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Developing Autonomy and Self-efficacy in Writing among Intermediate Iranian EFL Learners through Collaborative Vs. Individual Instruction of Formulaic Sequences

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Abstract
The present mixed-methods study investigated the effect of instruction of formulaic language on the autonomy, self-efficacy, and writing ability of 80 Iranian undergraduate intermediate EFL learners. To this end, the participants were randomly assigned to either an experimental group (n = 40) or a control group (n = 40). The experimental group underwent the collaborative EFL writing treatment, while the control group continued with their regular mainstream classes, promoting individual learning of formulaic sequences. Results indicated that the explicit instruction of incorporating formulaic language featuring collaborative learning significantly improved the experimental group EFL learners' writing performance, self-efficacy, and autonomy levels compared with their control group peers. Through engaging in collaborative writing tasks with peers, the learners have the opportunity to negotiate meaning, exchange ideas, co-construct knowledge, and improve their writing using formulaic language. The interview results also revealed that the collaborative instruction of the formulaic sequences has a number of advantages, such as useful exchange of knowledge, immediate written feedback, improved linguistic features, higher quality work, faster task completion, improved confidence and self-efficacy, improved autonomy, improved interpersonal skills, enhanced negotiation skills, and finally enhanced management skills.

Keywords: Autonomy; Collaborative task; Formulaic language; self-efficacy; Writing Ability

INTRODUCTION

A very important goal in learning a second language is for the learners to attain native-like proficiency in all four language skills. An influential factor in this regard is developing knowledge of what has been known as formulaic language, also known as multiword chunks or lexical bundles, which refers to groups of words that are commonly used together and possess a specific meaning that is often challenging to deduce from the individual component words alone (Wray, 2013).

Formulaic expressions are an integral part of native-like language use, and by incorporating these sequences into their linguistic repertoire, EFL learners can enhance their overall language performance and sound more natural and fluent in their target language use (Assassi & Benyelles, 2016). Formulaic sequences refer to predetermined language chunks or phrases that, instead of being created at the moment using grammar rules, are remembered and used as complete units (Hyland, 2012).

In recent years, research on the specifications, functions, and application of formulaic language in various aspects of learning English as a foreign language has flourished, making it an integral component of second language learning and teaching (Wood, 2015). Due to their widespread

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prevalence and practicality in conveying meaning efficiently, formulaic sequences can be found in all aspects of language, including conversation, writing, and even specialized domains such as academic and technical language (Conklin & Schmitt, 2012).

Consequently, research in second language acquisition (SLA) has taken note of this observation and extensively examined the role of formulaic sequences in enhancing English language learners' language proficiency, particularly proficiency in writing. Developing fluency in writing, which is considered one of the most important and challenging skills in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), can contribute to another significant theoretical construct in the field: self-efficacy.

Drawing upon this notion, human beings possess the capability to exert influence over their surroundings rather than assuming the role of a passive entity devoid of agency. This capacity is predominantly manifested through their perception of self-efficacy (Bandura, 2000; Schunk, 2003). It can be postulated that enhancing the proficiency of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners by facilitating the acquisition of formulaic expressions, as a pivotal component of natural language, can augment their sense of self-efficacy.

This is evidenced in the literature, wherein it has been demonstrated that these expressions enable more efficient communication in both speaking and writing (Lenko-Szymanska, 2014). Consequently, learners can experience a sense of accomplishment in effectively conveying their intended message with decreasing reliance on assistance from teachers or more proficient peers. This, in turn, can lead to the enhancement of learner autonomy, which is another variable of interest in the present study.

The term “autonomy” is defined as assuming responsibility for one's own learning (Benson, 1997, 2001), emphasizing the agency and active involvement of EFL learners in fostering their knowledge of language. Due to its importance, autonomy has been examined in conjunction with various other concepts. For instance, studies have revealed a significant influence of attitude toward language learning on learner autonomy (Liu, 2015), as well as a noteworthy correlation between learner autonomy and vocabulary learning strategies among Iranian EFL learners (Abadi & Baradaran, 2013).

Purpose of the Study

The primary objective of the present study was to examine the potential impact of instructing formulaic language on the self-efficacy, autonomy, and writing ability of intermediate EFL learners through engaging learners in collaborative writing tasks. This objective was derived from the observation that formulaic language has been found to have a significant role in shaping meaning and facilitating communication among native speakers in both spoken and written contexts (Wray, 2013).

More specifically, the objective was to determine which aspects of writing produced by intermediate EFL learners are more influenced by their explicit exposure to formulaic language compared to other aspects.

A further aim of the study was to examine the potential effect of explicit teaching of formulaic language on self-efficacy and autonomy. In other words, the aim was to investigate the extent to which exposure to formulaic language in writing can influence EFL learners' self-efficacy and self-efficacy.

Research Questions

Based on the aforementioned points, the following research questions were postulated:

Q1: *Does teaching formulaic sequences through collaborative learning have any significant effect on EFL learners' writing performance?*

Q2: *Does teaching formulaic sequences through collaborative learning have any significant effect on EFL learners' self-efficacy?*

Q3: *Does teaching formulaic sequences through collaborative learning have any significant effect on EFL learners' autonomy?*

Q4: *What is the EFL learners' attitude toward collaborative learning and incorporating formulaic language in their EFL writing?*

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Theoretical backgrounds

The Theoretical frameworks for formulaic

language instruction in EFL learning have been explored by a number of authors. Wang (2020) discusses the role of formulaic language in decoding the spoken production of native speakers (NSs) in the teaching of English as a foreign language.

Thoai (2020) emphasizes the need for empirical research involving EFL learners and explores the extent to which non-native EFL teachers are familiar with and use formulaic language during class time. Ogawa (2020) suggests three teaching ideas to improve L2 learners' speaking performances through form-focused instruction using formulaic language and highlights the need for empirical research involving EFL learners.

Sarani and Najjarbaghseyah (2019) explore formulaic expressions used by EFL learners and suggest that instruction in these formulas could enhance effective and natural communication. Assassi and Benyelles (2019) investigated the effects of formulaic language on EFL learners' communicative competence and suggested that it should be an essential part of the curriculum.

One key observation is that formulaic language greatly assists learners in deciphering and comprehending spoken production by native speakers. Native speakers often employ formulaic expressions, and familiarity with these sequences enables learners to better understand and engage in authentic conversations and interactions (Wang, 2020). Consequently, the incorporation of formulaic language into EFL teaching is fundamental, as it allows learners to bridge the gap between classroom instruction and real-world communication.

Furthermore, the use of formulaic language by teachers in the classroom has been found to have a substantial impact on learners' language learning process. When EFL teachers' model and provide explicit instruction on the usage of formulaic expressions, EFL learners become more attuned to these linguistic patterns and are more likely to incorporate them into their own speech and writing. This integration of formulaic language not only enhances learners' linguistic competence but also promotes their overall language development (Thoai, 2020).

