

The Impact of Guided Writing Practice on the Speaking Proficiency and Attitude of EFL Elementary Learners

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Abstract

Writing and speaking are the productive skills of a language and share similar components. However, there has been little attempt to investigate the impact of writing practice on the speaking proficiency of the learners. The present study using a pretest-posttest controlled group design in a quasi-experimental approach investigated the effect of guided writing practice on the speaking proficiency of Iranian EFL students. Two elementary intact classes which were classified based on the institute's placement test were selected for the study. The homogeneity of the learners was checked through Key English Test (2007) as the pretest of the study, and the classes were randomly assigned into the experimental group (n=26) and the comparison group (n=26). The experimental group was provided with 10 guided writing worksheets in the last 15 to 20 minutes of the class, whereas the comparison group went through the procedure of a typical institute class in which they worked on workbook exercises during the mentioned time. The quantitative analysis of the posttest using an independent samples t-test indicated that not only writing proficiency, but also the speaking proficiency of the experimental group had significantly improved. Moreover, at the end of the term a semi-structured interview sought the experimental group learners' attitudes toward the role of writing practice in improving their speaking skill. The content analysis of the interview transcripts revealed that the learners held positive attitudes toward the guided writing worksheets at the end of the term, though they did not have the same attitude at the beginning.

Keywords: guided writing, writing proficiency, speaking proficiency, EFL elementary learners, attitudes

1.Introduction

Since acquiring a new language necessarily involves developing the four primary skills of listening, reading, speaking and writing, a good way of teaching a target language is practicing the four modalities in varying degrees and combinations (Oxford, 1990). According to Jordan (1997), in learning a second language it is emphasized that all the language skills should be worked on simultaneously and focusing on one skill should not interrupt learning the other skills. The language learning skills have been divided into two major groups including receptive (listening and reading) and productive (writing and speaking) skills. Investigating the interrelation between the components of skills in each group as well as their mutual effect can lead to the improvement of their actual application in practical teaching processes. This study mainly concentrated on the productive skills and the one-directional effect of writing practice on the speaking proficiency was examined.

Speaking is defined as the interpersonal function of language through which meaning is produced and transferred (Hughes, 2013) and “writing is a way to produce language you do naturally when you speak” (Meyers, 2005, p. 2). Hinkel (2013) states that in order to improve writing skill students need to acquire a proper level of linguistic foundations to enable them to master a range of lexical and grammatical skills required for writing development. As Silva (1990) remarks, writing generally follows a standardized form of grammar, structure, and vocabulary which is inseparable from the structure of spoken sentences. Consequently, writing practice can maximize students’ conscious awareness of the sentence structures while speaking and enhance their speaking proficiency. El-Koumy (1998) conducted a study investigating the effect of dialogue journal writing on EFL students’ speaking proficiency, in which the results indicated the significant performance of the experimental group. He adds that several studies have dealt with writing skill from different points of view but not considering it as a means of speaking proficiency enhancement. The relationship between writing and speaking has been studied considering the similar syntactic patterns in writing and speaking (Cleland & Pickering, 2006). In addition, Zhu (2007) indicated that students with high proficiency

write and speak better than the ones with low language proficiency. Concerning the existing relationship, the present study aimed to investigate the influence of guided writing practice on speaking proficiency of elementary level students as well as their attitudes toward the writing practice through the following questions:

1. Is there any significant difference in EFL elementary students' speaking proficiency who practice guided writing and those who do not?
2. What are the students' attitudes toward learning speaking through the practice of guided writing?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Second language writing

“Writing is an indispensable tool for learning and communicating. We use writing as a medium to gather, preserve and transmit information” (Graham, MacArthur, & Fitzgerald, 2013, p. 5). As the result of different changes in viewpoints toward writing practice and its important role for second language learning, various pedagogical approaches are proposed by different researchers (Matsuda, 2003), as well as a number of theories to support teachers' actual teaching and understanding of L2 writing. The theories are seen as parts of a jigsaw and the purpose of a new theory is not to replace the old one but to act as a complement (Hyland, 2003). Matsuda (2003) points out that the approaches include writing as sentence-level structure, writing as discourse-level structure, writing as a process, and writing as language use in context. However, the classification given by Hyland (2003) consists of some more aspects including focus on language structure, text function, content (themes and topics), creative expression, composing processes and genres and contexts of writing.

