Using convergent and divergent tasks to improve writing and language learning motivation

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A B S T R A C T

This study was an attempt to investigate the comparative impact of convergent and divergent condition tasks on EFL learners' writing and motivation. Sixty female intermediate EFL learners were selected from among a total number of 90 through their performance on a sample piloted PET and further homogenized in terms of their writing and motivation. Based on the results, the students were randomly assigned to two experimental groups with 30 participants in each. Both groups underwent the same amount of teaching time during 18 sessions of treatment which included using divergent tasks for the first group and convergent tasks for the second. A posttest (the writing section of another sample PET) and Gardener's Attitude and Motivation Test Battery (used also earlier for the homogenization) were administered at the end of the treatment to both groups and their mean scores on the test were compared through independent samples t-tests. The results led to the rejection of the first null hypothesis, thereby demonstrating that the learners in the convergent group benefited significantly more than those in the divergent group in terms of improving their writing. The second null hypothesis was not rejected, however, meaning that the two treatments were not significantly different in terms of improving the learners' motivation.

Keywords: convergent/divergent tasks; writing; motivation

A R T I C L E   S U M M A R Y

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Introduction

Writing

Writing is an important experience through which individuals acquire the ability to share ideas and feelings and also persuade other people (White & Ardnt, 1991). "It is a process of generating a text as a communicative bridge between the reader and the writer. It is important to view writing not solely as the product of the individual, but as a cognitive, social and cultural act" (Weigle, 2002, p. 146). Writing has been described as "an act that takes place within a context, that accomplishes a particular purpose and that is appropriately shaped for its intended audience" (Hamp-Lyons & Kroll, 1997, p. 8). Accordingly, becoming increasingly aware of this necessity, English language teaching circles are paying further attention to writing (Seidlhofer & Widdowson, 1999) as the ability to write well is not a naturally acquired skill; rather, it is usually learned or culturally transmitted as a set of practices in formal instructional settings or other environments (Brown, 2001).

Shin (2003) holds that if learning to write in a second or foreign language were simply a matter of knowing how to write things down in the new code, then teaching writing could be a relatively easy task. Indeed, learning to write even in one's native language is not simply a matter of writing things down. Indeed, "competent writing is frequently accepted as being the last language skill to be acquired for native speakers of the language as well as for foreign/second language learners" (Hamp-Lyons & Heasly, 2006, p. 81). Perhaps the majority of those who have attempted to put their ideas on paper would agree that expressing oneself clearly in writing can be a slow and painful process (Hadley, 2003). This may well be particularly true in the context of ELT as "to a preponderance of EFL learners, nothing is more discouraging than doing a writing task and knowing that it will come under the eyes of the teacher, who will consider it as a source of errors to be corrected" (Tuan, 2010, p. 81).

In ESL/EFL pedagogy, hence, writing needs considerable attention since producing a well-prepared piece requires meticulous consideration. Results of several studies (e.g. Biton & Sivasurbamaniam, 2009; Brown, 2001; Hyland, 2003; Image, 2010; Lindgern & Sullivan, 2003) show that teaching writing through exercises cannot help students select a topic, find references, organize ideas, use supporting evidence, produce outlines, write a draft, revise the draft, and develop visual aids. Rather, creating an accurate piece of text calls for attending to many essential factors, such as grammaticality of sentences, unity and coherence of the pieces, choice of lexis, and punctuation (Peasley, Rosaen, & Roth, 1993).

Planning a writing course is by no means an easy task and to use Raimes' (2002, p. 306) analogy, "it resembles walking a minefield as it involves so many choices about where to go next, what is the best step to take, and what is the best route to the goal". In an earlier work, Raimes (1983) presented a solid reason why writing should be included as a part of a language teaching syllabus by stating that "the fact that people frequently have to communicate with each other in writing is not the only reason to include writing as a part of second-language syllabus" (p. 6). Rather, the significant reason would be that writing helps students learn better and more since it reinforces their knowledge of grammatical structures, idioms, vocabulary, genres, and ways of developing and connecting ideas to each other. In fact, Raimes goes on to assert that as learners write, "they necessarily become involved with the new language; the effort to express ideas and the constant use of eyes, hand, and brain is a unique way to reinforce learning" (p. 3).

