

Contributory Role of Pre-task Planning in Improving Iranian EFL Learners' Writing of Argumentative Essays: The Case of Accuracy and Complexity

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Abstract—Generally, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is an approach which places a high premium on the utilization of tasks as fundamental units of planning language instruction in L2 writing classroom. Accordingly, the present study sought to investigate the extent to which pre-task planning can influence the accuracy and complexity of the sentence structures in the argumentative essays written by male and female Iranian EFL learners with an intermediate proficiency level. As such, a Quick Oxford Proficiency Test (Q.O.P.T) was administered to a population of intermediate students learning English in a language institute in Isfahan. Based on their scores, two intermediate samples, 25 each, were randomly selected and labeled as control and experimental groups. While learners in the control group received writing instruction by a product based approach, the learners in the treatment sample were taught by a task based approach focusing on pre-task planning. At the end of the treatment, a full term, the analysis of the data obtained from the essays written by the participants revealed that pre-task planning improved the accuracy and complexity of the structures in the essays written by both male and female learners in the treatment group compared with those in the control group. Additionally, the results indicated that there was a meaningful interaction between pre-task planning and gender.

Index Terms— task, task-based language teaching, pre-task planning, argumentative essays, accuracy, complexity

I. INTRODUCTION

Interaction with individuals having different cultures, attitudes, and social backgrounds through the medium of foreign languages has always been of a great interest to both scholars of the field. However, for a considerably long time the prevailing method in language teaching was Grammar Translation Method (G.T.M) which primarily concentrated on teaching long lists of words as well as grammar and translation from the source language into the target and vice versa. Essentially, the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) placed a very high premium on the reading skill rather than the ability to communicate in the target language and such an orientation eventually evoked intense debates concerning its pedagogical efficacy. It seems that negative reactions towards GTM began to grow since the goals of language learning were redefined in light of paradigm shifts resulting from new developments in psychology and linguistics. Such a fresh outlook necessitated a reevaluation of the existing methods and their substitution with new methods and approaches which focused on the communicative aspects of language teaching and learning. Evidently, the resulting outcome was the introduction of new approaches like Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).

Focusing on “communicative competence” and paying attention to the integration of all language skills were advocated by concerned practionairs such as Richard and Rodgers (2001) and Brown (2007). In fact, the primary attention in CLT was diverted to the functional, communicative aspects of language rather than the formal features of language since communicating in L2 required of the learners to use language in real life contexts. Accordingly, CLT places an appreciably great emphasis on fluency rather than accuracy. Brown’s (2007, p. 241) seminal statement about CLT describing it as an approach and not a method is a logical proof substantiating why many other new methods have been derived from it. Consequently, task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) defined as a “logical development of CLT” (Richard & Rodgers, 2001; p. 233) assumes that tasks are the most fundamental units of planning content and formats of presentation in methods accommodated within the umbrella term of TBLT (Ellis, 2000, 2003; Littlewood, 2004).

Many practionairs have considered tasks as a crucial resource in curriculum design, material development and methodologies whose central goal is the negotiation of meaning in ELT. However, task-based language teaching (TBLT) offers a totally different rationale for the application of tasks in language teaching and offers certain essential criteria for devising, choosing and sequencing tasks in communicative language programs. Here tasks are utilized as the main

output units in instruction, practice and even in evaluation. The reason is that task-based instruction is deeply rooted in theory and research motivated by the cognitive approach to language teaching and the psychological reality underlying psycholinguistic theories.

It is interesting to note that the ability to write in a foreign language has been gaining a remarkable momentum so much so the instruction in writing is assuming a more fundamental role in most language teaching programs. In the past, however, writing skill was not considered as an important skill and was not investigated by the researchers. Thus the dominant approach in teaching writing was the “product approach” which only exposed the L2 learners to the formal features of language such as grammar, vocabulary, punctuation and spelling. According to Badger and White (2000), product-based approaches only focused on the linguistic knowledge and sentential features of language utilizing group imitation for teaching how texts develop in English.

