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Chapter 9 Improving cohesiveness in argumentative writing
Abbas Ali Zarei and Maryam Dodangeh

The effect of controlled, guided, and free writing on the cohesiveness of Iranian EFL learners’ argumentative writing

This study aimed at investigating the effect of controlled, guided, and free writing, on the cohesiveness of Iranian EFL learners’ argumentative writing. The participants were 60 Iranian senior high school students from four high schools in Abhar. The participants were randomly assigned to three experimental groups and each group was assigned to one of the treatment conditions. The first group practiced controlled writing, the second group practiced guided writing, and the third group practiced free writing for ten sessions. The data were collected via the participants’ pre and posttest writings, and analysed using three paired-samples t-tests and a One-Way ANOVA procedure. The findings showed that although the students in all three experimental groups showed significant improvements from pretest to posttest, the controlled writing group outperformed the other two groups. These findings can have implications for EFL learners as well as teachers.

Keywords writing, controlled writing, guided writing, free writing, argumentative writing

Introduction
Writing is “the act of putting in conventional graphic form what has been spoken” (Rivers, 1968, p. 242). According to Smith (1982), writing dominates many aspects of our lives; its importance in various aspects of life has made it a fundamental sign of literacy skill for communication and learning. In second language acquisition, writing is the most critical and challenging of the four language skills (Hongwei & Lyqin, 2012), which occupies an extremely important position in second language teaching.

This study is an attempt to find out the effect of controlled, guided, and free writing activities on the cohesiveness of the students’ argumentative writing. It aims to answer the following research questions.

• Is controlled writing effective on the cohesiveness of argumentative writing?
• Is guided writing effective on the cohesiveness of argumentative writing?
• Is free writing effective on the cohesiveness of argumentative writing?
• Are there any significant differences among the effects of controlled, guided, and free writing, on the cohesiveness of argumentative writing?

Literature review

According to Hyland (2003), since the development of EFL/ESL writing as a distinctive area of scholarship in the 1980s, three major approaches have been introduced. The first approach, which is called product-oriented approach, concentrates on texts as the product of writing and considers writing as an outcome. In this approach, learning to become a good writer is largely a matter of knowing a good grammar, because it sees texts as arrangements of words clauses and sentences. Pines (1982) sees it as being primarily about linguistic knowledge, with attention focused on the appropriate use of vocabulary, syntax, and cohesive devices. Besides, he believes that writing in the product approach has four stages: familiarisation, controlled writing, guided writing, and free writing. The underlying principles behind this approach are that mastery of a language is in speech production, and this is to be achieved by drills and repetition (Silva, 1990).

Writing in the process approach, on the other hand, is seen as predominantly having to do with planning and drafting, and there is much less emphasis on linguistic knowledge, such as knowledge of grammar and text structure (Badger & White, 2000). Badger and White also believe that “in process approaches, the teacher primarily facilitates the learners’ writing, and providing input or stimulus is considered to be less important” (p.154). It would mean that we need to teach students systematically problem-solving skills connected with the writing process that will enable them to realise specific goals at each stage of the composing process (Seow, 2002).

What differentiates a process-focused approach from a product-centered one is that the outcome of the writing, the product, is not preconceived. In short, it can be said that process approaches see writing primarily as the exercise of linguistic skills, and writing development as an unconscious process, which happens when teachers facilitate the exercise of writing skill. Although controlled and guided-writing fall in the scope of product approach and free writing principles are compatible with process approach, this study tries to have an eclectic one by the integration of re-drafting, collaboration, and brainstorming with the practice of studying written models in the classrooms.

Controlled, guided, and free writing

Vergheese (1989) looks at these strategies as stages of teaching writing, claiming that a writing course for students at the intermediate level consists of three stages of a) controlled writing b) guided writing and c) free writing. He further makes a distinction between guided and controlled
writing, in that the former concerns itself with structures, use of appropriate words, and punctuations and not with facts or ideas supplied by the teacher, while the latter is concerned with the organisation of material which is given. Moreover, free writing is concerned with students' production of both content and language (Verghese, 1989).

