The Effectiveness of One-way and Two-way Tasks in ESP Writing Courses

La eficacia de las tareas unidireccionales y bidireccionales en los cursos de redacción de Inglés para propósitos especiales

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of one-way and two-way tasks in improving the ability of learners to write about subjects in Economics. To achieve this objective, 32 undergraduate students of Economics were selected for this study. They were divided into two groups, each one consisting of 16 participants. These groups attended two separate ESP writing courses. While the first group was treated by one-way tasks of writing, the second group was treated by two-way tasks. A pretest and a posttest of ESP writing were administered. Scores of participants were analyzed by two paired and two unpaired t-tests. Results obtained by these tests showed that both one-way and two-way tasks were effective in improving ESP writing ability of language learners. However, the effectiveness of two-way tasks was significantly higher than the effectiveness of one-way tasks. The direct role of all participants in the writing of final product is suggested to be one of the main possible reasons behind the effectiveness of two-way tasks. This is the main feature that distinguishes

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two-way tasks from one-way tasks and makes them superior to one-way tasks for improving writing ability of language learners.

Keywords: one-way task, two-way task, ESP, writing, foreign language teaching

RESUMEN

El objetivo de este estudio es investigar la eficacia de las tareas unidireccionales y bidireccionales para mejorar la habilidad de los alumnos para escribir sobre temas de Economía. Para lograr este objetivo, se seleccionaron 32 estudiantes universitarios de Economía. Se dividieron en dos grupos de 16 participantes cada uno. Estos grupos asistieron por separado a dos cursos de redacción de Inglés para Propósitos Especiales (ESP). Mientras que el primer grupo trabajó con tareas de escritura unidireccionales, el segundo grupo lo hizo con tareas bidireccionales. Se administró un pretest y un postest de escritura ESP. Las puntuaciones de los participantes se analizaron mediante dos t-test emparejados y dos no emparejados. Los resultados obtenidos mostraron que tanto las tareas unidireccionales como las bidireccionales eran eficaces para mejorar la capacidad de escritura ESP de los estudiantes de idiomas. Sin embargo, la eficacia de las tareas bidireccionales fue significativamente mayor que la de las tareas unidireccionales. Se sugiere que el papel directo de todos los participantes en la redacción del producto final es una de las principales razones posibles de la eficacia de las tareas bidireccionales. Esta es la principal característica que distingue a las tareas bidireccionales de las unidireccionales y las hace superiores a estas para mejorar las habilidades de escritura de los estudiantes de idiomas.

Palabras clave: tareas unidireccionales, tareas bidireccionales, Inglés para propósitos especiales, enseñanza de idiomas

1. INTRODUCCIÓN

The use of tasks, as an effective tool to improve quality of foreign language teaching, has significantly grown in recent years (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 1991, 2004; Skehan, 1996, 2003; Zare-Behtash & Banaruee, 2017). A variety of definitions have been given for pedagogical tasks (e.g., Bygate, Skehan, & Swain, 2001; Ellis, 2003; Skehan, 1998). Nunan (2004, p. 4) defines pedagogical task as "a

piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form". The role of attention and in particular on the basis of the visual sense involved in learning is highly salient (e.g., see Farsani & Villa-Ochoa, 2022).

According to Ellis' (2003) definition, task is "a workplan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whether the correct or appropriate propositional content has been conveyed". Although there have been a lot of disagreements among researchers about the efficiency of tasks (DeKeyser, 1998; Doughty, 1991; Lightbown, 1998; Lightbown & Spada, 1990; Norris & Ortega, 2001; Pawlak, 2006; Robinson, 1996; Spada & Lightbown, 1993; Swain, 1985), they have remained a major part of language teaching profession across the world.

