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# THE IMPACT OF PROVIDING BACKGROUND INFORMATION VIA E-MAIL BY THE TEACHER & WRITING E-MAIL BY THE STUDENTS ON IRANIAN EFL LEARNER'S WRITING ABILITY

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## ABSTRACT

The present study was an attempt to investigate the impact of providing background information via e-mail by the teacher and writing e-mail by the students on Iranian EFL learner's writing ability. The study also aimed at finding if the e-mailing method has any significant effect on gender of the learners concerning their second language writing ability. To do so, sixty advanced EFL learners studying English conversation in Iran Language Institute (ILI), in Tehran were selected based on the result of their performance on a piloted and validated version of paper-based TOEFL. The participants, in two control and experimental groups, received a pretest of writing, the designed treatment, and a posttest of writing. The study enjoyed a quasi- experimental design and the data collected were put into SPSS version 21 for the purpose of running an analysis of variances (ANOVA) to compare the male and female experimental and control group's means on the posttest of writing while controlling for possible effects of their entry writing knowledge as measured through the pretest. The results of data analysis firstly revealed that providing background information via e-mail by the teacher and writing e-mail by the students highly affected Iranian EFL learner's writing ability and secondly, showed that providing background information via e-mail by the teacher and writing e-mail by the students doesn't have any significant effect on writing ability of the learners regarding their gender. Therefore, providing background information via e-mail can be considered successful in helping learners improve their second language writing skill. The Findings have pedagogical implications for language teachers to make the learners more aware of what they are dealing with.

*Keywords:Background Information, E-mail, Second Language Writing, EFL Learners*

## INTRODUCTION

Education technologies are one of the newest areas in the world though they emerged in the second half of the 20th century. In the late 1950s, in the developed countries, computers were invited to the academic life and are still developing without any stop throughout the world. Today, computers have become more powerful, quicker, easier to use, more convenient and cheaper, and they can process and save much more information, as well.

At the end of the 20th century, the computer-mediated communication and the Internet have reformed the use of computers for language learning. Computers are no longer a way for just information processing but also a tool for information processing along with communication. With the help of the Internet, language Learners can now interact with others or target language speakers all over the world. According to Dhaif (1989), computers can never substitute the 'live' teacher, specifically in language teaching, where the attention is on mutual interaction between people. It can just accept a role in teaching the second or foreign language as help to the teacher.

Recent years have shown a growth of interest in using computers for foreign language teaching and learning. A decade ago, only a small number of specialists in western countries used computers in the language classroom. But, with the arrival of multimedia computing and the Internet, the role of computers in language teaching has now become a substantial issue facing more and more language teachers all over the world.

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However, computer-based instruction has been conflicting traditional teaching and learning processes. The role of these technologies in language learning and teaching is called CALL. CALL is a language learning and teaching approach in which the computer is used as an instrument for presentation, helping students, and evaluating learning material, and has an interactional principal. As cited in Davies (2002), Levy (1997) accentuates that CALL is more widely defined as the study for computer applications in language teaching and learning and research on the case. CALL adapts the research results of second language acquisition, linguistics, sociology, cognitive sciences, psychology, natural language processing, and culture examinations to second language education and joins them to probe into artificial intelligence, data processing, and telecommunication (CALICO, 2001). Thus, the development of language learning and teaching processes is received.

Based on the mentioned facts, the present researcher aims to perform a study in the case of the effect of e-mail writing on learner's writing development. In order to make good in the academic context, students require a wide range of linguistic skills that will aid them both develop their learningopportunities and illustrate proficiency of their learning**.** For learners whose native language is not English, such proficiency has been especially hard to achieve in the domain of writing. No wonder writing is often considered to be the fourth skill. This is because of the fact that naturally writing is instructed as the final, fourth stage of the sequence of learning the four skills (i.e. listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Critically, it is the most difficult of these skills too. Surprisingly, this sequence remained sound in the process of human language development (Duinand Hansen, 2013).

