-lived anti-grammar period emerged, pursued by a radical shift of emphasis away from accuracy to fluency (Brown, 2007). The supremacy of fluency-oriented pedagogy did not last long either. The mid and late 1970s was the heyday of cognitive psychology which seeded the plants for process-based and learner-centered approaches to language pedagogy. In the mid 1970s, a new approach emerged with a shift of focus from the form to the writer (Furneaux, 2000; Li, 1998; Pakdel & Khodareza, 2012; Duong, Cuc, & Griffin, 2011; Cahyono, 2001). This was the golden period of maintaining the balance between accuracy and fluency in all skills. Therefore, there was a profound pedagogical change from product-oriented to process-oriented approaches.

Process writing is characterized by pre-writing, multi-drafts, peer collaboration, feedback, and revisions (Li, 1998). Ziahosseiny and Salehi (2007) have stated that writing is an exceedingly complex cognitive activity in which the writer is required to attend to and demonstrate the control of a number of features simultaneously while converting his/her thoughts to language. To Piri, Barati, and Ketabi (2012), accuracy, organization, and fluency represent three important features of writing, the development of which entails gaining a native-like competency. The focus in accurate performance is on form whereas fluency is concerned with the primacy of meaning (Skehan & Foster, 1997) and the smooth flow of content. Organization, on the other hand, concerns the writer's ability to produce a unified text void of irrelevant and redundant ideas (Arnaudet & Barret, 1990). The ultimate goal in process-oriented approaches to writing has been to enable second and foreign language learners to achieve an adequate level of proficiency required for producing accurate, fluent, and well-organized written texts.

Despite the valuable merits, process-writing approach has not been devoid of its critics. Cahyono (2001) has proposed that writing can become cumbersome and over-lengthy in class, since too much prominence is given to the process. Besides, the emphasis on multiple drafts can make the work on a particular text tedious to students, especially when they know that the audience is still the teacher (Li, 1998). Not only the students but also teachers find it lengthy and difficult to apply process writing approach in the classroom because they have to provide constructive individual feedback during the writing process. Finally, the process approach is not suitable for writing examination essays and is not applicable to all types of writers and tasks.

Task-based and Task-supported Instruction

Attempt to address weaknesses of the process-writing approach on the one hand and the empirical investigation of the writing process in many areas of research including applied linguistics, cognitive psychology, sociolinguistics, rhetoric, text linguistics, and educational ethnography on the other seemed to have led the researchers and experts to a number of methodological options, among which is Task-based Instuction (TBI) (Ellis, 2006). TBI, which according to Nunan (1989), seemed to offer a long-term solution to the shortcomings of the process writing represent an approach based on the use of tasks as the core unit of planning and instruction in language teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Although definitions of task vary in TBI, there is a common-held belief that task is an activity or goal that is carried out using language, such as finding a solution to a puzzle (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). To Skehan (1996), tasks are activities the performance of which is accompanied by a primary focus on meaning and the evaluation of which is made in terms of learners' achievements of some specified task outcome. The use of such tasks as the units of analysis in syllabus design and core of classroom activities is popular in all TBI practices where learners learn a foreign language through performing various unfocused tasks (Ellis, 2004).

TBI with its focus on completion of a series of selected target-like tasks might not prove meritorious in the contexts where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL) and learners' exposure to the target language is more or less restricted. Such contexts call for a more modified version of TBLT in the form of task-supported instruction (TSI). The design of a TSI course entails selection of a number of tasks in line with the course syllabus that can be used to engage learners in the process of learning and to help them produce output. Such a design entails consideration of the stages or components of a lesson that a task has as its principal component. Various designs have been proposed in this regard (Lee 2000, cited in Ellis, 2006; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Skehan, 1996).

According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), TBI proceeds in three stages of pre-task, task, and post-task. These phases reflect the chronology of a task-based lesson. During the 'pre-task' phase teachers engage learners in various activities before they start the task, for example, planning their performance of the task, performing a modeled task, and consciousness-raising activities to help reduce cognitive load of the task (Foster & Skehan, 1996), to enable learners to prepare themselves for task completion (Skehan, Xiaoyue, Qian, & Wang, 2012), and to perform the task in ways that will promote acquisition (Ellis, 2006). Lee (2000, cited in Ellis, 2006) has described pre-task activities as 'framing' the task which sets the student up for success on many different levels (Pakdel & Khoda Reza, 2012). The second phase of a TBI design, the 'during task' phase, centers on the task itself and gives various instructional options, including whether students are required to function under time-pressure or not (Ellis, 2006). The final phase of a TBI design is 'post-task' involving procedures for following-up on the task performance (Skehan, 1996). Pedagogically, such activities may focus on language which is made salient by the earlier task performance, to consolidate, practice, and extend the teaching points (Skehan et al., 2012). Skehan (2002) has postulated task repetition as one of the post-task activities which may lead learners to more accurate and syntactic task performance. Willis (1996), however, has suggested that if the link between task

performance and subsequent public performance is clearly made in the learner's mind, foreknowledge of a post-task can shift the fluency-accuracy balance very clearly towards the latter, since the task performance itself will be seen as a rehearsal for the later performance where display and correctness of language assume greater importance.

The significance of utilizing a beneficial TSI methodology in teaching writing has been asserted by Richards and Renandya (2002) and Agustin Llach (2011), who regard writing a very difficult skill for all language users, particularly non-native learners who have to generate and organize original ideas and to pay due attention to formal features at the same time. Tasks are, therefore, fundamental in learning to write and represent a central aspect of the teacher's planning and delivery of writing courses (Richards & Renandya, 2002). The tasks teachers assign will help students to learn how to from their experience, to develop an understanding of the text and to control their writing skill. Richards and Renandya (2002) believe that in practice, TSI is recognized as an effective means of developing students' language output by applying a variety of meaningful tasks ranging from participating, experiencing, interacting and corporative learning. In the process of implementing this approach, learners take advantage of their own cognitive potentials and their existing resources of the target language, sensing and learning the target language through practice (Jeon & Hahn, 2006).