In the 1960s, the audio-lingual method was predominant and teaching materials were designed to help students practice correct habits. Writing at the lower levels was often seen as an activity to reinforce other language skills. In the same way, the writing was controlled to provide a practice for particular language features and to prevent students from making errors (Moran, 1987). In addition, Nunan (2003) states that writing is not a talent; rather, it is a teachable and learnable skill. Therefore, it is obvious that such a skill training needs the teacher's help and tremendous exercises, and for this purpose the employment of controlled writing strategies seems inevitable. There are numerous examples of controlled writing activities in writing classes. Some examples of controlled writing activities are imitating, rewriting the text with the given clues, combining sentences, completing sentences, and rearranging sentences into chronological order.

Sutherland (1967) claims that one big effect of dictation on composition is that dictation can help learners with such linguistic features of composition as punctuation, spelling, and contractions. In addition, he states that the process of copying down will improve the ability to write and compose in a foreign language. But, Arapoff (1967), Carr (1967), and Finocchiaro (1967), taking the opposite view, claim that a copy book approach or controlled writing approach does not guarantee the active involvement of the learners' thinking process in production and organisation of ideas in a composition. They also criticise free writing by pointing out that free writing causes many grammatically incorrect sentences.

Similarly, Backingham and Pech (1976) criticise controlled composition techniques for lacking a means of determining gradations of control and forcing students to write for teachers or text book writers' purposes but not their own. In fact, the approach they have taken is a bridge between controlled and free writing. The approach they introduce has five phases including preparation, orientation, experience, oral reconstruction, and output. Their rationale is that learning to write involves selection and organisation of experience to achieve a certain purpose. Therefore, because of many shortcomings that the controlled approach had and the amount of criticism it attracted, a revised model was introduced which paid more attention to the writer's ideas and opinions during writing and not just the practice of grammatical features of the language. That was guided writing. Guided writing is a kind of writing in which "the teacher demonstrates for students the process of writing a sentence or paragraph using proper English conventions" (Simpson, 1998, p. 1). As Simpson points out, students then are given opportunities to use those strategies themselves in their own work. Dickson (2001) introduces some prompts to be used in English guided writing classes such as short story, music, picture, memory,
proverbs, questions, and so on. In guided writing, the teacher asks students to answer some guiding questions after they watched a story on the screen. After that, the students write a story based on the questions given.

Pincas (1982) maintains that free writing is in direct opposition to controlled writing and contrary to controlled writing, which introduces correct patterns of language to be imitated by the writer, may increase the probability of making errors and introduces incorrect patterns of language. On the other hand, some believe that these strategies are complementary and can be applied in ordered stages beginning with controlled and ending with free writing (Mingli, 2012; Verghese, 1989). Rai (1983) states that the emphasis of free writing is on the point that intermediate-level students should put content and fluency first and not worry about form. Jacobs (1986) outlines the nature of free writing as having three important aspects “concentrating on content, not worrying about form, and writing without stopping” (p.282). As such, free writing offers a student-centred activity, eases the students’ expectations of themselves, and increases their sense of motivation (Jacobs, 1986).

Guided writing strategies have been examined in various studies (Graham & Delapez, 2002; Kieft, Rijlaarsdam, Galbraith, & van den Bergh, 2007; Maham & Nejadansari, 2012; Moradan & Heidari, 2011; Sarabi & Toonekaboni, 2012). Graham and Delapez (2002) believe that for developing writing it is necessary to explicitly teach learners important writing processes, skills and knowledge involved in planning, drafting, and revising texts. They examined the effects of an integrated writing program on middle school students’ essay writing abilities. They taught students strategies for planning, drafting, and revising and expository essay involving explanation and persuasion. They selected two middle schools, one as an experimental group and another as a control group. They considered four variables to assess the students’ writing. They were planning, length, vocabulary, and quality.