Unsurprisingly, the recent developments in language teaching profession directed the swing of the pendulum more towards the teaching of writing through the process-based approaches to text production in L2 contexts. This approach helped improve the efficiency of writing methods and techniques because the primary attention was given to the processes involved in producing the written text not the final text or features of texture. According to Harmer (2001), the process approach may be defined as processing any piece of writing through various stages such as pre-writing, revising, redrafting to meet the requirements which represent the skills crucial for writing a text. Therefore, pre-writing and during writing processes drafting play a significant part mainly because process based approaches consider writing as a dynamic and meaning-centered activity whose main goal is to help learners to satisfy their writing needs. As such, process based approaches have been reported to be more efficient than the product-based approaches. Alternatively, the main objective in generic approaches was to teach writing in terms of sociocultural and linguistic norms characterizing the underlying goals of various communicative tasks. In other words, the concept of genre refers to the recognizable and recurring patterns of daily, academic and literary texts occurring within specific cultures. It seems that genre approach has certain principles in common with the process approach even though it also enlists some of the principles of product-based approaches.

Later developments in the theory and practice of writing caused the majority of writing experiments to focus on various writing modes and their rhetorical structures. Clearly, rhetorical modes are patterns of organization used to impinge a particular effect on the readers (Stifler, 2002). Consequently, essays with specific purposes and text organizations are classified as different rhetorical modes, for example, description, narration, exposition, and argumentation etc. In the early stages of learning to write in fluent and accurate style at intermediate and advanced levels, the specified pedagogical purposes such as improving, developing, training and practicing language play a pivotal role (Ramies, 1987). In this case, writing is seen as a complicated process through which the writers express and create thoughts and ideas. Notably, in comparison with L1 writing, learning to write in a foreign language is a hard and complicated process taking considerable time and effort. Overall, the role of English writing instruction in foreign language educational context is crucial in turning learners into skillful writers (Weigel, 2002).

It seems that composing a paragraph accurately and fluently is by no means an easy task. As relevant studies indicate, the ability to write cannot be separated from language learning and without language learning an effective acquisition cannot be actualized. In fact, writing is a hard laden task not only for native speakers but also for non-native speakers. Iranian EFL learners are no exception in this matter. Over the last decades, the interest in writing as one of the most important communicative skills in English language teaching has inevitably gained momentum (for more information, see Hayes & Flower, 1986).

It is a commonly held belief that a piece of writing conveys the writer's thoughts encoded in the form of a composition provides a bridge between the readers and the writers. Mao (2002) has introduced the term “Games rules” as an effective metaphor reflecting how the writers should organize the whole writing process of text creation into a coherent structure with regard to particular topics. These guidelines are used for the readers to decode written text correctly. Although writing is generally taught as a product-based approach, this study uses the task-based approach to teaching writing. There is a general support to the claim that planning in advance impacts positively on language production, especially where fluency and complexity are concerned. Studies by Crookes (1989), Foster and Skehan (1996), as well as Wendel (1997), among others, report that pre-task planning affects fluency positively.

On this basis, the present study aimed to find out the contributory role of pre-task planning in improving Iranian EFL learners writing argumentative essays with regard to accuracy and complexity. The current study also sought to measure the extent to which pre-task planning can affect accuracy and complexity in argumentative essays written by Iranian male and female EFL learners with an intermediate proficiency level.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Willis (2001), language learners can communicate in the foreign language they are learning as a result of task-based language teaching (TBLT). Similarly, Willis (2004) points out that task-based instruction (TBI) is considered as a meaning-focused approach emphasizing the use of language in real world for achieving specific objectives. In TBLT, all of the four language skills are considered as significant. As such, task-based language teaching is supported by an increasingly larger number of SLA studies and theories. As an illustration, Nunan (2004, p. 76) states that “... it [task-based language teaching] is supported by a rich and growing research agenda”. Such a view towards

task-based language teaching makes it different from other methods of language teaching so much so Richards and Rodgers (2001) consider tasks as research tools widely employed in SLA. In the same vein, way, Ellis (2003) asserts that, language use samples can be elicited through tasks in SLA studies. In other words, the process of second language acquisition may be identified through tasks. Thus, SLA studies provide a scientific basis for task-based language teaching whose underlying theories and hypotheses including input hypothesis, interaction hypothesis, and output hypotheses also foster the necessity of applying task-based language teaching techniques.

