

The Effect of Task Type and Pre-task Planning Condition on the Accuracy of Intermediate EFL Learners' Writing Performance

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Task-based language teaching, which requires learners to transact tasks resembling their real life language needs, demands language learners to perform planning at different stages of their learning. Since various types of tasks can be used in task-based instruction, the present study examined the effect of task types and various participatory structures during pre-task planning on the quality of learners' writing performance, (i.e., accuracy). Towards this end, 120 intermediate EFL students were randomly assigned to 3 experimental groups and one control group. While the experimental groups were subjected to different pre-task planning conditions, (i.e., individual, pair, and group), the control group performed tasks without any planning. During the treatment, they experienced task modeling, presentation and completion. A factorial design was followed in the present study, and the collected data were analyzed through ANOVAs that revealed task type and pre-task planning condition influenced the writing accuracy of the participants in a way that resulted in greater accuracy in the decision-making task in the

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experimental groups, thereby ensuring the effectiveness of the treatment in mitigating the long-standing problem of EFL learners in achieving higher levels of accuracy when a specific task type is concerned.

Keywords: Task Type, Pre-task Planning Condition, Accuracy, Writing Performance, Strategic Planning, Task Complexity

The dissatisfaction with traditional methodologies in language teaching and their failure in bringing about naturalistic language learning in which language is used meaningfully and communicatively resulted in a paradigm shift within language teaching towards the more learner-centered communicative methodologies. One of these developments is known as task-based language teaching, a logical development of communicative language teaching (CLT). Task-based language teaching draws on the use of different tasks in the classroom context as a tool to make language learning a meaningful experience in which an outcome is desired.

Historically speaking, an interest in tasks as potential building blocks of second language instruction came to the scene when researchers turned to tasks as second language acquisition research tools in mid 1980s (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Some of the proponents of task-based language teaching (TBLT) (e.g., Willis, 1996) consider this change to be a logical development of CLT since it draws on several principles forming part of the CLT movement from 1980s. In fact, in TBLT, it is suggested that engaging learners in task work provides a better context for the activation of learning processes than form-focused activities. This appears to ultimately provide better opportunities for language learning. As indicated by Samuda and Madden (cited in Crookes & Gass, 1993), task-based learning comes from the belief that language can be learned by doing when attention is focused on meaning. TBLT, therefore, organizes the learning process by tasks to be performed in the target language not by functions, notions, topics, and structures.

During the last 25 years, SLA researches have widely used various task types as vehicles for eliciting language production,

interaction, negotiation of meaning, processing of input, and focus on form, all of which are considered as ways to foster second language acquisition. In effect, it is suggested to conceive tasks as providing opportunities to achieve particular instructional goals" (Foster & Skehan, 1999, p. 217). In other words, some task choices may have a more effective functioning than others with respect to targeted pedagogic outcomes.

Such claims have been investigated in various language skills. For example, to affirm the effectiveness of teaching EFL learners through task-based procedure, Malmir (2008) investigated the effect of this approach on learners' quality of writing. He found that both experimental narrative and expository groups did significantly better than control narrative and expository groups who did not experience a task-based writing procedure. Then, it appears that the role of task types and planning conditions have not been explored in examining writing qualities of language learners in a foreign language learning context. This crucial issue has been targeted in this study. The following sections elaborate on task type and pre-task planning (or Strategic planning) to provide an understanding of their related issues.

Task Types

Considered as language learning goals, tasks are activities in which a person engages to attain an objective, and which necessitate the use of language (Van den Branden, 2006). In a similar vein, Richards and Renandya (2002) define a task as an activity that learners carry out using their available language resources and leads to a real outcome. Finally, Samuda and Bygate (2008) consider a task as a holistic pedagogical activity that involves language use and has a pragmatic, non-linguistic outcome. Concerning ways of clustering language tasks, Long (1985, cited in Van den Branden, 2006) developed the concept of 'task type' that allows for classifying concrete language tasks based on their common characteristics, although they may differ in detail. Long (1985) argues that while language tasks are specified by verb plus noun phrase (e.g. ordering a pizza), a task type is specified by a verb alone or by combination of a verb and generic

noun phrase (e.g. ordering a meal). Hence, his categorization of task types is only based on the feature 'language action'.

