

## Direct versus Translated Writing: The Effect of Translation on Learners' Second Language Writing Ability

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### ABSTRACT

A growing body of research has been investigating how L2 writers, while writing in the second language (L2), make use of their first language (L1). In view of this, the present study was conducted to examine the effect of translation on the enhancement or deterioration of Iranian Elementary EFL learners' writing ability. The participants (N = 60) were prompted to perform two writing tasks: (a) writing directly in English (learners' L2) and (b) writing in their L1 (Persian) and then translating it into English. They were also assigned a checklist, a retrospective verbal report, to express their attitudes towards the two modes of writing. Analysis of the results revealed that although translation may be of help to some learners, it cannot be an effective strategy to enhance the writing ability of all learners. In effect, the results indicated that there was a significant difference between two writing tasks in terms of using expressions, transitions, and grammatical points. What was of particular interest to the authors was the fact that direct writing did not seem to be as direct as it was expected. The vast majority (75%) of students reported they think in Persian, as "often" or "always" while doing the English task in the direct writing mode. This finding suggests that teachers should incorporate translation strategies into their writing courses and explicitly teach students how to employ effective strategies in different situations. The provision of instruction and practice in using L1, particularly in planning and organizing learners' writings, may be of benefit to some learners in performing certain writing tasks.

**Keywords:** direct writing; translated writing; writing ability; learner attitudes; Iranian EFL learners

### INTRODUCTION

Second language writing is a complex task which depends particularly on the writer's capacity and interest in understanding the reader's potential point of view (Perez, et al., 2003). Hence, in order to create a piece of writing in an L2, it is required that the writer possess not only the knowledge of a particular subject matter, but also the knowledge of the relevant language as well as the personal aspects involved in writing. For one thing, a number of studies have been conducted to explore how L2 writers make use of their first language (L1) while writing in the second language. These studies have demonstrated how learners use their first language for different purposes such as planning (Wang, 2003; Woodall, 2002), idea or content generation (Beare & Bourdages, 2007; Knutson, 2006), linguistic problem solving (Beare, 2000; Centeno-Cortes & Jimenez Jimenez, 2004; Lay, 1982), backtracking

(Manchon, Roca de Larios, & Murphy, 2000), stylistic choices (Knutson, 2006), and preventing cognitive overload (Cohen & Brooks-Carson, 2001; Knutson, 2006).

Previous studies that involve the comparison of ESL texts with their L1 counterparts discovered that English as a second language (ESL) texts are typically shorter, less developed, and of lower quality ratings than L1 essays. In addition, where paragraph organization is concerned, the paragraphs are less unified in the former than in the latter. With regards to cohesion, writers have fewer cohesive resources and less control over those at their disposal. Furthermore, L2 writers usually use less figurative language and make more errors. In addition, the limited L2 vocabulary domain of the learners would lead to their inability to distinguish the nuances of difference between the words (Silva, 1992). In fact, past research has demonstrated significant correlations between L1 and ESL data (Silva, 1992). Taking a translation approach to writing in the second language, the cohesion of the text, including markers of transition and syntactic complexity, could actually be enhanced. Further, given the broader use of terminologies and set of phrases in line with L1 expressions, learners would be able to improve the breadth of their expressions (Cohen & Brooks-Carson, 2001). Similarly, Brooks (1996) indicated that employing such an approach to writing would significantly enrich learners' writings as well as syntactic complexity, including more frequent use of coordination and subordination. Cohen and Brooks-Carson (2001) also argued that the translated approach to writing might lead to the lower quality of grammar, in particular syntax. Thus, it seems necessary that the investigators consider participants' ability to use, *inter alia*, a vast number of cohesive devices, complex syntactic structures, breadth of terminologies, and grammatical structures in L1.