Clearly, the application of task-based approach within a communicative framework for language teaching can be traced back to Bangalore Project running from 1979 to 1984. The project, the result of dissatisfaction with the structural approach to English language teaching, was intended to encourage the learners' focus on meaning assuming that grammar construction by the learners is an subconscious process. (Menhert, 1998 & Prabhu, 1987).

The Malaysian Communicational Syllabus as another application of task-based approach reported in 1975 by Richards and Rodgers (2001). Additionally, enlisting Holliday's macro skills as the point of departure for curriculum development, Nunan (2004) introduced the Australian Language Level (ALL) which a version of a task-based curriculum. The Bangalore Project also called Communicational Teaching Project (CTP), was conducted in eight schools and was seen as an effort towards task-based teaching (Menhert, 1999). Actually, Howatt (1984) believes that "whatever happens Bangalore Project has set the context for one of the most interesting arguments of the eighties, if not beyond" (p. 288). With regard to the evaluation of the Bangalore Project, Bretta and Davies (1985) have also reported that Prabhu's learners were more successful, compared to their counterparts who were taught traditionally.

III. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Tasks have long been ignored despite their crucial role in the writing process. Teaching writing seems to be too difficult and time-consuming in comparison with the other language skills, so insufficient attention has been paid to the teaching and practicing of writing in the class (Zeng, 2005). It is clear that students need a sufficient amount of knowledge to generate and create great ideas in order to write a satisfactory text reflecting a specific rhetorical purpose. Unfortunately, Second language learners in Iran including those studying in private language institutes receive little practice in writing in English due to time limitation, students' limited proficiency, and poor motivation.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of Task-based language teaching, more specifically pre-task planning and its contributory role in improving the writing skill of Iranian EFL learners at an intermediate proficiency level. The main objective was to examine the students' writing power in terms of such factors as accuracy and complexity. To this end, this study was an attempt to touch upon the following research questions.

1. To what extent does pre-task planning influence **accuracy** and **complexity** of argumentative essays written by Iranian **male** EFL learners with an intermediate proficiency level?

2. To what extent does pre-task planning influence **accuracy** and **complexity** of argumentative essays written by Iranian **female** EFL learners with an intermediate proficiency level?

Based on these research questions, the following null hypotheses were designed:

H01: There is no positive evidence for the influence of pre-task planning on *accuracy* and *complexity* of argumentative essays written by Iranian **male** EFL learners with an intermediate proficiency level.

H02: There is no positive evidence for the influence of pre-task planning on *accuracy* and *complexity* of argumentative essays written by Iranian **female** EFL learners with an intermediate proficiency level.

V. METHOD

A. Participants

The participants in the present study were chosen from among Iranian EFL learners studying English in one of the language institutes in Isfahan (Iran). A Quick Oxford Proficiency Test (Q.O.P.T) was administered to choose 50 out of 100 participants with an intermediate level of proficiency. The reason for choosing intermediate students among other levels was that they were required to write essays of 250 words, and seemingly, the students at the elementary level possessed a limited English proficiency and lacked the proper resources of writing compositions. On the other hand, the advanced students with a high level of English proficiency, already having learnt the proper mechanisms of writing, were not suitable for gauging the effect of pre-task planning on accuracy and complexity of writing argumentative essays, and as a result, they were also excluded. The selected sample included 20 males and 30 females. They were all Persian native speakers who learned English as a foreign language. This study was carried out in summer 2013 and the age range of the participants was from 19 to 23. In fact, their average age was 21.

The selected sample was divided into two groups; namely, control and experimental. From the 50 intermediate learners selected as the result of Quick Oxford Proficiency Test, 25 learners were randomly assigned to the control group (11 males and 14 females) and another 25 served as the experimental group (9 males and 16 females).

B. Design

A Quick Oxford Proficiency Test was administered to measure the students' writing ability in order to achieve maximum possible homogeneity among the subjects regarding their general English proficiency. The selected sample was assigned randomly to control and experimental groups. All participants were then taught how to develop an argumentative essay through a pre-task planning phase during which they were required to write an argumentative essay in 25 minutes.

