

The Effect of Reconstruction as a Noticing Strategy on Iranian Female First Grade High School Students' Writing Ability

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Abstract—Most Iranian high school and university students suffer from lack of enough knowledge of writing and are not able to communicate via this skill properly. To help Iranian EFL learners improve their writing skill, in the present study attempts were made to investigate the effect of reconstruction, as a noticing strategy, on first grade high school female students' writing ability. To this end, 96 participants were selected via convenience sampling technique and were divided into two groups—experimental and control (48 participants each). Before beginning the treatment, the pretest was administered to the two groups. The experimental group reconstructed the original extracts during 10 treatment sessions each took 40 minutes while the control group was taught writing skill through explicit explanation without reconstruction. Finally, the posttest was administered to both groups. The data collected were analyzed running ANCOVA and the results showed that the main effect of the treatment was significant.

Index Terms—noticing, reconstruction, writing ability

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Overview

It is about two decades that many scholars have debated that second language acquisition (SLA) is the result of what learners pay attention to and become aware of in target language (TL) input. In other words, they believe that people learn more about things they attend to in comparison to the things they do not (Schmidt, 2010).

The most challenging claims in the role of noticing have been posed by Schmidt (1990) and Ellis (1995). Schmidt (1990) argued that attention plays a crucial role in learning and claimed “there can be no learning without attention”, but he was not the only person who believed in such a strong claim (Gass & Selinker, 1994). Ellis (1995) also asserted in his models that noticing is the primary step for learning and evoked “no noticing, no acquisition”. However, such claims are in dispute; for example, Reber (1989) as a psychologist and Doughty (2001, in Ellis 2008) believe in unconscious learning it means learning without awareness is possible. But Schmidt (1994) pointed out “it is not clear to what extent such learning is robust and long-lasting or peripheral and fragile”. He believes that the role of unconscious learning has been exaggerated (Ellis, 2008). Schmidt's idea, eventually, resulted in his proposal of ‘Noticing Hypothesis’ and its underlying hypothesis called ‘Noticing the Gap’.

The role of noticing and consciousness in SLA has gained increasing support recently. Reviewing a number of empirical studies related to the notion of noticing, both Long (1983, 1988; in Cross 2002) and Ellis (1990; in Cross 2002) concluded that conscious learning is a contributory factor in SLA.

Eventually, receiving adequate evidence in favor of Schmidt's noticing hypothesis, language teachers can take advantage of stimulating cognitive processes and benefit from the idea in successful teaching/ learning processes by planning instructional syllabuses and educational materials that provide more noticing opportunities for learners on one hand, as well as tasks and strategies that require or attract learners' conscious attention on the other, in order to facilitate learning.

A level of awareness is an essential part of language learning process. This particular level is mentioned by psychologists as ‘attention’ and by linguists as ‘noticing’ (Zhang, 2012). To investigate the effectiveness of attention/noticing in language learning one should consider noticing strategies such as highlighting, think aloud, and reconstruction.

The present study investigates whether reconstruction as a noticing process can benefit learners in their writing ability which is really important in communication.

B. *Statement of the Problem*

The growth of science in the world in different disciplines such as technology, business, humanities as well as academic ones especially international relations between the universities, scholars, journals, and students requires writers' competence in order to make them able to communicate with others effectively all around the world via E-mails, articles, letters, and books that reflect one's knowledge and power of writing. Unfortunately, after being taught English for many years—sometimes from kindergarten to university and at least about six years in secondary and high school—'most Iranian learners lack the ability to write properly' (Shokrpour and Fallahzade, 2007; Rasouli & Abbasvandi, 2013).

Shokrpour and Fallahzade (2007) in their study point out Iranian EFL medical students have problems both in language and writing skills, but with a higher percentage of problems in writing skills. They assert what our students need, in addition to language knowledge, is writing skills. Their investigation on learners' problem showed that Iranian learners have problem in grammar, syntax, and punctuation too.

Rasouli and Abbasvandi (2013) back Shokrpour and Fallahzades' findings and say that "this has always been detected by the raters" they write "the raters found learners' writing poor in vocabulary and grammar" and suggest for promoting writing quality improving students' writing knowledge are in all aspects required.

C. *Significant of the Study*

Communication via writing is a daily need for various classes of society in one way or another. So, boosting students' knowledge and power of writing must really be a crucial part of language teachers' efforts and responsibilities. To this end, language teachers should be equipped with techniques and strategies that facilitate writing.

The results of the previous studies concerning noticing are mixed. For example, 'Krashen (1983) believes that acquisition is a subconscious process while Schmidt (1994) knows acquisition as a conscious process and finally some others like Tomlin and Villa (1994) claim that acquisition is an amalgam of conscious and subconscious processes' (Soleimani, Ketabi, & Talebinejad, 2008).

Regarding to such disagreements Green (2012) expresses that "Somebody had this to say and somebody thought this". He exemplifies if there are two students who are alike in every respect, but one notices more language than the other, we would expect the one who notices more to learn better and quicker. Jeremy Cross (2002) in his article 'noticing in SLA' argues that 'noticing' has gained wide support on the basis of intuition and assumption rather than on the findings of related and exhaustive empirical research. Consequently, the effect of noticing in learning a second language still requires more experimental work and if it gets verified that noticing can positively affect learning, we can easily utilize its strategies such as reconstruction in our teaching approach because it is not costly, nor difficult. So, learners may then notice a particular linguistic feature in input while following a formal instruction as consciousness raising (Cross, 2002).

D. *Purpose of the Study*

The main purpose of the present study is to enhance EFL learners' writing ability. To this end, the secondary purpose is to see whether reconstruction positively affects the writing of Iranian students studying in high school, especially the first graders.

E. *Variables*

- Independent variables: reconstruction
- Dependent variable: students' writing ability

F. *Research Question*

Does reconstruction significantly affect Iranian female high school students' writing ability?

G. *Research Hypothesis*

As a noticing strategy, reconstruction improves the Iranian EFL learners' writing competence.

II. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

The frustration of achieving high levels of competence by language learners in communicative classrooms led scholars to think about what communicative approaches lack; and it is certainly 'focus on form'. As Baleghizade and Derakhshesh (2012) bring from Long (1991), teaching language bits are not fruitful and language learning is a complex process of cognitive development not such a simplistic matter. He does not approve communicative approach since it ignores grammar.