Based on the findings of this study, in comparison to control group, students in the experimental group produced essays that were longer, contained more mature vocabularies, and were qualitatively better. Kieft, et al (2007) compared the effect of two kinds of writing instruction strategy on the writing performance of 113 high school students. The students were randomly assigned to either planning or revising conditions. In addition, students completed a questionnaire concerning their planning and revising tendencies. The analysis of their texts in pre and posttests showed that while performance in the planning condition was related to the individual differences, performance in the revising condition was completely unrelated to individual differences. The main finding of this study was that a revising condition would be effective for those with an undeveloped writing strategy while a planning condition could be effective for those with a relatively developed writing strategy.

Moradan and Heidari (2011) examined the impact of portfolios and conferencing techniques on Iranian intermediate learners’ writing performance. They assigned the students into three groups, one as a control group, the second as a portfolio group who were asked to provide portfolios
of their four paragraphs during the course and after each paragraph, they were asked to answer a self-assessment checklist. The third group was a conferencing group, who were asked to take part in four whole class and two individual conferences after writing each paragraph. The result of the study revealed that there was a significant difference between the performance of the two experimental groups and the control group. However, no significant difference was found between the performances of the two experimental groups.

Along the same line, Sarabi and Toonekaboni (2012) conducted a quasi-experimental study on the use of picture and music as guided-writing strategies in the pre-writing stage. They utilized 61 university-sophomore students majoring in English language translation. The participants were assigned into three groups: A control group who were supplied with a topic to write, the music group who were provided with musical prompts as pre-writing, and a pictorial group who were given some pictures as clues and asking them to write an essay. Their findings showed that although both experimental groups outperformed the control group on the posttest, the employment of music as a guided writing strategy showed significant differences in the performance of the students. Moreover, the students of the experimental group could expand their imagination to express themselves better in the target language.

In addition, several studies have attempted to employ controlled, guided, and free writing strategies to enhance learners' writing performances as a sequence of one learning process (Hwang, 2010; Mingli, 2012; Vahid Dastjerdi & Hayati Samian, 2011). Hwang (2010) examined the effect of guided free writing on EFL college-level students' writing fluency. During the study, a total of 208 guided free writing samples written by eight EFL college-level students over eight weeks were analysed in terms of fluency by words per minute in order to measure writing fluency, and the data were analysed using a repeated-measures one-way ANOVA. The results showed that practicing guided free writing for eight weeks had a statistically significant effect on improving the students' writing fluency.

Vahid Dastjerdi and Hayati Samian (2011) investigated the use of types of cohesive devices used by Iranian graduate non-English majors in their argumentative writing. They taught the students' characteristics of good writing during the course and at the end of the course, they were asked to write an argumentative essay. Using Halliday and Hassan's taxonomy, they counted the number of different cohesive devices and found that among the three cohesive devices examined, lexical devices (52.2%) formed the highest percentage of the total number of cohesive devices used in the argumentative essays, followed by reference devices (27.6%) and conjunctions (20.2%). But, there was no statistically significant relationship between the essay scores and the number of cohesive devices used in the same essay.

In the same way, Mingli (2012) investigated the application of scaffolding theory and schema theory in writing, and proposed a series of training strategies of blank-filling writing, guided writing, controlled
writing, and free writing. Through this series of training that was based on
the process, product, and genre approach, he observed the development of
argumentative writing from mechanical imitation to autonomous-
acquisition, from form to content, and from low-level free writing without
planning before writing to higher-level free writing.

As it is apparent from the related literature, studies are mostly
concerned with various guided writing strategies and even those studies
that have tried to employ controlled, guided, and free- writing strategies
have failed to show the effectiveness of each of them at high school level as
a primary writing level, which is the aim of this study. In short, several
studies have examined the effects of different writing strategies on the
cohesion and the quality of students’ written texts at the college level.
However, most of the studies have been carried out with intermediate
learners at college level. Nevertheless, there are gaps on the effect of
controlled, guided, and free writing strategies on the cohesion of Iranian
EFL learners’ writings in the senior high school level, which is
significantly important on their future college success. In order to fill this
gap, this study aims to investigate, if training students with these three
kinds of writing strategies (controlled, guided, and free writing) will have
any effect on the cohesion of their argumentative texts, and if yes, which
strategy is the most appropriate one for their level.