C. Materials

This study enlisted two kinds of materials. First, a Quick Oxford Proficiency Test was administered to choose 50 EFL learners at an intermediate level of proficiency. The subjects were chosen on the basis of their scores on the Quick Oxford Proficiency Test, that is, those participants who scored 3/5 - 5 were chosen as the targeted subjects. Second, an argumentative essay writing task in which a topic of general interest was selected from IELTS and was given to the students. Afterwards, 30 written texts, 15 of which were produced by students in the control group and 15 by students in the experimental group, were manually typed in to a computer. The AntConc 3.2.1 w software was employed to count the number of words.

D. Procedures

In this study, planning was operationalized at two levels (a) no planning (NP) for the control group, (b) pre-task planning (PTP) for the experimental group.

In the no planning condition, the participants performed the task under normal classroom settings. The control group consisted of 25 learners who were asked to write an essay in 40 minutes. The essay writing was performed based on a structure based approach. In the pre-task planning condition, the topic was introduced and the instructor encouraged the students to activate the related schemata and the background knowledge. Like the no planning stage, they were required to finish the task in 40 minutes by preparing an essay consisting of at least 250 words. Afterwards, the written texts were analyzed in terms of fluency.

VI. RESULTS

The results related to the null hypotheses under investigation will be presented for both control and experimental groups:

A. Null Hypothesis/H01

H01: There is no positive evidence for the influence of pre-task planning on *accuracy* and *complexity* of argumentative essays written by Iranian **male** EFL learners with an intermediate proficiency level.

1. Accuracy

Accuracy of written essays by males in the control group was compared with those produced by the experimental group through measuring the average number of T-units per text. The results of the above-mentioned comparison for T-units and the accuracy have been illustrated in the following tables.

Regarding the essays written by the male participants in the control and experimental groups, the descriptive statistics including the mean, standard deviation, and standard error of the means are represented in Table 1. Table 1 depicts, among other things, the mean scores, and standard deviations of the writing accuracy of male participants in the control and experimental groups. Descriptive statistics clearly indicates that the mean score of male control group (MCG) is 6.09 while that of male experimental group (MEG) equals 10.33. To see if the difference between the mean scores is statistically large or not, Table 2 demonstrates the results of a relevant statistical t-test: should be examined.

TABLE 1.
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS COMPARING WRITING ACCURACY OF MALES IN THE CONTROL AND EXPERIMENTAL GROUPS

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
ACCURACY	MCG	11	6.0909	1.86840	.56334
	MEG	9	10.3333	1.16228	1.05409

TABLE 2.
INDEPENDENT-SAMPLES T TEST RESULTS COMPARING WRITING ACCURACY OF MALE PARTICIPANTS IN THE CONTROL AND EXPERIMENTAL GROUPS

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	t test for Equality of Means							
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Errors Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Accuracy	Equal Variances Assumed	3.938	.063	-3.736	18	.002	-4.24242	1.13563	-6.62830	-1.85655
	Equal Variances not Assumed			-3.550	12.412	.004	-4.24242	1.19518	-6.83694	-1.64791

The two means obtained from two independent groups were compared and an independent Samples *t*-test was used for analyzing the data. Table 2 shows the results of the Independent Samples *t* test according to the means of T-units per text for male essays in the control and experimental groups. For T-units, the level of significance was 0.21 (bolded in Table 2, under [Sig/2-tailed] column); the difference between the two groups was significant. In fact, there was a significant difference between male essays regarding the average number of T-units in both control and experimental groups. Since the value under Sig. (2-tailed) is .02, it is obvious that *p* is less than our specified level of significance (i.e., .02 > .05), indicating a statistically significant difference between male participants in the two groups. Writing fluency of males, as a result, had indeed been affected by the pre-task treatment utilized in this study.