Nunan (1991) argued that communicative tasks help bridge the gap between language learning in an educational setting and authentic language use in the real world; therefore, they are believed to contribute incidentally to fluency and accuracy of language use (Ellis, 1997). Hyland (2002) believes that there are generic skills and forms of language that are shared by a range of disciplines, professions, or purposes, and that ESP involves teaching general skills and forms that can be transferred across contexts and purposes. Hence, it is suggested that the techniques, language of communication, and types of tasks implemented in the learning context affect the skills that the learners develop (Zare-Behtash, Khatin-Zadeh, & Banaruee, 2017).

This study aimed to investigate how tasks can be employed to improve writing ability of language learners in ESP courses. To achieve this objective, two types of tasks were employed in two separate ESP courses. Two groups of undergraduate students of Economics were selected for this study. Throughout these courses, the first group of language learners was given a number of one-way tasks and the

second group was taught by two-way tasks. The writing proficiency of learners was examined by a pretest and a posttest.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Among various task categorizations, one of them divides tasks into one-way and two-way tasks. Two-way tasks allow for interaction among participants and share of responsibility to get involved in a learning activity in order to achieve a goal. There is a variety of two-way tasks such as jigsaw and text reconstruction. Some scholars (see Ellis, 2003; Izumi & Izumi, 2004; Mackey, 2012) pointed out that two-way tasks allow participants to share information with the aim of fulfilling a goal. In the one-way task approach, no interaction takes place between or among learners in a learning environment to complete a task or achieve a goal (Ellis, 2003; Izumi & Izumi, 2004; Mackey, 2012). In other words, there is no share of responsibility between two individuals or among learners as a collective work plan to complete a task. When a one-way task is performed, information is held by a single person and there is no chance for negotiation or interaction between students. According to Mackey (2012), one-way tasks involve no transfer of information or interaction, and learner individually takes the burden of completing the task. Examples of one-way tasks include listen-and-do tasks, fill-in-blanks exercises, translation, and telling a personal story. According to Iwashita (2001), one-way tasks offer a higher chance of producing more modified output than two-way tasks. Needless to say, there are studies that argue the importance of matching the curricular components and tasks in classrooms to the learners' cognitive styles and cultural etiquettes (e.g., see Banaruee et al., 2023a; Farsani, 2022).

According to Krahnke (1987, p.61) task-based instruction is appropriate in ESP because learners "have a clear and immediate need to use language for a well-defined purpose." Long and Porter (1985) and Long (1989) suggest that group work and task can produce a higher quality of talk among language learners. Grosse (1988) states that small-group work for the ESP classroom can improve

the quality of learning among language learners and address the affective needs of the learners, resulting in an increased level of motivation among them. Furthermore, current literature (e.g., see Askari et al., 2017; Banaruee et al., 2017, 2022; Khatin-Zadeh et al., 2023; Khoshsima & Banaruee, 2017; Yarahmadzehi & Banaruee, 2017; Yazdani-Fazlabadi & Khatin-Zadeh, 2016; Zare-Behtash et al., 2017) argues the significance of considering personality and learning styles in teaching and learning. In the majority of the previous studies, learners were more successful in contexts where they received appropriate and well-designed tasks which were more personality-wise and cognitively relevant. Research in education benefits from contemporary findings of different disciplines such as cognition and psychology which suggest the prevalence of strategies and cognitive models to process information (for a detailed review, refer to Banaruee et al., 2023b).

The role that is given to each learner in one-way and two-way tasks might have some impact on the effectiveness of the tasks. Yule and McDonald (1990) experimented with adult mixed ability pairs in one-way tasks and found if the weaker learner is placed in the sender's position, the task promoted far richer interaction than if the stronger learner was the sender. Therefore, the assignment of roles in task-based language teaching must be done carefully. The type of tasks selected to practice language can subsequently affect the interaction in classrooms and the feedback and supports that learners receive from their teachers and the peer groups (Banaruee, Khoshsima, & Askari, 2017).