Ellis (2008) suggests that:

One reason why learners fail to achieve high levels of competence in communicative classrooms may be their failure to attend to form. That is, because the activities they engage in are meaning-focused, they do not notice features such as past tense markings ... such an interpretation is compatible with NOTICING and OUTPUT HYPOTHESIS. (p. 827)

So, in recent years SLA studies put more emphasis on the concept of attention and noticing eventually (Gass & Selinker 2008; Ellis 2008; Cross 2002; Noonan 2004; Greene 2012; Baleghizade & Derakhshesh 2012; Doughty 2003, Zhang 2012; Sysoyev 1999).

According to Cross (2002) there are some techniques such as awareness/ consciousness/ attention raising, and noticing (the gap) that can be utilized by language teachers to facilitate learning by influencing the complex processes of it. It seems to be helpful to review some definitions of the term 'noticing'. Some influential definitions have been given by Schmidt (1994), Tomlin and Villa (1994; in Ellis 2008), and Robinson (1995) which are brought respectively.

A. Definition of Noticing

- **Schmidt's definition of noticing.** Schmidt (1990, 1994, and 2001) defines noticing as the process of attending consciously to linguistic features in the input and believes that it is necessary for learning.

- **Tomlin and Villas' definition of noticing.** Tomlin and Villa's (1994; cited in Ellis 2008) definition of detection is closely associated with Schmidt's noticing. They define it as a cognitive registration of sensory stimuli, "the process that selects or engages a particular and specific bit of information.

- **Robinson's definition of noticing.** Robinson (1995; Robinson 2002) suggests that noticing means detection and 'rehearsal'. Rehearsal, here, suggests that learners must make some conscious effort to memorize the new forms they have noticed.

'Attention' in SLA was conceptualized in terms of 'consciousness' initially. Krashen in 1981 (cited in Ellis, 2008) used the terms 'conscious' and 'unconscious' to characterize processes responsible for 'learning' explicit knowledge and 'acquisition' of implicit knowledge, respectively. Not surprisingly, such a rigid distinction followed by scholars' controversies over the idea. McLaughlin (1990; cited in Ellis, 2008), for instance, viewed it untenable and argued that it is not amenable to empirical studies. But more much clarification to the role of consciousness has been done by Schmidt's contributions.

B. Schmidt's Contributions of Consciousness

Reviewing the related literature up to the end of the 1980s, Schmidt (1990) introduced three types or levels of consciousness: 1) consciousness as intention, 2) consciousness as attention, and 3) consciousness as awareness; and put some claims forward about each to clarify them.

1) Consciousness as intention: refers to the differences between 'incidental' and 'intentional' subject. For example, learning new vocabulary or structures through reading which is not the aim of a reading text, definitely, comprehending it can be the main goal of such tasks. On the other hand, the latter is goal-oriented and requires learners' deliberate attention to the subject for detection. For example, when the L2 learners fail to notice an issue since it is processed differently in learners' first language or L1 (Schmidt, 2010).

2) Consciousness as attention: refers to a variety of mechanisms or subsystems, such as alertness, orientation, detection, facilitation, and inhibition that their common function is controlling information processing. As Schmidt (2010) says consciousness as attention seems to be heart of the matter and learners need to pay conscious attention to the form, irrespective of the way they acquire that piece of knowledge of language, incidentally or intentionally. While there is not any evidence against the claim that people learn much less about the things they do not attend to (Logan, Taylor, and Etherton, 1996 in Schmidt, 2010), the important question in Baars' (1988) idea is 'whether more attention results in more learning'.

3) Consciousness as awareness: is most controversial in SLA. In 'implicit learning', Reber (1967, 1993) proposed that learning takes place without awareness. He points out that people acquire knowledge without conscious effort to learn and are not able to express it. On the contrary, there are some others, like Barrs (1988), who believe that awareness and attention are closely linked and "what we are aware of is what we attend to" so it must be concluded that if attention is necessary for learning then perhaps awareness is as well (cited in Schmidt 2010).

Schmidt's (2010) solution was to classify three levels for awareness: *perception*, *noticing*, and *understanding*. Perception implies mental organization and the ability to create internal representations of external events. But more noticeable issue in Schmidt's classification is the distinction he has made between 'noticing' and 'understanding' as different levels of awareness; that just one of them is crucial for acquisition language.

C. 'Noticing' versus 'Understanding'

According to Schmidt (2010), noticing and understanding differ from each other. 'Noticing' refers to the "conscious registration of attended specific instances of language" and 'understanding' points to a "higher level of awareness that includes generalizations across instances" (p.725). Schmidt's proposal is that "the lower level of awareness is necessary for second language acquisition, while the higher level is facilitative (p. 721-737)". In other words, 'noticing is required for SLA, but 'understanding' not.

Schmidt's claim about the position of noticing is backed by Ellis's (1997, 1999) models. They also show that noticing is the very first step of the processes responsible for input to be intake. In addition to Ellis's models, there are some other models of scholars based on different points of view that support Schmidt's ideas about the influential role of noticing in language learning.

D. Some Models and Hypotheses Based on Different Points of View That Support the Role of Noticing

• **Ellis's (1997) model 'the process of learning implicit knowledge'**. Ellis shows his model of 'the process of learning implicit knowledge' as the following diagram:

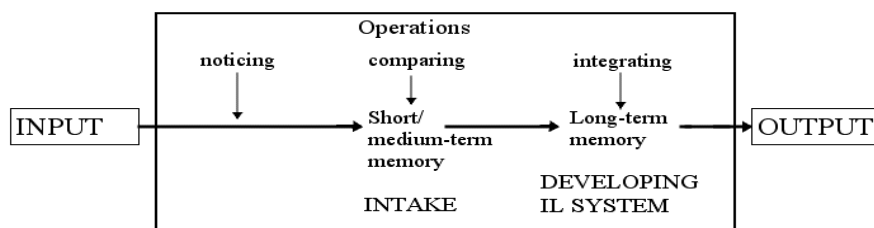


Figure 1: The process of learning implicit knowledge from R. Ellis (1990, p.119)

He put his model forward based on the theory of SLA in which two different stages are involved; in the first stage input becomes intake by means of involving learners noticing language features in the input, absorbing them into their short-term memories and comparing them to features produced as output. In the second stage, on the other hand, intake is absorbed into the learner's interlanguage system (IL) and changes to this system only occur when language features become part of long-term memory (Zhang, 2012; Cross, 2002).

• **Ellis's (1999) model 'the cognitive process in SLA'**. Ellis in 1999, proposed a model in which the role of noticing was given great importance. It became a consensual model and drew attentions to the cognitive progress in cognitive approach, in other words, what a learner does with input. This framework which explains the language learning from a cognitive perspective, also asserts that noticing is the first stage of language acquisition.