Concerning the method of presenting formulaicsequences, collaborative task-based instruction (TBI) has been recognized as a powerful method for empowering EFL self-efficacy, particularly from a psychological perspective (Nur & Butarbutar, 2022). By engaging learners in meaningful and interactive tasks that require communication and problem-solving, TBI is believed to foster a sense of competence and achievement. Through successful completion of collaborative tasks, learners can develop a belief in their ability to effectively use the language in real-world scenarios, thus enhancing their self-efficacy.

Influence of formulaic language instruction on learner autonomy and self-efficacy

Formulaic language instruction in EFL learning has emerged as a valuable tool for enhancing learner self-efficacy (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016). Research indicates that the frequent use of formulaic sequences by EFL learners can significantly improve their linguistic, psycholinguistic, and communicative competency, leading to a more native-like fluency and proficiency (Thoai, 2020). As learners become more proficient in using these fixed expressions, their confidence in their language abilities grows, thereby boosting their self-efficacy.

This sense of self-efficacy, in turn, allows EFL learners to take ownership of their learning, develop a sense of autonomy and take control over their language production. Providing opportunities for learners to make choices, such as selecting topics, materials, or tasks, fosters a sense of responsibility and empowerment. Autonomy in learning helps learners feel more capable and confident in their language abilities, thereby enhancing their self-efficacy (Sousa et al., 2012).

Formulaic language instruction and its impact on writing ability

Formulaic language instruction has been found to be crucial in second language (L2) learning, particularly in the development of writing skills in English as a foreign language (EFL) (Thoai, 2020). By incorporating formulaic language into their writing, learners can improve their fluency, coherence, and overall writing proficiency. (Wang, 2020).

These findings highlight the importance of

incorporating formulaic language instruction in EFL writing instruction to enhance learners' writing abilities. By integrating formulaic language into writing tasks, teachers can help learners develop a repertoire of commonly used expressions and improve their writing fluency and accuracy (Oakey, 2002).

Formulaic language instruction not only enhances learners' writing skills but also contributes to their overall language competence. By exposing learners to a wide range of formulaic language, such as collocations, phrasal verbs, and idiomatic expressions, teachers can help learners sound more natural and fluent. Moreover, formulaic language use enhances learners' communicative competence by providing them with ready-made language chunks that facilitate effective communication in various contexts (Mustafa, 2022).

Empirical Studies

The effects of knowledge of formulaic sequences on second language learners' writing skills and components have been the focus of investigation in a number of experimental research studies in the related literature. To begin with, Wachidah et al. (2020) conducted an examination of the lexical bundles utilized in the findings and discussion sections of graduate students' theses, focusing on the structures, functions, and the contribution of lexical bundles to the coherence of the students' texts. The outcomes indicated that the lexical bundles in the students' texts play a crucial role in establishing coherence within the texts, and they incorporate both coherence elements, namely reference and transition signals

Suhardijanto (2020) employed a mixed-method approach to identify lexical bundles across six disciplines. The investigation categorized the lexical bundle patterns into five types: noun-based, prepositional-based, verb-based, adjective-based, and clause-based bundles. Among these, clause-based bundles are the most prevalent in research articles (49.2%). The utilization of clause fragments and passive verbs are prominent features within this genre. In terms of discourse function, research-oriented bundles are the most commonly utilized, whereas participant-oriented bundles are less frequent. Each discourse function presents distinct structural attributes. Furthermore, it was observed that a single lexical bundle can serve two functional categories.

In a separate scholarly corpus-based inquiry, Oktavianti and Sarage (2021) delved into the structural composition of multi-word collocations employed by EFL students within the domain of argumentative essays. The identified bundles were subsequently categorized into structural taxonomies, and an in-depth analysis was conducted on the frequency of these lexical bundles. The analysis revealed a diverse range of structural patterns detected in the learner corpus, with NP-based bundles emerging as the most prevalent. Nevertheless, the variations of bundles within the learner corpus predominantly adhered to fixed patterns. Furthermore, in addition to the overlapping bundles between the learner corpus and the Academic Formulas List, there were certain discrepancies observed concerning the linguistic registers.

In a similar manner, Falah (2020) conducted an empirical investigation into a multi-process pedagogical strategy for effectively instructing formulaic sequences to undergraduate students in Yemen. The findings of the research indicated that learners who received the pedagogical intervention exhibited enhanced utilization of these formulaic sequences, leading to a reduction in grammatical errors and an elevated level of English proficiency. Moreover, the outcomes demonstrated that the experimental group surpassed the control group in performance across both four-week instructional sessions.

In a similar line of explorations, Fajri et al. (2020) also conducted an examination of the structural and functional varieties of four-word lexical bundles in two distinct corpora of scholarly articles in applied linguistics authored by professional writers of L1 English and L1 Indonesian. The results indicate that L2 writers utilized a greater quantity of bundles compared to L1 writers; however, they did not fully utilize some of the most common lexical bundles in L1 English composition. In terms of structure, the study highlights the frequent utilization of prepositional phrase (PP)-based bundles in the works of L2 writers. Nonetheless, alongside the prevalence of PP-based bundles, L2 authors also displayed a significant usage of verbal

phrase-based bundles, implying that these L2 writers were progressively adopting more native-like bundles. With regard to functional categories, L2 writers utilized fewer quantification bundles in comparison to their counterparts.

More recently, within Iranian eduactional context, Shirazizadeh and Amirfazlian (2021) explored the forms and functions of multi-word bundles used in textbooks, research articles, and theses in the field of applied linguistics to illuminate the intradisciplinary variations across the three genres. The analysis uncovered substantial variations in bundles across diverse genres within the same field, yet significant commonalities were identified among disciplinary genres.

A glance at the findings of the above and other similar studies in the related literature reveals that the studies have come up with rather inconclusive results as to the potential of formulaic sequences to foster the writing ability of EFL learners. Moreover, there have been a limited number of empirical studies in the Iranian educational context to examine the role of explicit instruction of formulaic sequences through collaborative tasks on the writing proficiency of English language learners (Koosha et al., 2015; Rahimi & Hasheminasab, 2020; Vaziri et al., 2023), hence the main objective of the present study.

METHOD

Design of the Study

The study employed a mixed method pre-test/post-test design, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2004). The emphasis was primarily on quantitative data collection and analysis, which involved examining the responses provided by respondents in the questionnaires and their writing assignments. However, the qualitative analysis and interpretation of the comment section in the questionnaire and the interviews were also conducted. Specifically, the study utilized a sequential explanatory design, where the quantitative data were analyzed and interpreted first, followed by the qualitative analysis to enhance the understanding and insights gained from the quantitative data analysis (Ivankova et al., 2006).

Due to the objective of establishing a cause-and-effect relationship between the independent variable (learning the formulaic language) and dependent variables (writing proficiency, autonomy, and self-efficacy of EFL learners), the study employed a quasi-experimental design. However, unlike a true experimental design, it was not feasible to randomly assign participants to groups due to practical constraints. Therefore, convenience sampling was used as a practical alternative. The random assignment of participants to the experimental and control groups was performed to enhance the construct validity of the research (Best & Kahn, 2007).