It is with little surprise then that huge initiatives and endeavors are made to enhance EFL learners' writing competence through designing more effective writing courses. Many such endeavors are being materialized within the context of task-based language teaching (TBLT) which has been the

subject of extensive inquiry in the last two to three decades (e.g. Ellis, 2003, 2006; Foster & Skehan, 1999; Long & Crookes, 1992; Marashi & Dadari, 2012; Nunan, 2005, 2006; Robinson, 2005; Willis, 1996).

Convergent/Divergent Tasks

TBLT focuses on the use of authentic language and on asking students to do meaningful activities using the target language with the tasks serving as the core unit of planning and instruction in language teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). There are indeed numerous types of tasks within TBLT, the application of which is usually determined by interactive conditional factors (Robinson, 2005); one such typology is convergent/divergent tasks derived from concepts of knowledge formation. Convergent tasks are defined as those tasks "that require true justified knowledge, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. They allow for collaboration in meaning negotiation of where a single goal is needed; thus, collaborative work is required" (Skehan, 2001, p. 49). Such tasks should prompt "only one correct answer, allow collaborative work with short answers of which are not highly cognitively demanding, and so require no reference making" (Astika, 2004, p. 30). Convergent tasks encourage learners to reach a consensus in order for a reasonable solution to be produced (Wegerif, Mercer, & Dawes, 1999). Furthermore, students work interdependently and need to interact and communicate in a manner that necessitates more negotiation and interaction (Cropley, 2006).

Contrary to convergent tasks, divergent tasks are those that require new significant knowledge and have various outcome options with possibly more than one goal (Hommel, 2011). "These types of tasks allow independent works which individuals can perform differently according to their cognitive styles and which might lead to different outcomes" (Swan, 2005, p. 382). Questioning in divergent tasks enables students to raise questions with more than one correct answer. In such a situation, there is no correct answer or answers as the possible responses depend on one's point of view or experience (Nielsen, Bayard, Pickett, & Simonton, 2008).

Duff (1986) states that in convergent condition tasks, pairs of learners are asked to solve a given problem together to agree on a justifiable solution to it. While in divergent condition tasks, pairs of learners are asked to cover a broad range of topics and operations and they are assigned different viewpoints on an issue, and they are asked to defend the given position and refute their partner's with as many arguments as possible. Duff further elaborates the finding of his study stating that convergent tasks (e.g. problem solving) produce more negotiation of meaning than divergent ones (e.g. debating). He concludes that convergent tasks result in more comprehensible input than divergent tasks but that the latter lead to more output. In addition, divergent tasks produce more words and greater utterance complexity than convergent tasks.

Nunan (1989) also reports the finding of his study: convergent problem-solving tasks prompted significant interactional and discourse differences with more and shorter turns than divergent debating tasks. In another study, Long (1989) reports that convergent tasks result in more turns, questions, and confirmation checks per task than divergent tasks.

Reviewing the results of the above studies, one could conclude that there seems to be no specific pattern regarding the definite advantage of divergent and convergent tasks compared to one another.

Motivation

Alongside the ongoing issue of which teaching procedure to adopt in order to enhance learner intake, equally – if not more important – is the case of learners' motivation to learn. Ironically, people in need of help often lack the motivation to achieve the things that they want and need in life (Dörnyei, 2001) as "Motivational deficits can prevent people from seizing opportunities that would enable them to lead fulfilling lives" (Spolsky, 2000, p. 112). "These deficits can interfere with people's work productivity and their satisfaction with life. They can cause people to seek alternative but self-defeating ways to obtain satisfaction" (Gardner, 2001, p. 376).