Method

Participants

Initially, a sample of 100 participants was selected from four senior
high schools. All the participants were female students of second and third
grades in high schools of Abhar within the age range of 15 to 18. To
homogenise them, all participants were given a version of The Key English
Test (KET). 60 students who scored between one standard deviation above
and below the mean score were considered as the participants of the study.
The selected participants were randomly assigned to one of the treatment
conditions (controlled- writing group or C- group, n= 20; guided- writing
group or G- group, n = 20; and free- writing group or F- group, n= 20).

Materials and Instruments

The Key English Test (KET) was used to ensure the homogeneity
of the participants. In the controlled and guided writing classes, the
students practiced Richards and Sandy’s (1998) book titled Passages. The
most emphasised parts of the book for the class were the grammar,
discussion, and writing sections. While the topics were similar in guided
and free writing classes, for controlled writing classes the gap-filling, re-
ordering and re-write techniques were adopted from Teach English; a
training course for teachers by Adrian Doff (1988). The writing prompts for
class were adapted from 501 writing prompts by Bohlke et al (2003).
As a pretest, the students were supposed to write about the following topic:
'Ve all have favourite activities that we enjoy. Write an essay
convincing readers to try the activity that you enjoy most.'
For the posttest they were asked to write about the topic:
'Many students nowadays spend hours in front of their computers and communicate more by e-mail or instant-messaging than in person. Some people believe that this is good because it helps them in learning. Others believe that sitting for hours in front of the computer is harmful for them in that it prevents them from developing interpersonal skills. How do you feel about this? Use specific reasons and examples to support your position.'

Procedures
First, the participants were homogenised based on their performance on the Key English Test. Then, the participants were assigned to controlled, guided, and free writing groups randomly. As a third step, the participants were asked to write a persuasive text as a Pretest. Since the learners had received no formal instruction about writing before, they were taught the basic writing skills, such as the use of cohesive devices, discourse markers, and appropriate mechanics through three writing strategies. During each session, they were expected to write an argumentative text with three main parts (an introductory paragraph, body or supporting sentences, and a concluding paragraph). The procedures followed in each class were as follows.

In the controlled-writing group, 20 minutes of each session was allocated to practicing the book titled *Passages* by Richards and Sandy (1998). The learners were presented with a passage to find its main idea and cohesive ties. Then, they practiced unscrambling the scrambled sentences or rewriting a passage with various subjects to make a meaningful whole, for 30 minutes of the class time. Finally, they read their peers’ papers to find mistakes, discussing them and correcting errors in 10 minutes.

In the guided-writing group, after introducing sample texts to students to find its main idea and supporting details from Richards and Sandy’s book, each session, the participants were set in groups of four and a persuasive writing prompt was introduced to them, which was accompanied with some ‘wh’ questions or a picture. After discussing the questions or the picture, the participants were asked to write for 30 minutes in their group. The papers were then exchanged within groups to be assessed by peers, or a sample of writing was read to the class and analysed by the class in terms of its cohesive devices.

In the free-writing group, the participants were divided into five groups for class activities. An argumentative topic was introduced and the learners were asked to brainstorm the topic, discuss it within their groups, and find logical reasons to support their ideas. Then, exchanging their views with other groups, they tried to persuade others to accept their opinions. As a conclusion, the groups were asked to write an essay based on the discussions within their groups and the whole class. At the end of the session, the papers were read in front of the class and analysed by the whole class, in terms of cohesive devices.
The most important grammatical points were about the cohesive ties as reference devices, conjunction devices and lexical devices while ellipsis and substitution were not considered because of their rare use in a written discourse. After practicing this for eight sessions, in the last session a posttest was administered.

Having collected the data, Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) cohesion taxonomy was used to examine the kinds and number of cohesive ties used in argumentative texts. Then, frequency, mean, and standard deviation of the cohesive devices in each category were computed. In addition, to check the effectiveness of different strategies used by the different groups, the pretest scores of the participants in each group were compared with their posttest scores, using a matched t-test procedure. To investigate the effect the three strategies on the cohesiveness of the participants’ argumentative texts, the one-way ANOVA procedure was used.

