

## **The Effect of Reading on Improving the Writing of EFL Students**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Since reading and writing have been taught separately and independently by some English instructors, students, especially EFL learners, do not use their knowledge in either area to improve their literacy learning in general. This study is aimed at examining the impact of incorporating reading in efforts to improve the writing skills of EFL students. In this study, five Iranian students, studying in an international school in Malaysia, were purposively selected. Two instruments were used: a compiled genre-specific corpus as the main tool to evaluate the participants' level of proficiency in writing and two semi-structured interviews as supplementary instruments to obtain EFL participants' perspectives on the effect of reading on the development of writing skills. The method used to analyse the corpus was CACA, short for computer-assisted corpus analysis, where the written texts from the pre-test and the post-test were used and compiled into a corpus and then tagged and analysed using suitable concordance software. After intervention was done, the participants were given some instruction on how to write effectively. The findings indicated that the participants' writing skills had significantly improved by integrating reading in writing tasks. It is hoped that the findings of this study will help students as well as English teachers realise the significant role of reading in writing i.e. in enhancing writing performance and motivating students to read at the same time.

*Keywords:* Corpus linguistics, EFL learners, reading, reading to writing, writing

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Since students, particularly EFL students, are not well informed about the benefits of connecting reading and writing, they do not have the opportunity to use strategies that integrate both reading and writing. Most of the time, reading has been taught in isolation. The same can be said about

teaching writing skills. Thus, students face various problems in writing such as integrating new information, presenting appropriate details and summarising information from given texts.

Grabe (2009) and Ahn (2014) believed that among language learning skills, writing has been consistently referred to as a complicated skill particularly for non-native speakers of English due to the fact that they are not exposed to English compared with English native speakers. Tangpermpoon (2008) explained that the reason for this was that during writing production, students of English as a foreign language (EFL) are required to focus on different tasks such as choosing proper words, using correct grammatical patterns and checking spelling of words. Ibrahim (2006, p.2) pointed out that writing is a difficult skill for native and non-native speakers alike, for writers should make a balance between multiple issues such as content, organisation, purpose, audience, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling and mechanics.

Ejraee, Baradaran and Sharif (2014) also considered writing as a difficult learning skill that is needed by EFL students from primary to higher education. Therefore, as Ahn (2014) concluded, writing should be re-evaluated by teachers, educators and students as well. A number of studies show that English teachers often look for more effective methods to teach writing. For example, in their study, Gorjian, Pazhakh and Parang (2012) introduced critical thinking (CT) as one of the best approaches to improving

EFL students' ability to create effective writings. In another study, Mahmoud (2014) proposed cooperative language learning (CLL) as a useful way to leave a positive impact on the writing performance of students. However, neither of these studies considered the effect of reading-writing integration as an instrumental technique to lessen the difficulty of writing in educational contexts.

According to Ibrahim (2006), since the 1960s, the traditional ways of teaching and learning writing (formalistic) were gradually replaced by a new impressive model called 'response students', also known as 'reader response theory' (Watson, 2005).

Writing was no longer perceived as an individual task taught separately from other language learning skills. It was instead viewed as a process of pedagogy (prewriting, drafting and post writing) through which students learned to make a relationship between what they read and what they tend to write (Kennedy, 1994). This theory was like a revolution in the arena of teaching writing. Zamel (1987) believed that process writing pedagogy benefits ESL students in several ways. It requires students to put their concern about rhetorical structures away and just focus freely on writing. It also gives them the opportunity to employ reading to generate a variety of ideas. As Watson (ibid) claimed, even with the emergence of this fruitful theory, students' writing is not improved as much as expected. To overcome this shortcoming, this study was aimed at using Watson's (2005) theory of process writing

pedagogy which considers writing as a process including pre-writing, drafting and post-writing to see whether reading-writing reconnection has this capability to increase the writing knowledge of EFL students.

### READING IN RELATION TO WRITING

So far, a large number of definitions for reading have been proposed by different well-known and less famous researchers. Some describe it as a solitary class activity (Gough, 1995), while others view it as a social act that is more or less in relation with other learning skills, especially writing (Carrell, 1988). However, reading is best defined as an interactive or socio-cognitive process that results in creating meaning from the printed text (Alderson, 1984). Therefore, meaning creation is the production of a close negotiation between reading on one hand and writing on the other. As Horning and Kraemer (2013) mentioned, if readers *read to analyse* different parts in a text, if they *read different reading passages* on a similar topic, if they *evaluate what they read*, and only if they *generalise what they read* to their personal life and experiences, will meaning be conveyed through the interaction of both reading and writing.

In his study, Ahn (2014) suggested a pedagogical writing technique, namely, critical reading, to English teachers from Korea to help their students develop their writing skill. According to the results of the study, he claimed that critical reading is a positive, effective and beneficial reading strategy that can be used by Korean

teachers to help their students improve their expository essay writing.

In another study, Alqadi and M-Alkadi (2013) investigated the impact of extensive reading on development of EFL freshmen's writing in terms of grammatical accuracy. The outcomes of the study indicated that extensive reading saliently improved the grammatical accuracy of the EFL freshmen of Al-al-Bayt University. Similarly, another study conducted by Chuenchaichon (2011) on the impact of intensive reading on the written performance of Thai University EFL writers revealed an increase in grammatical accuracy.

Abdul-Majeed (2013), as a supporter of reading-writing association, points out that there is a decrease in the use of reading in composition classes. According to Jolliffe (2007, p.473), reading is a concept that is largely absent from the theory and practice of college composition. Subsequently, the study discusses the merits of connecting reading to writing to develop the writing performance of EFL students.

