

# The Effect of Pushed Output Collaborative Tasks on the Writing Skills of EFL Learners



**Ali M. Fazilatfar**, Ph.D in TEFL,  
English Dept, Yazd University,  
Email: afazilatfar@yazduni.ac.ir  
**Hamid Azizi** MA in TEFL  
Yazd University

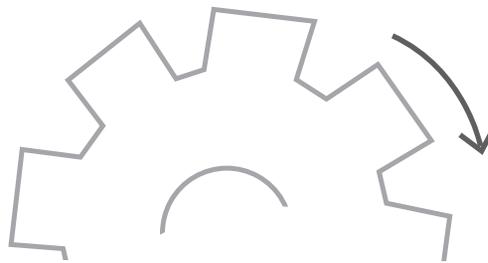
## Abstract

There is less published research on how teachers in EFL contexts respond to students who are relatively less mature and less competent L2 writers. While writing researchers have examined various issues concerning peer and teacher response in writing-oriented classes, little research has centered on the effect of collaborative tasks particularly dictogloss on writing skills. Output collaborative tasks are among the methods applied to enhance students' writing skills.

The purpose of this study was twofold. First, it was intended to compare the effect of pushed output collaborative tasks in particular dictogloss on overall writing quality of Iranian EFL learners at high, intermediate and low proficiency level. Second, it was meant to examine this effect on male vs. female groups. The participants were 124 Iranian EFL students at a well-known Language Institute ranging in age from 15 to 50.

The study led into three main conclusions: First, the present study found that dictogloss had a significant effect on writing proficiency and helped students reduce their errors. Second, it was found that low proficiency learners (EL) made more progress in their post-test compared to intermediate ones, and intermediate ones made more progress in their post-test compared to high proficiency ones. Third, it was found that the effect of dictogloss is statistically independent of gender for all groups.

**Key Words:** dictogloss (DG), collaborative pushed output task, writing skill, task-based language teaching



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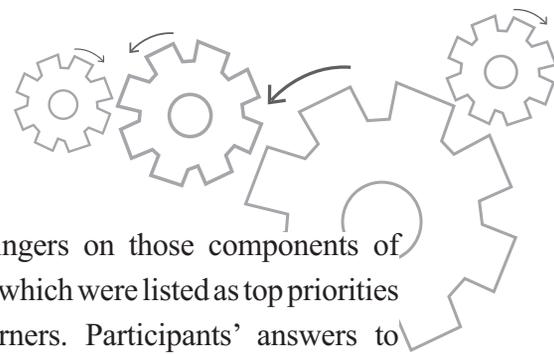
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**Appendix:** Themes assessed in each item of subscales

Subscale	No. of item	Theme
Form-focused instruction	1	Importance of language components in learning English
	2	Important role of memorizing vocabulary and grammar rules
	3	Preference for grammatical explanation
	4	Preference for translation exercises
	5	Preference for Persian language for explaining grammar
	6	Preference for Persian for analyzing passages
	7	Preference for speaking in Persian in class
	8	Importance of accuracy over fluency
	9	Preference for memorizing the Persian equivalence of English words
	10	The vital role of grammar in learning English
Communicative-based instruction	11	Importance of communication in learning English
	12	Importance of listening and speaking skills
	13	Preference for use of real-life activities in class
	14	Importance of teaching listening and speaking strategies
	15	Preference for speaking in English in class
	16	Preference for teaching daily English
	17	Preference for pair or group activities to practice speaking skill
	18	Priority of listening and speaking skills over reading and writing
	19	Importance of oral skills in enhancing written skills
Integrative motivation	20	Learning English for meeting and conversing with foreigners
	21	Learning English for enjoying English TV programs and movies
	22	Learning English for chatting with English-speakers
	23	Learning English for reading English stories
Instrumental motivation	24	Learning English for succeeding in the future career
	25	Learning English for being a more knowledgeable person
	26	Learning English for getting a job
	27	Learning English for its prestige
	28	Learning English for passing a compulsory course
	29	Learning English for being an English teacher or translator
	30	Learning English for computer and internet applications