In line with the aforementioned studies, Cohen and Brooks-Carson (2001) examined the effectiveness of an alternative approach to writing in a second language. They invited thirty-nine intermediate students of French to work on two different writing tasks: (a) writing directly in French (L2) and (b) writing in first language (English), and then translating it into French. The participants were also asked to fill out a number of scales concerning the strategies they used while writing directly in French as well as those they used while writing first in English and then translating it into French as well as their attitudes regarding two modes of writing. Findings indicated that, while 26 students outperformed in their direct writing across all the writing scales, 13 of them did better in the translated one. It is worth mentioning that no grammatical significant differences were found across the two writing modes as there was a significant difference in scales of expression, transition and clauses. Furthermore, according to the results of the retrospective verbal report, it was revealed that learners were often thinking in English while writing directly into French. These results indicated that the two writing tasks were apparently not of a different nature.

In another study, Weijan et al. (2009) attempted to examine the use of L1 while writing in L2 in Netherlands. In doing so, they involved twenty Dutch students in writing four argumentative essays in Dutch (learners' L1) and four essays of the same type in English (learners' L2). The results of their study revealed that all the students used their first language while doing the task in the second language; however, the degree of L1 usage differed within the conceptual activities including idea generation, planning and meta-comments. Besides, a close relationship was found between L2 proficiency and text quality in L2, though it was not related to the given conceptual activities in both L1 and L2. General proficiency in writing, according to them, has a weak influence on L1 use while writing in L2, though it has strong influence on L2 use while writing in L2. Similarly, a negative relationship was found between the use of L1 while writing in L2 and text quality in L2. Conversely, a positive relationship was found between L2 use and L2 text quality in setting goals, generating ideas, and structuring.

Moreover, Sasaki (2002) investigated Japanese learners' processes of English expository writing through various data sources including their writings, videotaped writing behaviors, and stimulated recall protocols. Two groups of Japanese learners learning English as a foreign language comprising twelve experts and twenty-two novices participated in the study. Participants' performances were compared cross-sectionally and longitudinally. The results showed that novice learners of English mostly tended to translate from L1 into L2.

Taken together, the comparisons made between taking a translation approach in writing a second language and a direct L2 writing approach are somewhat intricate, as subjects, although they were not supposed to, mostly reported having made considerable use of L1 while writing in L2 (Cohen & Brooks-Carson, 2001; Kobayashi & Rinnert, 1992; Petchprasert, 2013). With that in mind, and considering the lack of research evidence on the effect of translation on writing ability, the present study aimed at exploring the effect of translation on the writing ability of elementary EFL learners in Iran.

Unlike Cohen and Brooks-Carson's (2001) study which explored the effect of translation on the writing of English and Spanish Intermediate learners of French while participants were under time pressure, the present study was designed to focus on Iranian elementary EFL learners where there was no time pressure for the learners' performance. Considering the importance of knowing about learners' attitudes on second language learning (Al-Tamimi & Shuib, 2009; Chalak & Kassaian, 2010; Ismail, Hussin, & Darus, 2012) and granted the fact to understand second language writing and its differences with its first language counterpart, it is recommended that researchers analyze not only learners' writings but also their attitudes (Silva, 1992). Therefore, this study was designed to address the following questions:

1. What effect does translation have on the Iranian Elementary EFL learners' writing ability?
2. What is the nature of the learners' attitudes towards direct English writing vs. translated English writing?

## **METHOD**

The present study utilizes a non-experimental intact group comparative research design (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006) to investigate the effect of translation (from L1) on L2 learners' writing ability.

## **PARTICIPANTS**

Based on a version of an Oxford Placement Test (OPT), elementary-level learners were selected for the study. A total of 60 elementary-level Iranian learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) studying at the English Department of Esfahan Training Center of National Iranian Oil Company participated in this study. The overall rationale for the selection of elementary-level learners was that these participants, due to their lack of L2 proficiency, were more likely to resort to their L1 (Persian) and then translate into the L2 (English). Therefore, after correcting the papers, 60 learners were selected as the elementary-level group based on the categorizations put forth in the OPT manual. They ranged in age from 18 to 32 and were either undergraduate or graduate-level university students with a variety of majors. The sample consisted of both junior and senior students, including both male (N = 27) and female (N = 33) participants.

