The Effect of Input-based and Output-based Instruction on EFL Learners' Autonomy in Writing

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Abstract—The current research investigates the comparative effects of input-based and output-based task-induced activities on EFL learners' autonomy in writing. 35 learners were homogenized out of 70 Pre-intermediate EFL learners. The methodology was that at first session, a task of writing - similar to the writing tasks in their book- was given to all the participants in both experimental groups of input-based and output-based. During six treatment sessions some vocabularies related to the writing task is taught to the students. In input-based group the words are just taught and given to learners without asking them to use these words during the process of learning the lessons, but in the output-based group the teacher asks the students to produce the meaning of the words or try to use these vocabularies. At the seventh session, the same task is given to both groups as the post-test to see whether input and output-based instruction has positive effect on the results of their writing production. The writings are assessed in terms of measurements, fluency, accuracy and complexity. The data are analyzed using paired T-test. The paper concludes that output-based task-induced activities were more effective in improving learners' autonomy in Writing.

Index Terms—input-based, output-based, task-induced activities, autonomy, accuracy, fluency, complexity

I. INTRODUCTION

Majority of scholars acknowledged the important role of input in Second language Acquisition and it is widely approved that exposure to the input may not necessarily lead the learners to achieve L2 high proficiency level. Beside input, it has been recognized that Output also plays a vital role in the process of SLA. There are conflicting viewpoints according to the primacy of input or output for SLA. The controversy about the role of input and output in second language learning was very helpful for the researchers to know how to compare the effects of input-based and output-based instruction on L2 development. (Rassaei, 2012) The understanding of how input and output affect comprehension and production of L2 forms and structures has been considered as a vital issue in SLA research and different studies have tried to examine the relative effects of input-based and output-based instructions (Allen, 2000; DeKeyser & Sokalski, 1996; Erlam, 2003; Nagata, 1998; Salaberry, 1997).

In terms of the concept of Learner autonomy, it has been proved by some scholars around the world that Language learners have learned a lot more whenever they themselves acts as teachers, by preparing a lesson plan, selecting teaching methodology and learning materials, determining class activities and assessing learning results. It is believed that L2 learners can develop their ability to learn by being knowing the procedures they are involved in, by contextualizing their learning experiences, by being actively engaged in the learning situation and by taking charge of sorting out their learning experience (Esch, 1996, p.37).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Task-based Language Teaching

Task-based Language Teaching constitutes a strong version of CLT (Ellis, 2004). According to the definition given by Ellis (2009), TBLT is a L2 or Fl teaching methodology that tries to involve learners in authentic context through leading learners to do various tasks. The goal of this approach is to enable learners to acquire a new language as well as to develop the knowledge that they already have. In other words; this approach encourages L2 learners to use their own linguistic knowledge to learn a new language system. Based on TBLT methodology, teaching is based mainly on tasks. Such teaching makes use of a procedural syllabus. (Ellis, 2004, P.351)

B. Defining a Task

In order to clarify the meaning of the task, the following definitions are extracted from the book TBLT by Ellis (2004):

As Prabhu (1987) defines it, a task can be assumed as an activity which demand learners to arrive at findings from given information through a thinking process which allows teachers to control and regulate that process.

Skehan (1998) indicated that meaning is primary in a task which itself can be considered as an activity. There is somehow a kind of priority in Task completion and the evaluation of task performance is in terms of task results. (p.95)

A task as Swain, Skehan and Bygate (2001) indicated is an activity which demands learners to apply language, with emphasis on meaning, to get to an objective. (p.11)

C. Characteristics of Task

Ellis (2004) identified some of the critical features of a task that are presented bellow.

A task is a kind of work plan which focuses on meaning and involves language use in real-world. It may involve all or one of four language skills having a clearly defined communicative outcome.

D. Definitions of Learner Autonomy

Transferring responsibility from teachers to learners can be called 'learner autonomy', although there are different labels related to this concept (Cotterall & Crabbe, 1999, p.3). All the definitions of autonomy refer to the capability of the Language learner to act independently and in cooperation with other learners, to be considered as a responsible person. In order to fully understand the concept of Learner Autonomy, linguistics have provided many definitions in different ways which are presented below:

As Holec (1981) indicated, autonomy occurs when the learner become responsible for his own learning. (p.3) Dickinson (1987) assumed that autonomy is the situation in which the learner himself tries to make decisions related to learning and he/she takes the charge of the implementation of these decisions. Little (1990) believes that learner autonomy is connected to the learner's psychological relation to the process and learning content. According to Pennycook's (1997) viewpoint, development of autonomy is to become the author of one's own world. (p.45) "It is the capacity for a certain range of highly explicit behavior that embraces both the process and the content of learning (as cited in Cotterall & Crabbe, 1999, p.11). As it can be inferred from the definitions provided above, educators and linguists do not agree on the term' learner autonomy'. But as it is obvious, all the definitions are illustrating the same thing. Learners themselves build knowledge and every learner takes use of his own experience and knowledge to perform the task presented to him (Candy, 1991, p. 270). It can be stated that each learner can be the author of his own world of education. Although so many definitions have been provided for it, the concept of learner autonomy has not been fully understood yet (Oxford, 2003).

E. Learner Autonomy as the Main Goal of Educational Setting

During the process of CLT development, recent innovations in classroom exercises have emphasized the value of pair work or group work learning, learner-centeredness, and autonomy and shared decision-making in the classroom. In some educational settings based on learner autonomy, the majority of students believed that they could acquire new things through doing things with their hands, with their mouth and more importantly with their minds. The learners realized that the teacher was not the dominant person in the classroom, but the students were. It has completely changed the traditional way of teaching with students staying standstill and listening while the teacher is giving a lecture as the only authority in the class. Learner autonomy has been widely flourished in education since 1970s. Nowadays, autonomy is accepted as an appropriate objective in education worldwide, and most of the teachers know that it is important to help learners become more autonomous. (Wenden, 1991). In Education, the development of autonomy in the learner should be considered as an important issue (Nunan, 1988). Language teaching has developed so rapidly and the attention toward the learner autonomy has been increased. In other words, the interest to define how learners make conscious efforts to master a foreign or second language, is increasing. Learners who accept responsibility for their learning are more likely to achieve their learning targets in a shorter period of time and they generally has a positive view to further learning. If the students are not trained how to learn by their own, they will have little encouragement to continue learning outside the Classroom settings (Lee, 1998). Both teachers and students should know about the goal of language education and that is to develop learner autonomy. For any Language learner who wants to become autonomous, he/she should improve to learn independently if there is not a teacher available. It is vital for students to acquire the habit of learning steadily, and continue doing that after finishing their academic or institutional studies.

In order to promote learner autonomy, accepted as the ultimate goal of education, it should be determined how to promote learner autonomy and how to make learners take charge-at least temporarily of the whole or part of the learning process. It is no so hard for them to be able to produce a well-formed and appropriately predetermined plan, when the teachers decide in advance what to teach and where and when and in what order they should present the material. When learners are involved in the process of decision-making and they are properly aware of learning procedures, sharing their opinions through negotiation, they will have excellent learning. (Curran, 1968). Therefore, it is so important for teachers to provide suitable materials for learners in order to help students develop their own autonomy and be aware that they are somehow responsible for their process of language learning. We trust that a classroom based on negotiated knowledge and procedures help the learner to obtain equal level of autonomy and there will be a good learning community. (Breen and Littlejohn, 2000, p.22).

F. Input-based Instruction (Structured-input Instruction)

Today there is an agreement upon the fact that learners' exposure to input plays a crucial role in SLA so that it has been proved to be impossible to achieve a new language without considering the role of input. In structured –input instruction, the learners pay attention to the form of the target structure and process input for meaning through tasks that do not require them to produce the target structure. The structured-input group receives explicit instruction on the key grammatical item and practices this feature through input-based activities. (As Anna-Maria Andreou indicated in her paper in Conference: ECER 2008, From Teaching to Learning?)

VanPatten's processing instruction (PI) is a kind of input-based instructional technique which affects the acquisition of target language forms by involving learners in processing structured input.

G. Output-based Instruction (Meaning-oriented Output- based Instruction)

In meaning-oriented output- based instruction, the learners are intended to focus only on meaningful activities, in which students attend to the meaning of both the stimulus and the response, and are given opportunities to produce language. This area of research has found a fertile ground in Second Language Acquisition and there are now a number of studies that have contrasted structured-input and output-based instruction on tests of comprehension and production. One type of output–based instruction was applied in traditional audio-lingual classrooms in which the structures of target language were practiced through a number of different mechanical drills without any focus on communicative context. Swain (1985, 1995, 2000, 2005) indicates that output is as considerable as input in L2 knowledge development to higher levels. Swain (1985) claims that output drew students attention from the semantic processing needed for comprehending input toward the syntactic processing necessary for encoding meaning (p.249). One crucial function of output is helping learners become aware of the gap which exist between their current linguistic knowledge and the target language system. (Swain, 1995, 2005)

