Teaching Lexical Bundles to Improve Academic Writing via Tasks: Does the Type of Input Matter?

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the impact of teaching lexical bundles (LBs) on the academic writing of Iranian EFL learners. Therefore, a mixed methods study in three phases was designed. In phase one, an experimental group (n=10), in phase two, an experimental and a control group (n1=n2=26), and in phase three, two experimental groups (Cloze Task and Input Enhancement) and a control group took part (n1=n2=n3=20). We designed 11 cloze tasks, the format of which was modified during the study based on the data from the retrospective questionnaires and the analysis of the participants' writings. The result of the paired samples t-test in phase one showed a significant difference between the pre- and post-writing tests of the group, and the qualitative analysis of the writings led to modification of the format of the cloze tasks. In phase two, the independent samples t-tests on three posttests (general, rehearsed, and unrehearsed topics) showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group. The participants' insightful comments regarding the type of the treatment and format of the tasks led to the improvement of the study in phase three. The results of the MANOVA pointed to the superiority of the Cloze Task group on the three types of posttests to the Input Enhancement and Control groups. The study showed that cloze tasks are useful for teaching LBs and can improve learners' academic writing. The study has implications for EFL university students and teachers who seek ways to facilitate learning and teaching of academic writing.

1 Introduction

The term "cohesive device," first introduced by Halliday and Hasan (1976), bears different names in the literature such as "lexical bundles" (Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, & Finegan, 1999), linguistic markers (Sanders & Noordman, 2000), and "formulaic expressions" (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). This diversity shows that they have been studied intensely and perceived differently. According to Wei and Lei (2011), lexical bundles (LBs) are multi-word expressions without any idiomatic meaning and structural status that usually go together in a particular discourse. LBs, as Hyland (2008) maintained, give meaning, coherence, and cohesion to a text, bridge the known information with the new one, and express the viewpoint of the writer. Employing LBs can contribute to the conformity of the writings to social norms of the L2, and improve the organization and comprehensibility of a text.

Dontcheva-Navratilova (2012) and Hyland (2008) refer to two types of LBs, namely, structural LBs and functional LBs. Structural LBs are divided into four types, including verb phrases, noun phrases, prepositional phrases, and clausal bundles. Verb phrase bundles include passive voice structures, structures which can have the "anticipatory it," and fragments of dependent clauses. Noun phrase bundles (e.g. "the end of the," "the extent to which," which include "of" followed by a prepositional phrase or other types of modifiers), and prepositional phrase bundles (which contain prepositions or components of clauses) are two other types of structural bundles (Dontcheva-Navratilova, 2012, p. 39). However, clausal structural bundles, according to Biber (2004), are stated for politeness (as cited in Dontcheva-Navratilova, 2012).

Functional LBs are divided into three categories (Chen & Baker, 2010; Dontcheva-Navratilova, 2012; Hyland, 2008). The first category includes referential bundles (e.g. "at the end of the," "the beginning of") and, to quote Cortes (2004), conveys how writers "structure their experience and determine their way of looking at things" (p. 401). The second includes textual organizers (Cortes, 2004) or discourse organizers (Byrd & Coxhead, 2010; Dontcheva-Navratilova, 2012) that help writers organize information (e.g. "in addition to the," "on the other hand"). Attitudinal bundles (Dontcheva-Navratilova, 2012; Hyland, 2008) is the third category showing the sense of the writer (e.g. "the fact that," "it should be noted that").The present study focused on EFL learners' use of different types of LBs in academic writing. The assumption was that emphasis on LBs could help learners grasp the differences between their L1 and the English language system, and follow the patterns of organizing and developing information in English. We believe that accurate use of LBs could help EFL learners expand their rhetorical and organizational patterns, and develop native-like English style writings. Thus, insufficient use of such expressions that may change the style and tone of the writings demands additional attention.

2   Literature review

Academic writing as impersonal prose requires students to use a language that is appropriately adjusted for the purposes it encompasses. The precise language and formal style of academic writing make it a complex task that requires practice and mastery over academic words and phrases. University students are continuously involved in academic writing tasks such as projects and theses or dissertations. While writing for academic purposes, they need not only to focus on the task but also to utilize professional knowledge and expertise, which makes the process a multifaceted one. Furthermore, cultural and pragmatic differences between learners' L1 and the target language can add to the complexity of the task and lead to problems at sentential, textual, and rhetorical levels (Connor, 1996). Therefore, one of the responsibilities of EFL/ESL teachers in writing courses is to enable learners to use LBs to generate a discourse that is appropriate for academic purposes. More to the point, as Hyland (2008) believed, "gaining control of a new language or register requires a sensitivity to expert users' preferences for certain sequences of words over others that might seem equally possible" (p. 5).

