The Impact of Decision-making Technique on Saudi EFL Learners' Writing Skill

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Abstract

This study was conducted to see the impact of decision-making technique on Saudi EFL learners' writing skill. The aim of this study is to find out a good solution for improving the students' writing. Most of Saudi EFL learners have problems in writing and they are not motivated in writing. This study was applied on 20 students of intermediate school in Saudi. In order to collect data, the researcher used a pre-post-test of writing and a pre-post-questionnaire. After that, the researcher used a particular rubric to analyze students' writing and collected their answers of the questionnaire and compared them. The results showed that the students performed better when they had the chance to make a decision. Decision-making technique makes improvements in EFL learners' writing skills.

Keywords: decision-making technique, Saudi EFL learners, writing skill

INTRODUCTION

There are many techniques that can help Saudi EFL learners to improve their writing. The nature of writing skill itself is not interesting for EFL learners (Hedge, 1991). Decision-making technique is the process of choosing one choice out of two or more choices. "Decision-making is the process of choosing among alternative courses of action, to attain a goal or goals." (Turban et al., 2008). In the process of decision-making, we can use different tools, techniques, and perceptions. If the teachers help the students to work as decision makers, they will be more involved in the learning process. Moreover, the students will be more confident and comfortable about themselves and that may help them to improve their writing.

Most of the Saudi EFL learners do not have the interest and readiness to learn writing skill. Interest and readiness are important in the writing process, so if the students are losing their interest and not ready to learn, they will not be able to receive any information. Saudi EFL learners are weak in writing, because they usually feel bored during writing classes.

This study investigated the impact of decision-making technique on Saudi EFL learners' writing skill. In addition, it investigated Saudi EFL learners' attitudes toward decision-making technique for improving writing.

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This research attempted to answer the following questions.

- What is the impact of decision-making technique on Saudi EFL learners' writing skill?
- What is Saudi EFL learners' attitudes toward decision-making technique for improving writing skill?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The section sheds light on two key concepts which are writing skill and decision-making technique. Also, it contains the previous studies that have been done about decision-making technique.

Writing skill is an important skill in communication. Everyone needs to learn writing to express their messages clearly to the people. Donovan (2017) stated that writing skill is the ability to write sentences and paragraphs in appropriate grammar, spelling and punctuation. Learning second language acquisition need to caver all four skills orderly. Listening with speaking then reading with writing. So, to be able to write you must learn reading before. Writing is the biggest challenge for many students. Therefore, many associations exert their effort to improve English writing (Mourtaga, 2010).

Decision-making is the process of making decisions. All people are decision maker, because all what they do is a result of their decisions. Decision theory have focused on choice, the selection of the best option from a choice set containing two or more options. (Beach ,1993). The information we learn is to help us to understand the circumstances then we can make a good judgment to make decisions about the circumstances. However, not all information is helpful to make a good decision. (Saaty, 2008).

Previous Studies

Several studies had been carried out to investigate the impact of decision-making on EFL learners. Abbasian and Chenabi (2016) conducted a study to examine the effect of jigsaw and decision-making tasks on EFL learners'' listening and speaking. The participants were 75 adult female Iranian EFL learners, and their age was between (20-30). Their language proficiency is intermediate. They were divided into two experimental groups. Both of them were measured before and after the treatment based on the listening and speaking. Group A received decision-making -based listening and speaking instruction, 12 meeting of 45 minutes. Group B received jigsaw-based listening and speaking instruction. Descriptive statistics and multiple inferential were used to analyze the data. The result of this study showed that group B who received jigsaw-based listening and speaking tasks excelled those who were taking decision-making -based listening and speaking instruction.

Another study was conducted by Celis, Milena, and Cárdenas (2014), investigating promoting adolescent EFL students' decision-making through work plans gathered in their portfolios. The aim of this study was to develop the students' decision-making in the induction of collaborative work by using portfolios in English class. The participants of this study were eighth grade students. Their ages ranged between 12 and 15 years old. They got the lowest marks in English course for the first semester. Moreover, participants

have some common characters like the dependence on the teacher and lack of parental support. The study was carried out in a Colombian school in a forbidden area. The tools of this study were: students' portfolios, field notes, semi-structured interviews, and surveys. The data were collected once a week during twelve English classes. The results of this study showed that the students can be independent when they engaged in decision-making practices.