Having given two types of tasks (one-way and two-way) to two groups of undergraduate students of Economics, researchers of this study tried to examine the effectiveness of these tasks in teaching writing skills to ESP students. Proficiency levels of the groups in general English was tested by a sample of Michigan TOEFL test. Also, a pretest and a posttest of writing were administered before and after the treatment period in order to compare the two groups with each other. In this way, the study tried to answer the following question:

Is there any difference between the effectiveness of one-way and two-way tasks for teaching writing skills to L2 learners in ESP courses?

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Participants

Participants of the study were 32 undergraduate students of Economics at Chabahar Maritime University. All of them were at low-intermediate level general English proficiency. A sample of Michigan TOEFL test was used to select these participants from a larger group of undergraduate students. All of them were Persian native speakers. They were between 19 and 23 years old, including 19 males and 13 females.

3.2. Materials

In addition to a sample of Michigan TOEFL test, a pretest and a posttest was used to examine writing ability of the participants. Each test included three topics. Participants were expected to write a paragraph about each topic in Economics. The aim of these tests was to examine grammatical ability of participants and their ability to communicate about a special subject in Economics. These tests were scored by researchers of the study and professor in Economics.

3.3. Procedure

Participants of the study were selected from a larger group of 71 undergraduate students of Economics. After the selection of 32 participants for the main part of the study, they were given a pretest. In this test, they were expected to write three paragraphs about three subjects in Economics. Then, participants were divided into two groups, each one consisting of 16 participants. These two groups attended two separate courses of 15 sessions. Throughout the treatment period, participants of the first group were given a number of one-way tasks in writing. In these tasks, participants were

expected to write a paragraph about special subjects in Economics. In each task, one of the participants was given some information about a topic. This participant had to transfer this information to his/her partner. Then, the partner had to write a paragraph about that subject. Therefore, one participant of each pair was responsible for providing information and the other participant was responsible for writing. After the treatment period, participants took the posttest. Pretest and posttest were scored by researchers of the study and a university professor in Economics.

3.4. Data analysis

Two paired t-tests were used to compare the scores of each group in pretest and posttest. The aim was to find whether the groups had a significant improvement throughout the course. Also, two unpaired t-tests were used to compare scores of the groups. The aim of the first unpaired t-test was compare scores of the two groups in the pre-test, and the second one was used to compare the scores of the two groups in the posttest. Results obtained by these two tests could reveal any significant difference between the performances of the two groups.

4. RESULTS

Results of the paired t-tests have been given in Table 1 and Table 2. The P-values in these two tables indicate that both groups made a significant progress throughout treatment period.

Table 1
Results of paired t-test for first group

	Paired differences		t	df	P- Value
	M1-M2	95% confidence interval of the difference			
First group (one-way task)	-0.44	From -0.95 to 0.08	1.8155	15	0.0895

Table 2
Results of paired t-test for second group

	Paired differences		t	df	P- Value
	M1-M2	95% confidence interval of the difference			
Second group (two-way task)	-1.25	From -1.99 to -0.51	3.5960	15	0.0026

The first unpaired t-test compared scores of the two groups in the pretest. Results of this test have been given in Table 3. The P-value indicates that there was no significant difference between the performances of the two groups in the pretest.

Table 3
Results of unpaired t-test for pretest

	Paired differences		t	df	P- Value
	M1-M2	95% confidence interval of the difference			
Pretest	-0.19	From -1.34 to 0.97	0.3312	30	0.7428

The second unpaired t-test compared scores of the two groups in the posttest. Results of this test have been given in Table 4. The P-value indicates that there was a noticeable difference between the performances of the two groups in the posttest. The scores of the second group, which was treated by two-way tasks throughout the course, were significantly better than the scores of the first group.

