Exploring the effects of content-integrated writing instruction on students' English writing skills in an EFL context[1]

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Abstract

One of the main purposes of foreign/second language instruction is to improve language learners' writing skills. A way that is often preferred by language instructors may be to teach vocabulary and grammar of the foreign language and expect the students to write in that language automatically. An alternative to such a traditional way of form oriented instruction can be to organize writing instruction around a theme or a content in order to enable the students to acquire not only linguistic forms but also thematic units within a context. The present research study tried to explore the effects of these two approaches on writing development of foreign language (L2) learners at a state university in Turkey. In order to make a comparison between these two orientations, two groups were determined as experimental and control groups and they were involved in writing instructions designed in accordance with these two instructional approaches. The research study was conducted through a quasi-experimental pretest - posttest research design. The results of the study suggest that the method which offered a content-integrated writing instruction has been more effective in developing students' L2 writing than the traditional way of instruction.

Key words: Foreign language teaching, writing in foreign language, content-integrated instruction.

Öz

İçerik temelli yazma öğretiminin öğrencilerin ingilizce yazma becerileri üzerine etkileri

Yabancı/ikinci dil öğretiminin başlıca amaçlarından biri, dil öğrencilerinin yazma becerilerini geliştirmektir. Yabancı dil öğretmenleri tarafından sıkça tercih edilen yöntemlerden birisi, öğrencilere yabancı dilin kelime ve dilbilgisi yapısını öğreterek bu yabancı dilde otomatik bir şekilde yazmalarını beklemek olabilmektedir. Bu şekildeki yapı-odaklı geleneksel yöntemin bir alternatifi yazma öğretiminin bir tema veya bir içerik etrafında düzenlenerek, öğrencilerin sadece dilbilgisi yapılarını değil aynı zamanda belli bir bağlam içinde sunulan konuları da öğrenmelerini sağlamak olabilir. Söz konusu çalışma, bu iki yöntemin Türkiye'de bir devlet üniversitesindeki yabancı dil öğrencilerinin yazma becerileri üzerine etkilerini incelemeye çalışmıştır. Bu iki yaklaşım arasında bir karşılaştırma yapmak için iki grup deney ve kontrol grupları olarak belirlendi ve bu gruplara çalışmaya konu olan iki yaklaşıma göre düzenlenmiş olan yabancı dilde yazma dersleri verildi. Araştırma, öntest-sontest araştırma desenine sahip yarı-deneysel bir çalışmadır. Çalışmanın

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sonuçları, içerik temelli yazma öğretiminin öğrencilerin yabancı dilde yazma becerilerini geliştirmede geleneksel yöntemden daha etkili olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Yabancı dil öğretimi, yabancı dilde yazma, içerik temelli öğretim.

Introduction

Writing is one of the most essential skills that should be developed for second/foreign language (L2) learners. When the fact that writing even in one's own native language requires extensive instruction and it does not develop all by itself is considered, the importance of L2 writing instruction may be better inferred. As writing is an action involving a number of elements such as the conveyance of one's thoughts and feelings, the use of lexical units, rhetoric, language use, text organization, cohesion and coherence, the development of writing skill for L2 learners is a multi-dimensional process. As a result, throughout the history of L2 writing research, various conceptions about L2 writing have been suggested.

A review of the theories of writing and the instructional processes of writing that have been subject to research studies yields that it is not possible to arrive at a prescriptive and "one size fits all" type of instructional perspective that results in effective teaching of writing skill in L2. However, a review of the basic approaches to L2 writing can provide a framework for organizing L2 writing instruction. The literature on L2 writing research presents various classifications of the approaches to L2 writing under various titles such as process-product oriented approach, content-form oriented approach, cognitive-social oriented approach to writing (Agustin Llach, 2011). Grabe (2001b, p. 53) presents a list of conditions that should be taken into consideration during the process of L2 writing instruction, which is like "knowing the language, knowing how to use the language, the human learner, individual abilities and preferences, the social context, attitudes and motivation, opportunities for learning and practice, formal instructional contexts, processing factors, cultural variability, content and topical knowledge and discourse, genre and register knowledge." All these conditions are considered to be effective in the L2 writing. Another illustration of the different approaches to writing is provided by Hyland (2003, p. 2) as the different foci of L2 writing instruction such as "language structures, text functions, themes or topics, creative expression, composing processes, content, genre and contexts of writing." The basic concepts in teaching L2 writing as suggested by Hyland (2003) may be briefly explained:

