A Comparison of the Effects of Reflective Learning Portfolios and Dialogue Journal Writing on Iranian EFL Learners' Accuracy in Writing Performance

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Abstract

This study aimed at comparing the effects of reflective learning portfolio (RLP) and dialogue journal writing (DJW) on the Iranian EFL learners' grammatical accuracy in writing as well as their overall writing performance. 60 Iranian EFL learners between the ages of 17 to 30 who were studying at general English courses were selected based on their performance on the Nelson English Language Test. They were assigned randomly into two experimental groups: DJW and RLP. Each group received 14-sessions of treatment. Two samples of Task 2 of General Module of IELTS were used for the pretests and posttests. Each essay was scored independently by three raters. The final score consisted of the average score of the three raters. The findings revealed that the gains in the RLP group's grammatical accuracy and overall writing performance were significantly better than that of the DJW group. This could have been due to the influence of reflection with support of a mentor or collaborator as well as the efficacy of intentional learning over incidental one and explicit learning over implicit one. The results have some main implications for syllabus designers, material developers, and language teachers.

Keywords: grammatical accuracy, writing performance, dialogue journal, learning portfolio, reflection

1. Introduction

L2 writers usually encounter significant challenges in developing their writing skills (Evans, Hartshorn, McCollum, & Wolfersberger, 2010). As most writing instructors frequently observe and Leki, (1992, as cited in Howrey & Tanner, 2008) stated, the main challenge writing teachers encounter is to see that learners learn from their previous mistakes, and acquire writing fluency as well as accuracy. In spite of the given instructions, learners often show slight or no improvement in their writing. As Howrey & Tanner (2008) argued, learners often do not learn that they need to take serious responsibility for improving their own writing, and often neglect teacher feedback.

The accuracy of L2 writing, according to Evans et al. (2010) may be influenced by a number of variables such as the learning environment, learner differences, and instructional methodologies. Among all the mentioned variables, they pointed to the weaknesses in instructional methodologies which may play a significant role in preventing EFL/ESL learners from maximizing their ability to write accurately.

As Voit (2009) assured, the dialogue journal could provide a social opportunity for great linguistic achievements. On the other hand, according to Zubizarreta (2009), learning portfolio that requires reflection with support and under the guidance of a collaborator and mentor can be helpful for learner's acquisition of language.

1.1 The Significance of the Present Study

The majority of the Iranian EFL learners are unable to produce a piece of writing that is accurate. This is a challenge for not only the students enrolled in English programs, but for many university students as well. As it was argued by Evans et al. (2010), the weaknesses in instructional methodologies can be an important reason for this problem.

As it will be argued below, two techniques of keeping the learning portfolio and DJW are among the techniques that claim to be effective in helping the learners acquire the language skills, and among all the skills and components of the language, they have special focus on improving writing skills. Both techniques try to develop

the reflective practice through social interactions. The primary concern for the researcher in this study was to see how such an opportunity to write reflectively via writing dialogue journals as well as the opportunity for critical reflection and self-assessment of learning under the guidance and with support of a collaborator and mentor via technique of using learning portfolio is effective in helping the learners improve their writing accuracy as well as their grammatical accuracy in writing.

It should be noted that due to the fact that the learning portfolio puts strong emphasis on the reflection and because of the researcher's interest and attention on this point, the term reflective learning portfolio has been used for the technique of the learning portfolio in this study.

1.2 The Base of Dialogue Journal Writing and Reflective Learning Portfolios

Halliday and Hasan (1989) emphasized on learning as *a social process* and believed that there is a strong connection between language and its social context. Halliday's "social-semiotic perspective" (Lingley, 2005) is relevant to various kinds of studies of interaction including the interaction in the DJW [and probably RLP].

Moreover, the above-mentioned techniques are consistent with Lev Vygotsky's "sociocultural theory" which assumes that language develops as a result of social interaction. Vygotsky believed in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). He assured that learning takes place through the learner's participation in completing tasks with a more experienced partner (Kumpulainen & Wray, 2002; Lightbown & Spada, 2006; O'Donoghue & Clarke, 2010).

