

Comparison of the Impacts of Writing To Learn and Writing To Communicate Activities on Academic Achievement in TESL Classrooms

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Abstract

The main question of the study is “What are the impacts of Writing To Learn (WTL) and Writing To Communicate (WTC) activities on the academic success of the English learning students?”. This study aims to compare the effects of WTL and WTC activities on academic success of students in English lessons. The study was carried out with 59 (27 male, 32 female) ninth grade high school students in 2015-2016 in Turkey. One of the quantitative designs, quasi-experimental design with nonequivalent control group was used in the study. Experimental group had 30 students (16 female, 14 male) and control group had 29 students (16 female, 13 male). Present Perfect Tense Academic Achievement Test (PPTAAT) and Rubrics developed by the researcher were used as data collection tools in the study. Students in the experiment group wrote “WTL letters” and the control group students wrote “WTC letters” for four weeks as in-class and homework assignments. There are four hypotheses of the research and analyses were made to prove the correctness of them. All of the hypotheses were corrected based on the results. As a result of the study, it was detected that there is a statistically meaningful difference for the benefit of the experimental group. It can be said that writing WTL letter helps students learn English better than writing WTC letter. Teachers can be recommended to change the way they use writing from WTC to WTL.

Keywords: academic achievement, TESOL writing to communicate, writing to learn, WTC, WTL

Cite as: İNCİRCİ, A. (2016) Comparison of the Impacts of Writing To Learn and Writing To Communicate Activities on Academic Achievement in TESL Classrooms. *Arab World English Journal*, 7(3). DOI:<https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol7no3.9>

Introduction

“If there's a book that you want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it.”

Toni Morrison

Learning is like in Morrison's quote; if you do not know what you have learnt or want to see what else you need to add to your new learnings, you need to write them first. Only by writing you can see, so read what is happening in your cognitive world. Writing is described as language and thought written down (Fulwiler, 1987). According to Kawano, Kida, Carvalho & Ávila (2011) and Graham, Harris & Santangelo (2015) writing is a necessary tool for knowledge learning and development, because it enables students to understand and develop new ideas and concepts, construct meaning from different reading sources, and develop critical thinking (Simão, Malpique, Frison & Marques, 2016). The beginning of Writing To Learn movement is based on this idea. It originally started with the Writing Across Curriculum (WAC) Movement in USA in 1870s (Russel, 2002). Eming (1977) states that rather than being a simple tool for representing information, writing is viewed as an interactive learning tool (technology) that incorporates students (Gunel & Yesildag-Hasancebi, 2016). WTL includes writing activities other than compositions, diaries, letters etc. activities as usually used in teaching. WTL activities are mistaken for regular activities (WTC) that are already known and used widely. Regular writing activities are used to improve writing. If the students is writing a letter as a homework, that means s/he is learning the format of the letter; where to write the date, adress etc with the aim of communication. This activity is a WTC activity beacuse s/he is learning and practising “how to write a letter” and trying to deliver a massage. However, if a student is writing a WTL letter, this means s/he is still learning. S/he is trying write the experience of learning process s/he has just had in the classroom. Because in WTL letter s/he is expected to write “how s/he has learnt” the subject. S/he is expected to explain the way s/he has learnt. The difference between WTL and WTC is presented in table 1.

Table 1 *Places of WTL and WTC in Curriculum*

<i>Four Dimensions of Curriculum</i>			
Context	Input	Process	Product
		WTL	WTC

*Four Dimensions of Curriculum are taken from Stufflebeam (2001).

As it is seen in table 1, WTC activities are the product activities. Students learn in the classroom and use “what” they learn as an activitty. On the other hand, WTL learn takes place in the process part of learning. Students' learning process is still going on with the activity. S/he is trying to explain “how” s/he has learnt using, examples, diagrams, tables etc. WTL activities are used in processing the information. WTC activities are used to present the product of information and they are written to communicate (Balgopal & Wallace, 2013).

In his experimental study, Jaafar (2016) finds that not only students understand the lesson deeply but also develop appreciation and learning habits essential to their success in other fields. Ray, Graham, Houston & Harris (2016) carried out a research with middle school teachers from six to nine grades. In their study, they examined the types of writing to learn strategies that middle school teachers in their classrooms and found that 43 different WTL were used by teachers. The kind of the WTL activity may vary based on the time or teacher's preparedness.

