

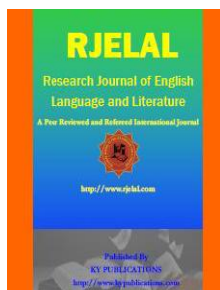


## EFFECTS OF USING PICTURE CUES AND OUTLINING ON EFL LEARNERS' WRITING SKILL

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### ABSTRACT

With the advent of the more communicative approaches to language teaching, more attention has been given to communicative strategies to teach writing skill. Instead of focusing on the final product by writing teachers, various techniques can be employed to help language learners develop effective writing strategies in a continuous process and specially during pre-writing stage (Hayes and Flower). The present study investigated the effects on EFL learners' writing ability of some visual aids and outlining during the pre-writing stage. To do so, 40 Iranian EFL learners completed four essay writing tasks i.e., writing without any pre-writing hint, writing using some picture cues, writing with teacher-made outline and writing with their own outlines. Paired comparisons of the participants' performances on these tasks revealed that all three pre-writing strategies were effective in improving students writing scores as compared with writing without pre-writing hint. Further comparisons revealed that the subjects' scores on writing with their own outline were significantly higher than the scores on picture cue writing. It is interesting that the students' scores on writing with their own outlining were significantly higher than their scores on writing following teacher-made outline, suggesting that the learners own outling was more effective in improving their writing skill than using picture cues and teacher-made outline.

**Key words:** Student outline; teacher-made outline; picture cue writing; process writing; writing skill

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### INTRODUCTION

It was not until 1970s that writing was generally viewed as a separate language skill to be taught to language learners. Instead, it was used as a support skill in language learning to practice handwriting, writing answers to grammar questions and reading exercises, and writing dictation (The idea of expertise: An exploration of cognitive and social dimensions of writing). In many English language programs, writing classes were in fact

grammar courses. The practice of teaching writing was characterized by a traditional rhetoric in which preconceived ideas were translated into words according to a set of prescriptive rules about the form of effective text. It involved identifying the features of effective text; outlining these for students; asking them to practice producing texts with these characteristics; and giving them feedback about how effectively they had managed to do so. Learning to write, on the other hand, involved

learning how to transcribe language in a written form, learning spelling and grammatical conventions; learning the principles of a good style of writing by examining exemplary models, and learning conventional text structures (Reid).

In the early 1980s, there was a shift from strictly controlled writing to guided writing. In fact, writing was limited to structuring sentences, often in direct answers to questions, or by combining sentences to form short pieces of discourse. Later on, English L2 composition textbooks showed a shift from focusing on the teaching of organization patterns common in English academic prose: topic sentences, thesis statement, different methods of developing paragraphs and essays, with the major focus on the product, i. e. the finished paper or essay.

During the 1990s in English L2 teaching, a dichotomy was made between process and product writing activities. Adherents of process writing would encourage students to use their internal resources and individual ideas. They would teach writer-based writing without considering the audiences. Fluency, but not accuracy was important in this approach. The processes of generating ideas and expressing feelings were more important to individual development than the final product. In contrast, adherents of the product writing focused more on accuracy, appropriate rhetorical discourse and linguistic patterns to the exclusion of writing processes. They would focus on reader-based writing for an academic audience. In fact, students were taught process writing strategies to achieve effective written communication goals.

The new trends in the practice of teaching writing have moved towards a more balanced perspective of composition theory. The traditional teacher-centered approaches are evolving into more learner-centered courses, and writing is viewed as a communicative social act. It is common practice in most English L2 writing courses for students to practice individualized processes to achieve products. Such courses focus more on the highly complex constructs of audience and purpose have concentrated on author-reader interaction.

Instead of focusing on the final product, various techniques can be employed to help language learners develop effective writing strategies in a continuous process and specially during the pre-writing stage. The purpose of the present study is to investigate the effects on EFL learners' writing ability of some process-writing techniques such as giving pictures, drawings, charts, and outlines presented during the pre-writing stage

**Visual aids and learning language skills**

Lewkowicz and Low examined the effects of visual aids and word structure on children's learning of phonemic segmentation—a skill recently shown to correlate highly with reading achievement. The visual aids used were three items of equipment—counters, squares, and pictures. Results indicated that squares made a significant contribution to segmentation of two-phoneme words, but none of the visual aids made a difference on three-phoneme words.

Walker and Riu in a research verified the effects of different types of images used in multimedia teaching materials on the story understanding and story reproduction ability of Japanese language learners based on a Japanese fairy tale. Images were shown to promote both story understanding and story reproduction. In terms of story understanding, dynamic pictures were not always more effective than still pictures with designated standards; it was more effective to present important images selected from the story development. In terms of story reproduction, however, dynamic pictures were more effective than still pictures.

