

The Use of Journal Writing and Reading Comprehension Texts During Pre-Writing in Developing EFL Students' Academic Writing

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Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the effects of journal writing and reading comprehension practice during pre-writing on the development of the writing of college students enrolled in English as a foreign language (EFL) programme. A factorial design was manipulated, where subjects ($n = 42$) were randomly assigned to control and experimental groups. Existing scores on the students' first semester writing achievement test were used to determine the writing proficiency levels of the subjects. Data were collected through administering two writing tests, an one-hour test and a 15-minutes free writing test. The results of these tests were analyzed using *t*-test to assess the relationship between writing fluency, complexity and accuracy. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and two multivariate analyses of variances (MANOVA) were further run in order to address the questions raised in the study. Findings of the study showed that there was no significant difference between journal writing and reading comprehension practice in improving the writing fluency, complexity and accuracy of the students. The MANOVA test run to test the interaction between the treatment (*journal writing and reading comprehension texts*) and the writing proficiency levels (low vs. high) on the writing fluency, complexity and accuracy showed no significant results. Recommendations for future research were provided at the end of the study.

Key words: Journal writing and reading comprehension texts; Foreign language programme; Pre-writing

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary writing theory and instructional practices advocates a process teaching approach that involves the generation of ideas, multiple drafting and revising. The underlying assumption is that writing is a complex process that allows writers to explore thoughts and ideas that render them to be visible and concrete, given the fact that "competent writing is frequently accepted as being the last language skill to be acquired for native speakers of the language as well as for foreign/second language learners" (Hamp & Heasley, 2006, p.2). This process-oriented approach allows students to manage the complexity of writing tasks as EFL students go through the different stages of writing, prewriting, drafting, revising, editing and writing up the final version of writing assignments. When thoughts are put down, ideas can be examined, reconsidered, replaced, rearranged, and changed for the better. Prior research on writing instruction indicates that this skill needs to be taught as a process rather than a product (Al-Asmari, 2013; He, 2009; Perego & Boyle, 1997; Widodo, 2013).

Process writing is an approach to teaching writing that has been researched in depth over the past year and recommended for use with both English as a first language learners (L1) (Calkins, 1986; Emig, 1981; Graves, 1983; Perego & Boyle, 1977) and English as a second language learners (L2), (Kroll, 1990; Perego & Boyle, 1997). According to Halliday MAK (1989) and Kaplan (1996), it has been widely accepted to think of writing not as being an innate skill or potential capacity or aptitude,

but as a technology that has to be learned; that is, a skill that requires a certain technical capacity which involves cognitive-psychomotor cooperation.

According to Huff and Kline (1987), the authors suggested a writing model that moves along three main phases, namely *rehearsing*, *composing*, and *valuing*. The authors, in this regard, further propose that...

a writing curriculum must provide daily and systematically focused rehearsal of writing skills; it must incorporate a thorough, well grounded understanding of the composing process, and it must assist students in developing skills to value and judge their own and others' writing (p.1).

In addition, though classroom writing has been identified as an important part of foreign language learning, writing outside the classroom, e.g., home writing assignments, should be thought of as complementary to classroom writing development and should be used as a supplementary tool to enhance writing skill (Chandrasegaran, 2002, p.14). An important task for developing writing skills both in class and at home is to keep a daily journal "in which writers keep a record of ideas, opinions, and description of daily life; journals help writers develop their creativity" (Spaventa, 2000, p.168).

Regular journal writing in the EFL classroom helps better to develop the learners' writing skills and instills into learners the attitude freely writes about what they wish to whenever they feel like writing; thus Hamp-Lions and Heasley (2006, p. 5) indicate that:

The most obvious way you can help yourself become a good writer is by writing. We strongly suggest that in addition to completing the tasks, you also keep your own personal journal. Buy yourself a notebook, and try to write down some ideas every day, in English, about anything that interests you (...). You will surprise yourself by producing pages and pages of writing.

Journal writing is, therefore, "an active learning technique" (Chickering and Gamson, 1987, p.5). EFL learners can pen down or even type as in the case of keeping online blogfolios, their personal or life activities. The value of keeping personal diaries or journals has received ample research efforts by several scholars (Tin, 2000); according to Artof (1992):

It is a powerful tool to find our own untapped creative power, uncover our family history, learn to see the world more clearly, heal unsolved issues, understand our fears, and explore our motivation. Through personal writing, we can develop both writing skills and awareness, can develop greater awareness and interpersonal understanding, increasing the ability to relate to others.

Journal writing is defined as a type of written interaction between teachers and students that focuses on meaning rather than form and is a means of developing student's linguistic competence, and their ability to communicate in written English (Peyton, 1990).

The aim of this study, congruent with Huff and Kline's paradigm (1987) is to examine the element of rehearsing as an essential component of the writing process during

pre-writing. An important activity that can provide daily and systematically focused rehearsal of writing skills is to maintain daily journal writing (Tuan, 2010). Journal writing is one type of writing which provides learners with opportunities to write freely from their own experiences and gives learners the time they need to rehearse writing in a foreign language (Daskalogiannaki, 2012; Hemmati & Soltanpour, 2012; Li, 2013).

Generally, the benefits of journal writing have been asserted in the literature (White or Arndt, 1991; Spaventa, 2000); journal writing keeps students instilled with joy and momentum and involves them in the writing process in an interesting way. According to White and Arndt's (1991, p.67):

This technique has been found to be an effective and productive means of arousing interest in writing, which, at the same time, develops fluency of expression. It also helps students to become aware of why they wish to communicate their ideas and to regard writing not only as a means of personal expression, but also a dialogue in written language with the reader.

More significantly, journal writing provides learners with multiple opportunities to improve their skills individually (Ngho, 2002; Spaventa, 2000; Tuan, 2010; Al Asmari, 2013).

Writing daily journals for pedagogical purposes has many advantages. In fact, Huff and Kline (1987) have maintained that...

...there is no replacement for the journal within the composing curriculum. It serves as an ongoing rehearsal of skills and ideas that interact to ignite the composing process, turning it into an act of discovery as opposed to the reduction of experience that characterizes the school-assigned essay (p.49).

Journal writing can influence learner's interactions with teachers, and it can brush up on the learner's overall language ability. One reason for the popularity of journals is the flexibility it offers students and teachers. Journals can be used as opportunities for student-teacher dialogs; as places to record notes, gather materials, and plan writing. Another reason for the popularity of journal is that they engage students in non-threatening exploration and development of ideas; they are "the most consistently effective tool for establishing fluency" (Kirby, 1988; Reid, 1993, p.162).

In addition, using journal writing with EFL students can improve their language proficiency (Peyton, 1990). Language proficiency can be defined in terms of accuracy and fluency. Successful mastering of a foreign language means that the learner can understand and produce it both accurately (correctly) and fluently (receiving and conveying messages with ease). This applies to both reading and writing skills. When we talk about "getting the language right", we are talking about accuracy; and when we are concentrating on the "message", we are talking about fluency (Brumfit, 1984). In this respect, Casanave (1994) maintained that

we watch student's fluency and depth of thought increase as they manage to move away from dependency on dictionaries and translations. We watch them lose their fear and dislike of writing. We witness increasing number of creative out-bursts and incidents of risk-taking. We notice that fewer students dwell on their grades and instead dwell on ideas. We sense that student's language and thinking both mature over time (p.180).

Furthermore, journal writing is one of the pre-writing activities which allows student to overcome the frustration they face with the assigned daily or weekly compositions where they can not come up with ideas to express themselves fluently and comfortably. Journal writing allows EFL learners to experience what Janet Emig (1971) calls the self-sponsored writing as opposed to the schools-sponsored; that is the students will learn how to get involved in their own writing through creative pre-drafting, part of which is being the journal writing.