Furthermore, the RLP has roots in "Constructivism" which, based on Razak and Asmawi (2004) and O'Donoghue & Clarke (2010), has great focus on the context and learning process. Constructivists believe that learning always involves both analyzing and transforming new information (O'Donoghue & Clarke, 2010). Students learn in problem-solving environments that challenge their knowledge and encourage them to reflect on what they know and whether or not their knowledge is accurate and profound enough based on the content of the course (Nelson, 2002). Learners are in charge and control of what, when, and how they learn (Driscoll, 2000 and Hannafin, 1992, both cited in Callele, 2008). As a result, they need to be aware of their own thinking and learning processes (Driscoll, 1994, as cited in Razak & Asmawi, 2004). When learners are in charge and control of their learning (Gilbert, 1989, as cited in Callele, 2008), they take responsibility for the quality of it as well (Driscoll, 2000, as cited in Callele, 2008).

In addition, the DJW and RLP are in line with Merrill Swain's *comprehensible output hypothesis*. Swain (2000, as cited in Lightbown & Spada, 2006) stated that successful second language acquisition depends on learners producing oral or written language. She believed that through collaborative dialogue, which is a cognitive and a social activity, language use mediates language learning.

The concept of reflective practice dates back to John Dewey's notion of reflection (Akbari, 2007; Kocoglu, Akyel, & Ercetin, 2008). Reflection is both an educational outcome and a means to life-long learning. The unique values of reflection need to be realized through educational practices in the learning context (Richards et al., 2008).

Portfolio-based learning, as Elango, Jutti, and Lee (2005) stated, is "an approach firmly rooted in the principles of experiential learning, which is a cyclical process of recording, reviewing/reflecting, and learning from events" (p. 511).

1.3 Dialogue Journal Writing

A dialogue journal, often used as a supplementary activity (Yoshihara, 2008), is a written conversation between a student and teacher who write regularly to each other over a course of study. Students initiate writing. They make decisions about topics, length, style, and format (Peyton, 1993). Thus, the interaction becomes student-generated. The goal is to communicate through writing, not on form (Jones, 1991). Peyton (1993) stated the teacher does not overtly correct errors. Thus, students can write freely, without focusing on form. The teacher's response in the journal is used as a model of correct English usage.

Effective dialogue journal use is a system with three equally important components: "(a) the written communication itself, (b) the dialogic conversation, and (c) the responsive relationship" between a learner and a more competent person in the foreign language (Staton, 1991, p. xvii).

Hiemstra (2002) stated that journal writing is a learning method that can help solve problems about the learner's writing ability. As Jones (1991) believed, improvement of the written forms of language and syntax can be made in at least two ways: First, the willingness to express the thoughts and ideas while taking part in real dialogue may encourage and lead the students to search for the correct use of a grammatical structure, spelling, or meaning of the word. Second, according to Burling (1982) and Krashen (1982) (both cited in Jones, 1991), by

taking part in a communicative act through writing, students may acquire the written linguistic structures unconsciously.

Kreeft (1984) argued that writing dialogue journal provides students with a large number of comprehensible texts to read. As a result, it can help students build fluency in writing.

Previous studies on the DJW have proved its efficacy in improving the writing skill for reluctant writers (Kreeft, 1984; Reid, 1997), limited English proficiency students (Peyton, Staton, Richardson, & Wolfram, 1990), development of writing fluency (McGrail, 1991) and (Holmes and Moulton, 1997), writing quality, reading comprehension, and writing apprehension (Minjong, 1997), developing language functions (Nassaji and Cumming, 2000 as well as Shuy, 1993, as cited in Yoshihara, 2008), decreasing the grammatical errors (Crumley 1998 as well as Peyton 1986, as cited in Mirhosseini, 2009).

1.4 Reflective Learning Portfolio

The learning portfolio is a *flexible* tool that involves learners in a process of continuous *reflection* and *collaboration* which has focus on *selective evidence* of learning. It provides an opportunity for both *improvement* and *assessment* of students' learning (Zubizarreta, 2008). Zubizarreta (2009) pointed out that, "deep reflection – not a learning log – is at the very heart of the learning portfolio" (p. xxv). Learners' reflection on their cognition process is proved as a vital component of education (McCombs 1987; Wolf and Reardon 1996, both cited in Nunes, 2004). Zubizarreta (2009) stated through reflective portfolios, students become involved in self-evaluation and begin to monitor their own progress over time. The learning portfolio can come in different forms such as written text, electronic display, or other creative project (Zubizarreta, 2008). Based on Zubizarreta (2008, 2009), during the process of developing the learning portfolio, there is an interplay among three essential elements of reflection, evidence, and collaboration or mentoring.

