THE EFFECTS OF TASK INTERNAL AND TASK EXTERNAL READINESS ON THE EFL IRANIAN LEARNERS` WRITING PERFORMANCE IN TERMS OF ACCURACY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of strategic planning and topic familiarity on L2 writing performance in terms of accuracy. The participants were 80 intermediate Iranian learners studying English Language as a Foreign Language at three Universities in Bojnourd and Mashhad, Iran. Oxford Quick Placement Test (OPT) was administered to make sure about the homogeneity of the learners with regard to their language proficiency. Then, the participants were randomly divided into four groups including a control group and three experimental groups. In control group, topic familiarity and strategic planning as two types of internal and external task readiness were not administered. In experimental group one, three familiar topics were given during three sessions without strategic planning condition. In the second group, three unfamiliar topics were given during three sessions in strategic planning condition. Students had 10 minutes for pre-task prior to the task performance in which brainstorming was administered. In experimental group three like group one, three familiar topics were used in the strategic planning condition. To analyze the data, Pearson correlation coefficients, factor analysis, multivariate ANOVA (MANOVA) and post-hoc Scheffe's tests were employed. The results indicated that while strategic planning didn't have significant effect on accuracy, topic familiarity had significant impact on the accuracy of Iranian EFL learners' writing performance. Moreover, it was illustrated that the combination of strategic planning and topic familiarity had statically significant impact on the accuracy of Iranian EFL learners' writing performance.

Field of Research: *Task-Internal, Task-External, Accuracy.*

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1. Introduction

English as an international language is a vital mean of communication in the world. English has become the language of lingua franca around the globe and writing skill is necessary as the globalization has taken place. The ability to write effectively and accurately has been considered as an important demand that contributes to professional success in education and business (Harris & Bargiela-Chiappini, 2003; Nickerson, 2005). Teaching and learning writing skill is a complicated process through which ideas are generated and expressed (Reid, 1994).

2. Task Internal

As one of the macro-dimensions of Bui`s model including: topic familiarity (prior subject knowledge) which is another independent variable of the current study. It is defined as the familiarity of the learners with the topic of writing task. Task-internal includes schematic familiarity (structural or procedural knowledge), task familiarity (task types), and task repetition (content repetition without awareness of future performance).

3. Task External

Based on Bui`s (2014) model of task readiness taxonomy, task external as a macro-dimension has subcategories of rehearsal (repetition with awareness of future performance), strategic planning (pre-task preparation), and within-task planning (online-preparation). The present study follows Bui`s taxonomy and strategic planning in external type, which is one of the independent variables of this research. We apply this variable by giving a ten-minute time for brainstorming and classification of the participants' ideas before they start to write.

4. Accuracy

It has been defined by Skehan (1996, p. 46) as "a learner's capacity to handle whatever level of interlanguage complexity [one] has currently attained". Hughes (2003) also proposed a definition for accuracy in writing as an error-free piece of written work including no grammatical and word order problems. This aspect of writing would be evaluated by a scale adopted from Hughes (2003, p.101).

5. Theoretical Framework

Table 1. A framework of task-readiness

	Macro-dimension	Micro-dimension	Sample studies
Task-readiness	– Task-internal readiness (implicit planning)	– **Topic familiarity** (prior subject knowledge)	This chapter
		– **Schematic familiarity** (structural or procedural knowledge)	Skehan & Foster (1999)
		– **Task familiarity** (task types)	Bygate (2001)
		– **Task repetition** (content repetition without awareness of future performance.)	Bygate (2001)
	– Task-external readiness (explicit planning)	– **Rehearsal** (repetition with awareness of future performance)	Bei (2013)
		– **Strategic planning** (pre-task preparation)	Foster & Skehan (1996)
		– **Within-task planning** (online preparation)	Yuan & Ellis (2003)

Ellis (2005) distinguished between two types of planning: (1) pre-task planning which can be further divided into rehearsal and strategic planning, and (2) within-task planning that subsumes both pressured and unpressured situations. Rehearsal, simply put, is to allow learners to practice a task before its actual performance, as exemplified by Bey (2013). Three research questions were probed for the current study based on this model:

1. Does internal task readiness have any significant impact on the accuracy of the Intermediate EFL learners?

2. Does external task readiness have any significant impact on the accuracy of the Intermediate EFL learners?

3. Do internal and external task readiness have any significant impact on the accuracy of the Intermediate EFL learners?

6. Methodology
6.1 Sample and data collection method
To conduct this study, the researcher selected eighty BA Iranian EFL students. Participants were among males and females majoring in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) at Islamic Azad University of Bojnord, Islamic Azad University and Tabaran Institute of Higher Education in Mashhad, Iran. Students were native speakers of Persian and they were at intermediate level taking Advanced/Essay Writing course given in the academic year 2015-2016. In order to homogenize the participants and to make sure about their level of general proficiency, a Quick Placement Test (OPT) was administered to the participants. After analyzing the data, participants were selected and randomly assigned into three experimental groups and a control group. In the control group, topic familiarity and strategic planning as two types of internal and external task readiness were not administered. In experimental group one, three familiar topics were given during three sessions without strategic planning condition. In the second group, three unfamiliar topics were given during three sessions in strategic planning condition. Students had 10 minutes for pre-task prior to the task performance in which brainstorming was administered. In the experimental group three like group one, three familiar topics were used in the strategic planning condition. Finally, a post test of writing was administered to determine any significant difference in the performance of the four groups.

6.2 Instrumentation
For the purposes of the present study, Oxford Quick Placement Test was administered to a group of intermediate EFL learners to homogenize the participants based on their language proficiency level. The test included 60 multiple choice items and students were to read each item carefully and mark the best choice. It covered both grammar and vocabulary evaluation within embedded questions. The placement test consisted of two parts; part one included questions 1-40 and part two questions 41 up to 60. The allotted time for taking this test was 30-45 minutest and the answers are recorded directly on the answer sheet provided parallel to the questions. In the present study, those participants who scored 40-47 out of 60 were assigned as intermediate subjects.

As the other instruments of the study, a pretest and post of writing were manipulated to measure the participants' writing ability at the onset and end of the study.

Finally, the scoring scale for measuring the writing performance of the learners was used. In this scale, three components of writing were areas of focus: accuracy, fluency, and organization.

7. Finding & Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of strategic planning and topic familiarity on written performance with regard to accuracy. A multivariate analysis of variances (MANOVA), followed by post-hoc Scheffe's tests, was applied to examine the null hypotheses.

The first null hypothesis was rejected, which stated that topic familiarity (task internal readiness) has no significant impact on the accuracy of Iranian EFL learners' writing performance. Therefore the second null hypothesis, which claimed that strategic planning (task external readiness) has no significant impact on the accuracy of Iranian EFL learners' writing performance, was accepted. The findings indicated that strategic planning has no significant impact on the accuracy of writing performance. However, students outperformed the control group on the post-test of accuracy concerning topic familiarity. Moreover, it was revealed that students outperformed the control group when both strategic planning and topic familiarity were applied. Then, the third null hypothesis was rejected that suggested strategic planning (task external readiness) and topic familiarity (task internal readiness) have no significant impact on the accuracy of Iranian EFL learners' writing performance.

These results are not in line with the study carried on by Ellis (1987) who realized that planning time has a systematic effect on accuracy levels of learners' writing performance. Concerning topic familiarity, the results of the present study are in agreement with the study done by Gilligan (2008) who stated that familiarity of the topic can affect accuracy of writing. It means that students may produce more accurate written texts about familiar topics than unfamiliar ones. Nevertheless, Yang (2014) examined the effect of topic familiarity on Chinese university EFL students' writing achievement. He showed that topic familiarity didn't influence students' L2 writing scores in terms of accuracy and fluency.