Participants

The participants in the present study consisted of 80 undergraduate English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, with an age range of 19 to 30, who were studying at two branches of Islamic Azad University, namely South Tehran Branch and Central Tehran Branch. They obtained their high school education in different majors and had varying levels of proficiency in English. As language proficiency level played a crucial role in the current study due to its interaction with the variables of interest, the participants were homogenized. They were selected from a larger group of 110 primary participants, who were chosen through a convenience sampling procedure from the aforementioned universities. The selected participants possessed an intermediate level of English language proficiency, which was deemed appropriate for the study as it enabled them to handle formulaic language and successfully complete the required tasks.

Instruments and Materials

The following instruments were utilized during the course of the current study.

Oxford Placement Test

In order to ensure consistency in the evaluation of participants, irrespective of their enrollment in the same language course, the participants were required to take the Oxford Placement Test (OPT). In this particular study, the sample of the Oxford placement test was divided into three sections. Part A consisted of 40 items,

which included five multiple-choice pictorial items, 15 multiple-choice cloze text questions, and 20 grammatical multiple-choice items. This section had a duration of 30 minutes. Part B, lasting for 20 minutes, comprised 10 multiple-choice cloze text items and 10 multiple-choice vocabulary items. Additionally, part C of the test encompassed writing tasks that required the test takers to produce approximately 300 words on the assigned topic.

Learner Autonomy Questionnaire

The second research instrument employed in this study was a learner autonomy questionnaire (LAQ), used both as a pretest and a post-test to assess the EFL learners' autonomy and to measure the potential impact of the treatment. The questionnaire consisted of 44 statements based on nine dimensions related to language learning. The items within these nine dimensions aimed to determine the extent to which learners exhibit a higher level of control over specific aspects of their learning. Table 1 provides an overview of the nine areas that were investigated in the learner autonomy questionnaire. This particular questionnaire was selected for this study based on its comprehensive nature, as it encompassed a greater number of dimensions and therefore possessed superior content validity compared to other available questionnaires in the field of learner autonomy, as confirmed by multiple researchers in the field (Gömleksiz & Bozpolat, 2012; Tilfarlioglu & Ciftci, 2011).

In order to adapt the questionnaire to the Iranian context, it was piloted with a group of 20 students, and based on expert opinions, certain items were modified or replaced. Additionally, various questionnaires used in the Iranian EFL context were examined to identify suitable items that could replace those that were deemed inappropriate (Moini & Asadi Sajed, 2012; Hashemian & Soureshjani, 2011; Nematipour, 2012; Rahnama & Zafarghandi, 2013; Maftoon et al., 2011).

Table 1
Nine Dimensions in Learner Autonomy Questionnaire

Section	Number of items	Focus	Questions
Dimension 1	6 items	Readiness for Self-direction	What are the learners' beliefs relating to self-directed learning in general?
Dimension 2	6 items	Independent Work in Language Learning	What are the learners' beliefs about independent work in language learning?
Dimension 3	8 items	Importance of Class/ Teacher	How important do learners see the class/ the teacher in their language learning?
Dimension 4	5 items	Role of Teacher: Explanation/Supervision	What importance do learners give to teacher explanation and supervision?
Dimension 5	4 items	Language Learning Activities Outside the Class	In relation to particular language learning activities, what are the learners' attitudes?
Dimension 6	3 items	Selecting Content	What are the learners' attitudes relating to the selection of content for language learning?
Dimension 7	3 items	Intrinsic motivation	How confident do learners feel about defining objectives?
Dimension 8	5 items	Assessment/ Motivation	How important is external assessment in motivating the learners' work?
Dimension 9	4 items	Interest in Other Cultures	What are the learners' attitudes relating to the culture of other countries?

Self-efficacy Questionnaire

The self-efficacy questionnaire (SEQ) used in this study was adopted from Rahimi and Abedini (2009) and modified for the purpose of assessing writing skills. It was developed based on three existing questionnaires: the 'Beliefs about Language Learning (BALLI)' by Horwitz (1985), the 'General Self-efficacy Scale' by Luszczynska et al. (2005), and the 'Morgan-Links Student Efficacy Scale (MJSES)' by Jinks and Morgan (1999). The questionnaire consisted of 18 Likert-scale items, incorporating

items from the aforementioned questionnaires as well as additional items created by the researchers to address the research questions. Participants were instructed to indicate their level of agreement with each statement on a scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, namely (1) strongly disagree (2) moderately disagree (3) slightly disagree (4) moderately agree, and (5) strongly agree. The questionnaire demonstrated good internal consistency with a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.73.

Writing scoring rubric

The next instrument employed in this study was an analytic writing scoring rubric, adapted from Wiseman (2012), to assess the writing tasks before and after the treatment, which involved explicit instruction on formulaic language. The rubric consisted of five domains that reflected the construct of second language writing, as determined through a rigorous content-validation process. This process involved examining existing writing rubrics, analyzing student writing samples, seeking input from faculty members, aligning the domains with curricula and course objectives, and incorporating feedback from raters. The newly developed analytic rubric encompassed the following subdomains: task fulfillment, topic development, organization, register and vocabulary, and language control. The performance criteria for each domain were designed to differentiate between different levels of proficiency.

Writings tasks

The writing tasks completed by participants in both the control and experimental groups served as additional instruments in this study. The topics for these tasks were generated by the participants themselves prior to the treatment. Each participant was asked to propose up to three topics, and the most frequently suggested themes were selected as the writing prompts. The aim of this process was to ensure that the chosen topics appealed to the interests and preferences of as many participants as possible. Eventually, a total of 10 topics were finalized, covering areas such as the environment, tourism, globalization, academic ethics, economic factors, and features of imagined communities.

Materials for explicit instruction of formulaic language

Various materials were utilized to teach formulaic language, including news articles on a range of topics such as sports, science, politics, and economy. Additionally, short stories and paragraphs on different subjects were incorporated to cater to the diverse preferences of the participants. Care was taken in the selection of these readings to avoid using overly specialized or technical texts that participants may have had limited background knowledge on, as this could potentially detract from the focus on formulaic language.

Interview

To gain an in-depth understanding of the potential impact of the instruction of formulaic language on the writing proficiency, self-efficacy, and autonomy of EFL learners, individuals who agreed to participate in interviews were interviewed after completing their post-test. The interview questions were selected from the questionnaire based on their significance and the need for further explanation. This process involved asking the interviewee to provide comments on specific points of interest, which guided the interviewer through the interview.

Procedure

The following steps were undertaken to carry out the present study. Initially, a total of 120 undergraduate EFL learners were selected from Islamic Azad University South Tehran Branch and Central Tehran Branch using convenience sampling. Subsequently, all participants completed the one-hour Oxford Placement Test. Based on their scores, those whose scores fell one standard deviation below and one standard deviation above the mean were chosen as the final participants, totaling 80 individuals.

In the subsequent phase, all participants were requested to complete the autonomy questionnaire, self-efficacy questionnaire, and a writing task on a topic of their interest, which had been collected from their preferred topics. These assessments served as the pre-test and were used as a benchmark to compare their performance in the post-test following the treatment. Once these samples were obtained,

the participants were randomly assigned to either the control group (with 40 participants) or the experimental group (also with 40 participants). The experimental group underwent the treatment, while the control group continued with their regular mainstream classes. The treatment employed in the present study was as follows.