## **INSTRUMENTATION**

### **THE OXFORD PLACEMENT TEST (OPT)**

The test contained 60 multiple choice items, and it was used to enable the researchers to control the language proficiency of the learners. This test consisted of grammar (20 items),

vocabulary (20 items), reading comprehension (20 items) together with a writing section. The time allocated for answering the questions was 45 minutes.

#### WRITING TASKS

There were two topics for the writing tasks, taken from the course book covered during the course of the study: (a) My Dream House (writing first in Persian and then translated into English), and (b) My Family Members (writing directly in English). In addition, students were given a separate checklist to investigate their attitudes towards the two kinds of writing tasks (see appendix A). The checklist was a modified version of the one used in a previous study by Cohen and Brooks-Carson (2001). The checklist was first modified and translated into Persian (Learners' L1) by two professional translators. The inter-rater reliability between the translators yielded a high estimate (i.e. 0.90).

#### CHECKLIST: STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD DIRECT VS. TRANSLATED WRITING TASK

The checklist was designed by Cohen and Brooks-Carson (2001) and constituted a retrospective measure of strategy use and attitudes towards direct and translated writing approaches. Learners were asked to indicate based on a five-point rating scale the degree to which they agreed with statements about the effectiveness of translation as a strategy and to supply additional feedback on the experiences they had during the completion of the essay tasks. Cronbach's alpha, the index of internal consistency, was computed for each of the multi-item factors, direct writing mode and translated writing mode. Internal consistency estimate was acceptable, varying from .62 for the ten items on the translation writing mode to .78 for the six items on the direct writing mode.

#### PROCEDURES

##### DATA COLLECTION

The data for the present study were collected in four consecutive class sessions. In the first session, students were asked to write the first writing task, *My Family Members*, directly in English, at home and bring it to the class for the next session. In the second session, participants were asked to write the second writing task, *My Dream House*, in their native language, Persian, and hand it in by the next session. In the third session, participants were asked to translate the Persian text into English at home. In the last session, students were given a checklist assessing their attitudes concerning the two writing tasks. They were fully briefed on how to fill out the checklist. Participants were given ample time to complete the checklist.

##### DATA ANALYSIS

Two experienced raters who have been teaching English for more than ten years scored the two writing tasks. The inter-rater reliability between the raters was obtained at .80, indicating high reliability. A multi-trait rating scale, taken from the previous study (Cohen & Brooks-Carson, 2001), were used to assess four multi-trait aspects of writing that focused more on the form and function of the writing than on the content of the ideas (see appendix B): expression (*freedom from translation effect, variety in vocabulary, and sense of the language*), transitions (*organizational structure, clarity of point, and smoothness of connectors*), clauses (*use of subordination and use of relative pronouns*), and grammar (*prepositions/ articles, noun/adjective agreement, and verbs*).

The data obtained from the checklist were codified and entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, version 16). Descriptive statistics were used to determine the mean and standard deviations of the statements in the checklist. In addition, a Paired samples t-test was run to determine the significant difference between students' performance in the translated and direct English writings.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### SUBJECTS' PERFORMANCE IN TRANSLATED WRITING TASK VERSUS DIRECT WRITING TASK

With reference to the first research question that asked whether translation has any effect on learners' second language writing ability, we initially scored learners' writings in terms of expressions, transitions, and grammatical structures. As shown in Table 1, students performed better in the direct writing task than in the translated one. Students' performances on the direct writing task were rather good in terms of expression (mean=12.25), transition (mean=11.80), and grammar (mean=12.25), while their performances on the translated task were rather weak in terms of expression (mean=8.9), transition (mean=9.30), and grammar (mean=10.55). In other words, these findings clearly pointed to the superiority of performances in the direct writing task than in the translated one. Specifically, learners performed better on the direct writing task than on the translated one in terms of expression, transition, and grammar. These results are to some extent similar to those of Cohen and Brooks-Carson (2001) in which two-thirds of the students performed better on the direct writing task across all scales, while one-third of the students outperformed the translated task.