Focus on language structures implies that learning to write in L2 is possible through learning grammatical and lexical knowledge. It is considered that if learners have enough knowledge about syntactic patterns and cohesive devices and can make appropriate vocabulary choices, they can produce texts. Accuracy is considered to be vital for a good writing and grammatical and lexical knowledge is considered to be a pre-requisite for successful writing. Writing exercises often involve guided production of compositions such as filling in gaps, completing sentences or transforming certain units of sentences like pronouns or tenses (Agustin Llach, 2011; Hyland, 2003; Zúñiga, 2006).

Focus on text functions emphasizes the idea that in order to achieve certain communicative functions, certain models should be applied. Texts are viewed as composed of structural units such as introduction, body and conclusion; therefore, writing exercises often involve reordering sentences, and choosing appropriate sentences to fill in the gaps in a paragraph. It is considered that in order to ensure that students write effective paragraphs, they need to be taught how to write topic sentences, how they can make transitions between paragraphs or sentences; and it is believed that students should be provided with models which they can follow to produce their own texts. Composing tasks that often include so-

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called types of writing such as narration, description or argumentation are taught and students are expected to structure their texts based on the distinctive models of writing (Agustin Llach, 2011; Hyland, 2003; Matsuda, 2003; Silva, 1990).

Focus on creativity suggests that students' creativity needs to be encouraged and students should be fostered to express themselves and reflect their own meanings. Teachers try to stimulate writers' ideas and to provide them with opportunities to reflect their own meanings in their scripts. Instead of focusing on formal features of written texts, teachers respond to students' ideas (Murray, 1985).

Focus on the writing process emphasizes cognitive processes involved in writing. Writing process is considered to involve various steps such as "planning, drafting, revising, and editing" (Hyland, 2003, p. 11). Teachers try to guide their students from the beginning to the end of the writing process for the purpose of increasing their metacognitive awareness about the stages they follow / should follow when producing their texts. Process approach to writing is often supported by most researchers and teachers in L2 writing field; however, it should be also considered that writing is a process influenced not only by cognitive stages showing writers how to write but also by an understanding of the relevant topic, audience, psychological factors, purpose, social, and cultural norms (Hyland, 2002; 2003).

Focus on content emphasizes the role of integrating content in writing courses as it is conceived that studying content provides writers with the knowledge to write about. When students are asked to write on a specific topic, it may be often the case that they may not have any idea (or very little) on that topic; therefore, they may not develop a coherent and meaningful text. Therefore, familiarizing students with certain themes may contribute to their writing. This is often done through extensive reading (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996), which also provides students with relevant information about the use of certain language structures and also rhetorical patterns.

Focus on genre proposes that there are certain social conventions that should be followed to be able to achieve certain purposes. Different social purposes call for different genres; for example, a prescription differs from an essay or a poem is different from a novel depending on the purposes for which they are produced. Language is used in particular ways in order to accomplish certain purposes (Halliday, 1994). In order to enable students to produce texts in compliance with certain genres, teachers provide them with texts written in target genre for an explicit awareness of language and style for that genre.

It is clear that due to the multi-dimensional nature of L2 writing instruction, the approaches to the development of writing skill have focused on different aspects of writing instruction. The prevalent view is to consider these orientations not as opposing views that replace the previous one, but as curriculum options complementing each other (Cumming, 2010; Hyland, 2003; Matsuda, 2003; Silva, 1990). As Cumming (2010, p. 19) states "No single theory might ever explain such complex phenomena as second language writing, which necessarily involves the full range of psychological, cultural, linguistic, political, and educational variables in which humans engage," each of these orientations towards L2 writing can be viewed as a piece of a puzzle in order to explain the nature of writing in foreign language.