To understand the differences between the means for the male participants in the control and experimental groups, Figure 1 was used:

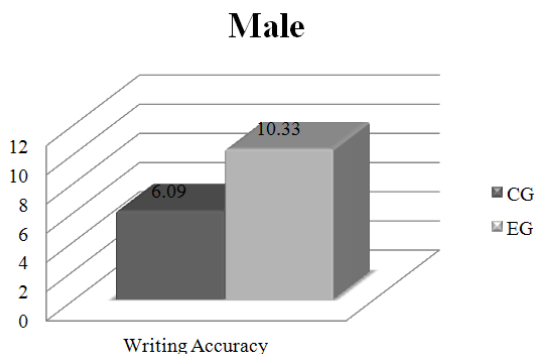


Figure1. Graphical representation of the writing accuracy mean of the male

Clearly, Fig. 1 shows that there was a difference in the average number of T-units per text for both groups. In comparison with male participants in the control group, participants in the experimental group wrote more accurately. Based on the results drawn from the study, there was a significant difference between the mean values of accuracy in argumentative essays written by the males in the control and experimental groups; therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected in this regard.

2. Complexity

Grammatical complexity of essays written in the control and experimental groups was measured through calculating the proportion of clauses comprising T-units. The two measures of complexity of written essays by the males in the control group and experimental groups were compared. The possible results of this treatment on writing complexity of male participants are dealt with in the next two tables.

TABLE 3. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS COMPARING WRITING COMPLEXITY OF MALES IN THE CONTROL AND EXPERIMENTAL GROUPS

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
COMPLEXITY	MCG	11	1.4418	.14573	.04394
	MEG	9	1.4789	.12139	.04046

Table 3 illustrates the descriptive statistics of grammatical complexity including the number of male participants in the control and experimental groups, their mean scores, and standard deviations. As can be seen, the mean score of MCG is 1.44 while that of MEG equals 1.47. To check if the difference between the mean scores is statistically meaningful or not, Table 4 was used:

TABLE 4. INDEPENDENT-SAMPLES T TEST RESULTS COMPARING WRITING COMPLEXITY OF MALE PARTICIPANTS IN THE CONTROL AND EXPERIMENTAL GROUPS

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	<i>t</i> test for Equality of Means							
		<i>F</i>	Sig.	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Errors Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Complexity	Equal Variances Assumed	.278	.605	-.609	18	.550	-.03707	.06088	-.16498	.09084
	Equal Variances not Assumed			-.621	17.985	.543	-.03707	.05973	-.16257	.08843

Table 4 illustrates the results of the independent Samples *t*-test in terms of the means of the complexity for the control and experimental groups. Considering the Sig. (2-tailed) value which is .550 (i.e., *p* > .05), the difference

between the mean of complexity in the two groups is not significant. This would imply that no statistically significant difference between the complexity scores of males in the two groups was observed.

B. Null Hypothesis/H02

H02: There is no positive evidence for the influence of pre-task planning on *accuracy* and *complexity* of argumentative essays written by Iranian **female** EFL learners with an intermediate proficiency level.

1. Accuracy

In this stage, the accuracy of the scripts produced by females in the control and experimental groups has been scrutinized separately. Here, the difference in percentage values should be investigated. In other words, the second research question was examined to find out the impact of pre-task planning on the degree of development in accuracy of the writing task. Accordingly, the written essays by females in the control group were compared with those produced in the experimental group in terms of mean values which are clearly observed in the following tables. Each table is further supplemented by relevant bar charts displaying the degree of improvement. It should be kept in mind that the results will be presented in two tables; while the first refers to the results of descriptive statistics pertinent to the comparison of female participants' accuracy scores in the control and experimental groups, the second depicts the results of the comparison for the T-units, and the accuracy.

It was clearly observed in Table 3 that the essays written by the females in the control and experimental groups are compared regarding the average number of T-units per text. Apparently, the means for the second sub-measure of fluency that is average number of T-units per text in the experimental group produced by the females is higher than those in the control group.

TABLE 5.
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS COMPARING WRITING ACCURACY OF FEMALE PARTICIPANTS
IN THE CONTROL & EXPERIMENTAL GROUPS

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
ACCURACY	FCG	14	6.9286	2.46403	.65854
	FEG	16	12.3125	3.04891	.76223

Table 5 displays, the mean scores, and standard deviations of writing accuracy of female participants in the control and experimental groups. The mean score of females in the control group (FCG) is 6.9286, while that of females in the experimental group (FEG) equals 12.3125. To see if the difference between the mean scores is statistically significant or not, the *t* test table should be considered.