Finally, having students keep journals allows EFL teachers to discover that all students can write and that they are good writers. This is consistent with the premise of Macrorie (1976) who maintained that "we need to listen to what students say and look at what they write" (p.4).

On the other hand, reading before writing is one of the writing techniques which focuses on teaching both reading and writing skills within an integrated pedagogy (Reid, 1993; Mekheimer, 2011; Royal, 2000).

In this vein, the teaching of reading and writing by integration has increasingly become a focus of research; some researchers have attempted to provide the benefits of teaching both skills across the curriculum. Gebhard (1983) suggested that the writing process requires apt observation of experiences and higher order thinking skills, readily accessible in reading comprehension texts used as reading before writing texts. Reading courses require the same components for successful comprehension that are required in writing development; therefore, the two must be taught in an integrated manner. Kennedy (1980) believes that it is time for instructors in the reading field to become knowledgeable about written communication because the skills for both areas are interwoven. Mekheimer (2011) also found the reading/writing connection to be beneficial to students in an expressionist, personal writing course where journal writing was a significant course component. His conclusion was drawn not because reading helped the students to use appropriate textual strategies, but because the reading assignments had a strong impact on their attitudes about themselves as readers and writers alike.

Within the "Whole Language" movement, or holistic teaching of both reading and writing, Goodman and Goodman (1983) examined the relationship between reading and writing. Goodman & Goodman state aptly observed that "Children use in writing what they observe in reading. But they must also be reading like writers." Students observe certain characteristics when reading a text, and only when they begin to write, are there

an attempt to recreate the style of language that was previously read. By the same token, Sanacore (1983) also supports this idea of using reading comprehension texts, and encouraging students to identify various types of written discourse to help EFL students to understand the different processes and constructs, which improves reading comprehension and allows students the opportunity to gain insights into the behaviours that are similar in reading and writing that also assists in developing their writing skills.

A. Context of the Problem

As stated earlier, the present study was set to investigate the effects of journal writing, a prewriting activity focusing on writing rehearsal, on promoting the writing development of EFL students and the effects of reading before writing which is another type of writing practice on promoting the writing development of EFL students in terms of writing fluency, complexity and accuracy.

Interest in developing this study was due to the fact that most of the studies reviewed in this paper looked at writing development in terms of fluency, complexity, and accuracy, but not necessarily in relation to the daily journal writing or the reading before writing strategy as used with EFL learners. Therefore, there is a possibility of examining the relative effectiveness of these two techniques of teaching writing on the writing fluency, complexity, and accuracy of EFL learners.

The T-unit analysis, which was used to measure the writing fluency, complexity and accuracy, does not appear to be appropriate for the analysis of data from subjects with relatively low proficiency. It works better with learners with high degree of proficiency (Gaies, 1980). Therefore, college students who have adequate language proficiency seemed to be more suitable than pre-tertiary students for this study especially that the journal writing and reading before writing activities are appropriate with EFL college students.

The number of studies dealing with the effect of journal writing on the writing fluency, complexity and accuracy is limited. This provides ample rationale for this study to be conducted in the EFL context.

By the same token, prior research demonstrated that journal writing had positive effects on writing fluency and writing complexity, but not in writing accuracy of ESL students (Bazih, 1996). Therefore, empirical research needs to tap into the effects of journal writing on writing accuracy and correctness.

B. Problem of the Study

The present study aimed at investigating the relative effectiveness of journal writing practice and reading before writing tasks in improving writing development of EFL learners in terms of writing fluency, complexity, and accuracy at the college level. More specifically, the study addressed the following questions.

a) Is journal writing practice more effective than reading before writing in developing the writing fluency, complexity, and accuracy of EFL student writers?

b) Is there an interaction between the instructional method (journal writing and reading before writing) and the writing proficiency levels (low and high) of student writers?

C. Statement of the Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested in the present study.

HO 1: There is a significant difference in the writing fluency of the writing of EFL students instructed according to the journal writing technique and of those instructed according to the reading before writing technique:

HO 2: There is a significant difference in the writing complexity of the writing of EFL students instructed according to the journal writing technique and of those instructed according to the reading before writing technique.

HO 3: There is a significant difference in the writing accuracy of the writing of EFL students instructed according to the journal writing technique and of those instructed according to the reading before writing technique.

HO 4: There is a significant interaction between the writing instructional techniques and the writing proficiency levels of the student's writing.

D. Independent Variables

Treatment: The treatment factor design is double-valued; the journal writing and the reading before writing. Journal writing is one of the prewriting strategies which can be used in the process writing (Huff & Kline, 1987). Journal writing is a type of written interaction between teachers and students that focuses on meaning rather than form and is a means of developing student's linguistic competencies and their ability to communicate in written English (Peyton, 1990). Whereas reading before writing is the use of reading comprehension texts relevant to the writing tasks and is rich in schema-activating content that fosters the idea generation and triggers of vocabulary learning relevant to the writing tasks.

Writing Proficiency: In this study, students writing proficiency levels were determined based on students existing writing achievement scores on their writing test which was administered by the English department at the end of the first semester. Highly proficient writers were the ones whose achievement scores were above the median which was 70; whereas, low proficient writers were the ones whose achievement scores were below the median score.

E. Dependant Variables

Writing Fluency: It is defined as the ability to get the words down on a page (Peyton, 1990). As the students write more they show more fluent writing than those who write less.

Writing Complexity: It is the ability to use subordination and to produce complex sentences and clauses (Peyton, 1990). The more the students use subordination the more complex their writing becomes.

Writing Accuracy: In this study, it was defined as the ability to produce error free sentences except for spelling mistakes which were not counted as errors (Casanave, 1994).

Limitations of the Study: A major limitation in the present study was the period of intervention since the treatment lasted for 12 weeks only. It was possible that the period of intervention was not long enough to bring significant changes in the writing of the 42 students participating in the study especially in terms of writing fluency, complexity and accuracy.

Another limitation was the number of students involved in the study. The 42 EFL learners enrolled in the sophomore year of the College of Languages & Translation were divided into two groups receiving two different writing instructional techniques. The 42 students formed a representative sample of the target population of the sophomore year of the EFL Saudi students enrolled in the English Department in a Saudi public Southeastern university.

F. Significance of the Study

The present study represents an extension of earlier investigation of the journal writing practice and the reading before writing strategy on the writing quality of students. More specifically, the study looks at the relative effectiveness of the two writing instructional techniques; the journal writing and the reading before writing in improving the writing development of EFL learners in terms of writing fluency, complexity and accuracy, a topic which was not addressed in previous research.

Therefore, the study seeks to provide information on (a) whether journal writing and reading before writing affect the writing development of EFL students, and (b) whether there is a significant interaction between the treatment (journal writing and reading before writing) and the writing proficiency levels (low versus high).

1. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This review seeks to address a) views on the different approaches to writing pedagogy, b) views on the writing process, c) studies related to writing development and journal writing, and d) studies related to reading before writing as a pre-writing strategy.

Writing is a complex process that requires incessant rehearsal for improvement of the writing product. A common way to practice writing is to keep a journal. Journal writing, which is one of the prewriting activities in the process writing approach, influences writing development of students in terms of their writing fluency,

complexity and accuracy (Casanave, 1994; Peyton, 1990; Kirby, 1988; Reid, 1993).