Ulper studied the effect of the schematic structure of story texts as a visual strategy on comprehension. He found that there was a positive contribution of the strategy used in the listening process.

Most studies in the related literature have focused on the effects of visual aids on vocabulary learning, reading comprehension, and listening comprehension. Yet, few studies have concentrated on writing skill and its components, providing the motive for conducting the present research.

### Process versus product writing

The way of teaching writing has changed radically over the last four decades. Before 1970s, the practice of teaching writing was characterized by a traditional rhetoric in which some preconceived ideas were translated into words according to a set of prescriptive rules about the form of effective texts. This involved identifying the features of effective texts; outlining these for students; asking them to practice producing texts with these characteristics; and giving them feedback about how effectively they had managed to do so. Learning to write, on the other hand, involved learning how to transcribe language in a written form, learning spelling and grammatical conventions; learning the principles of a good style by examining exemplary models, and learning conventional text structures (Reid).

Eming (The composing processes of twelfth graders) called this set of practices and the assumptions underlying them into question. He carried out the first study of the processes employed by schoolchildren as they write, including verbal protocols of children thinking aloud as they wrote. This was further emphasized by Britton (The development of writing abilities) who emphasized the underlying functions of different kinds of writing rather than superficial features of the texts themselves. These insights were then formalized by Hayes, & Flower in an explicit model of the components of the writing process. In this model writing was viewed as a process of problem-solving in which ideas were actively constructed to satisfy communicative goals.

The key ingredients of the new process approach to writing are the emphasis on the goals which texts are designed to satisfy rather than the linguistic characteristics which texts have, and on the variety of processes which are involved in trying to satisfy those goals, including in particular the construction and evaluation of ideas, rather than on the translation of preconceived ideas into text. While learning rules for expression is still an element of learning to write, this is seen as one element among many and is a resource to be used within the overall process of writing rather than constituting the fundamental skill of writing. In addition,

learning to write involves learning about the different processes involved in writing, and how to coordinate these in order to satisfy goals which vary as a function of context, task and audience.

In the literature of ESL/EFL writing research, process writing has been advocated by many writing specialists (e.g., Zamel, White and Arndt, Susser). Susser (cited in Galbraith and Rijlaarsdam) identified three different senses of process used in the related literature: (a) to mean the act of writing itself, (b) to describe writing pedagogies, and (c) to designate a theory of writing. Regarding the first sense, writing, the writing process, composing are all synonyms. In its second sense, the term process has been used as a shorthand for a variety of writing pedagogies.

Process writing can be taken as an approach in contrast to the more commonly practice of product-writing pedagogies, in which the rhetorical forms, grammar exercises, and weekly assignments are emphasized (Bogel & Hjortshoj, 1988). Process writing pedagogies are said to have two essential components: awareness and intervention (Kostelnick, 1989). In other words, a process approach helps make students aware that writing is a process, and that there are different processes for different kinds of writing. Many students believe that composing is a matter of getting clearly in mind what we want to say, and then finding the words which will record those meanings and make them available to others (e.g., Smith, 1982). Thus, a major element of process writing is to make students aware that writing is often a discovery in which ideas are generated and not just transcribed.

Equally important is to make student aware that not all writing is the discovery of ideas (Harison, 1996), but rhetorical forms which have often been criticized by many advocates of process authors, are means of expressing ideas (Coe, 1987), and can be taught within a process context (Swales, 1990).

The second element of process writing is intervention, to use Emig's (1967) term for teaching of this type. In this sense, process writing is type of a pedagogy in which the teacher is involved with the student during the writing process. As Zamel (1983) put it, intervening throughout the process sets up a

dynamic relationship which gives writers the opportunity to tell their readers what they mean to say before these writers are told what they ought to have done. It has been suggested that intervention is not just from the side of the teacher, but peer review and other related procedures encourage intervention as they write and revise.

The change in the direction of writing from product to process has had a significant influence on the way of teaching writing. A huge variety of activities have been designed to give students experience of the process of writing and its separate components (Galbraith, & Rijlaarsdam). Process writing teachers use various procedures designed to help students think through and organize their ideas before writing and to rethink and revise their initial drafts. These procedures include brain storming, outlining, free writing, journal writing, small-group activities, teacher/student conferences, peer critiquing, revising, editing the final draft, and some form of class publication (Applebee). It should be noted here that activities can vary with the type of writing in hand, the writer's preferences, and other factors.