### RELATED LITERATURE

The integration of L2 reading and writing to develop EFL students' literacy learning has been studied by numerous researchers (Ito, 2011). Li and Yang (2014) bore part of the weight of this notion by stating that teaching reading and writing together is a beneficiary methodology to promote Chinese EFL students' reading and writing. Similarly, Plakans and Gebril (2012) demonstrated some advantages of connecting reading and writing. The

following steps were suggested. First, the reading sources used tend to help students gain ideas about the topic. Next, the reading sources used also shape opinions related the topic. Finally, the texts in the resources can be used for evidence and language support. The significant role of reading into writing on students' language learning development was also emphasised in a study investigated by Durukan (2011, p102). He declared that among the four language skills, reading, together with writing, was the first skill to be learnt. It is also known that, in the learning process, there is a high correlation between reading comprehension and writing achievement. Esmaili (2002) pointed out that if reading and writing could be used together, there is a positive impact on students' academic success. Yoshimura (2009) presented the close relationship between reading and writing in an extremely artistic way. Yoshimura (ibid) remarked that reading and writing played a complementary role. If characteristics that are missed in methods of reading can be effectively addressed in writing programmes and vice versa, then students' composition skills will begin to grow.

According to Tuan (2012), the correlation between reading and writing helps EFL students improve their writing skill. However, despite the fair amount of studies that have been conducted in this field, Horning (2007; 2013) still believed that even in the United States, where English is spoken as a first language, connecting reading and writing to facilitate learning is not paid sufficient attention to by instructors.

Jolliffe (2007), one of the famous scholars of reading and writing studies, agreed with this and mentioned that in almost all writing classes, reading is treated as an alien concept, showing that students are not involved in reading as much as expected.

Kroll (1993) expressed his concern regarding the reading and writing disconnect when he stated that most English instructors teach reading separately from writing. Hirvela (2004) continued that in composition classrooms, reading is largely overlooked by both students and teachers. Hirvela (ibid) added that a simple justification for this phenomenon is that the teachers do not have sufficient and required knowledge to interrelate reading with writing in writing courses. One of the areas that are badly affected by the results coming from the disconnect between reading and writing skills (Shuying, 2002; Hirvela, 2004) is writing, which has been considered by many EFL/ESL students as a difficult task to master (Heffernan, 2006). In order to address this serious issue in the literacy context, the present study was aimed at examining the effectiveness of integrating reading and writing skills in EFL students' writing by relying on the reading-writing reconnection theory by Horning and Kraemer (2013). According to this theory, reading can or should be used as an effective method to teach/learn writing effectively in high schools and colleges.

## **METHODOLOGY**

As Dörnyei (2001) stated, the combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches can

neutralise the demerits of each approach and can also create the best outcomes in a research study. Therefore, in this study, a mixed-method approach of both the quantitative and qualitative designs was adopted. The quantitative approach consisted of frequency analysis of the tagged part-of-speech (POS) in the corpus while the qualitative approach included the identification of the structural strategies used by the participants while writing and the interpretation of the semi-structured interviews.

#### *Research Instruments*

##### ***Applying CACA (computer assisted corpus analysis)***

Manvender (2014) proposed an easily replicated method of corpus analysis known as the computer assisted corpus analysis or CACA for short, which uses a genre-specific corpus compiled from written texts. The compiled corpus is then computer-tagged accordingly and analysed using various concordance software. The compiled corpus is used as a tool leading to various linguistics investigations (Manvender & Sarimah, 2010; Manvender, Yasmin, & Sarimah, 2012; Manvender, 2014), depending on the requirements of each individual study conducted. The corpus analysis included various structural analyses, syntactical analyses and grammatical analyses with supplementary frequency analyses (Manvender & Sarimah, 2010).

Anthony (2013), the founder of AntConc (a free corpus analysis software), borrowed Biber, Conrad and Reppen's (1998) definition of corpus linguistics

to describe it as a computerised method of analysing lexical and grammatical patterns of a language both qualitatively and quantitatively. Thurstun and Candlin (1998) defined it as the representative of the use of language in real life.

Recently, numerous studies have been conducted regarding the benefits of employing corpus linguistics to analyse students' L2 writing performance (Botao, Min, & Yunxia, 2010; Manvender & Sarimah, 2010; Roemer & Wulff, 2010; Anthony, 2013; Yoon & Jo, 2014). For instance, Yoon and Hirvela (2004) studied the efficacy of corpus use on L2 writing construction. It was concluded that the corpus approach had a positive impact on L2 students' writing performance.

Manvender and Sarimah (2010) employed corpus linguistics to assess the grammatical structures in a learner corpus. The findings of this study introduced the computer-based method of genre analysis known as CACA, which is highlighted as an appropriate, time-saving, quick and easy approach to interpret L2 learners' grammatical linguistics knowledge. Since previous studies in EFL students' literacy development have utilised complicated corpus-based methods to check students' writing skill, the present study replicated the genre-based corpus analysis model as proposed by Manvender, Yasmin and Sarimah (2012) as one of the easiest and time-saving methods to both evaluate EFL students' writing ability and facilitate their language learning process.

### ***Semi-structured interviews***

Turner (2010) stated that an interview is a dialogue happening between the interviewer and the interviewee for a specific purpose. Interviews give the researcher an opportunity to access the participants' perceptions, feelings and opinions that are unobservable. Thus, this study used semi-structured interview questions adapted from Al-Ghonaim's (2005) study in order to qualitatively analyse the participants' attitudes towards the integration of reading and writing (please refer to Appendices A and B) before and after the intervention.