Težak, K. (2015) investigated the creative thinking and decision-making processes in EFL creative writing. The aim of this article was to study decision-making process in EFL creative writing and its connections to students' language learning. The participants of this study were two 3rd-year bachelor English students, at the University of Maribor, Faculty of Arts. They were asked to write a short story in English by using a think-aloud process. The data of this study were transcribed and coded to observe the students' reasons in language use decisions. The result of this study showed that decision-making drove the students to have creativity and made them more interested while writing their own stories. Also, it showed how much they responsible and motivated to approve their creativity in writing.

Another study was done by Kopriva, Emick, Hipolito-Delgado, and Cameron (2007), to examine the impact of improved decision-making on scores for English language learners. This study was conducted on South Carolina for third and fourth grade. They were randomly assigned to various types of test accommodations on a mathematics assessment. The researchers used different types of post-test accommodations depending on mathematics assessment. The result showed that those students who received the appropriate test accommodations (the selection taxonomy for English language learners accommodations; STELLA) had higher test scores than those who received no appropriate test accommodations. The results showed the importance of learners' decision-making accommodations in English language learners.

Zare-Behtash and Etehadi (2016), investigated the impact of decision-making tasks and production tasks on the collocational knowledge. The study was conducted on Iranian EFL learners. The participants were sixty intermediate students, divided into two experimental groups (decision-making and production tasks). The participants in the two groups were given the collocation pre-test to know their existing knowledge of collocation. After being exposed to the treatment, they got post-test to measure the learners' knowledge. The results showed that the production group performed better than decision-making group. That means production tasks were more effective in increasing the collocational knowledge of the participants.

Most of the studies had been conducted to show the effect of decision-making on EFL learners' listening and speaking. Few studies had been carried out for the induction of collaborative work. The present study examined the impact of decision-making on EFL learners' writing skill. This study used pre-post-test like the first previous study. Furthermore, this study used pre-post-questionnaires. Most of the studies had been conducted in different countries, while the present study was conducted in Saudi Arabia-Yanbu Al Sinaiyah. The participants of the previous study were 20-30 years and 12-15 years while the participants of the present study were between 13 to 14 years old.

METHOD

Research Design

The current study is a quantitative research, which includes an experimental group of intermediate students.

Participants

The participants of this study are 15 female students from Om Ayman intermediate school in Yanbu Al Sinaiyah. Their age is between 12 to 14 years. Also, their language proficiency is low.

Instruments

Pre-questionnaires and post-questionnaires

The researcher designed a questionnaire on Likert scale with the 5 possible responses (5= strongly agree, 4= agree, 3= neutral, 2= strongly disagree, 1= disagree). There were five statements. The purpose of using this tool was to know the students' opinion and attitude about decision-making in the writing class before and after the technique. This measured the change of their interest and readiness for writing class.

Pre-test

The researcher gave the students a pre-test by asking them to write five sentences about a particular topic. The purpose of a pre-test was to know the students' level.

Post-test

The researcher gave the students post-test by asking them to choose one of topics and write about it. The purpose a post-test is to find out the impact of decision-making technique on students' writing.

Data Collection Procedure

First, the researcher chose the 15 students as participants from Om Ayman school. Then, the researcher asked the participants to answer the pre-questionnaire. The researcher gave them a pre-test asking them to write about a particular topic. After that, the researcher applied decision-making technique in writing classes. The researcher applied the technique by giving the students multiples choices and they have to decide what they want. For instance, the researcher asked them when they wanted to have writing homework? And asked them to choose the topic they want. Moreover, the researcher gave the participants the chance to choose the day of the post-test. (see Appendix A for the lesson plans) After three weeks, the researcher gave the participants post-test. In the post test, the researcher gave the participants the chance to choose one topic of the followings. The researcher analyzed the results of the pre-test and the post-test to see the differences by using a particular rubric (see Appendix B for rubric). After that, the researcher gave them a post-questionnaire. Finally, the researcher compared the responses of pre-questionnaire and post- questionnaires individually.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the data obtained from pre-post-questionnaires and pre-post-tests are presented and discussed.

