

RESEARCH ARTICLE



ISSN

INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print):2321-3108 (online)

THE EFFECT OF DIARY WRITING ON LEARNING GRAMMAR BY INTERMEDIATE EFL LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to investigate the impact of diary writing on learning grammar of EFL learners. In this study, 24 intermediate students from one of the institutes in Birjand, South Khorasan, in 2015 that were selected through purposive sampling. The mean of age was 20 and most of them had bachelor's degree. Half of the participants were randomly assigned to the control group, and the other half to the experimental group. At first, a test of grammar was given to all the students. Then the control group received the regular class instruction, but the experimental group was instructed write diary and write at least ten diaries during the remaining period of the institute term. After a period of one months, another test of grammar, oxford placement test (2004) was given to both the control and experimental groups. The results of the two tests were analyzed using one way ANCOVA test. The results indicated that the students who had participated in the diary writing experiment had indeed gone through a process of grammar acquisition by themselves ($p < 0.05$) compared with the control group. The results also showed that keeping diaries is an effective way for the improvement of learning grammar by EFL learners. In addition, it was suggested that further researches should be conducted on the effect of diary writing on different dimensions of achieving English language and other institute subjects. The overall results of the study were discussed and the theoretical implications for further studies and the practical recommendations for EFL context are made.

Keywords: Learning grammar, Diary writing, Intermediate

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1. INTRODUCTION

Language is one of the main features that human being is characterized with, so it is a social as well as an individual phenomenon that enables man to express his feelings, thoughts and culture. The importance of grammar is also due to the fact that it is because of grammar of the language that makes it possible for us to talk about language. Grammar names the types of words and word groups that

make up sentences not only in English but also in any language. Allwright (1983) points out that one technique for conducting classroom research is introspection. At this point, one may think of diary as an introspective research tool for initiation of writing and communicating meaning (Bailey, 1990; Porter et al. 1996). Some practitioners (Bailey, 1990; McDonough and McDonough, 1997) stress the significance of diaries in writing curriculum asserting

that in writing a diary the content is under the control of the author, he has little worry about the style or grammar and it is a means for promoting autonomous learning. In a different use of diary, porter et al. (1996) conclude that 'The journal enables students to develop a professional approach toward learning and to write as member of the larger language learning community. (p.240)

As Davis (1998) and Huang (2005) stated many of the students are familiar with the rules of writing and when they are being asked about the rules they are at best but they think that they are poor at writing. Therefore, these students do not experience any tangible and meaningful act of writing. On the other hand, they need to communicate in writing for different purposes.

1.1 statement of the problem

English being the most wide spread language becomes an issue of interest that increases rapidly. In Iran we can find different centers for teaching English, and they provide programs for English language in almost every Centre, to increase its possibility of dissemination. This has become an extremely important issue both in terms of the future of Iranian children and the further development of Iran as a nation. But over the last two decades, the summary of English education in Iran most often repeated by students and teachers and parents is that "Although we study English for all of seven years we still cannot speak it." People became frustrated about not being able to speak as much and fast as they wished. They decided to blame the traditional Grammar Translation method. One thing is certain; less grammar is taught, at least less explicit grammar instruction.

However, after a brief review of the history of language instruction, it's found that grammar has always been playing a role in foreign language teaching and learning. This may probably be one of the reasons leading to the debates of teaching grammar. The debates result in fresh cognition of grammar: it is very important in that not only does it help improve learners' writing, but also it helps learners do better in reading comprehension and listening alike; more significantly, the problem of how to teach grammar has been raised. The motivation for the study, which concerns the

students' diary writing, is important for better understanding of learning grammar. There has been little research done on the impact of diary writing on learning grammar and there is insufficient research in this area to draw any firm conclusions on learning grammar.

1.2 Research purpose, question and hypothesis

The purpose of the present study is to contribute to an understanding of whether the use of diary writing in the subject of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in institute can help develop learning grammar. To achieve this aim, the researcher sight to investigate two classes of intermediate learner's results in writing. Therefore, the study explores how the learners develop their grammar by writing diaries. The study aims to address the following research question:

Does diary writing have any significant impact on the development of the grammar of the EFL learners?

The hypothesis of the study is:

H0: Diary writing has no significant impact on the development of the grammar of the EFL learners.

1.3 Significance of the study

The findings of this study expected to be useful to the following groups:

1. Syllabus designers: They may benefit from this study to modify, organize and enrich English language curricula with activities based on diary writing.
2. Language teachers to make use of the findings and become aware of the effect diary writing on learning grammar.
3. Students to use diary writing on learning grammar.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

In this study, 24 intermediate EFL male and female learners from one of the institutes in Birjand, South Khorasan, in 2015. The mean of age was 20 and most of them had bachelor's degree. Half of the participants were randomly assigned to the control group, and the other half to the experimental group selected through purposive sampling. The experimental group was asked to write diary while the control group was taught the same grammatical item by the usual method. The classes met for 15

sessions, three sessions a week two hours each. The researcher taught both the control and experimental groups.

