Abstract

Learning to write as a basic skill in second language learning and teaching is a fundamental goal in foreign language classrooms (Raimes, 1983; Einterhold, 1990). Despite this role, most L2 learners have difficulty to writing in L2. This study is based on the use of videos and reading comprehension texts to improve composition writing skills on the advance levels. To do this, 120 female and male students at Osmania University, Hyderabad were selected. Following a pre-test, the students were divided into two groups. Then a post-test was done for the results. The results show that using videos as a pre-writing task has positive effects and help second language learners be better writers.

Key words: second language learning, reading comprehension, composition writing, pre-writing activities
INTRODUCTION

The notion that writing is simply a skill that students learn has been convincingly challenged by research and theory in social practice theory, genre analysis, and academic literacy. All these bodies of research converge to demonstrate that students need to engage in different forms of writing. Learning to write as a basic skill in second language (L2) learning and teaching is a fundamental goal in foreign language classrooms. Writing is considered a basic skill because it plays a significant role in L2 learning at the academic level. The importance and role of writing as a medium to convey ideas and as a channel to L2 learning has been acknowledged by several authors (Raimes, 1983; Hughey, Wormuth, Hartfiel, & Jacobs, 1983; Eisterhold, 1990).

Hughey et al. (1983) argue that writing serves four purposes for second language learners. They argue that people should learn to write because they engage in writing for different reasons during their lifetime. Writing is useful for language learners because it can provide an opportunity to deal with what they have learned about the linguistic system of the target language, their knowledge of structure, vocabulary, and expressions of that language. Writing creates a reason to use language, test their linguistic knowledge, and make learners express their thoughts and ideas. This is what Hughey et al. (1983, p. 35) call a means of "self actualization." Moreover, writing is a tool for survival since second language learners may need to write in L2 if they want to communicate with native or non-native speakers of that language.

Therefore, writing is essential for second language learners to keep contact with people from other societies.

Despite its significant role and importance, most second language learners have difficulty when they want to write in L2. Some, if not most, of the problems stem from inadequate preparation for the writing assignments. Many students, even at the advanced level, might have hard time finding related ideas, and therefore, their writing might not reasonably represent their linguistic ability. The problem might be much worse when students in their first language (LI) context have no adequate composition practices or positive experiences which they can transfer to their L2 contexts. One productive procedure to help students overcome the hurdle of getting started is adequate preparation for writing through the use of reading or video that provides input to facilitate their linguistic performance and frame their composition.

Chung (2002) describes the role of strategies for increasing students' comprehension by providing students with background information. Among several strategies and techniques that have been suggested, reading comprehension and watching videos have been of fundamental considerations among methodologists. Reading materials as a source of information for students' language acquisition has been the subject of a host of studies (Krashen, 1982, 1985; Krashen & Terrell, 1983; Gass & Madden, 1985; Freeman & Freeman, 1992).

There is suggestive evidence that extensive reading can contribute to the writing ability. Viewing the LI reading-writing relationship from directional, non-directional and bidirectional perspectives, Eisterhold (1990) regards reading as a strategy to develop writing. From a theoretical perspective, reading and writing share structural features which can be applied from one modality to another. From a non-directional perspective, reading and writing are derived from a single underlying proficiency, and from a bidirectional perspective, reading and writing are both interactive and interdependent. Therefore, any
change in one would result in a change in the other. However, increased availability of media technology in the classroom has added to the possible list of strategies to writing tasks.

A number of studies have acknowledged the effect of video on the learners' language ability (Secules, Herron, & Tomasello, 1992; Hanley, Herron, & Cole, 1995; Chung, 2002; Herron, Corrie, Cole, & Dubreil, 2002).

Hanley et al. (1995) compared the effects of video and pictures and teacher narrative on comprehension and retention of a written passage in a foreign language in elementary schools. Herron et al. (2002) examined the effects of videos on cultural knowledge at the intermediate level. Herron, Corrie, Cloe, and Dubreil's (1999) study also capitalized on the benefits of using video to introduce cultural information. Research has also shown that the incorporation of technologies into the classroom can enhance students' skills in the area of writing and literacy (Kern, 2000). Dupuy (2001) states that students like the integration of movies into the course work because this popular cultural medium is motivating and increases students' willingness to engage in some of the more demanding aspects of the course. Students are interested in writing and writing movie preview as an art form, and this requires extra effort that students would willingly put in. According to Dupuy (2001, p. 10), "film is an art medium that appeals to all no matter their background knowledge and previous education".

