

## Using Writing Checklist in Composing Descriptive Essays Among EFL Learners at the Intermediate Level

*Bahman Gorjian*

*Associate Professor, Department of Applied Linguistics, Abadan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Abadan, Iran*

### **Abstract**

This study investigated the impact of writing checklist on composing descriptive essays among EFL learners at the intermediate level. Sixty participants were assigned to experimental and control groups. Both groups were given a pre-test of writing a descriptive essay including 150 words. The experimental group used checklist for learning while the control used teacher correcting technique in each session. Finally, the participants took the post-test of writing descriptive essays at the end of course. Data analysis revealed that the experimental group outperformed the control group. The implications suggest that using the writing checklists could be beneficial in writing activities.

**Keywords:** Writing Checklist, Descriptive Essay, Paragraph Development.

### **1. Introduction**

Essay writing fundamental for is succeeding in school and after school career. In educational settings students demonstrate their knowledge predominantly through writing. More important, writing is an important tool for remembering and organizing what we learn. According to cognitive models, writing can be defined as a problem-solving process using a knowledge transforming strategy, as defined by Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987).

The main role the checklist should play is to guide learners' reading process thus they can learn about English writing from reading. Cumming (1989) suggests that the importance of "cognitive modeling" (p. 383). According to Cumming, cognitive modeling involves demonstrating and practicing the kinds of thinking process that experts use so that learners can become aware of, and can practice, the complex mental activities that characterize expert processing. Therefore, the most important role the checklist should play is as an aid to cognitive modeling. Learners need to internalize the questions and directions in the checklist and apply them in their academic writing practice repeatedly until they acquire such thinking. In order to do that, the questions and directions in the checklist should not be too many or too complicated. Therefore, though many questions or directions could have been included in the checklist; the total number was limited as few as possible. To sum up, a considerable body of research, both in educational psychology and in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), has been conducted in relation to writing essay and the practice of self-assessment with regard to writing checklist. So the

present study attempts to explore the effect of writing checklist on composing descriptive essay among EFL learners (Baradaran & Sarfarazi, 2011).

Descriptive writing can be considered as analogous processes of composing (Bidabadi & Yamat, 2010). Learners are considered an important part of any teaching practice, and understanding the differences and the ways they learn is important in such an Endeavour. Insights gained from such an understanding can help students become familiar with their learning tendencies and preferences and, in turn, oblige educational authorities to design classroom structures and materials that fit and respond directly to those tendencies and assist learners to have a better performance in language skills, especially writing skill the development of which is more dependent on individual practice and participation in the process of converting thought to message.

Checklist practice has an important role for learners in the writing process and can be used while dealing with the variety of language skills. Therefore, writing skill is one of essential skills in learning English that could be mastered by the students through this technique. Some of the students consider that writing is a very difficult and complicated skill (Bidabadi & Yamat, 2010). So, in order to guide students to become good writer, the teacher must concern with the process of writing: checklist. It is very important, and has big role to help students in writing activities (Khodadady & Khodabakhshzade, 2012).

## **2. Method**

### ***2.1 Participants***

Sixty learners at that level were non-randomly were divided in two groups of experimental and control groups' ones.30 as control group and 30 as the experimental group. The two groups received ten sessions of treatment in a whole academic semester winter, 2015.

### ***2.2 Instrumentation***

The first instrument was Quick Placement Test .The test consists of 60 multiple-choice items. Learners were given 30 minutes to finish the entire test. The second instrument was a pre-test including writing a paragraph of descriptive essay comprising of along 150 words that was selected from textbook "Paragraph Development" (Dorothy & Carlos, 2005). The participant should write the essay on the selected topic in 30 minutes. The tests were administered to determine the knowledge of writing of the effectiveness of instruction to two groups at the beginning of study. The inter rater reliability of the pre-tests was measured through Pearson correlation analysis by two raters who scored the essays as ( $r=.81$ ).

The post-test was designed based on the pre-test So that the two tests would not look very much alike. Furthermore, the learners were not told that the same test would be used for post-test. They should write a descriptive essay included 150 words in 30 minutes. The reliability of the post test was computed through two

raters who scored the essays and the inter-rater reliability was measured through Pearson Correlation analysis as ( $r=.765$ )

The checklist was extracted from Jacob et al, (1981) scoring profile that contains organization, content, vocabulary, and language use and mechanic parts. Then learners edit their own or their peer's work for grammar, spelling, punctuation, diction, sentence structure, accuracy of supportive textual material such as quotation, examination, and the like.

In this research, editing checklist within process writing is meaningful because the learners can see the connection between their own writing and other learners' ones.

### 2.3 Procedure

The pre-test was conducted to evaluate the subjects' ability in descriptive writing at the beginning of the study. The participants should write a descriptive essay with 150 words. They also should read descriptive essays and scored based on the contents of the checklist. The contents of the checklist included Organization, Vocabulary, Content, Language use and Mechanics.

In the experimental group, the teacher used a variety of activities such as using inductive approach to teach grammar, creating relax atmosphere in order to promote communication, set communicative interaction among learners and set feedback session at end of class. But the participants in the control group do not use the checklist. In fact, teacher assessed their essays through traditional activities such as: using native language equivalents in the classroom, using deductive approach to teach grammar, translating in context, focusing on mental exercises and using grammar rules of the target language in order to memorize them. At the end of the semester, the post-test was administered. Data were analyzed through Paired and Independent Samples t-tests to measure difference between experimental and control groups.

### 3. Results

The students' overall scores on the pre-test were collected and analyzed through independent samples t-test as presented in Table 1.