The other writing technique which affects the writing quality of students is the reading before writing practice (Goodman & Goodman, 1983; Mekheimer, 2011; Royal, 2000). Both writing techniques, the journal writing and the reading before writing strategies, have effects on the overall writing quality of learners especially in relation to the writing fluency, complexity and accuracy. Literature reviews are chock-full with supporting evidence in favour of teaching foreign language according to an integrated approach, especially the integration of reading comprehension with writing skills (Heffernan, 2006; Al-Ghamari, 2004; Faydi, 2003; Bose, 2003; Mekheimer, 2011). Researchers assertively emphasise the fact that reading and writing is closely connected “as readers and writers activate schema to create meaning from their own and others’ texts” (Mekheimer, 2011). Reading and writing is not separate entities but they are integral parts in the communicative process (Al-Melhi, 2014).

1.1 Views on the Pedagogical Approaches to Writing

Writing is one of the language skills which occupy an important role in language learning and teaching. One of the many reasons why writing deserves attention in teaching language is because writing is the most common way of examining student performance in English. The ability to write itself may be associated with evidence of having learned the language. Although, writing has its place among the language skills, there is no one answer to the question of how to teach writing in ESL classes. Many approaches to teaching writing were developed since the 1950’s and they continue to change as the needs of student change.

Under this section, six approaches to the teaching of writing based on Raimes’ (1983) work are briefly summarized to present an idea on the developing and changing way of viewing writing since the 1950’s till recently. The first approach reviewed is the controlled-to-free approach. The controlled-to-free approach in writing is sequential; students are first given sentence exercise, then paragraphs to copy or manipulate grammatically. They might also change words or clauses or combine sentences. With these controlled composition, it is relatively easy for students to write a great deal yet avoids errors. This approach emphasizes accuracy rather than fluency or originality.

The second approach is the free-writing approach which emphasizes that intermediate level students should put content and fluency first and not worry about form. Some teachers and researchers using this approach have stressed quantity rather than quality. They have approached the teaching of writing by assigning vast amounts of free writing on given topics with minimal correction of error.

Instead of accuracy of grammar or fluency of content, the paragraph-pattern approach, which is the third writing approach reviewed in this section, stresses on organization. Students copy paragraphs, analyze the form of model paragraphs and imitate model passages. This approach is based on the principle that in different cultures of peoples construct and organize their communication with each other in different ways. So even if students organize their ideas well in their first language, they still need to see, analyze, and practice the particularity of “English” features of a piece of writing.

The fourth approach is the grammar-syntax-organization approach. Teachers who use this approach say that writing cannot be seen as compose of separate skills which are learned one by one. So they devise writing tasks that lead students to pay attention to the organization while they also work on the necessary grammar and syntax. This approach, then, links the purpose of a piece of writing to the forms that are needed to convey the message.

The communicative approach, the fifth approach, stresses on the purpose of a piece of writing and the audience for it. Student writers are encouraged to behave like writers in real life to ask themselves the crucial questions about purpose and audience. Why am I writing this? and who will read it?

Recently, the teaching of writing has begun to move away from a concentration on the written product to an emphasis on the process of writing – an approach which is more ground at the levels of theory and practice. In this approach, writers ask themselves not only questions about purpose and audience that underlie writing activities, but also the crucial questions: How do I write this? How do I get start with the writing process?

1.2 Views on the Process Approach

In the 1970’s, the ESL profession gradually began abandoning structuralist views of language and grammar based methodologies in favour of approaches which focused on communication not grammatical accuracy, as the goal of language learning. ESL teachers and researchers especially interested in writing also shifted their perspective and began to examine native-speaker writing classes, already well engaged in the paradigm shift toward a process approach to teaching writing (Hairston, 1982; & Zamel, 1976 as cited in Leki, 1992). It was in the 1980’s up till the present time that increasing number of ESL/EFL conference papers explored the idea of using process approaches with ESL students (Leki, 1992; Mekheimer, 2005; Zaid, 2011).

The advantage in adopting the process approach lies in identifying the significance of the cyclical and recursive nature of writing (Mekheimer, 2005), evidently, employed by native writers, where ‘ordinarily pre-writing, writing and re-writing frequently seem to be going on simultaneously’ (Smith, 1982, p.104).

It is now firmly established that the most central principle of process-oriented pedagogy is that writing is the result of a very complex, highly individualized process. Therefore, the redirection of process-driven writing has arisen in opposition to the traditional method to write instruction that mostly relied on:

- The three or five paragraph model;
- Simplistic assumptions about essay organization and ordering of data and information in the text of the essay;
- The typical one draft essay writing product;
- Individualistic approach to writing where each student writes to herself or himself and the only one to see or judge the writing is the teacher;
- Over-reliance on mechanics and lecturing method;
- Linear composing starting with outlining, writing and editing (Grabe or Kaplan, 1996, p.86).

This change to process-based instruction into writing in English was first started in the US due to changes in linguistics and requirements of higher education (White or Arndt, 1990); however, the approach is contagious; it was transmitted to the EFL context. This led to the elaboration of a model of the composing processes of the writer which has had a major impact on the writing instruction in the English speaking world (Tribble, 1996), and one may further claim, to the EFL contexts around the world. The composing processor is described as having three operational processes; i.e., planning, translating and reviewing which are controlled by a monitor. The task environment and the writer's long-term memory provide resources and stimuli which are utilized by the composing processor. In this way, the ideas in the mind of the planning writers are changed into language on the page by the interpreter and then reviewed to be finally revised and edited towards producing a final version that seeks perfection.

Thus, the process approach calls for providing a positive, encouraging, and collaborative workshop environment within which students, with ample time and minimal interference, can work through their composing processes in a collaborative learning environment. The teacher's role is to help students develop viable strategies for getting started (finding topics, generating ideas and information, focusing, and planning structure and procedure), for drafting (encouraging multiple drafts), for revising (adding, deleting, modifying, and rearranging ideas), and for editing (attending to vocabulary, grammar and mechanics). From a process perspective, then "writing is a complex, recursive, and creative process or set of behaviours that is very similar in its broad outlines for first and second language writers." (Kroll, 1990, p.16)

One of the researchers who were interested in studying the use of process-oriented writing with ESL learners was Zamel (1982) who studied the writing of eight

university-level "proficient" L2 writers, one of whom was a graduate student. Her data consisted of interviews about her subject's writing experiences and behaviours, which were retrospective accounts of writing processes and the students multiple drafts for the production of one essay. Zamel (1982) found that the writing processes of her L2 subjects were like those of the subjects described in L1 studies. She conducted that L2 composing processes indicate that L1 process-oriented writing instruction might also be effective for teaching L2 writing (Zamel, 1982).

Zamel further investigated the issue of using process writing with L2 writers. Zamel's (1983) investigation of the process writing of six advanced L2 students provided more support to the idea that L2 writers compose like L1 writers – an issue that received similar research attention in the literature.

Having thus summarized the history of the writing approaches to the teaching of writing as a process and its relation to second language writers, a further review of studies related directly to the present study follows. Some of these studies are related to prewriting processes as related to journal writing practice. Other studies are related to the effect of journal writing and reading before writing on the writing development in ESL/EFL writers.

1.3 Studies Related to Writing Development and Journal Writing

Some prior research examined writing fluency, complexity and accuracy in terms of the T-unit analysis. For example, Bardovi-Harlig and Bofman (1989) investigated the relationship between syntactic development or complexity, and overall accuracy evidenced in the written English of 30 advanced learners of English as a foreign language. The 30 learner participating in the study were representatives of 5 native languages: Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Malay and Spanish. The 30 students wrote on topics about "advice to Americans visiting your country", "how the women/family has changed in your country", "the person who influenced your life", and "national characteristics". The essays were scored along two parameters: syntactic complexity and surface errors. Syntactic complexity was calculated as the number of clauses per T-unit. The complexity data and the analysis of errors using the T-unit measures showed that the inter-language of the 30 advanced EFL learners exhibited relatively strong syntax but incomplete and variable acquisition of grammatical morphemes (Bardovi-Harlig & Bofman, 1989).