The Role of Feedback in Writing

Many second language acquisition (SLA) researchers consider a significant role for feedback in a task-based language teaching curriculum (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Skehan, 1996; Willis & Willis, 2007). Ferris (2004) believed that error treatment in L2 writing classes should be attended to seriously. This error treatment frequently takes the form of feedback which has been defined by Falchikov (2005, p.3) as 'information about the gap between the actual level and the reference level of a system parameter which is used to alter the gap in some way'. Keh (1990)

has also defined feedback as a decisive factor in the attainment of language fluency and accuracy.

One of the classifications of feedback proposed by Subasi (2002) pertains to the type of feedback representing a dichotomy of oral and written feedback. Written feedback has been defined as the written input from a reader to a writer with the purpose of providing information to the writer for revision (Keh, 1990). Montgomery and Baker (2007) have found that both teachers and students feel that teacher-written feedback is an important part of the writing process. Oral feedback, on the other hand, refers to the oral input from a reader to a writer with the purpose of providing information to the writer for revision (Keh, 1990). These two types of feedback can be of interactive type, since there is a process of giving and taking information. Interactive oral feedback can be given in one-to-one situation or with a small group through teacher-student negotiation (Zhu, 1995). Subasi (2002) has proposed that feedback can be first provided by the group members and then be supervised by the teacher.

Although this dichotomy of oral/written feedback introduces two sides of a coin, Hyland and Hyland (2006) have claimed that there is a close relationship between written and oral feedback, because the points made through explicit teaching are picked up and reinforced by written feedback and then recycled in both peer and student-teacher oral interactions. Traditionally, only written feedback was used in the learners' written assignments by directly writing the correct form of the mistake. However, Lazaro (1996) provided indirect written feedback to learners through using some codes in the margins of the learners' assignments. This might be regarded as a kind of interactive feedback since learners had to reflect on their errors and turn back their corrections to the teacher. Lazaro (1996) has attested that this form of interactive written feedback assist learners to reflect on their errors and can prove facilitative in the long-run. Ferris (2004) also advocated teachers' use of indirect interactive written feedback to engage students in cognitive problem-solving activities as they were attempting to self-edit based upon the feedback they have received. Likewise, Cumming (2006) has underscored the facilitative impact of the

instructors' scaffolding on their students' mastery of the writing goals. Thus, it seems that a combination of oral and written interactive feedback might prove more advantageous in guiding learners to self-edit their own written texts.

Empirical Background to the Study

Several empirical studies have investigated the impact of various task related features in TBI and TSI on varying features of EFL learners' writing skill. Ong and Zhang (2010) explored the effects of task complexity on the fluency and lexical complexity of 108 EFL students' argumentative writing and reported significantly greater fluency and lexical complexity owing to increasing task complexity with respect to the planning time continuum.

In the context of Iranian EFL, Pakdel and Khodareza (2011) conducted a study to investigate the effects of warm up tasks as classroom activities on the participants' writing and found warm-up activities as a crucial condition for the success of learners. Rezazadeh, Tavakoli, and Eslami Rasekh (2011) investigated the effects of two task types, the instruction tasks and the argumentative tasks, on foreign language written production with respect to three aspects of fluency, complexity, and accuracy. Based on their findings, the instruction-task group was found to significantly outperform those in the argumentative-task group in terms of fluency and accuracy. Sadeghi and Fazelijou (2012) reported a more beneficial role for task-based writing activities compared to the traditional writing activities evident in PPP (Presentation-Practice-Production) model. Pourdana and Karimi Behbahani (2012) investigated the impact of three types of language assessment tasks, Topic Writing, Picture Description, and Text Reconstruction on the accuracy, fluency and complexity of Iranian EFL learners' writing performance. The results revealed a high degree of accuracy and complexity gains in EFL learners' performance on Topic Writing tasks, compared to higher achievements in fluency on Picture Description tasks.

Likewise, numerous explorations have been conducted to investigate the impact of feedback on various aspects of writing,

comprising both accuracy-oriented feedback and the various forms it may take, and fluency-oriented feedback with its focus on the content and the smooth flow of ideas. Ashwell (2000) found that grammar correction within a process approach to instruction would help students to edit their writing in order to improve the formal accuracy of the final product. Chandler (2003) found direct correction method influential in improving learners' fluency in writing because it acted as a form of recast by providing a model of positive evidence. Fazio (2001) studied the effect of differential feedback, i.e., corrections focusing on accuracy, commentaries focusing on fluency, and a combination of the two, on the students' journal writing accuracy. The two student groups were randomly assigned to weekly feedback on form, content, or a combination of both. The findings indicated no significant difference in accuracy due to feedback conditions. Frantzen (1995) investigated error correction in groups who received feedback on content, on form, and on both. He found that feedback improved written accuracy more than fluency. Ferris and Roberts (2001) studied error feedback in three groups who received coded, un-coded, and no feedback. The results revealed that both groups who received feedback significantly outperformed the no-feedback group on the self-editing task but there were no significant differences between the ''codes'' and ''no-codes'' groups. Lalande (1982) examined two feedback types, namely direct and indirect and found that indirect error feedback may encourage learner reflection and self-editing. Peyton, Staton, Richardson, and Wolfram (1990) studied specific linguistic features of the students' texts in the attempt to understand how certain valued features of writing might be encouraged by different kinds of writing tasks. The findings revealed that ESL students might explore and demonstrate a more complete range of their writing abilities in "unassigned" writing about self-chosen topics where there is a communicative purpose and a genuine response than in "assigned" writing about teacher-chosen topics, produced for evaluative purposes. It was argued, therefore, that although a variety of assigned writing tasks are essential for developing students' expressive abilities in various types of writing, unassigned writing in which students choose their

own topics and purpose may also be a necessary part of an ESL writing program. Robb, Ross, and Shortreed (1986) who examined four kinds of feedback, namely direct, coded, un-coded, and marginal found that direct correction of errors is not so much effective. They pointed that less time-consuming methods of directing student attention to surface error may suffice. While well-intentioned teachers may provide elaborate forms of corrective feedback, time might be more profitably spent in responding to more important aspects of student writing.

