The Effect of Collaborative Summary Writing on the Iranian EFL Learners' Vocabulary Recall and Retention

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to discover the effects of collaborative summary writing on vocabulary recall and retention of Iranian EFL learners. For this reason, 45 female students were selected from a university and were then homogenized by the Nelson Test. The participants were randomly divided into three experimental groups: Collaborative summary writing group (n = 15), individual writing group (n = 15) and control group (n = 15). Each writing group had one intensive session for target vocabulary learning. The collaborative summary writing group had three sessions at irregular time intervals. The control group had no vocabulary-focused education. Using before and after design, students were tested again after 5 weeks. To collect data, receptive vocabulary tests were conducted both pre-test and post-test. The results of the one-way ANOVA showed that the collaborative summary writing group significantly outperformed the individual writing group in both immediate and delayed post-tests. The results suggest that EFL practitioners need to incorporate collaborative summary writing into their curriculum, instruction, and teaching materials as a useful teaching method to facilitate vocabulary learning in real-world classroom settings.
Keywords: Collaborative summary writing, Individual writing, Vocabulary recall and retention, EFL Learners.

1. Introduction

Second or foreign language learning is characterized as a cognitive and effective process which a lot of people would like to willingly read all over the world. The center of focus has been recently changed in the procedures and methods of education. As a major consequence of this shift, experts and researcher's attentions have turned from teachers and teaching towards the learners and learning process (Oxford, 1990). In line with this revolution, giving or receiving feedback from peers or teachers in the learning process and showing enough tendency to engage in a collaborative learning task have been regarded as a necessary part of learning process (Bationo, 1992). Specifically, in the realm of language education, a very suitable manifestation of this shift is collaborative writing which enhance the quality of language learning process through stimulating a sense of cooperation and engagement among learners (Strasma & Foster, as cited in Li, 2000).

Furthermore, summary writing as an important and beneficial task in higher education makes the learners capable of extracting required information from different sources in their fields. It is the best means for language teachers to recognize whether students understand the whole reading passage (Wichadee, 2013). In spite of the fact that summary writing is a highly significant skill, the students face substantial challenges in fulfilling this kind of tasks.

They usually have serious problems in identifying more relevant and essential information to gain an accurate summary and are inclined to intervene their own personal ideas and opinions in organizing their summary of a text. Furthermore, they are not able to organize the ideas with suitable connections (Nyugen, 2011). Difficulty of this task and students' apparent weakness in the process of summary writing leads them to copy instead of paraphrasing or rephrasing the main points of the text. In this regard, it is crucial for students to be engaged in a collaborative writing in which they can benefit from availability of peer feedbacks and assistance in fulfilling the process (Storch, 1998, as cited in Sajed, 2014).

From theoretical point of view, in spite of well-established significance of collaborative learning in reinforcing learners' sense of cooperation and their engagement, it seems Iranian students are not educated based on current trends of teaching methodology. Most of teachers or educators considering traditional teaching framework disregard the learners' views and opinions and do not give them enough chance to express themselves, involve in learning process sufficiently, and engage in pair or group works.

Accordingly, it seems that there have not been satisfactory attempts in exploring the effectiveness of collaborative writing on other dimensions of language learning (e.g., language skills, language proficiency and so on) in Iranian context. In other words, learning is not merely the outcome of an individual learner's effort, but it is influenced by the learning environment, tools and context in which learning process occurs (Konstantina, 2017). Due to the advantages and effectiveness of collaborative writing on some aspects of language learning and also well-stablished significance of vocabulary knowledge, a number of investigations should be carried out in the EFL context to reveal any possible effect that el learners' pair or group works in the writing process might exert on their ability to retrieve and remember language vocabularies efficiently as much as possible.

To fulfill the purpose of this study, the following research questions were formulated:

Q1. Does collaborative summary writing have any significant effect on the Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary learning?

Q2. Do individual and collaborative summary writing affect the Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary recall and retention differently?

2. Review of Related Literature

Reviewing the literature with respect to effectiveness of adopting collaborative procedure in writing shows that there are relatively considerable number of studies in this regard. In one of the early studies in this area, Storch (2005) investigated the nature of the writing processes and compared texts produced by pairs with those produced by individual learners. The obtained results suggested that the text prepared through pair work was shorter but much more comprehensive in terms of grammatical accuracy and complexity. In a similar work, Wigglesworth and Storch (2009) in the investigation of using collaborative writing in second language contexts revealed that collaboration impacted positively on accuracy, but did not affect fluency and complexity. Similarly, Elola and Oskoz (2010) examined learners' collaborative interactions with regard to different aspects of writing task and their perceptions of individual and collaborative writing. The findings suggested that there were no significant differences in terms of fluency, accuracy and complexity of writing task when comparing the individual and collaborative assignments.