The mentor attempts to train or develop the learners' thinking skills and support them in aspects of the process of decision making and learning (Malderez, 2009).

Documentation and evidence of learning in the model require the students to write reflective narrative. In selecting information to be included in the appendix as the concrete evidence of learning, the students and collaborators establish some criteria in the beginning of the work and apply them during the practice of learning portfolio development (Zubizarreta, 2009).

One of the big differences between student assessment portfolios and learning portfolios, based on Zubizarreta (2009), is the learning portfolios' intentional focus on the students' learning – what is "left out of the formula in student [assessment] portfolios" (p. 5). Such learning includes not only learning the content of the lesson but also as Zubizarreta (2009) claimed, through developing the learning portfolio, the learners will gain insights into their own *learning styles*, and also the *strategies* they can adopt to promote their learning. On the other hand, as Cameron et al. (1998, as cited in Davies & Le Mahieu, 2003) claimed, students' self-assessment is one essential component in the process of learning portfolio development which is served to promote learning. In learning portfolio, assessment is not the goal, but one means to achieve the real goal which is effective learning.

Moreover, it should be noted that the student assessment portfolios focus on the product, the finished document; however, learning portfolios focus on both process and the product (Zubizarreta, 2008).

1.5 Research Questions and Hypotheses

Based on the above-mentioned literature, this study addressed the following research questions:

1.   Is there any significant difference between the RLP and DJW in improving Iranian EFL learners' grammatical accuracy in writing?

2.   Is there any significant difference between the RLP and DJW in improving Iranian EFL learners' overall writing performance?

Based on the above questions, the following research hypotheses were formulated:

1.   There is no significant difference between the RLP and DJW in improving Iranian EFL learners' grammatical accuracy in writing.

2.   There is no significant difference between the RLP and DJW in improving Iranian EFL learners' overall writing performance.

2. Methods

2.1 Participants

The participants were 60 Iranian EFL learners between the ages of 17 to 30 who were selected among a total of

121 learners. They were studying at general English courses at Jahad e Daneshgahi of Khaarazmi University in Karaj, Iran. There were 24 women and seven men in the RLP, and 25 women and five men in the DJW group; thus, among 60 participants, there were 48 women and 12 men. They all had already passed eight semesters and were studying at the intermediate level.

2.2 Sampling Procedures

The study was a pretest-posttest as well as a comparison-group one. It was quasi-experimental because the convenience sampling was used based on the participants' performance on the Nelson English Language Test. However, they were randomly assigned into two experimental groups called the RLP and DJW. Thus, there were two independent variables named the RLP and DJW as well as two dependent variables named grammatical accuracy in writing and overall writing performance.

Each of the RLP and DJW groups consisted of 30 participants totaled 60. Both groups were taught by the researcher herself.

2.3 Instrumentation

The test 200 B from Book 2 (Intermediate) of "Nelson English Language Tests" was used for homogenizing the students' general English. No item of the test was excluded; the students answered all 50 items. Based on the authors' recommendation, the test takers needed to answer at least 30 questions correctly to get the pass mark (Fowler & Coe, 1976).

In order to consider the important factors of *content validity, face validity,* and *test comparability* that is one of the important factors of internal validity, two samples of the Task 2 of the General Writing Module of IELTS were used for both pretest and posttest of writing. The exam topics required the participants to present and justify their opinions (See Appendix A). It should be noted that the participants in this study had already experienced writing in argumentative format, so they were familiar with the format of the test. Moreover, due to the fact that the criterion-related validity of the test was important, the researcher has tried to use a test that is comparable to a well-established test of writing.

To evaluate the learners' essays, a modified version of Cohen's (1994) and Jacobs et al.'s (1981) scale was used (as cited in Ghafarian, 2011) (See Appendix B). This scale was used in the study because based on Bacha (2001) and Weigle (2002), analytic scales separate scores which provide the researcher with more useful diagnostic information and a more accurate picture of the individuals' writing ability, and the researcher can identify writers' strengths and weaknesses. As a result, as Becker (2010/2011) assured, the reliability of scoring is improved when analytic rubrics are used.

