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## Effects of Non-integrated vs. Integrated Tasks on EFL Learners' Writing Development: Content and Organization in Focus

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### Abstract

The current study aimed to investigate whether there was any significant difference between the effects of non-integrated tasks and reading-writing integrated tasks on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' writing development in terms of content and organization of their writings. To this end, 60 male and female adult Iranian undergraduate EFL university students were selected through convenience sampling and divided into two equal experimental groups and one control group. The integrated reading-writing group was presented with a reading passage of approximately four paragraphs simultaneously with teaching writing. The non-integrated group accomplished and submitted the reading and writing assignments in each session. In contrast, the control group received placebo instruction on writing and reading skills through the conventional methods of teaching writing. For the purpose of the study, writing tasks and a writing scoring rubric were utilized. The results revealed that there was no significant difference between the effects of non-integrated tasks and reading-writing integrated tasks on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' writing development in terms of content, but there was a significant difference between the effects of non-integrated tasks and reading-writing integrated tasks on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' writing development concerning the organization. The findings might have theoretical and pedagogical implications for EFL teachers, learners, and curriculum designers.

**Keywords:** Integrated Tasks; Non-integrated Tasks; Reading-writing; Task; Writing Content; Writing Organization

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### INTRODUCTION

Learning to write is one of the most problematic facets of learning a second language since writing is the scariest and most difficult task which requires deliberate effort. Writing ability has taken a prominent role in contemporary research and pedagogy. Writing is seen to be the most important representation of language and the foundation of all linguistic abilities

(Silva & Matsuda, 2012).

It is a valuable tool for L2 students in both learning and communication. It gives students the abilities and attributes they need to cope successfully with real-life circumstances, especially in today's modern world, where, owing to recent technological advances, a person may send a variety of messages to a closer or distant reader or readers. Two variables are credited by Hyland (2003) for this prominence.

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On the one hand, mastering effective writing abilities is becoming increasingly important in preparing students for 21st-century success—the capacity to express thoughts and facts in a clear and concise manner. In the literature, a fundamental problem in integrated writing has been overlooked. Given that an integrated writing job necessitates hearing or reading stimulus and materials followed by a written summary of the source information, the essential question that emerges is to what degree the integrated writing ability may influence the outcome of the integrated approach's education. This information is required in order to adopt the integrated approach to writing instruction in a broad-based manner. Reading and listening are both receptive skills that can support the growth of productive skills such as writing. However, there is no conclusive evidence as to how these two talents vary in their ability to develop writing skills.

Writing in a second language is challenging and demanding, both for teachers who choose to teach it and for students who make an attempt to acquire it (Nation, 2008). Instruction of second language writing is perhaps the greatest thought-provoking job that second language practitioners face. It's difficult since the amount of time spent on class preparation and paper grading far outnumbers the amount of time spent in the classroom. Even more challenging is determining how to effectively aid pupils in their efforts to learn to write in another language. As a result, there has been a recent boom in introducing novel strategies for boosting writing education and learning (e.g., Frodesen, 2018; Hyland & Hyland, 2019; Jiang & Ribeiro, 2017; Widiati, 2016). According to the traditional approach in language education, writing serves primarily to reinforce patterns of spoken language usage, grammar, and vocabulary. However, the idea that writing is a meaningful endeavor in and of itself is gradually displacing it (Hyland, 2015). As a result, innovative ways to teach second or foreign language writing that include contemporary ideas and research findings are receiving much attention these days.

In ESL classrooms, research on integrated and segregated methods to skills instruction

has shown some intriguing results. In some classroom situations, discrete teaching techniques might be effective. When skills are taught discretely, learners have the opportunity to master them completely in a separate setting. They make unique improvements in each skill here. Hinkel (2010) backs this up by stating that teaching distinct language abilities in class allows for more concentrated instruction and intensive learning. Using numerous abilities simultaneously might be problematic for learners in some instances, especially if they are not fluent in the language. If a student is faced with a complicated assignment requiring a wide range of abilities, they will likely struggle and get demotivated.

Teaching integrated skills can be challenging. According to Jing (2006), Hinkel (2010), and Klimova (2014), tasks mix numerous language skills, and learners practice numerous communicative processes all at once, putting greater strains on both the teachers and learners.

Teachers must work hard to identify or create resources that are acceptable for skill integration in the classroom, as well as arrange assignments and activities that balance all four skills for genuine application. As a result, according to Akram and Malik (2010), integration necessitates a significant amount of effort and tolerance on the part of teachers.