There exists a multitude of definitions regarding motivation with different scholars approaching this construct from varying angles. Gardner (2001) defines motivation as a "combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favorable attitudes towards learning the language" (p. 208). Hashimoto (2002) reflects a long tradition when he defines motivation as "the internal status of the organism that lead to the instigation, persistence, energy, and direction of behavior" (p. 429). Ellis (2008) argues that "motivation is defined as the learner's orientation with regard to the goal of learning a second language" (p. 208). In Dörneyi's (2005) opinion, "motivation is as a concept to account for factors within the organism which arouse, maintain, and channel behavior toward a goal" (p. 303). Finally, Gredler, Broussard, and Garrison (2004) provide a somewhat broad definition of motivation: "the attribute that moves us to do or not to do something" (p. 106).

Motivation is undeniably one of the most important psychological factors that could produce effective learning and can be considered "without question, the most complex and challenging issue facing teachers" (Scheidecker & Freeman, 1999, p. 116) and is mostly regarded seen as the most noteworthy learner variable since without it, not much is achieved (Cohen & Dörnyei, 2002). "Motivation represents one of the most appealing, yet complex, variables used to explain individual differences in language learning" (MacIntyre, MacMaster, & Baker, 2001, p. 462).

Motivation in learning a language occurs where EFL learners "find a meaning in learning that language in the society they live in, where using that language they can express their thoughts, exchange opinions with each other, and therefore feel they would like to learn that language continuously and autonomously" (Vohs, Baumeister, Jean, Twenge, Nelson, & Tice, 2008, p. 885). It is of no surprise then that the literature of ELT is overwhelmed by studies proving that motivation bears a significantly positive impact on L2 learning (e.g. Dörnyei; 2005; Ehrman & Oxford, 1990; Gardner, Tremblay, & Masgoret, 1997; Kimura, Nakata, & Okumura, 2001; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Oxford & Shearin, 1994; Vohs et al., 2008; Vandergrift, 2005; Watkins, McInerney, Lee, Akande, & Regmi, 2002).

It certainly makes sense that motivation would be associated with second language achievement since language learning requires a long-term time commitment, and motivated individuals would be more likely to devote the time required to language learning (Spolsky, 2000). It is, however, imperative to consider motivation as one of a set of variables in a model of interrelated individual and situational factors which are unique to each language learner (Weiner, 1990).

Yet, another prominent feature of motivation is the fact that it shows continuous variability (Dörnyei, 2005). Indeed, "classroom L2 learning motivation is not a static construct as often measured in a quantitative manner, but a compound and relative phenomenon situated in various resources and tools in a dynamic classroom context" (Kimura, 2003, p. 78).

In line with what has been discussed so far, the purpose of this study was to investigate whether convergent and divergent tasks bore a significant effect upon the writing and motivation of EFL learners and the two following two research questions were stated:

- Is there any significant difference between the effect of convergent and divergent task conditions on EFL learners' writing?

- Is there any significant difference between the effect of convergent and divergent task conditions on EFL learners' motivation?

Method

Participants

A total of 60 female intermediate EFL learners studying at a language school located in Karaj (Iran) participated in this study. These learners were selected based on their performance on a sample Preliminary English Test (PET) administered to a larger sample of 90 students (the sample PET had been piloted among 30 other female intermediate EFL learners). Next, these 60 participants were randomly put into two experimental groups prior to the instruction phase; naturally, there were 30 students in each group while each group consisted of two classes of 15 learners. Hence, a total of four classes sat in the course. The participants' age range was between 18 and 26.

Furthermore, two teachers (one of the researchers and a colleague of hers who taught the same level of classes at the same language school) participated as raters of the writing section of the PET in this study. The two raters enjoyed a significant inter-rater reliability of 0.83.

Instrumentations and Materials

Preliminary English Test (PET)

To begin with, the researchers utilized a sample PET piloted beforehand to choose a homogenous sample of participants based on their level of proficiency prior to the study. PET consists of the four parts of reading and writing (paper 1), listening (paper 2), and speaking (paper 3).