Although the general tendency towards L2 writing is to view it as an eclectic process, it is often the case that one theory becomes more dominant for a teacher and therefore s/he conceptualizes his/her work and organizes the instruction around this theory (Cumming, 2003). For instance, it is common to focus on the correct use of language structures during L2 instruction in traditional language teaching settings, which also affects the way instructors view writing instruction; that is, focus on language forms may

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become the "dominant" (in Cumming's terms) approach in instructional processes. The research study that is the topic of this paper has been conducted in such an instructional environment where L2 instruction was organized around a single approach, which was focus on language forms. As an alternative to such a one-dimensional approach, the researcher aimed at introducing another alternative that is content integrated L2 writing instruction as use of content and context has been considered to address L2 writing as an end in itself not an automatic outcome of grammar-focused instruction (e.g. Agustin Llach, 2011; Cumming, 2001; 2003; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Hyland, 2003). Before presenting the details about that current research study, the following section will provide an illustration of content integrated writing instruction.

Content-integrated (theme-based) L2 writing instruction

Content based approach suggests content integration in language teaching can provide the attainment of language skills and acquisition of content at the same time (Brinton, Snow & Wesche, 1989; Crandall, 1987; Met, 1991; Mohan, 1986). It is thought that learning takes place effectively when language learners are exposed to meaningful input and when they are required to complete purposeful tasks. The curricula in content based settings are organized around content rather than being determined by mere forms and structures (Stryker & Leaver, 1997). In content based instruction, language is considered to have a function of being a medium for learning a subject matter and communicating (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010). Content is viewed as a curricular subject matter of various fields such as history, geography, arts or literature (Banegas, 2012).

In order to engage students in teaching and learning process, teachers try to select authentic texts and tasks that are compatible with the students' cognitive and affective needs, socio-demographic background and language proficiency, and such a consideration can contribute to students' motivation to discover and learn target points during a language course (Genesee, 1994, Leaver & Stryker, 1989). In language learning contexts, students are provided with texts which are used not only for the development of language proficiency of the students but also for learning something new. In addition to use of authentic texts, diverse materials are also used to stimulate students to complete meaningful and purposeful tasks that are considered to be similar to real life experiences (Brinton et al., 1989; Crandall, 1987).

There is not only one type of content-based instruction, instead, depending on the instructional purposes of a learning environment, it is possible to offer a range of types of content-based instruction. For instance, Met (1999) provides a continuum of content-based models ranging from content-driven types to language driven types of content based instruction. If the basic purpose of a language class is to teach a certain content through language, content-driven types such as sheltered courses and immersion programs can be preferred; on the other hand, if the basic purpose is to teach language through content, language-driven courses such as theme-based models can be implemented. The most frequently applied model of CBI is theme-based model (Stoller & Grabe, 1997). In theme-based model, themes that are intended to provide the content for language instruction are determined considering learners' profiles. The use of themes in language classes ensures a meaningful, purposeful and contextualized learning environment (Snow, 1991). That continuum can imply that there is no single way or model to integrate content and language (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010) as each language learning environment has unique properties, the integration of content and language can be shaped in accordance with those distinct features (Banegas, 2012).

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One of the basic premises of content based instruction is the idea that people can learn a new language more effectively if they are given chances to learn new knowledge through that language (Larsen Freeman & Anderson, 2015; Richards & Rogers, 2001). The use of content from diverse subject matter areas can enrich language learning environment leading to a more motivating and interesting teaching-learning processes and this can lead to an increase in students' success in language learning (Chapple & Curtis, 2000; Crandall, 1987; Met, 1991).