instruction while their daily practices make their students define language learning as mastering grammar and vocabulary. Therefore, in order to increase the quality and efficiency of English classes, the hidden reasons behind such as perceptual gap should be investigated. Moreover, the students' evaluation of communicative language teaching showed that different principles and techniques of this instruction raised different reactions on the part of students. That is, some were accepted wholeheartedly while others were rejected strongly. Therefore, It can be suggested that some techniques of communicative language teaching are embedded in current English classes especially those which the students were more willing to experience. It should be noted that the students' lower mean score for evaluation of communicatively-based instruction doesn't mean that they are unwilling to enjoy communicative classes. What their answers signify is that the students consider grammar and vocabulary as the main components of language which can be supplied by some principles of communicatively-based instruction.

Relative resemblance between students and their teachers in their evaluation of the students' motivation is promising. It can be attributed to teachers' description of advantages of knowing English as an international language. Because the teachers are aware of their students' needs and wants, they can play a vital role in arousing their students' interest to invest more on their English learning activities. They can also

put their fingers on those components of motivation which were listed as top priorities by the learners. Participants' answers to motivation subscales are also important from another angle. The students showed moderate motivation to learn English particularly in the context of the study where the learners had few opportunities to use it for integrative and instrumental purposes.

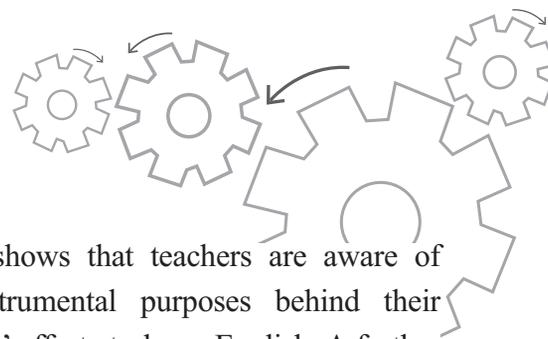
Based on the findings of this study, it is time for English teachers to update their perceptions about their students' attitudes about teaching methods. They need to employ the communicative principles and techniques but not at the expense of marginalizing grammar and vocabulary. In spite of teachers' negative attitude towards form-focused instruction, their students are positive towards this deeply-rooted instruction, and the alternative approach, although evaluated differently, is enjoying satisfactory status in the eyes of both groups. Therefore, the context of the study seems to be ready to experience some transition from a traditional approach to an innovative one. Moreover, teachers' correct perception about learners' motivation paves the way for such a transition to occur truly and thoroughly.

#### Note

1. De Vaus (2004) suggests anything less than .30 is a weak correlation for item-analysis purposes.

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students. Students' answers revealed great inconsistency from item to item. Item 15, in which speaking English in classrooms as a technique was proposed, ranked the last item in the questionnaire by the students ( $M=2.20$ ;  $SD=1.29$ ) while item 13, in which real life activities as a communicative technique was suggested, ranked the topmost among the nine items of communicative subscale ( $M=4.10$ ;  $SD=1.05$ ).

The answers in the third subscale, integrative motivation, enjoyed close congruence across the two groups. Both teachers and students were conservative in their responses. This can be attributed to the perceived social and cultural distance between the context of the study and the English language context. Such distance was perceived similarly by both groups. Among the four items assessing integrative motivation, only item 20 was answered as significantly different by students and their teachers. The students claimed that talking with foreigners was their major integrative purpose in English language learning while their teachers found this purpose as the least important one among other integrative purposes.