The classifications can indicate that guided writing is incorporated into the first stage, writing as sentence-level structure. At this stage writing is considered as a product that focuses on text units, vocabulary choices, grammatical features, content, organization and cohesive devices (Hyland, 2003). An adept teacher needs to be able to teach sentence structures such as grammar, punctuation, capitalization, etc., and teaching these skills can

facilitate mastering the sentence constructions in addition to enhancing the quality of the whole text (Graham et al., 2013).

Matsuda (2003) believes that controlled composition was likewise proposed at the first stage and Pincas (1962) emphasizes the importance of controlled and guided composition in the same stage in order to prevent errors occurring due to L1 to L2 conversion. Controlled writing was created out of behavioral and habit formation theory of learning, in which the focus was on the sentence level development through substitution exercises (Matsuda, 2003, p. 19) that can eliminate the probability of making mistakes (Pincas, 1982). Above all, Hyland (2003) explains teaching writing skill in four distinctive stages. The first stage called familiarization addresses teaching some grammatical structures and words. Through the second stage which is controlled writing, learners perform sentence-based activities. In the third stage writing occurs based on a model text which is called guided writing, and the last stage deals with free writing using the taught patterns. He also believes that task-based writing assignments by doing exercises such as fill in the gaps can be supportive to controlled writing, and they can enhance the students' focus on achieving accuracy and avoiding errors (Pincas, 1982; Matsuda, 2003).

2.2 Interrelation between writing and speaking

Although writing and speaking are two separate skills of language with particular differences, they both belong to the classification of productive skills and due to sharing many similar components they are very much interrelated (Jordan, 1997). Writing seems very difficult for students and learning to write is even more demanding. A teacher needs to provide a suitable environment for learners to encourage them to write and provide them with clear goals and reasonable expectations of what they are going to write (Graham et al., 2013). Weissberg (2006) believes that students can improve their language skills as well as their social interaction skills through fundamental writing practice, since oral and written skills share the same strategies such as topic selection and providing comments.

Writing can facilitate comprehension and recalling of the learning object. (Graham et al., 2013). Nation and Newton (2009) believe that,

written input can be a very influential factor to encourage speaking. In a research on the effect of written input on negotiation, Newton (1995) found out that all the vocabulary used by learners for negotiation are the ones present in their written input. The development of verbal working memory of the oral proficiency can directly influence the quality of the writing assignments (MacArthur et al., 2008).

Regarding the relationship between writing and speaking, Cleland and Pickering (2006) carried out a study in which they tried to investigate the mechanisms used in writing and speaking constructing different syntactic patterns, meanwhile they defined syntactic priming as the tendency of the speaker to repeat previously used syntactic forms. Applying three different experiments with the use of syntactic priming, results showed that the syntactic operation rooted in both spoken and written production were identical. The outcome of their study is in line with MacArthur et al.'s (2008) findings that "There is a significant connection between the sophistication of grammar or syntax in terms of density and embedding used in speech and writing" (p.172).

Zhu (2007) conducted a study in which the relationship between speaking and writing skill in college-level students was taken into consideration. In their study the syntactic maturity of 10 college-level ESL students currently studying in an American university was analyzed both in speaking and writing, and the findings indicated that there is a positive relationship between college-level ESL students' speaking and writing proficiency. The outcome indicated that high proficient students had both better writing and speaking ability than the low proficient ones. The common fundamental cognitive abilities between writing and oral language makes the two very much dependent on each other (MacArthur, Graham, and Fitzgerald 2008).