Pre-test of writing

The first data collection procedure was a writing pre- test. The researcher gave the participants a pre-test of writing, asked them to write about different ways of communication (see Appendix C for pre-test). After that, the researcher started correcting their answers regarding to the rubric. The whole test was out of ten. Four marks for the mechanisms (punctuation, capitalization and spacing), three marks for spelling and three marks too for grammar.
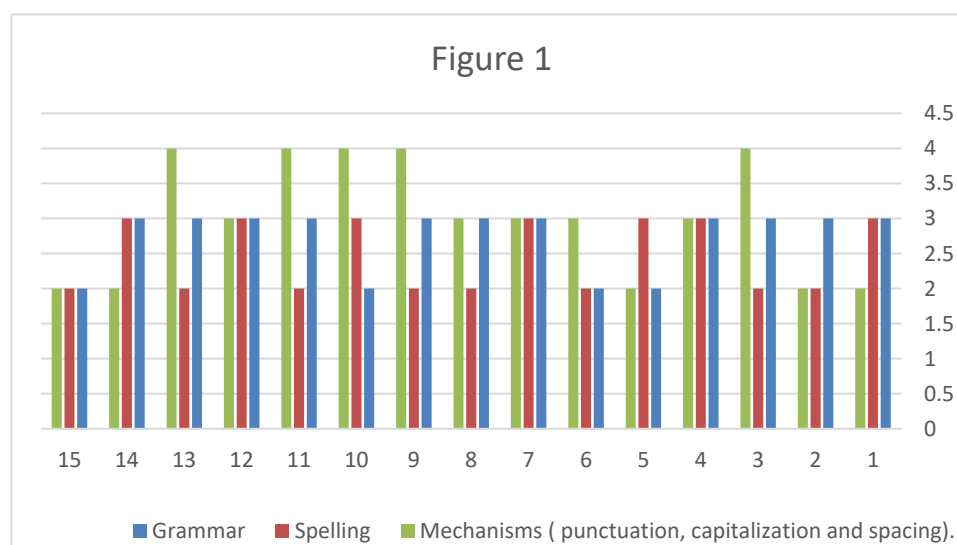

Figure 1. Participants' scores of the pre-test.

This figure shows that ten students scored three out of three in the grammar part. While, five students scored full marks in mechanisms (punctuation, capitalization and spacing). Moreover, most of the participants got two marks out of three in the spelling.

Post-test of writing

After three weeks of applying the decision-making technique, the researcher gave the participants the post-test to see the impact of decision-making technique. This test contained three different options of topics. The participants have to decide which topic they want to write about (see Appendix D for post-test). Then, the researcher the researcher started correcting their answers regarding to the same rubric of the pre-test.
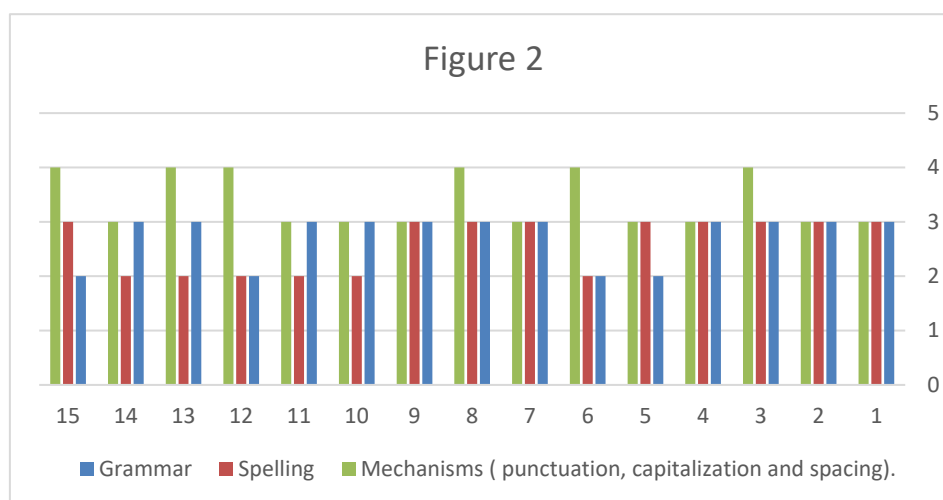
Figure 2. Participants' scores of the post-test.

This figure shows that eleven students scored three out of three in the grammar part. While, six students scored full marks in mechanisms (punctuation, capitalization and spacing) part. Moreover, most of the students scored three out of three in the spelling part. So, the students' level have improved a little bit after decision-making technique. Their mistakes have decreased in all parts.