TABLE 1. Students' Performances in Translated Writing Task vs. Direct Writing Task

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
<b>Expression(Translation)</b>	60	3.00	12.00	8.9000	2.62775
<b>Expression(Direct)</b>	60	9.00	14.00	12.2500	1.27059
<b>Transition(Translation)</b>	60	3.00	12.00	9.3000	2.57300
<b>Transition(Direct)</b>	60	7.00	15.00	11.8000	2.54319
<b>Grammar(Translation)</b>	60	4.00	14.00	10.5500	2.22028
<b>Grammar(Direct)</b>	60	9.00	15.00	12.2500	1.74302

\*15=excellent 12=good 9=acceptable 6=weak 3=poor

In terms of the expressions used in both writing tasks, a slight negative transfer in the direct writing task (mean=4.3) and a moderate negative transfer in the translated task (mean=2.9) were discovered. The variety of vocabularies exploited in the direct writing task was fair (mean=3.95), whereas the variety of vocabularies used in the translated writing task was average (mean=3.05). Concerning the sense of language, there was good control over native-like expressions in the direct writing task (mean=4.00), while the control over native-like expressions in the translated task was in part fair with a mean of 2.90 (Table 2). Hence, it may be concluded that translating from an L1 into the target language would not be a proper writing strategy as it demonstrated the deterioration (not amelioration) of writing abilities in terms of using expressions.

TABLE 2. Performances in Translated Writing Task vs. Direct Writing Task in terms of Expressions

Expression	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Freedom from translation (Translation)	60	1.00	4.00	2.9000	.83767
Freedom from translation (Direct)	60	3.00	5.00	4.3000	.72017
Effect variety in vocabulary (Translation)	60	1.00	4.00	3.0500	1.03211



Effect variety in vocabulary (Direct)	60	3.00	4.00	3.9500	.21978
Sense of the language (Translation)	60	1.00	4.00	2.9000	.95136
Sense of the language (Direct)	60	3.00	5.00	4.0000	.55234

\***Freedom from translation:** 5= no negative transfer ; 4= only slight negative transfer; 3= moderate negative transfer 2=extensive negative transfer; 1= very extensive negative transfer

\***Effect variety in vocabulary:** 5=excellent; 4=good; 3=fair; 2=week; 1= poor

\***Sense of the language:** 5=excellent control over native-like expression; 4=good control over native-like expression; 3=fair control over native-like expression; 2=week control over native-like expression; 1=no control over native-like expression

Concerning the transitions used, the results suggested a partial difference between the translated writing as opposed to the direct writing task. The overall organizational structure, clarity of points, and smoothness of the writing were partially good in the direct writing task with the means of 3.85, 3.9 and 4.05, respectively. On the other hand, the overall organizational structure, clarity of points and smoothness of the writing were acceptable in the translated writing task with the means of 3.05, 3.05 and 3.15, respectively (see table 3). Therefore, it would not be a proper writing strategy to translate from a first language into the target language as the research reported in this study pointed to the deterioration of writing abilities in terms of using transitions.

TABLE 3. Students' Performances in Translated Writing Task vs. Direct Writing Task in terms of Transitions

Transition	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Organizational structure (Translation)	60	1.00	4.00	3.0500	1.03211
Organizational structure (Direct)	60	2.00	5.00	3.8500	.86013
Clarity of points (Translation)	60	1.00	4.00	3.0500	.92837
Clarity of points (Direct)	60	2.00	5.00	3.9000	.95136
Smoothness of writing (Translation)	60	1.00	4.00	3.1500	.97120
Smoothness of writing (Direct)	60	2.00	5.00	4.0500	.98161

\***Organizational structure:** 5=excellent; 4=good; 3=acceptable; 2=week; 1=poor

\***Clarity of points:** 5=excellent; 4=good; 3=acceptable; 2=week; 1=poor

\***Smoothness of writing:** 5=excellent use of connectors; 4=good use of connectors; 3=acceptable use of connectors; 2=week use of connectors; 1=poor use of connectors

Regarding the grammatical points, the use of prepositions/articles (mean=3.85), noun/adjective agreements (mean=4.40) and verbs (mean=4.00) in the direct writing task was good. However, the use of prepositions/articles (mean=3.30), noun/adjective agreements (mean=3.65) and verbs (mean=3.65) in the translated writing task was average (see table 4). Thus, given the results reported in table 4 which pointed to the deterioration of writing abilities in terms of using grammatical structures, translation from an L1 into the target language does not seem to be a proper writing strategy.