#### **Review of literature**

As it has been noted by Susser (cited in Galbraith and Rijlaarsdam), a process writing pedagogy is basically an attitude rather than a practical program. This may account for the fact that few experimental researches have been done to explore the nature of process activities and their effects on the final product in writing. A great number of studies in the related literature have focused on the relationship between process and product writing at the theoretical level (e.g., dykstra, Arapoff, Raimes, Zamel, Tayler, Hughey et al., Horowitz, Krapels).

McKay investigated the effects of prewriting strategies. Spack and Sadow advocated the use of journals in their study. Spack argued for teaching invention techniques, and Krashen stressed that feedback is useful when it is given during the writing process, i.e., between drafts, but not when given at the end.

Collins, & Gentner and Glynn et al investigated the relative effectiveness of different drafting strategies. Traditionally it has been

suggested by researchers to make an outline prior to writing, i.e. to focus on generating and organizing ideas in outline form prior to producing full text. Others researchers ( e.g. Elbow and Wason) recommend rough drafting strategies in which constraints are relaxed during the production of text itself: the writer concentrates on getting their ideas down on paper, in connected prose, but without worrying about organization or expression; this draft is then organized and expression polished during revision. There is some evidence that outline strategies are associated with improved quality of writing, whereas rough drafting strategies are not (Kellogg). However, others (Torrance, Thomas and Robinson) have suggested that the apparent advantage of outlining over rough drafting strategies is a consequence of students' lack of familiarity with, and skill at using, writing strategies that involve revision rather than the benefits of planning per se. Furthermore, Galbraith, & Rijlaarsdam found that preferences for different drafting strategies are related to individual differences in self-presentational goals.

The main implication of this research is that it is important to differentiate between the different components of the writing process. Indeed it is this which motivates many of the activities carried out under the banner of process-based teaching. Thus, activities like brainstorming, outlining and journal writing are designed to focus on generating ideas; free-writing and deferred revision are designed to promote fluent translation; peer revision and collaboration are designed to focus on revision. In addition, it is useful for students to reflect upon the processes they have employed in a differentiated way. There is less agreement about whether there is necessarily a best way of combining these different activities, with both rough drafting and outlining strategies having their advocates. It may be that no single method is necessarily superior, but rather that different methods may be more appropriate for different individuals, and that, accordingly, different forms of instruction may be more appropriate for different writers.

Rough drafting or generative writing, to use Wason's (Specific thoughts on the writing process) term, and outline planning strategies are

not just different ways of reducing cognitive load during writing, but they also enable writers to better satisfy different social goals. Thus, outline planning has the advantage that it enables the writer to control the way they present ideas in public. Rough drafting has the advantage that it better enables the writer to capture their implicit disposition towards the topic. Consistent with the view that such strategies are a means of achieving different social goals rather than, or in addition to, managing cognitive load. Galbraith found marked individual differences in the drafting strategies of undergraduates as a function of writers' goals of self-presentation.

The main implication of such research is that different individuals may benefit from different kinds of writing instruction. Low self-monitors, for example, may benefit more from explicit instruction in revision; high self-monitors, by contrast, may require instruction in planning more flexibly. More generally, different kinds of writing instruction may be necessary depending on the specific social context in which it takes place.

For example, a study by Torrance, Thomas and Robinson compared the effectiveness of three different training courses for beginning postgraduate students. The first course was product-centered, and it focused on teaching general rules for good English, and on making the rules of academic discourse explicit. In other words, it concentrated on increasing the students' understanding of goals by explicating the nature of the expected product. The second course focused on cognitive strategies, teaching a variety of different methods for planning, based mainly on strategies derived from Flower (Problem-solving strategies for writing). It can be seen as a pure cognitive approach focusing on helping students to make their writing more goal directed. Finally, the third course combined a generative writing strategy with shared revision. Students were encouraged to produce a spontaneous draft without planning, and these drafts were then used in a number of revision exercises, including having a fellow student read the writer's text, voicing their response as they did so. Although on average all these courses were perceived as equally useful by the students, there

were wide individual differences among the students.

There were, however, significant differences in the course on post-test measures of readability and productivity. The product-centered course and the generative writing course showed increases in readability and productivity, whereas the cognitive strategies course did not. Torrance et al suggested that the reason for the success of these two courses may be that they both addressed the constraint that inadequate rhetorical knowledge can place on the writing process. The product-centered course did this directly, by familiarizing the students with the conventions of the research community, whereas the generative writing course did it indirectly, by removing the constraint during the initial production of text, and then supplementing this with peer feedback from fellow members.