Furthermore, in another study, Shehadeh (2011) found that collaborative writing had an overall significant effect on students' l2 writing and the effect was significant for content, organization, and vocabulary, but not for grammar. Moreover, most students in the collaborative writing condition found the experience enjoyable and felt that it contributed to their l2 learning. Kessler, Bikowski, and Boggs (2012) in a study tried to explore how students engage in collaborative writing using google docs. Their results indicated that students focus more on meaning than on form, but that when they do focus on form, they make correct more often than incorrect changes.

In another study, Dobao (2012) investigated the benefits of collaborative writing tasks in the l2 classroom comparing group, pair, and individual work and found that the texts written by the groups were more accurate not only than those written individually but also than those written in pairs. They found that the learners who worked in pairs produced less fluent written product than the individual writers and also pair work could improve the overall quality of the learners' writing outputs even though the fluency of written texts did not change significantly.

In the EFL context of the world, a substantial body of investigations have been conducted in the realm of foreign/second language vocabulary learning. In most of these studies the retention and recall of vocabulary are aspects that have largely attracted attention of researchers. These two related cognitive abilities to EFL vocabulary have been examined in relation with different variables. In the Chinese EFL context, Ge (2014) conducted an interesting study in which through adopting an L1 story context to teach second language vocabulary, he explored the influence of storytelling on Chinese adult e-learners' vocabulary knowledge. The findings suggested that story-telling technique in comparison to rote memorization could exert much more positive effect on the quality of both short-term and long-term retention of vocabulary.

Chun and Plass (2016) conducted a study in which findings indicated that glossing words with text and picture compared with glossing with text and video or text alone can result in better vocabulary recall. In this study, based on Paivio's dual coding theory, it was argued that visual and verbal coding of inputs were more efficient than singular

coding of information. In spite the fact that, existing literature suggests the influence of different factors on the ability of learners to efficiently retrieve and remember language vocabulary, it seems that there is a lack of research on the role of collaborative writing has been focused in vocabulary learning process.

With reviewing the conducted studies, it was proved that collaborative writing has largely been investigated with regard to the socio-cognitive factors, quality of leaners' writing or their perceptions toward group or pair works. Therefore, it seems that there is a lack of research study on the role of collaborative writing regarding other aspects of language learning.

3. Method

3.1 Participants and setting

The participants of this study were chosen from a group of three intact non-English major undergraduate students studying at Azad university, Karaj branch. The population of this study included 100 members. The researchers selected 45 intermediate level students from among 60 students after running a test of language proficiency (Nelson) as the participants of this study. The participants were equally and randomly distributed in the three groups (two experimental and one control group). In the first experimental group (n=15), the students were supposed to carry out summary writing task individually, and in the second one (n=15), they were asked to engage in a collaborative summary writing. Further, the third group (n=15) of students was assigned as control group that did not receive any summary writing task and went through with traditional reading comprehension tasks.

3.2. Materials and Instruments

For the purpose of data collection some materials and instruments were used:

The Nelson Test of Language Proficiency. In this study, a 50-item Nelson test of language proficiency was used to determine the participants' proficiency level and ensure homogeneity of them. This general proficiency test was adopted from Nelson English language test.

Vocabulary Recognition Pre-test. The vocabulary items of five reading poems selected by the researchers in the 60-item vocabulary awareness test were used for the treatment session and designed. It was used early in the study to test the familiarity of participants with the subject vocabulary. This test consisted of multiple choices, matching, and fill-in-the-blanks, each testing one vocabulary.

Vocabulary Retention Post-test. The difference was that in parallel with the 60-question vocabulary recognition test, the participants omitted the correctly selected vocabulary in the early 25% of learning.

Passages from Select Readings Book for Intermediate Levels. The first five reading poems in the "Select Reading" (by Linda lee & Erik Gunderson and originally published at November 30, 2000) were used as necessary resources to proceed with the treatment session of this study (based on general English course syllabus). Students had to pair in this classroom or work together individually to outline each unit and prepare for an assessment of their vocabulary knowledge.