While Al-Ghonaim (ibid.) used three different forms of interview namely one unstructured interview, two semi-structured interviews (Interview One & Final Interview) and one mid-interview, this study only relied on the open-ended semi-structured interview to disclose participants' beliefs about reading-writing integration. The first interview consisted of 24 questions. However, the researcher of this study extracted only the most relevant questions. The overall aim of the first interview was to collect in-depth information on students' past experiences about learning English, particularly reading and writing before the beginning of the intervention. After the intervention was performed, the participants were given the final interview including 32 questions.

Some questions which were considered irrelevant to the topic under discussion were omitted. The participants in this study were asked to talk freely because the more they talked, the more the interviewer

would learn (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The interviews, which were tape-recorded, took 20 minutes. At the end, the responses to both interviews were compared with each other to see whether there were any changes in participants' beliefs regarding the integration of reading and writing.

### ***The respondents***

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2009), the population in statistics includes all members of a defined group that are being studied or collecting information for data collection. In this study, a total number of five respondents, 2 male and 3 female EFL students studying in a selected international school in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia were purposively selected. The participants were aged between 15 and 17 years old. They were required to sign a letter of consent before the study began (see Appendix C).

Farhady, Hezaveh and Hedayati (2010) reviewed EFL education in Iran before the revolution until recent days. They stated that the history of Iran is divided into two main periods: pre-revolution and post-revolution. Before the revolution in Iran in 1981, English enjoyed very high status. It played a very significant role in commerce, education and the army. After the revolution, however, English was not paid sufficient attention and even worse, it was considered a threat to the national language, that is, Persian. English was no longer a social need or an essential requirement for students who decided to enter the labour market. Although stabilised at the present

time, English teaching and learning still need to be improved greatly in the following sections: students' beliefs about English, teachers' methods of teaching English, theories of teaching English, schools' curricula of teaching reading and writing (Shabani, 2013; Sadeghi, 2013), among others. This study, hence, intended to select Iranian EFL students to collect their ideas about the impact of the reading-writing connection on their writing enhancement in order to help the researcher discover the strengths and weaknesses of students in reading and writing, and propose to them a new model of improving their writing skills i.e. via an integrated programme that has been overlooked in school curricula for many years (Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006).

### ***The corpus analysis – POS tagging***

In order to access the structures and strategies used by the writers, it was first necessary to compile a corpus. First, the written texts produced by participants during the pre-test were gathered and stored as several files in a folder created in the computer. Then, each written document was changed into plain text format and saved as a new file in the folder. Next, the files were opened and edited using Notepad ++ 6, which is installed on most computers equipped with Windows 2010 or above.

The files were saved and coded in the computer as WT, as a raw corpus for the analysis. Then, the corpus was POS-tagged using the online version of the CLAWS tagger. This was done using a tagging

software programme called CLAWS<sup>1</sup> Tagger with an accuracy of 96-97% and an error rate of 1.5%. This automatic tagger includes two main tagsets; C5 carrying 62 tags and C7 Tagset with 152 tags used for larger corpora. CLAWS5 also consists of a series of codes for POS tagging (see Appendix D) and three main modes namely horizontal, vertical and html. For the purpose of this study, both the horizontal style illustrating a general picture of linguistic structures of a text and the vertical style disclosing the most commonly made errors or mistakes by the participants in the pre-test and the post-test were employed to tag the corpora. An example of a tagged text (a written text produced by one of the participants), which is horizontally tagged, is shown in Table 1.

The horizontally tagged texts in the pre-test were coded as HTGDPreWT and saved as new files in the folder in the computer. One of the positive aspects of horizontal tagging is that it breaks sentences and therefore, helps to find the syntactical and semantic errors the participants commonly make while writing (Manvender & Sarimah, 2010). Another advantage is related to the high capability of horizontal tagging in making powerful comparisons between two corpora.

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<sup>1</sup>CLAWS is the abbreviation for Constituent Likelihood Automatic Word-tagging System. It was first explored by UCREL (University Centre for Computer Corpus Research on Language) for use in POS (Part-of-Speech) tagging. CLAWS4 Tagger is commonly used to tag the British National Corpus (BNC) including 100 million words.

TABLE 1  
A Horizontally Tagged Text

<p>School_NN1 is_VBZ a_AT0 place_NN1 to_TO0 study_VVI ,_PUN learn_VVB and_CJC also_AV0 improve_VVB our_DPS education_NN1 ._SENT -----_PUN                  There_EX0 are_VBB many_DT0 things_NN2 in_PRP school_NN1 that_CJT we_PNP can_VM0 enjoy_VVI ._SENT -----_PUN</p> <p>Individual Sentences</p> <p>1. School_NN1 is_VBZ a_AT0 place_NN1 to_TO0 study_VVI ,_PUN learn_VVB and_CJC also_AV0 improve_VVB our_DPS education_NN1 ._SENT -----_PUN</p> <p>2. There_EX0 are_VBB many_DT0 things_NN2 in_PRP school_NN1 that_CJT we_PNP can_VM0 enjoy_VVI ._SENT -----_PUN</p>
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(Text used: HTGDWT2)

TABLE 2  
POS Vertical Tagging

0000003 312 -----	
0000003 320 So	97 RR
0000003 330 every	93 AT1
0000003 340 one	93 [PN1/63] MC1/37
0000003 350 have	93 VH0
0000003 360 responsibility	03 NN1
0000003 370 against	93 II
0000003 380 schools	93 [NN2/100] VVZ%/0
0000003 381 .	03 .
0000004 001 -----	