Writing, the most difficult skill among the four skills in language learning, has received attention after listening, speaking, and reading. For a large number of students writing seems to deal with great problems and most of these difficulties come from inadequate preparation for the writing task. Many techniques have been suggested to function as the pre-writing activities in order to pave the way for the students to improve their writing skill. Activating student's background knowledge stands in a unique position among these techniques. Direct education on background knowledge can result in an approach such as previewing, where students are provided introductory material before they read special texts (Beatty, 2013). Such introductory material may cover background information such as explanations of difficult concepts, definitions of new vocabularies, and translations of foreign phrases. Through providing student's background knowledge, teachers will be able to indirectly touch other facets of academic performance, specially writing. Bruce and Rubin (2013) see the new technology as offering not just better ways to carry out traditional teaching functions, but entirely new forms of teaching and learning. Networks create an unusual opportunity for writing teachers to shift away from the traditional writing to modern ways of training by the help of technology.

### *Statement of the Problem*

In line with the advances in technology, computer and academic technologies are becoming an imperative part of the learning and teaching processes. The role assigned to academic technologies in foreign language instruction has also shifted with these achievements. As cited in Spanou (2001), Levy (1997) declares that for the past 40 years, in the domain of mainframes in which high-level programming skill is needed, computers had a dramatic nature. However, for the last 20 years, with more "user-friendly" interfaces, it has been probable for language instructors to make more complete applications for themselves. These days, the computers which are used for practice and drill in language learning and language teaching along with the advances like combination of speech recognition programs with multimedia software enhance student's language learning experiences. The Internet affords a lot of facilities for interacting in the target language, and getting text-based and multimedia resources and worldwide information. From the beginning up to now, the amazing role of various CALL materials has relied on instructional designs and the way teachers apply these materials. When computers are properly used, they will develop the learning process in a various way (Warschauer and Healey, 1998).

CALL has had different impacts on the foreign language learning process. In their study titled "Language learning in cyberspace", for second language learners from universities (Donaldson andKötter, 1999) conducted a real-time MOO (Multiuser Object Oriented) system. For five months the sample used this

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system one session a week for cooperative tasks. The researchers came to the fact that such CALL applications are appealing, help students learn more communicatively, and inspire students in language learning. Kartal (2002) also conceded that computer use in foreign language teaching is triggering for students since computers can personalize learning, and aid students to learn quicker and simpler than before.

A large number of researches have studied the impacts of e-mail writing on grammar by asynchronous computer-mediated corrective feedback, but a very limited number of such researchers studied the role of e-mail on writing, and none of these studies can be traced in an Iranian context.

Regrettably, in Iran like many other countries in the world, writing does not receive the due attention. Teachers tend to give more importance to the reading skill which the learners need for their continuing study and their future academic life. Being regarded a neglected skill, writing should be paid the appropriate attention it deserves. For this reason, some vigorous studies should be done to provide learners, teachers, and administrators with some sound vision to the process of writing, especially through e-mails.

### Research Questions

Based on the above mentioned problem and purpose the present research attempted to answer the following questions:

1. Does providing background Information via e-mail by the teacher and writing e-mail by the students have any effect on Iranian EFL learner's writing ability?

2. Is there a significant difference between males and females regarding the effect of providing background information via e-mail by the teacher and writing e-mail by the students?

### Research Hypotheses

In order to answer the research questions above the following null hypotheses were formulated.

**H01.** Providing background Information via e-mail by the teacher and writing e-mail by the students does not have any effect on Iranian EFL learner's writing ability.

**H02.** There is not any significant difference between males and females regarding the effect of providing background information via e-mail by the teacher and writing e-mail by the students.

### A brief Overview on Activating Background Knowledge

Direct instruction on background knowledge can significantly improve student's comprehension of relevant reading material (McKeown*et al.,* 1992). For example, in one study, students who received direct instruction on relevant background knowledge before reading an expository text demonstrated significantly greater reading comprehension than peers who received direct instruction on an irrelevant topic area (Stevens, 1982). Dole *et al.,* (1991) extended these findings, showing that teaching students important background ideas for an expository or narrative text led to significantly greater performance on comprehension questions than did no pre-reading background knowledge instruction. By building student's background knowledge teachers might also help to counteract the detrimental effects that incoherent or poorly organized texts have on comprehension (McKeown*et al.,* 1992).

