International Journal of Research in English Education (IJREE)

Original Article **Published online: 20 September 2020.**

The Effect of Self-Directed Learning on EFL Learners' Writing Performance

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Received: 2 April 2020
Revision: 8 June 2020
Accepted: 13 August 2020
Published online: 20 September 2020

Abstract

The focus of the present study was to explore the effect of self-directed learning method on Iranian EFL students' writing achievement in two levels of language proficiency (pre-intermediate and intermediate). It also attempted to find out if there was any significant difference between two groups of learners, control and experimental, in each level regarding their development of writing skill. In order to reach this goal, 30 male EFL learners that were selected based on random sampling, participated in this study. After the treatment was over, both groups in each level were given the post-test, the results of which were compared with pre-test results. Then, an independent sample t-test was run to find the effectiveness of two approaches to detect the differences among the means of the two groups in each level. The results of the present research indicated that the self-directed learning method had significant effects on the pre-intermediate and intermediate students' performance of English writing ability. The results also indicated that there was a significant difference between the two groups of learners in each level regarding their development of English writing ability.

Keywords: EFL learners, self-directed learning, writing performance, writing, proficiency level

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[DOI: 10.29252/ijree.5.3.78]

1. Introduction

It seems that learners acquire writing as the last skill; however, it has a significant nature like other skills. In the academic context, writing skill is considered as an important skill, where most ESL teaching happens. However, in many scholars' perspectives, writing has been a very significant form of expression and communication; we can see that both scholars and teachers have ignored this language element in first and second languages (Badger & White, 2000). Writing is a difficult activity in the first language, and consequently in the second one, hence learning to produce a composition in second, or a third language has its own additional problems. In most non-native learners' perspectives, the most difficult skill to learn is writing. In addition, writing activity in L2 is particularly more difficult when learners are asked to produce a high-quality outcome, for example in academic settings (McDonough & Shaw, 2003).

In the past few decades, researches focused on the think-aloud protocols to investigate the strategies that L2 writers apply, particularly the differences between those of more and less-skilled writers. However, researches in more and less skilled writers' strategy use in the L2 studies are limited (Chien, 2012). Perhaps think-aloud writing studies are difficult, and it is because they are time-consuming, and takes the researcher a large number of hours transcribing a recorded protocol, and other several hours analyzing and comparing the transcription. Thus involving a large number of participants in such studies is not possible.

In many individuals' perspectives, writing even in the first language is a complicated and demanding process that needs the writer to involve several cognitive skills and knowledge sources, like goal setting, discourse awareness, memory management strategies, and social-cultural knowledge (Torrance & Galbraith, 2006). Definitely, this process is hard for the second/foreign language learner, either, since learners writing demands related to lower-level language skills, like grammar and vocabulary knowledge (Schoonen, Snellings, Stevenson, & van Gelderen, 2009). However, producing a text in the second language is more difficult than in the first language and leads to a less effective product (Roca de Larios, Murphy, & Marin, 2002).

Writing can be considered as an art, but it is the work of the artist to create the masterpiece. Without the ability and practice of writing skills, neither proficient works of written art can be fictional nor can any lives be influenced (Currier, 2008). In discussing the importance of writing to learning, Suleiman (2000) asserts that "writing is a central element of language, any reading, and language arts program must consider the multidimensional nature of writing in instructional practices, assessment procedures, and language development" (p. 155). Considering the power of words to affect and persuade other people, before a learner graduates, a proficient writing teaching should be created, which is becoming increasingly insufficient focusing mainly upon only the final course test (Currier, 2008). Although there is no tendency to consider the importance of such tests, there needs to be more importance on writing during the terms of study more than before (Huy, 2015).

In the setting of adult learning, self-directed learning is a term, which is mostly used. According to Merriam (2001), adult learning theory is based on andragogy and self-directed learning. There are different definitions about the self-directed learning (SDL). Among different scholars, according to Garrison (1997), SDL can be defined as a process where students are able to merge "external management (contextual control), internal monitoring (cognitive responsibility), and motivational (entering and task) factors associated with learning in an educational context" (p. 20). Concerning adult education, most scholars claim that we can regard the previous definition as the basic one among other definitions. Since there are various attitudes about self-directed learning, this term has been defined in many various ways: as a process, a characteristic, and a combination of these two.