Aligned with the objective of the present study, the intentional and explicit instruction of formulaic language was carried out. According to Pellicer-Sánchez and Boers (2018), texts can be manipulated to increase the likelihood of EFL learners encountering these linguistic features in order to achieve this objective. This was done in tandem to raise the participants' awareness of the function, usage, and prevalence of formulaic language in the texts they were studying. As highlighted by Pellicer-Sánchez and Boers, if learners fail to attend to the expected elements, such as formulaic language, tangible results cannot be expected. Therefore, in the treatment section of the present study, formulaic language was explicitly presented to the participants as the focal point of a language study, and the activity and task procedures were explained explicitly. This approach adhered to the guideline proposed by Pellicer-Sánchez and Boers, which suggested three ways of creating intentional learning conditions: (1) instructing learners to explore texts for the presence of formulaic language, (2) engaging learners in decontextualized formulaic language-focused activities that are not necessarily tied to any particular input text, and (3) involving learners with specific characteristics of formulaic language that can enhance memorability.

Hence, in line with Laufer's (2005) distinction between (a) exclusively meaning-focused activities (referred to as incidental learning conditions), (b) activities with a focus on words as the need arises during primarily meaning-focused activities (similar in some respects to what is termed semi-incidental learning conditions), and (c) activities where words are presented as objects for language study (i.e., intentional learning conditions - the focus of the present study), the third approach was adopted as the primary means of exposing the participants to formulaic language, with occasional utilization of the other techniques as deemed appropriate. This decision was based on the fact that the study was conducted in accordance with the aforementioned distinction.

In accordance with the priority and prevalence of the reading skill in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, the intentional and explicit instruction of formulaic language was conducted through the reading skill in this current study as well. To achieve this objective, the experimental group was consistently prompted to identify instances of formulaic language and phrases in the texts through an activity called "text chunking," which was previously employed by Boers et al. (2006). In order to familiarize the EFL learners with formulaic language, at the beginning of the intervention, a number of lexical items were visually enhanced and defined as a technique to raise awareness among the learners, following the approach suggested by Peters (2009). Subsequently, the glossing of formulaic language was gradually reduced, and the learners were tasked with independently recognizing these instances in the text.

In order to enhance the learning of formulaic language, the intervention was not restricted to exposing the instances of formulaic language via explicit instruction. Following the reading and input phase of the treatment, an output phase was introduced, which required the participants to actively utilize and recycle the formulaic language. The manner in which this was done varied according to the participants' preferences. These activities included employing the formulaic language in controlled question and answer exercises, where the participants had to either pose the questions or respond to them using the formulaic language. Another activity involved identifying similarities between the formulaic language in English (L2) and their first language (L1), which is in line with the research conducted by Laufer and Girsai (2008) and Peters (2016). Additionally, the participants were also asked to summarize the text while incorporating as much of the formulaic language as possible, either through oral or written means. This output phase was implemented based on the findings of a study conducted

by Szudarski (2012), which indicated the usefulness of producing formulaic language in the process of learning.

The rationale for employing diverse methodologies and activities for acquiring formulaic language was derived from the findings of Peters and Pauwels (2015), which indicated that in order for EFL learners to transition from mere recognition of the formulaic language to the ability to produce it appropriately, they need to undergo a substantial period of successive exposure and engagement at varying levels of activation and involvement. In simpler terms, in order for learners to effectively and naturally utilize their knowledge of formulaic language in communicative tasks, they must engage in extensive practice with the newly acquired language. The significance of providing ample opportunities for learners to consolidate their knowledge to the point where it can be readily accessed (procedural knowledge) is widely acknowledged in the field (Gatbonton & Segalowitz, 2005; Wood, 2010).

Consequently, the presentation of formulaic language in a decontextualized manner has also been proposed as an auxiliary technique for learning formulaic language, with the aim of reinforcing comprehension gained from the text (as suggested by Peters, 2016; Steinel et al., 2007; Webb & Kagimato, 2011). An associated exercise in this regard involves watching and completing the blanks with the appropriate collocation of the formulaic language, as recommended by Boers et al. (2014). This exercise can be performed individually or with a peer, thus providing an additional opportunity for exposure to and engagement with the collocation in the formulaic language (as recommended by Boers et al., 2017).

Following each treatment session, the participants in the experimental group were instructed to write a 300-word essay on one of the selected topics, utilizing as many of the formulaic language expressions as possible that they had learned during the treatment session. This process was repeated for a total of 10 sessions. Due to time constraints and the curriculum that needed to be covered, the writing was assigned as homework. The written samples were collected and exchanged among the peers, who were provided with specific instructions on which aspects of the text to focus on based on the previously explained writing rubrics. The feedback received from peers was then negotiated between the writer and the peer, and the writers were asked to revise their texts based on the feedback provided. The teacher was available to assist if any difficulties arose.

The participants also filled out the questionnaire on self-efficacy and autonomy after the treatment sessions. They were collected to be analyzed and compared with the pre-test samples to find out the potential effect of learning the formulaic language on them. To have an in-depth understating, a column was added to that questionnaire titled 'explain your reason' so that the participants could write their rationale for opting for certain choice if they wished. This part was analyzed content-wise to add to the richness of the data analyzed quantitatively.

Data Analysis

In order to analyze the data in the quantitative phase, the reliability of the questionnaire was first calculated using Cronbach Alpha internal consistency in SPSS software.

The paired samples t-test was employed as a statistical procedure in the quantitative phase to compare the writing pre-test and post-test results, with the aim of examining the potential effects of the treatment on the writing abilities of EFL learners.

Another statistical procedure, the independent samples t-test, was used to compare the mean scores of the control and experimental groups in the pre-test and post-test, in order to determine if there were any significant differences in their writing proficiency levels before and after the treatment. This same procedure was also carried out on the questionnaire.

In the qualitative analysis of the interview section, the content of the interviews and the comments provided in the questionnaire were examined to identify themes

RESULTS

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 24 (IBM SPSS Statistics 24.0), was used to analyze the EFL learners' performance on the writing task, the self-efficacy

questionnaire, and the learner autonomy questionnaire. To analyze the related data in the quantitative phase, the internal consistency reliability of the instruments and the normality of the pre- and post-test data in the case of both groups were calculated. Next, paired samples and independent samples *t*-tests were performed to compare the mean scores of the control and experimental groups in the pre-test and post-test, in order to determine whether there were any statistically significant differences in their writing performance before and after the treatment. Effect sizes were also reported in terms of the statistical tests performed. Note that this same procedure was also followed for the two questionnaires. To analyze the related data in the qualitative phase, the results of the semi-structured interviews conducted after completing the post-tests were examined by the NVivo Software, Version 12, to identify the extracted themes by means of thematic analysis and content coding.