Direct instruction on background knowledge can be embedded into an approach such as previewing, where students are presented with introductory material before they read specific texts. Such introductory material may include important background information such as definitions of difficult vocabulary, translations of foreign phrases, and explanations of difficult concepts. For example, in a study by Graves *et al.,* (1983), students were given previews of narrative texts that included a plot synopsis, descriptive list of characters, and definitions of difficult words in the story. Thus, students were given both a framework for understanding the stories and important background information. Students not only liked the previews but made significant improvements in both story comprehension and recall.

As an alternative to a direct instruction approach, teachers might consider one more indirect, such as immersing students in field experiences through which they can absorb background knowledge more independently. Koldewyn (1998) investigated an approach that combined reading trade books, journal keeping, fields trips that put students in authentic experiences related to their reading, and follow-up Language Experience activities. Qualitative observations in Koldewyn's report reflect positively on the

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technique. However, the data is too preliminary to clearly establish the effectiveness of the approach or clarify which of its elements are most valuable.

Getting started is the most difficult stage in writing. Much writing is spent not writing but rather wondering, worrying, crossing out and having second thoughts. So the purpose of this research is to help students to improve their writing ability by teaching them how to get started through electronically receiving background information and writing e-mail and at the same breath to help teachers to find a new way of teaching writing in EFL classes.

### *Communication through E-mail*

Considering language learning and teaching in various situations, a reflection on the nature of e-mail communication as one of the major ways of text-based Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) and its implications is provided in his section. Levy (1997) believed that, respecting online educational context, e-mail is one of the most useful and practical ways of language learning and teaching. As Kim (2008) mentioned, "E-mail has been used in different educational contexts. Obvious benefits of e-mail include efficiency, convenience, and cost" (p. 189). Correspondingly, Kim (2008) refers to the practicality of e-mail in various situations and mentions that e-mail is broadly used in real-life situations as well as in teaching and learning settings, such as, online educational settings, face-to-face educational settings, and in connected educational contexts. As a matter of fact, use of technology of e-mail has been perused in different situations (p. 188). Kim (2008) also focuses on a variety of studies confirming the positive effect communication through e-mail in supporting close teacher-student relationship (e.g., De Montes and Gonzales, 2000), triggering mediation capabilities among students (e.g., Van andBoersma, 2002), encouraging active involvement in the process oflearning (e.g., Clingermanand Bernard, 2004), promoting learner's writing skill (e.g., Brown and Dexter, 2002), and completing "reflective and critical thinking" (Overbaugh, 2002) among students. Kim (2008) has summed up some findings regarding educational merits of using e-mail such as:

● Providing the chance of enabling instant, repeated support for individual needs; student-centered context; individualized education; transfer of sources and data (Cook-Sather andMawr, 2007).

● Developing interpersonal context; informal conversations; intimacy; social content exchanges; psychological comfort; expression of personal opinions, emotions, and ideas (Clingermanand Bernard, 2004; Davenport, 2006).

● Making close relationship; awareness of other's attitudes; interpersonal skills; insights into other's perspectives; collegiality (Brown and Dexter, 2002).

● Critical thinking; Improving contemplation; reflection; planning; careful analysis; cognitive task structuring (Overbaugh, 2002; Boxie, 2004).

● Active participation; change in personal values; Simulating interest; enthusiasm; motivation; self-confidence; self-esteem (Davenport, 2006;).

● Real-world anxiety decrease; gap instruction between knowledge and practice; permitting authentic but convenient context (Cook-Sather andMawr, 2007).