In general, going through different studies in relation to writing and speaking skills, it was revealed that many researchers have worked on these two skills independently or in some cases concerning their contribution to overall language learning, but none of these studies investigated the mutual relationship between writing and speaking. Overall, theoretically it is believed that there is a significant relationship between writing and speaking

skill (Brown, 2001; Bygate, 1987; Luoma, 2004; Nation & Newton, 2009; Newton, 1995; Rivers, 1981; Zhu, 2007) but experimentally the only and the most relevant study is the one conducted by El-Koumy (1998), in which he considered the effect of dialogue journal writing on the speaking proficiency of the learners. Hence, this study aimed to investigate the impact of guided writing practice on speaking proficiency of EFL elementary learners, which has rarely come to the center of attention in studies conducted by other researchers.

2.3 Attitudes toward learning a second language

Gardner (1985) discussed two main types of learner attitudes: attitudes toward learning a second language and attitudes toward the second language community. He stated that the former can be categorized as an 'educational' type and the latter as a 'social' type of attitude. Tahaineh and Danna (2013) defined attitude as an internal state that influences what learners may like to do including positive/negative or favorable/unfavorable reactions toward something. They believed attitude is an important factor in language growth and destruction that differ in intensity or strength. Holding a positive attitude towards learning a second language can help the learners positively adjust themselves and fit in the context (Karahana, 2007). According to Oller (1979), language mastery is principally dependent on motivation which can be facilitated by attitudes.

Baker (1988) believed that attitudes toward a particular language might be either positive or negative which are likely to have been developed by learners' experiences and may change during the passage of time. Several studies look at attitudes toward learning a second language differently regarding the objectives of the study. In case of writing skill, MacArthur et al. (2008) emphasized that the way students think about their own writing process and their beliefs about writing competence can maximize their final success. In addition, their understanding of their own abilities can influence the time and effort they tend to allocate for a writing assignment. Learners need to realize that their actions and effort can lead to the intended outcome, therefore, to boost their motivation, offering exercises which they feel capable of doing and which they have interest in, can be a significant factor

(Lo & Hyland, 2007). In this study, the semi-structured interview intended to seek the learners' attitude toward writing practice concerning the usefulness, and appropriateness of the writing worksheets as well as the students' understanding of the effect of writing practice on the speaking proficiency.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

This study was conducted in one of the branches of Kish English Language Institute in Iran (Tehran) and participants of the study were two intact classes at this institute consisting of 57 female language learners. The two intact classes were randomly assigned into the experimental (n=28) and the comparison group (n=29) of the study. Though they were assigned to this level based on the institute's strict criteria and placement test, in order to make sure of the homogeneity of the participants in the two groups in regards to their writing and speaking proficiency, which were the main concerns of the study, they all took part in the speaking and writing section of a sample of Cambridge Key English Test (2007). The homogeneity was approved after the test but since two of the students in the experimental group could not catch up with the rest of the class during the term, they were excluded from the analysis. Having an equal sample size, in the final data analysis the control group was also reduced to 26 learners (random exclusion of 3 learners). Eventually, the study was conducted by 52 EFL elementary learners.

3.2 Instrumentation

Two different samples of the Key English Test (KET) writing and speaking sections were employed as the pre-test (2008) and post-test (2012) of the quantitative phase of the study. "Cambridge examinations cover all four language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing. They are designed around four essential qualities: validity, reliability, impact and practicality." (University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations, 2008, p. 2). Although the reliability of KET is approved by the University of Cambridge, the researchers once more checked the reliability of the speaking section, the

main concern of the study, through the parallel speaking tests of the study. The reliability figured out to be 0.92, which indicated the test to be reliable for the current study (Larson-Hall, 2010).

A semi-structured interview was designed by the researchers for the qualitative phase of the study to seek the learners' attitude towards the writing worksheets specifically and the overall influence of writing practice on their speaking proficiency. In addition to these measurement instruments, different guided writing practices were used as the treatment materials of the study.