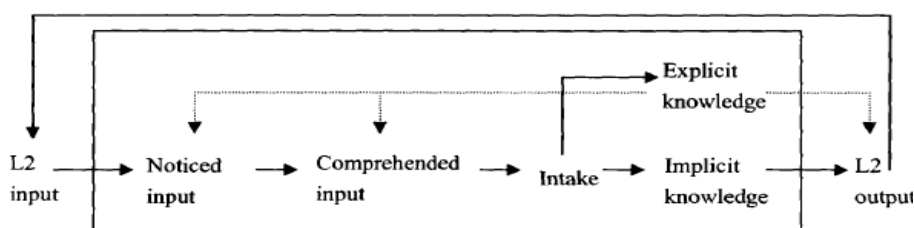


Figure 2- The framework for investigating L2 acquisition (Adapted from Ellis 1999, p. 349)

In this framework, the initial role is given to noticing. That part of input which has been noticed by the learners functions as a primary device that prepares the input for further analysis (Zhang, 2012; Cross, 2002).

According to Zhang (2012), there are some other supporters of the idea that noticing is a very low/beginning level of consciousness, for instances, Gass (1988) evokes "noticing is the first stage of language acquisition" and Batstone (1994) claims that "noticing is the gateway to subsequent learning" (p. 581).

• **VanPatten's (1996) model 'Input Processing' or (IP) model**. As its name conveys Input Processing Theory of VanPatten (1996) is based on information processing viewpoint. It expresses that since working memory is limited in capacity, attending to different stimuli in the input simultaneously is very difficult in practice. He believes that a key intentional process can be the solution. He called such a process as 'detection' and claimed that detecting one bit of information can lead in detection of other bits. For VanPatten the main problem was how learners chose certain stimuli to detect.

• **Swain's (1985, 1995) 'Output Hypothesis'**. In her model Swain claims that language production may result in noticing by the learners to the problems they have in their existing knowledge in comparison to the target language; it means that output enables them to 'notice the gap' and consequently leads them to what they need to know, and finally leads them consciously to attend to something they want to detect about the target language. This conscious recognition of their linguistic deficit that may make learners to work on those features of language that were not match to the target ones echoes the 'Noticing Hypothesis' (Zhang, 2012).

• **Long's (1983, 1985) 'Interaction Hypothesis'**. Long (1985, cited in Zhang, 2012) added a new factor to Krashen's 'Input Hypothesis' and proposed a new theory called 'Interaction Hypothesis'. He believes that "interaction and input are two major players in language acquisition" (Brown, 2007; p.305). Currently researchers, who have conducted studies to examine interaction theory, reveal that interaction can stimulate noticing (Zhang, 2012).

• **McLaughlin's (1987) model 'Attention-Processing'**. McLaughlin and his colleagues' model (cited in Brown 2007) avoided any direct appeal to a consciousness continuum and explained the process by forming four cells, instead. They allocated two mechanisms named as 'controlled' and 'automatic' processes to information processing and two categories of attention known as 'focal' and 'peripheral' for learning to occur (Brown, 2007). Thus as the following table conveys based on this model, there can be four possible processes:

- 1) Focal attention-Controlled process;
- 2) Focal attention- Automatic process;
- 3) Peripheral attention-Controlled process;
- 4) Peripheral attention-Automatic process

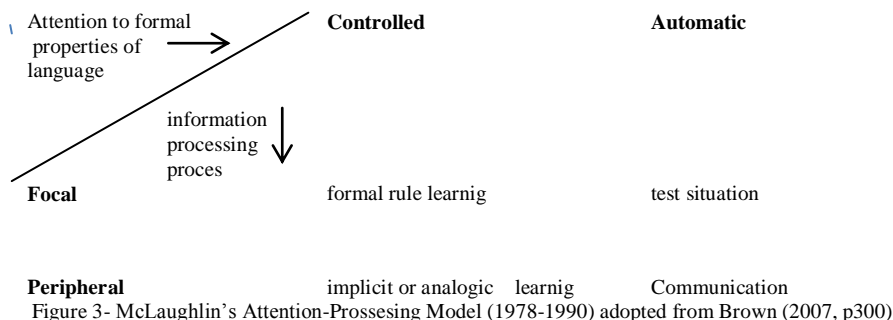


Figure 3- McLaughlin's Attention-Processing Model (1978-1990) adopted from Brown (2007, p300)

Zhang (2012) has summarized Brown (2007, p. 299-302) and brought that the processes which are capacity limited and temporary are 'controlled' and those which are relatively permanent are 'automatic' ones. To continue s/he added that in both ends of this continuum of processing, attention on the task at hand can be either focal or peripheral, considering that focal attention does not mean "conscious" attention, and peripheral attention does not mean "subconscious" attention here; s/he also has brought from Hulstijn (1990) that both focal and peripheral attention can be quite conscious. Thus, second language learning can be considered as a movement from a controlled process with focal attention to an automatic process with peripheral attention. Attention is an indispensable factor in language learning (p.582).

• **Robinson's Multiple-Resource Model.** One of the most impressive works on the role of attention is the one of Robinson's (1995a, 2003). He distinguished three senses of attention: 1) Attention as selection which is corresponding to the first stage in an information processing model where input is perceived; 2) Attention as capacity which is corresponding to the central control and decision-making stage; 3) Attention as effort which is referring to the sustained attention involved in response execution and monitoring. The second one coincides with Schmidt's 'noticing'.

• **Kihlstrom (1984) suggestions concerning short-term memory.** 1) consciousness and short-term memory are essentially the same; 2) language items must be processed in short-term memory in order to be stored in long-term memory; 3) Those items which are not processed into short-term memory or not further encoded into long-term memory from short-term memory will be lost.

Schmidt (1990) concluded, "If consciousness is indeed equivalent to the short term store, this amount to a claim that storage without conscious awareness is impossible" (p.136).

Another model with regard to memory is the following:

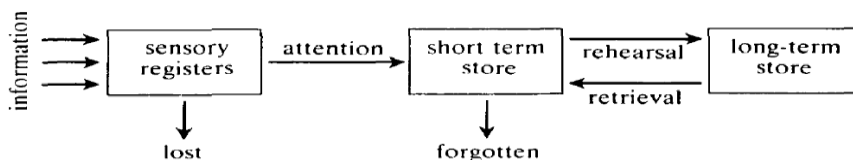


Figure 4- Consciousness in a multistore model of memory (after Kihlstrom, 1984)

Schmidt (1990) expressed that in spite of the simplicity of some models, there are two points shared by them that one can take advantage of in relation to such discussions like the present. The first point is the identification of short term memory with consciousness and the second one is the claim that processing in short term memory is necessary for permanent storage.