Zia Hosseini investigated the effects of presenting pictures during pre-writing stage on writing ability of EFL learners. He found that providing the students with some pictures related to the topic improved their writing scores. The results of this study showed that presenting pictures during pre-writing stage positively influenced the general organization of the students' writing, but it didn't have any effect on their writing concerning grammatical points and structures.

Plakans in a study used an inductive analysis of think-aloud protocol data and interviews to uncover the reading strategies of some non-native English writers who completed an integrated reading-writing task. The results suggested that reading plays a role in the process and performance of integrated writing tasks.

#### **Research questions**

As most studies of process writing have dealt with the theoretical issues of the relationship and differences between process and product writing, few studies have tried to investigate the practical matters in the related area of research. In line with the previous studies in the related literature ( e.g., McKay, Spack and Sadow, Spack, Krashen, John, shih, Reid, Chenoweth, Liebman-Klein and Zia Hosseini), this research paper tries to find out whether providing the students with

different forms of cues, such as pictures, charts, drawings, and outlining during the pre-writing stage will have a positive effect on their writing skill. Consequently the following research questions were put forward:

- 1) Will presenting picture cues during the pre-writing stage have a positive effect on the writing ability of EFL learners?
- 2) Will providing students with an outline during the pre-writing stage positively influence EFL learners' writing ability?
- 3) Will teacher-made outline benefit EFL learners' writing ability more than using picture cues?
- 4) Will EFL learners' own outlines benefit their writing ability more than using picture cues?
- 5) Will EFL learners' own outlines benefit their writing ability more than the teacher-prepared outline?

#### **Method**

##### *Participants*

The original sample included two classes of sophomore students (a total of 68 students) majoring at English translation in an Iranian university (Islamic Azad university, Qaemshahr Branch). All of the participants have been studying English translation at the Islamic Azad University for two years. The participants from the intact classes took part in a paper-based TOEFL proficiency test from Broukal, Pearson Education Center, which was used to check the homogeneity of the group in terms of their proficiency level. Forty learners whose scores on the language proficiency test fell within  $\pm 1$  standard deviation of the mean score were selected as participants for this study.

##### *Research design*

This study is a quasi-experimental, time-series design study. It is quasi-experimental because the participants were not selected through true randomization. After selecting the participants for the study, they took part in the proficiency test. Then, the subjects completed the writing tasks which were implemented in four stages. First, they were given a topic to write a four paragraph essay.

In the second step, they were given another topic to write an essay. This time, however, before they wrote the essay, they were presented with some pictures related to the topic. In the third step, the participants were asked to do the same task on a different topic. For this task, the researcher prepared a well-organized outline based on the topic. The subjects were asked to use the outline and develop an essay accordingly. Finally, they were asked to do the same writing task, for this final step, however, they were guided to provide a well-organized outline on the topic and then to write an essay on the basis of their own outline.

##### *Scoring procedure*

After completing the writing tasks, the subjects' essays were checked to find answers to the research questions put forwarded above. An analytic method of scoring was adopted on the basis of the scales proposed by Jacobs et al. (Testing ESL composition: A practical approach) which is one of the best known and most widely used analytic scales in ESL studies (Assessing writing). In this scale, scripts are rated on five major aspects of writing content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. The five aspects are given different weights: content, 30 points; language use, 25 points; organization, 20 points; vocabulary 20 points; and mechanics, 5 points. In this study, as a total of 20 points was given to each paper, the above scale was adapted to 6, 5, 4, 4, and 1 points, respectively.

#### **Results and discussion**

This study was conducted to test the effects of picture cues and outlining on EFL learners writing ability. After conducting the experiment data was collected to analyze the results. Descriptive statistics of the performances of the participants on the four writing tasks are shown in Table 1. The figures in the table indicate that the participants had the highest scores after writing their essays on the basis of their own outline, with the mean score of 15.25, followed by writing after picture cues, with the mean score of 13.77. Then stands writing on the basis of the teacher's outline (mean score=6.05), followed by unaided writing, with the mean score of 11.32.



Table 1. Mean scores and SD on the four writing tasks

	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Unaided	40	11.32	3.02	6	17
Teacheroutline	40	13.27	2.53	8	18
Picturecue	40	13.77	2.40	9	18
Selfoutline	40	15.25	2.03	11	19

Also, results of one-way ANOVA of the participants' performances on the four types of writing (Table 2) indicate that the p value (0.000) is lower than the critical value. Thus, we conclude that

there was a significant difference in the scores of the participants on the four writing tasks.