The researchers can refer to SDL, as any enhancement in knowledge, skills, accomplishments, or personal development that a person chooses and achieves by his/her attempts through different approaches in their lives. So, when students control both the learning aims and the means of learning, self-directed learning takes place. This process focuses on the significance of letting students follow their own interests, which leads to learning that is more meaningful. This challenge also exists to enhance and go beyond the easy and the familiar (Bharathi, 2014). Self-directed learning can be utilized as an effective strategy that assists students to improve their skills more (Rafiee, Pazhakh, & Gorjian, 2014). In addition, during self-directed learning, according to Robinson and Persky (2020), "the learner sets goals, determines how progress will be assessed, defines the structure and sequence of activities and a timeline, identifies resources, and seeks out feedback" (p. 292).

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1.1 Statement of the Problem

Writing ability is "an important part of the language ability and it is linked closely with other language skills. Although it has a significant role, it is observed that writing is a neglected factor in the educational programs for language teaching in Iran" (Ma'azi & Janfeshan, 2018, p. 8). In contexts in which English is considered as a foreign language and persons do not have any practical use of it, writing skill becomes the most difficult task to the students. In the language learning context of Iran where English is considered as a foreign language, writing skill does not get a very high amount of significance. In Iranian language institutes, the English syllabus which is followed by teachers is based on the traditional methods. The educational organizations in Iran have prescribed the syllabus and course books based on grammar, vocabulary, and reading skills. So in these EFL contexts, students need to practice writing in L2 more to improve writing ability and to acquire an effective result.

Although, there is extensive research into the factors affecting writing skill; therefore, little is known about the effect of self-directed learning on students' performance in writing. In the Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, Majedi and Pishkar (2016) found a significant effect of self-directed learning on Iranian upper-intermediate learners. Little attention has been paid to investigate the effect of self-directed learning on Iranian EFL learners' writing ability. However, Akmilia, Purnawarman, and Rodliyah (2015) in their study among Indonesian EFL learners found that self-directed learning gives benefits for EFL learners' writing skills. So, the aim of the present study is to examine how self-directed learning actually affects writing skills in the EFL context, especially in the Iranian context.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the literature, this study sought to investigate the answers of the following questions:

- Does the self-directed learning method have any significant effect on EFL learners' writing achievement in pre-intermediate levels of language proficiency?
- Does the self-directed learning method have any significant effect on EFL learners' writing achievement in intermediate levels of language proficiency?

1.3 Research Hypotheses

On the basis of the above questions, the following null hypotheses were generated:

- $H0_1$: Self-directed learning method does not have a significant effect on EFL learners' writing achievement in pre-intermediate levels of language proficiency.
- $H0_2$: Self-directed learning method does not have a significant effect on EFL learners' writing achievement in intermediate levels of language proficiency.

2. Review of the Related Literature

The importance of self-directed learning to increase student performance in language classes has been investigated in numerous experimental and descriptive studies. The results of these studies indicated that self-directed learning skills enhance students' success in any discipline (Claro & Loeb, 2019) and at all levels of schooling (Duckworth et al., 2019). Moreover, Kim (2010) found that the SMMIS (Self-Motivation, Motivation, Metacognition, Interaction, and Self-reflection) model-based SDL enhanced 13 elementary and 14 middle school learners' academic achievement in Korean, English, mathematics, social studies, and science. This study, then, suggested that implementing a self-directed model with learners can assist them to have more opportunities for learning, irrespective of variables such as their age and field of study. Chou's (2012) study was done among the engineering learners' self-directed learning ability and their learning achievements. The conclusion he drew was that a positive correlation exists between engineering learners' self-directed learning abilities and their learning achievements. Positive and correct uses of such formulas assisted learners to improve their learning.

Wichadee (2011) tried to examine the issue by means of (1) providing a learning contract that required students to take the responsibility of their own learning, and (2) developing an SDL instructional model in order to enhance the reading ability of undergraduate learners. He found that the learning contract and his SDL model assisted the learners significantly enhance their reading ability. Zheng, Young, Brewer, and Wagner (2013) examined the effect of self-directed learning method on school learners' performance in math and English, as the courses needing critical thinking,

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[DOI: 10.29252/ijree.5.3.78]

at the beginning and end of the school year. The finding of their study showed that the self-directed learning method was a strong predictor of math and English achievement and critical thinking development.