What seems untouched in these debates and is felt praiseworthy to scrutinize is to verify the impact of interactive feedback in a task-supported writing classroom on accuracy, fluency, and organization of Iranian learners' writing simultaneously. Hence, based on previous research findings, the present study was launched to investigate the impact of task-supported interactive feedback on the accuracy, fluency, and organization of Iranian EFL learners' writing skill. To achieve this purpose, the researcher formulated the following research questions:

1. Does task-supported instruction with interactive feedback influence the accuracy of Iranian EFL learners' writing?
2. Does task-supported instruction with interactive feedback influence the organization of Iranian EFL learners' writing?
3. Does task-supported instruction with interactive feedback influence the fluency of Iranian EFL learners' writing?

Method

Participants and Setting

A total of 72 Iranian university students majoring in English at Islamic Azad University -Mashhad Branch participated in the study. They were all sophomores including twenty five males and 47 females, and within the age range of 19 to 35. They were selected from a population of 97 after, based on their scores on a TOEFL, some very high and low proficiency level test takers with scores 3 standard deviations above and below the mean were excluded from the study. Further, The participants were randomly

assigned as the control group (CG), who were taught based on process writing approach with no definite tasks and with no provision of interactive feedback, the Experimental Group 1 (TG), who were taught based on some writing tasks, and the experimental group2 (TFG), who received task-supported instruction along with interactive feedback. All three groups received process-oriented instruction in writing for fourteen sessions.

Instruments

To handle this study, the researchers used two different instruments. The first instrument was a test of TOEFL to ascertain initial homogeneity of the participants in general English. Two sections of the test were used, structure and written expressions section including 40 items, and the reading comprehension section containing 50 items. These two parts, with a total score of 90, were utilized as the criteria to assess the initial homogeneity of the participants and to exclude extreme cases. The writing section of the TOEFL was used as the writing pre-test and post-test. Both tests were scored based on Hughes'(2003) scoring scale (see Appendix 1), which is an analytic approach of scoring writing. To serve the purpose of the study, the researchers deployed three sections of the scale measuring accuracy, organization, and fluency. Hughes categorized accuracy to six levels from few errors of grammar (6) to errors that make comprehension impossible (1). He also assigned 6 levels for organization arranged from highly organized (6) to lacking organization (1). Finally fluency was categorized to 6 levels from appropriate choice of structures and vocabulary (6) to misused structures and vocabulary that make comprehension impossible (1).

Both tests were scored by two experienced teachers. The inter-rater reliability was estimated between the two sets of post-test accuracy, organization, and fluency scorers presented as follows: accuracy ($r(72) = .83$, $P = .000 < .05$), organization ($r(72) = .84$, $P = .000 < .05$), and fluency ($r(72) = .75$, $P = .000 < .05$). The inter-rater reliability coefficients were acceptably high enough to indicate significant agreement between the two raters'

scores. Hence, the two sets of scores were averaged for further statistical analyses.

Operationalization of measures

The dependent variables in the present study were accuracy, organization, and fluency of written language. These features are subjective in nature and do not lend themselves to objective evaluation. However, the researchers attempted to objectify the scoring procedure in two ways. First, two scorers scored the papers based on a single scoring scale. The averages of the scores from the two scorers were used as a basis for further analysis. Secondly, the abstract nature of the statements used in the measurement scale, for example, "few errors, highly organized, like native speakers", seemed to present a threat to its objectivity. Hence, the researchers decided to make the scale more objective by operationally defining such terms. Three experienced language lecturers with experience in teaching writing courses were required to quantify the terms by assigning a numerical value to each. The suggested values were averaged and used as the criterion to assign any of the values ranging from one to six. The validated scale is attached (See Appendix 2).

Material

To handle the present study, two kinds of materials were utilized: a book entitled "Paragraph development" by Arnaudet and Barret (1990) and a set of writing tasks adopted from RIC Publication (2004). The course book presented the principles and types of paragraphs in eight chapters. The first two chapters were related to teaching and practicing writing topic sentences and supporting sentences. Each of the remaining chapters introduced one kind of paragraph and the listing signals, such as conjunctions, that could be used in each type. The book was used as the basis for presenting the basic principles of paragraph development and the tasks were selected to match the teaching content and offer opportunities for more practice on the teaching point. The second teaching material used in the study was a series of tasks adopted

from RIC Publications (2004), a course book designed by a group of Australian teachers as a classroom resource for applying the theory of multiple intelligences to allow students to use their dominant intelligences to aid understanding and to work on their weaknesses.

Procedure

At the onset of the study, a general English test of proficiency (TOEFL) was administered to assess groups' initial homogeneity. The writing section of this test was used as the pretest initially and as the post test later at the end. Although the general approach to teaching writing in all three research groups was process-oriented based on the same textbook (Arnaudet & Barret, 1990), the supplementary teaching materials and the teaching methodology were different.

The control group (the NTG) received process-oriented instruction during the fourteen sessions. Each session, one type of paragraph writing, for example, cause and effect, was introduced by the researcher within the framework of process writing. To this end, the researcher first involved the participants in a brainstorming activity in the classroom based on the lesson objective, for example, "Endangered Species". The participants were then required to write their first draft. Finally, they were then required to monitor their drafts individually and in groups before they turned in their papers to the teacher.