E. 'Noticing Hypothesis' vs. 'Noticing the Gap Hypothesis'

S Schmidt (1990, 2001) proposed these hypotheses after encountering two different situations that are called by him as their origins. First he put forward the well-known 'Noticing Hypothesis'— a hypothesis that claims input does not become intake for language learning unless it is noticed, that is, consciously registered. One of the situations that resulted in emerging noticing hypothesis was a case study (Schmidt, 1983, 1984) of uninstructed (naturalistic) learner of English who was given pseudonym 'Wes' by Schmidt. He tried to understand why 'Wes' continued to say sentences like:

- 'Yesterday I'm go beach' and 'Tomorrow I'm go beach' (with no articles, no prepositions, and no tense marking) (the example is adopted from Schmidt, 2010; p.723)

The other situation was a case study of Schmidt's own learning Portuguese during five months living in Brazil.

In spite of the beliefs in the 1980s whose emphasis were on unconscious process of learning and unconscious nature of linguistic knowledge, Schmidt's case study of 'Wes' showed that through naturalistic learning learners' fluency, vocabulary, listening comprehension, conversational ability, and strategic competence may develop quickly, however, his development in the area of grammar (morphology and syntax) is very limited. In the second study, Schmidt took a

Portuguese class himself for five weeks, and then he continued learning the language just through interaction with native speakers. Frota and Schmidt found that some frequent forms in input were not acquired until they were noticed in the input consciously. They also found that native speakers' correction of his grammatical errors were not effective in many cases because he was not aware that he was being corrected by them. So, they put a new hypothesis forward which was slightly different from noticing hypothesis called '*Noticing The gap*'—“the idea that learners must make conscious comparison between their own output and target language input in order to overcome errors” (Schmidt, 2010). Schmidt (1990) claims that there are some factors that influence noticing in the input.

F. Factors That Influence 'Noticing'

- **Instruction.** (also called expectations) may increase the likelihood of noticing features in input through the establishment of expectations.

- **Frequency.** The likelihood that an item will be noticed and integrated into the interlanguage system is increased when that item appears more frequently in the input due to repeated instruction or by way of teacher talk. Therefore, the more frequent an item, the greater number of opportunities for noticing exist.

- **Perceptual salience.** Schmidt (1990) says, “We observed that a number of the forms I noticed late were phonologically reduced, and some were thus rendered homophonous with other morphemes” (p.143). He brings from Slobin (1985) “the less salient a form, the less likely it is to be noticed and such forms include those morphemes that are bound, contracted, or unstressed” and from Skehan (1998) “the more prominent a language form at input, the greater the chance it will be noticed” (p.143).

- **Skill Level.** Skill level, according to Schmidt (1990), refers to the extent to which individuals are able to routinize previously met structures. This processing ability in turn determines how ready learners are to notice new forms in the input.

- **Task demands.** As Cross (2002) noted an instructional task causes learners to notice particular features in a way; such a way is 'Task demand'

Noonan (2004) summarizes feasibility of factors mentioned above in teaching as follows:

- √ Explicit instruction—instruction explaining and drawing attention to a particular form
- √ Frequency—the regular occurrence of a certain structure in input
- √ Perceptual Salience—highlighting or underlining to draw attention to a certain structure
- √ Task Demands—constructing a task that requires learners to notice a structure in order to complete it.

Cross (2002) also introduces 'comparing' as another influential factor on noticing. 'Comparing' refers to the comparison made by learners between their observed input and typical output based on their existing interlanguage system. In other word, they must be aware of 'mismatches' and consciously 'notice the gap'. According to Gass and Slinker (2008) learners pay focal attention to a specific feature of the language, say, 'mismatches' between TL forms and learner-language forms through interaction (e.g., negotiation, recast).

Leow (1997, 2000; cited in Schmidt, 2010) used a clever crossword puzzle task as input to manipulate the focus of learners' attention when exposed to instances of Spanish stem-changing verbs .S/he divided subjects to three groups: unaware, low aware, and high aware; and found that those who demonstrated a higher level of awareness (i.e. understanding) outperformed low aware and unaware groups.

Mackey (2006) investigated whether feedback promotes noticing of L2 forms in a classroom context, and whether there is a relationship between learners' reports of noticing and learning outcomes using multiple measures of noticing and development. The findings of this study revealed that learners reported more noticing when feedback was provided, and learners who displayed more noticing developed more than those who exhibited less noticing (Gass & Selinker, 2008; Schmidt, 2010; Al-Hejin 2005).

Izumi (2002) conducted an empirical study to compare the effects of output and enhanced input on noticing and development and found that output groups participants demonstrated more noticing and more learning than did control group, and that enhanced input subjects exhibited more noticing but not more learning.

In an experimental research Baleghizade and Derakhshesh (2012) asked the learnersto transcribe their own recorded lectures, correct their mistakes and hand them in to their teacher for additional correction. Finally, the corrected version was returned to the students to prepare themselves for the second oral presentation. The results showed since task repetition provide an opportunity for the learners to produce language, notice the errors in their output, and correct those errors through substantial noticing function of the output has had a positive effect on the learners accuracy.

Soleimani, Ketabi, and Talebinejad (2008) conducted a research on three homogeneous groups; one experimental and two comparison groups. The subjects in the experimental group and comparison group1 worked on writing a contrast paragraph using underlining helpful points of a contrast paragraph written by a native while in the comparison group 2, the teacher drew the learners' attention to the form before a problem arises and the study procedure started with the teacher's explicit teaching of paragraphs of contrast using a deductive method. The results showed that the experimental groups outperform the comparison group 2 who was taught traditionally and were in support of noticing.

In an empirical research done by Song (2010) the experimental group was asked to do output practice and received the input passage as a model essay to be learned from whereas the CG received the same passage as a reading

comprehension exercise. The results of this study showed that the differences between the EG and the CG were statistically significant. Therefore, he argued that output may promote noticing on the relevant input.

Rasouli and Abbasvandi (2013) in their study 'the effects of explicit instruction of grammatical cohesive devices on intermediate Iranian learners' writing' revealed that the instruction encouraged the learners to use more cohesive writings in their required tasks.