Table 2. Results of one-way ANOVA for the four writing tasks

	df	Mean Sq.	F	Sig
Unaided, teacheroutline, picturecue, & selfoutline	3	123.07	18.03	0.000

Results of Tukey's Post Hoc analysis of the subjects' performances on the four writing tasks through one-way repeated measures ANOVA are shown in Table 3. Paired comparisons of the participants' performances on these tasks reveal that there was a significant difference between the participants' performance on unaided writing and the writing with teacher outline as the p value (0.019) in table 3 suggests. Also, the difference of

performance between unaided writing and writing with picture cue was statistically significant with p value of 0.000. So was the performance on unaided writing and writing with self outline ( $p= 0.080$ ). The results in this regard seem to point to the effectiveness pre-writing strategies that seem to provide an underlying block on which learners can build their own composition.

Table 3: Results of one-way repeated measures ANOVA for the post-tests on input versions

	Mean D	Std. Error	Sig
Unaided-teacheroutline	-1.72	0.584	0.019
Unaided-picturecue	-2.62	0.584	0.000
Unaided-selfoutline	-4.20	0.584	0.080
Teacheroutline-picturecue	-0.90	0.584	0.416
Teacheroutline-selfoutline	-0.47	0.584	0.000
Picturecue-selfoutline	-1.57	0.584	0.039

Referring to table 3, we can further understand that the difference between the learners' performance on the writing task with picture cue and the one with teacher outline did not prove statistically significant as the p value (0.416) suggest. It can be interpreted that these two types of strategies seem to influence EFL learners writing ability similarly though the results need to be further confirmed by future studies.

was significantly higher than their scores on writing with picture cue, suggesting that the learners own outling was even more effective that using picture cues and the outline prepared by the teacher. The results are in line with the findings of the previous studies in the related literature (e.g., Zia Hosseini) that suggested visual aids can help foster second language learners' writing skills.

Further comparisons reveal that the subjects' scores on writing with their own outline was significantly higher than the scores on picture cue writing ( $p$  value= 0.00). Furthermore, the students' scores on writing with their own writing

Regarding the first research questions postulated above, we have found that presenting picture cues during the pre-writing stage have a positive effect on the writing ability of EFL learners. Also, with reference to the second research question above, the results of the present study indicate that

providing students with an outline during the pre-writing stage positively influence EFL learners' writing ability. The results in this respect are consistent with some previous studies that reported positive effects of outlining on writing short essays (Torrance, Thomas and Robinson). The results, however, did not support the third research question above concerning the relative effectiveness of teacher-made outline using picture cues. Furthermore, findings have revealed that EFL learners' own outlines benefit their writing ability more than using picture cues. Finally, concerning the fifth research question in this paper, it has been found that EFL learners' own outlines benefit their writing ability more than the teacher-prepared outline.

#### Conclusion and suggestions for further studies

Previous Studies have shown that visual aids have direct effects on improving language skills and its different sub-skills, specially vocabulary, listening comprehension, and reading comprehension. One major problem with EFL learners, especially at beginning and intermediate levels, is that they generally have problem at the very beginning step of writing i.e., at creating ideas. They simply don't know how to create ideas and then organize them in a logical order. Visual aids are believed to have the potentials to help learners organize their thoughts, and activate the related schemata (De Smet, Brand-Gruwel, Leijten and Kirschner, Zia Hosseini).

Analysis of the results of the present study reveals that presenting topic-related pictures during the prewriting stage enhances students general scores in writing. The findings of the present research confirm the results of some of the previous studies claiming that visual aids helps students improve their writing ability (e.g., Zia Hosseini). The finding also suggest that giving an outline related to the topic will improve learners' writing scores. This implies that student generally have problems in both creating and organizing their ideas. It is interesting that helping students prepare their own outline was more effective in improving their writing ability than giving them a prepared outline. The findings seems to be in line with those studies that suggest tasks that involve more cognitive load, in

the sense used by Hulstijn & Laufer, lead to a better learning of target forms. This also suggests that students do better jobs in classroom activities if they are allowed to take charge of their own learning while the teacher plays his role as facilitator of learning.

This paper has concentrated on the effects of some of the process-writing techniques such as giving visual aids and outlining on writing ability of EFL learners. There are many other areas still to be tested in further research. One can, for instance, investigate the effects of film scripts, charts, drawings, and short movies on writing as well. Moreover, presenting outlining can also be practiced in other ways, too. In this experiment pictures and outlines were given during the pre-writing stage; thus they may be tested during other stages of writing, too. The experiment can also be carried out with other participant at different levels and with other features. One more idea comes from testing the effects of the same materials on other components of language, for example grammar.

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