Looking from another perspective, Johnson and Johnson (1999) classify tasks according to the extent to which they are focused on language and communication. Littlewood (cited in Johnson & Johnson, 1999) used the labels 'pre-communicative' and 'communicative' activities to refer to roughly the same distinction between 'skill-getting' and 'skill-using'. Pre-communicative activities include part-skill 'structural' and 'quasi-communicative' activities focusing on the aspects of the target system and their meaning in a way which is clearly language-focused. However, communicative activities are those that include features of communication. Information-gap 'functional communication' activities or 'social interaction' activities within a simulated social context can be considered as examples of communicative activities.

To end with, although different researchers have made different classifications concerning task types, task cognitive complexity, i.e., the degree of a task cognitive involvement, has been considered as the main distinctive factor in determining task types. In this line, Laufer and Hulstijn (2001) proposed their involvement load hypothesis or task-induced involvement stating that word learning and retention depend on the amount of mental effort or involvement a task imposes. Consonant with this hypothesis, it can be predicted that measures of performance would be the highest in the task type which is the most cognitively demanding one.

Pre-task Planning

Ellis (2003) believes that the learners' ability to perform different tasks is dependent on a set of factors involving the methodological procedures that are used to teach a task. These procedures are called task procedures and can increase or decrease the processing burden placed on the learner. These can be classified into pre-task procedures, during task procedures (e.g. limiting the time for performing the task) and post-task procedures (e.g. repeating the task performed). The first group constitutes the

use of pre-task activities—for instance, planning time (i.e., giving students the opportunity to plan before undertaking the task at hand). In effect, as Ellis (2003, p. 348) suggests, pre-task planning is “the process by which learners plan what they are going to say or write before commencing a task”. The focus can be on propositional content, organization of information, or the language choice. It contrasts with online-planning.

Accuracy and Fluency

According to Skehan and Foster (1999), the term accuracy is concerned with the ability to avoid errors in the performance that reflects higher levels of control in the language as well as a conservative orientation. This can be considered as the avoidance of challenging structures that can probably provoke a kind of error. Skehan (1996) suggests that learners need to have a firm belief in norms in a way that their performance would be native-like through its rule-governed nature. On the basis of this assumption, accuracy can be defined as “the extent to which the language produced in performing a task conforms with target language norms” (Ellis, 2003, p. 339). Finally, Skehan (1998) believes that production is generally in need of attention to form, and thus defines accuracy as one of the aspects of production requiring learners to use an interlanguage system of a particular level to produce correct, but possibly limited language.

Practicing accuracy or fluency as the prime target in language pedagogy appears to be a critical issue. As Johnson and Johnson (1999) put it, the distinction between the two is parallel to that of code and communication in SLA. While the emphasis on the former (accuracy/ code) deals with the production of structurally correct L2 instances, the latter (fluency/ communication) focuses on functional appropriateness and the smooth flow of L2. The accuracy/ fluency polarity underlies much formal instruction controversies. In this regard, Ellis’s (1985) middle-of-the-road position considers decisions over formal instruction to be dependent on students’ goals. Having argued that formal instruction is necessary only if the learner’s goal is to participate in discourse requiring careful, conscious planning, Ellis

(1985) suggests that the learner “will need to develop a careful style by acquiring L2 knowledge that is automatic and analyzed” (p. 3). By focusing on forms and not merely on meanings, the automatic production of structurally correct instances of L2 can be made possible. Consequently, this very suggestion can best be accomplished by formal instruction focusing on the L2 code [accuracy]. Hammerly (cited in Johnson & Johnson, 1999) also “advocates a balanced approach to language teaching and learning in which the question of accuracy/ fluency is perceived not as one of kind but degree”. Hammerly favors greater emphasis on the teaching of accuracy in the beginning and intermediate L2 learning stages, and fluency at the more advanced levels.