H. Related Empirical Studies on Input-based and Out-put Based Instruction

A number of empirical studies have been done that compared the effects of input practice to output-based instruction with the aim to require learners to utter comprehensible output. However, the outcomes of these studies are contrary. Many of these studies revealed that input-based and output-based are both effective in L2 development. Several other studies showed that input-based and output-based instructions are effective in developing SLA equally (Erlam, Loewen, and Philp, 2009, Farley, 2001b) Some others provided evidence showing that the input-based instruction was more advantageous than the output one. (e.g., Benati, 2005; Farley, 2001a; Lee and Benati, 2006) The findings of several studies showed that output-based instruction was superior comparing to input-based one. (Toth, 2006, Morgan-Short and Bowden, 2006, Allen, 2000)

The findings of the study done by Erlam et al. (2009) revealed that both instructional groups significantly outperformed the control group that did not receive any instruction. Toth (2006) investigated the role of input and output in second language acquisition of Spanish morphosyntax and the results showed that both groups improved equally on a grammar task, but the output group performed better than its counterpart in a task of controlled production.

Benati (2001) examined the effects of processing instruction and output-based grammar instruction and the results showed that the processing instruction group surpassed the output-based group in a task of interpretation while both groups arrived at equal achievements in a production task. Morgan-Short and Bowden (2006) did a laboratory research study to investigate the effects of input-based instruction for both processing instruction and meaningful output-based instruction. The outcome of their study revealed that both groups had significant gains comparing to the control group from pre-tests to post-tests. According to these findings, this can be concluded that both input-based and output-based instruction might result in linguistic development. (p. 31).

There are also several researches that offer that the role of output is secondary to the role of input and output only acts as a facilitator to reach to a developed second language system (Benati, 2001; VanPatten & Cadierno, 1993; VanPatten & Wong, 2004). The results of these studies manifested that performance of those learners receiving instruction with no output practice was as well in tasks of comprehension and production as those receiving output-based instruction.

Ellis (2012) indicated that the outcomes of previously done studies comparing the effects of input-based and output-based instruction are contradictory and mixed. According to VanPatten's processing instruction model, one of the preceding studies' constraints is that they focused mostly on input-based instruction and did not take account of other kinds of input-based instructions, such as textual enrichment or input enhancement. Some of the studies provided evidence that output has a more effective role in second language development than it has been considered before, and they used output in a more communicative setting (e.g., Toth, 2006; Erlam et al., 2009). As Ellis (2012) states, the advantages of input-based and production-based instructions depend on the negotiations that emerge while giving the instruction. To this end, we investigate the effects of input-based instruction and compare them with the effects of output-based instruction on the development of Learner autonomy in writing.

I. Related Empirical Studies on Learner Autonomy

Zejun Ma and Peng Gao (2010) attempted to develop syllabuses in the language classroom in order to aid learners decide about their learning progress by negotiations. In this way, the value of collaborative learning, learner-centeredness, learner autonomy and shared decision making were all emphasized. They could conclude that through

contents, ways of assessment, negotiations of purposes, learners follow various steps of producing language and through transferring the energy into students' hands, they become highly provoked and deeply involved in the learning procedure and they can take charge of their own learning. According to some of the participants' comments, it seemed that the teacher was given some freedom in class, but the learners could learn more than just staring at the teacher and some students believed that It was an innovative and original method, which motivated them to learn vigorously by themselves.

Haiyan Wang did a study in china in 2011 and he concluded that there is little evidence that autonomy is more appropriate in some contexts or countries but not in other cultures. The results showed that although the eastern and western language learners come from different backgrounds, there are still substantial similarities. These are the importance of building self-confidence and self-reliance, freedom of choice, collaboration, and mutual respect of the individual. (as cited in Wang, 2011)

The findings of the study done by Filiz Yalcin Tilfarlioglu and Fatma Seyma Ciftci in Turkey (2011) have revealed that there exist a obvious direct relationship between self-efficacy and learner autonomy ($r=.667$, $p>.01$) and they found out that learner autonomy and self-efficacy influence on educational success positively according to the outcome of several regression analysis. In this current study, it is found out that the relationship between self-efficacy and learner autonomy and also academic success play a crucial role in language learning and teaching.