2.2. Instrumentation

To accomplish the task, the following instruments were employed:

1. A standard proficiency Oxford Placement Test (OPT, 2004) to make sure that both groups were at the intermediate level.
2. A standard grammar test, Oxford Placement Test (OPT, 2004), as the pretest to know the effectiveness of the treatment.
3. The researcher gave both groups a standard grammar test, Oxford Placement Test (OPT, 2004), as the posttest to see the impact of diary writing on learning grammar.

The researcher chose this test, because it was more available and reliable and it was corrected easier than other proficiency tests. In other words, Oxford Placement Test (OPT) is a highly economical and easy-to-administer objectively scorable test, which provides consistently meaningful scores.

2.3 Procedures

2.3.1 Data collection procedures

The data was collected from an English institute in Birjand in spring semester, 2015. For collecting the data, the researcher distributed a proficiency test to make sure the learners would be intermediate. Then, both groups, experimental and control were given a proficiency grammar test (Oxford Placement Test) as a pretest on the first session to assure that the differences in results were just because of the treatment. The experimental group received the treatment-writing diary. At the end of each session, they were asked to write a diary at home and bring it as homework for the next session. The diaries were collected and checked that

all the students have done the homework. The control group was isolated from any influence of the experimental group. The control group was given a placebo (they did not write diary). Then after 15 sessions, after the treatment, both groups were given a grammar test, Oxford Placement Test, as a posttest to measure the effect of diaries writing on learning grammar.

2.3.2. Data analysis procedures

In order to find an answer to the research question, the data collected through the instrument were scored and then entered into SPSS version 22 to be analyzed. The statistical test used in order to answer research questions is one way ANCOVA test. One way ANCOVA test used to determine whether there exist any significant differences on the development of learning grammar among learners who have written diary and those who have not written.

3. Results and Discussion

The results, as indicated by the tables below, showed that according to the hypothesis, diary writing, as many studies have also shown, improves the learning grammar of students and gives them motivation to write in the second language. The results of the ANCOVA test showed that the students who had gone through the diary writing experiment received higher scores from the independent scorers. Also the students who had gone through the diary writing process seemed to have gone through a self-learning process and significantly progressed in using correct grammar in their diaries. As they showed fewer grammar errors in the post-test. As indicated in Table 2, 12 control and 12 experimental EFL learners participated. Mean of control learners' posttest is 12.45 (SD= .72) and that of experimental ones is 16.62 (SD= 1.20).

Table 4.2: Results of descriptive statistics for control and experimental EFL learners

Parameters	Control Group			Experimental Group		
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
pre-test	12	10.91	.90	12	11	.73
post-test	12	12.45	.72	12	16.62	1.20

Table 4.3: Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for difference between pretest and posttest

Parameters	Type III Sum of Squares	Mean Square	f	Partial Eta Squared	F	Squared
Intercept	5075.042	5075.042	1	.996	0.000	5123.560
Groups	104.167	104.167	1	.827	0.000	105.163
Error	21.792	.991	22			
Total	5201.000	24				
Corrected Total	125.958	23				

As Table 4.3 shows there is a significant difference between EFL learners' performance in learning grammar in control (M=12.45, SD= .72) and experimental group (M= 16.62, SD= 1.20). Accordingly, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference between control and experimental groups' performance in learning grammar. The results in the above table show that the experimental group outperformed the control

group because of diary writing. [$F(1) = 5123.560$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$, partial eta squared = .82] therefore the null hypothesis was rejected. In this case, the difference that was observed is statistically significant ($P < 0.05$) indicating a higher score for those who had experienced diary writing. Due to fewer grammar mistakes and greater overall writing accuracy, the scores obtained by the experimental group were higher in the post test.

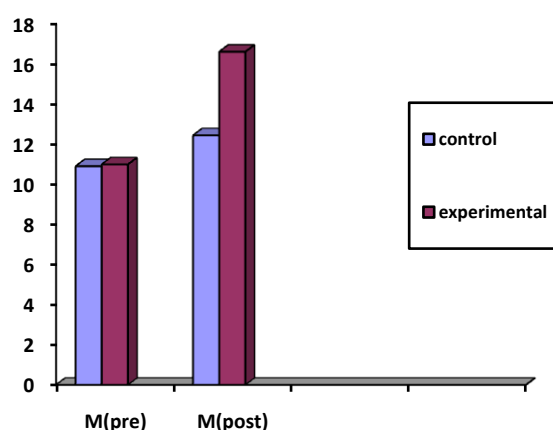


Figure 4.1-Difference between pretest and posttest students' performance in learning grammar

The results in the above Figure show that there is a significant difference between control and experimental groups' performance in writing diary. It indicates the experimental group outperformed control group. Therefore, as Tables 4.2 and 4.3 show, there is a statistically significant difference ($F(1) = 5123.560$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$, partial eta squared = 0.827) between means of control and experimental EFL learners. Based on these data it can be

concluded that EFL learners with diary writing had better performance than the others.

4. Conclusion

Participants' scores on the pre-intervention administration of the grammar test were used as the covariate in this analysis. Results from one way ANCOVA indicated that there was statistically significant difference between the two groups. Based on the present findings it can be concluded

that EFL learning grammar is affected by diary writing they receive.

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