3.3 Procedure

At the beginning of the term all the learners of both the experimental and the comparison groups took a pretest including the writing and speaking sections of the sample Key English Test (2007). The normality of the distribution of pretest writing scores was checked through One-sample K-S and the findings revealed that test distribution was normal [$Z=0.750$; $p=0.627$]. Therefore, to make sure of the homogeneity of the two groups before the treatment in terms of writing proficiency, an independent samples t-test was conducted. The results indicated that there was no significant difference between the scores of the comparison and the experimental groups [$t(43.110)=0.979$; $p=0.332$], and it was concluded that both groups were homogeneous in terms of their writing proficiency. To compare the speaking pretest scores of the comparison and the experimental group learners, the normality of distribution of pre-test scores was also checked through One-sample K-S [$Z=1.109$; $p=0.171$], and following that another independent samples t-test indicated that there was no significant difference between the scores of the comparison and the experimental group learners [$t(50)=1.147$; $p=0.257$] in terms of their speaking proficiency at the beginning of the term before the treatment. The descriptive statistics of their scores in both writing and speaking pre-test are shown in Tables 1 and 2.

Students of both experimental and comparison groups were at TE5 (Teenager Elementary 5) level and they studied *Pacesetter* elementary books of Oxford University Press. They had students' books including 15 teaching units in addition to three consolidation units, and workbooks consisting of

different types of exercises. Both experimental and comparison groups passed a term of 20 sessions, in which each session took about 90 minutes. In a typical institute class the teacher teaches the student's book for about 70 to 75 minutes, and during the remaining time students can work on the workbook exercises or any extra activities prepared by the teacher to enhance second language learning. The workbook exercises include a variety of activities compatible with vocabulary and grammar structures of the targeted unit.

The comparison group of this study passed a typical institute class and worked on their workbook activities for about 15 to 20 minutes at the end of each session, whereas the experimental group learners were provided with different guided writing activities during the last 15 to 20 minutes at the end of each session. The writing practice consisted of 10 worksheets providing different model texts such as letters, postcards, and personal information writings according to their level of language proficiency. Learners were supposed to produce different texts imitating the given samples and instructions, and meanwhile the teacher supported them with feedback and corrections. It is worth mentioning that the teacher of both comparison and experimental groups was one of the researchers.

At the end of the term both the experimental and the comparison group learners took the writing and speaking section of another sample of the Key English Test (2012) as the posttest of the study. The results of the KET speaking and writing section that investigated the homogeneity of the learners at the beginning of the term also acted as the pre-test of the study. The speaking tests were all recorded, transcribed and scored according to Cambridge ESOL examination rubrics for speaking at the A2 level (elementary). Writing exam results were also scored according to Cambridge ESOL examination rubrics for writing at A2 level. To assure the reliability of the speaking scores, pre-test and post-test transcriptions were rescored by another teacher who was present in the exam sessions as well. In order to check the internal consistency of the two sets of scores by the two raters, Cronbach Alpha coefficient was applied (Dornyei, 2007). Internal consistency of the scores were proved by the Cronbach Alpha 0.841 for the

pre-test scores and 0.958 for the post-test scores respectively. It is necessary to mention that the teacher of all these classes was one of the researchers.

To carry out the qualitative part of the study, after the post-test at the end of the term, students of the experimental group were interviewed to see whether they held positive or negative attitudes toward writing practice and their influence on speaking proficiency. To increase the accuracy of answers of the interview, these interviews were all conducted in the students' mother tongue, which was Persian. The interviews were also recorded and transcribed for content analysis including description, discussion and analysis of the answers. Dornyei (2007) believes that in qualitative studies, content analysis mainly focuses on coding for themes, finding patterns, interpretation of the data and drawing conclusions.