(text used: VTGDPosWT3)

TABLE 3  
Frequency of NOUNS (Pre-test)

Corpus Files	NN0	NN1	NN2	NP0	PNP	Total
TGDPreWT1	1	60	44	12	12	129
TGDPreWT2	0	41	12	4	11	68
TGDPreWT3	1	16	42	0	6	65
TGDPreWT4	0	19	7	1	18	45
TGDPreWT5	1	25	34	0	10	70
Total	3	161	139	17	57	

TABLE 4  
Frequency of LEXICAL VERBS (Pre-test)

Corpus Files	VBB	VVB	VVG	VVI	VVN	VVZ	Total
TGDPreWT1	11	7	3	9	1	6	30
TGDPreWT2	3	5	0	7	1	7	19
TGDPreWT3	8	11	1	7	2	2	23
TGDPreWT4	1	6	3	6	0	0	16
TGDPreWT5	10	9	3	8	0	5	25
Total	33	37	10	37	4	20	

POS vertical tagging also plays a significant role in the analysis of participants' writing tasks. Unlike horizontal tagging, which segments sentences in an intensive way, the vertical tagging system allows the researcher to explicitly view each sentence separately in a vertical form. The following is an example of a vertically tagged corpus.

**Subject-verb agreement (SVA).** In order to check whether the written texts produced by the participants followed the basic rule of creating an English sentence i.e. singular subjects need singular verbs; plural subjects need plural verbs, the frequency of the NOUNS (NN0, NN1, NN2) and LEXICAL VERBS (VBB, VVB, VVG, VVI, VVN, VVZ) in both the pre-test and post-test were analysed using AntConc<sup>2</sup>. Differences seen in participants' use of SVA were examined at the same time. Frequency of nouns and lexical verbs are illustrated in Table 3 and 4 respectively.

As shown in Table 3, NN1 is the most frequently used word compared with other forms of nouns. In the corpus file coded as TGDPreWT1, for instance, it was used 60 times. Another form of noun, which was the second most frequently used POS, was coded as NN2 (plural common noun) with an occurrence of 161 times. PNP and NP0 were other important nouns that are distributed very often in the texts i.e. 57 times and 17 times, respectively.

<sup>2</sup>AntConc, first developed by Laurence Anthony, is a computerised system of checking concordances and repetition of words or key words in a text. It is a freeware programme easy to be used.

Finally, NN0 occurred with the lowest frequency (3 times) in participants' written texts.

As disclosed in Table 4, VVB (the base form of a verb) and VVI were the most recurring lexical verbs seen in participants' written texts. The number of occurrences of VVI was recorded 37 times during the frequency analysis. VBB was the second most frequently used verb, with the frequency of occurrences as many as 33 times. VVZ appeared 20 times while VVG appeared 10 times. Subsequently, VVN occurred 4 times as shown in the table.

According to this frequency table, NN1 possessed the highest frequency. Participants used it 249 times. Another frequently chosen noun by the participants was the plural common noun form, which was coded as NN2 and occurred 116 times, followed by PNP, which appeared 107 times. NP0 and NN0 were considered nouns with a very low frequency as these two noun forms only appeared 16 and 3 times, respectively, in the students' written texts.

Table 6 reveals that the range of nouns in participants' written texts was from 11 to 63. While VVB occurred 63 times and had the maximum frequency, VVG and VVN have an equal number of occurrences, which was 11 times. These two verbs seemed to be the least frequently used verbs in the texts.

TABLE 5  
Frequency of NOUNS (Post-test)

Corpus Files	NN0	NN1	NN2	NP0	PNP	Total
TGDPostWT1	2	86	24	16	65	193
TGDPostWT2	0	47	20	0	0	67
TGDPostWT3	0	24	29	0	11	64
TGDPostWT4	0	72	14	0	21	107
TGDPostWT5	1	20	29	0	10	60
Total	3	249	116	16	107	

TABLE 6  
Frequency of LEXICAL VERBS (Post-test)

Corpus Files	VBB	VVB	VVG	VVI	VVN	VVZ	Total
TGDPostWT1	7	27	1	24	1	3	63
TGDPostWT2	2	13	3	5	5	0	28
TGDPostWT3	8	2	3	8	1	4	26
TGDPostWT4	2	13	1	16	2	1	35
TGDPostWT5	11	8	3	7	2	4	35
Total	30	63	11	60	11	12	

## RESULTS

### *Quantitative Results*

CACA provided the researcher with useful information to explore common structural errors EFL participants make while writing an informative essay. The findings indicated that before the intervention, the written texts produced by the participants presented a high number of issues in different aspects of writing. For instance, due to lack of knowledge and sufficient reading regarding where to put a full stop, one of the participants in this study could only create a total number of five sentences in his five-paragraph essay in the pre-test. A small part of his writing vertically tagged is illustrated in Table 7.

As seen in Table 7, punctuation was weakly used by the writer particularly when a comma (120) was wrongly replaced by a full stop. Instead of ending the first sentence

with a dot, the author used a comma, which indicated that the sentence was continuing. However, this serious error was reduced after the participant was required to read the reading passages related to the topic he had already written about. The number of sentences created by him was increased from 6 to 10 after the intervention. The use of a full stop in its right time and place helped the participant make more meaningful sentences. As Watson (2005) claimed, in order to write well, students needed to take a pre-writing step in which they were assisted to brainstorm ideas, learn new words and structures etc. through reading passages. At this point, the integration of reading with writing also became significant as Horning and Kraemer (2013) believed that the real nature of reading is to teach students how to read and what to write. After being aware of the benefits of

reading-writing connection through the pre-writing process, the participant mentioned above could successfully develop his writing skill. As a good sample, two of the sentences produced by him in the post-test are displayed in Table 8.