Planning and Accuracy

There seems to be mixed results concerning the effects of pre-task planning or strategic planning on accuracy. Foster and Skehan (1996) found that both detailed and undetailed planners (i.e., the dyads receiving guidance on how to use the 10 minutes’ planning time for considering the syntax, lexis, content, and organization of what they would say, and the dyads who received no guidance and were simply told to plan respectively) produced fewer errors than the nonplanners on the decision-making task, but only undetailed planners were more accurate on the personal task and, surprisingly, no effect for planning was evident on the narrative task. Observing similar trends for different oral tasks, Skehan and Foster (1997) reported that undetailed planning resulted in greater accuracy on the personal and narrative tasks, but not on the decision-making task. In contrast, Yuan and Ellis (2003), using a general accuracy measure, found no effect for strategic planning in an L2 oral production environment. Furthermore, studying the influences of planning source, Foster and Skehan (1999) reported that accuracy was greatest in ‘teacher-led’ planning condition. However, directing learners’ attention to form as opposed to content during planning did not influence accuracy. In contrast with this finding, Sangarun’s (2001, cited in Ellis, 2003) investigation of three planning conditions-content-focused, form-focused and content/ form-focused- showed that all

conditions assisted accuracy in a task with a low linguistic and cognitive load, but only content-focused planning affected accuracy in the task with a high linguistic and cognitive load.

Having all these controversial findings, one should only consider occasional improvement of grammatical accuracy as a result of strategic planning while performing different pedagogic tasks. However, these mixed results concerning accuracy could not impede one from carrying out similar researches in EFL contexts.

Empirical Studies of Planning and Task Type

As one of the proponents of task-based methodology, Skehan (1998) believes that "the extent to which learners accord importance to the accuracy of their language, expand the complexity of their expression or attend to the fluency of their performance" (p. 188) can be influenced by different aspects of tasks and conditions under which the tasks are carried out. Planning is among the conditions exerting such an influence. Foster and Skehan (1999) found that solitary planners produced language in oral mode that was more complex, more fluent, and based on longer turns. Moreover, teacher-fronted planners produced more accurate language, while group-based planners seemed less fluent. While the no planning group lacked complexity in their language, they often do not differ from the other groups in terms of accuracy when compared to group-based and solitary conditions. They also observed that the Teacher-fronted condition produced the most balanced performance. This group produced clearly the highest level accuracy, and did not do badly on other measures (i.e., achieving good levels of complexity and fluency). On balance, Solitary and Teacher-fronted conditions seem to be the most effective and clearly preferable to the Group-Based and control conditions.

In another study on the effects of planning condition, task structure and gender on different aspects of written performance, Jafari (2006) found that there was a significant difference between planned and no-planned groups in terms of performance measures (i.e., strong and positive effects of planning on all aspects of learners' performance were observed). There was also an

interaction between task structure and planning condition. That is to say, the effects of planning were greater with the personal (i.e., picture-description tasks) and narrative (i.e., narrating stories from some picture strips) tasks than with the decision-making task. In contrast, no interaction was found among task structure, planning condition and gender. Rahmanian (2004) examined the relationship between pre-task and online planning and fluency, accuracy and complexity. He concluded that pre-task planners outperformed other groups in terms of fluency. However, the difference in accuracy and complexity of different planning groups did not reach conventional level of significance and the mean difference was not considerable. Regarding the effect of task type, he found that descriptive tasks, being easier than narrative tasks and freeing up more attentional resources, were not only significantly more accurate, but also more complex.

Philp, Oliver, & Mackey (2006) conducted a research on a study of the impact of different amounts of planning time on children's fluency, accuracy, and complexity of oral production. This study suggested that fluency was not influenced by the amount of planning time. His justification was that children's turns were short without significant pauses or hesitations, and

turn-taking was often in explicit control. Therefore, fluency as measured by the absence of reformulations and restarts did not differ across planning conditions. Tracing accuracy in the learners' performances showed that planning did not orient learners' attention to form, but rather to how they would do the task and what they would say in terms of content. Not surprisingly, the learners' accuracy in production did not change greatly regardless of the amount of time they had to plan. And finally, concerning complexity, the longest amount of planning time led to significantly more complexity. Notwithstanding that complexity relates to learning in that more complex patterns could be regarded as evidence for higher levels of linguistic competence. Last but not the least is the recent research by Seifoori (2009) on the impacts that metacognitive training and levels of planning have on learners' oral performance. She discovered some evidence for the statistically significant effect of metacognitive training on the

participants' ability to plan and produce accurate language under Pre-task planning, online planning, and pre-/online planning conditions. In contrast, regarding complexity, the changes from the pre-test to the post-test were not statistically meaningful.

What is missing in previous studies of the influence of task type and pre-task planning conditions on learners' accuracy was a comparative study of having learners plan in different conditions; namely, no planning, or planning in small groups, in pairs, and individually where an EFL context is concerned. Moreover, a need was felt to double check the learners' levels of accuracy in personal and decision-making tasks when there is an intermediate level of language proficiency.