**Results and discussion**

**Investigation of the first research question**

The first research question attempted to see whether controlled writing strategies significantly influenced the cohesiveness of the EFL writers’ argumentative texts. To answer this research question, a paired samples t-test was utilised. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>St. Dev.</th>
<th>St. Error of Mean.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td>41.200</td>
<td>7.61301</td>
<td>1.70232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest</td>
<td>579.700</td>
<td>13.04688</td>
<td>2.91737</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To check whether or not the observed difference between the pretest and posttest mean scores was statistically significant, the paired samples t-test was used. The result is presented in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Mean dif.</th>
<th>Std.Dev.</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pretest v Posttest</td>
<td>-3.85000E1</td>
<td>6.24500</td>
<td>-27.570</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( \eta^2 = .675 \)

The observed t-value and the significance level \((t_{(19)} = -27.57, p < .05)\) are indicative of a significant difference in the cohesiveness of the learners’ texts between pre and posttest. At the same time, the index of the strength of association \(\eta^2 = .675\) indicates that 67.5% of the total variance in the dependent variable (cohesiveness of the text) is accounted for by the independent variable (controlled-writing strategies). This means that the remaining 32.5% is left unaccounted for.
Investigation of the second research question

The second research question tried to consider the effect of guided-writing strategies on the cohesiveness of the EFL learners’ argumentative writing. To answer this research question, another paired samples t-test was utilised. Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics.

Table 3 Guided-writing group’s pretest and posttest results and cohesiveness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std.Dev.</th>
<th>Std. Error of Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td>42.70</td>
<td>6.24163</td>
<td>1.39567</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest</td>
<td>55.80</td>
<td>7.43817</td>
<td>1.66322</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To see whether or not the observed difference between the pretest and posttest mean scores was statistically significant, the paired samples t-test was used, the result of which is presented in Table 4.

Table 4 Paired samples t-test of the guided writing group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Mean diff.</th>
<th>Std.Dev.</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pretest v Posttest</td>
<td>-1.31000E1</td>
<td>2.51103</td>
<td>-23.331</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(\eta^2 = .93\)

The observed t-value and the significant level (\(t_{(df)} = -23.331, p < .05\)) are indicative of a significant difference in the cohesiveness of the learners’ writing between pretest and posttest. At the same time, the index of the strength of association (\(\eta^2 = .93\)) indicates that 93% of the total variance in the dependent variable is accounted for by the independent variable.

Investigation of the third research question

The third research question investigated the effect of free-writing strategies on the cohesiveness of EFL learners’ argumentative writing. To answer this research question, another paired samples t-test was utilised. Table 5 shows the descriptive statistics.

Table 5 Free writing group’s pretest and posttest results for cohesiveness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std.Dev.</th>
<th>Std. Error of Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td>42.70</td>
<td>6.24163</td>
<td>1.39567</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest</td>
<td>49.80</td>
<td>5.93473</td>
<td>1.32705</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To see whether or not the observed difference between the pretest and posttest mean scores was statistically significant, the paired samples t-test was used, the result of which is presented in Table 6.
Table 6 Paired samples t-test of the free writing group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Mean diff.</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pretest v Posttest</td>
<td>-7.100</td>
<td>9.53</td>
<td>2.156</td>
<td>-5.33</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \eta^2 = .36 )</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The observed t-value and the significant level \( (t_{19} = -3.33, p < .05) \) show that there is a significant difference in the cohesiveness of the learners’ writing between pre and posttests. At the same time, the index of the strength of association \( (\eta^2 = .3676) \) indicates that 36.76% of the total variance in the cohesiveness of the text is accounted for by Free-writing strategies.