The first experimental groups, the TG group, received the same process-oriented instruction in relation to the same paragraph types, for example, "Cause and Effect", only as the pre-task stage of teaching which took around 20 to 25 minutes a session. Then, the participants were grouped to work on a relevant writing task, for example, "Endangered Species". The two experimental groups performed a similar task, for example, an incomplete table related to the reasons that threatened animals' life, and were required to complete the table to help them generate ideas. They were further asked to use the completed table as a basis to write their first drafts of a cause and effect paragraph individually and to self-edit their paragraphs. The revised writing assignments were later collected to

be evaluated by the teacher based on the scale adopted from Hughes (2003). It should be noted that all the writing tasks were adapted from RIC publication (2004) (See Appendix 2) and were modified to comply with the teaching points and lesson objectives.

The second experimental group, the TFG group, was given the same tasks used in TG group based on the same teaching method. The difference between these two groups related to the post-task stage where TFG group received interactive feedback. Each session the teacher randomly chose 1 or 2 papers to display on the overhead projector. The teacher raised questions to engage the participants in the feedback process with no direct written feedback. The assignments which were not displayed were collected and corrected by the teacher using Lazaro's (1996) written interactive feedback codes in the margins of their work. These codes were some symbols used as a sign to lead the learners to revise their errors. They were all introduced to the learners in the first session. Some of them are as follows: (Sp= spelling mistake, T= wrong tense, Wo= word order, Pr= prepositions, L= linking word, P= punctuation, 0= a word missing, V= inaccurate vocabulary, ?= unclear meaning, Ir= irrelevant sentence).

Having received the first coded corrections, the participants were required to think about their errors, to revise them, and return their papers to the teacher. This was done in order to help the learners to reflect on their errors and avoid them in their future writing tasks.

Design

This quasi-experimental pre-test/post test design was conducted to examine the effect of the independent research variable, the task-supported instruction with interactive feedback, on three dependent variables, accuracy, fluency, and organization of Iranian language learners' writing performance. Task-supported instruction might be operationally defined as the use of tasks in the TG and TFG classrooms where all learners are engaged in a task completion activity to generate ideas and to subsequently write down their paragraphs individually.

Data Analysis

The researchers employed three one-way ANOVAs to compare the means of the Task-supported (TG), Task-supported Interactive feedback (TFG), the No Task (NTG) control groups on the TOEFL test in order to assess their initial homogeneity, and on the measures of accuracy, organization, and fluency obtained from the writing post-test to answer the three research questions.

Results

The General Proficiency TOEFL Test

A one-way ANOVA was run to compare the means of the NTG, TG, and TFG groups on the TOEFL test scores, the descriptive statistics of which are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of the Groups' TOEFL Test Scores

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
TG	24	71.21	11.03	2.25	66.55	75.87
TFG	24	70.50	10.78	2.20	65.95	75.05
NTG	24	71.33	9.33	1.90	67.39	75.27
Total	72	71.01	10.26	1.21	68.60	73.43

As displayed in Table 1, the means of the TG, TFG, and NTG groups on the TOEFL test were 71.21, 70.50, and 71.33 respectively. To see whether the differences were significant or not, the researchers submitted the data to a one-way ANOVA test, the results of which are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
One-Way ANOVA Analysis of the Groups' TOEFL Test Scores Groups

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	9.694	2	4.84	.045	.95
Within Groups	7475.29	69	108.33		
Total	7484.98	71			

The results of the one-way ANOVA displayed in Table 2 showed no significant differences between the means of the groups, which proved their initial homogeneity, $F (2, 69) = .045$, $p = .95 > .05$; $\omega^2 = .02$; it represents a small effect size because based on Field (1990), if the results of the effect size is .01, it is weak, if it is .06, it is moderate, but if it is 14, it shows a strong effect size.

The accuracy, organization, and fluency measures obtained from the writing pre-test were also analyzed to estimate probable differences in the groups' mean scores. Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics of the data.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics for the Groups' Accuracy, Organization, and Fluency on the Writing Pre-test

						95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Lower bound	Upper bound
Accuracy	TG	24	1.63	.576	.118	1.38	1.87
	TFG	24	1.54	.658	.134	1.26	1.82
	NTG	24	1.54	.658	.134	1.26	1.82
	TG	24	2.83	1.090	.223	2.37	3.29

Organization	TFG	24	2.42	1.139	.232	1.94	2.90
	NTG	24	2.42	1.018	.208	1.99	2.85
Fluency	TG	24	2.33	.917	.187	1.95	2.72
	TFG	24	2.00	.978	.200	1.59	2.41
	NTG	24	1.92	.830	.169	1.57	2.27

Some slight differences were observed in the groups' pretest scores. Hence, it was crucial to run another ANOVA to assess the significance of the differences. Table 4 presents the results of this analysis.

Table 4
Results of the One-way ANOVA for the Groups' Accuracy, Organization, and Fluency on the Writing Pre-test

		Sum of squares	Df.	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Accuracy	Between groups	.11	2	.05	.13	.87
	Within groups	27.54	69	.39		
Organization	Between groups	2.77	2	1.38	1.18	.31
	Within groups	81.00	69	1.17		
Fluency	Between groups	2.33	2	1.16	1.40	.25
	Within groups	57.16	69	.82		

Based on the results displayed in Table 4, there were no significant differences in the accuracy, F (2, 69) = .13, P = .870 >

.05, in organization, F (2, 69) = 1.18, P = .31 > .05, and in fluency measures, F (2, 69) = 1.40, P = .25 > .05. The analysis revealed a small effect size as well (ω^2 = .02).

Research Questions

The research questions addressed the probable different impact of task-supported and task-supported interactive feedback on the accuracy, organization, and fluency of Iranian EFL learners' writing. To answer these questions, the researchers first calculated the descriptive statistics of the groups' accuracy, organization, and fluency measures on the writing post-test, as presented in Table 5.