As this research was focused on the writing ability of the learners, all the three parts excluding the speaking section of the PET were administered. Furthermore, the test originally contained 75 items but five items were discarded as a result of the item analysis following the piloting. The reliability of the piloting among the 30 students was 0.81 while that of the actual administration for the selection of the 60 participants was 0.87.

Rating Scale for the PET Writing Part

For the assessment of parts two and three of the writing section of the sample PET, the two raters used the PET general mark scheme which is used as a rubric for a summative score. According to the PET rating scale, the criteria include language range, variety, complexity message communication, grammatical structure, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, content points, length, and target reader. The maximum overall score would be five.

Writing Posttest

After the treatment process, another sample PET writing paper was administered to both groups as one of the posttests.

Attitude Questionnaire

Gardner's (1985) Attitude and Motivation Test Battery (AMTB – the original English version) was used in this study at the beginning and at the end of the treatment to check the participants' attitude in both groups towards the course in general before and after the treatment. This battery includes 25 Likert-type items and requires 25 minutes for administration. The test is recognized universally as being valid with a reliability of around 0.87 (Gardner, Lalonde, Moorcroft, & Evers, 1987; Gardner & Lysynchuk, 1990; Gardner & Macintyre, 1993; Gardner & Tremblay, 1998). Furthermore, the reliability of the AMTB in this study stood at 0.87.

Course Book

The participants' main course book was *Passages* (Richards & Sandy, 2008) which covers the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, while giving systematic attention to grammar and vocabulary. The topic-based syllabus seeks to develop both fluency and accuracy in English and provides maximum opportunities for personalized discussion that should enhance linguistic and communication skills.

Procedure

Following the piloting and administration of the sample PET and the formation of the two experimental groups, the AMTB was administered to make sure that the learners bore no significant difference in terms of their motivation prior to the treatment either.

In the treatment process, both experimental groups underwent 18 sessions held twice a week; each session lasted 90 minutes and a total of 60 minutes per session was allocated to teaching writing. Throughout the term, four units of the course book were taught to both groups. Each of these units comprised five titles for writing. It is worth noting that the researchers used a conglomeration of the ideas and techniques discussed by the following together with their own experience of TBLT: Ellis (2005), Nunn (2006), Skehan (2001), Van der Branden (2006), and Willis and Willis (2007).

In the experimental group (N = 30) which received convergent tasks and comprised of two classes (with 15 learners in each), the teacher (one of the researchers) divided each of the two classes into small groups of five learners. These learners chose their own groups and, in order to be able to complete the task focusing on a single outcome, these groups engaged in information exchange. To this end, each group underwent a pre-task stage in which they performed activities to prepare themselves for the task.

During the pre-task phase, the groups were asked to think of some words related to the topic (for instance, TV). They had to write the words down on a piece of paper. Then, the teacher randomly

asked the members of each group to say those words (e.g. channel, movie, and film) and the teacher wrote them on the board. After that, she made some sentences within which she inserted the new words. Next, she listed the new words introduced in the sentences already mentioned in addition to some definitions.

The students had to find each appropriate pair. Another pre-task activity for the groups was asking a few questions aimed to activate their background knowledge of the topic (top-down exercise). Examples of these questions were: *What do you understand by the term "TV or not TV"? Or how is your life going to be without TV?* The students had discussed these questions in groups of five before they wrote the text. At the end of the discussion, some of the groups' answers were randomly invited to be discussed in the class.

The grouping of students remained the same during the pre- and while-task phases. Each group was given one or two of the same topics that they had received in pre-task in order to write. After that, each group was asked to recite what they had written. Meanwhile, the teacher helped them correct their grammatical errors in this part. The teacher took notes on the common mistakes the students made. During the follow-up correction session, the teacher presented the common mistakes made so that all students could benefit from an analysis of the mistakes made and the reason behind them. This process gave the students clues to the type of error they were making (in writing) and also allowed them to either correct the mistakes themselves or ask other students to remark on them. They were then asked to write collaboratively once more and choose some new words and rewrite their texts.