TABLE 6.
INDEPENDENT-SAMPLES T TEST RESULTS COMPARING WRITING ACCURACY OF FEMALE PARTICIPANTS
IN THE CONTROL AND EXPERIMENTAL GROUPS

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	<i>t</i> test for Equality of Means							
		<i>F</i>	Sig.	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Errors Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
ACCURACY	Equal Variances Assumed	.547	.466	-5.268	28	.000	-5.38393	1.02200	-7.47740	-3.29046
	Equal Variances not Assumed			-5.345	27.848	.000	-5.38393	1.00730	-7.44781	-3.32005

In table 6, it is observed the the Sig. (2-tailed) value is 0.000 (i.e., $p < .05$). This means that the difference between the accuracy scores of females in the two groups is statistically large. Figure 4.5 indicates the mean in bar form.

Using the following bar graph can help much to have a better picture of what has happened.

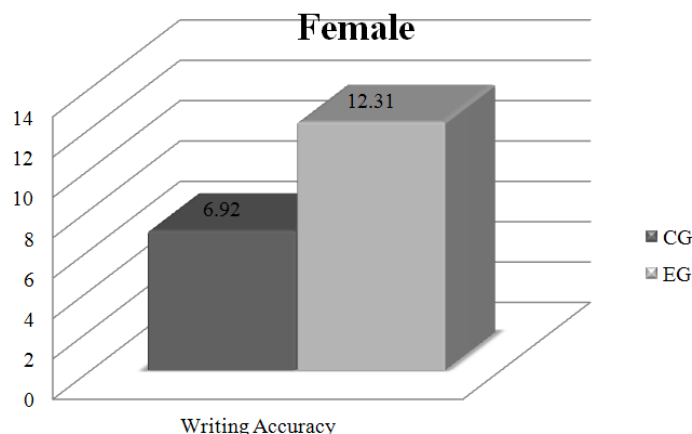


Figure 2. Performance Profile of the female participants in Control and Experimental Groups

According to Figure 2, the mean value for the argumentative essays written by females in the experimental group was higher than those in the control group. Although improvement in writing can be seen in both groups, the degree of improvement in the use of clauses was higher for pairs than individuals. Pairs had progressed about 24% more than individuals in this regard. The difference in percentage was significant.

Consequently, the pre-task treatment used in this study turned out to affect writing accuracy of the female participants. Therefore, the null hypothesis *H02* is rejected.

2. Complexity

In Table 7, the number of female participants in the control and experimental groups, their mean scores, and standard deviations are displayed with regard to the proportion of clauses associated with T-units. As such, the complexity of the texts produced by females in the control and experimental groups has been scrutinized separately. It is clearly observed that the mean score of FCG is 1.44 while that of FEG equals 1.71.

TABLE 7.
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS COMPARING WRITING COMPLEXITY OF FEMALES IN THE CONTROL AND EXPERIMENTAL GROUPS

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
COMPLEXITY	MCG	14	1.4471	.16569	.04428
	MEG	16	1.7144	.12749	.03187

To see if the difference between the mean scores is statistically large or not, one needs to look up the relevant information in Table 8

TABLE 8
INDEPENDENT-SAMPLES T TEST RESULTS COMPARING WRITING COMPLEXITY OF FEMALE PARTICIPANTS
IN THE CONTROL AND EXPERIMENTAL GROUPS

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	t test for Equality of Means							
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Errors Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Complexity	Equal Variances Assumed	.593	.448	-4.986	28	.000	-.26723	-.05360	-.37703	-.15743
	Equal Variances not Assumed			-4.898	24.305	.000	-.26723	.05456	-.37976	-.15470

In able 8, the Sig. (2-tailed) value is .000 (i.e. $p < .05$). This implies that a statistically significant difference exists between the complexity scores of females in the two groups. As the above table indicates, there is a significant difference between the complexities of scripts produced by females in the both group; therefore, the null hypothesis *H02* is rejected.