2.3 Procedure

The participants in both treatment groups named the RLP and DJW had two classes each week. Each class session lasted one hour & 45 minutes. During the study, the students studied the book Top Notch 3 written by Saslow and Ascher (2006). At the beginning of the study, all the participants filled out a questionnaire concerning their personal information (See Appendix C). However, they were assured that their anonymity would be preserved. The participants took the pretest in the second session and the posttest in session 19. Two points should be noted: (1) No student took the tests twice, and (2) The topics of essays were different in pretests and posttests. However, the topics were the same for both experimental groups. The sampling method used in this study was convenience sampling. However, random assignment to groups was used by the researcher. As Mackey and Gass (2005) argued, to assess the feasibility and usefulness of the data collection methods and make the necessary revisions, the whole study was piloted before the beginning of the main study.

In order to prevent the possibility of the researcher's bias and considering the rater reliability, two other raters scored the students' essays. Each essay was scored independently by the three raters. The final score consisted of the average score of the three raters.

2.3.1 Reflective Learning Portfolio

Every session during the term, the RLP group had a break of about 20 minutes at the end of the session. The participants were required to think about that session: what they studied; what they learned; how they learned; how they felt, what surprised them; what concerned them, etc. and filled out reflection questionnaires related to their learning processes (See Appendix D).The questionnaire also included reflections on mistakes produced in written essays and compositions, or in exercises from books and worksheets. The students cooperated with the teacher or their fellow students and tried to solve their problems. To help the students be familiar with writing

reflections, thinking aloud method was used in the beginning of the term. The students were asked to save all their work – worksheets done in class, notes kept after reflection on teacher's feedback to their essays, drafts of their essays, homework and their learning portfolio forms. The treatment in this group also lasted for 14 sessions. What was done (except for the number of treatment sessions) had been suggested by Zubizarreta (2008, 2009) as well as Nunes (2004).

2.3.2 Dialogue Journal Group

Every session the DJW group had a break of about 20 minutes at the end of the class. The participants were required to write to their teacher in their notebooks. The learners decided about topic, length, style, and format (Staton, 1991). After the class, the teacher read what the learner had written and wrote back in their journals. According to Mirhosseini's (2009) suggestion, learners were told not to worry about grammar or spelling, and to focus on expressing their thoughts and feelings freely. On the other hand, Mirhosseini and Peyton (1991) stated that teachers can at times correct written forms in the journals or comment on the communicative aspects of dialogues without inhibiting the dialogue. According to Peyton's (1991) suggestion, the teacher tried to model the correct usage of the error in her responses. In addition, she occasionally addressed the problem areas common to many students separately in class. The treatment lasted for 14 sessions.

3. Data Analyses and Results

3.1 The Normality Tests

In the RLP group, the following tests did not enjoy normal distribution: pretest of grammatical accuracy in writing, posttest of grammatical accuracy in writing, pretest of overall writing performance, and the Nelson Test. Their outcomes were not within the ranges of +/- 1.96. As a result, the data did not enjoy normal distribution (Field, 2009). Pretest of overall writing performance was the only non-normal data in the DJW group. That is why the tests that enjoyed normal distribution were analyzed through the parametric independent t-test, while the other tests which did not meet the assumption of normality were analyzed through the non-parametric test of Mann-Whitney U test.

3.2 The Nelson Test

A Mann-Whitney U test was run to compare the RLP and DJW groups on the Nelson Test in order to prove that both groups enjoyed the same level of general language proficiency prior to the administration of the treatments. Based on the results, it could be concluded that the RLP group (Mdn= 16) did not differ significantly from the DJW group (Mdn= 16.00) on the Nelson Test, ($U = 447$, $z = -.052$, ns, $r = -.006$). Based on these results, it could be concluded that the two groups enjoyed the same level of general language proficiency prior to the main study.

3.3 Pretest of Grammatical Accuracy

A Mann-Whitney U test was run to compare the RLP and DJW groups on the pretest of grammatical accuracy in writing in order to prove that both groups enjoyed the same level of grammatical accuracy prior to the administration of the treatments. Based on the results, it could be concluded that the RLP group (Mdn= 11.67) did not differ significantly from the DJW group (Mdn= 11.67) on the pretest of grammatical accuracy, ($U = 440.50$, $z = -.150$, ns, $r = -.019$). Based on these results, it could be concluded that the two groups enjoyed the same level of grammatical accuracy in writing prior to the main study.