In order to cover the post-task phase, the groups were asked to do some tasks such as information gap, decision making, reasoning task, and problem solving task; subsequently, they wrote their writing collaboratively once more. Towards the end, she asked the groups to choose one person as a representative to recite and check their writing. The students used specific forms incorrectly and the teacher paid close attention to what each group would say without interrupting them. She wrote some of these errors on the board to be corrected by the students and subsequently, commented on and corrected some of those wrong forms, wherever necessary.

The second experimental group undergoing the divergent condition was divided into small groups. The teacher used an opinion exchange pre-task in which the groups were told to report their views on the language learning contributions of the preceding tasks, while each interactant had access to all the information needed and supplied it in response to the other individual's request.

In the meantime, each group was asked to work divergently toward different outcomes meaning that it was not necessary for the groups to reach any agreement. To this end, the groups received the pre-task phase like the previous experimental group to complete the task. During the while task phase, the students worked in groups of five. Each group was given the same topic in order to write. Next, they were asked to use the information from the text to report their ideas to their group and teacher through preparing ideas or taking notes before a discussion or, doing a short written assignment. For instance, in such a situation, they were asked to create another title for the text based on their viewpoints or answer such questions as *Can you live without TV?* or *Which one do you prefer: swimming in the pool or watching TV?* They were asked individually to give reasons to support their ideas and reject their partners' viewpoints. The teacher walked through the class for further help.

During the post-task phase, the groups were asked to do some tasks such as brainstorming, mind and subject mapping, or opinion exchange tasks and debates. The learners subsequently presented their writing to the whole class individually and the teacher dealt with correcting their written

mistakes (grammar, spelling, and vocabulary choice mistakes in written work, mistakes of verb tenses, preposition use, etc.) and vocabulary mistakes (incorrect collocations, idiomatic phrase usage, etc.).

Some of the groups' writings were randomly selected to be corrected by the teacher. The teacher wrote wrong sentences on the board and invited the students to recognize the wrong point within each sentence. After having discussed each others' suggestions during this stage, the learners had the opportunity to reflect on their writing and chose a useful phrase for each sentence.

Finally, the teacher commented on the ungrammaticality of the sentences and wrote the correct form on the board. At the end, each learner individually rewrote her writing again and submitted it to the teacher. Five days after the teaching process was over, the writing posttest and the attitude questionnaire were administered to both groups.

Results

In order to test the two hypotheses, the researchers carried out a series of both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses the results of which are elaborated in a chronological order from participant selection to testing the hypotheses.

Participant Selection

Following the piloting of the sample PET among 30 learners and the actual administration among 90 learners to choose the 60 participants (described earlier), the researchers had to ensure that the two groups displayed no significant difference at the outset of the study in terms of their writing. Hence, a comparison of the mean scores of the two groups on the writing component of the PET had to be conducted. The descriptive statistics of the scores on the writing test appear in Table 1 below.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics on the PET writing section at the outset

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness Ratio
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	
Divergent PreWriting	30	9.5	15.0	12.250	1.3818	.33
Convergent PreWriting	30	9.0	15.0	12.283	1.5794	.81
Valid N (listwise)	30					

As is clear in Table 1, the mean and standard deviation of the two groups stood at 12.25 and 1.38, and 12.28 and 1.57, respectively. The subsequent step was to run an independent samples *t*-test. With the skewness ratios of the scores of both groups falling within the acceptable range (±1.96), running this parametric test was legitimized. Table 2 below includes the results of the *t*-test run between the mean scores of the two groups on the writing section of the PET.