In another survey Shokrpour and Fallahzade (2007) worked on the problems that medical sciences students of Shiraz University, Iran, faced while writing reports. Their findings indicated that Iranian EFL medical students had problems both in language and writing skills, but with a higher percentage of problems in writing skills. They concluded although grammar, vocabulary, and syntax are essential for a well written report, but language accuracy cannot alone result in effective writing; what our students need is also writing skills.

Khatib and Alizade (2012) in an attempt to solve learners' problems in using past tense English verbs in writing were conducted a study to examine the effects of using two different types of output tasks on noticing and learning them. Two experimental groups were given picture-cued writing and reconstruction tasks, but the comparison group did comprehension check-up tasks. The results of the statistical analyses revealed that only the reconstruction group improved in their noticing of the target feature. However, both experimental groups equally promoted their learning of the form.

Bandar Al-Hejin (2005) mentioned a study conducted by Jourdenais, Ota, Stauffer, Boyson, and Doughty in 1995 as a stronger evidence for the facilitative role of noticing in acquisition of second language. In his article, he has also referred to many other empirical researches related to the issues of awareness, attention, and noticing; but as he mentioned, they are not all similar and the results are various. On the contrary, Schmidt (2010) claims that "most empirical studies have been supportive of the Noticing Hypothesis". These controversies show that there is still a need for more empirical work on the noticing issue in order to reach more supportive results, on the other hand, since noticing is an unobservable issue, assessing it must be done cautiously under certain conditions.

G. How to Assess the Role of 'Noticing'

In empirical researches three approaches are mostly utilized to assess the role of noticing:

1) Highlighting particular linguistic feature as providing input enhancement conditions (Sharwood Smith, 1993 cited by Zhang). Zhang (2012) also writes that in a study conducted by Doughty in 1991, using materials with highlighted relative clauses in the text, experimental group outperformed control group in knowledge of relative clauses (Zhang, 2012).

2) Asking students to report what they had noticed during task completion retrospectively. Researchers examine retrospective *think-aloud* to assess the extent to which learners noticed highlighted input. A study of this kind shows a group of 14 adults receiving enhanced input made more reference to Spanish verb forms during think-aloud than the group receiving no input enhancement (Zhang, 2012).

3) Inferring noticing from observable interactions such as negotiation of meaning, conversational adjustments, request for modified input, and language related episodes (Zhang, 2012). Thornbury (1997) explains tasks that provide noticing opportunities this way: they are essentially meaning-focused, allow the learner to devote some intentional resources to form, and provide both the data and the incentive for the learner to make comparison between interlanguage output and target language models. Two generic classroom task types that meet these criteria are '*reformulation*' and '*reconstruction*' tasks.

In reconstruction activities, the learners are supposed to reconstruct the teacher's text or a provided text by the teacher. Thus the reconstructed version is available for matching with the teacher's original text. Such activities force learners' attention on forms and activate bottom-up processes in comprehending a text, so communicative activities are not necessarily engaged; this producing activity may prompt L2 learners to find out some target linguistic problems in their output and may bring something they need to discover about L2, in their attention and suggests that since noticing is a conscious cognitive process, it is theoretically accessible to training and development. So, teachers' role is to develop noticing strategies that learners can apply independently and autonomously (Thornbury, 1997).

III. METHOD

A. Design

In this study a quasi-experimental method of research with pretest-posttest control design was used. The design is schematically shown below:

EG	T1	X	T2
CG	T1		T2

B. Participants

Ninety-six first grade female students aged from 14 to 16 were selected conveniently from Kosar High School in Alborz province, Iran. Afterward, four classes out of five that all were taught by the same teacher and obviously the same method were taken under the study to attend in their English classes for 10 sessions and conduct the research.

C. Instruments

The instruments used in this study were a pretest to assess students' knowledge of writing in advance and a posttest to compare probable changes to students' ability of writing after the treatment. They were two writing tasks through which students were supposed to write about 10 lines and explain an event that had happened in the past. The tests were designed like a part 3 writing task from Key English Tests for schools (KET) and students were asked to answer questions such as "When was it? Who were there? What special thing happened or what special thing you did?" A scoring model based on International English Language Testing System (IELTS) scoring criteria for writing tasks was used for scoring; I just added marks (points) to its different parts by which students received 3 points for the task completion, coherence and cohesion; 3 for the range and appropriateness of vocabulary they chose; and 4 points for forms and grammatical range and accuracy –10 points in total to score the participants' writing objectively and to avoid bias.

D. Procedure

First, the participants were chosen based on convenient sampling among from the first grade high school students of Alborz province. Then, they were divided into two groups, that is, experimental and control groups with 48 students in each. At the beginning of the study, I gave both groups a writing task as the pretest by which they were asked to write almost 10 lines about their last trip and/or about a special event that had happened to them. Students were informed that they were supposed to write answers to questions like the followings "Where did you go on your last trip? When did you go there? Who did you go with? What did you do there? What special thing has happened to them? When was it? Where was it? And how it happened?"

The first step of treatment got started with work on writing ability of the experimental group by giving them written reconstruction sheets and asking them to fill in the extracts the same as the original one to draw their attention toward forms they were taught and made them compare their completed texts with the original ones as matching to find out their problems. In the first session following the school's normal syllabus, I taught the students passive form of English and read an exercise from Azar's book (1999) fully without any missing words. Thereafter, they worked in pairs on reconstruction sheets on which verbs were missing and were asked to reconstruct the text based on what they had heard. After that the original text with no missing word was distributed to students to match their answers with the correct form. Finally, they were given an unseen text and were asked to reconstruct it individually.

In the second session, I wrote down few lines on the board and asked students to read it, after that the board got erased completely and the same lines was written on the board again but this time, punctuation marks were omitted. Afterward students were asked to reconstruct the text in pairs. The activity was followed by an unseen extract without punctuation marks to be reconstructed as solo work. The same way took place with capitalization, spelling, punctuation, simple and continuous present tense, simple past tense, and articles a/an/the in the rest of sessions. So, the experimental group received a treatment as an especial way of teaching writing through which they were directed to notice the English written forms by means of reconstructing short texts they were exposed to their original version via a visual channel like handouts and board or audio one like the time I was reading the extract loudly in advance.

During 10 sessions of treatment which lasted for five weeks, the control group wrote writing assignments without special treatment, they were taught as usual based on their teacher's instruction and high school syllabus which mostly emanated from deductive teaching and explicit explanation of grammatical points. Writing skill was not taught separately but students were assigned to write; when they encountered a problem they were given an explanation, for example, explanation about usage of comma or other points. Finally, both groups were asked to complete the second writing task. This time, they were ordered to write about their last birthday. They were informed that they were supposed to write 10 lines and answer to questions like the followings "When was your last birthday? Did you have a party? Who did you invite? What was the best gift and who gave it to you; if you had not a party, "What did you do? Did you go out? What did you eat? Who did you go with? What happened? Did you have a good time" and the like.