Although abilities are trained independently in an isolated skills approach, several skills are organically integrated into the class. It is unreasonable and difficult to employ only one skill in class when the skills are combined and applied in real life. For example, Oxford (2001) mentions that in a reading class, learners require listening skills to understand the teacher's instructions and speaking skills, resulting in a natural integration of listening, speaking, and reading skills in the classroom. Likewise, while a certain ability may be stressed in textbooks, other language abilities are nevertheless used through the exercises offered in the textbook.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The theory of integrated-skills training is founded on the idea that oral and written languages are not maintained separate and

separated from one another in everyday life. Instead, they frequently occur in tandem as part of certain communication events (Peregoy & Boyle, 2001). Because both promote meaningful and authentic language usage and integrate oral and written language development, this method is consistent with communicative language teaching and the entire language.

The four talents, according to Klimova (2014), represent both the goals and the means of communication. Learners will be able to employ realistic language in real-life situations as a result of skill integration. Additionally, learners' progress in several skills improves as a result of this method (Oxford, 2001). Furthermore, instead of promoting structural items, the meaning of language is promoted, giving learners the opportunity to acquire practical characteristics of the language (Klimova, 2014). It is very motivating for students to prioritize learning to communicate over simply passing a test (Oxford, 2001). Language abilities are rarely utilized in isolation in practice; for instance, a discussion requires both speaking and listening comprehension. Furthermore, in some situations, reading, listening, and taking notes (writing) are virtually as common as having a discussion (Baturay & Akar, 2014; Hinkel, 2010; Tajzad & Namaghi, 2014).

In English language teaching, effective English writing has always been a struggle (Manchón, 2016). Non-integrated writing has been the most common approach of L2 writing since the beginning (Hyland, 2015). Independent writing, or non-integrative writing as it is more generally referred to in most references, is a method of writing in which students write on their own (Anderson, 2019). Students are taught to construct their own written texts during independent writing by drawing on knowledge and abilities learned through earlier instructor modeling and guided practice (Cumming, 2016). The development of written texts is the direct result of teacher training in this manner. Teacher training is designed to help students gain knowledge and abilities related to various types of texts and the writing process (Zhang, 2017).

Teacher teaching in EFL/ESL is usually described as support or scaffolding (Lantolf, Thorne, & Poehner, 2015) and is conceptualized in connection to Vygotsky's theoretical viewpoints (1998). Scaffolding is stated to transition from full support during instructor modeling to less support during guided instruction or joint engagement with students. Finally, there is no support when students write freely (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014). Teachers are considered to be working within students' zones of proximal development when they provide scaffolding to the entire class, small groups, or individual students (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014).

According to post-method academics such as Oxford (2001), integrated language education is a good technique for language acquisition in general. "The instructional loom is likely to produce something little, weak, ragged, and pale—not recognized as a tapestry at all" (Oxford, 2001, p. 33)

Aljiffri (2010) conducted research to offer a complete explanation of the integrated curriculum and its multiple variants, tracked by an assessment study of amalgamation integrating English and Social Studies reading abilities. As an illustration of the real-world aspect of curricular integration, the sequenced form of amalgamation of reading and writing abilities in a foreign language and social studies was used. The results showed that the integrated strategy resulted in greater advances in learning development and social studies accomplishment.

Soleimani and Mahdavi-pour (2014) used a quantitative technique to look at how written textual aspects and the utilization of source material(s) differed across two types of text-based integrated writing tasks (listening-to-write vs. reading-to-write) and two levels of language ability (i.e., high vs. low). Purposive sampling was used to choose sixty Iranian English major students, who were then separated into low and high competence groups based on an IELTS practice exam. After that, they had to complete a listening-to-write and a reading-to-write challenge. The findings revealed that, first, differences in integrated writing tasks, and a level of proficiency, had a

significant impact on all generated discourse features; second, the two types of integrated tasks produced features that were similar, and third, some features could distinguish a specific level of proficiency. Gholami and Alinasab (2017) investigated the fundamental tactics used and favored by EFL learners while engaging in integrated writing complications in another study. Yang and Plakans' (2012) context on the employment of discourse production, self-regulatory, and test-wisness methods, as well as their interaction, was used in this study. The study's principal data collecting tool was the Strategy Inventory for Integrated Writing (SIIW), which was adapted from Yang and Plakans (2012). In the last session of a TOEFL iBT preparatory course, 101 EFL learners answered the questionnaire to check their acquaintance with integrated writing tasks and to investigate the tactics utilized by the subjects in completing the assignments. According to the findings of the Friedman rank test, discourse production was the highest desired method, whereas self-regulatory and test-wisness techniques were valued less. The Pearson Correlation Coefficient established a substantial association between self-regulatory and test-wisness strategies, but the discourse production strategy displayed no important affiliation with the other two strategies.