Chang, Rao, Stewart, Farley & Li, (2016) made a research in order to explore new ways and used WTL activities. In their study they detected that WTL activities help students to increase the understanding of their experiences, of learning and using new strategies. Traver (2016) emphasizes the importance of peer evaluating and learn from one another. In his study, he says “students are more engaged in the learning process and that the quality of their work improves” when peer reviewed. That is the reason in our study that we used peer review. Lund (2015) interviews with 19 Norwegian EFL teacher-students using WTL activities and writing by hand has much greater impact on their learning which shows superiority of hand writing against keyboard. Because of this reason, handwriting was used in our study. Balgopal & Wallace (2013) detected in their study that WTL is an effective instructional and learning strategy takes place in the process of organizing and articulating ideas, while writing to-communicate which is based on the finished written product. Although there are varieties of research proving that writing can be an effective tool to promote student learning and engagement, WTL activities are still not widely implemented in other school subjects (Reynolds, Thaiss, Katkin, & Thompson, 2012). When all these are gathered, it can be said that examining the effect of WTL in TESL classroom is a necessary study in the field (İncirci, 2016).

The Research Problem

The main problem of our study is “What are the effects of using WTL and WTC activities on the academic success of students in TESL classrooms?”.

Research Hypotheses

The research has four hypotheses. They are:

- 1- Experimental and Control group students get similar (not statistically different) scores from the pre-tests.
- 2- Control group students get statistically higher scores in favor of post-tests.
- 3- Experimental group students get statistically higher scores in favor of post-tests.
- 4- Experimental group students get statistically higher scores than Control group students from the post-tests.

Method

Information about the participants, design of the research, application of the activities (WTL, WTC) and data collection tools are given in this part of the study.

Participants

The study started to be carried out with 60 (28 male, 32 female) ninth grade students in March 2016 in a high school in the northern part of Turkey. One of the male students had a traffic accident and a broken leg, so he was not able to attend the class for four weeks. He could only attend the first lesson. The number of the participants decreased to 59 (27 male, 32 female) ninth grade students. There are six ninth classes in the school the research was carried out. With the aim of determining the experiment and control group classes, the researcher tried to choose two very similar classes based on the number of male and female distribution of students, grade point average and absenteeism average of the students. In experiment group (EG) there are 30 (16 female, 14 male) students with age range of 15,3 years. In the control group (CG) there are 29 (16 female, 13 male) students with the age range of 15,6 years. The average score of last English exam in EG is 67,8 and in CG 64,4 from 100. The average absenteeism in EG is 2,3 days

and in CG 3,03 days. The research was explained to students and asked them if they want to attend it voluntarily or not. All the students accepted to attend the classes voluntarily. Because the students are under the age of 18, the researcher had a meeting with the parents of the students and explained the experiment in details. The researcher also took the written permissions of the parents. 59 students attended all the classes for 28 hours of English classes.

Design of the Research and Application of the Activities

One of the quantitative designs, quasi-experimental design with nonequivalent control group was used in the study. Two groups (EG and CG) attended to the study. The formation of the groups was explained the participants part of the study above. Application process is presented in table 2.

Table 2 Applied Procedure

Groups	Before the Application	During the Application	After the Application
EG	Achievement Test (M1)	Teaching and Application of WTL Activity	Achievement Test (M2)
CG	Achievement Test (M3)	Teaching and Application of WTC Activity	Achievement Test (M4)

*M : Measurement

Before the application of activities (WTL, WTC), the researcher explained the WTL letter to the EG students and also, reminded the WTC letter to the CG students. The students of both groups were informed that their letters will be evaluated using a rubric prepared by the researcher. Two different rubrics were prepared for two groups. Each group was shown only the related rubric. They were informed about the rubric and their questions were answered clearly about the rubrics. The preparation part took two hours of English lesson.

After the preparation part, both groups had pre-tests. The application of pre-tests took two hours of English lessons. Then the researcher taught "Present Perfect Tense (PPT)" using the same method, books, exercises and techniques. Only difference was the in-class and homework writing assignments. The EG was assigned to write WTL letter, whereas CG was assigned to WTC letters. The subject was studied for four weeks and students wrote four letters. The first letter was written as an in-class assignment and the researcher evaluated the letters in the class to show the students how he scores and corrects the letters using rubrics. The second, the third and the fourth letters were given as homework assignments. The last letters were evaluated outside of the classroom and students were informed about it. All the letters were given back to the students after the evaluation and feedback. Two groups were applied the same procedure by the same teacher. Only difference was the kind of writing activity. CG students wrote letters using PPT to explain what they have done through the week. EG students wrote letters explaining how they have learnt PPT and tried to teach the PPT to the students whom they wrote letter to. CG students learned PPT and wrote PPT sentences to communicate. EG students explained how they learnt, draw tables, diagrams, gave examples about the PPT. Two group made the same activity with a totally different aim, so they wrote very different sentences to form the structure of the assignment.

Completing the application part of the research, EG and CG had pos-tests. Pos-test application took two hours of English lesson. The process of the research is shown in table 3.