The above studies verify the presence of video in language learning and that video can be an effective input to enhance comprehension and retention of a written passage as well as cultural knowledge. These studies, however, did not assess the impact of video as an input to composition writing. And since reading is regarded by many methodologists and practitioners as a powerful means of developing competence in a second language, specially in writing, at least one question has remained unresolved which runs like the following:

*Which one of the strategies can more effectively prepare students for writing compositions: reading comprehension or video viewing?*

**Method**

**Participants**

A total population of 120 female and male students at Osmania University were selected. All the key informants were within the age range of 20-24 years and all of them were residing in Hyderabad. They were picked out based on a pretest. They were in their 5th and 6th term at the time of the research, and they had already passed at least 70 credits in English grammar, reading, conversation, writing and linguistics. Writing courses start with basic writing in which students practice writing paragraphs with various rhetorical structures. In advance writing courses, students practice standard five paragraph essays. They were assigned to two experimental conditions, the video condition and the reading condition.

**Instrument**

The first instrument in this study (the pretest) was a simulated paper-and-pencil TOEFL proficiency test (Sharpe, 2000) to screen the participants. The test included 80 questions. The reliability of this test determined by the KR21 formula was 0.76.

The materials included three authentic TV talk shows and three authentic reading comprehension
passages. The videos were episodes from one of the world's most renowned talk shows, Dr. Phil, an American series that mainly discusses social and family issues. Each episode was on a social issue and lasted for about 20 minutes. It focused on a general social problem by bringing particular instances of individuals involved in that issue. The topics of the videos were as follows:

1. How do money problems affect your marriage?
2. Can parents and teachers use corporal punishment to make children aware of their mistakes?
3. What is the psychology behind most plastic surgeries?

The rationale for the selection of the topics was their argumentative nature, generality and subject matter appropriacy which made them challenging topics for the students to write. They were also closely related to the social issues of the concern of the society at large. Transcription of the videotaped shows confirmed that the input that the video group received was comparable to that of the reading.

Three descriptive and authentic reading passages were also selected on the same topics. The texts were extracted from the internet cites (See references for the cites). The average length of the passages was 423 words, and the readability (difficulty) of these passages calculated through Fry's Extended graph was 12.7 on average which falls in that area of the graph that belongs to the advanced level.

Procedures

The pretest was administered to one hundred twenty senior students who participated in the test voluntarily, from whom seventy male and female students scored above 75%. In order to select an equal number of students from both sexes, only the first thirty male and the first thirty female students were chosen and they were randomly put into two groups each consisting of thirty students. Care was exercised to include an equal number of sexes in each group. For the video group, one of the researchers introduced one of the topics for composition writing and stated the reason for the selection of the topic. Then in order to prepare the students for the writing task, she asked the students to watch a talk show on about the same topic and they watched it in its entirety, and they were allowed to take notes while viewing it. Each video was shown only once.

After viewing of the video, the students were asked to write a composition in about an hour by incorporating what they had seen in the film. They regarded the film show as a source of content for composition. Since the talk shows introduced ideas and examples to bolster those ideas, students could use them to develop their own composition. The same procedure was repeated for the other topics for the video group.

In order to remain consistent throughout the experiment, the same procedure was employed for the reading group. The same researchers introduced one of the topics for composition writing, and then they were asked to read the related passage in about 20 minutes only once as pre-writing task. Like the video group, the researchers gave no introductory remarks before reading and they asked the students to read the passage and take notes if they wanted. After reading the passage, the students were asked to write a composition in about an hour by incorporating what they had read. For example, they could borrow the main ideas and build their discussion around them, or they took the supporting details as ways to bolster their main ideas. This procedure was repeated for the other two topics.
It is important to note that neither of the groups was supposed to summarize or retell the video or the reading text content, but they were advised to take the content (general ideas and examples) as resource for the generation of ideas in their own wording and structure.

**Scoring procedure**

After the writing assignment, each composition was scored by three raters (the two researchers of the present study and a colleague). This enabled us to account for the rater reliability check and minimize sources of unreliability. In order to evaluate the compositions qualitatively and quantitatively, following Perkins (1983), each rater assigned two scores to a composition: an impressionistic marking and an analytic marking. In the impressionistic marking, the scorer glanced through the writing quickly and assigned a holistic grade. This enabled the raters to see each composition as an integrated unit of language—a macro-text. In the analytic marking, on the other hand, the rater employed the marking scheme or the composition scoring system suggested by Hughey et al. (1983). This system allowed the raters to see each composition in terms of a number of components (micro-features) which can be rated in isolation. The scoring system included such components as content, organization, vocabulary, language use and mechanics. Each component consisted of four criteria to each of which a certain point was devoted. Each rater read the compositions carefully and assigned a grade from the specified range to each of the various components. In fact, the two scores depicted the composition in terms of macro and micro-structures.