Figure 3 is the bar chart showing differences of means related to complexity:

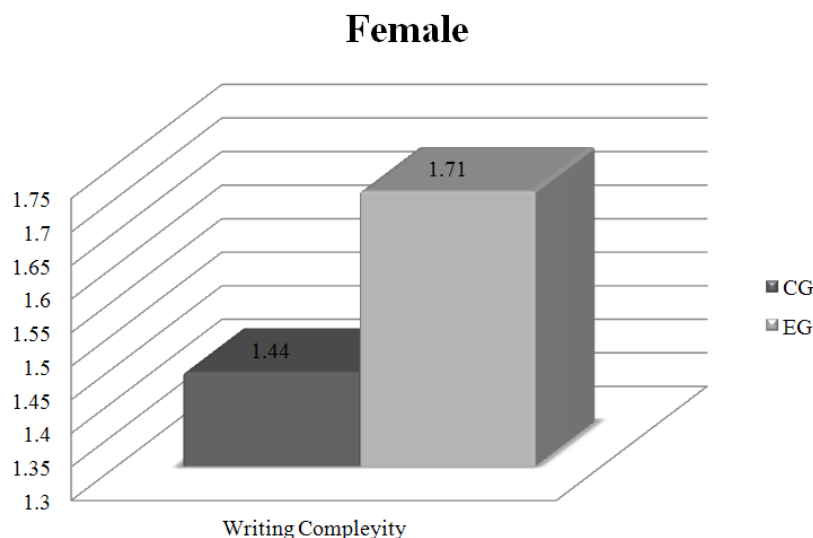


Figure 3. Graphical representation of the writing complexity mean of the female

VII. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As you recall, the first research question of this study addressed the influence of pre-task planning on accuracy and complexity, in written argumentative essays by **male** EFL learners. The results indicated that the accuracy of the written texts by the male participants in the experimental group was higher than those in the control group. In other words, the experimental group outperformed the control group. With regard to the complexity, although there was a considerable progress in the use of clauses/T-units by the male participants in the experimental group, the complexity of the written texts was not significant in comparison to the complexity of the written texts by the males in the control group. In other words, task-based instruction helped learners to produce significantly more accurate texts. (Here, it is worthy to mention that for the null hypothesis to be rejected, the observed value of p must be smaller than the significance level of .05 [$p < .05$]. If the observed p -value is equal or greater than the significance level of .05, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.) It was shown in Tables 1 and 2 that there was a significant difference between the accuracy of male essays in the control and experimental groups. Since the p -value for accuracy of the texts written by the male in the experimental group is .002 and it is smaller than .05, the null hypothesis is rejected in this regard. This means that the difference between the accuracy scores of males in the two groups is statistically large. Clearly pre-task planning results in greater accuracy of language written production. Figure 1 earlier demonstrated a growing tendency in using error-free T-units. The important point to mention is that the treatment used in this study has caused the participants to produce more error-free T-units. As it can be inferred from figure 1, the male participants in the experimental group developed a growth in the number of T-units per text.

The difference between scripts produced by male subjects in the control and experimental groups in terms of complexity constituted the second stage of the study. Tables 3, and 4 shows that there is no significant difference between the complexity scores of males in the two groups. The findings imply that although there was a meaningful progress in the use of clauses/T-units by the males in experimental group, the complexity of the written texts was not significant in comparison to the complexity of the written texts by the males in the control group. Generally speaking, pre-task planning had offered the advantage of improving the writing accuracy while it did not lead to producing more complex texts by the male participants. This is supported by the study of Storch and Wigglesworth (2007) according to which writing tasks within a task-based framework lead to the production of more accurate texts but not more complex texts. Rahimpour (2011) also gained the same results concerning the complexity of essays written by the Iranian male EFL learners.