Table 4
Results of unpaired t-test for posttest

	Paired differences		t	df	P- Value
	M1-M2	95% confidence interval of the difference			
Posttest	-1.00	From -2.18 to 0.18	1.7321	30	0.0935

5. DISCUSSION

As was mentioned in the results, the P-values of the two paired t-tests showed that both groups made significant progress in terms of ESP writing ability. Therefore, it can be said that both types of instruction were effective in improving learners' ability to write about subjects in Economics. Also, results of the second unpaired t-test showed that the second group, which was treated by two-way tasks, was more successful than the first group in the posttest. In other words, both types of tasks were effective and significantly improved learners' ability in writing. However, level of improvement was significantly higher in the second group. This indicates that two-way tasks can be more powerful tools for improving learners' ability to write about special subjects in Economics. The question raised here is that why two-way tasks are more effective than one-way tasks in this aspect of language competence. To answer this question, we have to look at the features of these tasks and the nature of ESP writing competence.

In two-way tasks, information is shared by both members of the pair. They cooperate with each other and exchange their ideas and finally produce a result. The exchanging of ideas and making a common decision on a shared product are the crucial features of two-way tasks. Throughout the process of exchanging ideas, each member makes her/his own contribution. This is particularly important in writing tasks, because learners are usually given enough time to work with each other and to agree on a common product (for effective writing feedback discussions, see Banaruee et al., 2018). In the tasks of this study, the pairs were given topics in Economics and some information. They were expected to use that information to write about those topics. Of course, learners had the chance to use their background knowledge of Economics in the process of writing. In fact, this is a crucial point, as background knowledge is the principal base on which the piece of writing is constructed.

When a pair of partners cooperate with each other to produce a piece of writing about an ESP subject, each member looks at

the product from his/her own perspective. They might look at the product from a grammatical, content, or stylistic perspective. This can significantly improve quality of the work. In many cases, the writer himself/herself cannot see the problems of the writing product. These problems (grammatical, content, or stylistic) can better be detected by the other member of the pair. In this process of writing and correction, both members become aware of their errors and improve their writing proficiency. This fact has been extensively studied in cognitive linguistic and cognitive psychology research, with a focus on how information is processed during the comprehension of literal and metaphorical language (e.g., see Banaruee et al, 2017; Banaruee et al., 2019a, 2019b; Eskandari & Khatin-Zadeh, 2021; Khatin-Zadeh et al., 2019). It seems that this feature of two-way tasks makes them superior to one-way-tasks. One –way tasks of writing does not give learners the chance to produce an agreed-upon composition; one member just provides information and the other member is responsible for writing. Therefore, what distinguishes two-way task is the element of cooperation in the final stage of writing. In fact, the final product is directly produced by both members of each pair of participants. However, in one-way writing task, one of the members of pair has an indirect role in the production of final work. While the product of one-way task is created by one learner, the product of two-way task is made and approved by both learners of the pair. All in all, two-way tasks of writing seem to be more effective tools than one-way tasks for using in ESP writing courses.

Finally, there are several points that must not be ignored in giving two-way writing tasks to learners. The ways that members of the pairs are selected, the topics that are selected for writing, the amount of information that is provided in each task, and the length of time that that is given to learners are important issues that must be thought of in the planning for ESP writing courses.

6. CONCLUSION

Results obtained in this study suggest that both one-way and two-way tasks are effective for improving writing ability of language learners in ESP courses. Also, the findings indicate that two-way tasks are more effective than one-way tasks in such courses. The direct role of both members of each pair in the writing and production of final work was suggested to be one of the main possible reasons behind the high effectiveness of two-way tasks. When learners are performing a two-way task, the detection of errors can be done by both members of the pairs of participants. In this way, learners can contribute to the improvement of writing ability of each other. This is the main feature of two-way task that distinguishes it from one-way task. In one-way task, one learner provides information and another one produces the piece of writing. Therefore, learners do not have the chance to detect the errors of each other. Finally, it was suggested that some other elements might have a significant impact on the efficiency of tasks, such as manner of group formation, length of time of task, subjects of topics etc. These are elements that can be examined in future studies.

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