In the area of second language writing, current research documents the similarities in the writing processes of first and second language writers. For example, second language writers make use of their budding knowledge of English as they create texts for different audiences and different purposes, just as first language writers do (Ammon, 1985; Devine & Eskey, 1988; Peregoy & Boyle, 1997).

The focus in the classroom turned away from the final product, the structuring of essays and correction of errors to concentrate on creativity and self-discovery through the use of journals, in which students write freely without the consequences of grammar evaluation, teacher imposed topics and structures, critical comments, and grades (Elbow, 1973; Macrorie, 1970, 1976; Reid, 1993). It is important here to say that the kind of journal writing to be emphasized is that which aims at building the writing skills of the students. A skill-building model of journal writing is appropriate for the writing classroom. In this theory of curriculum, the journal becomes the place where basic writing skills can be developed and where observations and experiences can be accurately recorded. The skill-building model depends on an intensive and ongoing interaction between the writer and the material in the journal (Huff & Kline, 1987).

The number of studies conducted on the effect of journal writing on the writing development of EFL learners in terms of fluency, complexity, and accuracy is limited. However, all of the students reviewed here have one thing in common and that is they measure the writing fluency, complexity, and accuracy using T-unit analysis as the main analysis technique which is the case in the present study.

In this vein, too, Kintsch (1986) examined the effect of journal writing on the writing of elementary native speakers. In the 4 years study of the process of journal writing with native speakers, Kintsch (1986) reported that young ESL learners seem to use a richer lexicon in their writing than they did under traditional writing programmes and that they write more easily and cogently as they move into the middle school:

The most outstanding development ... to journal writing is the abundance of eager authors. Students write fluently and easily. They take risks with paper and pencil because they have years of experience in building confidence. They are fearless and imaginative when it comes to written communication (p.172).

Casanave (1994) emphasized the benefits of journal writing in terms of language acquisition, building cognitive growth, and fostering self-confidence of ESL learners. In her analysis of 16 ESL student's journals, Casanave (1994) concluded that the journal writing provided a window into student's cognitive processes, sense of fluency, and depth of treatment. The purpose of Casanave's study was to identify how the language in the 16 student's journals changed over three semesters in a setting where the journal was used extensively in a content-based class. The writing themes for the journals included cross-cultural conflict/prejudice and discrimination, human relationships and issues in law. The majority of analyses in Casanave's study consisted of various T-unit counts. The kinds of counts had to do with T-unit length, complexity, and accuracy. Length, as measured by number of words per T-unit. Complexity,

as measured by the number of clauses per T-unit and the percentage of complex T-units (those with at least one subordinate or embedded clause). Accuracy, as measured by percent of error free-T-units and length of error free T-units (EFT's). The T-unit analysis demonstrated that the writing of all the students changed over time. The analysis showed that 45% of the students did not progress in the area of error reduction while 55% did. The findings showed also that all students wrote more fluently, thoughtfully and insightfully.

Investigating into the effect of journal writing on the writing fluency, complexity and accuracy, Bazih (1996) examined change in the writing of six intermediate ESL students during a remedial English course. The purpose of the study was to test the generalizability of some of the linguistic and rhetorical gains attributed to journal writing, namely fluency, complexity and accuracy. Students were expected to write daily journal entries for a period of nine consecutive weeks. T-unit analysis and three paired sample t-tests showed that the student's writing improved in the areas of fluency and complexity but deteriorated in accuracy.

Finally, theoretical support for the use of journals in teaching writing is derived from Vygotsky's (1962) views on the interactions of thought and language. Britton, Burgess, Martin, Mcleod, and Rosen (1975) (as cited in Stevenson & Jenkins, 1994) drew on the work of Vygotsky in claiming that the style of writing used in journals (expressive writing) "maybe... the kind of writing best adapted to exploration and discovery. It externalizes our first stage in tackling a problem or coming to grips with experience." (p.197) By bringing thoughts further into consciousness and objectifying them, journal writing helps individuals to connect new formation with what they already know, and, thus, promotes better learning (Fulwiler, 1982; Lund, 1984 as cited in Stevenson and Jenkins, 1994).

1.4 Studies on Reading and Writing as Integral Skills

Long ago, Squire (1983) contended that the much bemoaned and exposed weakness of students in reading and writing emanated from the failure of teachers to recognize that "composing and comprehending" are basically interrelated, "process-oriented thinking skills" and that failure to teach composing and comprehending as process-oriented skills impeded efforts to teach students to read, write, and think. (See also Applebee, 1981) By the same token, Squire (1983) based this argument that reading is essential to write on five demonstrable principles.

- a) Basic to all reading and writing is skill in processing language.
- b) Classroom strategies for regenerating ideas are essential to teaching comprehending. Because language learning and processing involve cognitive

processes basic to every discipline, application to the discipline is critical if children are to learn to think in the discipline.

- c) Students require instructional experience in all important modes of rhetoric if they are to comprehend and compose using these varied forms and functions.
- d) Instruction in comprehending and composing must concentrate on coping with the total process of constructing and reconstructing ideas.
- e) A critical factor in shaping the quality of both composing and comprehending is the prior knowledge the student brings to reading and writing (Squire, 1983, pp.581-582).

Several researchers agree that students learn many words through extensive and guided reading in which instruction can target the important vocabulary in a text and content area subject, thus improving students' vocabulary as well as their comprehension (McKeown, Beck, Omanson, & Perfetti, 1983; McKeown, Beck, Omanson, & Pople, 1985). In this regard, Blachowicz, Fisher and Ogle (2006) indicated that guided reading can provide cues for writers to develop active vocabulary that they can make use of in their writing. Guided reading that guides the process of writing is commensurate with the notion of scaffolding, which, in turn, is consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) theory of *cognitive development* and *scaffolding* student understanding within a *zone of proximal development*. The zone of proximal development is represented by those reading and writing tasks that students cannot accomplish independently at the beginning of explicit instruction and which the teacher carefully models for students followed by guided practice that facilitates students' competence. The modelling, collaboration, and guided practice function as scaffolds for students' understanding until independent learning is achieved.

Krashen aptly observed that reading is a "powerful means of developing reading comprehension ability, writing style, vocabulary, grammar and spelling", as well as a means of promoting cognitive development and lowering writing apprehension (Krashen, 2004, p.37). In this respect, established research demonstrated that vocabulary acquisition improves by extensive reading (Matsuka or Harish, 2010; Benettayeb, 2010) and writing does, too (Tsang, 1996; Lee & Hsu, 2009). Improvements in writing skills span a wide range of areas, including fluency, accuracy, word count, range of language structure, expression, complex structure, general improvement, content, language use, etc. (Tsang, 1996; Abu Saleem, 2010; Han, 2010).

Similarly, Tudor and Hafiz (1989) explored the role of reading in developing writing skills using a sample of 31 ESL university students in a twenty week extensive reading programme. The learners were provided guided and graded reading texts before writing tasks according to their interest as they were asked to report on and react

to what they had read in specific writing tasks. Findings indicated an overall improvement in reading and writing in the experimental students concluding that extensive L2 input in a tension-free environment can be conducive to the enhancement of learners' overall linguistic ability, particularly reading and writing. In this direction, too, Hafiz and Tudor (1990) also conducted an empirical study on 25 male students who were guided to read 104 simplified readers during a year and wrote 6 essays. These participants showed significant gains in fluency (writing readiness and vocabulary), accuracy (accuracy of expression), but not in the range of language structure and expression after a 90-hour programme.