Table 2
Independent samples *t*-test of the two groups' writing mean scores on the PET prior to the treatment

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		*t*-test for Equality of Means						
								95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	*t*	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.303	.585	-.087	58	.931	-.0333	.3831	-.800	.733
Equal variances not assumed			-.087	56.9	.931	-.0333	.3831	-.800	.733

As Table 2 indicates, with the *F* value of 0.303 at the significance level of 0.585 being greater than 0.05, the variance between the two groups was not significantly different. Therefore, the assumption of equal variances applied to this case. The results ($t = -0.087$, $p = 0.931 > 0.05$) indicate that there was no significant difference between the writing mean scores of the two groups at the outset. Hence, the researchers could rest assured that both groups manifested no significant difference in their writing prior to the treatment and any probable difference at the posttest level would be attributed to the effect of the two instructions.

The same procedure was conducted with the AMTB (i.e. to ensure that the participants bore no significant difference in terms of their motivation at the outset either). Table 3 below shows the descriptive statistics of the administration of the ATMB prior to the treatment. As is clear in Table 3, the mean and standard deviation of the divergent group stood at 303.03 and 26.32, respectively, while those of the convergent group were 303.33 and 22.00, respectively.

Table 3
Descriptive statistics of the scores on the AMTB prior to the treatment

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness Ratio
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	
Divergent PreAMTB	30	248	350	303.03	26.320	-1.03
Convergent PreAMTB	30	257	335	303.33	21.996	-1.33
Valid N (listwise)	30					

Again with the skewness ratios of the scores of both groups falling within the acceptable range (Table 3 above), an independent samples *t*-test was run on the mean scores of the two groups on the AMTB at the outset.

Table 4

Independent samples *t*-test of the two groups' AMTB mean scores prior to the treatment

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		*t*-test for Equality of Means						
								95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	*t*	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	1.100	.299	-.048	58	.962	-.300	6.262	-12.8	12.23
Equal variances not assumed			-.048	56.2	.962	-.300	6.262	-12.8	12.24

As Table 5 indicates, with the *F* value of 1.100 at the significance level of 0.299 being greater than 0.05, the variance between the two groups was not significantly different. Therefore, the results of the *t*-test with the assumption of homogeneity of the variances were reported here. The results ($t = -0.48$, $p = 0.962 > 0.05$) indicate that there was no significant difference between the AMTB scores of the two groups at the outset. Hence, the researchers could rest assured that both groups manifested no significant difference in their motivation degree prior to the treatment and any probable difference at the posttest level would be attributed to the effect of the two instructions.

Testing the First Null Hypothesis

To test the first null hypothesis raised in this study, that is whether a significant difference existed between the two divergent and convergent groups in terms of their writing, the researchers first report the descriptive statistics of the writing posttest administration.

Table 5
Descriptive statistics for the writing posttest in both groups

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness Ratio
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	
Divergent	30	11.0	15.0	12.967	1.1740	.24
Convergent	30	11.5	15.0	13.817	1.1483	-1.18
Valid N (listwise)	30					

As shown in Table 5 above, the mean and standard deviation of the divergent group were 12.97 and 1.17, respectively. In the convergent group, however, the mean was 13.82 while the standard deviation stood at 1.15. In addition, the skewness ratios of the scores of both groups fell within the acceptable range (Table 5 above). Hence, an independent samples *t*-test was run on the mean scores of the two groups on the writing posttest.

Table 6

Independent samples *t*-test of the two groups' writing posttest mean

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		*t*-test for Equality of Means						
								95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	*t*	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	2.135	.799	-.143	58	.002	-.310	4.275	2.8	14.23
Equal variances not assumed			-.143	56.2	.002	-.310	4.275	2.8	14.23

As Table 6 indicates, with the *F* value of 2.135 at the significance level of 0.799 being greater than 0.05, the variance between the two groups was not significantly different. Therefore, the results of the *t*-test with the assumption of homogeneity of the variances were reported here. The results ($t = -0.143$, $p = 0.002 < 0.05$) indicate that there was indeed a significant difference between the writing scores of the two groups at the posttest. Hence, the first null hypothesis of the study was rejected meaning that convergent tasks instruction had a significantly different impact on EFL learners' writing compared to divergent tasks instruction.