Cumming, Lai, and Cho (2016) conducted synthesis research in this area, providing a complete overview of the studies that focused on the capacities of source-oriented tasks. They suggested that providing explicit training on source-oriented writing can provide authors with several possibilities to improve the quality of their written projects. On the other hand, this synthesis research simply looked at reading as a modality that could be combined with writing.

Gholami and Alinasab (2017) conducted a follow-up study in which twenty female students who enrolled in a TOEFL iBT preparation course were randomly assigned to one of two groups: an only-writing group receiving only autonomous writing teaching and essay preparation, and a mixed-writing-approach group receiving both independent writing and source-based essay writing instruction and practice for ten sessions. According to the re-

sults, individuals who practiced mixed writing outpaced their peers in integrated essay evaluations. In typical independent writing activities, their greater performance was not found. The above-mentioned problems in the literature motivated the current study. The skill to write in English is well-thought-out as a grave obstacle for EFL learners, especially in the EFL context of Iran, where research on meticulous and fresh ways of writing instruction has received scant attention. The following research questions and hypotheses were, therefore, addressed in the current study:

**RQ1.** *Is there a significant difference between the effects of non-integrated tasks and reading-writing integrated tasks on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' writing development in terms of content?*

**RQ2.** *Is there a significant difference between the effects of non-integrated tasks and reading-writing integrated tasks on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' writing development in terms of organization?*

**Ho1.** There is no significant difference between the effects of non-integrated tasks and reading-writing integrated tasks on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' writing development in terms of the content of the essay.

**Ho2.** There is no significant difference between the effects of non-integrated tasks and reading-writing integrated tasks on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' writing development in terms of the organization of the essay.

## METHODOLOGY

### Design and Context of the Study

The present study was conducted under a quantitative quasi-experimental design with a pre-test, post-test sequence. The quasi-experimental design included a separate sample pre-test/post-test control group. Due to practical constraints, random assignment of the groups was not possible. The study was conducted in Sheikhabaee University, Isfahan, Iran, with Iranian undergraduate students in essay writing courses during the 2020 academic year.

### Participants

In the current study, a nonprobability sampling technique (convenience/opportunity sampling)

was utilized to select the participants. They comprised 60 male and female adult Persian-speaking EFL university students with the age range of 19 to 24. They came from three

intact *essay writing* classes in Sheikhabaeh University, Isfahan, Iran. The demographic representation of the participants is shown in Table 1 below:

**Table 2**  
*Descriptive Statistics for the OPT Scores of the Learners*

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Shapiro-Wilk's Test of Normality	
					Statistic	Sig.
NIG	30	34.46	2.86	.52	.949	.155
RWIG	30	35.26	2.08	.38	.947	.138
LWIG	30	35.03	2.48	.45	.932	.056

The OPT mean scores of the learners in the NIG (M = 34.46), (M = 35.26), and (M = 35.03) are not very different from one another. The ANOVA table below determines whether the differences among the three groups are of statistical significance or not. Before checking Table 3, however, it should

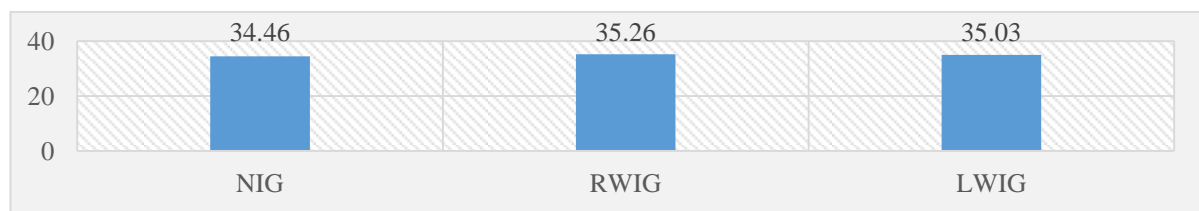
be noted that the distributions for the OPT scores of the two groups are homogeneous because the p values under the Sig. The column of Shapiro-Wilk's test in the above table is larger than the .05 level of significance, indicating no deviation from the postulation of normality.