**Investigation of the fourth research question**

The fourth research question aimed to investigate if there were any significant differences among the effects of the three writing strategies on the cohesiveness of EFL learners’ argumentative texts. To this end, a One-Way ANOVA was utilized for analysing the data. Table 7 presents the descriptive statistics

Table 7 Descriptive statistics for the ANOVA on writing strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing strategy</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>Std. Error of Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Controlled</td>
<td>79.70</td>
<td>13.046</td>
<td>2.917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guided</td>
<td>55.80</td>
<td>7.433</td>
<td>1.663</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free</td>
<td>49.80</td>
<td>5.934</td>
<td>1.327</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the results of Table 7, it can be observed that the controlled writing group has the highest mean \( (\bar{x} = 13.04) \). Coming second is the group that received guided writing treatment \( (\bar{x} = 7.43) \), followed closely by the group that practiced free writing \( (\bar{x} = 5.93) \). To see whether the differences among the groups are statistically significant the One-Way ANOVA procedure was run. The results of the ANOVA procedure are presented in Table 8.

Table 8 The results of ANOVA on the cohesiveness of texts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>10008.133</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5004.067</td>
<td>57.569</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>4954.600</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>86.923</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The observed F value and the significance level shown in Table 8 are indicative of significant differences among the groups \( (F_{2,57} = 57.56, p < .05) \). At the same time, the index of the strength of association \( (\omega^2 = .57) \) indicates that 57% of the total variance in the dependent variable is
accounted for by the independent variable. To locate the differences between the means, a post-hoc Sheffé test was utilised. The results of the post-hoc comparisons are presented in Table 9.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(I) group</th>
<th>(J) group</th>
<th>Mean diff. (I-J)</th>
<th>Std. Error of Mean</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Controlled</td>
<td>Guided</td>
<td>30.65</td>
<td>1.398</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlled</td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>49.05</td>
<td>1.430</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guided</td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>82.30</td>
<td>1.395</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9 shows that the difference between the controlled and guided writing groups is statistically significant. The controlled writing group performed better than the guided writing group on the posttest. As a result, it can be concluded that the controlled writing is significantly more effective than guided writing on the cohesiveness of learners' argumentative texts.

In addition, the results indicate that there is a significant difference between controlled writing and free writing. The participants who practiced controlled writing outperformed the participants of the free writing group. As a result, it can be concluded that controlled writing is also significantly more effective than free writing on the cohesiveness of learners' argumentative texts. At the same time, no significant difference was found between the mean scores of the guided and free writing groups.

Discussion and conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, all three writing strategies turned out to be effective on the cohesiveness of the subjects' argumentative texts. A high improvement of controlled writing may be justified on grounds that controlled writing strategies emerged with the advent of the audio-lingual method, the aim of which was to help learners to be more competent regarding the linguistic features of language. Cohesive devices, as a part of these linguistic features, are not exception. This result is in accordance with the claims of many researchers (Hyland, 2003; Mingli, 2012; Moran, 1987; Nunan, 2003; Pincas, 1982; Silva, 1996; Vergaas, 2007), who believe in stages in writing, which starts with controlled writing and ends with free writing.

Furthermore, the findings of this study concerning controlled writing strategy is compatible with the opinion of Riverse (1968) and Chastain (1971), who describe stages or sequences of exercises in writing, which theoretically bring the student from total control to total freedom. They indicate the necessity of observing these stages, warn about the danger of asking students to write expressively too early. In the same way, Zamel (1976) believes in control of writing in the starting stages of writing instruction, when learners are not linguistically and communicatively competent in the second language.
Additionally, several studies on writing difficulties (Alkhasawneh, 2010; Msunjila, 2005; Trang & Hoa, 2008; Yu, 2012), found that the prominent reasons for poor writings were lack of appropriate vocabulary and grammar as well as discourse patterns and cohesion. The results of these studies lend support to the finding of the present study in that practicing controlled writing strategies, with its focus on linguistic features such as vocabulary, grammar, and discourse patterns, seems necessary in the elementary levels of writing courses.

However, the findings of the present study are not in line with the findings of some studies (Arapoff, 1967; Backingham & Pech, 1976; Carr, 1967; Finocchiaro, 1967). Finocchiaro (1967), Arapoff (1967), and Carr (1967), attempting to take a reading comprehension approach to writing in elementary levels, criticised controlled writing for a passive role that is given to the writer during the writing process. Similarly, Backingham and Pech (1976), taking an experience approach to teaching composition in the intermediate level, regarded controlled writing insufficient because of lacking a means of gradation and forcing students to write for the purpose of teachers or textbook writers. Although our study did not contradict these findings, it suggests that at a lower intermediate level, because of students’ poor repertoire of vocabulary and grammar, controlled writing is advisable.