The aim of the study of Bordonaro (2006) was to investigate the use of an American college library by English as a Second Language (ESL) learners in a self-directed manner for the aim of developing their English. The ESL learners in this investigation involved in language learning practices in the library in all four language-skill fields: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The study included self-directed language students, and some of them seemed also to display language learner autonomy through awareness and reflection on their language learning activities in this context. The results showed that self-directed language participants involved in browsing and recreational reading in the library as an approach to develop their English, and the appearance of language learner independence in a library might be related to learning of English content as a second language in this setting. This exploration reported that the library can be regarded as a useful way for further study of language learning matters.

The aim of the study of Kiani Harchegani, Biria, and Nadi (2013) was to investigate to what extend SDL affects teaching speaking in Iranian EFL learners. Using selective clustering approach for choosing the participants, the researchers selected 30 high school students, enrolling in a language institute for conversation classes at pre-intermediate level. In their study, learners divided into two groups of 15 participants. Then, the instructor taught the control group the book Interchange and the experimental group went under SDL instructions. After fifteen-session-planned course, learners took a post-test by three different raters, the speaking module of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exam, which was similar exactly to the pre-test. The findings revealed that the experimental group had a better performance compared to the control group in speaking skill development; therefore, the study was in favor of the effectiveness of the SDL model in teaching speaking skill to Iranian EFL learners.

Rafiee, Pazhakh, and Gorjian (2014) carried out a study to investigate the relationship between Iranian EFL learners' self-directed learning and their speaking ability. The study was also gender-based in using self-directed learning. To collect the data, a semi-structured interview was used as the pre-test which was carried out at the beginning of the semester. Learners' ability to speak screened by proficiency test and accordingly, they categorized into three proficiency groups. Then, these groups took a Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale (SDLRS). At the end of the semester, a parallel post-test was administered. It was found out that there were statistically significant differences between the students' performances on the SDLRS in the upper-intermediate and the elementary levels, but upper-intermediate and the intermediate levels have no statistically significant difference. The study came to the result that the upper-intermediate learners were more self-directed, in simple words, also it was revealed that there is a direct relationship between self-directedness and the speaking skill at the upper-intermediate level. The results also showed no significant differences between the two genders.

Akmilia, Purnawarman, and Rodliyah (2015) investigated self-directed feedback in EFL writing classes in Indonesia. The findings obtained from their study showed that self-directed learning gives benefits to EFL learners' writing skills. In another study, Olivier (2016) came to the conclusion that participants' responses to the questionnaire emphasized the importance of self-directed learning on their writing ability. Moreover, Rivera and Pinilla (2017) in their study titled as "*Promoting Self-Directed Learning Strategies by Means of Creative Writing*" found that application of self-directed learning assisted ELT undergraduates when organizing their texts for creative writing. More recently, the results from Sriwichai and Inpin' study (2018) revealed that self-directed learning promoted EFL University students' writing ability.

3. Methodology

3.1 Design of the Study

Design of the present study was quasi-experimental as it examined the effect of self-directed learning on EFL learners' writing achievement. To do this, the performances of participants at control and experimental groups in each level were compared.

3.2 Participants

The present study was conducted in one of the language institutes in Iran. The institute provided two separate classes of Four Corners 1 and 2 books, the pre-intermediate and intermediate levels needed for this study. Each level included 30 male learners. The participants of the present research all had approximately the same first language and cultural background, as they were asked orally about their first language. The learners' ages ranged from 18 to 23 and the

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mean was 21. The researchers conducted a proficiency test to be ensured about the level and homogeneity of students at four separate English classes. After administering the proficiency test, the participants in each level were divided into control and experimental groups.

3.3 Material and Instruments

The main material and instruments of the present study were as follows:

1. Oxford Placement Test (OPT): To have homogeneous participants, OPT (Allen, 2004) was used to determine the proficiency level of participants at the first step of the study. OPT consisted of 60 multiple choice vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension items that were developed by Oxford University Press. The test was selected to determine low and high level participants in terms of language proficiency. The reliability and validity of the OPT were reported in details by Pollitt (2014) in a comprehensive report. He stated that "the Oxford Online Placement Test is a tool designed to measure test takers' ability to function communicatively at different levels of English language proficiency according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)" (p. 1).

2. Four Corners 1 and 2 books by Jack C. Richards and David Bohlke (2011) which students studied at language institutes. These books which integrated all four skills are developed for beginners and intermediate learners. The books include basic grammar, vocabulary, and functional language. There are twelve unites with interesting topics such as daily life, work and play, food, experiences, and celebrations. The books encourage students' communication and confidence.