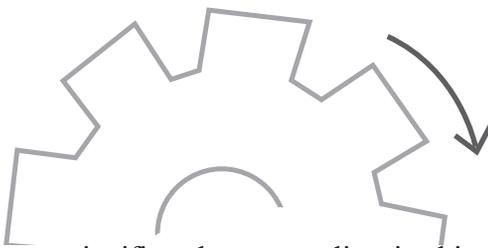
The items in the last subscale of the questionnaire which aimed at investigating instrumental motivation as a probable area of mismatch between the intended groups turned out to overlap in a similar pattern. In spite of the similar pattern of rising and falling, three items out of seven were significantly different across the groups. But the overall mean scores in this subscale were not significantly different

which shows that teachers are aware of the instrumental purposes behind their students' efforts to learn English. A further look at individual items shows that item 25 and 30 which propose English for getting knowledge and English for computer and internet use respectively ranked the first among all items of instrumental motivation subscale. This can indicate that both groups prefer immediate use of learning English to delayed ones in future like getting a good job or occupying English related careers.

## Conclusion and implications

The results of this study showed that there is some perceptual gap between teachers and their students as far as method of instruction is concerned. The students in this study showed their noticeable preference for form-focused instruction which is prevalent in traditional approaches while their teachers were to a large extent reluctant to follow the principles of this type of instruction. On the other hand teachers believed in principles of CLT and techniques of communicative language teaching while their students were less willing to experience communicatively-based instruction. In the realm of motivation, teachers had a clear picture of what their students expected from their English learning program.

The results of this study imply that English language classes in the context of the present study are experiencing some sort of innovation in values but not in approaches and techniques on the part of teachers. In fact, teachers downgrade form-focused



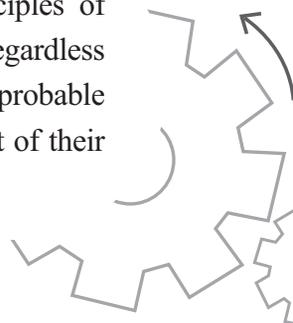
except for item 1 and 9 were significantly different across the groups. There was also a significant difference between the learners and their teachers in their evaluation of communicative-based instruction  $U=471.5$ ,  $p=.000$ . Results of Mann-Whitney U tests for individual items also revealed significant differences between the two groups in items 11, 12, 14, 15, 16 and none-significant differences in items 13, 17, 18, and 19. But the results of a Mann-Whitney U test for integrative motivation subscale didn't show any significant difference between learners' integrative purposes and their teachers' evaluation of these purposes,  $U=1155.5$ ,  $p=.84$ . Among all the four items of this subscale, only item 20 was significantly different across the teachers and their students. The same results for instrumental motivation were also obtained because no significant difference was observed between learners' and their teachers' answers,  $U=1138.5$ ,  $p=.76$ . As far as individual item difference in this subscale is concerned, items 24, 28, and 30 were significantly different.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to consider how far learners' beliefs differ from those held by their EFL teachers. Regarding some potential mismatches in the realms of instruction and motivation. The results of the study showed that teachers and their students had different ideas about form-focused instruction. This type of instruction is more appealing to the students than to their teachers. The results of item analysis are also

revealing in this regard. Such discrepancy can be attributed to the gap between theory and practice. The teachers downgrade the role of grammar and vocabulary in learning English in theory but their actual practice in English classes implies vital importance of these two components for their students. Interestingly, item (3) in which the status of explicit instruction of grammatical points was investigated was evaluated most differently among all 30 items by the teachers and their learners ( $M=4.27$ ;  $SD=0.98$  vs.  $M=2.42$ ;  $SD=1.07$ ) which overtly signifies a huge gap between the two groups in explicit teaching of grammar.

The participants' answers to items of communicatively-focused instruction subscale also revealed significant differences between the two groups. Contrary to the first subscale in which form-focused instruction was welcomed by the students, communicatively-focused instruction, as an alternative, was supported more noticeably by the teachers. A brief look at the mean scores shows that the teachers advocate communicatively-based instruction as much as the students support form-focused instruction. Teachers' inclination for communicative approaches indicates the prestigious status of this approach within the high school teachers' ideology. Teachers' answers to the items of this subscale showed less fluctuation than those by students. This, in turn, implies that the teachers agree with principles of communicative language teaching regardless of its possibility or plausibility or probable resistance or opposition on the part of their





other items were omitted in the same way. The results of the final analysis showed the Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of 0.88, 0.81, 0.77, and 0.78 for grammar-based instruction, communicative-based instruction, integrative motivation, and instrumental motivation, respectively.