**Table 3**  
*One-way ANOVA Results for the OPT Scores of the Learners*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	10.15	2	5.07	.81	.44
Within Groups	542.30	87	6.23		
Total	552.45	89			

It could be seen in Table 3 above that there are no significant differences among the OPT scores of the learners in the three groups,  $F(87, 2) = .81$ ,

$p = .44 > .05$ . The approximate equality of the mean scores of the three groups of learners is shown in the bar graph in Figure 1:



**Figure 1**  
*OPT mean scores of the learners*

The bar graph in Figure 1 above reveals that the mean scores of the NIG, RWIG and LWIG learners are roughly the same. Thus, the differences among the learners in the experiment could not be attributed to factors like pre-existing differences among the learners.

### Testing the First Hypothesis

The writing content post-test scores of the learners in the NIG and RWIG had to be compared to test the first null hypothesis of the study; namely, that there is no significant difference between the

effects of non-integrated tasks and reading-writing integrated tasks on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' writing development in terms of the content of the essay, and to answer the first research question. Nonetheless, It was necessary to to make sure that there were no pre-existing disparities between the learners in the two groups in terms of writing content pre-test scores, or that the discrepancies had been adjusted for. Hence, a one-way ANCOVA was conducted because this statistical test could control for any possible pre-existing

differences between the two groups and compare their post-test scores. Table 5

shows the results of the descriptive statistics for this ANCOVA analysis:

**Table 5**  
*Descriptive Statistics for Writing Content Post-test Scores of the NIG and RWIG Learners*

Groups	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Shapiro-Wilk's Test of Normality	
				Statistic	Sig.
NIG	2.46	.82	30	.948	.146
RWIG	3.83	.71	30	.938	.068
Total	3.15	1.03	60	-	-

The writing content post-test mean score of the NIG learners ( $M = 2.46$ ) was found to be smaller than the writing content post-test mean score of the RWIG learners ( $M = 3.83$ ). To figure out whether the RWIG

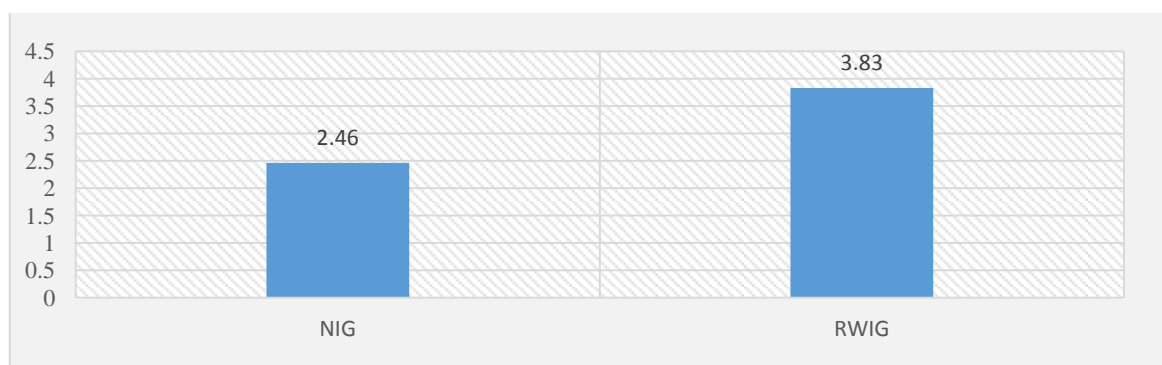
learners significantly outperformed their NIG counterparts in terms of writing content on the post-test or not, the results of the one-way ANCOVA table (Table 6) had to be examined:

**Table 6**  
*One-way ANCOVA for the Writing Content Post-test Scores of the NIG and RWIG Learners*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	53.56	2	26.78	168.11	.000	.85
Intercept	40.77	1	40.77	255.91	.000	.81
Pre-test	25.55	1	25.55	160.38	.000	.73
Groups	26.23	1	26.23	164.64	.000	.74
Error	9.08	57	.15			
Total	658.00	60				
Corrected Total	62.65	59				