By the same token, Lai (1993) conducted another research to explore the effects of reading before writing by getting the students to read graded readers and short reading comprehension passages to test their reading comprehension, their speed in reading, and developments in their writing ability through writing essays around the topic of "my family" one at the start of the program and one at the end in a four-week summer institute. The results suggested that very little improvement was gained in their writing ability such as word count and accuracy but not in complex structure and T-unit.

In the same vein, Tsang (1996) researched the effects of reading before writing in 144 high elementary to low intermediate EFL secondary students in Hong Kong, comparing the impacts of three different programmes on writing including extensive reading, writing practice, and regular programme as control group. The treatments were an input-based reading programme and an output-based writing program. Students in the reading programme were guided to read some graded reading texts of interest to the students and participants in the writing programme were given 8 essay-writing tasks to complete in 24 weeks. The researcher concluded that the program that provided guided reading before writing was significantly effective in developing the writing ability of the students, especially in content, language use, and overall impression but not in the organization, vocabulary and mechanics, however. Quite on the contrary to the findings of Tsang (1996), Lee and Hsu (2009) investigated the effectiveness of extensive reading before writing on the improvement of the writing ability which resulted in improvement in organization, mechanics, and vocabulary.

In this regard, Mason and Krashen (1997) conducted a study on 26 elementary level learners in Japan. Experimental participants were asked to read graded readers and control group had detailed study of some short passages. The experimental students demonstrated considerable gains in reading speed, reading comprehension, and matured writing ability.

Explicably, researchers suggested that when reading comprehension strategies are taught explicitly to students, students' comprehension improves (Palinscar & Brown, 1984; Pressley, 2002). Reading comprehension strategies

that students use effectively before writing can activate students' prior knowledge about concepts and vocabulary to create schema development (Flood, Lapp & Squire, 1991), develop an awareness of different text structure to understand the organization of information in text, (Armbruster, Anderson, & Ostertag, 1987; Flood, Lapp, & Fisher, 2003) and summarize the main ideas and related details in texts (Brown & Day, 1983; Palinscar & Brown, 1984), which eventually help in building essential writing skills.

In a similar mode, Langer (1986) indicated that reading and writing share cognitive operations, such as the reasoning, in which common skills, knowledge, and strategies overlap and mesh together. These shared cognitive operations can be used gear reading and writing towards perfection. To enhance students' writing using reading passages to active writers' schemata, instructors should teach reading and writing strategies that share fundamental similarities such as the construction of meaning and the organization of ideas in a way that helps students to achieve accuracy and fluency. Just as students construct meaning to comprehend, student writers must activate their prior knowledge to produce text, be aware of the text structure suggested by the reading before writing prompts, be certain that their answers reflect that text structure, and be able to summarize text ideas to produce/reproduce coherent essays. Langer (1986) concludes that L2 students are capable of focusing more on the content of their writing and of using more reading before strategies in their writing.

In general, prior research on reading/writing connections focused on the combined effect of using both reading and writing tasks to improve comprehension and writing (Rinehart, Stahl & Erickson, 1986; Taylor & Beach, 1984). Although there are studies of the shared cognitive operations between reading and writing and the significant effect that writing has on reading comprehension, there is little information about the reverse – the influence of students' reading comprehension of informational text on the writing ability, however.

Further, and above all, there is a plethora of research that addressed the success of explicit reading strategy instruction in improving the comprehension ability (Flood, Lapp, & Fisher, 2003). However, there are few research studies that describe the effect of integrated reading and writing strategy instruction on struggling students' expository reading and writing. Therefore, this study was conducted to explore in part the effects of reading before writing on developing the writing ability in college students.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Subjects and Sampling

Participants in this study were 42 second years EFL students studying in a Southwestern Saudi university.

The 42 students were randomly assigned using a table of random numbers to two classes. One of the classes was randomly assigned to receive the journal writing practice, and the other class would receive the reading before writing practice for ten weeks, the period of the intervention. The 2nd level students are all Saudis. Their native language is Arabic. Their age ranges between 17 and 187 years old.

2.2 Instrumentation

2.2.1 The 1-Hour Writing Test

At the end of the 10 weeks of intervention, a writing test was administered to both groups receiving the journal writing practice and the reading before writing practice. The topic for the writing test was provided by the researcher from their course-book. The students were told to write about one only of three topics:

- a) What is your favourite form of transportation and why?
- b) Do all communities need to have a public transportation system? Why or why not?
- c) Should cities allow cars in the city centre? Why or why not?

The students were given a whole hour to write about one of these topics. They were told to pay attention to spelling mistakes and grammar mistakes. They were told also to write a developed essay including a good introduction, body, and conclusion.

At the end of the hour, the tests were collected by the researcher. The researcher analyzed the essays written by the students using the T-units analysis. First of all, the researcher counted the words in all of the essays for the 42 students. Second, the researcher counted the T-units for each essay considering every short complete grammatical sentence as a T-unit. To get the mean T-unit length which measures fluency, the researcher divided the total number of words in each passage by the number of T-units. As for complexity, the researcher counted the number of complex sentences by the number of T-units. Finally, to measure the accuracy, the number of error-free-T-units (except for spelling mistake which was not counted as mistakes) was divided by the number of T-units.

2.2.2 The 15 Minutes Free Writing Test

The second test administered to both groups receiving the journal writing practice and the reading before practice was a free writing test. The students were told to free-write for 15 minutes on a topic of their own choice. There was no restriction on how and what to write. Students were not given directions to pay attention to grammar or spelling or anything else. They just wrote on a topic of their own choice. At the end of the 15 minutes, the researcher collected the tests. The tests were analyzed on the same basis of the 1 hour writing test. The writing fluency, complexity and accuracy were measured using the same T-unit analysis used in the 1 hour test.

2.3 The Checklist for the Journal Writing

A checklist designed by the researcher for the journal writing activity was used to make sure that all the students who were receiving the journal writing practice did not miss any journal writing activity. The checklist was stapled on the front page of the copybooks where the students did their journal writing. Every checklist included the name of the writer, the number of the weeks of the period of intervention, and a place for the researcher's signature. The checklist served the purpose of keeping the researcher informed about the journal writing activity to make sure that there was an accumulation of 20 journals for every student receiving the journal writing practice at the end of the 10 weeks of treatment.

2.3.1 Design

A factorial experimental design was employed in this study. Twenty 2nd years EFL college students were randomly assigned to receive the journal writing practice, and 22 2nd year EFL college students were randomly assigned to receive the reading before practice. The subjects who received the journal writing practice wrote twice per week for 15 minutes in their journals for the 10 weeks of intervention. The other group did not practice this 15-minute writing. Rather, they worked on another type of guided writing employing this strategy of reading before writing.

The writing proficiency levels of the subjects were determined by dividing them into high and low proficient writers based on the median score on their Writing-I achievement test for the first semester of the year 2013. This achievement test is administered by the college and is corrected according to specific criteria as a unified test that corresponds to the course syllabus of Writing I. This system of correction is shared among all writing instructors in the college. The writing achievement test is administered once at the end of the semester to check the student's writing achievement at the end of a specific period of instruction where certain specific writing competencies are taught in the course. This achievement test is corrected according to the following basic competency criteria: content, organization, language and mechanics. Five points on any of these criteria mean an excellent performance, 4 points mean good, 3 points mean average, and 2 points to any of the above criteria mean a poor writing performance. An excellent grade on the writing achievement test would range between 85 to 100, a very good grade from 75 to 84, an average grade from 60 to 74, and a failing grade would be 59 points and below. Therefore, the existing scores on the first achievement writing test for this level served as the base scores and helped the researcher to determine the writing proficiency levels of the students prior to the intervention period.