Procedure

The design of this study was quasi-experiment because participants were non-randomly selected. This study followed a pre- and post-test design to determine whether the collaborative summary procedure could affect participants' vocabulary learning and retention. In the early stages of this study, a group of students from three intact classes was subjected to a version of Nelson Test of Language Proficiency to ensure student homogeneity, from which 45 students was selected with a score between 15-36 and their level were intermediate. The students' age ranged from 18 to 23. In the pilot phase, after preparing the items and before starting the treatment session, all instruments for the students were similar to the participants in the study. They were a reliable tool for this study. In this regard, the lexical recognition and retention test item analysis prepared by the researchers was taken, and the malfunctioning items were deleted. The obtained data were analyzed using KR21 and the reliability of these tests was calculated. In the next step as a pre-test, a pilot vocabulary recognition test including 50 items was administered on the selected homogeneous participants and confirmed that this group of students was also homogeneous in terms of vocabulary knowledge and unfamiliarity with the target vocabulary. Next, the participants who responded less than 25% of the test items were considered primary participants in the study. Also, one participant's correct answer vocabulary recognition test items were deleted from the parallel vocabulary retention post-test. After conducting the pre-test and identifying key participants, they were assigned to three groups (two experimental groups and one control group) and began the process of primary investigation and treatment. In the treatment phase, a total of 5 treatment sessions were given over 5 weeks on the instruction for both experimental groups. In this step, during each session, students in both experimental groups were asked to work individually on pairs given passages (the first passages from the selected reading book) to summarize the texts given out using their own words (rephrasing and paraphrasing). Rather, students in the third class, assigned as controls, performed conventional reading steps on a given sentence without receiving any treatment. A post-test of vocabulary retention after weeks of treatment was administered to both groups. The post-test was a parallel form of the vocabulary recognition pre-test, and included

multiple-choice blank-filling and matching. Finally, the data collected in these tests were analyzed in response to the research questions using descriptive statistical procedures to test the assumed null hypothesis. A one-way analysis of variance (One-Way ANOVA) was used to find the homogeneity of the subjects in the two populations, using the evaluation of subjects in the Nelson test. In addition, another One-Way ANOVA was run to examine whether summary writing might affect the vocabulary learning of the participants. Next the researcher runs SPSS statistical software 20.

4. Results

The data were analyzed using parametric tests of. descriptive statistics and One-Way ANOVA. Descriptive statistics were used to compare the experimental (individual and collaborative summery writing) groups and control (traditional) groups' means on the pretest of vocabulary in order to probe that they were homogenous in terms of their vocabulary ability prior to the main study. Based on the results displayed in Table 1, it can be claimed that the experimental (M1 = 13.44, M2=14.0) and control (M = 13.92) groups' means on the pretest of vocabulary were almost the same.

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics of the vocabulary scores on the pretest*

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics; Pretest of Two Experimental and Control Groups

Group	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error mean
Individual writing	13.44	15	1.26	.25
Collaborative summery writing	14.04	15	1.68	.33
Control	13.92	15	1.70	.34

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for the three groups in the pretest. According to the table above, in the pretest, the average of the first experimental (individually writing) group is 13.44. In the pretest, the average for the second experimental (collaborative summary writing) group was 14.04 and the average for the control group was 13.92. As shown in the table, all three groups showed almost the same performance in the pre-test.

4.1. Answer to the first research question

Q1. Does collaborative summary writing have any significant effect on the Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary learning?

Descriptive statistics were used to compare the experimental (individual and collaborative summery writing) groups and control (traditional) groups' means on the posttest of vocabulary in order to compare their vocabulary scores after to the main study. Based on the results displayed in Table 2, it can be claimed that the experimental (M1 = 17.62, M2=15.62) and control (M = 14.12) groups' means on the pretest of vocabulary showed that the participants in the first experimental group (collaborative summery writing) have better performance on learning vocabulary.

Table 2. *Descriptive statistics of the vocabulary scores on the posttest*

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics; Posttest of Two Experimental and Control Groups

Group	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error mean
Individual writing	15.62	15	1.76	.35
Collaborative summery writing	17.62	15	1.16	.23
Control	14.12	15	2.06	.41

Based on the results displayed in Table 2, it can be claimed that the collaborative summery writing strategy have positive effect on the Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary learning. So, the first null-hypothesis **was rejected.**

4.2. Answer to the second research question

Q2. Do individual and collaborative summary writing affect the Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary recall and retention differently?