Table 6 demonstrates that the p-value under the Sig. column and across the row labeled is lower than the alpha level of significance ( $p < .05$ ), which indicates that the difference between the learners in the NIG ( $M = 2.46$ ) and RWIG ( $M = 3.83$ ) on the writing content post-test reached statistical significance. In other words, those exposed to reading-writing integrated tasks significantly outperformed the learners who received non-integrated tasks with respect to their writing

content scores. The effect size value, shown under the Partial Eta Squared column, shows that the magnitude of the effect was a very large one (.74), based on Cohen (1988, as cited in Pallant 2010), who proposed the following guideline for the interpretation of the effect size: .01 = small, .06 = moderate, and .14 = large. Figure 2 also illustrates the fact that the RWIG learners managed to get a significantly better mean score than the NIG learners on the post-test of writing content:



**Figure 2**  
*Writing content post-test mean scores of the NIG and RWIG learners*

The bar graph in Figure 2 shows that the difference between the NIG and RWIG learners' writing content post-test scores was considerable, with the latter considerably outperforming the former. This disproves the study's first null hypothesis; namely, that there is a significant difference in the effects of non-integrated tasks and reading-writing integrated tasks on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' writing development in terms of essay content, with the reading-writing integrated tasks winning out.

### Testing the Second Hypothesis

The second null hypothesis of the present

study posited that there was no significant difference between the effects of non-integrated tasks and reading-writing integrated tasks on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' writing development in terms of the organization of the essay. To test this hypothesis, once again a one-way ANCOVA was conducted to compare the writing organization post-test scores of the NIG and RWIG learners while at the same time controlling for any putative differences between their writing organization pre-test scores. Tables 6 and 7 present the results obtained from this one-way ANCOVA analysis.

**Table 7**

*Descriptive Statistics for Writing Organization Post-test Scores of the NIG and RWIG Learners*

Groups	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Shapiro-Wilk's Test of Normality	
				Statistic	Sig.
NIG	2.55	.81	30	.944	.119
RWIG	3.45	.54	30	.951	.174
Total	3.00	.82	60	-	-

It could be found in Table 6 that on the writing organization post-test, the RWIG learners ( $M = 3.45$ ) had a higher mean score than the NIG learners ( $M = 2.55$ ). In order to see whether this difference between the writ-

ing organization post-test mean scores of the two groups was statistically significant or not, the p-value under the Sig. column in front of the Groups row had to be checked (Table 8).

**Table 8**

*One-way ANCOVA for Writing Organization Post-test Scores of the NIG and RWIG Learners*

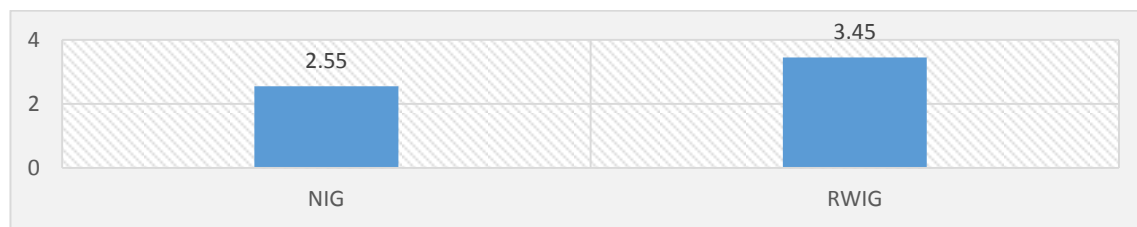
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	28.08	2	14.04	67.16	.000	.70
Intercept	54.60	1	54.60	261.20	.000	.82
Pre-test	15.93	1	15.93	76.21	.000	.57
Groups	13.96	1	13.96	66.78	.000	.54
Error	11.91	57	.20			
Total	580.00	60				
Corrected Total	40.00	59				

The results presented in Table 8 indicate that the p-value corresponding to the Groups row is lower than the alpha level of significance ( $p < .05$ ), which means that the difference between the writing organization post-test mean scores of the NIG ( $M = 2.55$ ) and RWIG ( $M = 3.45$ ) learners reached statistical significance.

The magnitude of these differences, as shown under the Partial Effect Size column, is

very large (.54). It could thus be concluded that using reading-writing integrated tasks was significantly more effective than using non-integrated tasks so far as the learners' writing organization was concerned.

In Figure 4, the significant difference between the writing organization post-test mean scores of the NIG and RWIG learners is graphically represented:



**Figure 3**

*Writing organization post-test mean scores of NIG and RWIG learners*

Taking a glance at Figure 3, one can easily notice that the difference between the writing organization post-test mean scores of the NIG and RWIG learners was considerable. This gives rise to the rejection of the second null hypothesis of the study. Differently put, using reading-writing integrated tasks was significantly more effective than using non-integrated tasks as far as the writing organization of Iranian EFL learners was concerned.