At the end of the period of intervention, two writing tests were administered; one test was a writing

composition test given to both groups on a topic chosen by the researcher related to any of the three optional writing topics. Students were given one hour to write on any of these topics. The second writing test was a 15-minute free writing test. The two tests were analyzed on the basis of writing fluency (number of words in a passage divided by the number of T-units), complexity (number of complex sentences per T-units), and accuracy (number of error-free T-units) using the T-units analysis. Two experienced independent raters scored a sample selected randomly from the two writing tests of both groups. A high level of inter-rater reliability was ensured for the writing fluency, $r = 0.96$, the writing complexity, $r = 0.95$ and the writing accuracy, $r = 0.92$.

2.3.2 Procedure

As indicated earlier, the present study employed a factorial experimental design. There were two groups randomly assigned to two different treatments, one group consisted of 22 students and the other of 20 students. The researcher handled the implementation of all the activities given to both groups throughout the 10 weeks of the period of intervention. The students in both groups received feedback on their journal writing and guided writing activities grounded in reading before writing practice from the researcher who worked as the coordinator of the Writing II classes for the period of the study. The researcher's direct intervention in the classes started at the beginning of the second week of October and lasted till the third week of December 2013.

Subjects who received the journal writing practice were instructed to keep a journal for a 10-week period where they wrote twice per week for 15 minutes during the Writing II classes on topics from their daily observations and experiences and from the set book. The 20 students in this group got copybooks labelled journal writing where they did all their journal writings. The researcher explained to students how to handle their journal writing copybooks. They were told that they are expected to write per week for 15 minutes in their journals at the beginning of the English writing periods. At the end of the period of intervention, there was an accumulation of 20 journals for every student doing the journal writing. A sample of 2 students in journals done inside the classroom is included at the end as an example of what the students were doing.

The students receiving the journal writing treatment wrote in response to different stimuli. The design for the weekly journal assignment developed by Huff and Kline (1987) was modified to meet the needs of second year secondary EFL students. Huff and Kline (1987) proposed a sequence of writing in response to a stimulus on Monday (it could be a story, a poem, etc.), selects an idea from Monday's entry and develops it on Tuesday. On Wednesday, to write a careful description of an object, scene, person, etc.. On Thursday, they are asked to write a letter and on Friday, they are asked to

rethink one of the week's journal entries. Saturdays and Sundays entries are optional but provide the writers the opportunity to write anything they choose (Huff & Kline, 1987). The researcher provided 10 stimuli throughout the 10 weeks of the period of intervention to students doing the journal writing. For every stimulus, the students had the opportunity to write twice on the same stimulus in order to improve their writing from the first to the second time. For example, students wrote for the first time in response to a story which was read out-loud twice by the researcher in the classroom. After receiving feedback in the form of comments on content of their first journal, students were asked to rewrite for a second time on the same topic making the necessary changes according to the researcher's feedback. The researcher used a checklist for the journal writing activity to make sure that all the students who received this practice wrote 20 journals and that no one skipped the journal writing activity. The journals were not corrected like an ordinary composition with grades and mark all over the pages. They were treated differently.

After every writing period, the journals were collected and returned back at the beginning of the next writing period so that the students can read the researcher's feedback before they write for the second time on the same stimulus. Students were expected to make the necessary changes for their writings to make them better according to the feedback they receive. The researcher followed suggestions made by Raimes (1983) and Vanett and Jurich (1975) (as cited in Peyton, 1990) in responding to students journals through comments. The researcher focused in the comments on what the students wrote by paraphrasing the understanding of the main idea, pointing out sections that were very well written, and asking for clarification about parts that were not very clear.

Students in the other group did not practice this 15 minutes writing, they worked on another type of writing in the form of guided writing exercises based on brief readers (reading before writing). In the 10 weeks of intervention, the subjects receiving the reading before writing instructional strategy for guided writing worked on 20 worksheets of reading-inspired writing exercises related to the different topics in the abridged readers. The extra practice exercises in their readers were used to write the guided writing exercises (Stewig & Haley-James, 1990). Sometimes, the researcher used items from the course book to make the writing after reading exercises more challenging. In every writing class, students worked for 15 minutes on writing after reading exercises, 10 minutes were spent on guided writing exercises and the remaining 5 minutes were spent on the oral correction of the exercises through eliciting the responses from the students themselves on their guided writing assignments.

The students doing writing after reading exercises were told to put a check mark beside correct sentences.

After correcting the guided writing exercises orally with the students inside the classroom, the researcher used to collect all the worksheets to check whether all the students put the right marks beside the correct or wrong writing practices, then the worksheets were returned back at the beginning of every writing class.

Throughout the period of intervention, both groups continued to do what they were doing in the 2 hours of writing compositions. The teacher explains a new type of writing (narrative story, cause/effect relationship, comparison/contrast...) through a reading selection. After explanation of the reading-writing lessons, the teacher provided a topic wherein students practice writing (e.g., a narrative composition, a cause/effect composition, etc.); students used to write during one of the two hours on the topic assigned to them, and then they hand their compositions in to their instructor.

Two writing tests were administered to both groups at the end of the 10 weeks of intervention, a regular 1 hour composition test and a 15-minute free writing test. The two tests were analyzed for both groups on the basis of writing fluency, complexity, and accuracy using the T-unit analysis.

2.3.3 Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, means and standard deviations were computed and two Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) tests were run in order to address the questions raised in the study.

3. RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The present study raised two questions concerning the relative effectiveness of journal writing practice and reading before practice on the writing fluency, complexity, and accuracy of EFL Saudi college students. In order to answer the first question concerning which of the two practices (journal writing or reading before guided writing) is effective in improving the writing fluency, complexity, and accuracy of the students writers, descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were computed and a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) test was run to check the effect of the treatment (journal writing vs. reading before writing) on the writing fluency, complexity, and accuracy of the students writers.

3.1 Answering the First Question

Q-1. Is journal writing practice more effective than reading before writing practice in developing the writing fluency, complexity and accuracy of EFL student writers?

The mean scores and standard deviations of the writing fluency, complexity, and accuracy of both groups on the first 1 hour writing test (post-test) are shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of the 1 Hour Writing Test Scores by Treatment

Treatment	N	Fluency 1		Accuracy 1			
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Journal writing	20	10.5843	2.4719	0.4081	0.1642	0.5281	0.1997
Reading before writing	22	9.9700	2.5273	0.3873	0.1645	0.4200	0.2186
Total	43	10.2700	2.4900	0.3974	0.1627	0.4728	0.2142

Note. Fluency 1 = fluency on the first 1 hour writing test, complexity 1 = complexity on the 1 hour writing test, accuracy 1 = accuracy on the 1 hour writing test

The mean scores and standard deviation of the writing fluency, complexity and accuracy of both groups on the free writing test are shown in Table 2 below:

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics Free Writing Test Scores by Treatment

Treatment	N	Fluency 2		Complexity 2		Accuracy 2	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Journal writing	20	11.8719	2.6940	0.4057	0.2053	0.4805	0.1877
Reading before writing	22	11.8823	2.5431	0.4655	0.1537	0.3695	0.1762
Total	43	11.8772	2.5864	0.4363	0.1811	0.4237	0.1883

Note. Fluency 2 = fluency on the 15 minutes free writing test, complexity 2 = complexity in the 15 minutes free writing test, Accuracy 2 = accuracy in the 15 minutes free writing test.