Sproull and Kiesler (1991) refer to the privilege of communication through e-mail and point out those who are introverted and shy can widely profit exchange of information via e-mail because "ephemeral and plain text in electronic mail reduce the fear of appearing foolish in front of others. By removing reminders of a possibly critical audience, electronic mail induces people to be more open". This privilege reduces "social differences apparent in face-to-face communication" (p. 42-43). Kitade (2000) also speaks of the merits of communication through e-mail and mentions that because of the "absence of authority" in computer mediated interaction, it supports learners with more possibilities to take part in interpersonal communications (p. 147). Based on what Shang (2007) declaredapart from the profit alleviating learner anxiety, a lot of studies have showed that e-mail is the most fruitful way used in academic settings to develop learner's writing skills more and above their listening, speaking, and reading skills" (p. 81). Moreover, Hoffman (1996) speaks of the positive impact of e-mail in promoting student's written interactive skills and says:

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*Electronic mail provided students with more timely, more complete and more usable information about their writing and assignments than written comments on work returned to them. They also found, on occasion, that mail feedback was more face-saving and less stressful than face-to-face communication. (p. 65)*

According to Fotos (2004), numerous studies have also substantiated the potential benefits of e-mail communication in enabling learners to "develop their thoughts and ideas", "learn about different cultures", and "improve their English proficiency, giving them feelings of accomplishment and enjoyment" (p. 116).

Turning to the specific context of languages education, in the last 10 yearsthe use of email communication has been successfully integrated into the teaching of languages at university level (Warschauerand Kern, 2000). This has profoundly altered the dynamics of interaction creating a learning environment which can be characterized as interactive and collaborative as well as student-centred. Through the use of email communication, an increasing number of scholars argue that students can exercise and acquire the target language in an authentic, motivating environment which offers real communicative goals (Warschauer, 1996).

Stockwell (2003) also mentions some previous studies on the benefits of e-mail and states that "These include increases in motivation due to interaction with a real audience, reduction in stress through anonymity, opportunities for authentic communication, increased participation and development of learner autonomy" (p. 38).

According to Absalom and Marden (2004), "it is also possible that students feel more comfortable interacting in CMC because there is no fear of bad pronunciation" (p. 406). The notion of alleviating the need to have "above-standard" pronunciation in text-based CMC has also been accounted for by Roed (2003). Another advantage of e-mail is that it allows learners to review and ponder on the previous messages resulting in developing more deliberate communication than FtF communication (Absalom &Marden, 2004). Shang (2007) refers to the scarcity of the investigation "regarding linguistic characteristics" of foreign language writing and states one study conducted by Li (2000) investigating "the linguistic characteristics of 132 e-mails of ESL students in tasks that differed in terms of purpose, audience interaction, and task structure. Statistical results showed that in e-mail tasks involving audience interaction, students tended to produce syntactically and lexically more complex texts" (p. 82).

According to Shang (2007), "it is important to look into the linguistic characteristics of student's e-mail writing, and examine the relation between the number of e-mail exchanges and the student's writing performance, so as to effectively integrate such an approach into the EFL curriculum" (p. 83).

In the same sense, Kim (2008) refers to Burgstahler and Cronheim (2001) arguing that up to now "these studies have not provided sufficient information about how to design and develop e-mail to exploit cognitive and noncognitive" (p. 191) facets of language learning. Therefore, more investigation is merited as to how to implement and exploit benefits of e-mail exchanges as a fundamental means of communication regarding electronic media in FL environments.

*Participants*

In order to investigate the effect of providing background information via e-mail by the teacher and e-mail writing on Iranian EFL learner's writing ability, the present researcher examined Iranian advanced learners. To do so, a total number of 90 EFL advanced male and female learners whose ages ranged between 25 and 40 at different branches of Iran Language Institute in Tehran, attended received a valid and reliable sample of paper-based TOEFL which was first piloted with 30 students with similar characteristics to the main participants to check its reliability and then the test was implemented to the study.

*Instruments*

The data for the present study were collected by means of two tests: a paper- based TOEFL and a writing test which was used as pre and posttests.

***Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL):***To homogenize students at advanced level, a standard version of paper-based TOEFL released by the ETS in 2002 was employed. However, the listening

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comprehension section was deliberately omitted to make its administration more feasible. The test then was piloted and used in the present study. The whole test included 40 grammar and written expressions and 50 reading comprehension items (the total score of the test equaled to 90). The administration of the whole test took around 120 minutes.

***Pre and Post-tests of Writing:***The pretest of writing was selected from among the standard topics of TOEFL. The writings of the learners were corrected employing the inter-rater method and based on the rubrics presented by ETS (2000) .This revealed how well they were familiar with the concept of writing before the treatment began. Reliability and validity of the test was taken into consideration as well.