Writing task

The first research question strove to examine whether the explicit teaching of formulaic sequences through collaborative learning had any significant effect on EFL learners' writing performance. The answer to this question is affirmative. A randomly selected writing task was given to the participants in the experimental group during the pretest and the posttest phases. The internal consistency reliability of the writing task was calculated in terms of the internal consistency of the average scores of the participants in the two groups and with respect to the five scoring criteria, namely task fulfillment, topic development, organization, register and vocabulary, and language control. The Cronbach's Alpha measures related to the total pre- and post-writing tasks (i.e., .81 and .84) and their related individual constructs (i.e., .82, .80, .87, .83, and .84) indicated an overall acceptable level of internal consistency. Then, tests of normality for the writing task pre- and post-tests were run. Taken together, the Shapiro-Wilk test results revealed that the pre- and post-test data in both the experimental and control groups were normally distributed ($P > 0.05$).

Table 2 and Table 3 show the descriptive and inferential information related to the experimental group participants' performance on the writing tasks in both groups before and after the treatment (i.e., explicit teaching of formulaic sequences), respectively. According to Table 2, the mean scores of the experimental group, compared with their control group peers, show improvements in their writing performance from the pretest to the posttest.

Table 2

Descriptive information on the writing performance related to the two groups (n = 80)

Writing task	Groups	*Min*	*Max*	*M*	*SD*	*n*
Pre-test	Exp	8	20	13.53	2.92	40
	Ctrl	9	18	12.85	2.48	40
Post-test	Exp	15	25	18.55	2.44	40
	Ctrl	11	20	14.80	2.46	40

Table 3 presents the results of the independent samples *t*-test indicating that the experimental group participants who underwent collaborative instruction of EFL writing outperformed their control group counterparts (t (78) = 6.83; $p < .05$) with a very large effect size ($d = 1.53$). Therefore, the fourth null hypothesis is rejected since the *p*-value is less than the significance level ($P < 0.05$).

Table 3

Independent samples t-test on the participants' writing performance from pre- to post-test

Groups	Equal variances	*F*	*Sig.*	*t*	*Df*	*Sig (2-tailed)*
Writing Pre-test	Assumed	.91	.34	1.11	78	.27
	Not assumed			1.11	76.01	.27
Writing Post-test	Assumed	.003	.95	6.83	78	.00
	Not assumed			6.83	77.99	.00

We were also interested to compare the EFL writing constructs in the two groups from the pre-test to the posttest. Table 4 presents the descriptive information related to the experimental and control group participants' performance on the EFL writing constructs before and after the treatment.

Table 4

Descriptive information on the writing construct measures related to the two groups (n = 80)

EFL writing constructs	Group	Test	*Min*	*Max*	*M*	*SD*	*n*
Task fulfillment	Exp	Pre	1	5	2.55	1.28	40
		Post	2	6	4.20	1.24	40
	Ctrl	Pre	1	5	2.33	1.22	40
		Post	1	6	3.15	1.14	40
Topic development	Exp	Pre	1	5	3.10	.84	40
		Post	2	6	3.93	1.02	40
	Ctrl	Pre	2	5	2.85	.89	40
		Post	1	5	3.08	.97	40
Organization	Exp	Pre	1	5	2.68	1.09	40
		Post	2	5	3.55	.84	40
	Ctrl	Pre	1	5	2.75	.89	40
		Post	2	5	2.98	.83	40
Register & Vocabulary	Exp	Pre	1	5	2.48	1.01	40
		Post	2	5	3.35	.97	40
	Ctrl	Pre	1	4	2.38	.97	40
		Post	1	5	2.80	.82	40
Language control	Exp	Pre	1	5	2.73	1.06	40
		Post	1	6	3.53	1.13	40
	Ctrl	Pre	1	4	2.55	.90	40
		Post	1	4	2.80	.68	40

Note: Exp = Experimental; Ctrl = Control; Pre = Pretest; Post = Posttest; M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation

In order to examine whether there was any statistical difference between the two groups concerning the above EFL writing constructs, we ran independent samples *t*-tests whose results are tabulated in Table 5 below. As seen from the table, there were statistically significant differences between the two groups in terms of all EFL writing constructs.

Table 5

Independent samples t-test on the EFL writing constructs from pre- to post-test

EFL writing constructs	Equal variances	*F*	*Sig.*	*t*	*Df*	*Sig (2-tailed)*
Task fulfillment	Assumed	1.519	.221	3.927	78	.000
	Not assumed			3.927	77.461	.000
Topic development	Assumed	.823	.367	3.812	78	.000
	Not assumed			3.812	77.793	.000
Organization	Assumed	2.406	.125	3.066	78	.003
	Not assumed			3.066	77.978	.003
Register & Vocabulary	Assumed	2.288	.134	2.726	78	.008
	Not assumed			2.726	75.846	.008
Language control	Assumed	8.543	.005	3.463	78	.001
	Not assumed			3.463	64.290	.001

Self-efficacy questionnaire

The second research question investigated whether the teaching of formulaic sequences had any significant effect on the EFL learners' self-efficacy. The answer to this question is affirmative. A self-efficacy questionnaire was

distributed among the participants in both groups as the pre- and post-tests. The internal consistency reliability of the self-efficacy questionnaire was calculated to be .88 and .81 for the pre- and post-tests, respectively. Then, tests of normality for the self-efficacy scores of the pre- and post-tests were run, suggesting that the pre- and post-test data in both the experimental and control groups were almost normally distributed (P > 0.05).

Table 6 and Table 7 show the descriptive and inferential information related to the participants' performance on the self-efficacy questionnaire before and after the treatment, respectively. As evident from Table 6, the mean scores of the experimental group, compared with their control group peers, show improvements in their self-efficacy scores from the pretest to the posttest.

Table 6
Descriptive information on the self-efficacy scores related to the two groups (n = 80)

Self-efficacy	Groups	*Min*	*Max*	*M*	*SD*	*n*
Pre-test	Exp	35	82	54.35	11.06	40
	Ctrl	34	74	52.75	10.37	40
Post-test	Exp	37	84	61.53	10.92	40
	Ctrl	38	77	56.05	10.09	40

Meanwhile, Table 7 presents the results of the independent samples *t*-test indicating that the experimental group participants who underwent collaborative instruction of EFL writing outperformed their control group counterparts in terms of the self-efficacy measures ($t(78) = 2.32$; $p < .05$). Therefore, the second null hypothesis is rejected since the *p* value is less than the significance level (P < 0.05). In conclusion, the explicit teaching of formulaic sequences had a significant effect with a moderate effect size ($d = .52$) on the EFL learners' self-efficacy measures.

Table 7
Independent samples t-test on the participants' self-efficacy scores from pre- to posttest

Groups	Equal variances	*F*	*Sig.*	*t*	*Df*	*Sig (2-tailed)*
Self-efficacy	Assumed	.05	.81	.66	78	.50
Pre-test	Not assumed			.66	77.68	.50
Self-efficacy	Assumed	.26	.61	2.32	78	.02
Post-test	Not assumed			2.32	77.52	.02

Learner autonomy questionnaire

The third research question studied whether the explicit teaching of formulaic sequences through collaborative learning had any significant effect on the EFL learners' autonomy. The answer to this research question is affirmative. A learner autonomy questionnaire was distributed among the participants in both groups as the pre- and post-tests. The internal consistency reliability of the self-efficacy questionnaire was calculated to be .76 and .81 in the pre- and post-test, respectively. The Cronbach's Alpha measures related to the total learner autonomy scores and the related constructs show an overall acceptable level of internal consistency. Then, the tests of normality for the autonomy pre- and post-tests revealed that the pre- and post-test data in both the experimental and control groups were normally distributed (P > 0.05).