3. Composition writing: All participants, at two different proficiency levels, were asked to write a piece of narrative writing in 60 minutes on the same topic (about the best day(s) of their life). This test was used as both pre and post-test. The function of the post-test was also to measure narrative writing knowledge of the participants at the end of the experiment and write a piece of narrative writing in 60 minutes. In order to assess participants' post-tests, the ACT Aspire assessment rubric for narrative writing was used. And participants' post-tests were rated by the same three raters who had rated the pre-test results.

3.4 Procedure

First, learners at each level were divided into two groups of control and experimental. All two groups of participants in each level took a pretest one week before treatment. To do so, the participants in the experimental group and control group were asked to write about the topic offered to them and write a piece of narrative writing as the pre-test of the study. This draft was considered as the pre-test of the study. The pre-test consisted of writing composition. All learners were given one hour to write on the same topic. The pre-test was given to both groups and the results were recorded.

Second, the treatment started for two groups. The period of treatment was 45 minutes for 10 sessions for each group. In the experimental group, the instructor followed SDL instructions in experimental group and started from the very beginning session to help students develop lifelong learning strategies, set goals and sub-goals for each session and for the overall course. The teacher incorporated different self-directed learning tasks based on the interests of students. He provided students with different motivational activities to engage actively, think critically, and select independently in all class time. Moreover; the instructor gave them chances to choose which one to do at any time; also, he encouraged them to have control over what they were learning and what went on in the class. They were asked to self-monitor and self-evaluate and use their metacognition. The whole course truly exhibited a practice of learning how to learn during which the vitality of language practice out of the classroom was accentuated all along the way (Kiani Harchegani et al., 2013).

Third, within a time gap of 4 weeks, the students were asked to write about the selected topic. This procedure was repeated using the same topic as the pre-test of the study. Then the writing scores of the participants were estimated through the ACT Aspire assessment rubric for narrative writing and fed into *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* (SPSS) 25 software for analysis. Finally, necessary statistical analyses were run to measure participants' performances.

3.5 Data Collection

After administering the proficiency test, learners at pre-intermediate and intermediate levels were selected based on their scores. This was done by considering one standard deviation above and below the mean. As for the control group at each level, the instructor followed the four corners textbook and completed the course just like all other normal

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writing classes. After the treatment was over, both groups at each level were given the post-test, the results of which were compared with pre-test results. The data collected through composition writing on the same topic (about the best day(s) of their life) both as pre-test and post-test. In order to score the participants' writing in pre-test and post-test, the ACT Aspire assessment rubric for narrative writing was used. Besides, participants' writing papers were rated by three raters. One of them held a Ph.D. degree in *Teaching English as a Foreign Language* (TEFL) and the other one held an M.A. degree in TEFL.

3.6 Data Analysis

Analysis of the present study was performed using SPSS software. Independent sample *t* test was run to detect the effectiveness of two approaches and to show the differences among the means of the two groups in each level.

4. Results

4.1 Results of the Proficiency Test

As stated above, a proficiency test (Oxford Placement Test) was used before the treatment to determine the two levels' proficiency in English. To compare the proficiency scores of the students in the two levels, an independent-samples t-test was run. Based on Table 1, there was no significant difference between the pre-intermediate and intermediate groups' proficiency scores (t (58) =.65, Sig=.51). This represents the homogeneity of the two classes in terms of language proficiency before the intended treatments.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for language proficiency scores of the pre-intermediate and intermediate groups and results of independent-samples t-test

Group	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max	t	df	Sig.(two-tailed)
Pre-intermediate	30	40	9.71	25	53	.659	58	.516
Intermediate	30	37	9.43	18	52			

4.2 Addressing the First Research Question

The first research question was: Does self-directed learning method have any significant effect on EFL learners' writing achievement in pre intermediate levels of language proficiency? To answer the first research question and compare the results of the two groups, an independent-samples t-test is run to see if there is any significant difference in the mean scores of pretests of participants who were taught at pre-intermediate level.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of pre-test scores of experimental and control groups in pre-intermediate level

Level	Groups	N	Mean score	SD
Pre-intermediate	Control	15	27	4.35
	Experimental	15	26	5.23

As it is depicted in Table 2, the mean scores of the groups are as follows: control group 27, and experimental group 26. In order to make these descriptive findings more meaningful, and find out whether there was a significant difference between the groups in the pre-test, the researchers used a *t*-test.