Table 1 *Independent Samples T-Test (Pre-test)*

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
F	Sig.	t	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference

Equal variances assumed	.704	.405	-.717	58	-.86	1.20	-3.28	1.55
Equal variances not assumed			-.717	56.7	-.86	1.20	-3.284	1.55

Table 1 shows that the average means for two groups was near and the difference among the two groups' was not significant. Since the observed  $t$  (.717) is less than critical  $t$  (2.00) with  $df= 58$ , the difference between two groups is not significant ( $p<0.05$ ). In order to find out whether the difference among the performances of the two groups was statistically significant, Independent Samples  $t$ -test was applied in the post-test. The results of the statistical operations are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 *Independent Samples t-Test (post-test)*

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower Upper	
Equal variances assumed	.193	.662	-.393	58	.000	-3.60	.915	-5.433	-1.766
Equal variances not assumed			-.5799	57.99	.000	-3.60	.915	-5.433	-1.766

Table 2 shows that the observed  $t$  (3.930) is greater than the critical  $t$  (2.00) with  $df= 58$ , thus the difference between the two groups is significant ( $p<0.05$ ). To show the difference between the pre and posttest of each groups, Paired Samples  $t$ -test was calculated in Table 3.

Table 3 *Descriptive Statistics (control vs. experimental pre-test)*

Groups	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1 Pre-test Control	10.9000	30	4.32594	.78981

	Post-test Control	11.7667	30	5.01503	.91562
Pair 2	Pre-test Experimental	13.0333	30	3.56693	.65123
	Post-test Experimental	16.6333	30	3.52805	.64413

Table 3 shows that experimental group is not so different from the control group in the pre-test. However, there is a difference between the control and experimental group's pre-test and post-test. However, to arrive at the significant difference, Paired Samples t-test was used. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4 *Paired Samples Test(control vs. experimental pre-test )*

		Paired Differences			t	df	Sig		
		Mea	Std.	Std.	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		(2-tail ed)		
		n	Deviation	Error Mean	Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pre-test Cont. vs. Post-test Cont.	-0.86	7.67	1.401	-3.73	2.00	.618	29	.541
Pair 2	Pre-test Exp. vs. Post-test Exp.	-3.60	4.22	.771	-5.17	-2.02	-4.669	29	.000

Table 4 shows that there are significant differences between the means of the experimental and the control groups; Paired Samples t-test was applied shows Since the observed t (.618) is less than the critical t (2.04) with df =29, thus the difference between the two groups is not significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) in control group. Since the observed t (4.669) is greater than the critical t (2.04) with df=29 in the experimental groups. Thus the difference between the two groups is significant ( $p < 0.05$ ).

#### 4. Discussion

The results of the experiment provide important findings which showed that the importance of connecting checklist in writing. Participant wrote their thoughts in the effective essay to compare their ideas in the text, to pay closer attention to the rhetorical structures and expressions in the writing materials. In addition, the students, performed better in all the categories in the post-test among the experimental group. When investigate the effects of checklist on the subsequent writing essay, it was found that the participants had received various input from writing organization ,structure ,coherence and cohesion .This helps the participants to achieve knowledge on the content information, information about rhetorical organization, and English expressions. Thus, in general, checklists related to text

before structure writing seems to have positive effect on learners' subsequent writing process and performance.

The results showed that the way of writing students were guided by the checklist in experimental group was different from their usual writing in the control group. Not all students usually read texts more than once, and even when they reread a text, they do not pay conscious attention toward rhetorical organizations or language forms. Their main concern is to comprehend the content of the text deeply. The results at the study are consistent with the findings of Bidabadi and Yamat (2010) who emphasize that, the checklist directs the users to pay attention to not only content but rhetorical structures and language forms. In addition, their usual units of writing are mainly clauses or sentences. Khodadady and Khodabakhshzade (2012) also support the result of the study which demonstrates, using phrase as the processing unit promotes most effective comprehension. The checklist also guides the users to check their comprehension after writing essay.

The experimental group outperformed the control one. The possible reason may be due to the fact that although both strategies were explained to the participants; however, learners are more interested take part with peer corrections than teacher corrections. Furthermore, peer correction by the checklist is easier, comes exiting, funny, and does not need much instruction for learners; while teacher corrections is stressful, take much time and may be confusing for the learners who encounter it for the first time. this is supported by Anker (2009) who notes that the checklist becomes the basis of writing because the information acquired through read checklist it contains print-encoded messages as well as clues about how the messages' grammatical, lexical, semantic, pragmatic, and rhetorical constitutes combine to make the message meaningful. Hirose (2009) supports the results of this study and notes that peer correction support writing through meaningful input. So the peer can check their friend's writing essay in term of organization, structure, vocabulary, and grammar. This helps them to check the problem in writing essay and indirectly learn how to follow the checklist and write effectively (Javaherbakhsh, 2010).

### **5. Conclusion**

The results indicated that majority of the participants who used the checklist in writing got helps to act more productively and guided them to create organized texts and defend their argument or positions in a structured way. Finally, the analysis of the checklist of writing revealed that the participants' performance in experimental group outperformed from the control group in writing ability. It can be suggested that checklist use by students may help them to follow the rules in writing descriptive essay.

The checklist in writing can assist the teachers to target the areas of strength and to find the areas of weaknesses in the learners, to make the necessary

adaptations and changes in the instruction, to suggest strategies in order to improve their learning in writing. Moreover, the peer assessment practice by checklist can help students become aware of and strive for an acceptable level of absorbing knowledge that suits the criteria which have been specified for the level of mastery intended for each skill and, hence, improve their performance. Similar studies can be done on other proficiency levels, namely intermediate, upper-intermediate and advanced.

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