TABLE 7  
Pre-Test Punctuation Error Sample

0000004 010 Many	00 DT0
0000004 020 people	00 NN0
0000004 030 believe	00 VVB
0000004 040 that	00 CJT
0000004 050 ,	00 PUN
0000004 060 schools	00 NN2
0000004 070 have	00 VHB
0000004 080 many	00 DT0
0000004 090 advantages	00 NN2
0000004 100 and	00 CJC
0000004 110 disadvantages	00 NN2
0000004 120 ,	00 PUN
0000004 130 some	00 DT0
0000004 140 times	00 NN2
0000004 150 the	00 AT0
0000004 160 disadvantages	00 NN2
0000004 170 are	00 VBB
0000004 180 more	00 DT0
0000004 190 than	00 CJS
0000004 200 benefits	00 NN2
0000004 210 ,	00 PUN
0000003 320 so	00 CJS

TABLE 8  
Post-Test Punctuation Error Sample

0000005 332 -----	
0000005 340 Playing	93 [VVG/100] NN1%/0 JJ%/0
0000005 350 a	93 AT1
0000005 360 sport	93 [NN1/100] VV0%/0
0000005 370 gives	03 VVZ
0000005 380 a	93 AT1
0000005 390 teen	93 NN1
0000005 400 the	93 AT
0000005 410 ability	93 NN1
0000005 420 to	97 TO
0000005 430 use	97 VVI
0000005 440 their	93 APPGE
0000005 450 brain	93 [NN1/100] VV0%/0
0000005 460 in	93 [II/99] RP@/1
0000005 470 the	93 AT
0000005 480 better	93 [JJR/99] RRR/0 NN1%/0 VV0%/0
0000005 490 ways	93 NN2
0000005 491 .	03 .
0000005 492 -----	

Or

0000007 302 -----	
0000007 310 In	93 [II/99] RP@/1
0000007 320 my	93 APPGE
0000007 330 opinion	03 NN1
0000007 331 ,	03 ,
0000007 340 they	93 PPHS2
0000007 350 should	93 VM
0000007 360 change	97 VVI
0000007 370 teachers	03 NN2
0000007 371 ,	03 ,
0000007 380 so	93 [CS@/82] RR/18 RG/0
0000007 390 they	93 PPHS2
0000007 400 can	93 [VM/100] VV0%/0 NN1%/0
0000007 410 see	97 VVI
0000007 420 progresses	93 VVZ
0000007 430 on	93 [II/88] RP@/12
0000007 440 students	93 NN2
0000007 441 .	03 .
0000007 442 -----	

(text used: VTGDPostWT3)

TABLE 9  
Subject-Verb Agreement (Pre-Test)

SVA1	SVA2	SVA3	SVA4
Subject: Education	Subject: one of the most important factors	Subject: the child	Subject: not every child
Verb: has	Verb: is	Verb: must be	Verb: has & get

(Source: PreWT1)

TABLE 10  
Subject-Verb Agreement (Post-Test)

SVA1	SVA2
Subject: I	Subject: my school
Verb: like	Verb: has

(Source: PostWT1)

The analysis of Subject-Verb Agreement before and after the intervention is also another benefit from CACA. It revealed that except in one case, no special difference was seen in participants' written texts in accordance with SVA before and after the intervention. The following is a tagged written text produced by one of the participants in the pre-test and post-test.

**Coded Corpus File:** TGDPreWT1

**Sentence Sample No. 1:**

Education\_NN1 has\_VHZ a\_AT0 very\_AV0 important\_AJ0 role\_NN1 in\_PRP every\_AT0 childs\_NN2 role\_NN1 ,\_PUN and\_CJC one\_CRD of\_PRF the\_AT0 most\_AV0 important\_AJ0 factors\_NN2 is\_VBZ that\_CJT the\_AT0 child\_NN1 must\_VM0 be\_VBI happy\_AJ0 about\_

PRP the\_AT0 school\_NN1 and\_CJC goes\_VVZ to\_PRP school\_NN1 with\_PRP love\_NN1 ,\_PUN because\_CJS not\_XX0 every\_AT0 child\_NN1 has\_VHZ the\_AT0 opportunity\_NN1 to\_TO0 go\_VVI to\_PRP a\_AT0 good\_AJ0 school\_NN1 and\_CJC get\_VVI a\_AT0 good\_AJ0 education\_NN1 .\_SENT -----\_PUN

**Coded Corpus File:** TGDPostWT1

**Sentence Sample No. 2:**

I\_PNP like\_VVB our\_DPS teachers\_NN2 ,\_PUN sport\_NN1 fields\_NN2 and\_CJC our\_DPS canteen\_NN1 .\_SENT -----\_PUN But\_CJC my\_DPS school\_NN1 has\_VHZ a\_AT0 lot\_NN1 of\_PRF problems\_NN2 .\_SENT -----\_PUN

As shown in Tables 9 and 10, most subjects were correctly matched with the verbs chosen by the participants in both the pre-test and post-test.