Table 8 and Table 9 present the descriptive and inferential information related to the participants' performance on the autonomy questionnaire before and after the treatment, respectively. As shown in Table 8, the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group reveal improvements in their autonomy scores from the pretest to the posttest.

Table 8

Descriptive information on the learners' autonomy related to the two groups (n = 80)

Autonomy	Groups	*Min*	*Max*	*M*	*SD*	*n*
Pre-test	Exp	98	159	130.53	14.28	40
	Ctrl	103	167	132.15	13.64	40
Post-test	Exp	118	174	147.30	14.03	40
	Ctrl	112	164	138.80	12.075	40

Also, Table 9 presents the results of the independent samples *t*-test, indicating statistically significant improvement with a moderate effect size (d = .64) in the overall autonomy measures between the two groups from the pretest to the post test. Therefore, the third null hypothesis is rejected since the *p*-value is less than the significance level ($P < 0.05$).

Table 9

Independent samples t-test on the participants' autonomy scores from pre- to post-test

Groups	Equal variances	*F*	*Sig.*	*t*	*Df*	*Sig (2-tailed)*
Autonomy Pre-test	Assumed	.012	.912	-.520	78	.604
	Not assumed			-.520	77.834	.604
Autonomy Post-test	Assumed	1.055	.308	2.904	78	.005
	Not assumed			2.904	76.302	.005

We were also interested to compare the autonomy constructs in the two groups from the pretest to the posttest. Table 10 and Table 11 present the descriptive and inferential information related to the participants' performance on the learner autonomy constructs before and after the treatment, respectively.

Table 10

Descriptive information on the autonomy constructs related to the two groups (n = 80)

Autonomy constructs	Groups	Test	*Min*	*Max*	*M*	*SD*
Readiness for self-direction	**Exp**	Pre	10	40	18.30	4.36
		Post	14	29	21.73	4.20
	Ctrl	Pre	9	27	18.48	4.70
		Post	10	27	19.50	4.40
Independent work for language learning	**Exp**	Pre	11	29	18.45	3.94
		Post	12	28	19.63	3.65
	Ctrl	Pre	12	26	18.18	3.81
		Post	14	27	19.93	3.77
Importance of class/teacher	**Exp**	Pre	18	34	26.35	4.26
		Post	20	36	28.25	4.06
	Ctrl	Pre	20	34	25.93	3.71
		Post	21	35	27.03	3.71
Role of teacher: Explanation/Supervision	**Exp**	Pre	14	23	18.13	2.26
		Post	14	23	19.65	2.25
	Ctrl	Pre	12	24	17.63	2.94
		Post	14	25	19.13	2.60
Language learning activities outside the class	**Exp**	Pre	8	18	13.33	2.74
		Post	10	18	14.48	2.00
	Ctrl	Pre	11	18	13.93	1.77
		Post	12	19	15.20	1.92
Selecting content	**Exp**	Pre	4	14	8.65	2.54
		Post	6	14	9.58	1.92
	Ctrl	Pre	5	13	9.03	1.84

		Post	8	13	10.18	1.37
Intrinsic motivation	**Exp**	Pre	6	12	9.63	1.46
		Post	10	13	11.03	1.00
	Ctrl	Pre	7	13	9.45	1.46
		Post	8	13	10.13	1.28
Assessment motivation	**Exp**	Pre	2	24	9.95	6.36
		Post	3	22	12.70	6.32
	Ctrl	Pre	3	23	10.45	6.37
		Post	3	24	9.40	6.36
Interest in other cultures	**Exp**	Pre	2	23	7.75	5.70
		Post	3	20	10.28	6.05
	Ctrl	Pre	2	20	9.10	5.91
		Post	2	20	8.33	5.40

In order to examine whether there were any statistical differences between the two groups concerning the above autonomy constructs, we ran independent samples *t*-tests, whose results are tabulated in Table 11 below. As seen from the table, there were statistically significant differences between the two groups in terms of three autonomy constructs, namely readiness for self-direction (t (77.83) = 2.31; p = .02), intrinsic motivation (t (78) = 3.49; p = .00), and assessment motivation (t (78) = 2.32; p = .02). Besides, no statistically significant differences were found in terms of the remaining constructs.

Table 11

Independent samples t-test on the learner autonomy constructs from pre- to post-test

Autonomy constructs	**Equal variances**	***F***	***Sig.***	***T***	***Df***	***Sig (2-tailed)***
Readiness for self-direction	Assumed	.005	.941	2.311	78	.023
	Not assumed			2.311	77.838	.023
Independent work for language learning	Assumed	.240	.625	-.361	78	.719
	Not assumed			-.361	77.916	.719
Importance of class/teacher	Assumed	.240	.625	1.406	78	.164
	Not assumed			1.406	77.374	.164
Role of teacher: Explanation / Supervision	Assumed	.367	.546	.963	78	.338
	Not assumed			.963	76.483	.338
Language learning activities outside the class	Assumed	.227	.635	-1.652	78	.103
	Not assumed			-1.652	77.884	.103
Selecting content	Assumed	5.474	.022	-1.607	78	.112
	Not assumed			-1.607	70.682	.113
Intrinsic motivation	Assumed	.842	.362	3.497	78	.001
	Not assumed			3.497	73.557	.001
Assessment motivation	Assumed	.495	.484	2.325	78	.023
	Not assumed			2.325	77.996	.023
Interest in other cultures	Assumed	1.485	.227	1.518	78	.133
	Not assumed			1.518	77.013	.133

The fourth research question probed into the EFL learners' attitude toward collaborative learning of incorporating formulaic language in their EFL writing. A semi-structured interview was conducted after running the posttests to collect 10 participants' opinions with regard to the fourth research question. The researcher asked five interview questions whose content validity has previously been validated by two professors in the subject-specific field. These questions have been adapted from and regenerated based on Abahussain (2020), Farrah (2015), and Nguyen and Phuong (2021). The interview questions are presented in Table 12 below.

Table 12

Interview questions on collaborative EFL writing

No	Interview questions
1	What is your opinion about collaborative writing?
2	What are the perceived advantages/disadvantages of writing collaboratively? Please provide some examples.
3	What challenges or difficulties have you faced while writing collaboratively? Please provide some examples.
4	How do you perceive your writing skills after receiving the treatment and performing the writing tasks collaboratively?
5	What effects did writing collaboratively have on your self-efficacy and autonomy, in particular?

To present the results of the semi-structured interview, we extracted 16 themes on the benefits and downsides of the collaborative EFL writing after reaching saturation during the content-coding and thematic analysis, during which the interview data were transcribed and coded to develop themes. These themes are presented in Table 13 below.