Another finding of this study was that the EFL writers’ texts showed a significant improvement concerning cohesive devices through the employment of guided writing strategies. This might be partially accounted for by the fact that guided writing activities, as a part of a product approach to writing, focus more on linguistic features than on developing ideas and personal thinking process. The results of this study are compatible with several studies that tried various guided writing strategies (Graham & Delapaz, 2002; Kieft, et al, 2007; Moradan & Heidari, 2011; Sarabi & Toonekaboni, 2012).

The result of this study lends support to those of Graham and Delapaz (2002), who found that for developing the writing ability it is necessary to teach learners important writing processes, skills and knowledge involved in planning, drafting, and revising texts explicitly. Taking a control and an experimental group, they found that the experimental group produced essays that were longer, contained more mature vocabularies, and were qualitatively better. The result of this study is in line with that of Sarabi and Toonekaboni (2012), who employed picture and music as guided writing strategies in a pre-writing stage. They found that although both experimental groups outperformed the control group during the posttest, the employment of music as a guided writing strategy showed significant differences in the performance of the students. Although the results of this study do not contradict any other studies in the field of guided writing, the important point is that none of the above-mentioned studies tried to consider the effect of guided writing strategies on the cohesiveness of learners’ texts.

Still another result of the study was that free writing strategies were also effective on the cohesiveness of the learners’ argumentative texts. This finding of the present study is in accordance with a number of previous
studies (Hwang, 2010; Mingli, 2012; Vahid Dastjerdi & Hayati Samian, 2011), which support the present findings in that they all emphasise the employment of controlled, guided, and free writing strategies.

However, regarding the purpose and participants, this study differs from other studies (Hwang, 2010; Mingle, 2012) in two ways. First, Hwang (2010) examined the effect of guided free writing on the college level students. Second, he considered students' writing fluency as an aim of the study. Analysing 208 writing samples of the students in terms of fluency by words per minute, he found that practicing guided free writing for eight weeks had a statistically significant effect on improving the students' writing fluency. In the same way, Mingli (2012) proposed a series of training strategies of blank-filling writing, guided writing, controlled writing, and free writing for the same group. Through this series of training that was based on the process, product, and genre approach, he observed the development of the three-part argumentative writing of college level students. However, the present study compared the effects of controlled, guided, and free writing, on Iranian lower intermediate level students with the aim of considering the cohesiveness of their texts.

The results of this study about free writing strategy may contradict some previous viewpoints (Chastain, 1971; Pincas, 1963; Riverse, 1968) in that they all believe in observing stages in writing and warn about the danger of applying free writing too early lest it may result in erroneous sentences. Based on the above-mentioned reasons, the improvement of their texts cohesiveness can be interpreted in a way that because of practicing free discussions to expand their thought processes, the length of their texts increased. Therefore, the increases in the length of their texts resulted in the increase in the number of cohesive devices. Another interpretation can be that although the application of free writing was effective on the cohesiveness of lower intermediate writers' texts, its effectiveness was the lowest one in comparison with the other writing groups.

Based on the results of the present study, it is obvious that all three writing strategies, (controlled writing, guided writing, and free writing) are significantly effective on Iranian EFL learners' writing in terms of cohesive devices. However, controlled and guided writing are more effective than free writing. This suggests that to have a cohesive text, students tend to resort more to controlled and guided writing than free writing. So, it can be concluded that, regarding the Iranian context in which English is taught as a foreign language and the proficiency level of the learners, who have a limited knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, controlled writing is the most useful strategy that can be followed by guided writing, in senior high school level. Probably, free writing can be postponed to later stages. The findings of the present study may have implications for textbook writers and syllabus designers. By knowing about the benefits and the efficacy of applying controlled and guided writing strategies from the earliest points of teaching and learning English as a foreign language, textbooks writers and syllabus designers can provide textbooks with suitable exercises to provide learners with the opportunity of practicing appropriate writing strategies.
References