When considered within the framework of L2 writing instruction, content integration can be an alternative to the idea that students' writing skill can develop automatically as a result of grammar focused language classes where language forms and vocabulary items are taught as isolated bits and pieces. As in many situations writing activities are organized around issues such as "pollution, relationships, stress, juvenile crime, smoking, and so on," implementing a writing instruction around such a content or a theme can form the necessary background knowledge about which language learners may have little or no knowledge (Hyland, 2003, p. 15). In addition to the development of background knowledge, integrating content in writing instruction can also provide students with opportunities to see how they can organize their opinions about a topic, how language is used and which lexical items are used about a given topic. In order to achieve these goals, intensive and extensive reading activities are most frequently preferred techniques for the development of writing skill in a content-oriented language classroom as reading texts from various subject areas provides learners with new knowledge in a subject area, and with the "rhetorical and structural knowledge" that they need to possess to produce written texts (Ferris, 2011; Grabe, 2001; Grabe & Stoller, 1996; Hyland, 2003, p. 17).

On the basis of the theoretical framework suggesting that integrating content in writing classrooms can have positive effects on students' writing development in L2, the current study tries to explore the effects of integrating content in L2 writing instruction in an EFL context in which writing development had been considered to develop automatically as a result of grammar-focused language courses.

Method

The study was a quasi-experimental research with a pretest-posttest research design involving a control and an experimental group. As the groups had been already formed before the research, it was a quasi-experimental study; however, the control and experimental groups were determined randomly.

Participants

The participants of the current research study consisted of 47 EFL students. 24 of them were in control group and 23 were in the experimental group (see Table 1). They were students at preparatory classrooms, and they were at the age of 17-18.

Table 1: Frequency and Percentage of the Participants According to Groups

	Experimental		Control		Total	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Female	18	38.3%	21	44.7%	39	83%

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Male	5	10.6%		3	6.4%	8	17%
Total	23	48.9%		24	51.1%	47	100%

At the beginning of the research study, the researcher asked the participants to respond to a survey which consisted of questions about their language learning experiences. The survey consisted of questions such as "When / where did you start to learn English? Is there anybody who is a native English speaker in your family? Have you ever had the chance of being abroad? What are the learning environments that you are (or have been) exposed to English? Which department did you graduate from at high school?" Students' answers to the survey questions yield that all of them have been exposed to English at state schools starting from fourth grade. They have never been exposed to English intensively, instead they have been exposed to English approximately three or four hours a week throughout their education life. None of the students have had chance of being abroad, and the only environment that they have had chance of being exposed to English has been English classes at school. All of the participants have entered university based on their verbal ability points (not on foreign language examination points). At the beginning of the semester, they were given a proficiency exam, and their level of English was determined to be pre-intermediate based on their scores of proficiency exam, and they were distributed to their current classes randomly at the beginning of the semester; they had been learning English at preparatory class for one month – 20 hours of English a week – when the research study started. As the researcher tried to make a comparison particularly on their writing development, at the beginning of the research, the researcher gave a writing test to both groups to see whether the groups were similar in terms of their L2 writing level. In order to analyze the participants' scores, Mann Whitney Test was administered as the number of the participants was below 30 in both groups and the dependent variable (pretest means) was not normally distributed for both groups according to Kolmogorov-Smirnov Normality Test. Pretest scores of both experimental group (D (23) = .251, p= .001) and control group (D (24) =. 371, p= .000) did not have a normal distribution.

The results of the Mann Whitney Test analysis for the pretest scores are given in Table 2.

Table 2: Mann Whitney Test Results for Experimental and Control Groups in Writing Pretest

Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of ranks	U	P
Experimental	23	25.04	576.00	252.00	.578
Control	24	23.00	552.00		

As presented in Table 2, in order to find out whether there was a statistically significant difference between two groups in terms of their English writing scores at the beginning of the research study, Mann Whitney Test was applied on pretest means. The results showed that there was not a significant difference between experimental and control groups in writing pre-test (U= 252.00, p= .578, z= -.556, r= -0.081). Therefore, it could be concluded that both groups were similar in terms of their English writing scores at the beginning of the research study.