As shown in Table 2, there were statistically significant differences in scores after the individual writing group (M1 = 15.62), collaborative summer writing group (M2 = 17.62) and control group (M3 = 14.12) tests. It can be argued that the treatment affected the performance of the experimental groups in the post-test, but the performance of the first experimental group (collaborative summery writing) was significantly better than the second experimental group (individual writing) in the post-test. However, to further clarify the exact difference, the researchers applied one-way ANOVA for comparing three groups' mean scores on posttest. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. *Results of One-Way ANOVA for Comparing Three Groups' Mean Scores on Posttest.*

Group	Sum of Squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	154.16	2	77.08	26.43	.000
Within groups	209.92	72	2.91		
Total	364.08	74			

As shown in Table 3, the results of a one-way ANOVA comparing the mean scores of the three groups showed both individual and collaborative in the posttest. The summery writing groups scored significantly higher than the control group ($p < 0.05$). Also, in a posttest, there was a significant difference between the collaborative summary writing group (M1 = 17.62) and the individual summary writing group (M2 = 15.62). In fact, the collaborative summary group outperformed both the individual summary group and the control group. These findings suggest that both collaborative summary and individual writing instruction can have a significant impact on the long-term recall and retention of words. Nevertheless, collaborative summary making has proven to be more effective between collaborative and other groups. In this case, it can be concluded that the collaborative summary leader had a positive effect on the vocabulary recall of EFL learners in Iran.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Research and empirical studies on collaborative summary writing have suggested its significance for teaching a second language. This study examined whether the collaborative summary writing should improve the retention and recall of the learning vocabulary of EFL learners. The general principle behind collaborative writing is that students work together as a team to achieve a common goal, namely that each student learns from the others. Hence, by considering the students group work in process of vocabulary learning, it can be concluded that students' recall and retention were generally improved by collaborative summary writing. The findings of this study echo a vast number of past studies and suggest a lot of advantages for using collaborative summary writing in enhancing different aspects of language proficiency, specially vocabulary learning.

With respect to the first research question, the finding of study showed that collaborative summary writing has positive effect on the Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary learning. In this regard, Scotland's (2014) study that was conducted with Qatari students showed they claimed to accept a group grade which confirms the findings of the current study. Four of the participants in this study pointed out that a group evaluation would be accepted only if all the group members are cooperative and one participant did not accept it at all, although they did not really receive a mark for their collaborative summary writing. The reason for this might be that some members work harder than others, and so deserve better marks. Normally, in group writing, a member's mark is tied to the performance of the whole group. Plastow, Spiliotopoulou, and Prior (2010) made a comparison between individual marks and group marks for 230 students. Surprisingly, the results indicated that no statistical correlation was found between individual and group marks. This is an indicator that group evaluation is not valid compared to individual evaluation. Maybe that is why the participants in the present study do not find group evaluation reflects the real ability of each member. For example, higher-ability members might positively affect the mark of lower-ability members and vice versa.

In regarding the second research question, Fernandez Dobao's findings indicated that there was a significant difference among the performance of individuals, students in pair, and students working in groups of four. Moreover, in Dobao's (2012) work it was witnessed that students working in groups of four reached a higher percentage of correctness in their writings than students in pair (pairs) while in the present study, it was observed that students working in pairs did better than those writing individually and the ones working in groups of three. Here, it can be resulted from reduction of defensiveness and encouragement of openness by the nature of the pair work as Blue and Grundy (1996) put it. On the other hand, it was shown that collaborative problem-solving activities are more likely to occur when all the learners adopt a collaborative orientation and are willing to share ideas and engage with each other's' contributions. When at least one of the group members tries to dominate or adopt a passive attitude, the resulting pattern of interaction tends to be less cooperative and collaborative (Fernandez Dobao, 2012; Furnham, 2005). In such a similar vein, it can be concluded that students in pairs cooperated more willingly since they knew that their cooperation and collaboration would benefit both of them while students in groups were less willing to work together.

The results shed more light on the interactive patterns in the EFL context of Iran regarding pairings and groupings of students, and opportunities for more interaction even in teacher fronted classes. Thus, teachers can help students by placing them in groups irrespective of their proficiency level, gender, L1, age, and motivation. The outcomes of the study can contribute to materials and syllabus design by indicating that collaborative task types are similarly beneficial in promoting vocabulary learning. In spite of the conclusions drawn here regarding the potential value of involving students in collaborative summery writing interactions in vocabulary learning, more research is needed before a generalization can be made about its efficacy on both theoretical and practical aspects.

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