J. Research Questions and Hypothesis

By considering the literature review presented above, the present study attempted to investigate the following research question and research hypotheses:

RQ1: What are the effects of input-based and output-based instruction on learners' autonomy in writing?

H0: There isn't any significant difference between input-based instruction and EFL Learners' successful writing task performance.

H1: There isn't any significant difference between output-based instruction and EFL Learners' successful writing task performance.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

The participants of the current study were 35 learners who were homogenized out of 70 Pre-intermediate learners studying English at Kish language school in Rasht. All of them were female.

B. Data Collection Instrument

In this study, the accuracy is measured by counting the number of Error Free T-unit (EFTs) per T-unit (Arent, 2003; Rahimpour, 2008; Salimi, Dadashpour, and Asadollahfam, 2011, Salimi & Fatollahnejad, 2012).

The fluency of the written production of language learners has been measured by words per T-units (Ishikawa, 2006; Kuiken and Vedder, 2007, Salimi, Dadashpour & Asadollahfam, 2011, Salimi & Fatollahnejad, 2012).

Measuring lexical and syntactic complexity can be assumed as complexity measurement. Lexical complexity of the written text was not considered because the learners were free to ask the teacher for explanation about the intended lexical item. A measure of the ratio of the number of clauses to total number of T-units was adopted taking account of syntactic complexity (Mehnert, 1998; Ellis and Yuan, 2004; Salimi, Dadashpour, and Asadollahfam, 2011). (as cited in Salimi & Fatollahnejad, 2012)

C. Procedure

A quasi-experimental design with a pretest-treatment-posttest sequence was used. The methodology applied for this study was that at first session, a pre-task that was a task of writing - similar to the writing tasks in their class book- was given to all the participants in both experimental groups of input-based and output-based. During six treatment sessions some useful vocabularies related to the writing task is taught to the students. In input-based group the words are just taught and given to l2 learners without drawing their attention or asking them to use these words during the process of learning the lessons, but in the output-based group the teacher asks the students to produce the meaning of the words or try to use these vocabularies while speaking or writing. At the seventh session, the same task is given to both groups as the post-test (post-task) to see whether input and output-based instruction has positive effect on the results of their writing production. In order to quantify the data gathered, the writing texts are assessed in terms of measurements, fluency, accuracy and complexity. The quantitative data are analyzed using paired T-test.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Paired T-test was applied to compare the means of fluency, accuracy and complexity of the written productions between two groups. The descriptive statistics (the mean scores and standard deviations) and also the results of independent samples T-test for the two experimental groups is shown in tables below.

TABLE 1:
COMPARISON OF THE MEANS OF FLUENCY OF WRITTEN PRODUCTION BETWEEN TWO GROUPS

Accuracy Measure	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Input-based group	18	2.287	0.733
Output-based group	18	2.367	0.750

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics of the comparison of the means of fluency for input-based group. The mean of Input-based group was a bit less than the mean in the Output-based group and the results of t-test showed that input-based group is not significantly different from output-based group t (34) =-0.3234, p > 0/05 and it does not reject the null-hypotheses.

TABLE 2
SHOWS THE RESULTS OF INDEPENDENT SAMPLES T-TEST FOR MEANS OF FLUENCY FOR THE TWO EXPERIMENTAL GROUPS.

Independent Samples t-Test

t-Statistic	-0.3234	**Result**
Degrees of Freedom	34	Do not reject the null hypothesis.
Critical Value	2.0322	**Conclusion**
95% Confidence Interval	[-0.5944, 0.7544]	Group A is not significantly different from Group B, t(34) = -0.3234, p > .05.

TABLE 3:
COMPARISON OF THE MEANS OF ACCURACY OF WRITTEN PRODUCTION BETWEEN TWO GROUPS

Accuracy Measure	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Input-based group	18	0.797	0.1223
Output-based group	18	0.796	0.1006

As it is obvious in the above table, the mean of the accuracy was the same in the input-based and Output-based groups and the results of t-test showed that input-based group is not significantly different from output-based group t (34) =0.0298, p > 0/05 and it does not reject the null-hypotheses.

TABLE 4
SHOWS THE RESULTS OF INDEPENDENT SAMPLES T-TEST FOR MEANS OF ACCURACY FOR THE TWO EXPERIMENTAL GROUPS.

Independent Samples t-Test

t-Statistic	0.0298	**Result**
Degrees of Freedom	34	Do not reject the null hypothesis.
Critical Value	2.0322	**Conclusion**
95% Confidence Interval	[-0.1007, 0.1029]	Group A is not significantly different from Group B, t(34) = 0.0298, p > .05.