Since there were three raters, and each rater scored each composition twice, the final score for each composition would be the sum of the separate grades averaged by the total number of scores for each composition.

**Results**

In order to test the hypothesis objectively, the t-test was applied for the first composition in order to find out whether the difference between the performances of the reading and video groups was statistically significant. Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics and the t-value of this comparison.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1 Independent t-test on composition one</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Video condition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading condition</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Once the observed t was calculated (2.85), the critical value of t was found in the table of critical t-value (1.67). The alpha was also set at .05 for two tailed tests. The observed value of t was greater than the t-critical suggesting that the difference was significant. The same procedures were employed for the analysis of the second and third compositions of the two groups of the study.

Tables 2 and 3 illustrate descriptive statistics and the observed t-value for the second and third compositions.
Looking at the three tables representing the statistical analyses of the three compositions, we noticed that the value of the t-observed had a steady increase from the first to the third composition which might be indicative of the more effective experience that the video group from the talk shows. It was concluded that video as a pre-writing task had affected the students overall writing ability more than the reading passages.

The one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) applied showed no significant difference in the performances of the participants in each group on the three different topics. Tables 4 and 5 represent the results of the one-way ANOVA for the reading and video groups. As is shown in the tables, the critical value (1.671) was greater than the F-ratio for both groups. Therefore, the F-ratio was not statistically significant at the p 0.05 level.

### Table 2 Independent t-test on composition two

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>Level of Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Video condition</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading condition</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>14.45</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3 Independent t-test on composition three

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>Level of Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Video condition</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>16.13</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>4.022</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading condition</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>14.73</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4 One-way ANOVA in three reading group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Variance</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>D.F.</th>
<th>Mean Squares</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>5.296</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.963</td>
<td>1.321</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>195.199</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>2.244</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>201.125</td>
<td>89</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 5 One-way ANOVA in three video group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Variance</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>D.F.</th>
<th>Mean Squares</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>2.286</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.143</td>
<td>.579</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>216.947</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>2.494</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>219.833</td>
<td>89</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
Discussion

The data obtained on the performance of the two groups provides a general answer to the research question posed earlier. Based on the data there was a difference in the writing output of the two groups and this difference was statistically significant.

The empirical findings of the present study suggest that the Indian students' English writing ability at the advanced level benefit more from video viewing than from text reading as the pre-writing task. That is to say, video was a more effective pre-writing activity than reading comprehension.

This study suggests that a writing task in a foreign language is facilitated by the richness of context, and authentic foreign language (FL) visual materials provide a rich context for L2 learners to improve their writing skill. It can also help L2 learners overcome their content knowledge deficits by providing audio-visual formation.

To perform more effectively in L2 classes, students should be exposed to stimulating input. One reason for the greater impact of visual stimuli is that it can lead to and generate more prediction, stipulation, and a chance to activate background schemata. Video can stimulate and motivate student interests. The use of visuals overall helps learners predict information, infer ideas and analyze the world that is brought into the classroom via the use of visual stimuli.

Improved performance of learners in the video condition possibly relates to the capacity of contextualized videos that provide a rich store of information than static words in a text. The information presented in the video has been more easily recalled due to the greater impact of audiovisual materials on the learners. It is hypothesized that although reading passages might be helpful initially, they are more likely to fade from memory than video images which might tap both hemispheres of the brain, hence the greater recall of the visual materials and the linguistic input that accompanies them.

This study is also linked to a significant chain of research on using video in the foreign language classroom (Hanley et al., 1995; Herron et al., 1999; Herron et al., 2002). While video was found to be effective in all these studies, it did not always have the same role. In the Hanley et al., (1995) study, the investigators examined the role of video as the advance organizer on comprehension and retention of a written passage. In Herron et al. (1999) and Herron et al. (2002), the investigators evaluated the effectiveness of using video to improve students' cultural knowledge. An important point is that all these studies dealt with beginning - and intermediate - level students while the current investigation centered on the advance-level learners. Also in these studies the effect of video was evaluated on comprehension and cultural knowledge, whereas in the present study the effectiveness of using video or reading comprehension texts to improve composition writing was examined.

The results of this study, following other studies in this field, support the fact that to perform more effectively in L2 classes, students can be exposed to relevant input offered by videos. Because of the positive effects of videos on the comprehension ability, it is suggested that material developers and teachers, in particular, foreign language instructors, consider the benefits of using videos as a pre-writing task. It should be noted that this current study does not underestimate the significance of reading comprehension as a prelude to composition writing; however, it capitalizes on the incredible impact of video viewing as a strong facilitator of composition writing at the advanced level.
References