Objectives of the Present Study

The present study was an attempt to investigate the role that pre-task planning could play in language acquisition of Iranian EFL learner. More specifically, this study aimed at examining the effects that the implementation of different conditions of planning could have on the accuracy of learners' writing. In fact, this study sought to examine the accuracy of EFL learners' writing performance under the conditions of pair, small group and individual pre-task planning while comparing the situation in which learners performed different writing tasks with no planning opportunity. By observing two task types of different levels of cognitive complexity (i.e., personal and decision-making tasks), the present study sought to bridge the gap existing in previous studies concerning the clear effects of pre-task planning on the participants' writing accuracy in the two tasks.

RQ#1. Is there any significant difference among the accuracy of Iranian EFL learners' writing while performing different task types (i.e., personal and decision-making tasks)?

RQ# 2. Is there any significant difference in the writing accuracy of Iranian EFL learners when there is no planning, individual planning, pair planning, or group planning in pre-task conditions?

RQ# 3. Do different participatory structures during pre-task planning (i.e., no planning, individual planning, pair planning, and

group planning) influence the accuracy of Iranian EFL learners' writing while performing personal tasks?

RQ# 4. Do different participatory structures during pre-task planning (i.e., no planning, individual planning, pair planning, and group planning) influence the accuracy of Iranian EFL learners' writing while performing decision-making tasks?

Method

Participants

The participants in the present study were 120 adult undergraduate students enrolling in an "Advanced Writing Course" in an EFL learning context. They were classified into four intact classes at Islamic Azad University of Qom. Their ages ranged between 19 to 25. Three classes were randomly specified as three experimental groups of the study and the fourth group served as the control group that would receive no treatment. The experimental groups, were also randomly assigned to receive planning in groups, pairs or individually.

In order to examine the language proficiency of the participants, the researcher administered a Preliminary English Test (PET) at the onset of the study. The results of a one-way ANOVA showed that they were homogenous with regard to their language proficiency.

Instrumentation

To further ensure homogeneity, a PET proficiency test (Preliminary English Test, 2004), a second level Cambridge ESOL exam for intermediate level learners, was run. However, in order to save time, only reading and writing sections of the test were administered.

In addition, in order to examine the probable effects of different task types on the subjects' performance, following Skehan and Foster (1999), two task types of different levels of complexity including three personal and three decision-making tasks were applied in the present study. The former task type consisted of a picture description task adopted from Heaton (1975) and the latter

task type had learners make a relationship between a set of decisions about people in prompts and a set of reasons why they made the specific choices.

Finally, having worked through the tasks in different planning conditions, the learners submitted a written production of the kind of task presented to them in the form of a paragraph or two. However, the length of their writing was not determined in advance and they were free to write as much as they could.

Task administration procedure

In order to examine the probable effects of different task types on the performances of participants, following Skehan and Foster (1999), two task types including personal and decision-making tasks were employed. In addition, in order to study the effects of planning on learners' written texts, six written productions, (i.e., based on three personal and three decision-making tasks whose scores were analyzed collectively for each task type) were collected of each learner participating in the pre-planned and non-pre-planned conditions. Since previous planning research in speaking contexts (Ojima, 2006) compared pre-planned and non-pre-planned utterances of learners, the participants' writing under these two planning conditions were examined in order to determine any similar or different traits of planning effects on their writing performance. However, in this study, there were four different planning conditions under which the participants were supposed to complete two various kinds of tasks (i.e., three personal tasks and three decision-making tasks).

Having followed the preparation time or "Strategic planning" of Ellis (2005), in the first three conditions, i.e., the experimental ones, the learners were provided with 10 minutes of pre-task planning time after the task had been explained to them and before they began writing. The learners in these three groups, however, were required to plan under three different conditions, i.e., planning individually, in pairs, or in small groups for 10 minutes. One reason why this planning time was used was based on the findings of Tuan and Neomy's (2007) study in which the researchers observed that most of the ideas presented in subjects'

productions were generated during the planning time. In contrast to these three conditions, there was no planning opportunity in condition four and the participants were required to begin the task as soon as it had been explained to them. This condition, therefore, operated as the control group for the study.