***Procedure***

First, the piloted TOEFL was administered to 90 advanced students to homogenize them regarding their general English proficiency. Out of 90 students, 60 students whose scores had fallen one standard deviation above and below the mean shaped the main participants of the study. The selected participants were randomly assigned to two groups, an experimental and a control group with 30 and 30 students, respectively. Then, the participants of the study in both groups received the writing pretest to assure their homogeneity regarding their second language writing.

Since this study lasted 8 sessions within 4 weeks the students were just given 8 topics, one topic for each session. In the experimental group, the learner's background knowledge was activated through e-mailing while the control group received no background knowledge activation through e-mail. In this phase, the teacher involved the learners in the new instruction (treatment). Like the TOEFL writing section, all groups were assigned to write one topic, and were given 30 minutes to write an essay of about 4-5 paragraphs, or 300-350 words in the classroom out of various topics.Working with these topics was considered as the treatment for the experimental group. During writing topics, the experimental group's background knowledge was activated through e-mail before writing and e-mailing topics while the control groups received no background knowledge activation through e-mail.

Throughout the treatment phase, the students in the experimental group received continuous feedback from the teacher virtually and the teacher (the researcher herself) tried her best to make them well understood about various grammatical points, diction, and writing strategies. Activating the learner's background knowledge about the topic of the day, the teacher presented how the new information should be connected to the previously developed and categorized one. Helping the learners to rely on their own experiences and memories was another significant activity followed in this group.

Then, the teacher sent the topic to the learners and asked them to present the most significant concepts concerning the issue. Then she checked the learner's emails and provided them with the eye-catching concepts presented by all the class members. In an attempt to activate the learner's back ground knowledge the teacher sent those stories, writing models, and corrected versions of previous learner's writings. This made the learners familiar with the ups and downs of correct and meaningful writing.

The learners were also encouraged to email each other to receive information and share their views. This energized the cooperative learning atmosphere in the experimental group. Such activities were supposed to enrich learner'sworld view which should indirectly improve their writings. Finally, the papers of the participants were collected, scored via the inter-rater method, and analyzed by using SPSS version 21 and reported.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

*Data Analysis and Results*

This study aims at investigating the following two research questions;

*1: Does providing background Information via e-mail by the teacher and writing e-mail by the students have any effect on Iranian EFL learner's writing ability?*

*2: Is there a significant difference between males and females regarding the effect of providing background information via e-mail by the teacher and writing e-mail by the students?*

A two way ANOVA was run to investigate the effect of types of treatment (providing background Information via e-mail by the teacher and writing e-mail by the students) and gender on the performance

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of the subjects on the posttest of writing. As displayed in Table 1, the experimental group (M = 81.33, SD = 1.10) outperformed the control group (M = 74.15, SD = 1.14) on the posttest of writing.

**Table 1:Descriptive Statistics for the posttest of Writing by Groups**

| Group | Mean | Std. Error | 95% Confidence Interval | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| Experimental | 81.335 | 1.101 | 79.130 | 83.541 |
| Control | 74.156 | 1.144 | 71.865 | 76.447 |

The results of two-way ANOVA for the effect of types of treatments (F (1, 56) = 20.45, P < .05, Partial $\eta^2$ = .26 representing a large effect size) (Table 2) indicated that there was a significant difference between the experimental and control group's means on the posttest of writing. Thus the first null-hypothesis as providing background Information via e-mail by the teacher and writing e-mail by the students have any effect on Iranian EFL learner's writing ability was rejected.

**Table 2:ANOVA tests for the effect of types of treatments**

| Source | Type III Sum of Squares | Df | Mean Square | F | Sig. | Partial Eta Squared |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Group | 767.571 | 1 | 767.571 | 20.456 | .000 | .268 |
| Gender | .870 | 1 | .870 | .023 | .880 | .000 |
| Group * Gender | 176.831 | 1 | 176.831 | 4.713 | .034 | .078 |
| Error | 2101.308 | 56 | 37.523 | | | |
| Total | 366274.000 | 60 | | | | |

Based on the results displayed in Table 3,it can be concluded that the male (M = 77.86, SD = 1.16) and female (M = 77.62, SD = 1.08) groups showed almost the same means on the posttest of writing.