The second statistical analysis run to answer the first question in this study was a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) test with the writing fluency, complexity, and accuracy as dependent variables and the treatment (journal writing practice and reading before writing practice) as independent variable. This test was run in order to determine the effect of treatment on the writing fluency, complexity and accuracy of the student writers.

Table 3
F Values for the Multivariate and Univariate Analyses of Variance of the Writing Tests by Treatment

Multivariate ANOVA (a)		Univariate ANOVA (b)		
Source	F	Fluency 2	Complexity 2	Accuracy 2
Treatment	1.79	0.52	1.17	3.99*
		Fluency 1	Complexity 1	Accuracy 1
		0.64	0.17	2.85

Note. (a) $dfs = (3,39)$, (b) $dfs = (1,43)$, * $P < .1$, ** $P < .05$, *** $P < .01$

The results in Table 3 showed that the multivariate analysis of variance revealed no significant difference between the journal writing practice and the reading before writing practice by treatment $F(3, 39) = 1.79$, $P < .05$. The univariate analysis of variance showed that there is a significant difference on the writing accuracy 2 $F(1, 43) = 3.99$, $P < .01$.

The statistical analysis computed and reported in this section showed no significant difference between the journal writing practice and the reading before writing

practice in improving the writing fluency, complexity and accuracy of the student writers.

3.2 Answering the Second Question

Q-2. Is there an interaction between the Treatment and the Writing Proficiency Levels of EFL student writers?

In order to answer the second question related to whether there is an interaction between the writing teaching technique (journal writing vs. reading before writing) and the writing proficiency levels (low vs. high) of the student writers, descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were computed and a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) test was run. The treatment (journal writing vs. reading before writing) was considered as a fixed independent variable in the analysis. Existing scores on the school's first writing achievement test were used to get the high and low levels of proficiency. These existing scores were divided into low and high based on the median score which was computed to be 12. The writing proficiency was considered as a fixed independent factor. The writing fluency, complexity and accuracy of the 2 different writing tests, the 1 hour and 15 minutes writing tests, were considered as dependent variables.

The mean scores and standard deviations of the writing fluency on both tests (the 1 hour writing test and the 15 minutes free writing test) by treatment (journal writing vs. reading before writing) and writing proficiency levels (low vs. high) are shown in the Table 4. The mean scores and standard deviations of

the writing complexity of both tests (the 1 hour writing test and the 15 minutes free writing test) by treatment (journal writing vs. reading before writing) and writing proficiency levels (low vs. high are shown in Table 5. The means and standard deviations of the writing

accuracy of both tests (the 1 hour writing test and the 15 minutes free writing test) by the treatment (journal writing vs. reading before writing) and proficiency levels (low vs. high) are shown in Table 6.

Table 4
Descriptive Statistics for the Writing Fluency by Treatment and Writing Proficiency

Proficiency	Treatment	n	Fluency 1		Fluency 2	
			M	SD	M	SD
Low	Journal writing	11	10.3922	3.0943	11.0600	2.3773
	Reading before writing	15	9.2700	1.6933	11.4720	1.5665
	Total	26	9.7719	2.4335	11.2889	1.938
High	Journal writing	9	10.8311	1.4109	12.9544	2.8402
	Reading before writing	7	11.4700	3.4375	12.7614	3.9480
	Total	16	11.1106	2.4280	12.8700	3.2475

Table 5
Descriptive Statistics for the Writing Complexity by Treatment and Writing Proficiency

Proficiency	Treatment	n	Complexity 1		Complexity 2	
			M	SD	M	SD
Low	Journal writing	11	0.3992	0.2045	0.3592	0.2070
	Reading before writing	15	0.3567	0.1539	0.4427	0.1324
	Total	26	0.3756	0.1758	0.4056	0.1714
High	Journal writing	9	0.4200	9.823E-02	0.4678	0.1972
	Reading before writing	7	0.4529	0.1790	0.5143	0.1941
	Total	16	0.4344	0.1351	0.4881	0.1907

Table 6
Descriptive Statistics for the Writing Accuracy by Treatment and Writing Proficiency

Proficiency	Treatment	n	Accuracy 1		Accuracy 2	
			M	SD	M	SD
Low	Journal writing	11	0.4550	0.1932	0.4825	0.2093
	Reading before writing	15	0.3827	0.2293	0.3533	0.1749
	Total	26	0.4148	0.2132	0.4107	0.1982
High	Journal writing	9	0.6256	0.1723	0.4778	0.1666
	Reading before writing	7	0.5000	0.1835	0.4043	0.1878
	Total	16	0.5706	0.1828	0.4456	0.174

Table 7
F Values for the Multivariate and Univariate Analyses of Variance of Treatment and Writing Proficiency on Writing Development

Multivariate ANOVA (a)		Univariate ANOVA (b)		
Source	F	Fluency 1	Complexity 1	Accuracy 1
Treatment	0.224	1.22	0.51	0.17
		Fluency 2	Complexity 2	Accuracy 2
		0.13	0.10	0.22

Note. (a) *dfs* = (6, 34), (b) *dfs* = (1, 43), **P* < .1, ***P* < .05, ****P* < .01

The results in Table 7 revealed that the multivariate analysis of variance showed no significant difference between the treatment (journal writing vs. reading before writing) and the writing proficiency levels (low vs. high) $F(6, 34) = 0.224, p < .05$

4. SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The statistical analyses computed to answer the two questions raised in this study showed that there was no significant difference between the effect of journal writing

practice and reading before writing practice on the writing fluency, complexity, and accuracy of the 42 2nd level EFL Saudi college student writers. The statistical analyses used also showed that there was no significant interaction of the treatment factor (journal writing vs. reading before writing) and the writing proficiency levels (low vs. high) on the writing fluency, complexity and accuracy on both writing tests (the 1 hour writing test and the 15 minutes free writing test) of the 42 2nd level EFL Saudi college student writers.

5. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

The results obtained from the statistical analyses showed no significant difference between the two writing instructional techniques on the writing development of EFL students. These results might be due to many factors.

First, the intervention period lasted for 10 weeks at the rate of 15 minutes twice per week. As such, it could be argued that this period was not long enough to bring about significant changes in the development of the writing of the students especially in terms of writing fluency, complexity, and accuracy. The journal writing practice was a new practice for the students. As such, a period of 10 weeks might not be a significant period to promote the writing development of 2nd level EFL college students. Similarly, students who received the reading before writing and guided writing exercises treatment may not have gotten the chance to practice many sentence exercises on the paragraph level, which means that they did not get the opportunity to practice challenging writing after reading exercises due to the time factor.

Second, another factor which might have affected the writing performance of students in both groups is that they were concerned with whether their work may be evaluated for a grade or not. This idea was picked up in prior research; for example, Chastain (1990) examined the effects of grading compositions on the quality of student writing. Chastain's study examined the compositions of 14 advanced undergraduate Spanish students, most of who were majors in their third or fourth year and who were characterized by the researcher as having "good" language skills and high motivation. The course emphasized process over product, and students were expected to write second drafts before turning in composition for a grade. Compositions in this experiment were written in clusters of three, the first two of which were ungraded and the third one is graded. Near the end of the semester, Chastain examined one ungraded and one graded composition for each of the 14 students in the class. The researcher reported that students wrote significantly more for the graded composition than for the ungraded and used significantly longer and more complex sentences.