Although the analysis of Subject-Verb Agreement did not indicate any specific change(s) in the participants' writing task after the intervention, it gave this opportunity to the researcher of this study to disclose other syntactical mistakes/errors the participants had made during the pre-test and post-test. One of these mistakes/errors was related to the participants' inability in attributing possession to someone or something. For instance, the participant whose written text in the post-test was coded as PostWT1 did not show the same competency in other grammatical rules of producing an English sentence. Her deficiency in giving possession allowed the researcher to find other mistakes in

her writing. For example, by moving around the phrase "every child's role", the researcher figured out that the participant was probably suffering from lack of vocabulary and knowledge of punctuation rules. The researcher also found that the participant was not strong enough to create concise meaningful sentences. Instead of producing different individual sentences, the participant used several subjects and verbs to write just one long sentence, which was not well constructed. This was more evidence of the participant's inability to (re)unite reading with writing. According to Horning and Kraemer (ibid), more reading leads students to more knowledge of vocabulary and grammar.

In order to check whether these grammatical mistakes had been overcome or even reduced in the written text produced by the same participant after the intervention, the researcher made a comparison between the quality of the sentences in her first writing paper with that of her final written text. The first sentence of her second writing is displayed below.

**Coded Corpus File:** TGDPostWT1

**Sentence Sample No. 1:** -----\_PUN My\_DPS school\_NN1 has\_VHZ a\_AT0 lot\_NN1 of\_PRF things\_NN2 that\_CJT we\_PNP can\_VM0 enjoy\_VVI .\_SENT -----\_PUN I\_PNP like\_VVB our\_DPS teachers\_NN2, \_PUN sport\_NN1 fields\_NN2 and\_CJC our\_DPS canteen\_NN1 .\_SENT -----\_PUN

Taking a closer look, it is extremely obvious that the participant's writing was

considerably developed. Apart from SVA, which remained the same, in her final writing task after the intervention, long non-sense sentences were replaced by a number of short, meaningful sentences. The participant also followed the rules of punctuation. As shown above, the first sentence was separated from the second sentence by a full stop, which was rarely used correctly in her first written text. The correct use of a common noun (NN) between nouns in the second sentence has also increased the validity of this sentence in terms of syntax and semantics.

### *Qualitative Results*

The two semi-structured interviews helped the researcher collect necessary information on participants' attitudes towards writing, reading and the efficacy of connecting reading and writing at the beginning and end of the course. Before the intervention, participants were asked to provide answers to two key questions;

1. *What's your idea about writing?*
2. *Does reading improve writing?*

All the participants found writing a difficult and frustrating activity in class. Actually, it was one of the main reasons that the participants did not show any interest to participate in this study before the researcher described the procedure. Responses suggested by two of the participants are provided below:

Respondent 1A:

Before the intervention, he believed that writing was a very complicated activity

compared with other skills. He said that *"I am sure that people laugh at my writing when they read it."* After being asked to explain the reason for that he stated that, *"I had a serious problem with writing from the beginning of learning this skill, but because I didn't have a good teacher, my writing didn't improve."* He continued that, *"And I myself didn't put any effort to learn writing through the use of other sources like online language learning."* When he was asked whether reading could develop his writing ability, he replied, *"I am not sure but I think it can."*

After the intervention, Respondent 1A stated that his writing had significantly improved. He said he was able to identify and knew the common mistakes and errors that he usually made while writing. The intervention had made him write *'better'*. In addition, he felt that reading had a positive impact on writing. He said he copied some useful phrases and grammatical structures from the reading passages he was given during the intervention, in order to produce his second writing paper which was written *'more properly'*.

Respondent 2M:

Although her writing competence was higher than that of the other participants, she also described writing as a difficult activity to master before she was taught to write using the intervention. She stated that *"When I see a topic that I can't write about, I get stressful and lose my confidence."* She mentioned that *"there is a connection between reading and writing, but I don't know how to connect them together."*

She also pointed out that her English teacher only taught students the principles of writing and she rarely used reading materials in writing class.

However, after the intervention, Respondent 2M's view towards writing changed a little. She stated that she had learnt how to write an essay by connecting reading and writing on the one hand and following the instructions of writing a good essay proposed by the researcher of this study, on the other. According to Respondent 2M, her self-confidence increased after she was exposed to the intervention.

The findings of the first and final interviews also showed that before the participants entered the intervention stage, they reported that they spent very little time reading a book, either in their language or in English. According to them, that was the reason they did not have sufficient knowledge to write about the topic that was assigned to them.

After the intervention, three out of five participants attempted to read about what they wanted to write. They believed that, in this way, they were able to catch a variety of ideas, new words and structures that could help them write satisfactorily.

### **LIMITATIONS**

One of the limitations of this study was the length of time to teach the intervention to the participants. In this study, the intervention took three to four weeks to be taught. However, it can be extended, for example, to one year, if better/more valid

results are expected to be achieved. In doing so, the fear of students' returning to their old and own way of learning i.e. learning autonomously will be decreased. Another issue that should be considered as another limitation of this study is that although there are many other methods to improve students' writing performance, this study only focused on one aspect of reading i.e. integrating reading and writing to develop students' literacy skill as the best technique to teach/learn writing effectively. Further studies might be undertaken in testing other ways such as the use of reading strategies, reading aloud techniques, or reading with fun for students' writing enhancement. This study is also restricted to EFL students from Iran. Future studies can change the context and examine the effects of reading to writing on ESL students from other countries such as Malaysia.