There was not any significant difference between means of two groups the null hypothesis stating "There isn't any significant difference between the input-based instruction and output-based instruction in terms of their effects on EFL Learners' successful writing task performance" is accepted.

TABLE 5:
COMPARISON OF THE MEANS OF COMPLEXITY OF WRITTEN PRODUCTION BETWEEN TWO GROUPS

Accuracy Measure	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Input-based group	18	1.028	0.188
Output-based group	18	1.261	0.190

As we can see in the above table, the mean of the accuracy was the same in the input-based and Output-based groups and the results of t-test showed that input-based group is not significantly different from output-based group t (34) =0.0298, p > 0/05 and it does not reject the null-hypotheses.

TABLE 6
SHOWS THE RESULTS OF INDEPENDENT SAMPLES T-TEST FOR MEANS OF COMPLEXITY FOR THE TWO EXPERIMENTAL GROUPS.

Independent Samples t-Test

t-Statistic	-3.679	Result
Degrees of Freedom	34	Reject the null hypothesis.
Critical Value	2.0322	Conclusion
95% Confidence Interval	[0.0601, 0.4043]	Group A is significantly different from Group B, t(34) = -3.679, p < .05. We are 95% confident tha the mean difference lies between 0.0601 and 0.4043.

V. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Decision-making collaboratively requires leveling each learner's plan with that of a others as well as the adjusting specific aims with individual's choices for learning. In group works, the autonomy has to be practiced a lot in an interconnected way (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000, p.22). While completing the tasks the students must be fully involved in a way that to be really helpful for themselves and also for their classmates. Beside all the facts mentioned above, autonomy enables learners to begin to take charge of their learning in a way that will be efficient in terms of objectives that they have for themselves in their mind. Practicing negotiated syllabus helps students to decrease the level of dependency on the teacher. Once this has happened, negotiation becomes an ongoing process with no doubt. It is determined in the College English Teaching Syllabus (1999) that Language learners should become autonomous with the teachers guiding them to learn appropriate language learning methods and to develop their self-learning abilities.

According to the results of the study, it was found out that there was no significant difference between input-based instruction and output-based one in terms of Accuracy as the means for both groups were the same. From the statistic analysis of fluency measure, the means of output-based group was a bit higher than the input-based one that showed a little difference in the EFL learners' written production. The mean of output-based group in the analysis of complexity was 1.26 and it was higher than that of the input-based group. Considering the outcomes, it can be concluded that the written production of the students in output-based group were better comparing to their counterparts. After final investigation according to the findings of other scholars, this can be indicated that if the EFL learners try to write through output-based instruction, they can produce more fluent and complex essays. Actually, in most of the cases it was seen that the students at the lower levels try to produce utterances or essays which are more accurate but as they become more fluent in producing L2 and their production becomes more complex. The participants in the current study were at PI level and most of them were very hardworking students and they were eager to learn English and they tried hard to produce what they have learned through previous terms or sessions and through investigating their essay writings it was clearly obvious that they preferred output-based instruction to improve their English and have more complex production and more fluent essays as well.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The development of a suitable learning and teaching environment partially depends on the educational system of a country. Language education system in Iran can be determined as a authority-oriented, old established and teacher-centered system since it is still run by the instructors. Most of the educators in Iran are not trained to be autonomous. As Little (2005) indicates, teachers without the ability of autonomy may have negative influence on the progress of autonomous and self-efficacious learners. Therefore, in Iran, no effective act has been done to improve these issues in educational settings. By investigating different studies done on the field of learner autonomy in Iran, it has been clear that group work is the only activity to improve learner autonomy which should be presented in the lesson plans and the curriculums. As Harmer (2001) claims, group work is an effective feature in the concept of learner autonomy. However, there should be more language exercise that help students become aware of abilities they own , so that they can control their own learning while learning a second language.

Iranian learners need to become critical thinkers. One possible solution can be making L2 learners be aware of their capabilities and develop their autonomy through educational program (Cotterall, 2000). As educators and instructors believe, the rules of self-efficacy and autonomy should be interdependent to the learning aims, tasks, strategies of learning, learning procedure and reflection on learning (Cotterall, 2000)

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2. R. Rahimy, K. Shams, "An investigation of the effectiveness of Vocabulary Learning Strategies On Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary test score", International Educational Studies Journal, Canada (Published in October 2012).