TABLE 4. Students' Performances in Translated Writing Task vs. Direct Writing Task in terms of Grammar

Grammar	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Prepositions/Articles (Translation)	60	1.00	5.00	3.3000	1.06246
Prepositions/Articles (Direct)	60	1.00	5.00	3.8500	.97120
Noun /Adjective Agreement (Translation)	60	1.00	4.00	3.6500	.73242
Noun /Adjective Agreement (Direct)	60	3.00	5.00	4.4000	.58802
Verbs (Translation)	60	2.00	5.00	3.6000	.80675
Verbs (Direct)	60	2.00	5.00	4.0000	.71307

\***Prepositions/Articles:** 5=excellent; 4=good; 3=acceptable; 2=week; 1=poor

\***Noun /Adjective Agreement:** 5=excellent; 4=good; 3=acceptable; 2=week; 1=poor

\***Verbs:** 5=excellent; 4=good; 3=acceptable; 2=week; 1=poor

In order to ascertain whether there is a significant difference between the two writing tasks, a paired sample t-test was performed. The results suggested significant differences between the two writing tasks in terms of using expressions ( $p=.000 < 0.05$ ), transitions ( $p=.000 < 0.05$ ), and grammatical points ( $p=.000 < 0.05$ ), though the difference between means were not high (see tables 5 and 6). As can be seen in these tables, learners had greater success in their performance on the direct writing task than on the translated one regarding the use of expressions, transitions, and grammatical structures. This finding also indicates that translating from an L1 into the target language is not a proper strategy.

TABLE 5. Paired Samples Statistics for Performances in Translated Writing Task vs. Direct Writing Task

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Expression(Translation)	8.9000	60	2.62775	.33924
	Expression(Direct)	12.2500	60	1.27059	.16403
Pair 2	Transition(Translation)	9.3000	60	2.57300	.33207
	Transition(Direct)	11.8000	60	2.22028	.32832
Pair 3	Grammar(Translation)	10.5500	60	2.25890	.28664
	Grammar(Direct)	12.2500	60	1.74302	.22502

TABLE 6. A Paired Samples T-test for Performances in Translated Writing task vs. Direct Writing Task

		Paired Difference		T	df	Sig (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. deviation			
Pair 1	Expression (Translation)	-3.35000	3.18343	-8.293	59	.000
	Expression (Direct)					
Pair 2	Transition (Translation)	-2.50000	3.66348	-5.378	59	.000
	Transition (Direct)					
Pair 3	Grammar (Translation)	-1.70000	2.51522	-5.326	59	.000
	Grammar (Direct)					

#### SUBJECTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD TRANSLATED WRITING TASK VERSUS DIRECT WRITING TASK

Given the diverse results obtained in the previous section regarding the effect of direct and translated writing approaches in learners' performances, this study also attempted to assess students' attitudes towards the two writing tasks (the second research question) and, in doing so, descriptive statistics was run. A key finding resulting from the retrospective verbal report data gathered by means of checklists was similar to that of Cohen and Brooks-Carson (2001), considering the fact that the direct writing mode was not quite "direct". The results are summarized in tables 7, 8, and 9. Based on the findings, students considered direct English writing to be faster than translated writing (mean=3.3); they largely found direct English writing as a help to focus on English expressions (mean=3.9) and to learn English better (mean=3.9) (see Table 7). They felt that thinking in English during the whole process was better than translating (mean=3.2) and moderately found it easier to write directly into English than to translate (mean=3.3).