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Table 3. Independent sample t-test for comparing the pre-test scores of two groups in pre intermediate level

	Leven's test for Equality of variance	*t*-test for Equality of Means			
	F	Sig	t	df	Sig
Equal variances assumed	.024	.875	.757	28	.452
Equal variances not assumed			.757	28	.452

As Table 3 indicates, the obtain value for F is 0.757. Because this value is smaller than the critical value with 28 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference between the groups in their performance in the pre-test. This result showed that the learners in both groups are similar regarding their knowledge of English before the commencement of the study. In other words, the participants in both control and experimental groups were homogeneous.

In order to find a proper answer for the first research question, the post-test scores of learners at the control and experimental groups in pre-intermediate level were compared. Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics of the post-test scores of experimental and control groups in pre intermediate level of language proficiency.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of post-test scores of experimental and control groups in pre intermediate level

	group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre intermediate	Experiment	15	16.5333	1.45733	.37628
	Control	15	15.2000	1.08233	.27946

As Table 4 shows, the mean score of the experimental group is bigger than the mean score of the control group which are 16.53 and 15.20 respectively. In order to see whether this difference between two groups of participants was statistically significant or not, an Independent Sample *t*-test was conducted. Table 4 shows the results of the test for two groups of participants.

Table 5. Independent sample t-test for comparing the post test scores of two groups in pre intermediate level

									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Pre intermediate	Equal variances assumed	1.036	.317	2.845	28	.008	1.33333	.46870	.37324	2.29343
	Equal variances not assumed			2.845	25.841	.009	1.33333	.46870	.36961	2.29705

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As the results of the Independent Sample *t*-test indicate, the difference between the writing post test scores of two groups of participants in pre intermediate level reached significance, as Sig<0.05. The values obtained for the F and P values showed that the two groups of participants did not perform equally and adopting self-directed learning method in classroom situations affected on EFL learners' writing achievement; that is self-directed learning method has a significant effect on EFL learners' writing achievement in pre-intermediate levels of language proficiency. Therefore, the first null hypothesis was rejected.

4.3 Addressing the Second Research Question

The second research question was: Does self-directed learning method have any significant effect on EFL learners' writing achievement in intermediate levels of language proficiency? To answer the second research question and compare the results of the two groups, an independent-samples *t*-test is run to see if there is any significant difference in the mean scores of pretests of participants who were taught in the intermediate level. According to Table 6, the mean differences for both experimental and control group in the pre-test were 35 and 34, respectively.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics of pre-test scores of experimental and control groups in intermediate level

Level	Groups	N	Mean score	SD
Intermediate	Control	15	34	4.35
	Experimental	15	35	5.23

To get the meaning of these descriptive findings, the researchers used a t-test to find out whether there was a significant difference between the groups in the pre-test.

Table 7. Independent sample *t*-test for comparing the pre-test scores of two groups in intermediate level

	Leven's test for Equality of variance	*t*-test for Equality of Means			
	F	Sig	t	df	Sig
Equal variances assumed	.316	.576	-1.103	28	.279
Equal variances not assumed			-1.103	28	.282

As Table 7 indicates, the *P*-value was also higher than .05; therefore, no statistical significance was found among the groups in terms of the students' performances in the pre-test. In other words, all the students at the beginning stage were similar in their English writing skill. In order to find out if there was any difference between two groups of learners, experimental and control, in intermediate level regarding their writing achievement, the post-test scores of learners were compared. Table 7 shows the descriptive statistics of the post test scores of experimental and control groups in the intermediate level of proficiency.

Table 8. Descriptive statistics of post-test scores of experimental and control groups in intermediate level

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Intermediate	Experiment	15	17.5333	1.45733	.37628
	Control	15	16.0667	1.22280	.31573

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According to Table 8, the mean score of the experimental group (17.53) is bigger than the mean score of the control group (16.06). In order to see whether this difference between two groups of participants was statistically significant or not, an independent sample *t* test was run. Table 9 indicates the results of the test for two groups of participants.

Table 9. Independent sample *t*-test for comparing the post test scores of two groups in intermediate level

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Intermediate	Equal variances assumed	.321	.575	2.986	28	.006	1.46667	.49119	.46050	2.47283
	Equal variances not assumed			2.986	27.180	.006	1.46667	.49119	.45914	2.47420

As the results of the independent sample *t*-test indicates, the difference between the writing post test scores of two groups of participants in intermediate level reached significance, as Sig<0.05. As a result, self-directed learning method has a significant effect on EFL learners' writing achievement in intermediate levels of language proficiency. Accordingly, the second null hypothesis was rejected.