Referring to the second question of the study about the influence of pre-task planning on accuracy and complexity of argumentative essay writing by **female** EFL learners at intermediate level, the results show a significant difference between essays created by the participants in the control and experimental groups. According to the table 5, and table 6 which represents the results of pre-task planning on writing accuracy of the female participants, the accuracy of written texts is significant. It means that pre-task planning has helped the female participants in the experimental group to write more error-free T-units. Figure 2 also shows that the writing accuracy mean of the female participants in the experimental group produce more accurate texts than those in the control group. Regarding the second question about complexity of essays written by female participants in control and experimental groups at intermediate level, table 7, and table 8 demonstrate the result. The effect of pre-task planning on complexity is noticeable. Figure 3 represents the grammatical complexity in terms of clauses/T-units used by the participants. It can be concluded that pre-task planning appears to have an appreciable impact on writing accuracy, and complexity and helps to produce more accurate, and

complex texts by the female participants. The findings of the present study also support those of Biria and Jafari (2014), who investigated the impact of tasks on individual and collaborative writing of different sexes. Their findings also indicated that there were significant differences in the performance of individual and paired learners with the pairs producing more complex texts as well as more accurate sentences.

In sum, this study sought to scrutinize the efficacy of pre-task planning on improving writing, regarding accuracy and complexity of essays written by Iranian intermediate learners. The results obtained from the scripts written by male participants revealed that pre-task planning improved accuracy but not complexity. On the other hand, **the comparison of the essays written by the females in both group revealed that they produced more accurate and complex texts.** That is the task-based approach was more effective than the traditional approach in teaching argumentative essays writing to the Iranian EFL learners with an intermediate proficiency level.

APPENDIX A. NUMBER OF OCCURRENCE FOR EACH MEASURE IN CONTROL GROUP

Male Participants	Words	T-units	Clauses	Dependent Clauses	Error-Free T-units	Error-Free Clauses
1	289	23	29	6	9	14
2	285	21	28	7	8	14
3	284	21	27	6	7	15
4	278	18	25	5	6	12
5	273	17	25	8	6	13
6	265	19	26	3	7	14
7	254	17	25	5	7	13
8	248	16	24	4	6	12
9	237	16	23	3	5	11
10	220	12	20	2	3	9
11	215	11	19	3	3	9

Female Participants	Words	T-units	Clauses	Dependent Clauses	Error-Free T-units	Error-Free Clauses
1	295	23	28	5	10	15
2	287	23	29	7	8	15
3	286	22	30	8	9	15
4	283	21	30	9	10	16
5	281	19	27	8	8	15
6	270	19	28	7	9	16
7	269	19	27	8	9	16
8	261	18	26	7	7	14
9	255	18	24	2	5	12
10	245	15	23	4	4	10
11	235	14	24	9	5	11
12	231	16	21	5	6	10
13	224	14	22	3	5	11
14	219	11	20	1	2	8

APPENDIX B. NUMBER OF OCCURRENCE FOR EACH MEASURE IN EXPERIMENTAL GROUP

Male Participants	words	T-units	Clauses	Dependent Clauses	Error-Free T-units	Error-Free Clauses
1	334	25	35	10	14	30
2	329	23	33	10	13	24
3	325	22	32	10	10	16
4	316	21	33	12	14	19
5	313	21	29	8	12	18
6	288	20	31	11	9	16
7	278	19	33	14	9	24
8	265	19	28	9	7	15
9	247	18	24	6	5	11

Female Participants	Words	T-units	Clauses	Dependent Clauses	Error-Free T-units	Error-Free Clauses
1	332	27	42	15	18	38
2	329	26	43	17	17	39
3	324	24	43	19	15	33
4	312	23	40	17	15	28
5	309	23	40	17	14	31
6	299	22	41	19	11	31
7	280	22	37	15	14	25
8	283	20	33	13	10	20
9	276	19	29	10	7	19
10	265	19	32	13	12	16
11	261	20	35	15	12	19
12	258	20	34	14	13	18
13	252	19	35	10	11	17
14	249	19	34	15	10	16
15	245	17	34	17	9	15
16	241	17	26	9	9	13

APPENDIX C. QUANTITATIVE MEASURES OF FLUENCY OF THE CONTROL GROUP

	Participants	N	Mean
Words	Male	11	258.90
	Female	14	260.07
T-units	Male	11	17.36
	Female	14	18
Clauses	Male	11	24.63
	Female	14	25.64

APPENDIX D. QUANTITATIVE MEASURES OF FLUENCY OF THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP

	Participants	N	Mean
Words	Male	9	299.44
	Female	16	282.18
T-units	Male	9	20.88
	Female	16	21.06
Clauses	Male	9	30.88
	Female	16	36.12

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