Table 1. The mean, maximum and minimum scores on the pre and post test

	Pre-test	Post-test
Number of students	15	15
Mean	8.1	8.5
Maximum	9	10
Minimum	6	8

Table 1 shows the differences between the mean, maximum and minimum scores on the pre and post-test. The mean has been increased by 0.4 in the post test. Moreover, six students score nine in the pre-test and it was the highest marks. While, one student scored the full mark and five students scored nine in the post-test. One student scored six in the pre-test and it was the lowest mark. On the other hand, the lowest mark in the post-test was eight and nine students scored it.

Pre-post-questionnaire

The second data collection tool was pre-post-questionnaires. It contained five statements about writing skill. (see Appendix E for questionnaires). The researcher gave the participants pre-questionnaire to check their attitude before using decision-making technique. Negative perceptions were scored of 1 and positive perceptions were scored 5. After that, the researcher applied the technique for three weeks. Then the researcher gave the participants a post-questionnaire to know their attitude after the decision-making technique.

Table 2. Response frequencies for pre-post questionnaire items

Statement	Pre-questionnaire						Post-questionnaire					
	S D	D	N	A	S A	Mean	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean
Writing is an enjoyable course. أنا استمتع في درس الكتابة.	0	1	1	8	5	4.1	0	2	2	3	8	4.1
I don't face any difficulties in writing when I choose the topic. لا أواجه أي صعوبة في الكتابة بموضوع من اختياري.	0	1	8	4	4	3.4	1	2	3	3	6	3.7
I get high marks when I choose the topic. أستطيع الحصول على درجات عالية عندما اختار الموضوع المناسب.	0	1	4	7	3	3.8	0	0	3	5	7	4.3
I can write in a short time. أستطيع الكتابة في وقت قصير.	2	2	3	1	7	3.6	2	0	4	4	5	3.6
I feel interest in writing classes. أشعر بالمتعة في درس الكتابة.	2	4	0	3	6	3.5	0	2	2	0	11	4.3

Table 2 demonstrates the students' attitudes towards using decision-making technique. First, statements 1,4 shows the same attitude before and after decision-making technique. Second, the mean response to statement 2 is increase slightly in the post-questionnaire by 0.3. Statement 3 shows a change in the participants' attitude by 0.5. Moreover, statement 5 presents a big difference in the students' attitude after decision-making technique. So, the students' attitude has changed in statement two which is about getting high marks when they choose the topic and in statement 5 the interest in writing classes has increased.

Briefly, the result of this study supports Kopriva, Emick, Hipolito-Delgado, and Cameron, (2007) study in the importance of EFL learners' decision-making in English language. In addition, it shows the independence of learners when they are engaged in decision-making as the result of Celis, Milena, and Cárdenas's (2014) study. On the other hand, the result of this study differs from the result of Abbasian and Chenabi (2016) study because it says that group B who received jigsaw-based listening and speaking tasks excelled those who were taking decision-making -based listening and speaking instruction. These results answered the research questions by showing the improvement impact on the students' writing skill. Moreover, it answered the second question by showing a positive attitude toward writing skill.

CONCLUSION

This study attempted to investigate the impact of decision-making technique on Saudi EFL learners' writing skill and to investigate Saudi EFL learners' attitudes toward decision-making technique for improving writing skill. The result of this study showed that the students perform better when they have the chance to make a decision. Decision-making technique makes improvements in EFL learners' writing skills.

The result of this study cannot be generalized because of some limitations like:

- The duration of the study was too short.
- The participants were few.

The researcher would like to recommend EFL teachers to:

- Use decision-making technique in writing classes especially with high school students and prep-year students because the students will become more responsible and will be interested in writing skill.
- Care about writing classes by using different techniques.
- Give the writing skill more classes for practice.