Data collection instruments

Two writing tests were given to the both groups before and after the study as pretest and posttest. Students' essays were evaluated by two raters using a rubric adapted from C. Weir (1990, as cited in Weigle, 2002, p. 117). The rubric was an analytic rubric that consisted of seven criteria which were content, organization, cohesion, vocabulary, grammar, punctuation and spelling. Each criterion was divided into four levels with score points ranging from 0 to 3. Therefore, the minimum possible score would be 0 while the maximum one would be 21. However, for the reasons of convenience, the researcher preferred to make scoring over 100; however, the levels of the rubric were kept as in the original. As a result, the possible maximum total score was 100 while the possible minimum score was 30. The raters scored the essays analytically taking the rubric as the basis for objective and reliable scoring; however, the analyses were conducted on the total scores of the participants in order to present the findings in a more concise way.

Data collection procedure

At the beginning of the research study, both groups were given a writing task as a pretest. They were required to write an essay on a topic they had already covered in their previous classes. Then the writing instruction process started and lasted for four weeks, that is 24 hours of writing courses. The experimental group received content-integrated writing instruction while the control group received their regular, traditional way of instruction. At the end of the study, they were required to write another essay on the topic covered during the study as a posttest.

During the instructional process, the researcher instructed both the control and the experimental groups as it was the case before the research study and both groups were taught during their regular class hours. The control group did not receive any implementation different from their previous courses, that is they were instructed in the same way as before. The teaching and learning materials involved reading texts provided by the instructor; the learners did not follow a specific textbook; instead the instructor provided students with a bunch of texts from different sources such as English teaching websites, textbooks or English newspapers. The basic focus of the courses was grammar instruction. The instructor taught the target grammatical forms in isolation and provided students with examples out of context. The students were also asked to make sentences using the target grammar form without any context. When they were reading the texts the instructor tried to attract students' attention to the use of particular forms. Another focus of the courses was memorization of new words. In order to learn some vocabulary items, the students were required to read texts and memorize the word lists related to those texts. Writing activities involved answers to reading comprehension questions, fill-in-gaps exercises, completion of sentences. In general, writing activity was seen as a way of practising the target linguistic structures and lexical items, expecting that writing skill would develop "automatically" as a result of grammar instruction and memorization of vocabulary items.

The experimental group was provided with a content integrated writing instruction. In order to integrate content in the writing courses, the instructor basically used reading texts from different textbooks or internet resources instead of following one course book. When designing the classroom activities, the instructor considered the suggestions by Ferris (2011) in order to make ultimate use of content resources for the development of writing skill. These involved processes such determining some key words related to the topic and talking about the topic of the text   before reading the texts, requiring students to determine lexical items or phrases that are unfamiliar to them while reading, and asking students how language features were used in context. The teacher mentored the students to analyze the language use and attend to particular lexical usages and guided them to apply such usages to their own writing.

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Writing was seen as a goal, and students were stimulated to write to convey a meaning within a context and to achieve a purpose, not just to practice a target grammar point.

Data analysis

Before conducting statistical analyses on the essay scores, first the researcher tried to ensure that essays were scored in an objective and reliable way. For that end, focusing on various aspects of the essays such as text organization, coherence or mechanics would make it easier to score the essays objectively and reliably as suggested by Wolcott & Legg (1998); therefore, analytical scoring was preferred. However, within the scope of the present paper, instead of handling each criterion in the rubric one by one and conducting analyses on each of them and presenting tables separately for each level, the data analyses were conducted on the total scores of the participants for the reasons of brevity as the basic aim of the research was to make an overall comparison between content integrated method and traditional way of instruction in terms of L2 writing development.

In addition, as it is strongly suggested that teachers should score the students anonymously for objective scoring and - if possible - the same person had better score the written work twice or a second person had better score the written piece for the second time using the same rubric (Airasian & Russell, 2011), the participants' essays were scored by two raters anonymously for objective and reliable scoring. The interrater reliability for pretest essays was found to be .82 and for the posttests .80, suggesting that scoring was conducted in a reliable way. In order to analyze the participants' pretest and posttest scores, Mann Whitney Tests were administered as the number of the participants was below 30 in both groups, and pretest means of both experimental group (D (23) = .251, p= .001) and control group (D (24) =. 371, p= .000) did not have a normal distribution according to Kolmogorov-Smirnov Normality Test. In terms of posttests, although posttest scores of control group (D (24) = .171, p=. 069) were normally distributed, the fact that posttest scores of experimental group (D (23) = .231, p=. 003) were not normally distributed according to Kolmogorov-Smirnov Normality Test necessitated the administration of Mann Whitney Test on posttest scores as well. In addition to these analyses, in order to make a comparison between pretest and posttest means of either group, Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Tests were applied for each group.