3.4 Pretest of Overall Writing Performance

A Mann-Whitney U test was run to compare the RLP and DJW groups on the pretest of overall writing performance in order to prove that both groups enjoyed the same level of overall writing performance prior to the administration of the treatments. Based on the results, it could be concluded that the RLP group (Mdn= 11.53) did not differ significantly from the DJW group (Mdn= 11.61) on the pretest of overall writing performance, ($U = 431.50$, $z = -.276$, ns, $r = -.035$). Based on these results, it could be concluded that the two groups enjoyed the same level of overall writing performance prior to the main study.

3.5 Inter-rater Reliability Indices

The Cronbach alpha indices were calculated as inter-rater reliability coefficients.

Table 1. Inter-rater reliability indices

Tests	Indices
Pretest of Grammatical Accuracy in Writing	.86
Posttest of Grammatical Accuracy in Writing	.91
Pretest of Overall Writing Performance	.87
Posttest of Overall Writing Performance	.91

As shown in Table 1, the indices ranged from a high of .91 for both the posttest of posttest of grammatical accuracy in writing and overall writing performance to a low of .86 for the pretest of grammatical accuracy.

3.6 The first Research Question

Because the posttest of grammatical accuracy in writing did not meet the assumption of normality, it was analyzed through the non-parametric test of Mann-Whitney U test. The test was run to compare the RLP and DJW groups on the posttest of grammatical accuracy in writing in order to probe the effect of the two types of writing techniques on the improvement of the grammatical accuracy of the students after the administration of the treatments.

Table 2. Mann-Whitney U posttest of grammatical accuracy in writing

Mann-Whitney U	154.000
Wilcoxon W	619.000
Z	-4.695
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

Based on the results displayed in Table 2, it could be concluded that RLP group (*Mdn*= 15) outperformed the DJW group (*Mdn*= 11.67) on the posttest of grammatical accuracy, ($U = 154$, $z = -4.69$, *s*, $r = -.60$). The *p* value associated with this *z* is .000. Based on these results, it could be concluded that the first null-hypothesis as there is not any significant difference between the RLP and DJW in improving the Iranian EFL learners' grammatical accuracy in writing was rejected.

3.7 The Second Research Question

An independent *t*-test was run to compare the mean scores of the RLP and DJW groups on the posttest of overall writing performance in order to probe the effect of the two types of writing techniques on the improvement of the overall writing performance of the students after the administration of the treatments.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics posttest of overall writing performance by groups

Group	N	Mean	SD	SEM
Reflective Learning Portfolio	30	13.8923	.78910	.14407
Dialogue Journal Writing	30	12.9407	.73591	.13436

Based on the results displayed in Table 3, it could be concluded that on average, the RLP group ($M = 13.89$) outperformed the DJW group ($M = 12.94$).

Table 4. Independent *t*-test posttest of overall writing performance by groups

	Levene's Test for equality of variances		*t*-test for equality of means					95% Confidence interval	
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Std. error difference	Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.46	.49	4.83	58	.000	.95	.19	.55	1.34
Equal variances not assumed			4.83	57.72	.000	.95	.19	.55	1.34

As shown in Table 4, the difference between the mean scores of the RLP and DJW groups was significant (*t* (58) = 4.83, *p*< .05); the *p*-value for this *t* was .000 (*Sig* (2-tailed) = .000 < .05); it represented a large-sized effect (*r* = .53). Thus, the null-hypothesis as there is not any significant difference between the RLP and DJW in improving the Iranian EFL learners' overall writing performance was rejected.