Furthermore, the effect size which evaluates the stability of the research finding across samples was estimated to be 0.63. According to Cohen (1988), this is a moderate effect size. Therefore, this specific result could be moderately generalized.

Testing the Second Null Hypothesis

To test the second null hypothesis raised in this study, that is whether a significant difference existed between the divergent and convergent groups in terms of their motivation, the researchers administered the AMTB again this time as a posttest; first, the descriptive statistics of the AMTB administration are presented in Table 7. As displayed in Table 7, the mean and standard deviation of the divergent group were 314.73 and 21.68, respectively. In the convergent group, however, the mean was 316.87 while the standard deviation stood at 18.06.

Table 7
Descriptive statistics for the AMTB posttest in both groups

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness Ratio
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	
Divergent	30	270	350	314.73	21.679	-1.70
Convergent	30	264	341	316.87	18.059	-.87
Valid N (listwise)	30					

With the normality of the scores in both groups having been established (skewness ratios being within the acceptable range as displayed in Table 7), running an independent samples *t*-test was legitimized.

Table 8
Independent samples *t*-test of the two groups' AMTB posttest mean

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		*t*-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	*t*	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	4.001	.809	-.565	58	.12	-.665	3.456	1.8	13.69
Equal variances not assumed			-.565	56.2	.12	-.665	3.456	1.8	13.69

As Table 8 indicates, with the *F* value of 4.001 at the significance level of 0.809 being greater than 0.05, the variance between the two groups was not significantly different. Therefore, the results of the *t*-test with the assumption of homogeneity of the variances were reported here. The results ($t = -0.565$, $p = 0.12 > 0.05$) indicate that there was no significant difference between the AMTB scores of the two groups at the posttest. To this end, the second null hypothesis of the study was not rejected meaning that convergent and divergent tasks instruction had no significantly different impact on EFL learners' language learning motivation.

Discussion

In recent years, numerous studies have been conducted which demonstrate that TBLT generally bears a more positive impact on learning outcomes (e.g. Chandler 2003; Latchem, Latchem, & Jung, 2010; Makumar, 2010; Marashi & Hatam, 2009; Plews & Zhao 2010; Pourdana, Karimi Behbahani, & Safdari, 2011; Van den Branden, 2006). Accordingly, the researchers engaged in the design and process of this study with the above paradigm in mind that TBLT does engender significantly positive results. The question remaining, however, was over the effectiveness of convergent and divergent tasks vis-à-vis one another as discussed earlier in this paper with the results of different studies not resembling conformity (Duff, 1986; Hommel, 2011; Long, 1989; Nielsen et al., 2008; Nunan, 1989; Swan, 2005).

As Carless (2009) notes and as reconsolidated in this study, some of the merits of convergent tasks are that they clarify what is to be learned and also facilitate the acquisition of the various language skills and components. To this end, the researchers clearly observed in the course of the study that

instruction through convergent tasks provided learners with more successful language learning by paving the grounds for their further involvement and participation.

Furthermore, it was noticeably clear in the convergent group that such tasks provided learners with a more encouraging context for language use. In the process of completing these tasks, the learners explored a significant number of opportunities where they could interact; this interaction, in turn, would facilitate their language learning through the challenge of understanding others and also making themselves understood. This is indeed a cornerstone established by the communicative language teaching paradigm which is still very much in place today in ELT and has been noted emphatically by various – if not all – key scholars (e.g. Brumfit, 2006; Ellis, 2003; Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Nunan & Richards, 2014; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Widdowson, 1990.

One highly probable factor which culminated in the convergent group achieving better results in writing was the fact that the procedure was spelled out in a step-by-step modality and also structured such that it guided the students specifically as to how they should proceed with the task. In both groups, the classroom activities of this study were designed commensurately with the required information exchange; thus the tasks could not be completed unless the learners exchanged the information required to achieve the single outcome in the convergent group. This, however, was not the case in the divergent group and perhaps lay the foundation for higher achievement in terms of writing in the convergent group. In addition, convergent tasks led to the production of more words and utterances and involved taking the different pieces of a particular topic and putting them back together in an organized, structured, and understandable manner.