Table 3 Application Process

Time	Experimental Group	Control Group	Hours of Lessons
1 st	<i>Explanation and Application of Pre Tests</i>		2
2 nd Week	Reading text written in PPT WTL in-class	Reading text written in PPT WTC in-class	6
3 rd Week	Exercises about PPT WTL homework	Exercises about PPT WTC homework	6
4 th Week	Exercises about PPT WTL homework	Exercises about PPT WTC homework	6
5 th Week	Exercises about PPT WTL homework	Exercises about PPT WTC homework	6
6 th Week	<i>Application of Post Tests</i>		2
Total			
6 weeks	4 WTL letters	4 WTC letters	28 hours

As it is seen in the table 3, the research proceeded for six weeks. There are six hours of lesson in a week in the 9th grade schedule. The experimental activity (WTL) and WTC applied four weeks (24 hours of English class). It took two lessons to explain the experimental activity and answer the questions, two lessons for pre-tests and two lessons for post-tests. At total the research took 28 hours of English class. Both EG and CG students wrote four letters each.

Data Collection Tools

Data were collected using PPTAAT and Rubrics. Information about data collection tools' validity and reliability take place in this part of the study.

Achievement Test (PPTAAT)

The achievement test "Present Perfect Tense Academic Achievement Test (PPTAAT)" prepared by the researcher was used as pre and post-tests. Test questions for the PPTAAT were prepared from the Course Book. At total 112 questions were prepared by six English Teachers. 32 questions considered to be of the same quality were removed out based on the views of experts (six English teachers and two Curriculum and two Instruction instructors) and 80 questions were used in the pilot study. In order to ensure construct validity and reliability of the activity, initially, it was performed with 244 students of 10th grade from three different high schools who studied the same subject in the previous year. Content validity is the most important thing in achievement tests to ensure the validity of the test, and this can be achieved with expert opinions (Büyüköztürk, 2014). Expert opinions were received from six English language teachers and two curriculum instructors to ensure the content validity of the test. The final 50 questions selected based on these views, can be stated to be valid. Validity and reliability values are presented in table 4.

Table 4. Validity and Reliability Results of PPTAAT

Number of the Questions	d	p	Cronbach Alpha	Item-total correlation values	Spearman Brown split-half Test (r)
50	0.33	0.52	0.84	0.41-0.64	0.87

As it is shown in table 4, the average difficulty level of the final form was found as 0.52. Considering this rate, it can be stated that; items have balanced distribution. The distinctiveness was found as 0.33, and it can be stated that; the items have a good level of distinctiveness. Total correlation of the elements was detected as varying from 0.41 to 0.64. The Spearman-Brown formula was applied and the value obtained at the end of the analysis was 0.87. Cronbach Alpha value is 0.84. The test can be stated to have a suitable level of distinctiveness as a result of the Cronbach Alpha and item-total correlation values. Considering the values of validity and reliability, it can be detected that the PPTAAT is suitable and ready to use (İncirci & Parmaksız, 2016).

Rubrics

Rubrics were prepared by the researcher based on the views of experts. Experts were six English Teachers, two Turkish Grammar Teachers and two Curriculum Instructors. Two different rubrics were prepared for two different kinds of letters which are WTL and WTC. The experts were divided into two groups. Each group included three English Teachers, one Turkish Grammar Teacher and one Curriculum Instructor. One group prepared rubric for WTL letter and the other for WTC letter. Then, two groups exchanged the rubrics to assess them. The agreement ratio of the experts is about 95% on the rubrics.

Findings and Comments

Findings and comments about the hypotheses of the research take place at this part of the study.

Findings and Comments about the First Hypothesis

PPTAAT was applied as pre-test in order to examine the first hypothesis of the research “Experimental and Control group students get similar (not statistically different) scores from the pre-tests”. The results are presented in table 5.

Table 5 Pre-tests of Groups

Groups	N	M	SD	df	t	p
EG	30	19,57	9,32	57	-,754	0,454
CG	29	21,52	10,54			

As it is seen in table 5, the average score of EG is 19,57 and CG is 21,52. The CG can be said to be more successful than the students in EG, but the difference is not statistically different ($t_{(57)} = -,754$; $p: 0,454 > 0,05$). As a result it can be stated that the academic success of two groups are similar. It can be stated that the first hypothesis of the study is corrected based on the results of the analyses of pre-tests.

Findings and Comments about the Second Hypothesis

PPTAAT was applied as pre and post-tests in order to examine the second hypothesis of the research “Control group students get statistically higher scores in favor of post-tests”. The results are presented in table 6.