Simply put, with regards to the subjects' attitudes towards the two modes of writing, the findings indicated that learners perceived direct English writing to be faster than its translated counterpart. Moreover, they largely found direct writing in English as an aid to focus on English expressions (such as "She's broke", "like the back of my hand", etc.) and to learn English better. Concerning the translated writing task, subjects mentioned that they moderately brought better organization (i.e. cohesion and coherence) to the translated writing in comparison to the one written directly in English. They also pointed out that they tried to

change the organization of the first writing to fit the English language structures, encountered time pressure to complete the translation task, found translating to English a difficult task, and thought in Persian prior to translating. In sum, the majority of learners expressed their tendencies to write directly in English, while only a few of them preferred to translate from L1 into L2.

TABLE 7. Students' Attitudes toward Direct Writing Task

Statements	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
I feel that writing directly in English is faster than translating.	60	1.00	5.00	3.3000	1.15421
I feel that writing directly in English helps to focus on English expression	60	1.00	5.00	3.9000	1.10008
I feel that writing directly in English helps you to learn the language	60	1.00	5.00	3.9000	1.10008
I found it easier to write directly in English than to translate.	60	1.00	5.00	3.3000	1.10928
I found it difficult to write directly in English than to translate.	60	1.00	4.00	2.7000	1.01347
I feel that thinking directly in English during the whole process is better than translating.	60	1.00	5.00	3.2000	1.08612

\*1= not at all    2= a little    3= moderately    4= quite a bit    5= completely

On the other hand, there was a contrast between the findings of this study and those of past researches (cited in Cohen & Brooks-Carson, 2001) in terms of the expressions used in both writing tasks. Findings revealed that learners use broader terminologies and set of phrases in line with L1 expressions that could have led to breadth of expressions in the translation approach to writing in the target language. These findings were also in contrast with those of Lay (1982) who reported that more L1 use resulted in better quality texts. With regards to grammatical points, the results of the present study partially disconfirmed that of Cohen and Brooks-Carson (2001) in which no significant difference was found in the grammatical scales across the two types of writing. Furthermore, previous researchers (e.g., Brooks, 1996; Kobayashi & Rinnert, 1992) had reported several advantages for the translation approach in writing. However, in the current study, the subjects did not benefit from the translation approach including the cohesion/coherence dimension and syntactic complexity. Having compared learners' L1 writings and their translated equivalents, the findings showed that the translated writings were likely to depict more errors, had less unified paragraphs, less figurative speech, and limited number of vocabulary.

In the translated writing task, participants mentioned that they moderately brought better organization to the translated writing (mean=3.15) in comparison to the one written directly in English. They pointed out that they changed the organization of the first writing to fit the English language (mean=3.7), had time pressure to complete the translation task (mean=3.05), found translating to English difficult (mean=3.00), and thought in Persian before translating into English (mean=3.95) (see table 8). They also declared that they purposely simplified their Persian text before translating it into English (mean=3.3).

Although the subjects were instructed to write one essay directly in English without translation, just like the study of Kobayashi and Rinnert (1992), the vast majority of them reported thinking in Persian "often" or "always" while doing the English essay in the direct writing mode. This finding also supported the results of the study carried out by Weijen et al. (2009) whose subjects used their first language while doing the task in their second language. In other words, the subjects in the present study reported having thought in Persian most of the time that they were supposedly engaged in the direct English writing task. This finding, supported by Cohen and Brooks-Carson (2001), proposes that, while in the translation



approach learners were involved in *written translation* on the paper, in direct writing they were involved in *mental translation*. Such a finding also coincides with those of Cohen and Brooks-Carson (2001) where participants in the direct writing condition reported using their L1 very often while writing in their L2, even though they were not supposed to. This is also in line with Sasaki's (2002) study in which novice learners, subsequent to the instruction, still tended to translate from their L1 into the L2 while writing in L2.