It should be noted that, the assumption of homogeneity of variances was met (Levene's *F* = .46, *P* = .49 > .05). That is why the first row of Table 4, "Equal variances assumed" is reported.
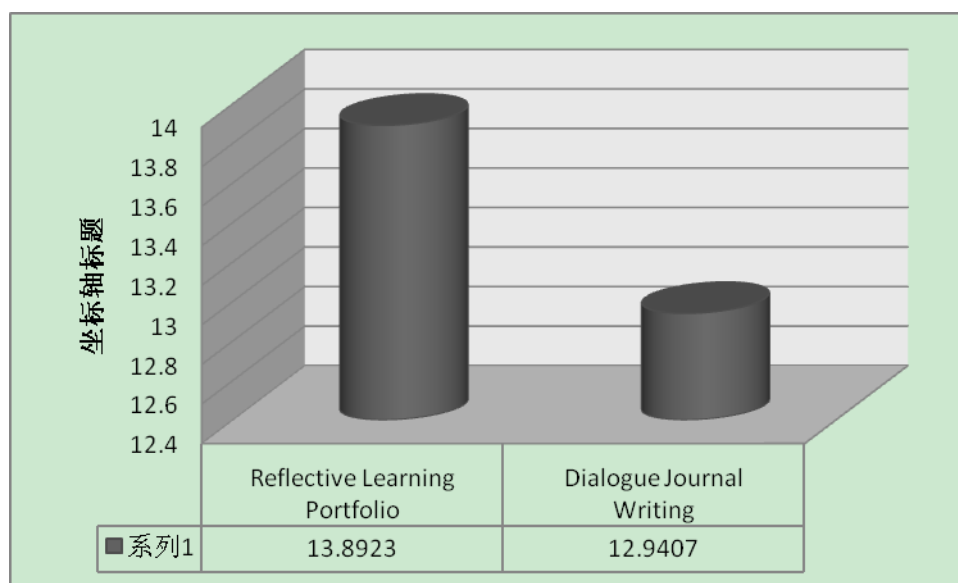

Figure 1. Posttest of overall writing performance

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The research questions in this study were concerned with the significance of differences in the grammatical accuracy as well as overall writing performance between the RLP and DJW groups. The analyses indicated that the RLP group of the EFL Iranian learners outperformed the DJW group in posttests, i.e., the gains in the RLP group's grammatical accuracy in writing as well as their overall writing performance were significantly better than that of the DJW group.

The findings of this study support the scholars' claim that developing learning portfolios promote reflective thinking. This was supported in previous studies such as (Cardona, 2005; Davies & Willis, 2001; Tillema& Smith, 2000; Wade & Yarbrough, 1996; Winsor & Ellefson, 1995; Zubizaretta, 2004; all cited in Kocoglu et al., 2008) as well as Orland-Barak (2005). On the other hand, the efficacy of the RLP technique in this study are in line with Zubizarreta's (2009) claim about the importance of using the power of collaboration and mentoring, as well as the findings of some of the previous studies on the effect of collaboration and collaborative learning on writing such as Liang (2002), Ekawat (2010), and Jafari & Nejad Ansari, (2012) as well as the effect of mentoring (Motallebzadeh, 2011). Consequently, the result of this study regarding the RLP supports the positive effects of reflection with support of a mentor or collaborator. That is, reflection with support of a collaborator could have affected the learners' improvement positively. On the other hand, as it was already explained, the goal of writing dialogue journals is to communicate through writing (Jones, 1991) and as Peyton (1993) stated, the teacher does not overtly correct the student's writing. Consequently, students can write freely, without focusing on form. That is, the teacher's response in the journal can be used as a model of correct English usage. According to some researchers such as Burling (1982) and Krashan (1982) (both cited in Jones, 1991), the act of communicating in writing can help learners acquire the written grammatical structures unconsciously. The researchers of the present study tried to provide the learners with the correct model of the errors committed by the subjects in the responses without referring explicitly to the errors. Thus, the technique of DJW included the concepts of *incidental learning* (Schmidt 1994a, as cited in Hulstijn, 2003) and *implicit learning* (Deykeyser, 2003) and (Schmidt, 2001). On the other hand, literature has supported the importance of attention on learning morphology and syntax (Schmidt, 2001). Van Patten (1994, as cited in Schmidt, 2001) argued that attention is not only necessary but also sufficient for learning L2 structure. Carr and Curran (1994, as cited in Schmidt, 2001, p. 8) assured that "focused attention is required for some types of structural learning", when the goal of learning

is learning complicated or ambiguous structures. The technique of RLP in this study had special focus on attention and reflection. The RLP created awareness of the quality of learning among students; as a result, their attention was focused on their errors and problems, and because of the existence of a collaborator or mentor, they had the opportunity to find the answers to their problems. The findings of this study is in line with several previous studies such as Norris and Ortegra (2000) and (Doughty and Williams, 1998; Long and Robinson, 1998; Spada, 1997, all cited in Deykeyser, 2003) which have already proved the efficacy of some kind of attention to form; such attention can be through explicit teaching of grammar and explicit error correction, or through input enhancement which were available for the participants in the RLP group. Moreover, considering the context of Iran, some previous studies such as Dabaghi (2008) and Khatib and Ghannadi (2011) supported the efficacy of intentional learning over incidental one, and the efficacy of explicit learning over implicit one. Thus, the greater efficacy of RLP in this study could have been due to the greater efficacy of intentional learning over incidental one as well as higher efficiency of explicit learning over implicit one.