The findings of this study also indicate that the learners' motivation in both experimental groups increased following the treatment and that neither was significantly more effective in doing so. Indeed, both convergent and divergent tasks provide learners with a wide range of advantages: for example, a comfortable learning environment that allows more introverted students to overcome stress or fear and speak or have discussions with others. Furthermore, the learners in both groups were motivated to do the tasks that were real and meaningful for them while being provided the opportunity to actively participate in completing the tasks. Naturally, such pretexts common to both teaching modalities generated a higher degree of motivation among the learners in the two groups.

Perhaps another reason for the increased motivation in both groups which was not significantly different could be that both convergent and divergent tasks were designed to match the factors that promoted intrinsic motivation. The quantity of information required in meeting the goal of these tasks was distributed between the groups rather than being exclusive to one of them only. The researchers observed clearly that in both groups, the learners seemed to be enjoying themselves through exchanging ideas, interacting, and becoming more acquainted with their classmates. Again such a congenial environment in both groups translated into motivating the learners to participate further in classroom tasks and activities.

Conclusion

The researchers clearly observed in the course of this study that from a pedagogical viewpoint, convergent tasks can lower the learners' stress and anxiety by making students work in groups and providing friendlier and less authoritative classrooms as they emphasize a more cooperative ambience rather than a competitive one compared to divergent tasks. Applying the three phases of pre-writing, while-writing, and post-writing plays particularly important roles in helping learners comprehend the text better with less effort. In addition, with convergent tasks where each group

is asked to work in collaboration with others toward the same outcome, the group members would enjoy themselves working with peers in exchanging information and interacting to comprehend the text.

When it comes to writing, teachers may encounter certain problems on the part of the learners like lack of participation and motivation. Many students do not know how to initiate their writing since they have not been provided with enough input to help them generate new ideas and enough motives to actively take part in the learning process.

The results of this study reveal that using convergent tasks is highly recommended to ELT teachers while providing for the learners enough input, allowing them to participate actively in the classroom activities, and also exploring ways to boost their creative learning.

To introduce convergent tasks to English teachers, teacher training centers and institutions obviously play a considerable role in familiarizing teachers with such techniques. This training could be done both for teachers who are being trained to become teachers or those already engaged in the practice of pedagogy in the form of in-service courses.

Syllabus designers and materials developers have to provide the content of teaching materials with comprehensible and proper tasks and exercises. They should thus consider tasks as the building blocks for classroom teaching and for designing instructional activities. Furthermore, syllabus designers and material developers can produce textbooks which highlight convergent writing tasks; naturally, such materials must be accompanied by teachers' guidebooks thereby assisting teachers in the their application. Such an approach would, in turn, endow teachers with a more open hand in selecting some tasks according to their learners' interests. All this, of course, requires a universal emphasis on learners' creativity in performing the convergent tasks presented in the materials.

There were two limitations in this study: the participants' age (18-26) and gender (females). Hence, the results of the study may not necessarily be generalizable to males and learners of other age groups. The researchers thus suggest further studies on this theme with male learners and/or in co-ed contexts and also participants of other age groups to find out whether age and gender are significant or negligible factors in this context. A second suggestion would be to focus on the comparative effect of convergent and divergent tasks on other language skills and/or components.

Furthermore, the researchers compared divergent and convergent tasks with one another in this study in terms of their impact on writing. Another study could be run to find out whether a combination of both these tasks would benefit learners more in comparison with the instruction of each task in isolation. And finally, the materials employed in this study were extracted from pedagogical textbooks; other types of texts such as news pieces taken from print and/or digital media which are perhaps more challenging than those selected and graded for textbooks could comprise the set of the texts used to establish whether materials could be regarded as a significantly influential variable in such a study.

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