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APPENDIX A – LESSON PLANS

Lesson plan 1

Unit: 8		New Material:
Lesson: 2 Did you sleep well?.		Projector (Prezi) , Flash card.
Date: 19 Oct 2019		**New Voc.**
Class: Third intermediate grade – first semester **Period: 40**		brain, dream (n, v), during, electrical, memory, movement, rapid(ly), specialist

Objectives	Procedure(s) and Activities	Teaching Aids	Evaluation
Students will be able to :	1. Greeting the students. 2. Check the homework. 3. Review by using gift game. 4. Announce the winner of unit 6\7. 4. Teacher will say : are you ready to listen ? 5. Students will response : ready to learn.	Gift speaker	What does the word camp mean? What does the word camp mean?
1- Recognize the title of the lesson.	1. Warm up, teacher will tell the students story about sleeping. 2. Students will guess the title of the lesson.	Projector	What do think ? What is our lesson talking about?
2- Define the meaning of the new words.	1. Teacher will show them new words. 2. Students will guess the meaning. 3. Teacher will say the meaning. 4. Students will repeat the words.	Projector Board	What does the word dream means ? is it verb or noun or both ?
3- Identify the main idea of the reading.	1. Teacher will ask the students (what do you see in these picture?) 2. Students will explain the picture. 3. Teacher will ask student to read the speech bubbles. 4. Students will attempt to find out the main idea.	Book Projector	What it is the main idea of this article?
4- Tell the answers about reading questions.	1. Teacher will divide the questions for the groups. 2. Each group will attempt to answer one question.	Board Projector Book	Who wrote this article ?
	To sum up, 1. Teacher will ask what we have done today? 2. Students will tell her about the new words. 3. Teacher will give writing homework. 4. Teacher will give the students the chance to choose the submission day.		How many words did we learn ? When do you want to submit the writing homework?

- Homework: Exercise B page 140

Lesson plan 2

Unit: 8		New Material:
Lesson: 1 Sami's favourite sport**.**		PowerPoints,
Date: 21 Oct		**New Voc.**

Class: Third intermediate grade – first semester **Period: 40**	circuit, compulsory, crowd, during, lap, medical, official, practice, protective, raise

Objectives	Procedure(s) and Activities	Teaching Aids	Evaluation
Students will be able to :	1. Greeting the students. 2. Check the homework. 3. Quiz for the previous unit. 4. Warm up, teacher will ask the students about their favourite sports.		Choose the correct answer within 5 minutes.
1- Identify the main idea of the reading.	1- Teacher will ask the students multiple question about the reading and the picture they see. 2- Teacher will ask students to read the speech bubble. 3- Teacher will ask the students to skim the reading in 3 minutes.	Book Projector	What is the main idea of this passage ? it's talking about what?
2- Write the number of the paragraph with the correct picture.	1. Teacher will divide the students into groups. 2. Each group will have one paragraph. 3. Each group will explain their paragraph and match it with the correct picture.	Book Projector	Match the paragraph with the correct picture.
3- Define the meaning of the new words.	1. After the answer of each group. 2. Teacher will show the new words in their paragraph and explain it within the context.	Book Projector PowerPoint	What dose the word raise mean?
	To sum up, • Quick review for the lesson. • Teacher will give writing homework and ask the		What we have done today?

Homework: A - Write about the topic that you like from the following topics:
- Favourite sport.
- Your future.
- Your talents.

APPENDIX B – RUBRIC

Criteria	Excellent	Good	Lack	Score
Grammar	No mistake 3	One mistake 2	More than one 1	/3
Spelling	No mistake 3	One mistake 2	More than one 1	/3
Mechanisms (punctuation, capitalization and spacing).	No mistake 4	One mistake 3	More than one mistake 2	/4
Total				/10

APPENDIX C PRE-TEST

Name : ………………………………………………………………...

Marks : ……………………………………………………………

Q 1. Write five sentences about different ways of communication.

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APPENDIX D POST-TEST

Name : ………………………………………………………………...

Marks : ……………………………………………………………

Q 1. Write five sentences on one of the following topics:

❖   An important thing in your life.

❖   Holiday.

❖   What you have done this week.

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APPENDIX E PRE-POST QUESTIONNAIRE

Statement	لا أوافق بشدة S D	لا أوافق D	محايد N	أوافق A	أوافق بشدة S A
1. Writing is an enjoyable class. أنا استمتع في درس الكتابة.					
2. I don't face any difficulties in writing when I choose the topic. لا أواجه لأي صعوبة في الكتابة بموضوع من اختياري.					
3. I get high marks when I choose the topic of writing. أستطيع الحصول على درجات عالية عندما اختار الموضوع المناسب.					
4. I can write in a short time. أستطيع الكتابة في وقت قصير.					
5. I feel interested in writing classes. أشعر بالمتعة في درس الكتابة.					