Table 6 Paired t test of CG's pre and post-tests

CG Tests	N	M	SD	df	t	p
Pre	29	21,51	10,54	28	-2,071	0,048
Post	29	26,76	8,94			

When table 6 is examined, it can be seen that average score of CG group is 21,51 from the pre-test and 26,76 from the post-tests. The students in CG are more successful in post-tests. But the difference between pre and post-tests are statistically meaningful ($t_{(28)} = -2,071$; $p: 0,048 < 0,05$). It can be said that the second hypothesis of the study is corrected based on the analysis of pre and post-tests of the CG.

Findings and Comments about the Third Hypothesis

PPTAAT was applied as pre and post-tests in order to examine the third hypothesis of the research “Experimental group students get statistically higher scores in favor of post-tests”. The results are presented in table 7.

Table 7 Paired t test of EG's pre and post-tests

EG Tests	N	M	SD	df	t	p
Pre	30	19,56	9,32	29	-8,037	0,000
Post	30	35,30	6,57			

As it is seen in table 7, the average score of EG from the pre-tests is 19,56 and 35,30 from the post-tests. Based on the results it can be said that EG students get statistically higher scores from the post-tests ($t_{(29)} = -8,037$; $p: 0,000 < 0,05$). It is detected that the third hypothesis of the study is corrected based on the analysis of pre and post-tests of the EG.

Findings and Comments about the Fourth Hypothesis

PPTAAT was applied as post-tests in order to examine the fourth hypothesis of the research “Experimental group students get statistically higher scores than Control group students from the post-tests”. The results are presented in table 8.

Table 8 Unpaired t test of post-tests

Groups	N	M	SD	df	t	p
EG	30	35,30	6,57	57	4,193	0,000
CG	29	26,76	8,94			

When table 8 is examined, it is detected that the average score of EG is 35,30 and CG is 26,76 from the post-tests. Considering the results, it can be stated that there is a statistically meaningful difference between the EG and CG post-test results ($t_{(57)} = -4,193$; $p: 0,000 < 0,05$).

The fourth hypothesis of the study is corrected based on the results of the t test analysis of post-tests.

Results and Discussion

Considering the results of the research, the four hypotheses are corrected based on the values obtained. The results are similar in other studies (Jani & Mellinger, 2015; Shultz & Gere, 2015; Tomas & Ritchie, 2015; Comer, Clark & Canelas, 2014; Jordon, 2014; Whitehead & Murphy, 2014; McDermott & Hand, 2013). WTL activities help students learn better than writing WTC activities.

Before the application of writing activities the EG and CG students had the similar success but writing activities helped them to become more successful. Taking into consideration of natural language learning system in order first we listen, then speak, then read and only the write. As all human being experienced writing is the climax of our language learning process (İncirci, 2016). Writing is a challenging activity for both teacher and student (Yangın-Ersanlı, 2013). It needs more than cognition skills. Writers need to use metacognition skills (Raofi, Chan, Mukundan & Rashid, 2014; Ruan, 2014). Writing is a helpful tool to teach students better is TESL classes.

After the application of writing activities, the data showed the usefulness of writing activities. In this study, there is a very important comparison issue: which one is more useful, WTL or WTC? Considering the results of the analyses both writing activities assisted students to have significantly higher scores, whereas comparing the post-tests, it is proven that WTL activity is better than WTC activity in students' academic achievement. There are studies in the literature proving that WTL has positive impact on academic achievement (Bahls, 2012; Reynolds, Thaiss, Katkin, & Thompson, 2012; Smith, 2001). Human brain has to store more than it can remember (Külekcı, 2012), but if the information is written, it can be read repeatedly any time. Writing is also used to filter and shape the experience we have. While shaping the experience, learner adds new information on his previous experiences.

Writing may provide us with a tool to make sense of experience and to clarify our thoughts (Myers & Burnett, 2004). Writing enhances language acquisition as learners experiment with words, sentences ... reinforce the grammar and vocabulary they are learning in class (Bello, 1997). While writing students make organization of ideas into coherent and cohesive form (Gebhard, 2006). Therefore, it can be concluded that WTL activities help students not only remind what s/he has learnt, but also develop their cognitive and metacognitive skills to become a more successful learners (Schunk, Şahin, Demir, Celasun, Kaçkar, Üzümcü, & Şahin, 2011; Ulu, 2001). With this study it is proven that WTL activities are better than WTC activities in terms of academic achievement. There are varieties of WTL activities and teachers may find a suitable activity for any lesson. WTL activities are mistaken for WTC activities, so there needs to be more studies about how teachers and students can use WTL in any field of the academic life. Many teachers need to make fundamental changes in how writing is taught (Graham, Harris & Santangelo, 2015) and used as a teaching/learning tool in TESL classrooms.

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