### Procedure

When the questionnaire was validated in the pilot study, thirty teachers who were the participants in the pilot study completed the validated questionnaire with thirty items. Because they were supposed to be both participants and research assistants, they were informed of the purpose and the procedure of the study. They were asked to select about ten to fifteen students from among their freshmen randomly and give them the student version of the questionnaire. After two weeks, the questionnaires were collected and evaluated. Based on their performance on the questionnaires, twenty-one teachers and 113 students were qualified as the final sample of the study.

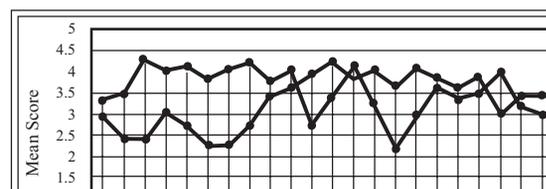
## Results

Table (1) shows the descriptive statistics of all types of the subscales based on the participants' answers to questionnaire items. As the table shows, form-focused instruction was evaluated most differently

by teachers and students. Communicative-based instruction was the second mostly differentiated area of mismatch between teachers and their students. As far as types of motivation are concerned, teachers had a clear picture of sources of motivation for foreign language learning on behalf of their learners.

As far as individual item analysis is concerned, item 3 which assessed the status of explicit detailed explanation of grammatical points scored most differently across the two groups and item 26 which assessed the role of learning English for getting a job was evaluated the most similarly. Figure (1) shows the preferences of the the two groups of each item individually.

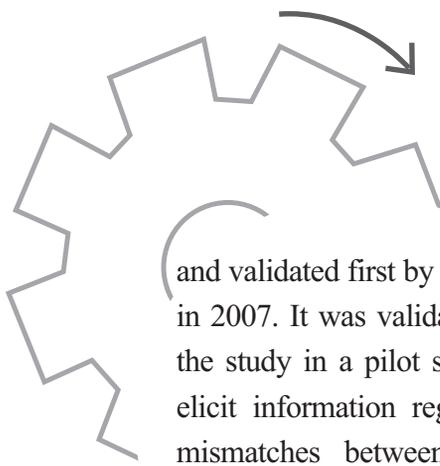
Figure 1. Participants' evaluation of each item



To find any probable significant differences between the groups a series of Mann-Whitney U tests were conducted. The results showed that the learners' attitude towards grammar-based instruction was significantly different from their teachers' attitude,  $U=166.0, p=.000$ . The results of individual item comparison showed that all grammar-focused instruction subscale items

table 1. Descriptive statistics of all subscales

Subscales	form-focused instruction	communicatively-based instruction	integrative motivation	instrumental motivation
Participants				
Teachers (N=21)	M= 2.78; SD= .46	M= 3.88; SD= .45	M= 3.27; SD= .68	M= 3.42; SD= .41
Students (N=113)	M= 3.90; SD= .53	M= 3.22; SD= .62	M= 3.29; SD= .90	M= 3.34; SD= .55