Table 5
Descriptive Statistics of Groups' Accuracy, Organization, and Fluency on the Writing Post-test

						95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Lower bound	Upper bound
Accuracy	TG	24	3.33	.761	.155	3.01	3.65
	TFG	24	3.71	.859	.175	3.35	4.07
	NTG	24	2.79	.658	.134	2.51	3.07
Organization	TG	24	4.67	.761	.155	4.35	4.99
	TFG	24	5.00	.780	.159	4.67	5.33
	NTG	24	3.96	.690	.141	3.67	4.25
Fluency	TG	24	4.08	.717	.146	3.78	4.39
	TFG	24	4.38	.875	.179	4.01	4.74
	NTG	24	3.50	.590	.120	3.25	3.75

The results showed noticeable increases in the estimated measures for all groups compared to their pre-test (Table 3), as well as differences in the means of the groups' post-test scores. The TFG group achieved the highest mean scores in accuracy (3.71), organization (5), and fluency (4.38), followed by the TG group (accuracy = 3.33, Organization = 4.67, and fluency = 4.08).

The NTG group achieved the lowest scores in all measures (accuracy = 2.79, Organization = 3.96, and fluency = 3.50). Three other one-way ANOVA tests were run to compare the significance of the groups' mean scores on the writing post-test, the results of which are presented in Table 6.

Table 6
One-way ANOVA Analysis of Groups' Accuracy, Organization, and Fluency on the Writing Post-test

		Sum of squares	df.	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Accuracy	Between groups	10.194	2	5.097	8.73	.000
	Within groups	40.250	69	.583		
	Total	50.444	71			
Organization	Between groups	13.583	2	6.792	12.23	.000
	Within groups	38.292	69	.555		
	Total	51.875	71			
Fluency	Between groups	9.528	2	4.764	8.77	.000
	Within groups	37.458	69	.543		
	Total	46.986	71			

According to Table 6, the differences reached significance level in the groups' accuracy mean scores, F(8.73),p=.000<.05, organization mean scores, F(12.23), p= .000<.05, and fluency mean scores, F(8.77), p = .000< .05. However, it was necessary to run a post-hoc test to locate the difference among the groups. The results of the Scheffe Post-Hoc test are presented in Table 7 below.

Table 7
Post-Hoc Scheffe Test of the Groups' Accuracy, Organization, and Fluency on the Writing Post-test

	(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Accuracy	Task	Control	.542	.220	.055	-.01	1.09
	Task IF	Task	.375	.220	.242	-.18	.93
		Control	.917*	.220	.000	.37	1.47
Organization	Task	Control	.708*	.215	.006	.17	1.25
	Task IF	Task	.333	.215	.307	-.20	.87
		Control	1.042*	.215	.000	.50	1.58
Fluency	Task	Control	.583*	.213	.028	.05	1.12
	Task IF	Task	.292	.213	.395	-.24	.82
		Control	.875*	.213	.001	.34	1.41

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Based on the results displayed in Table 7, the research questions could be answered as follows.

The Accuracy

The first research questions addressed the impact of TSI and TSI with interactive feedback on the accuracy of Iranian EFL learners' writing. The results of the post-hoc test revealed no significant difference between the accuracy averages of the NTG and TG groups with the means of 2.79 and 3.71 respectively, MD = .542, P = .055 > .05. Moreover, although the TG group, with an accuracy mean score of 3.33, revealed lower degrees of achievement in accuracy on the posttest compared to the TFG group, with a mean score of 3.71, the difference between the two

groups was not significant, MD = .375, P = .242 > .05. The TFG group, however, outperformed the NTG group, MD = .971, P = .000 < .05, yet their performance was not significantly more accurate than the TG group. Thus, based on the findings, the first research question can be cautiously answered positively, that is, task supported instruction with interactive feedback improved the accuracy of Iranian EFL learners' writing.

The Organization

The impact of TSI and TSI with feedback on the organization of Iranian EFL learners' writing was addressed in the second question. Based on the results, although the TFG group, with an average of 5, outperformed the TG group, with a mean of 4.67, the difference between the two groups was not significant, MD = .333, P = .307 > .05. Significant difference, however, was observed between the NTG group, with a mean of 3.96, and the TFG group, MD = 1.04, P = .000 < .05, on the one hand, and the TG group, MD = .70, P = .006 < .05, on the other. The second question is, therefore, answered negatively, i.e., interactive feedback had no significant influence on the organization of the participants' writing.

The Fluency

The fluency of the participants' writing was addressed in the third research question. The F value of 8.77 indicated significant differences between the fluency mean scores of the groups on the posttest; however, no significant difference was witnessed between the TFG group with a mean of 4.38 and the TG groups, with the mean of 4.08, MD = .292, P = .395 > .05. However, the difference between the TG and the NTG groups, with a mean difference of .583, reached a significant level, MD = .583, P = .028 < .05. The difference between the TFG and the NTG groups, was also statistically significant (MD = .875, P = .001 < .05). Based on the findings, the third question is also negatively answered: task-based interactive feedback did not bring about any enhancement in the fluency of the participants' writing. The observed improvement could have been merely achieved via the use of tasks.

Discussion

The results emerging from this study indicated that the use of tasks can improve the organization and fluency of the participants' writing skill and that interactive feedback can complement the use of pedagogic task and reinforce attention to form only when accuracy is of concern. The findings are in line with most of the studies investigating the impact of TSI on enhancing Iranian English learners' writing skill.

Rezazadeh, Tavakoli, and Eslami Rasekh (2011) found utilizing different task types effective in improving accuracy. Besides, Pourdana and Karimi Behbahani (2012) reported a high degree of accuracy gains in EFL learners' performance on topic writing tasks. Sadeghi and Fazelijou (2012) also confirmed the assumption that task-supported language teaching could actually enhance various aspects of learners' skills including their writing skill. They attributed this positive impact to the possibility of engaging learners in meaningful activities and diverting their attention from form to meaning via using various pedagogic tasks.