The amount of pre-task planning time given to the participants in this study follows the majority of research studies that have investigated this kind of planning and which have allocated between 1 and 10 minutes (Ellis, 2006). According to Skehan (1998), 10 minutes planning time can be considered optimal for witnessing its facilitative effect. During the time, the participants were required to take notes of what they were planning for. In so doing, the teacher was able not only to check that they were involved in planning attentively for the task, but also to examine what they were specifically planning for during the time allotted to this process.

Having collected all the notes written by the participants at the preparation stage, the researcher asked them to complete the task in written form individually not cooperatively. However, during the 30 minutes that they were involved in the task activity, the participants had the opportunity to perform the task while having access to the input data they had received in the form of task prompts in each session, thereby easing the processing of information by reducing the complexity of the tasks presented (Ellis, 2006). After having worked through the tasks in different planning conditions, the learners were expected to write about the kind of task presented in the form of one or two paragraphs. However, the length of the learners' writing was not determined in advance and they were free to write as much as they could.

Accuracy Measure

For the purpose of examining the extent of accuracy of the participants' written production, a reliable measure of accuracy was required. As Foster and Skehan (1996) propose, accuracy is best measured through the proportion of error-free clauses to all clauses (both independent and dependent clauses). The number of error-free clauses is calculated as a percentage of the total number

of clauses (Skehan & Foster, 1999). Therefore, the same measure was employed in the present study the only difference being that, for the purpose of practicality, the researcher calculated the proportion of errors to all clauses produced by the participants that led to comparable results. It is in line with what Tavakoli (2009) did in her work in which the effects of task design was studied. This scoring scheme is also in line with the measure used by Wigglesworth and Storch (2009).

The reason for using clauses (i.e., both independent and dependent clauses) as the basis for measurement is that they are smaller and less prone to error. Moreover, they have been shown to be sensitive in indicating influences upon accuracy (Foster & Skehan, 1996). It can be due to the fact that different types of errors can be more readily noticed and counted in the level of clauses. Accordingly, instead of focusing on accuracy of a particular language subsystem, this generalized measure was applied in this research since global units represent a more realistic measure of accuracy (Skehan & Foster, 1999).

At this stage, two scorers experienced in teaching writing courses were required to rate the papers according to the scoring criteria set in advance. Then, their ratings of thirty percent of the data (i.e., two pretests, two post-tests, and all treatments tasks) that was randomly selected were checked to be highly correlated with each other so that the researcher could examine that an acceptable level of inter-rater reliability (i.e., 0.89) was observed.

Results

Since this research sought to find out the probable effect of task type and participatory structures during pre-task planning on the accuracy of learners' written production, a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine both the main effects of the two independent variables, i.e., task type and planning condition, on learners' performance and the two-way interaction effects resulting in the detection of some combined effects on the participants' writing accuracy.

As the second statistical technique of this study, Post-hoc Scheffe's analysis was applied. According to George and Mallery (2000), this test allows the researcher to make pair-wise comparisons of means and locate the differences when a significant F-value has been observed in the preceding ANOVA.

An additional statistical analysis implemented in this study was a series of one-way ANOVAs to individually examine the writing accuracy of the participants in the four planning conditions when they were involved in personal tasks or decision-making tasks. Since each of the four groups had two different task types to complete, a test of this kind was run for all the groups in order to show which group produced the best mean score in each individual task type.

In sum, what merits attention is that the researcher sought to investigate the effect of task type and pre-task planning condition on the accuracy of intermediate EFL learners' writing performance through the analysis of the learners' accuracy scores in personal and decision-making tasks using a two-way ANOVA and two one-way ANOVAs.

Having previously checked the degree of groups' homogeneity through Analysis of Variance, no statistically significant group differences were found in their PET proficiency scores, $F(3, 97)=0.39$, $p = 0.76$ (see Table 1).

Table 1
Analysis of Variance for PET Scores

Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
PET Scores	63.669	3	21.223	.391	.760

Moreover, in RQ#1, the differences in writing accuracy scores between the personal and decision-making tasks were assessed through a two-way ANOVA (Table 2). The results for the main effect of the task type indicate that there was a statistically significant difference in participants' performance on the two tasks, $F(1, 597) = 99.53$, $p = .00$.