### **DISCUSSION**

There are several features that make this study unique. Firstly, only a few studies have been conducted to investigate the efficacy of the integrated approach (reading and writing) on Iranian EFL learners' writing improvement in writing classes. Therefore, this area needs much more attention. In addition, these studies have not focused on writing problems encountered by Iranian EFL students studying outside Iran, for example, in Malaysia. To the best of the authors' knowledge, no report has been found so far using CACA (Manvender, 2014) to evaluate Iranian EFL written texts in an ESL context.

This computer-based technique enables participants to identify their grammatical errors as well as a wide range of new vocabulary and phrases needed to create a satisfactory piece of writing. This study also addressed the language requirements of Iranian school curricula in which English skills, particularly reading and writing, are frequently taught separately.

Secondly, the results of this study can be also generalised to those students studying in Malaysian schools where writing is still treated as an alien concept (Ghabool, Mariadass, & Kashef, 2012). This study gives students an opportunity to acquire two complicated language learning skills i.e. reading and writing at the same time. The benefits of POS vertical tagging for EFL students' grammar correction was rarely emphasised by previous research studies. This study used vertical tagging of words to check if there are any syntactical differences in participants' written texts after the intervention.

The combination of reading and writing process pedagogy not only assisted students who looked at writing as a process which consists of pre-writing, writing and post-writing (revision), but also taught them how to employ the reading strategy to successfully engage in and master these three phases in writing. Reading needs writing and writing well requires a sufficient amount of reading.

## **CONCLUSION AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS**

According to previous studies, reading and writing are two skills that are closely

and tightly connected to each other (Yoshimura, 2009; Ghorbani *et al.*, 2013). The improvement of one leads to the development of the other. However, there are some students and even teachers who are not conscious of this relationship to facilitate language learning (writing, specifically) yet. Thus, the present study addressed this gap in literature and literacy context by investigating the effect of reading-writing integration on the writing performance of both male and female students studying in a selected international school in Malaysia.

It is hoped that the results of this study confirm the positive efficacy of instruction through reading passages for the enhancement of students' writing ability. It is also predicted that the findings of this study can assist students learning English as a foreign language to enrich their ability to write by employing more reading while composing a text. Students can be encouraged to read more through several intervention strategies such as giving them their favourite topic to read, selecting interesting reading passages for them to read and asking them to integrate reading to writing with the use of a variety of fun activities such as retelling the story etc. Since students mostly deal with writing through their school days, this skill needs to be paid enough attention and should be improved by improving other skills such as comprehension (meaning), word use (vocabulary expansion) and grammatical structures, which can occur by reading the works of other writers. This

study introduced a modern and a quick way of writing evaluation called Computer Assisted Corpus Analysis not only to EFL teachers around the world but also to EFL students to help them become independent evaluators of their own writing. The effect of integrating reading and writing in other skills such as speaking or listening can also be a case study for further research. This study only selected Iranian students studying in a selected international school in Malaysia. Future research can focus on other students such as locals who are studying in a local school in Malaysia. This study only used EFL students studying in secondary school as the sample of the study. Further studies, however, are recommended to investigate the effectiveness of the reading to writing method on other students who are studying in other levels of education such as primary school students or university students. Covering these suggested areas in language and linguistics will certainly promise students a brighter future as they learn a language more effectively.

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## **Appendix A - Interview One**

1. Please talk about your experience of learning English and learning writing.
2. Describe the previous English writing courses that you took.
3. Can you tell me how the writing courses are planned and organised in your country?
4. Is there reading in the writing courses in college?
5. What do you think of that?
6. Is it bad or good?
7. Do you read much in your language?
8. If yes, what do you like to read?
9. Do you read in English?
10. If yes, what do you like to read?
11. If no, why do you not read in English?
12. How do you feel about writing in your language?
13. How do you feel about writing in English?
14. Do you think reading in the course will help you?
15. Do you know how the reading will help you?
16. What are the strongest traits that you have as a writer?
17. What are your weakest traits as a writer?
18. What do you do first when you begin writing about a given topic?
19. Do you revise?
20. If yes, what kind of changes do you make?
21. Do you understand why reading is required in this course?
22. What do you think of this course?

**Appendix B - Final Interview**

1. How do you think your writing has changed during this course?
2. Have your feelings about writing or your attitude toward writing changed? If so, how have these changed?
3. Has this course, the instructor, or your peers helped you in any way to overcome your difficulties with writing?
4. What problems do you think you have as a writer now?
5. Do you think a good writer is a person who reads a lot? If so, what do you think is the connection?
6. Do you think you should read more to help your writing? Please share your thoughts With me.
7. What problems do you have with the idea of using reading to help your writing assignment? In what ways do you think this might work to improve your writing?
8. Please complete the following sentences:
9. Writing a paper is like .....
10. Reading an essay is like .....
11. Why do you think the course has assigned readings?
12. What do you think you have learned from the readings? When you read anything else, do you try to use words, sentence patterns, or other strategies that the writer uses? Please be as specific as you can.
13. What do you think you have learnt from the exercises in the Writer's Reference?
14. Do you think these exercises have helped you write better? In what way?
15. Do you ever analyse your own writing?
16. Do you think you write the same way now as you did three weeks ago?
17. How do you plan to work on your writing in the future?
18. Will you keep your textbooks and handouts of this course for future reference?
19. What advice do you have for future students?
20. Closing- Do you have any other general comments about the use of reading in this writing course related to your progress in writing?