5. Discussion

The first research question of the present study was "Does self-directed learning method have any significant effect on EFL learners' writing achievement in pre-intermediate levels of language proficiency?" Based on the results, the self-directed learning method has a significant effect on EFL learners' writing achievement in pre-intermediate levels of language proficiency. The results of the first research question also indicated that the writing improvement measurement of pre-intermediate learners in the experimental group who received a self-directed learning method showed a significant increase. The learners in experimental group performed significantly better in writing assignments at the end of the current study. This finding is in accordance with those of many previous studies (Akmilia et al., 2015; Kim, 2010; Olivier, 2016; Rivera & Pinilla, 2017; Sriwichai & Inpin, 2018; Wichadee, 2011).

The second research question of this study was "Does self-directed learning method have any significant effect on EFL learners' writing achievement in intermediate levels of language proficiency?" The results indicated that there was a significant difference between two groups of learners, experimental and control, in intermediate level regarding their writing achievement. That is, the self-directed learning method has a significant effect on EFL learners' writing achievement in intermediate levels of language proficiency. This finding is consistent with the findings of a number of previous studies in the area of self-directed learning method (Akmilia et al., 2015; Kim, 2010; Olivier, 2016; Rivera & Pinilla, 2017; Sriwichai & Inpin, 2018; Wichadee, 2011). They report that effective learning is strongly influenced by independent self-directed learning. They state that students should develop their strategies of learning beyond teacher-guided to self-guided and independent learning. Furthermore, these researchers suggest that implementing a self-directed learning method with learners can be utilized as an effective strategy which assists learners to improve their language skills more.

Similarly, the findings of the study also are in line with the results of the Majedi and Pishkar (2016). They assert that SDL can facilitate language learning. They also stress that if learners attempt to analyze their strategies in learning the second language, they will be more successful. Phongnapharuk's (2007) research consisted of the use of metacognitive strategies through Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) to improve English reading and writing skills. The participants were 25 learners who registered in the first term of an English reading and writing course. Phongnapharuk

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expressed that there is an important relationship between metacognition, as one of the significant elements of SDL, and learners' English reading and writing skills. There have only been a few studies regarding the negative effect of SDL on learning. In contrast to the previous studies, the findings of the present research are not in line with Reio's (2004) study. He ran a study in which he investigated if prior knowledge, self-directed learning readiness, and curiosity influence classroom achievement in a college classroom. The analysis of data showed that females demonstrated a lower level of self-directedness and it influenced their classroom performances negatively. To put it in nutshell, it can be claimed that self-directed learning has a great impact on preparing students to take more control over their second language learning process.

6. Conclusion

The focus of the present study was to explore the effects of self-directed learning method on Iranian EFL students' writing achievement in two levels of language proficiency. It also attempted to find out if there was any significant difference between two groups of learners, control and experimental, in each level regarding their development of writing skill. It was found that self-directed learning method had significant effects on the pre intermediate and intermediate students' performance of English writing ability. The results also indicated that there was a significant difference between two groups of learners in each level regarding their development of English writing ability. The significant feature of SDL is that the learners are responsible for their own leaning and they monitor their learning processes. This model of learning makes learners to actively participate in classroom activities.

In general, the experimental results of this study support the use of a self-directed learning method on the EFL learners' writing ability. Pre-intermediate and intermediate learners who were taught based on the use of self-directed learning method did better on the posttest than learners who learned the same material with the normal writing class methods. Based on the findings of this study, it can be suggested that while each of the phases of SDL is very significant for effective self-directed learning, students need help if they are to succeed in planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating their own learning. By explicitly introducing these aspects of the learning process to students, and providing opportunities for students to experiment with them, instructors can play an important role in supporting students involving in self-directed learning and enhancing autonomy as language students (Thornton, 2010). Thus, through the explicit presentation of SDL strategies, the language learners' ability in writing enhances significantly.

6.1 Suggestions for Further Researches

In the present research, we have only demonstrated the effects of self-directed learning method on writing achievement. SDL method might have different effects on other language skills and sub-skills. The present research was carried out in a language institute. This research also can be done on the EFL learners' writing improvement at other educational environments such as universities or high schools. The study also can be replicated with students with an advanced level of proficiency or with other features to be learned.

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