4. Results

4.1 The impact of guided writing practice on the speaking proficiency

After ensuring the normality of the distribution of the participants' writing post-test scores using One-sample K-S [$Z=0.786$; $P=0.567$], to explore the probable improvement in the performance of the learners in their writing proficiency, an independent samples t-test was conducted for the learners' gain scores in the writing pre-test and post-test. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the participants' writing pre-test and gain scores in both groups. Though the effect of guided writing on writing proficiency may seem to be clear, this analysis was required as the pre-requisite to the main intention of the study. In other words, one may correctly claim that the effect of guided writing on speaking proficiency can be explored provided its effect on writing proficiency is proved. But since the effect of guided writing on writing proficiency is proved in other studies (Gibson, 2008; Lan, Hung & Hsu, 2011; Oczkus, 2007) and hence it was not a new point of research, it was only considered as a pre-requisite of the main study, i.e., its effect on the speaking proficiency.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the writing pre-test and gain scores

		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
	Comparison group	26	10	18.5	14.5	2.34
Writing pre-test	Experimental group	26	10	16	13.9	1.53
	Comparison group	26	-0.5	2	0.5	0.67
Writing gain scores	Experimental group	26	0	3	2.09	0.78

The mean of the gain scores of the comparison group was 0.5 and the mean of the gain scores of the experimental group equaled 2.09. Table 2 demonstrates if this difference is significant or not.

Table 2. Independent samples t-test for the writing gain scores

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Gain scores	Equal variances assumed	.7	.3	-7.8	50	.00	-1.5	.2	-2	-1.1
	Equal variances not assumed			-7.8	48.9	.00	-1.5	.2	-2	-1.1

p<0.001

As Levene's test for equality of variances revealed, there was not any significant difference between the variances of the comparison and the experimental groups [$F=0.740$; $p=0.394$]; and the results indicated that there was a significant difference between the performance of learners in the comparison and the experimental group in their writing proficiency at the

end of the term [$t(50) = 7.83; p < 0.001$]. Therefore, it can be concluded that guided writing practice can improve the writing proficiency of the EFL elementary learners significantly.

The second and main stage of analysis dealt with the speaking scores. One-sample K-S revealed the normality of distribution of speaking post-test scores [$Z = 0.804; p = 0.538$]. Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics of pre-test and gain scores of both groups regarding the speaking proficiency.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of speaking pre-test and gain scores

		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Comparison group		26	14.0	17.5	16.1	0.93
Speaking pre-test	Experimental group	26	14.0	17.5	16.4	0.87
	Comparison group	26	-0.5	1.5	0.28	0.49
Speaking gain scores	Experimental group	26	0	4	1.53	0.88

Based on the results, there was a difference between means of the gain scores of the experimental group (1.53) and the comparison group (0.28). Table 4 demonstrates if this difference was significant.

Table 4. Independent samples t-test for the speaking gain scores

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
Gain scores	Equal variances assumed	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Gain scores	Equal variances assumed	4.7	.03	-6.3	50	.00	-1.2	.19	-1.6	-.8
	Equal variances not assumed			-6.3	39.2	.00	-1.2	.19	-1.6	-.8

$p < 0.001$

Based on Levene's test, equality of variances was confirmed [$F=4.702$; $p=0.035$], and the difference of the gain scores was significant [$t(39.24)=6.305$; $p<0.001$]. Therefore, it can be concluded that the experimental group significantly outperformed the comparison group in terms of speaking proficiency.

4.3 Attitudes of the learners toward guided writing practice

To answer the second research question, a semi-structured interview including seven questions was conducted. For this purpose, students of the experimental group who had been provided with different guided writing practice were interviewed at the end of the term after the post-test. It is worth mentioning that two of the students were not available for the interview and a total number of 24 students took part in the interview. All the interviews were recorded, transcribed, read, and analyzed through coding and recoding. The answers to each question were transcribed on different sheets of papers and were read and analyzed several times for the recurring themes. The common themes for each question were classified in detail in a table with their percentage of references (Appendix A). According to Berg (2001), in qualitative content analysis, researchers can use descriptive statistics including presenting proportions and frequency of the themes extracted from the contents. Therefore, the data of qualitative content analysis can be displayed in charts, graphs, matrices and networks (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The overall outcome of the interview indicated that the learners held positive attitudes towards guided writing practice at the end of the term, and they could perceive the influence of writing practice on their speaking proficiency improvement.