Another important factor regarding the DJW should be noticed here. Although the factor of individual differences was not investigated in this study, based on the literature, it can be stated that individual differences could be a factor which affects the effectiveness of the DJW on improving the students' language skills. Some of the previous studies such as, Peyton (1990) and Casanave (1994), (both cited in Farrell, 2005) as well as Farrell's (2005) study revealed that some of the students, but not all improved their sentence accuracy. It is argued in the literature that individual differences cause the learners to be different, for instance, in their noticing abilities; i.e., some learners may notice some qualities of input more than others (Sawyer & Rants, 2001, as cited in Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003). Considering this point, it can be said that some of the participants in this study might have failed to notice the use of the correct forms in their teachers' response to their letters. On the other hand, studies such as (MacIntyre & Noels, 1996; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Schmidt, Jacues, Kassabgy & Boraie, 1997) (all cited in Schmidt, 2001) proved the existence of strong links between motivation and learning strategies, especially cognitive and metacognitive strategies which focus attention on the aspects of the L2. The aptitude factor is also related to attention. Skehan (1998a, as cited in Schmidt, 2001) stated that "the ability to notice what is in input is one of three factors in foreign language aptitude" (p. 10). Moreover, short-term or working memory capacity is related to attention. The 'central executive' component of working memory in the model of Baddley (1986, as cited in Schmidt, 2001) is "explicitly related to attention and responsible for controlling the flow of information into working memory" (p. 10). As a result, the results of this study regarding the using of the DJW might have been due to the individual differences, i.e., only learners with certain type of characteristics may benefit from the DJW and improve their writing fluency and grammatical complexity of their writing.

The third factor which should be noted regarding the using of the DJW is the context of Iran which is a context of EFL. The point is that although vast body of literature on the use of journals in ESL settings has concluded that the DJW improves linguistic and writing ability, some of the studies in Japan, such as Casanave's (1994, as cited in Yoshihara, 2008) and Duppenthaler (2004) revealed that most of the students did not demonstrate considerable improvements in linguistic and writing ability. As the Iranian English learners study in an EFL context, the result of this study concerning the using of the DJW could suggest the existence of differences in the efficacy of the DJW on improving the students' linguistic and writing ability between the EFL and ESL contexts. This difference might be due to the lack of sufficient exposure to L2 in the context of the EFL. Therefore, the findings of this study regarding the grammatical accuracy are in line with Yoshihara's (2008) suggestion which pointed that more research into the DJW needs to be carried out to "deepen our understanding of its effects and whether or not it is equally effective in ESL and EFL contexts" (p. 4).

Based on the above-mentioned discussion, it can be concluded that the greater efficacy of intentional learning over incidental one as well as higher efficiency of explicit learning over implicit one could have caused the RLP technique to be more effective than the DJW in improving the participants' grammatical accuracy in writing as well as their overall writing performance. On the other hand, the factor of individual differences might have caused the DJW to be less effective than the RLP. Finally, learners in the ESL contexts may indicate different results regarding the using of the DJW than the students in the EFL contexts, and such a difference might be due to the lack of exposure to L2 out of the context of classrooms.

5. Implications

Syllabus designers and material developers can gain insights from the results of this study. Learning portfolio can be included in syllabus and materials, to enable students to acquire the habit of self-reflection, self-direction, and self-evaluation which are embedded in the portfolio process. Including learning portfolio in the textbooks can help learners enhance their writing skill and probably other skills. University students can benefit from the practice of learning portfolio and develop their writing as well as their ability to think critically through the

power of reflection, collaborative learning, self-assessment, noticing their multiple intelligences, critical thinking, accepting the challenges, noticing the power of writing for promoting learning, and gaining responsibility in the process of their learning.

Second, this study gives L2 teachers the insight that incorporating the learning portfolio into language learning activities can provide them with a better understanding of the learners' preferred learning styles, needs, and difficulties; thus, the teachers can adjust instruction to the students' individual goals, needs, and learning dispositions. Therefore, learning portfolios can provide the teachers with an opportunity to design future instructional strategies, materials and activities that are more meaningful and valuable to the learners, as well as make curricular decisions and choices, which will improve learners' motivation and involvement in class.