## Appendix C - Consent Letter

**Title:** Enhancing Students' Composition Skills via Incorporation of Reading in the Writing Class

**Involvement:**

**Principal Investigator:** Hadis Habibi, 013-2959929

**Dissertation Director:** Dr. Manvender Kaur Chahal

University Utara Malaysia (UUM)

**Overview:** You are invited to participate in this research study, which I am conducting to fulfil the doctoral degree requirements at University Utara Malaysia (UUM) in Malaysia. The purpose of this form is to give you a written description of the research study so you may decide whether to participate or not. Your participation in this study is 100% voluntary. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

**Risks and benefits:** The study does not include any known risks to the participants. The study primarily aims at increasing the students' awareness towards the reading-writing relationship. It also brings the students' attention to the importance of writing in EFL contexts.

**Compensation:** Not applicable

**Handling discomfort or injury:** Not applicable

**Confidentiality:** The names and samples of the subjects will remain of high priority to the researcher. The names will be disclosed only for showing some results in this study.

**Voluntary participation:** Your participation in this study is voluntary. You do not have to participate in this study if you feel uncomfortable with the study. Actually, you are free to decide not to participate in this study, limit your participation or withdraw at any time. If you decide to withdraw, please inform me. Be assured that the data collected during the study will be disposed of and will never be used for this or by any means. You have the ultimate right to stop during the interview, ask for more clarification or exclude any information you presented.

**Signature:** If you choose to participate, please sign below.

Thank you for your participation.

Name of participant:

Signature of participant:

**Appendix D - UCREL CLAWS5 Tagset**

AJ0	adjective (unmarked) (e.g. GOOD, OLD)
AJC	comparative adjective (e.g. BETTER, OLDER)
AJS	superlative adjective (e.g. BEST, OLDEST)
AT0	article (e.g. THE, A, AN)
AV0	adverb (unmarked) (e.g. OFTEN, WELL, LONGER, FURTHEST)
AVP	adverb particle (e.g. UP, OFF, OUT)
AVQ	WH-adverb (e.g. WHEN, HOW, WHY)
CJC	coordinating conjunction (e.g. AND, OR)
CJS	subordinating conjunction (e.g. ALTHOUGH, WHEN)
CJT	the conjunction THAT
CRD	cardinal numeral (e.g. 3, FIFTY-FIVE, 6609) (excl ONE)
DPS	possessive determiner form (e.g. YOUR, THEIR)
DT0	general determiner (e.g. THESE, SOME)
DTQ	WH-determiner (e.g. WHOSE, WHICH)
EX0	existential THERE
ITJ	interjection or other isolate (e.g. OH, YES, MHM)
NN0	noun (neutral for number) (e.g. AIRCRAFT, DATA)
NN1	singular noun (e.g. PENCIL, GOOSE)
NN2	plural noun (e.g. PENCILS, GEESE)
NP0	proper noun (e.g. LONDON, MICHAEL, MARS)
NULL	the null tag (for items not to be tagged)
ORD	ordinal (e.g. SIXTH, 77TH, LAST)
PNI	indefinite pronoun (e.g. NONE, EVERYTHING)
PNP	personal pronoun (e.g. YOU, THEM, OURS)
PNQ	WH-pronoun (e.g. WHO, WHOEVER)
PNX	reflexive pronoun (e.g. ITSELF, OURSELVES)
POS	the possessive (or genitive morpheme) 'S or ‘
PRF	the preposition OF
PRP	preposition (except for OF) (e.g. FOR, ABOVE, TO)
PUL	punctuation - left bracket (i.e. ( or [ )
PUN	punctuation - general mark (i.e. . ! , ; - ? ... )
PUQ	punctuation - quotation mark (i.e. ` ‘ “ )

PUR	punctuation - right bracket (i.e. ) or ] )
TOO	infinitive marker TO
UNC	“unclassified” items which are not words of the English lexicon
VBB	the “base forms” of the verb “BE” (except the infinitive), i.e. AM, ARE
VBD	past form of the verb “BE”, i.e. WAS, WERE
VBG	-ing form of the verb “BE”, i.e. BEING
VBI	infinitive of the verb “BE”
VBN	past participle of the verb “BE”, i.e. BEEN
VBZ	-s form of the verb “BE”, i.e. IS, ‘S
VDB	base form of the verb “DO” (except the infinitive), i.e.
VDD	past form of the verb “DO”, i.e. DID
VDG	-ing form of the verb “DO”, i.e. DOING
VDI	infinitive of the verb “DO”
VDN	past participle of the verb “DO” i.e. DONE
VDZ	-s form of the verb “DO” i.e. DOES
VHB	base form of the verb “HAVE” (except the infinitive) i.e. HAVE
VHD	past tense form of the verb “HAVE” i.e. HAD, ‘D
VHG	-ing form of the verb “HAVE” i.e. HAVING
VHI	infinitive of the verb “HAVE”
VHN	past participle of the verb “HAVE” i.e. HAD
VHZ	-s form of the verb “HAVE” i.e. HAS, ‘S
VM0	modal auxiliary verb (e.g. CAN, COULD, WILL, ‘LL)
VVB	base form of lexical verb (except the infinitive) (e.g. TAKE, LIVE)
VVD	past tense form of lexical verb (e.g. TOOK, LIVED)
VVG	-ing form of lexical verb (e.g. TAKING, LIVING)
VVI	infinitive of lexical verb
VVN	past participle form of lex. verb (e.g. TAKEN, LIVED)
VVZ	-s form of lexical verb (e.g. TAKES, LIVES)
XX0	the negative NOT or N’T
ZZ0	alphabetical symbol (e.g. A, B, c, d)

(Source: <http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/claws5tags.html>)