Table 13

The participants' attitude toward collaborative EFL writing

No	Perceived benefits	*n*	*%*	Perceived challenges	*n*	*%*
1	Useful exchange of knowledge	9	90%	Conflicts due to differences in opinions and learning tyles	8	80%
2	Immediate written feedback	7	70%	No more knowledgeable other	5	50%
3	Improved linguistic features (e.g., content, organization, grammar, & vocabulary)	6	60%	Uncooperative group mates	5	50%
4	Higher quality work	6	60%	Time management issues	4	40%
5	Faster task completion	5	50%	Miscommunication	3	30%
6	Improved confidence and self-efficacy	4	40%	Stress	2	20%
7	Improved autonomy	4	40%			
8	Improved interpersonal skills	3	30%			
9	Enhanced negotiation skills	2	20%			
10	Enhanced management skills	1	10%			

Benefits of collaborative EFL writing

The three prime advantages of collaborative EFL writing were useful exchange of knowledge, immediate written feedback, and improved linguistic features. Most participants (90%) believed that collaborative EFL writing would give them the opportunity to provide each other with mutual assistance through which they could exchange knowledge and improve their writing performance. Another point raised was the opportunity to provide immediate written feedback, which they (70%) thought was very timely and effective and would improve their motivation for writing better each time. The third most important factor (60%) mentioned was improved linguistic features

(e.g., content, organization, grammar, and vocabulary).

Challenges of collaborative EFL writing

The participants also mentioned some shortcomings or challenges that they had to face while sharing their ideas with their partners during collaborative EFL writing that would hinder its effectiveness. The three most elemental shortcomings were conflicts of opinions and learning styles, no more knowledgeable others, and uncooperative group mates, that can be discerned in the interviewee's opinions. For example, Ahmad refers to a challenge that was also mentioned by most of the other interviewees (80%), that is, conflicts of opinions and learning styles. He believed that members of each group might engage in arguments when they had different ideas about a specific point. A second noticeable problem (50%) was the lack of a more knowledgeable other to ask questions from. A Lack of knowledge would reduce the quality of the writing since someone would apply a comment that was not in fact correct. The third most disturbing issue (50%) to tackle was uncooperative group mates. For example, one participant asserted that his peer was not really contributive in terms of sharing his knowledge and ideas, and this would delay the writing process and annoy him.

DISCUSSION

The present research study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of the explicit instruction of incorporating formulaic language in improving EFL learners' writing performance, self-efficacy, and autonomy. To this end, following the previous line of research, we arrived at five research questions that are discussed below.

The first research question strove to examine whether the explicit teaching of formulaic sequences through collaborative learning had any significant effect on EFL learners' writing performance. The answer to this question was affirmative. The reason for this outperformance was that the participants were probably studying English to be language teachers in the future, which provided fresh impetus for them to learn the formulaic sequences with enthusiasm. We have observed that the experimental group participants used more types of the target formulaic language items compared with the control group, which is also in line with Peters and Pauwels' (2015) and Wonglakorn and Deerajviset's (2023) study, reporting that collaborative writing improved the EFL learners' writing skills. In addition, it was found that high-proficient EFL learners would use varied vocabulary and recheck the accuracy of their writing with the aid of their teacher. However, individual learning of using formulaic sequences, especially by low-proficiency EFL learners, can be difficult as they will have to use their dictionaries more frequently and use translation tools to generate ideas. Besides, they might lose their attention once in a while as they are writing.

It has been found that collaborative learning and meaningful interactions also play a crucial role in sociocultural perspectives on formulaic language development. When learners engage in communicative activities with their peers, they have opportunities to negotiate meaning, exchange ideas, and co-construct knowledge. This collaborative environment allows learners to practice using formulaic language in authentic interactions, incorporating feedback and adapting their language use based on social cues and contextual demands. By participating in these interactive tasks, learners develop not only their linguistic skills but also their sociocultural awareness and sensitivity.

The second research question investigated whether the teaching of formulaic sequences through collaborative learning had any significant effect on EFL learners' self-efficacy. The answer to this question was affirmative. As learners became more proficient in using these formulaic sequences through collaborative learning, their confidence in their language abilities increased, thereby, it boosted their self-efficacy. Thus, the treatment fostered a sense of competence and achievement by engaging the EFL learners in meaningful and interactive writing tasks that required communication and problem-solving. Besides, providing effective and constructive error correction is essential for supporting learners' self-efficacy. When peers or more knowledgeable others, such as teachers, provide timely and targeted feedback on learners' EFL writing, it assists them with identifying

and correcting their mistakes, leading to their improved accuracy and fluency in EFL writing. Constructive feedback that focuses on both strengths and areas for improvement helps learners understand that mistakes are a natural part of the learning process and that they have the ability to correct and improve their language skills (Zonoubi et al., 2017).

We have observed throughout the process that the EFL learners would set goals and regularly monitor their progress, leading them toward applying effective strategies. This was perhaps one of the reasons for enhancing their self-efficacy. When learners have particular goals to achieve, they develop a sense of purpose and direction in their language learning process. Therefore, teachers are able to guide learners in setting achievable goals and provide opportunities for learners to track their progress. Celebrating milestones and acknowledging progress along the way reinforces learners' belief in their abilities and motivates them to continue striving for success (Thoai, 2020). Besides, we have found that creating a supportive learning environment is crucial for fostering learners' self-efficacy (Sökmen, 2021). A positive and encouraging classroom atmosphere where learners feel safe to take risks, ask questions, and seek help promotes a sense of belonging and builds learners' confidence. In this respect, teachers can facilitate peer collaboration, provide opportunities for learners to support and learn from each other, and cultivate a growth mindset that emphasizes the value of effort and perseverance in language learning.

In general, our findings are aligned with those found in Lee and Evans (2019), Li (2023), and Rahimi and Fathi (2022) who found that the collaborative writing instruction enhanced the EFL learners' self-efficacy and motivation. The reason is that such an instruction provides opportunities for collaboration, immediate revision, and feedback. Through receiving timely and effective feedback from peers, the EFL learners feel that they are more in control of their learning process and this increases their confidence in their ability to produce quality writing works. In addition, the EFL learners' interest and motivation toward EFL writing is substantially boosted and their writing anxiety is also lowered, which assists them with tackling the challenges that arise during the process.

However, Van Blankenstein et al. (2019) reported that the script-workgroups collaborated similar to those in non-script-workgroups and thus, collaborative EFL writing through script and non-script workgroups did not leave a significant impact on the participants' self-efficacy beliefs due to reasons such as not following the instructions completely and sharing ideas between groups.

The third research question studied whether the explicit teaching of formulaic sequences through collaborative learning had any significant effect on the EFL learners' autonomy. The answer to this research question was affirmative, particularly in terms of autonomy constructs, such as their readiness for self-direction, intrinsic motivation, and assessment motivation. In general, encouraging learner autonomy allows EFL learners to take ownership of their learning and develop a sense of control over their language production. Providing opportunities for learners to make choices, such as selecting topics, materials, or tasks, fosters a sense of responsibility and empowerment. Autonomy in learning helps learners feel more capable and confident in their language abilities, thereby also enhancing their self-direction and self-efficacy (Sousa, et al., 2012). In any event, findings of the present study corroborated the effectiveness of collaborative learning of formulaic sequences in promoting learner autonomy and motivation, as learners take an active role in their language learning process (Renaldi, 2020).