Since scoring learners' writing was difficult and subjective to a large extent, IELTS criteria for scoring were used—task completion, coherence and cohesion, range of vocabulary and appropriateness, and range of structures and accuracy. So, I allocated 10 points to the writing task and divided these 10 points to 3, 3, and 4. Three points were allocated to the number of sentences that were correct or had minimal mistakes with no damage to the message of written sentences as task completion, coherence, and cohesion. Three points were allotted to the range, variety and appropriate vocabulary used in their writing, and 4 points were allotted to forms such as spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and accuracy like third person/plural s, past mark ed, articles a/an/the , etc. were included in these four points. To be more objective and reliable in scoring another policy was asking one of my colleagues to score the papers based on the model and criteria provided by me, as the second rater. Finally, the correlation coefficient was calculated between the two series of the scores given by both raters. The results showed that they were highly correlated in both experimental and control groups pretests and posttests.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

Since in this study there was a pretest or covariate which might affect the groups' scores on the posttest, ANCOVA was run to adjust or remove the effect of it.

TABLE 1

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF THE GROUPS' SCORES ON THE PRETEST AND POSTTEST			
group		pretest	posttest
experimental	Mean	4.87	7.56
	N	48	48
	Std. Deviation	2.367	1.878
	Minimum	1	3
	Maximum	10	10
control	Mean	7.06	7.44
	N	48	48
	Std. Deviation	2.521	1.832
	Minimum	1	3
	Maximum	10	10
Total	Mean	5.97	7.50
	N	96	96
	Std. Deviation	2.669	1.847
	Minimum	1	3
	Maximum	10	10

As it is evident in Table 1 the mean score and standard deviation of the experimental group on the pretest were 4.87 and 2.367 and they were 7.56 and 1.878 respectively on the posttest, and the mean score and standard deviation of the control group on the pretest were 7.06 and 2.521 and they were 7.44 and 1.832 respectively on the posttest.

TABLE 2

THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP'S SCORES ON PRETEST AND POSTTEST AS PRODUCED BY ONE-SAMPLE KOLMOGOROV-SMIRNOV TEST^c

		pretest	posttest
N		48	48
Normal Parameters ^{a,b}	Mean	4.88	7.56
	Std. Deviation	2.367	1.878
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.187	.153
	Positive	.187	.131
	Negative	-.106	-.153
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		1.297	1.060
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.069	.211

Note. a. Test distribution is Normal ; b. Calculated from data; c. group = experimental

As Table 2 shows the experimental group's scores on pretest and posttest were distributed normally ($p > 0.05$).

TABLE 3

THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE CONTROL GROUP'S SCORES ON PRETEST AND POSTTEST AS PRODUCED BY ONE-SAMPLE KOLMOGOROV-SMIRNOV TEST^c

		pretest	posttest
N		48	48
Normal Parameters ^{a,b}	Mean	7.06	7.44
	Std. Deviation	2.521	1.832
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.196	.162
	Positive	.122	.096
	Negative	-.196	-.162
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		1.355	1.124
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.051	.160

Note. a. Test distribution is Normal; b. Calculated from data; c. group = control

As Table 3 shows the control group's scores on pretest and posttest were distributed normally ($p > 0.05$).

Obviously, for running ANCOVA first assumptions of it must be checked. Here in figure 1 similar slopes are shown on the regression line both groups.

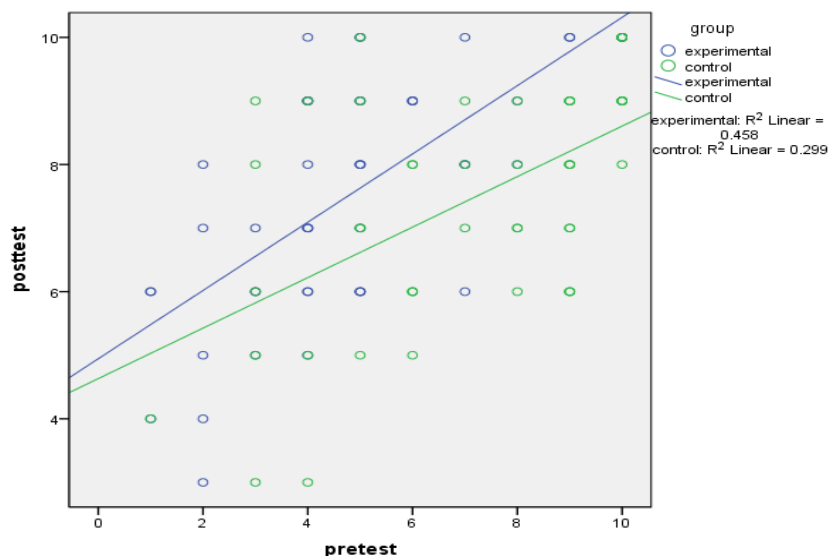


Figure 1: The homogeneity of the slopes of regression lines as produced by scattered dots

Since the lines run parallel, their slopes are homogeneous for all groups concerning both pretest and posttest implying that there was no interaction between the covariate and the treatment. Thus, one of the requirements of ANCOVA was fulfilled. Another assumption which is fulfilled here is linearity of the relationship between the dependent variable and the covariate.

TABLE 4
THE HOMOGENEITY OF THE SLOPES OF REGRESSION LINES AS PRODUCED BY TEST OF BETWEEN-SUBJECTS EFFECTS
DEPENDENT VARIABLE: POSTTEST

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	123.441 ^a	3	41.147	18.875	.000
Intercept	306.871	1	306.871	140.767	.000
group	.326	1	.326	.150	.700
pretest	122.150	1	122.150	56.032	.000
group * pretest	2.737	1	2.737	1.255	.265
Error	200.559	92	2.180		
Total	5724.000	96			
Corrected Total	324.000	95			

Note: a. R Squared = .381 (Adjusted R Squared = .361)

Table 4 shows that the slopes of regression lines was homogeneous for all groups [$F_{(1, 92)} = 1.255, p = 0.265, p > 0.05$] and it means that the assumption has not violated. This Table and Figure 1 support each other and indicate that there was no interaction between the treatment and the covariate.