Findings

The findings of the research study will be presented based on the data analyses conducted on the students' total scores for pretest and posttest. Although it would be possible to conduct analyses on each criterion in the analytic rubric used for scoring the essays and make comparisons for each criterion between and within the groups, the present paper prefers to conduct the analyses on the total scores of the participants as it basically tries to make an overall comparison between two methods.

First of all, in order to compare pretest and posttest scores of control group, Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was applied. The results are presented in Table 3:

Table 3: Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test for Control Group Pretest and Posttest

	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Z	P

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Writing posttest-writing pretest		N	Mean Rank	Sum Ranks	Z	P
	Negative ranks	1a	13.00	13.00	-2.899	.004
	Positive Ranks	15b	8.20	123.00		
	Ties	8c				
	Total	24				

a. writingposttest < writingpretest

b. writingposttest > writingpretest

c. writingposttest = writingpretest

The data in Table 3 present that there was a significant difference between pretest and posttest writing scores of control group (z = -2.899, p = .004) suggesting that regular implementation had positive effects on improving writing skills of the control group.

In order to make comparison between pretest and posttest scores of experimental group, Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was conducted. The results are given in Table 4.

Table 4: Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test for Experimental Group Pretest and Posttest

Writing posttest-writing pretest		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Z	P
	Negative ranks	1a	1.00	1.00	-4.105	.000
	Positive Ranks	21b	12.00	252.00		
	Ties	1c				
	Total	24				

a. writingposttest < writingpretest

b. writingposttest > writingpretest

c. writingposttest = writingpretest

The data in Table 4 present that there was a significant difference between pretest and posttest writing scores of experimental group (z = -4.105, p = .000) suggesting that content-integrated writing instruction had positive effects on improving writing skills of the experimental group.

Considering the results of the statistical analyses presented in Tables 3 and 4, it may be inferred that both instructional methods seem to have positive effects on L2 writing skill development if the external variables such as maturation, being exposed to English in other courses or reading English books for pleasure etc. are not considered. Therefore; in order to compare experimental group and the control group to see which instructional application was more effective, Mann Whitney Test was applied on posttest scores of both groups. Table 5 presents the results on post-test scores for both groups.

Table 5: Mann Whitney Test Results for Experimental and Control Groups in Writing Posttest

Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of ranks	U	P

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| Experimental | 23 | 31.70 | 729.00 | 99.00 | .000 |
| Control | 24 | 16.63 | 399.00 | | |

The data in Table 5 present that there was a significant difference between the control group and the experimental group in terms of their means in writing posttest (*U*= 99.00, *p*= .000, *z*= -3.808, *r*= -0.555). Therefore, it can be suggested that the content-integrated technique implemented in experimental group was found to be more effective than the regular method implemented in the control group in developing students' L2 writing skills.