When learners work together in pairs or groups to learn and apply strategies or practice the instructed points, such as the use of formulaic language, they benefit from the collective knowledge and experiences of their peers. Collaborative environments create opportunities for learners to share their insights, provide feedback, and engage in meaningful discussions about language learning (Assassi & Benyelles, 2016). Through these collaborative interactions, learners' beliefs about their own abilities and the effectiveness of different strategies can be transformed, leading to increased autonomy in their learning journey. Therefore, it stands to reason that educators should introduce a range

of strategies and guide learners in applying them to different language tasks. Opportunities for collaborative learning, such as group discussions, peer feedback, and project-based activities, should be integrated into the curriculum to foster learner autonomy.

Moreover, integrating formulaic language into communicative activities promotes learner confidence besides autonomy (Sirkel, 2017). When learners have the opportunity to use formulaic expressions in communicative contexts, they gain a sense of ownership and control over their language use. They become more confident in their ability to navigate real-life situations and express themselves effectively. Integrating formulaic language into communicative activities also encourages learners to take risks and experiment with their language production, fostering a positive and supportive learning environment. In general, findings are in compliance with those of Nasiri and Khorshidi (2015) and Chun-guang (2014) who found significant results in terms of the participants' autonomy measures due to the 16-week dynamic assessment practices and a 1-year corpus-based instruction of formulaic chunks, respectively. Besides, Li (2023) found similar results in terms of developing learner autonomy and self-directed learning through the application of online collaborative writing instruction.

However, our findings run counter to those of El-Dakhs et al. (2017), who found that despite the treatment period, the explicit instruction of formulaic sequences did not result in statistically significant improvements in the EFL learners' autonomous story re-writing. The findings are also in dissonance with those of Čolović-Marković (2012), who could not arrive at any statistical significance in terms of the uncontrolled and autonomous activity of essay writing. The reasons for this inconsistency were a need for more elaborate and systematic intervention, longer treatment periods, and higher proficiency levels to identify the formulaic sequences independently and apply them to their subsequent writings despite the treatment periods. These factors may improve the effect of the explicit teaching of using formulaic language in EFL writing collaboratively on EFL learners' autonomy, particularly autonomy constructs such as independent work for language learning, the importance of class/teacher, the role of the teacher (e.g., explanation/supervision), language learning activities outside the class, selecting content, and interest in other cultures. Notwithstanding, incorporating formulaic language courses in EFL learning promotes learner autonomy. By providing learners with the knowledge and tools to recognize and utilize formulaic language, educators empower learners to take an active role in their language development. Learners gain the independence to seek out and incorporate formulaic expressions and sequences in their language production. This autonomy allows learners to adapt their language use to different contexts and communicate effectively with a range of interlocutors (Roy, 2017).

The fourth and the last research question probed into the EFL learners' attitude toward collaborative learning of incorporating formulaic language in their EFL writing. The participants collectively mentioned 10 benefits of collaborative EFL writing, namely useful exchange of knowledge, immediate written feedback, improved linguistic features (e.g., content, organization, grammar, and vocabulary), higher quality work, faster task completion, improved confidence and self-efficacy, improved autonomy, improved interpersonal skills, enhanced negotiation skills, and finally enhanced management skills. These findings are in line with those of Wonglakorn and Deerajviset (2023), whose participants had positive attitudes towards collaborative EFL writing since they could share ideas and assist each other with developing their written tasks. Besides, collaborative learning improved their writing in terms of constructs, such as organization, coherence and accuracy. Similar results were also reported in Khodabakhshzadeh and Samadi (2018) revealing that collaborative writing instruction can lead to higher levels of motivation, peer feedback, and vocabulary learning, and would change the ineffective writing habits of the EFL learners. Coffin (2020) also enumerated a number of benefits, such as enhanced teamwork, communication, and problem-solving skills, which go along with the findings of the present research.

On the contrary, the participants in the present study referred to a number of shortcomings and challenges they had to face while writing collaboratively, namely conflicts due to differences in opinions and learning styles, no more knowledgeable other, uncooperative group mates, time management issues, miscommunication, and stress. Along these lines, Wonglakorn and Deerajviset (2023) found that working in groups of three or more especially working with introverted and low-willingness-to-communicate EFL learners could be troublesome as there will be more diverse ideas shared or reluctance to participate. Khodabakhshzadeh and Samadi (2018) also reported the peer and teacher authority as inhibiting factors. Finally, Coffin (2020) touched upon two issues, namely fairness of teamwork contribution and assessment, which were left unresolved.

CONCLUSION

The present research study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of the explicit instruction of incorporating formulaic language in improving EFL learners' writing performance, self-efficacy, and autonomy. Findings of the present research in terms of the first research question revealed significant improvements in undergraduate EFL learners' writing performance as a result of the explicit teaching of formulaic sequences. In other words, the findings suggested that the incorporation of systematic, explicit teaching of formulaic sequences in the form of collaborative learning instruction within the conventional EFL writing classes is more effective than following the regular procedures of traditional EFL writing instruction featuring individualized learning of formulaic sequences. Thus, we found that it was important to know what type of explicit exposure was more effective in that particular context and how it could benefit learning. The other findings were the participants' adequate intrinsic motivation to be engaged and involved in the writing tasks collaboratively designed for maximized learning.

In addition, it was found that the teaching of formulaic sequences using a collaborative learning mode has a significant effect on the EFL learners' self-efficacy and autonomy levels. As learners became more proficient in using these formulaic sequences through collaborative learning, their confidence in their language abilities increased; thereby, it boosted their self-efficacy. Providing opportunities for learners to make choices, such as selecting topics, materials, or tasks, fosters a sense of responsibility and empowerment. Also, it was found that there was a significant difference between collaborative and individual learning of incorporating formulaic language in EFL learners' writing. When learners engage in communicative activities with their peers, they have opportunities to negotiate meaning, exchange ideas, and co-construct knowledge. This collaborative environment allows learners to practice using formulaic language in authentic interactions, incorporating feedback and adapting their language use based on social cues and contextual demands. The undergraduate EFL learners believed that the collaborative instruction of the formulaic sequences has a number of benefits such as useful exchange of knowledge, immediate written feedback, improved linguistic features (e.g., content, organization, grammar, & vocabulary), higher quality work, faster task completion, improved confidence and self-efficacy, improved autonomy, improved interpersonal skills, enhanced negotiation skills, and finally enhanced management skills. On the contrary, the participants in the present study referred to a number of shortcomings and challenges they had to face while writing collaboratively, namely conflicts due to differences in opinions and learning styles, no more knowledgeable other, uncooperative group mates, time management issues, miscommunication, and stress.

All in all, our findings can usher policy-makers, curriculum designers and even material developers into designing materials and coursebooks that require the teachers to engage the EFL learners in active participation and co-construction of their writings with the aid of peer-collaboration.

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