TABLE 5
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF GROUPS' SCORE ON THE POSTTEST
DEPENDENT VARIABLE: POSTTEST

group	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
experimental	7.56	1.878	48
control	7.44	1.832	48
Total	7.50	1.847	96

Table 5 shows that the experimental group's mean score and standard deviation on the posttest were 7.56 and 1.878; while those of the control group were 7.44 and 1.832 respectively.

TABLE 6
THE EQUALITY OF VARIANCES OF THE GROUPS' SCORES ON THE POSTTEST AS PRODUCED BY LEVENE'S TEST OF EQUALITY OF ERROR VARIANCES^a
DEPENDENT VARIABLE: POSTTEST

F	df1	df2	Sig.
.466	1	96	.497

Since Sig. is greater than .05 in the table 6, it is inferred that variances of groups' scores on the posttest were equal. The distribution of both group's scores on the pretest and posttest as produced by histogram and normal curve showed normality. (see Appendix)

When all the requirements of ANCOVA (the normal distribution of the data, the linear relationship between the scores of groups in the pretest and posttest, the homogeneity of the slope of regression lines for all groups, and the

equality of variances across groups) were fulfilled, the researcher ran ANCOVA the results of which are reported as follows:

TABLE 7
THE RESULTS OF ANCOVA AS PRODUCED BY TEST OF BETWEEN-SUBJECTS EFFECTS
DEPENDENT VARIABLE: POSTTEST

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	120.704 ^a	2	60.352	27.609	.000	.373
Intercept	304.216	1	304.216	139.167	.000	.599
pretest	120.329	1	120.329	55.046	.000	.372
group	25.769	1	25.769	11.788	.001	.112
Error	203.296	93	2.186			
Total	5724.000	96				
Corrected Total	324.000	95				

a. R Squared = .373 (Adjusted R Squared = .359)

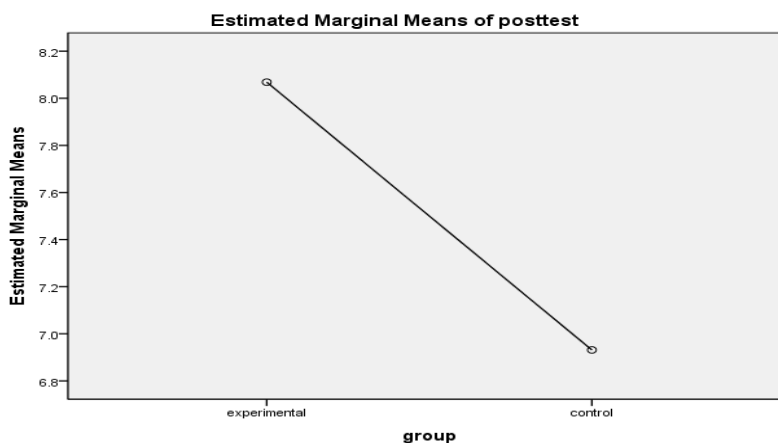
Table 7 shows that the main effect of the treatment (reconstruction) is less than .05, in other words, is significant [$F_{(193)} = 11.788$, $p = 0.001$, $p < 0.05$, $\eta^2 = 0.112$]. So, the hypothesis of the study was verified, and the effect size of the independent variable (or the change on the dependent variable) has been to the extent of 0.112. That is, 11.2% of the change on the dependent variable (writing ability) was due to the effect of the independent variable (reconstruction).

TABLE 8
THE GROUPS' ESTIMATED MARGINAL MEANS ON THE POSTTEST
DEPENDENT VARIABLE: POSTTEST

group	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
experimental	8.069 ^a	.224	7.624	8.513
control	6.931 ^a	.224	6.487	7.376

Note. Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: pretest = 5.97.

As it is evident in Table 8, the marginal or adjusted means of the experimental group is 8.069; while that of the control group is 6.931. Figure 2 below is also a support to the information in Table 8 and shows that the effect of covariate has been removed statistically.



Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: pretest = 5.97

Figure 2: Estimated marginal means of the groups on the posttest as produced by profile plot

V. DISCUSSION

After meeting the requirements of ANCOVA and running it, the outcome showed that the effect of reconstruction, as the independent variable of the present research, on writing ability as the dependent variable was significant [$F_{(193)} = 11.788$, $p = 0.001$, $p < 0.05$, $\eta^2 = 0.112$]. So, it is inferred that the change on dependent variable had taken place as the result of the treatment. In other words, it is deduced that reconstruction can make learners notice the target forms and lead them to perform more properly. Consequently, the hypothesis of the research was verified.

The verification of the hypothesis of this research resulted in the support of the results of other experimental studies conducted earlier; especially the works of Soleimani, Ketabi, and Talebinejad (2008); and Khatib and Alizade (2012) that had studied the effect of noticing in different ways on Iranian learners' writing ability. Of the two studies, the former proved that noticing is a requirement for the acquisition, and the latter showed that reconstruction improved learners' noticing of the target feature. Rasouli and Abbasvandi (2013) also concluded that learners' attending to cohesive devices improved learners' use of them.

The findings of this study are also backed by Schmidt's (1990) 'Noticing Hypothesis' that says it is conscious registration of stimuli in input that leads to input become intake and learning language takes place only when input is noticed. Other ideas in support of the effectiveness of noticing in learning language that are backed by the findings of this research are mentioned in chapter two in details like Ellis's (1997; 1999) models, as an example. He believes noticing is one of the very beginning and crucial steps for language learning. As another, Swain's (1983) Comprehensible Output Hypothesis (COH) that says output is as important as input in a successful language learning process. She believes that noticing is another function of output functions and learners may notice the problems they have in their existing knowledge in comparison to the target language while producing. Since writing is a productive skill the results of this study also goes along with Swain's idea.

VI. CONCLUSION

The present research was conducted on 96 Iranian female first grade high school students of Alborz province, Iran to examine the effect of reconstruction, as a noticing strategy, on learners' writing ability. The result of this quasi-experimental research with pretest-posttest control design showed that reconstruction can positively affect writing ability because analysis via ANCOVA revealed that the main effect of the treatment has been significant [$F_{(193)} = 11.788$, $p = 0.001$, $p < 0.05$, $\eta^2 = 0.112$]. So, it is deduced that the change on dependent variable had taken place as the result of the treatment and consequently the hypothesis of the study was verified. Hence, reconstruction can certainly be utilized as a technique for noticing by language teachers especially for improving learners' writing skill.

VII. IMPLICATIONS

According to the findings of the current study teachers can take advantage of reconstruction tasks and activities while drawing their students' attention to forms via a noticing strategy to improve their learners' writing competence. Reconstruction characteristics make utilizing it feasible in educational environments. It is economical in three dimensions: money, time, and human resource.