**Table 3:Descriptive Statistics for the posttest of writing by gender**

| Gender | Mean | Std. Error | 95% Confidence Interval | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| Male | 77.867 | 1.161 | 75.542 | 80.192 |
| Female | 77.625 | 1.083 | 75.456 | 79.794 |

The results of two-way ANOVA for the effect of gender (F (1, 56) = .023, P > .05, Partial $\eta^2$ = .000 representing a weak effect size) (Table 4) indicated that there was not any significant difference between the male and female subject's means on the posttest of writing.Table 4.12 displays the descriptive statistics for the interaction between types of treatment and gender. Based on these results it can be concluded that the female subject's writing improved through the email writing while the male subjects better benefitted from the classical methods.

**Table 4:Descriptive statistics for the posttest of writing by group by gender**

| Group | Gender | Mean | Std. Error | 95% Confidence Interval | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| Experimental | Male | 79.733 | 1.582 | 76.565 | 82.902 |
| | Female | 82.937 | 1.531 | 79.870 | 86.005 |
| Control | Male | 76.000 | 1.699 | 72.597 | 79.403 |
| | Female | 72.313 | 1.531 | 69.245 | 75.380 |

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The results of two-way ANOVA for the effect of gender (F (1, 56) = 4.71, P < .05, Partial $\eta^2$ = .078 representing a moderate effect size) (Table 4) indicated that there was a significant interaction between the types of treatment and gender of the subjects on the posttest of writing. Thus the second null-hypothesis as there was not any significant difference between males and females regarding the effect of providing background information via e-mail by the teacher and writing e-mail by the studentswas rejected.

*Discussion*

The findings of the present study firstlyrevealed that providing background information via e-mail by the teacher and writing e-mail by the students highly affected Iranian EFL learner's writing ability. **Secondly**, the results revealed that providing background information via e-mail by the teacher and writing e-mail by the students does not have more effect on writing ability of male learners than females.This signifies that providing background information via e-mail by the teacher and writing e-mail by the students does not have any significant effect on writing ability of the learners regarding their gender. Both of these findings are in line with the findings of other researchers recorded in the literature:

Sergeant (2001), comparing student's writing performance written by pen and pencil with student's writing performance written through technology, claimed that technology can have a positive impact on learner's writings.

The results of this study are to some extents similar to those obtained by Toyoda (2001) who claimed that"the technology can have a positive impact on learner autonomy when learners have extensive experience with technology" (Toyoda, 2001). He furthered that "it also can have a positive impact on autonomy only when learners perceive technology as a useful tool" (Toyoda, 2001).

The positive effects of technology on language learning also have been demonstrated by Warschauer (1996) who found that using technology in teaching encourages learners to develop their language skills. The common things among all these studies is that, by connecting classroom learning with other learning outside the class situation students may see new ways of learning experience as an extension to the future. In other research findings, Donaldson and Kötter (1993) and Kartal (2002) found that CALL applications are interesting and motivate students in foreign language learning.

Different justifications can be brought for this finding. First of all, the participants of this study were advanced students and in lower levels there may be some differences. Advanced students may have the experience of working with computers for some years and their writing ability might have improved to some extent because of dealing with the language before. It seems that for them, the use of technology influences their writing ability.

The second finding of the study focuses on the gender factor, presenting that providing background information via e-mail by the teacher and writing e-mail by the students does not have any significant effect on writing ability of the learners regarding their gender.

A number of studies have examined the role of writing instruction in second language writing development and its relation with gender and have reached differentconclusions: Boxie (2004) determined that, exceptionally, boys are superior to girls in the essay writing. Similarly, Carr and Thompson (1996) found that men performed significantly better than women in a test of academic writing. Nevertheless, Davis and Winek (1989) in their study concerning improving expository writing by increasing background knowledge discovered no significant gender differences in the writing performance test. Fotos (2004) in his study entitled writing as talking: e-mail exchange for promoting proficiency and motivation in the foreign language classroom pointed out those female learners performed better than males in writing development. Another study done by Gonglewski*et al.,* (2001) which focused on using e-mail in foreign language teaching also revealed that women outperformed men inn expository writing.