Therefore, it could be that the type of feedback played an important role in the present study. The student

practicing the journal writing might have expected grades on their works and not comments on content. Although, the type of feedback for the students doing the sentence combining practice received did not bring changes in their writing, it was more rewarding for those students who did the journal writing because the students doing reading exercises before guided writing exercises received immediate feedback in the form of oral correction.

Another factor needs to be considered concerning the writing habits of the student involved in this study. The students have been trained and expected throughout their learning to produce a one shot well-developed written product. They do not have adequate training in producing multiple drafts or in coming up with topics for their own writing, they do not have enough experience with prewriting strategies especially the journal writing activity which was the focus of the present study. They are used to the routine of being assigned topics by the teacher to write about. They perceive writing as a task that ends once they finish writing about an assigned topic during a specified time. Therefore, the students might have needed more explanation and more practice in different prewriting strategies including the journal writing practice before being expected to come up with topics for their own writing.

Finally, the fact that the students doing the journal writing were getting training only in one prewriting strategy of the writing process might be another factor which affected the results of the present study. The students did not go through the writing stage where they could have gotten the chance to write more than 2 drafts on a specific topic. Going through multiple drafting might have given the students sense on how to go about improving their writing from one draft to another. The above information is aimed at clarifying why the first three hypotheses related to the first question raised in this study were rejected.

In what follows, the results related to the second question are discussed in light of the intervention that took place in the present study. Thus, concerning the interaction between the treatment and the writing proficiency levels, it was expected based on Rivers' (1979) distinction between *skill-getting* and *skill-using* activities and based on prior research reading before writing practice can be more effective in bringing about changes in the writing of students with low writing proficiency levels than with students with high proficiency levels. Such expectation was not made for the journal writing practice in any of the studies reviewed in this paper; therefore, it was expected that the journal writing practice would be an effective practice for students with different writing proficiency levels.

However, the statistical analyses showed no significant interaction between the treatment (journal writing vs. reading before writing) and the writing proficiency

levels (low vs. high). These results might be due to the fact that more than half of the students participating in this study were already placed above average in writing performance prior to the treatment based on the student's school records and their achievement tests. The student's achievement tests which are corrected according to the basic competency criteria of content, organization, language and mechanics showed that most of the student's grades were above average at the onset of the study. To clarify how the grades were obtained on the achievement tests, a brief explanation follows: Five points on any of the previously cited criteria mean an excellent performance, 4 points mean good, 3 points mean average, and 2 points on any of the above criteria mean a poor writing performance. An excellent grade on the writing achievement test would range between 17 to 20, a good grade from 12 to 16, an average grade from 9 to 11, and a failing grade would be 8 points and below.

Thus, as Haswel (1981) argues concerning the syntactic and lexical gains attribute to reading before writing exercises that such practice with above average students showed a minor gain in T-unit length and a drop in clause length; the same might have occurred in the present study that is since most of the students were placed on an average writing proficiency level, no gains were observed in the writing of these students.

Another factor which might have affected the interaction between the treatment and the writing proficiency levels was the time factor. The treatment might have been more effective in bringing about changes in the writing of the students with different writing proficiency levels if the period of intervention was longer than 10 weeks.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the results of the present study showed that both writing techniques, the journal writing and the reading before writing, had no significant differential effects on the writing of the 42 2nd level EFL Saudi college students involved in this study. The two writing techniques did not differ statistically in their effect on the writing fluency, complexity and accuracy of the students instructed according to the journal writing and the sentence combining practice. The results showed also that there was no interaction between the treatment factors (journal writing vs. reading before writing) and the writing proficiency levels (low vs. high) on the writing fluency, complexity and accuracy of the students.

As earlier mentioned, the students enrolled in this study were of average or below average ability in the writing skill, and possibly, they have hit a plateau in skill development. According to Ericsson et al. (2006), hitting plateaus is a common occurrence in skill development as a result of routine and frustration with the language

process when language learners exert strenuous efforts to no or little tangible available. Plateau effects can emerge when language learners frequently experience a dwindling benefit from the learning efforts, especially when carried out as in monotonous exercises and tedious activities (Hattie, 2008). This could have been the case with students involved in routinely, monotonous journal writing and/or reading before writing.

Another explanation could be that students enrolled in the English programme are false beginners who have consistently failed to master sufficient language skills at each level of instruction: They are operating at an inadequate level of performance at whatever level of instruction they have reached. According to Helgesen (1987, p.24), "False beginners understand the meaning of a great deal of language and are able to engage in controlled, form-based [accuracy] activities, but their skills are very limited when they get into meaning-focused [fluency] situations"; this practically explains why students failed to respond properly to assessment tasks that require fluency and accuracy on writing assessments. In Arabian EFL environments, exposure to native or native-like English is extremely limited, especially in the formative years of language learning; this makes the acquisition of writing proficiency is much more difficult. The early formative years with pitfalls in language learning perpetuate this case of false beginners, thus affecting language learning at advanced levels, no matter how effective the new-fangled teaching methodologies is.

Consequently, the findings of this study regarding the efficacy of journal writing and reading/writing integration strategies may only be highly beneficial to only learners with specific learning characteristics with whom these strategies can lead to improving improve their writing fluency and grammatical complexity of their writing. The aptitude factor is also of relevance to this study; although the vast literature review on journal writing and reading/writing integration indicating the efficacy of these strategies in skill-acquisition and effective skill-use (e.g., Al Asmari, 2013; Casanave, 1994; Daskalogiannaki, 2012; Hemmati & Soltanpour, 2012; Li, 2013; Mekheimer, 2011; Royal, 2000), some other research revealed that most of the students did not demonstrate considerable improvements in linguistic and writing ability (Duppenhaler, 2004).

That the strategies experimentally evaluated in this study bore no effect on improving the writing abilities of the EFL Arabian students might be due to the lack of sufficient exposure to EFL in the proper context of foreign language learning when journal writing and free-writing purposefully used to promote fluency were in fact used to emphasise accuracy. Therefore, the findings of this study regarding the grammatical accuracy are in line with Yoshihara's (2008) suggestion which pointed that more research into the effect of journal writing needs to

be carried out to “deepen our understanding of its effects and whether or not it is equally effective in ESL and EFL contexts.” (p.4)

This study, however, poses a number of limitations. First of all, the size of the sample was small, thus rendering the results rather tentative. In addition to this, due to time constraints, the duration of the experiment and the number of learning sessions for both types of strategies at issue was minimal, only spanning a period of 10 weeks. Therefore, issue of generalizability of the results, negative in the case of this study's findings, or even positive as in some small-scale studies in the literature review were also raised as the study was based on a specific situation, measuring the writing development by dint of journal writing and reading before writing; the study was also done on elementary level students at the college level, and there were no gender comparisons to check the effect of gender on the effectiveness of the programme.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Investigation of other effects of both writing techniques on the writing of EFL students is subject to future research studies. Other studies need to take into consideration all the factors that might have influenced the results of the present study. Secondary level students need more explanation and more practice in different prewriting strategies including the journal writing practice before being expected to come up with topics for their own writing.

This study can be considered a preliminary, yet serious research endeavour on which follow-up work could be based and further research be conducted to tap into the effectiveness of these writing instructional techniques in developing writing fluency and accuracy both in conventional learning settings and/or in e-learning milieus. In prospective research, it would be interesting to assess whether student achievement improves after training on the use of these writing strategies of reading/writing integration and journal writing, and whether these techniques can result in reducing or attenuating negative affective factors that impede writing developing such as alleviating EFL students' writing apprehension by employing these writing strategies.

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