Table 2
Results of a Two-Way ANOVA for Task Type and Condition

<i>Source</i>	<i>Type III Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Partial Eta Squared</i>
Condition	27.64	3	9.21	77.55	.00	.28
Task type	11.82	1	11.82	99.53	.00	.14
Condition * Task type	.27	3	.09	.78	.50	.00

In addition, the inaccuracy mean score for the personal task ($M = 1.16$, $SD = 0.42$) was higher than that for the decision-making task ($M = 0.88$, $SD = 0.38$), suggesting that the participants performed better in the more complex decision-making writing task under different pre-task planning conditions. It can, therefore, be concluded that the task type had an impact on participants' accuracy of writing performance. Therefore, the first null hypothesis to the effect that there was no statistically significant difference among the accuracy of Iranian EFL learners' writing while performing different task types is rejected.

Another finding answering the second research question was related to the main effect of the pre-task planning conditions. The results of the two-way ANOVA (Table 2) showed that there was a statistically significant main effect for the pre-task condition, $F(3, 597) = 77.55$, $p = .00$. The effect size (0.28) was also large enough to generalize the findings of this study to similar contexts.

Furthermore, the Scheffe test was applied to make pairwise comparisons among the accuracy means of different pre-task planning conditions.

Table 3
Scheffe Test for Writing Inaccuracy Scores in Pre-Task Conditions

(I) Condition	(J) Condition	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Small group	Pair	.05	.03	.53	-.04	.15
	Individual	-.25*	.04	.00	-.37	-.14
	No planning	-.47*	.03	.00	-.58	-.36
Pair	Individual	-.31*	.04	.00	-.42	-.20
	No planning	-.53*	.03	.00	-.64	-.42
Individual	No planning	-.21*	.04	.00	-.33	-.09

* $p < .05$

The results of post-hoc Scheffe test (Table 3) indicated that regarding accuracy participants' performance in the pair condition, small group condition, and individual condition respectively were better, as compared with the no-planning condition.

The results of the study indicate that planning condition had an effect on learners' performance in the personal and decision-making tasks. These results also seem to suggest that different pre-task planning conditions could have varying degrees of influence on writing accuracy. Hence, the second null hypothesis is firmly rejected, (i.e., there is a significant difference in the writing accuracy of Iranian EFL learners in no planning, individual planning, pair planning, and group planning pre-task conditions.

With an aim to assess whether learners' overall accuracy scores in the personal writing task were statistically different

across the four planning conditions, a one-way ANOVA was employed.

Table 4

Results of a One-way ANOVA for Personal Writing Inaccuracy Scores Across Pre-Task Conditions

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Eta Squared
Conditions	38.17	3	12.72	12.97	.00	.28

The results (Table 4) showed that there was a statistically significant difference at the $p < .05$ level in the overall inaccuracy scores of the personal writing task for the four pre-task conditions, $F(3, 96) = 12.97$, $p = .00$.

Also, Scheffe post-hoc test revealed a number of statistically significant pairwise comparisons among the planning conditions. As illustrated in Table 5, participants' performance accuracy at the personal task in the small group condition and the pair condition respectively were superior to the no-planning and the individual conditions. Consequently, the third null hypothesis to the effect that there is no significant difference in the writing accuracy of Iranian EFL learners in different pre-task planning conditions in performing personal task is rejected.

Furthermore, in order to examine whether learners' overall inaccuracy scores in the decision-making writing task would be statistically different across the four conditions and answer the last research question, the researcher performed a one-way ANOVA.

Table 5
Scheffe test for Personal Writing Inaccuracy Scores Across Pre-Task Conditions

(I) group	(J) group	Mean Difference (I- J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Small group	Pair	.28	.26	.75	-.45	1.03
	Individual	-.62	.29	.21	-1.45	.20
	No- planning	-1.30*	.28	.00	-2.10	-.50
Pair	Individual	-.91*	.28	.02	-1.72	-.09
	No- planning	-1.59*	.27	.00	-2.37	-.81
Individual						
	No- planning	-.68	.30	.17	-1.54	.17

As shown in Table 6, there was a statistically significant difference in the overall inaccuracy scores of the decision-making task for the four pre-task conditions, $F(3, 96) = 22.83$, $p = .00$ with a high effect size (Eta squared, .41).