Conclusion

The findings of the present study put forward that integrating content in writing classes had positive effects on students' L2 writing within the context in which research was conducted. The basic rationale for that finding can be the fact that organizing writing instruction around a content can enable students to see real examples of the various aspects of L2 writing such as language use, organization, use of lexical items, coherence and cohesion (Ferris, 2011; Hyland, 2003). As students are frequently exposed to authentic reading texts they had chance for recognizing various patterns of language use, vocabulary usage, text organization used in various types of texts, which could lead to an awareness of the elements involved in writing (Banegas, 2012; Zuniga, 2006). When the participants' pretest essays were considered, it was clearly seen that most of the essays consisted of sentences or only phrases that did not make any sense as a whole. The raters stated that it was difficult to score those essays as they thought they consisted of bits and pieces of sentences. The posttest essays of the experimental group showed that the essays had an organization, at least. In addition, it was observed that the students tried to make use of cohesive devices, and they tried to organize sentences or paragraphs around a certain idea. They also showed evidence of the fact that the participants tried to use vocabulary items in proper places to convey a content not just to show that they knew some vocabulary items. In terms of the posttests of the control group, it was also found that there was a significant difference from pretest to posttest of the control group. This case might have resulted from the fact that they could also learn new vocabulary items and used grammar forms in a more correct way when compared with their pretest essays. However, it was also clear that in terms of content, text organization, coherence and cohesion, there was not much improvement in posttest essays of the control group observed by the researcher and the raters. At that point, considering the means of the experimental and control groups in pretest and posttest can also provide insights about the writing development of both groups. The pretest and posttest means for the experimental group were 31.74 and 47.00 respectively while those of the control group were 32.00 and 35.88 respectively. Although the increase in means are considered to be significant statistically, it is clear that experimental group had a "sharper" increase compared with the control group.

It is not possible to expect an overall increase in students' L2 writing without dealing with each dimension of writing process separately. Content integrated approach to writing enabled instructor to attract students' attention to each dimension of writing besides seeing the overall picture of a written text. As content integrated writing instruction provides learners with authentic use of content, students can build knowledge of content in order to write about a subject matter (Beckett & Gonzalez, 2004; Ferris, 2011; Grabe & Stoller, 1996; Met 1999). In a parallel way, students also have the opportunity in order to learn new vocabulary items within a context. When the knowledge of vocabulary is considered as one of the cornerstones of producing written texts (Agustin Llach, 2011), building up a knowledge base for vocabulary through content can be viewed as another reason for the findings of the present

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study that put forward that experimental group had significantly higher mean scores in posttest writing. Another important issue about writing is considered to be accurate use of language forms. During the process of the implementation of content integrated instruction, students were provided with explicit instruction of certain grammar rules in accordance with their needs; in addition, they could also see the use of those grammar points in various texts. As a result, it may be inferred that as put forward by Zúñiga (2006) and Schneider (2005), organizing lessons around a content within a context can lead to effective grammar instruction. A context in which content and language are integrated can also provide students with knowledge of the types of communicative styles in order to convey knowledge of content in an acceptable way (Beckett et al., 2004). This knowledge can enable students to construct their texts effectively, contributing to an overall improvement in students' writing, as well.

Besides focusing on particular language forms or new vocabulary items separately when needed, content integrated writing approach enables students to see how they can use those particular forms within a context. That is, instruction is not limited to isolated practising of target forms or words. As students are expected to make meaning in various contexts, and as it is great importance for students to achieve real communicative purposes in accordance with the social and linguistic norms of a variety of contexts (Colombi & Schleppegrell, 2002; Eggins, 1994), use of authentic contexts that provide the required social and linguistic knowledge to construct meaning (Halliday, 1994; Mohan & Beckett, 2001; Vygotsky, 1986) can help them meet that expectation. There are quite a number of previous research studies suggesting that in order to enable students to acquire and use language to convey their thoughts and present their knowledge on a topic of a discipline appropriately, authentic subject matter content can be utilized instead of mere drilling or practising of basic language forms (Adamson, 1993; Early & Hooper, 2001; Eggins, 1994; Mohan & Beckett, 2001; Smoke, 2001). However, further research is still needed to find out the effects of content integrated L2 writing instruction in various contexts.

As in many research studies conducted in the field of education, the present study has certain limitations as well. The basic limitation was that it was conducted with a limited number of participants. Another one can be the fact that it was conducted through a relatively short period of time in which it may be difficult to expect students to develop their writing skill although the researcher tried to overcome that limitation by asking students to write on a topic covered during the lessons. Despite such limitations, it can be suggested that the findings of the current study can imply that organizing L2 writing instruction around a theme or a content may have positive effects on students' L2 writing development compared to the traditional approach emphasizing only grammar instruction and memorization of vocabulary items and acknowledging writing skill development as a "by-product" of practising language forms.

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