TABLE 8. Students' Attitudes toward Translated Writing Task

Statements	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
I brought better organization to the translated writing in comparison to the one written directly in English.	60	2.00	5.00	3.1500	1.02221
When I translated, I changed the organization somewhat to fit the English language.	60	3.00	5.00	3.7000	.56148
I felt that I had time pressures to complete the translation into English.	60	2.00	4.00	3.0500	.74618
I found it difficult to translate into the English.	60	1.00	5.00	3.0000	.95002
When I translated, I thought in Persian then I translated.	60	3.00	5.00	3.9500	.68633
I purposely simplified my Persian text in order to translate it into English.	60	1.00	5.00	3.3000	1.23919
I thought through my ideas more clearly in Persian writing in comparison to the one written directly in English.	60	2.00	5.00	3.9000	.83667
I found it easier to write in Persian than in English.	60	1.00	5.00	3.5500	1.08025
I had a greater number of ideas for the Persian writing in comparison to the English one.	60	2.00	5.00	3.7000	.84973
I had a better vocabulary in Persian writing in comparison to the English one.	60	3.00	5.00	3.9500	.50169

\*1= not at all; 2= a little; 3= moderately; 4= quite a bit; 5= completely

Moreover, the findings revealed that students largely thought more clearly about their ideas in Persian (mean=3.9), found writing in L1 easier (mean=3.55), had a greater number of ideas (mean=3.7) and a better vocabulary in Persian writing task (mean=3.95) in comparison to the English one (see table 8). In sum, 85% of the subjects expressed that they tended to write directly in English, while 15% preferred translating from L1 into L2 (see table 9).

TABLE 9. Students' Attitudes towards Translated Writing task vs. Direct Writing task

Statements	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
I like to write directly in English	51	85.0	85.0	85.0
I like to translate from Persian into English	9	15.0	15.0	100.0
Total	60	100.0	100.0	

## CONCLUSION

This study was aimed at examining the effect of translation on enhancing Iranian Elementary EFL learners' writing ability. The data were obtained through the implementation of two different writing tasks, as well as the administration of a checklist to the subjects to assess their attitudes toward the two modes of writing. The analysis of the data brought us to a number of findings regarding the effectiveness of direct and translated writing in the Iranian EFL context. The findings pointed to differences between two writing tasks in terms of the use of expressions, transitions, and grammatical points.

Hence, based on the findings discussed above, the following pedagogical implications can be put forward so as to help language teachers in dealing effectively with second

language writing in the classroom. Most notably, the fact that learners have used their L1 while writing in L2 suggests that teachers should incorporate translation strategies into their writing courses and explicitly teach students why and how to employ effective strategies in different situations; as was pointed out by Cohen and Brooks-Carson (2001). Learners may think about the topic in the L1, engage in mental translation, or write a text in their L1 and then translate it into the L2.

Furthermore, teachers can use the results of the checklist concerning students' attitudes toward the translated writing task versus the direct writing task as a guide to determine the strategies that have the potential to improve learners' writing ability. They can provide instruction and practice in using L1, especially in planning and organizing their writings, which may be a benefit for some learners in performing on certain writing tasks. Third, cultivating, maintaining and enhancing the perceptions of EFL learners toward different writing tasks should be an important goal to be pursued by all educators in the field of second language writing.

Nonetheless, it should be noted that the findings of the present research should be interpreted with certain reservations. Given the limitations of this study, several avenues for further study can accordingly be mapped out to bridge the gaps in current research. For one, it may be argued that the small size of the sample in this study may not be a true representative of the larger population of Iranian EFL learners; another study might involve a larger sample of the participants from different educational settings. Second, the participants' attitudes were obtained merely by the administration of a questionnaire. Apparently this does not allow a sound generalization regarding their attitudes about direct versus translated writing tasks. Other studies may be carried out to investigate whether the results of this study are true with qualitative research methods including interviews and think-aloud protocols.

Furthermore, what the present study is unable to say is the subjects' learning style preferences as well as the rhetorical issues in their writings. To further complicate matters, concerning the use of L1, no effort was made by the participants to stipulate what they meant when they stated "I thought in Persian." Where this issue is concerned, more research can be done to find out what the participants mean when they say they are thinking in their L1, taking their learning styles and preferences into consideration. In addition, further research can be conducted to compare learners' writing performance as well as use of strategies across different levels of language proficiency.

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## APPENDIX A

*Checklist: Students' Attitudes towards Direct vs. Translated Writing Task (Taken from Cohen & Brooks-Carson, 2001)*

Please rate your responses to the following questions on a scale of 1-5.