Third, the findings of this study might be applicable to the teaching and learning of the other language skills and language components. However, many investigations need to be done to support these implications.

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Appendix A: Pretest Topic

> You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.
> Write about the following topic:
> ***Using a computer every day can have more negative than positive effects on the children.***
> ***Do you agree or disagree?***
> Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.
> Write at least 250 words.

Taken from http://www.ielts-exam.net/IELTS-WritingSamples/IELTS_Sample_Writing_General_Task_2_1.pdf

Posttest Topic

> You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.
> Write about the following topic:
> ***In Britain, when someone gets old they often go to live in a home with other old people where there are nurses to look after them. Sometimes the government has to pay for this care. What's your idea about this custom? Who do you think should pay for this care, the government or the family?***
> Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.
> Write at least 250 words.

Taken from http://www.ielts.org/pdf/115030_General_Training_Writing_sample_task_-_Task_2.pdf

Appendix B: A Modified Version of Cohen's (1994) and Jacobs, Zinkgraf, Wormuth, Hartfiel, and Hughey's (1981)

Analytic Scoring Scale

Level \\ Criteria	5 Advanced-High	4 Advanced-Low	3 Intermediate-High	2 Intermediate-Low	1 Novice
Content * Logical Development of ideas * Main ideas, supporting ideas, and examples	Effectively addresses the topic and task, using clearly appropriate explanations, examples, and details	Addresses the topic and task with using appropriate explanations, examples, and details	Addresses the topic and task using somewhat developed explanations and details	Limited development in response to the topic and task using inappropriate explanations, examples and details	Questionable responsiveness to the topic and task with using no detail or irrelevant explanations
Organization * The sequence of introduction, body, and conclusion *Use of cohesive devices	Well organized and cohesive devices effectively used	Fairly well organized and cohesive devices adequately used	Loosely organized and incomplete sequencing; cohesive devices may be absent or misused.	Ideas are disconnected and lack of logical sequencing; inadequate order of ideas	No organization and no use of cohesive devices
Language in use * choice of vocabulary *Register	Appropriate choice of words and use of idioms	Relatively appropriate choice of words and use of idioms	Adequate choice of words but some misuse of vocabulary or idioms	Limited range of vocabulary, confused use of words and idioms	Very limited vocabulary, very poor knowledge of idioms
Grammar *Sentence-level structure	No errors, full control of syntactic variety	Almost no errors, good control of syntactic variety	Some errors, fair control of syntactic variety	Many errors, poor control of syntactic variety	Severe and persistent errors, no control of syntactic variety
Mechanics *Punctuation *Spelling *Capitalization *Indentation	Mastery of spelling and punctuation	Few errors in spelling and punctuation	Fair number of spelling and punctuation errors	Frequent errors in spelling and punctuation	No control over spelling and punctuation

Appendix C: Biodata Information

Please complete the following information sheet. The information will be used only as background information for the present research study and will be kept strictly confidential.

1. Name …………………………………

2. Age …………………………………

3. Grade …………………………………

4. Where and how long have you studied English? (Check the following.)

Elementary School	………………… years
Junior High school	………………… years
High school	………………… years
University	………………… years
Institutions	………………… years

5. Have you ever traveled to or lived in an English-speaking country?

a) Where? (Please specify) ……………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………………………

b) For how long? (Please specify) …………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………………………

Thank you for your cooperation

Appendix D: RLP Questionnaire

Name: **Date:**   **Session:**

► Don't worry if your answers to these questions overlap or if you feel one question has already been answered in your response to an earlier question. Do try and write something, however brief, in response to each question. Even noting that nothing surprised you or that there were no high or low emotional moments in your learning tells you something about yourself as a learner and the conditions under which you learn.

1. What have I learned? (Grammar, Vocabulary, Discourse strategies, etc.) What can I do now?

2. How did I feel in the class?

3. What have I learned about myself as a learner?

4. What activities did I like best, and what activities did I like least?

5. What learning tasks did I respond to most easily?

6. What learning tasks gave me the greatest difficulties?

7. What problems do I still have regarding the learning activities or the skills? Why do these problems exist? What should I do to solve them?

8. What questions do I need to ask my teacher or my classmates?

9. Do I feel satisfied with myself regarding my learning? Why / Why not?