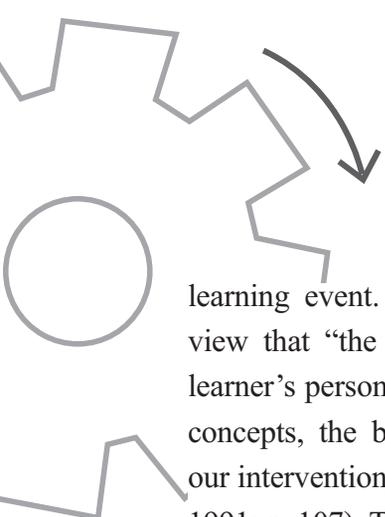


and validated first by Zhiwen Feng in China in 2007. It was validated for the context of the study in a pilot study and was used to elicit information regarding four potential mismatches between teachers and their learners. The questionnaire had two versions: the English version for the teachers and the Persian version for their students. These two versions were similar for types of instruction and a bit different in sources of motivation. That is, in form-focused instruction and communicative-based instruction subscales, students and their teachers identified their own attitude towards two types of instruction in their respective questionnaires, while for two sources of motivation students expressed their *own* purposes for learning English while teachers noted their evaluation of their students' purposes in language learning. For example, in the student version there was an item like: "Learning English is important for *me* because *I* need it for *my* future career"; the same item in the teacher version was presented as: "Learning English is important for *my students* because *they* need it for *their* future career". The questionnaire was in 5-point Likert scale format with thirty items in which ten items (1-10) measured form-focused instruction subscale, nine items (11-19) measured communicative-based instruction subscale, four items (20-23) assessed the students' integrative motivation and seven items (24-30) assessed their instrumental motivation.

The questionnaire used in this study was developed based on Feng's questionnaire which had sixty 5-point Likert scale items for

assessing students' attitude in four subscales of form-focused instruction, communication-based instruction, integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. First, the items of the questionnaire were evaluated for content validity by four English language teachers. Based on their comments, thirteen items were omitted for being irrelevant to the context of the study. The remaining forty-seven items constituted the teachers' version of the questionnaire. For the sake of clarity, the English version of the questionnaire was translated into Persian for students. Moreover, items of integrative and instrumental motivation subscales in teacher version which aimed at evaluating the teachers' interpretation of learners' motivation were changed to evaluate the learners' attitudes towards their own sources of motivation. The translated form was also evaluated for wording by the four teachers.

In a pilot study, the two versions of questionnaire were given to the respective target participants. Thirty-three English language teachers and ninety-one high school freshmen completed the teacher version and the student version, respectively. To evaluate the reliability of the questionnaire, their answers were plugged into SPSS (version 17) and a Chronbach  $\alpha$  was calculated for each subscale separately while combining both sets of results. Based on the statistical results for reliability analysis, fifteen items whose correlation was less than .30 ( $r \leq .30$ )<sup>1</sup> and whose omission increased total alpha were omitted. The remaining thirty-two items were reanalyzed and two



learning event. Other studies support the view that “the more we know about the learner’s personal approaches and personal concepts, the better and more productive our intervention will be” (Kumaravadivelu, 1991; p. 107). Therefore, understanding the gap between teacher and learner beliefs is the first step to bridge the gap.

Some of the beliefs held by learners and teachers are counterproductive and may hinder the learners’ progress (Borg, 2003, Freeman, 2002). If learners have negative or incorrect expectations about how foreign languages are learned, learners’ satisfaction with the course and their confidence in their teachers may be affected. In fact, studies show that beliefs are of critical importance to the success or failure of any student’s efforts to master a foreign language (Horwitz, 1988; Peacock, 1999). The other side of the coin is also of vital importance. If teachers do not have a clear picture of what is going on in their learners’ minds, particularly if it differs significantly from what commonly recognized by teachers, their efforts and practices may be doomed to failure. Therefore, in order to remove such deficiencies, it seems necessary to develop plans to overcome learners’ and teachers’ counterproductive beliefs about foreign language learning and to reduce gaps between learners’ and teachers’ beliefs (Horwitz, 1985; Wenden, 1986; Kern, 1995; Peacock, 1999).

Research studies indicate some areas of mismatch between learners’ beliefs on language learning and the teachers’ evaluation of these beliefs. These areas include beliefs on

the time needed to attain fluency, the relative difficulties of languages, the right age to start language learning, the role of grammar, vocabulary and communication in language learning and other aspects of the learning process. These factors are numerous and may vary from one situation to another. In the present study, the perceptual gap between Iranian teachers and their freshmen regarding four areas of form-focused instruction, communication-based instruction, integrative motivation and instrumental motivation will be identified. More specifically, the study tries to answer the following questions:

1. Are high school freshmen and their teachers different significantly in terms of their evaluation of form-focused instruction and communicative-based instruction?
2. Do high school English teachers have a correct perception of their students’ integrative and instrumental motivation?