## DISCUSSION

The objective of this study was to see if there was a significant difference in content development between non-integrated activities and reading-writing integrated tasks for Iranian intermediate EFL learners. In terms of the substance of the writing, the data demonstrated that there was no significant difference between the impacts of non-integrated tasks and reading-writing integrated tasks on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' writing growth. Furthermore, the current study looked at whether there was a significant difference in the impact of non-integrated tasks vs reading-writing integrated tasks on the organization of Iranian intermediate EFL learners' writing. The results displayed a substantial difference in the impact of non-integrated activities and reading-writing integrated tasks on the organization of Iranian intermediate EFL learners.

The findings of a study by Cumming et al (2005, 2006) are consistent with one explanation for the observed effect of integrated tasks in the present study. They linked such impacts to elements like understanding medium and memory. Cumming et al (2005, 2006) discovered that in the listening-to-write assignment, comprehension was lower than in the reading-to-write test due to the urge on combining literacy skills with content-

based training. Another reasoning argument may be task circumstances. Other findings from prior studies, such as King, 1996; O'Day, 2002; Kaltsounis, 1990; Goode, 1998; and Diem, 1996, support this conclusion. The higher diagnostic techniques, methodology, and materials used for integrating the abilities may also be responsible for the increased accomplishment. Furthermore, the EFL learners' superior performance via integrated task instruction can be attributed to the differences between such instruction and traditional writing instruction, which focuses on manifold facets of autonomous essay writing, such as essay writing structure and diverse kinds of essays, and practices of countless types of corrective feedback (Storch, 2005; Wigglesworth & Storch, 2012; Yasuda, 2014). As a matter of fact, integrated writing skills like summarizing, note-taking, paraphrasing, and denoting to others' viewpoint receive minimal attention in most EFL writing classrooms.

In addition, the findings of this study back with Yasuda's conclusions (2014). She also discovered that using integrated writing assignments resulted in significant variations in EFL/ESL writing capability in meaning-producing choices and that it should be thought of as a separate language skill with its own set of rules.

The findings of the current research are likewise akin to Gholami and Alinasab's findings (2017). In integrated essay assessments, the individuals with hybrid (integrated) writing practice outperformed their peers. In typical independent writing activities, their greater performance was not found. They also advocated for more integrated writing projects to be included in writing classes. Furthermore, Sevy-Biloon (2018) discovered that students were able to acquire and practice all EFL abilities in an authentic manner using communicative



teaching techniques and skill integrating activities. Alhujaylan (2020) too found that participants were dissatisfied with the present isolated reading and writing courses and the learning results in his study. The majority of experienced instructors indicated enthusiasm for the inclusion of these abilities. The researchers advocate adopting integrated skills pedagogy in teaching reading and writing abilities at the level of the university to improve students' function, based on their findings.

Finally, it is hypothesized that Iranian EFL students' greater performance in integrated writing groups might be linked to their increased attentional capacities. Reference to attentional resources, according to Doughty and Long (2003), substantiates the notion that children have developed low levels of attentional capacities, causing them to be unable to pay to many things at the same time. As a result of their intensive contact with a range of notions and thoughts in the source materials during the writing course, the students improved their attentional resource management.

## CONCLUSION

Language skills can be implemented in many ways in EFL lessons depending on the learners and the situation. One of the most fundamental and practical integrated teaching approaches, according to Hinkel (2010), is combining the two abilities in the same linguistic medium. This integration creates authenticity in the classroom with no effort on the part of the educator or the students. Furthermore, in an ESL school, receptive skills (listening and reading) are insufficient. As a result, the receptive skill can be combined with one producing talent, such as writing or speaking. Hinkel (2010) went on to say that when the class had a mix of language skills, complicated integrated activities occurred. The substance and topic of the tasks or activity will show which abilities are integrated with this context.

On the basis of the findings of the current research, integrated writing projects are thought to display greater authenticity, improve fairness, and provide positive washback when compared to nonintegrated writing tasks. As a result, further validation research is

desirable to well-understand the character of the integrated writing concept. Implications for consolidating integrated teaching of English language skills with other content-based areas include the following: first, an integrated curricular approach to teaching language should be taken; second, the emphasis on disciplinary textbooks and conventional teaching methods should be condensed, and instructors should be given more autonomy to generate their own integrated syllabus that meets the needs of their students; third, integrated language learning needs to be advanced along with skills integration, and at the level of interdisciplinary integration.

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