However, the findings are supported by other studies (Yuan, 2001; Ellis & Yuan, 2004; Al-Humaidi, 2008; Rahimpour & Safarie, 2011) showed that strategic planning or planning time had no significant effect on accuracy. Kellogg (1990) displayed that the greatest accuracy was produced by less detailed planners. Wendel (1997) found that strategic planning did not have a significant effect on accuracy. Furthermore, Yuan (2001) and Ellis and Yuan (2004) illustrated that pre-task or strategic planning didn't lead to greater accuracy. Similarly, Al-Humaidi (2008) analyzed the effects of strategic planning and unpressured within task planning on accuracy. He proposed that significant differences were not found in terms of accuracy. In the same way, Rahimpour and Safarie (2011) focused on the effects of pre-task planning on descriptive writing of Iranian EFL learners. It was demonstrated that planning conditions had no effect on accuracy. In another study, Salami and Fatollahnejad (2012) investigated the effect of strategic planning on intermediate EFL learners' written task performance. The result indicated that strategic planning did not have a significant effect on accuracy.

These results are in line with the study by Kellogg (1988) who investigated the effects of different types of planning on the process of writing and the quality of writing. He presented that planning condition decreased attentional overload and increased the quality of writing. In similar manner, William (1992) showed that students who had time to plan produced more discourse markers and complex tasks. Moreover, Dellerman (1996) explored the effects of planning in argumentative writing. He found that planning enhances the organization of information and increase the available cognitive resources. Noshadi, (2013) displayed that pre-task planning contributed to promoting EFL learners' overall writing skill and contributed to improving complexity of written performance. Yu (2010) indicated that essays on impersonal familiar topics had higher lexical diversity than essays on impersonal less familiar topics. Findings also showed higher scores and higher linguistic complexity for essays on impersonal familiar topics.

7.1 Reliability analysis

7.1.1 Inter-Rater Reliability
    7.1.1.1 Pretests of Writing
The Pearson correlation coefficients were employed to probe the inter-rater reliability of the two raters who rated the subjects on the pretests of writing fluency, accuracy and organization. Based on the results displayed in Table 17 it can be claimed that there were significant agreement between the two raters on the pretests of; a) accuracy (r (78) = .59, p = .000 representing a large effect size), b) fluency (r (78) = .50, p = .000 representing a large effect size) and c) organization (r (78) = .72, p = .000 representing a large effect size).

Table 17
Pearson Correlations; Inter-Rater Reliability on Pretests of Writing

		PreAccuR2	PreFluR2	PreOrgR2
	Pearson Correlation	.598**		
PreAccuR1	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		
	N	80		

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

    7.1.1.2 Post-test of Writing
The Pearson correlation coefficients were employed to probe the inter-rater reliability of the two raters who rated the subjects on the posttests of writing fluency, accuracy and organization. Based on the results displayed in Table 18 it can be claimed that there were significant agreement between the two raters on the posttests of; a) accuracy (r (78) = .82, p = .000 representing a large effect size), b) fluency (r (78) = .84, p = .000 representing a large effect size) and c) organization (r (78) = .85, p = .000 representing a large effect size).

Table 18
Pearson Correlations; Inter-Rater Reliability on Posttests of Writing

		PostAccuR2	PostFluR2	PostOrgR2
	Pearson Correlation	.822**		
PostAccuR1	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		
	N	80		

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
5100

7.2 Descriptive statistics & analysis
The first null hypothesis, which claimed that strategic planning (task external readiness) has no significant impact on the accuracy of Iranian EFL learners' writing performance, was accepted. The findings indicated that strategic planning has no significant impact on the accuracy of writing performance. However, students outperformed the control group on the post-test of accuracy concerning topic familiarity. Therefore, the fourth null hypothesis was rejected, which stated that topic familiarity (task internal readiness) has no significant impact on the accuracy of Iranian EFL learners' writing performance.

8. Conclusion and Future Recommendation

It can be concluded that topic familiarity had significant on accuracy of writing performance. The findings confirmed some other researches idea about the effect of topic familiarity on writing performance (Tedick, 1990; Langer, 1984). This is well supported by the study of Bacha (2010) believed that topic familiarity assists in making the context for better written performance on essays. Similarly, Khorasani and Amini Harsini (2015) found that there is a significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' topic familiarity and writing ability.

Acknowledgement

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