## **M**ethod **P**articipants

High school freshmen and their teachers were selected as two groups of participants in this study. A convenience sample of twenty-one high school English language teachers constituted the first group of participants. The student group was made of 113 first graders whose teachers were also participants in this study. All participants were from different cities in Markazi province.

## **I**nstrument

The instrument used in this study was a modified version of a questionnaire developed





نتایج، با وجود این که دانش‌آموزان به آن شیوه‌ی آموزشی که واژگان و گرامر را در کانون توجه قرار می‌دهد، تمایل دارند، دبیرانشان اثربخشی این نوع آموزش را ناچیز ارزیابی می‌کنند. از سوی دیگر، نگرش آزمودنی‌ها نسبت به شیوه‌ی ارتباطی، خلاف نگرششان نسبت به شیوه‌ی ساخت‌محور بود. بدین معنی که دبیران میزان اثربخشی این نوع آموزش را به‌طور معنی‌داری بالاتر از دانش‌آموزانشان ارزیابی کردند. درخصوص عوامل انگیزشی، تفاوت معنی‌داری بین سطوح نگرشی دانش‌آموزان و ارزیابی دبیرانشان از این عوامل مشاهده نشد. براساس این نتایج می‌توان نتیجه گرفت، گرچه معلمین تصورات کاملاً واضحی از اهداف دانش‌آموزان از یادگیری زبان انگلیسی دارند، این تصورات از روش‌های تدریس که ابزار تحقق این اهداف هستند، با تصورات دانش‌آموزان در یک راستا قرار ندارند.

لذا به معلمین توصیه می‌شود با به‌کارگیری تکنیک‌های موجود در روش‌های ارتباطی، دانش‌آموزان را در دست‌یابی به بازتعریفی از زبان، زبان‌آموزی، و شیوه‌های کارآمد زبان‌آموزی یاری دهند. مطمئناً گذر از فضای سنتی حاکم بر کلاس‌های زبان انگلیسی، در گام اول مستلزم تغییر هم‌زمان نگرش‌ها در معلمین و دانش‌آموزان است.

**کلیدواژه‌ها:** آموزش ساخت‌محور، آموزش ارتباطی، انگیزش یکپارچه‌شدن، انگیزش ابزاری

### Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the perceptual gap between high school freshmen and their teachers in four areas of form-focused instruction, communicative-based instruction, integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. A convenience sample of twenty-one high school English language teachers and 113 high school freshmen being taught by these teachers took part in this study. They answered thirty items of their own respective questionnaires which were validated for the context of the study by the researcher. The results of Mann-Whitney U test showed that the two groups were significantly different in their evaluation of form-focused instruction and communicative-based instruction. But in areas of integrative and instrumental motivation no significant difference was observed between learners' self evaluation and their teachers' assessment of their learners' motivation. Based on the results, it is recommended that teachers embark on bridging the pedagogical gap between their own perceptions and those of their students.

**Key Words:** perceptual gap, form-focused instruction, communicative-based instruction, integrative motivation, and instrumental motivation

### Introduction

In recent decades, pedagogy has shifted from teacher-directed instruction to learner-centered learning. Therefore, numerous studies have been conducted to see the issues from the learners' perspective. Among these perspectives are learners' beliefs which, according to Richardson (1996; cited in Peacock, 2001), are psychologically held understandings, premises, or propositions about the world that are felt to be true. These beliefs are a result of a number of factors such as past experiences, culture, context, and personal factors (Bernat & Gvozdenko,

2005). Foreign language learning, like other fields, is almost certainly the subject of many firm beliefs and convictions among both EFL learners and teachers around the world.

Research findings indicate that there is a gap between learners' beliefs and those held by teachers (Block, 1994; Kern, 1995; Peacock, 1998). Based on research findings, some believe that the principal reasons for this gap are the mismatch between what learners think and what teachers suppose their students think. Allwright (1986) points out that teachers and learners may not look at the same classroom event as a potential