5. Discussion

5.1 The impact of guided writing on writing and speaking proficiency

The first and second research questions of this study aimed to investigate the effect of different guided writing activities on the writing and speaking proficiency of EFL elementary students. In other words, the findings of the first research question acted as the prerequisite for the second question which was the main focus of the study. Results of the gain scores indicated

the positive effect of writing practice on both writing and speaking proficiency development of the learners. Based on the results of the study, the authors now believe that guided writing practice is beneficial, not only in support of writing proficiency, but also in speaking enhancement at the elementary levels of language proficiency. Moreover, results of the study lead support to the prior research conducted by El-Koumy (1998) who investigated the effect of dialogue journal writing on EFL students' speaking skill, in which findings indicated that the experimental group provided with dialogue journal writing, significantly outperformed the comparison group in terms of speaking proficiency.

Rivers (1981) believes that, lack of systematic practice in early stages of language learning can cause shortcomings in advanced levels. Since usually elementary level students are frequently encouraged to work on writing freely, they usually express themselves through hybrid phrases and strange patterns of native language. Consequently, Hyland (2003) emphasizes the importance of the four stages of familiarization, controlled writing, guided writing and finally free writing in the process of teaching and practicing writing skill, and he considers this hierarchy as an essential factor for learners' writing improvement. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to the proper way of writing practice from the early stages of language learning in order to prevent fossilization of incorrect forms.

Considering the relationship between writing and speaking, many researchers believe in similarities and differences between these two skills. These comparisons and contrasts include both theoretical (Brown, 2001; Bygate, 1987; Chastain, 1976; Jordan, 1997; Luoma, 2004) and practical aspects (Cleland & Pickering, 2006; El-koumy, 1998; Hyes, 1988; Zhu, 2007).

It is believed that although writing and speaking are two separate skills, they both belong to the productive skills of language and they share some similar components, these two activities are related to each other but with different ways of production (Cleland & Pickering, 2006; Oxford, 1990).

Although many researchers believe in the difference between spoken and written language theoretically, this study as a practical one revealed that writing can be helpful for the improvement of both writing and speaking

proficiency. In other words, the theoretical differences between writing and speaking have not acted as barriers in helping one to the other.

5.2 Attitudes of the learners toward guided writing practice

The second research question focused on the attitudes of the learners toward guided writing practice and the influence of the writing on their speaking proficiency. The results of the semi-structured interviews revealed the type of attitude learners held toward the focus of the study. The first four questions of the interview considered learners' attitudes toward the writing practice (Appendix A). The results indicated that at the end of the term students had positive attitudes toward practicing writing in the class. They found writing enjoyable and helpful in their whole process of language learning.

Although twenty percent of the learners found writing practice helpful and enjoyable from the beginning, in answering the first question of the interview, about sixty-seven percent stated directly that they did not have the same perspective at first. These students mentioned that because of their previous experiences considered writing practice as a tool for filling the time of the class. They did not take the writing practice seriously at the beginning due to the fact that they had never been taught writing seriously in second language learning, but gradually after some sessions of regular writing practice, they found the usefulness of writing practice. Among the twenty-four participants who were interviewed, three of them believed that they could learn whatever they had learned by writing practice through other ways of learning such as memorizing lists of vocabulary, yet they did not deny the positive effect of the worksheets.

Students believed in the usefulness of starting writing practice in the early stages of language learning. As indicated by the answers, two third of the students (75%) preferred to start writing practice at lower levels of learning English, but they emphasized the importance of this writing being guided by various exercises and model texts as well as the constant support of the teacher. As Hyland (2003) states, writing can be controlled by different exercises and guided by model texts in the early stages. On the contrary, one third of the learners (25%), preferred to postpone writing

practice to higher levels, yet they did not know that it could cause them difficulties in higher levels because of not having proper knowledge of writing skills (Bracy 1971; Rivers, 1981).