Lack of significant difference between the TG and TFG groups indicated that the appropriate use of tasks could surpass interactive feedback in importance and practical utility. Very few studies have been carried out to explore the impact of TSI with and without interactive feedback on the organization of written discourse. Hence, the findings cannot be discussed in relation to other studies. However, the findings from the present study confirm TSI as a practical proposal to enable learners to write more well-organized texts.

More fluent writings in the TG and TFG groups compared to NTG group suggested the facilitative role of tasks in enhancing the flow of writing regardless of interactive feedback. The contribution of tasks to fluency has also been suggested by other researchers in the EFL context of Iran (Pakdel & Khodareza, 2011; Pourdana , Karimi & Behbahani, 2012;). Pakdel and Khodareza (2011), who conducted a study to investigate the effects of warm up tasks as classroom activities on the participants' writing, found the use of tasks in warm up activities could help the participants produce a

more coherent, fluent, and extended piece of writing. Pourdana and Karimi Behbahani (2012), who scrutinized the impact of three types of language assessment tasks, Topic Writing, Picture Description, and Text Reconstruction, on the accuracy, fluency, and complexity of Iranian EFL learners' writing performance, found that Topic Writing tasks enhanced accuracy and complexity gains in EFL learners' performance while Picture Description tasks improved learners' fluency. Sadeghi and Fazelijou (2012) have claimed that task-supported language teaching enable learners to focus on content and meaning while writing. It seems that brainstorming ideas on the board in the TG and TFG groups helped the participants in the present study focus on the content and meaning as well and remember words and phrases to be used in their written texts. This might have been a step forward to help them link phrases to produce more fluent texts.

To sum up, the use of tasks enabled the participants in the present study to achieve higher degrees of organization and fluency and the same level of accuracy as the task interactive feedback group. The facilitative role of tasks can be substantiated in terms of the three stages of task-supported methodology: pre-task, task, and post-task stages. In teaching writing, pre-task activities trigger inductive learning, which help reduce cognitive load of the task (Foster & Skehan, 1996). This cognitive relief seems to be a prerequisite condition for fluent and well-organized transfer of ideas on paper as well as for focused attention to form while monitoring one's performance.

The assumption whether corrective feedback of any type could enhance accuracy, organization, and fluency of writing has been a controversial debate among scholars in the field. Besides TSI, feedback was also investigated to verify its effect on various features of writing. Most of the studies on feedback found it effective in improving overall quality of writing (Ferris & Roberts, 2001), lexical and grammatical accuracy (Chandler, 2003), and on accuracy alone (Frantzen, 1995). Ferris and Roberts (2001) investigated the impact of feedback on overall quality of L2 student writers' writing. Three experimental groups who received coded, un-coded, and no feedback took part in the study. The

results revealed that coded and un-coded feedback groups outperformed the no feedback group, while there was no significant difference between the groups who received feedback. Based on their conclusion, feedback of any type can enhance the overall quality of writing. In the present study, both TG and TFG groups received feedbacks of different types: the feedback for the TG group was in the form of teacher corrections they received while the TFG group received interactive feedback. Therefore, the findings regarding the facilitative role of feedback support those of Ferris and Roberts (2001). Chandler (2003) investigated whether students' correction of grammatical and lexical errors in the participants' assignments would reduce such errors in writing. The results revealed that direct correction is best for producing accurate revisions, and is preferred by students since it is the fastest and easiest way for them as well as for teachers. However, Frantzen (1995) investigated error correction in groups who received feedback on content, on form, and on both. He found that feedback improved written accuracy more than fluency.

Despite the numerous studies which have confirmed the supportive impact of feedback on learners' writing, few studies have proved the reverse. Truscott (2004) has claimed that correction was ineffective or harmful. Likewise, Truscott and Yi-ping Hsu (2008) carried out a study in which they provided feedback through underlining the erroneous forms and found that the group receiving feedback was significantly more successful than the control group. However, one week later, all students wrote a new narrative which revealed no difference between the groups. They concluded that improvements made during revision do not provide sufficient evidence on the long-term positive effect of correction on learners' writing skill. Thus, as Ferris (2004) and Truscott (1999) have suggested, the intricacy involved in the writing process and the wide range of factors impacting the transfer of ideas to written language complicates the research methodology. They call for more research studies, particularly longitudinal investigations, before coming to a final conclusion.

Lack of significant difference in the levels of accuracy, organization, and fluency achieved by the TG and TFG groups in

the present study support previous research findings (Ferris, 2004; Truscott, 2004; Yi-ping Hsu, 2008). The findings might be explicated in terms of the educational system which encourages Iranian learners to rely more on their individual resources in traditional and task-based teaching methodologies. Such long-lived habits cannot be readily changed and are manifested in individual reflective task performance when teachers try to improve the quality of their teaching by using tasks. The participants in this study might not have responded to the interactive feedback because they were not accustomed to learning through interaction and negotiation with peers or their teacher. Further socio-cultural studies are required to verify this possibility.

Conclusion

The results emerging from the present inquiry have underscored the significance of tasks in writing classrooms. Whether followed by interactive feedback or not, tasks can be utilized to enhance various features of writing. The findings have pedagogical implications for educators, English teachers, and course designers. It seems imperative to take into account learners' preferences, styles, and cultural background before deciding on a particular type of feedback in a task-supported classroom. Some learners tend to benefit more from explicit instruction and direct correction from the teacher while others may go for a more indirect and interactive methodology. Iranian EFL learners' failure in taking advantage of interactive feedback might pertain to their learning habits as well as the contextual factors governing their previous experiences. The use of such interactive and cooperative techniques at earlier stages of language learning may prove effective in habituating them to more interactive and reflective methods of learning.