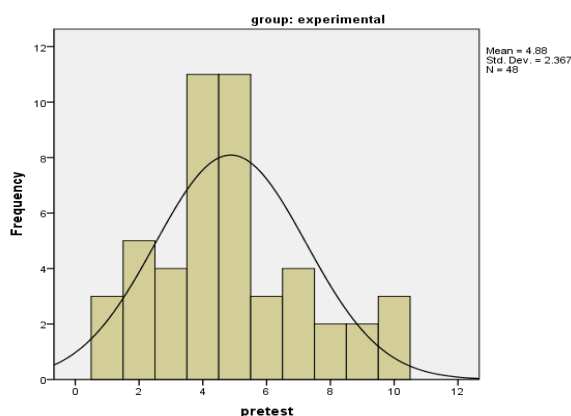
Reconstruction is not costly because it does not need special space and equipment and can be utilized in a classroom just by writing the extracts on the board or paper. It also does not need extra sessions because it does not need a long stretch of time to perform and can be done in a few minutes. Moreover, it is easy to explain to teachers how to prepare reconstruction tasks and activities, and how to administer them in classrooms, so training teachers does not need much time and money. Thus, it is really helpful to utilize it as a teaching technique in favor of improving writing skill.

VIII. RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER STUDIES

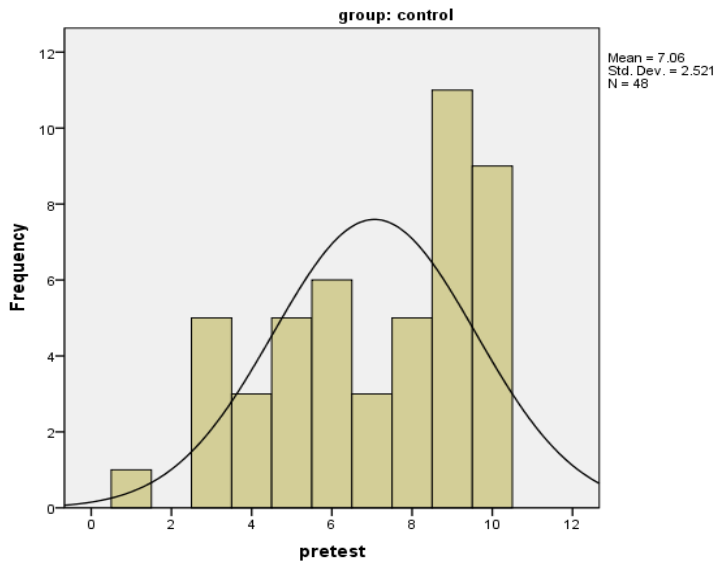
There are many issues related to this study that are worthy to work on. For example, the future researchers may investigate the effect of reconstruction on male learners' speaking or various grammatical patterns. This study dealt with the learners of only elementary level. Reconstruction may be tested on the learners of various levels. In addition to reconstruction, other noticing strategies such as underlining and highlighting may be tested on some other areas of language such as vocabulary, idioms, and important target points.

Shokrpour and Fallahzade's (2007) investigation on learners' problems showed that Iranian learners have problem in grammar, syntax, and punctuation too; and "it has always been detected by the raters" (Rasouli & Abbasvandi, 2013, p. 21). All these problematic areas can also be examined through utilizing different noticing strategies.

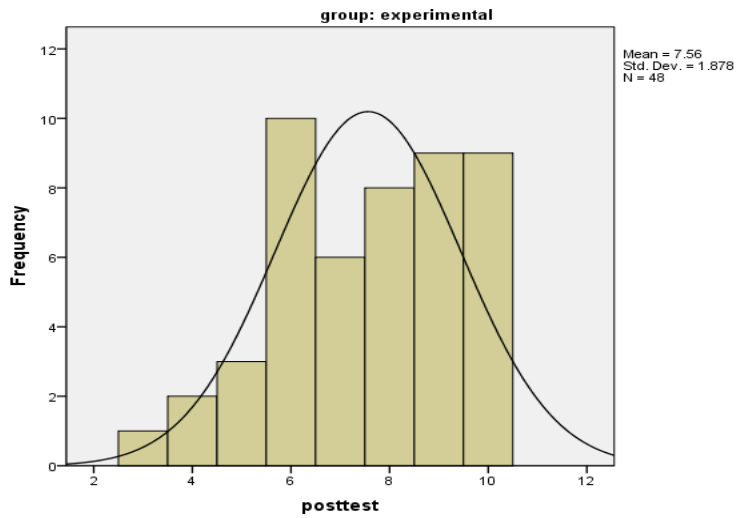
APPENDIX



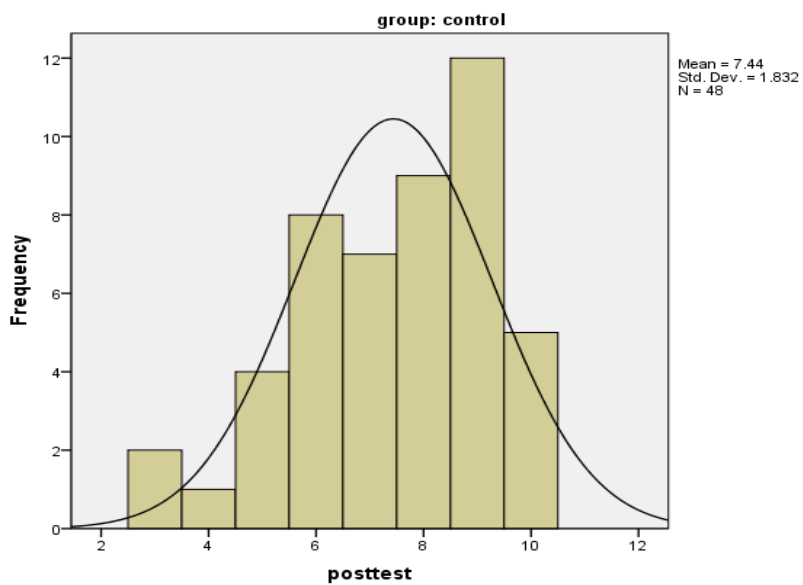
The distribution of experimental group's scores on the pretest as produced by histogram and normal curve



The distribution of control group's scores on the pretest as produced by histogram and normal curve



The distribution of experimental group's scores on the posttest as produced by histogram and normal curve



The distribution of control group's scores on the posttest as produced by histogram and normal curve

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