To sum up, it can be concluded that providing background information via e-mail by the teacher and writing e-mail by the students on Iranian EFL learner's writing ability proved positively effective and it also supported the fruitful and rewarding effect of the cooperative learning as an offshoot of employing such tasks e-mailing and providing others with various backgrounds EFL classrooms. The role of technology in the second/foreign language development was also emphasized.

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## Conclusion

The outcome of the posttest data analysis clarified that the participants in the experimental group significantly outperformed the subjects in the control. Therefore, the obvious conclusion is that the devised treatment i.e. the application of e-mailing to construct background for the learners has helped the participants in the experimental group to perform better than the control group in which the learners relied on conventional mode of writing development. The findings of the present study firstly revealed that providing background information via e-mail by the teacher and writing e-mail by the student's highly affected Iranian EFL learner's writing ability. Secondly, the results revealed that providing background information via e-mail by the teacher and writing e-mail by the students does not have any significant effect on writing ability of the learners regarding their gender. Therefore, providing background information via e-mail can be considered successful in helping learners improve their second language writing skill. Based on the literature on e-related concepts and applications (Absalom andMarden, 2004; AllfordandPachler, 2007; Matsuda, 2003), employing e-mailing to writing background as a technique could promote second language development in general, and second language writing development, in particular.

## Pedagogical Implications

The present study demonstrated that providing background information via e-mail can influence the EFL learner's second language writing development. EFL learners need to know native like vocabularies, grammatical points, and preferences, dictions, and the like for a native like performance. Therefore, according to the results of the present study, some implications for teaching and learning lexical items through employing e-mails to construct background information can be suggested.

Second language writing organized by e-mailing to construct background could be employed by second language teachers to make the learners more aware of what they are dealing with. The assumption is that participation in such a treatment facilitates learning (Warschauer, 1995), and learners must pay attention to the features of input they are exposed to and notice the gap between the target like forms and the current state of their linguistic knowledge. This could be done through a kind of cognitive comparison which has been seen as one of the crucial processes in language acquisition (Sunderland, 2010).

CALL framework proposed in the study attaches ultimate importance to the whole process of learning, writing. In this study, the experimental groups who received background information proved successful in writing. The current study was undertaken to find out the facilitative effect of background information by means of e-mail intervention on writing skill of Iranian EFL learners. The findings revealed that activating background information via e-mail had a significant and meaningful effect on the ease and feasibility of writing teaching and learning. English teachers and learners could employ providing background information via e-mail to help the learners develop their second language writing skill. This way the classroom interactions could be enriched and would help subsequent L2 development of the learners.

With respect to providing EFL learners background information, it is suggested that teachers activate related knowledge of the students to low level learners, too. It can be argued that learners at lower levels might not have enough proficiency to write, but it would be possible by providing support on the part of the instructors. It is also suggested that providing EFL learner's background information be used with learners of different proficiency levels. Thus, providing EFL learner's background information can be taken into account as being effective when dealing with different level learners. Generally speaking, Iranian EFL learners are mostly inclined to look up to their teachers to provide them with correct writing rather than by themselves. Another suggestion is that when activating background information teachers should make use of different ways of activating learner's background information.

It is hoped that the findings of the present study can contribute to the improvement of testing and online courses as well. It is suggested that test makers evaluate learners on the basis of their overt incompetency regarding their online performance. It is also recommended that the learners with low proficiency levels be provided with strategies of activating background information. On the other hand, some key words as ways of providing background information activation might seem appropriate for learners with higher

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proficiency levels as they might possess deeper-level processing capabilities than the lower level learners. Additionally, while dealing with low level learners, test makers are advised to test one structure in their writing performances at a time and avoid the combination of certain structures as it may result in learner's confusion and uncertainty.

Materials developers in the ELT domain could also employ the findings of the present study and those of the similar ones to present tasks in which learner's awareness toward learning is enhanced. Such tasks may help the learners move towards self-correction, autonomy, and meaningful learning.

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