The Authors

Zohreh Seifoori is an assistant professor at Islamic Azad University, Tabriz Branch. She has been teaching at

undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate levels and is also on the ELT research board. Her research interests encompass various aspects of task-based individualized learning. She has published a number of articles addressing various aspects of task-based and strategies-based instruction in national and international journals and.

Mitra Zeraatpishe is and assistant professor who received her Ph.D in TEFL from Islamic Azad University, Tabriz Branch and her MA from Al-Zahra University, Tehran, Iran. She is a faculty member of English department in Islamic Azad University, Mashhad Branch and her research interests include task-based teaching and individualized learning.

Saiedeh Ahangari is an assistant professor in TEFL at the Department of English Language, Tabriz Branch , Islamic Azad University. She obtained her PhD degree from Islamic Azad University, Science and Research Branch. She has an M.A. in Teaching English from the University of Tabriz. Her main interests are in the area of Task-based language Teaching, Language Testing, Systemic Functional Linguistics and CALL and their interface with the issues in English Language Teaching. She has published and presented papers in international journals and conferences.

References

Arnaudet, M.L. & Barret, M.E. (1990). *Paragraph development: A guide for students of English*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall Regents.

Ashwell, T. (2000). 'Patterns of teacher response to student writing in a multiple-draft composition classroom: Is content feedback followed by form feedback the best method?' *Journal of Second Language Writing,* 9(3), 227-257.

Agustin Llach, M.P. (2011). *Lexical errors and accuracy in foreign language writing.* USA, Multilingual Matters.

Brown, H. D. (2001). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy*. New York: Pearson Education.

Cahyono, B. Y. (2001). 'Research studies in second language writing and in contrastive rhetoric.' *k@ ta* 3(1), 39-52.

Chandler, J. (2003). The efficacy of various kinds of error feedback for improvement in the accuracy and fluency of L2 student writing. *Journal of second language writing*, *12*(3), 267-296.

Duong, M. T., N. T. K. Cuc. & P. Griffin. (2011). 'Developing a framework to measure process-oriented writing competence: A case of Vietnamese EFL students' formal portfolio assessment.' *RELC Journal*, 42(2), 167-185.

Ellis, R. (2003). *Task-based language learning and teaching.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ellis, R. (2006). The methodology of task-based teaching. *Asian EFL journal*, *8*(3).

Falchikov, N. (2005). *Improving assessment through student involvement: Practical solutions for learning in higher and further education.* USA and Canada: Routledge Falmer.

Fazio, L. L. (2001). The effect of corrections and commentaries on the journal writing accuracy of minority-and majority-language students. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *10*(4), 235-249.

Ferris, D. R. (2004). The "grammar correction" debate in L2 Writing: Where are we, and where do we go from here? (and what do we do in the meantime…?). *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *13*(1), 49-62.

Ferris, D. R., & Roberts, B. (2001). Error feedback in L2 writing classes. How explicit does it need to be? *Journal of Second Language Writing, 10(3), 161–184.*

Field, A. (2009). *Discovering statistics using SPSS*. 3rd ed. SAGE. London.

Foster, P., & Skehan, P. (1996). The influence of planning and task type on second language performance. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 18*, 299-324.

Frantzen, D. (1995). The effects of grammar supplementation on written accuracy in an intermediate Spanish content course. *The Modern Language Journal, 79*(3), 329-344.

Furneaux, C. (2000). Process writing. Available on-line [www.rdg.ac.uk/acadept/ Cl / slas / process. Html, 1-4.

Jeon, I. J., & Hahn, J. W. (2006). Exploring EFL teachers' perceptions of task-based language teaching: A case study of Korean secondary school classroom practice. *Asian EFL Journal, 8*(1), 123-143.

Hughes, A. (2003). *Testing for language teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hyland, K., & Hyland, F. (2006). *Feedback in second language writing: Contexts and issues*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Keh, C.L. (1990). Feedback in the Writing Process: a Model and Methods for implementation. *ELT Journal, 44(4), 294-304.*

Lalande, J. F. (1982). Reducing composition errors: An experiment. *Modern Language Journal, 66,140–149.*

Li, Y. (1998). Unpublished Thesis. *Using task-based email activities in developing academic writing skills in English as a second language.* USA: University of Arizona.

Montgomery, J. L., & Baker, W. (2007). Teacher-written feedback: Student perceptions, teacher self-assessment, and actual teacher performance. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 16*(2), 82-99.

Nunan, D. (1989). *Designing tasks for the communicative classroom.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Nunan, D. (2004). *Task-based language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ong, J. & L.J. Zhang. (2010). 'Effects of task complexity on the fluency and lexical complexity in EFL students' argumentative writing.' *Journal of Second Language Writing, 19*(4), 218–233.

Pakdel Estalkhbijari, Z. & M. Khodareza. (2012). 'The effects of warm-up tasks on the Iranian EFL students' writing ability.' *International Education Studies,* 5(2), 190-203.

Peyton,J.K., J. Staton, G. Richardson, & W. Wolfram. (1990). 'The influence of writing tasks on ESL students' written production.' *Research in the Teaching of English,* 24(2), 142-171.

Piri, F., Barati, H., & Ketabi, S. (2012). The effects of pre-task, on-line, and both pre-task and on-line planning on fluency, complexity, and accuracy–The case of Iranian EFL learners' written production. *English Language Teaching*, *5*(6), 158-167.

Pourdana, N. & S. M. Karimi Behbahani. 2012. 'Task types in EFL context: Accuracy, fluency, and complexity in assessing writing performance.' *International Journal of Social Science and humanity,* 2(1), 80-84.

Rezazadeh, M., M. Tavakoli, & A. Eslami Rasekh. 2011. 'The role of task type in foreign language written production: Focusing on fluency, complexity, and accuracy.' *International Education Studies* 4(2), 169-176.