Table 6
Results of a One-Way ANOVA for Decision-Making Inaccuracy Scores across Pre-Task Conditions

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Eta Squared
Conditions	47.49	3	15.83	22.83	.00	.41

A posteriori comparisons (Table 7) indicated that the mean scores of the small group condition ($M = 2.10$, $SD = .76$) and the

pair condition ($M = 2.02$, $SD = .62$) were significantly different from those of the individual condition ($M = 3.05$, $SD = .87$) and the no-planning condition ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 1.08$). Therefore, pair and small groups performed better than the individual and no-planning conditions in the decision-making task. Hence, the fourth null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 7

Scheffe Test for Decision-Making Inaccuracy Scores across Pre-Task Conditions

(I) group	(J) group	Mean Difference (I- J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Small group	Pair	.08	.22	.98	-.54	.71
	Individual	-.95*	.24	.00	-1.65	-.25
	No- planning	-1.57*	.23	.00	-2.24	-.90
Pair	Individual	-1.03*	.24	.00	-1.71	-.34
	No- planning	-1.65*	.23	.00	-2.31	-1.00
Individual						
	No- planning	-.62	.25	.11	-1.34	.10

Discussion

On the basis of the results of statistical analyses, it can be realized how task type affects learners' writing accuracy in a way that they have greater accuracy in the cognitively more complex

decision-making tasks. This finding is in accordance with the involvement load hypothesis proposed by Laufer and Hulstijn (2001). They stated that incidental tasks with a higher degree of involvement load are more conducive to the kind of processing that is deemed crucial for learning.

The reason may also lie in Kuiken and Vedder's (2007) argument stating that "task complexity does have an effect on linguistic performance, in the sense that an increase in cognitive task complexity leads to a more accurate text, suggesting that students pay more attention to language form" (p.130). Further, the findings emerging from this study are in line with Guerrero's (2005) study and Skehan and Foster's (1997) work which showed greater accuracy for a task with a clear inherent structure like the decision-making task in the present study.

However, these findings do not seem to support the studies conducted by Rahmanian (2004), Jafari (2006), and Rezazadeh, Tavakoli, & Eslami Rasekh (2011) since they reported low cognitively demanding tasks are more effective in promoting accuracy. Consequently, it appears that this issue demands further exploration in other EFL contexts.

This study also found that not only did pre-task planning condition influence the learners' writing accuracy but also all three experimental groups enjoyed a higher accuracy in the tasks than the control group thereby affirming the effectiveness of pre-task planning. This information is in line with studies of Foster and Skehan (1999), Foster and Skehan (1996), Mofidi (2005), Roohi (2006), and Seifoori (2009) but incongruent with Philip et al.'s (2006) work.

In the final place, considering the effect of participatory structures during pre-task planning in the personal and decision-making tasks separately, it was observed that pair and small group pre-task planners outperformed the individual planners and no planners in both tasks with regard to their degree of writing accuracy. This is somehow inconsistent with Foster and Skehan (1999) reporting more accurate performance for teacher-fronted planners than group and solitary planners. To conclude, the findings of the present research can suggest that pre-task planning

can be more effective when it is carried out in pairs or groups considering the tasks of different complexity levels; i.e., the positive effect of cooperative planning is observed in both personal and decision-making tasks.

Conclusion

The degree of task complexity and the conditions under which the learners preplan for

performing various tasks have vital roles in determining the EFL learners' level of writing accuracy. What the former indicates is that one should select appropriate tasks matching his/her own pedagogical objectives in order to boost learners' performance in specific areas of writing; namely, accuracy, complexity or fluency. However, while the results of the study revealed that decision-making tasks improved the writing accuracy of intermediate EFL learners, the future researchers should take caution in generalizing the findings to other levels of language proficiency since there exists much debate on this controversial issue. Nevertheless, what is clear in a pedagogical sense is that the involvement load hypothesis can allow us to manipulate task features and predict what tasks will be more effective in improving different areas of FL performance.

Besides the above issue, the pre-task planning was found to be an effective writing strategy in raising the accuracy level of foreign language learners. Accordingly, it calls for much attention to the critical role that planning plays in such EFL contexts as in Iran. In fact, pre-task planning is one of the most important stages in the process of writing which has been neglected by many practitioners in the field of writing instruction.

Finally, regarding the superiority of planning in pairs or small groups to individual planning, this study suggests that to promote the writing accuracy of EFL learners, it is better to organize the classes in pairs or small groups in contrast to working individually which has been the traditional, but ineffective, manner of arranging the language classes while ignoring the powerful effect of cooperative learning. Hence, it appears that the findings of the present study can shed light on how teachers can manipulate

the conditions of strategic planning in order to efficiently achieve their desired educational objectives.

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