According to the fourth question of the interview in which students referred to postcard and e-mail writing as their favorite part of writing practice, it can be concluded that being able to write at lower levels can be motivating by itself even without considering its role on speaking, especially nowadays that advances in technology and communication tools have facilitated interaction for people from all around the world with different cultures and languages. Hence, in different fields such as education, business and even personal affairs, the ability to speak and write communicatively gains a very significant amount of attention and importance (Weigle, 2002). She also states that “the ability to write effectively is becoming increasingly important in our global community, and instruction in writing is thus assuming an increasing role in both second and foreign language education” (p. 1).

The answers to the fourth question of the interview indicated that students were motivated enough to continue their writing practice out of the class including writing e-mails and postcards at home. As Hyland (2003) reckons, writing is a useful tool for outside class preparation as well. All teachers agree that only class time is not enough for learning a language, thus writing practice can keep students involved in learning even outside of the classroom.

The fifth question of the interview, helped researchers find out students' preferred type of productive skills in the learning English process. As indicated by the answers, about half of the students (54.16 %) believed in the importance of both writing and speaking practice. They referred to the process of learning their first language and how they required having both writing and speaking skill academically.

A group of 20.83% of the students believed that they could learn more through writing than speaking and what they learned through writing lasted longer. Moreover, Brown (2001) states that writing practice can assist learners to store whatever they learn in their long-term memory including learning vocabularies, grammar and patterns.

Students believed having enough time in writing could help them expand their language structure use more than just repeating some learned structures. According to Weigle (2002), one of the important advantages of writing is that, in comparison with the receptive skills such as reading and listening, writing requires a more exhaustive and thorough knowledge of the grammar of language, which is far more than what is needed for speaking as another productive skill.

Moreover, students believed that while writing they could go back and correct their mistakes as many times as they desired, which they could hardly do while speaking. They also mentioned that while writing, they did not worry about making mistakes since others could not observe their mistakes.

On the contrary, twenty-five percent of the learners preferred speaking practice to writing. They believed that while speaking they could transfer many ideas in less amount of time through the interactions with the teacher and other students. However, this is against what Harklau (2002) found in her study. She discovered that in only speaking classes, there could be only about two or three interactions between the teacher and each student, as well as limited number of interactions between the students themselves during the term. Therefore, only speaking practice cannot provide enough opportunities for the learners to transfer ideas, and writing can fill this gap and prepare opportunities for more interaction between the teacher and students on the paper.

The last question of the interview focused directly on the relationship between writing and speaking. The researchers aimed to find out if students could find out any positive relationship between the guided writing practice and their speaking proficiency. Responses revealed that students considered a positive relationship existed between writing and speaking and they could realize their own progress in both writing and speaking. According to Gardner (1985), attitudes of the learners toward learning the language can very much influence their learning, and as observed in this study, about 80% of the learners held positive attitudes toward learning speaking through guided writing practice.

Considering the relationship between writing and speaking, about half of the students (45.83 %) believed in the influence of writing on speaking. According to Rivers (1981), "Writing is not, then, a skill which can be learned in isolation. It is obvious, that the most effective writing practice, and the most generally useful, will have a close connection with what is being practiced in relation to other skills" (p. 297). Students could consider their own progress while speaking, for instance, some students referred to the use of some learned vocabularies through writings while speaking, as well as learning the correct structure of some sentences through writing practice, which they hardly paid attention to while speaking.

Seven students (29.16%) believed that the influence of writing practice on speaking proficiency depends on the way writing is practiced and the teacher's intention for writing practice. As Matsuda (2003) states, there are different goals for writing practice that differ according to students' needs and the purpose of the teachers. For some teachers it is the language structure which is important, for some the focus is on communication, and some others may focus on both forms and message. The students also believed in the role of feedback provided by the teacher in making writing practice influential. Feedback is a significant point in process-based and learner-centered classrooms where there is an emphasis on assisting students in gaining control over their composing skills (Villamil & Guerrero, 2006).