R.I.C. Publication. (2004). *Multiple intelligences: A thematic approach.* RIC. Publication.

Richards, J.C, & T. S. Rodgers. (2001). *Approaches and methods in language teaching* (2nd edition), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 152–244.

Richards, J. C., & Renandya, W. A. (Eds.). (2002). *Methodology in language teaching: An anthology of current practice*. Cambridge University Press.

Robb T., S. Ross & I. Shortreed. (1986). 'Salience of feedback on error and its effect on EFL writing quality.' *TESOL Quarterly,* 20(1), 83-95.

Sadeghi, K. & E. Fazelijou. (2012). 'The role of task-supported language teaching in EFL learner's writing performance and grammar gains.' *3L: The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies,* 18(1), 117–127.

Skehan, P. (1996). 'A framework for the implementation of task-based instruction.' *Applied Linguistics,* 17(1), 38-62.

Skehan, P. (2002). A non-marginal role for tasks. *ELT Journal*, *56*(3), 289-295.

Skehan, P., & Foster, P. (1997). Task type and task processing conditions as influences on foreign language performance. *Language Teaching Research*, *1*(3), 185-211.

Skehan, P., Xiaoyue, B., Qian, L., & Wang, Z. (2012). The task is not enough: Processing approaches to task-based performance. *Language Teaching Research*, *16*(2), 170-187.

Truscott, J. (1999). The case for "The case against grammar correction in L2 writing classes": A response to Ferris. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 8(2), 111-122.

Truscott, J. (2004). Evidence and conjecture on the effects of correction: A response to Chandler. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *13*(4), 337-343.

Truscott, J. & Hsu, A. P. (2008). Error correction, revision, and learning. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 17, 292 –305

Willis, J. (1996). *A framework for task-based learning.* Harlow: Addison Wesley Longman.

Willis, D., & Willis, J. (2007). *Doing task-based teaching*. Oxford University Press.

Ziahosseini, S. M., & Salehi, M. (2008). An Investigation of the relationship between motivation and language learning strategies. *Pazhouhesh-e Zabanha-ye Kareji, 41*, 85-107.

Zhu, W. (1995). Effects of Training for peer response on student's comments and

interaction. *Written communication, 12(4), 492-528.*

Appendices

Appendix I: Writing Scoring Scale (Adopted from Hughes, 2003)

Accuracy	
- Few noticeable errors of grammar or word order. (0-1grammatical error throughout all of the sentences e.g. wrong preposition, wrong verb tense, wrong voice,…)	6 5
- Some errors of grammar or word order which do not interfere with comprehension. (2-3 grammatical errors)	4
- Errors of grammar or word order fairly frequent; occasional re-reading for full comprehension. (4-5 grammatical errors)	3
- Errors of grammar or word order frequent; efforts of interpretations sometimes required on reader's part. (6-7 grammatical errors)	2
- Errors of grammar or word order very frequent; reader often has to rely on own interpretation. (8-10 grammatical errors)	1
- Errors of grammar or word order so severe as to make comprehension virtually impossible. (more than 10 grammatical errors)	
Organization	
- Highly organized; clear progression of ideas well-linked; like educated native writer. (well organized topic sentence based on the kind of paragraph, no irrelevant supporting sentence and no incorrect linking word, correct punctuation)	6
- Material well-organized; links could occasionally be clearer but communication not impaired. (no irrelevant supporting sentence, 1 or 2 misused listing signal, one or no punctuation error which may cause misunderstanding)	5
- Some lack of organization; re-reading require for clarification of ideas.(1 irrelevant supporting sentence and 1 or 2 misused listing signal, 2 or 3 punctuation errors bringing misunderstanding)	4 3
- Little or no attempt at connectivity, though reader can deduce some organization. (2 irrelevant supporting sentences and 2-3 misused listing signals, 3 punctuation errors bringing misunderstanding)	2
- Individual ideas may be clear, but very difficult to deduce connection between them. (more than 2 irrelevant sentences and 2 or more misused listing signals, 4 punctuation errors bringing misunderstanding)	1
- Lack of organization so severe that communication is seriously impaired.(most sentences are irrelevant, more than 4 punctuation errors bringing misunderstanding)	

Fluency	
- Choice of structures and vocabulary consistently appropriate; like that of educated native speaker. (use of at least 3 sentences, 2 or more correct use of complex/compound/simple sentences, with no misused vocabulary)	6
- Occasional lack of consistency in choice of structures and vocabulary which does not impair overall ease of communication. (1 complex, 2 or more compound/ simple sentences with 1 or 2 misused vocabularies)	5 4
- "patchy", with some structures or vocabulary items noticeably inappropriate to general style. (no complex sentence, 2 compound, 2 or more simple sentences with 3 or 4 misused vocabularies)	3
- Structures or vocabulary items sometimes not only inappropriate but also misused; little sense of ease of communication. (no complex sentence, 1 compound, 2 or more simple sentences with 5 misused vocabularies, 3 punctuation errors bringing misunderstanding)	2 1
- Communication often impaired by completely inappropriate or misused structures or vocabulary items. (no complex sentence, no compound, 3 simple sentences with 4 misused vocabularies)	
- A "hotch-potch" of half-learned misused structures or vocabulary items rendering communication almost impossible. (no complex sentence, no compound, a lot of simple sentences with more than 4 misused vocabularies)	

Appendix II: A Sample of Writing Task (RIC Publications, 2004)

STATUS REPORT

Task You will explain the meaning of environmental words and research an animal or plant to suit each status.

word wise

Explain the meaning of each word. Research, write and draw an animal to best suit each status. Give reasons for each animal's status (e.g. hunted, habitat loss).

1 (a) extinct

animal

Draw your picture here

(b) endangered

animal

Draw your picture here

(c) threatened

animal

(d) [illegible]

animal

Draw your picture here