**When you translated the essay from your first language to English, to what extent did you:**

*5 = completely 4 = quite a bit 3 = moderately 2 = a little 1 = never*

- \_\_\_\_\_ bring better organization to the English essay than if you had written it directly in English.
- \_\_\_\_\_ change the organization somewhat to fit the English language
- \_\_\_\_\_ think in Persian then translate
- \_\_\_\_\_ think through your ideas more clearly in the dominant language essay than in the English essay written directly in English.
- \_\_\_\_\_ find it easier to write in the dominant language than in the essay directly written in English.
- \_\_\_\_\_ have a greater number of ideas for the dominant language essay than for the English essay.
- \_\_\_\_\_ have a better vocabulary in the dominant language essay than you did for the English essay.
- \_\_\_\_\_ feel that you had time pressures to complete the translation into English.
- \_\_\_\_\_ find it difficult to translate into the English.
- \_\_\_\_\_ purposely simplify your first language text in order to translate it into English.
- \_\_\_\_\_ find it easier to write directly in English than to translate.
- \_\_\_\_\_ find it difficult to write directly in English.
- \_\_\_\_\_ feel that thinking in English during the whole process is better than translating.

**I feel that writing directly IN English:**

*5 = always 4 = often 3 = sometimes 2 = rarely 1 = never*

- \_\_\_\_\_ is faster than translating.
- \_\_\_\_\_ helps to focus on English expression
- \_\_\_\_\_ helps you to learn the language

**Choose the best alternative.**

**I like to write.....**

directly in English  Translating from Persian into English

**APPENDIX B**

*Rating Scales for English Essays (Taken from Cohen & Brooks-Carson, 2001)*

**A. EXPRESSION:**

score	freedom from translation	Direct essay	Translated essay
5	There is no negative transfer from dominant language		
4	There is only slight negative transfer		
3	There is moderate negative transfer		
2	There is extensive negative transfer		
1	There is very extensive negative transfer		

**TOTAL: Direct essay: ..... Translated essay: .....**

score	effect variety in vocabulary	Direct essay	Translated essay
5	Vocabulary variety is excellent		
4	Vocabulary variety is good		
3	Vocabulary variety is fair		
2	Vocabulary variety is weak		
1	Vocabulary variety is poor		

**TOTAL: Direct essay: ..... Translated essay: .....**

score	sense of the language	Direct essay	Translated essay
5	Excellent control over native-like expression		
4	Good control over native-like expression		
3	fair control over native-like expression		
2	weak control over native-like expression		
1	no control over native-like expression		

**TOTAL: Direct essay: ..... Translated essay: .....**

**B. TRANSITIONS**

score	organizational structure	Direct essay	Translated essay
5	excellent statement structure		
4	good organizational structure		
3	acceptable organizational structure		
2	weak organizational structure		
1	poor organizational structure		

**TOTAL: Direct essay: ..... Translated essay: .....**

score	clarity of points	Direct essay	Translated essay
5	excellent statement of points		
4	good statement of points		
3	fair statement of points		
2	weak statement of points		
1	poor statement of points		

**TOTAL: Direct essay: ..... Translated essay: .....**

score	smoothness of essay	Direct essay	Translated essay
5	excellent connections across points		
4	good connections across points		
3	fair use of connectors		
2	weak use of connectors		
1	poor use of connectors		

**TOTAL: Direct essay: ..... Translated essay: .....**

**C. GRAMMAR**

score	Prepositions/Articles	Direct essay	Translated essay
5	excellent control		
4	good control		
3	fair control		
2	weak control		
1	poor control		

**TOTAL: Direct essay: ..... Translated essay: .....**

score	Noun /Adjective Agreement	Direct essay	Translated essay
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5	excellent control		
4	good control		
3	fair control		
2	weak control		
1	poor control		

TOTAL: Direct essay: ..... Translated essay: .....

score	Verbs	Direct essay	Translated essay
5	excellent control		
4	good control		
3	fair control		
2	weak control		
1	poor control		

TOTAL: Direct essay: ..... Translated essay: .....

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