On the contrary, 16.66% of the students believed in an opposite relationship between writing and speaking in which they mentioned that being a proficient speaker can enable a person to master writing as well. Finally, a group of 8.33% of students mentioned the important role of students' eagerness in learning through writing. Although they were reluctant to practice writing, the scores of these learners indicated to be 15 and 16.5 in the speaking pre-test, and 17 and 18 out of 20 in the speaking post-test. The gain scores of 2 and 1.5 can reveal that although students may not support writing practice, they can affect their speaking proficiency.

6. Conclusion

Results of the present study indicated that guided writing practice can influence both writing and speaking proficiency of the elementary EFL

learners significantly. It can be concluded that, guided writing practice not only can assist writing proficiency, but can also be very influential in enhancing speaking proficiency of elementary learners. Through the results of the speaking post-test, it was revealed that students had improved significantly using correct grammatical structures and vocabulary items. Therefore, the results of the study can encourage the EFL teachers to teach intended grammatical structures through guided writing practice, in order to prevent the fossilization of incorrect structures which may happen through speaking practice. The study can also inform the EFL teachers about the importance of the interrelation between language skills and the significance of including writing practice in the syllabi of language teaching classes even at the elementary levels. In addition, the outcome of the current study can act as a guideline for material developers in designing English course books and emphasize the advantage of including different kinds of guided writing practice for elementary level students.

The qualitative part of the study, which was conducted through an interview at the end of the term, indicated the attitudes of the learners toward guided writing practice. It was revealed that, although learners at the beginning may not have positive attitudes toward writing practice, they finally get accustomed to them as a part of classroom schedule, and they gradually realize the usefulness of writing practice for both speaking and writing skill, even if they are just at elementary level.

The results of the study also pointed out that, elementary students do not like writing freely, and if they are given the opportunity of writing practice, it is essential for them to be guided by an instructor and to be given feedback regularly. Accordingly, the EFL teachers would be informed that, attitudes of the learners would turn into positive after a planned and scheduled training and instruction. Moreover, the outcome of the interview highlighted the role of feedback provision in students' progress and attitudes.

Further studies can also be conducted for adults and higher levels of language proficiency with other types of writing. It is also worth mentioning that the learners of this study were only females and conducting a further study with male students may result into different findings.

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Appendix A.

Interview questions and extracted themes

Questions	Themes	Frequency of answers
1 Did you enjoy writing practices in your classes? Why/Why not?	At the beginning of the term, writings were not enjoyable but gradually they got used to them and they found them interesting.	62.5%
	They liked writing practice and from the beginning, they found them enjoyable.	20.83%
	They did not like writing practice and still they do not like them, but in a way, they thought they were interesting.	16.66%
2 At which level do you think writing practice should be taught?(early/late, lower/higher levels)	From the lower levels and it should be guided writing	75%
	In higher levels when students can write themselves easily	25%
3 How did you find the writing practices in the class? (Helpful or waste of time)	At the beginning, they thought writings were waste of time, but at the end, they found them helpful.	66.66%
	They found them very helpful for learning, from the beginning.	20.83%
	They found them helpful but they think they could use the time in better ways for learning.	12.5%
4 Which kind of these writing activities did you enjoy more? (Letter writing, postcards, personal descriptions, etc.)	Writing postcards and holiday writings were the most interesting ones.	83.33%
	Writing letters were the most interesting as it helped them writing e-mails.	16.66%
5 Which one do you prefer? Writing or speaking practice? Why?	They believed both of them are important in learning another language and they needed both.	54.16%
	They preferred speaking as it needed less time and facility and they were corrected less.	25%

Questions	Themes	Frequency of answers
	They preferred writing as they had more time thinking what to write, they could learn more, and it was only the teacher who could see and correct their mistakes	20.83%
6 Do you think writing practice may help you improve speaking, vice versa, or none?	They believed writing can influence speaking very much and they could use their gained knowledge of writing while speaking	45.83%
	They believed although writing can influence speaking, it depends on how to practice writing.	29.16%
	They believed speaking could influence writing, and if the person be able to speak well, she/he can also write well.	16.66%
	They believed although writing can influence speaking, it depends on the eagerness of the learner to learn through writing.	8.33%