Explicit teaching of LBs has been suggested by numerous researchers (e.g. Coxhead, 2008; Hirvela, 2004; Jones & Haywood, 2004; Wray, 2008). For example, Hirvela (2004) found the explicit teaching of LBs useful in improving learners' reading and writing ability and showed that implicit teaching of LBs did not lead to their acquisition by learners. Coxhead (2008) stated that her participants could not recall all language chunks they had learned during the treatment, and concluded that the use of tasks could enhance learners' focus on them. Likewise, Čolović-Marković (2012) reported that explicit instruction of LBs could improve the writing skill of EFL learners in both controlled (C-test) and uncontrolled (free essay writing) situations. Similarly, Li and Schmitt's (2009) case study revealed that explicit teaching and academic reading could boost their participant's skill in employing LBs in writing. Accordingly, the present study suggests that employing different meaningful tasks in EFL classes can facilitate the learning of LBs, and thus improve writing skill. This issue becomes more prominent when a review of the research findings shows that there is a discrepancy between the writings of academics and learners (native and non-native) regarding

the use of LBs (e.g. Chen & Baker, 2010). In the same vein, Safarzadeh, Monfared and Sarfeju (2013) report that, unlike native-speaker writers, Persian EFL learners use LBs irregularly and inappropriately to convey the message. Correspondingly, numerous studies confirm the effectiveness of teaching LBs in improving English learners' writing skill (e.g. Heidarnezhadian, Aliakbari, & Mashhadi, 2015; Wei& Lei, 2011). Thus, it could be stated that appropriate use of LBs not only can show EFL learners' expertise, but it can also give a native-like tone to their writings.

The present study employed consciousness-raising tasks and cloze tasks as strategies that can boost students' focus on LBs and improve their level of academic writing. These tasks can draw on language learners' cognitive processes, raise their consciousness toward the target structure, and facilitate the process of writing primarily for EFL learners. This position finds support from Ellis (2006), who maintained that explicit teaching of grammar through consciousness-raising activities can facilitate its learning. Also, in view of the cognitive processing model, Sharwood Smith (1991) proposed that input enhancement could increase learners' consciousness and facilitate the learning of target L2 structures. Consistent with input enhancement is the Noticing Hypothesis that lays emphasis on learners' focus on the input and conscious attention to the target structure (Schmidt, 1990). As Schmidt (1994) maintained, the saliency of input supports learning by increasing learners' attention toward language structures. Sharwood Smith (1993) argued that input enhancement triggers learners' underlying cognitive processes, and activates the restructuring process of the interlanguage system. The reason for comparing cloze tasks with tasks in which the input is salient was that, in cloze tasks, target structures are missing rather than becoming more noticeable. We believe that closure of the input helps students to focus on the target structures more than their saliency. It is worth mentioning that different activities have been employed for teaching LBs such as fill-in-the-blanks, multiple-choice exercises, and pair work (Cortes, 2006), reading (Hirvela, 2004), and writing sentences (Eriksson, 2012). However, a review by Salazar (2014), who provides a variety of activities for teaching LBs, indicates that cloze type tasks have not been used previously.

The term 'cloze' has its root in the concept of closure in Gestalt psychology, and suggests that individuals can complete a task after they perceive its pattern. A cloze task urges individuals to guess and reproduce the missing parts from the sentences that are present. Spolsky (1969) believed that knowledge of a language means understanding the message, albeit some parts of it are missing. Cloze is usually used to measure learners' language proficiency. However, several studies, similar to the present one, have employed cloze tasks as an instructional tool. For example, they have been used to improve reading (e.g. Lombard, 1990; Steinman, 2002), vocabulary (Laufer & Osimo, 1991; Steinman, 2002), and grammar (Legenza & Elijah, 2001).

This study aimed to investigate whether raising consciousness toward LBs could improve EFL learners' academic writing. To this end, a mixed methods design that "incorporates elements of both qualitative and quantitative approaches" was adopted (Creswell, 2014, p. 3). Among the three basic mixed methods designs, "convergent parallel mixed methods" was employed to collect both qualitative and quantitative data" (Creswell, 2014, p. 220). The data obtained from the participants' compositions and the retrospective questionnaire after the treatment in each phase constituted the qualitative data. The quantitative data comprised the writing scores before and after the treatment.

The study took a year and a half – equal to three consecutive academic semesters – and consisted of three phases. The first phase included a single group, the second phase two groups (an experimental and a control group), and the third phase three groups (two experimental groups and a control group). The first and second phases helped us improve the procedure, and thus strengthened the internal validity and generalizability of the study. In order to meet the objectives, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1: Does teaching LBs through consciousness-raising cloze-type tasks affect Iranian EFL learners' discourse management in academic writing in the first and second phases of the study?

RQ2: Does teaching LBs through consciousness-raising cloze-type tasks, input-enhanced tasks, and no-task instruction similarly affect Iranian EFL learners' discourse management in academic writing?

3   Methods

3.1   Participants

Totally, 96 students selected based on convenience sampling participated in this study. For the first phase, a sample of 10 Iranian male and female students took part in the experimental group (EG1). In the second phase, 26 Iranian female and male students ($n1=n2=13$) were randomly assigned to the experimental group (EG2) and the control group (CG1). Finally, in the third academic semester, 60 Iranian female and male students in three intact classes ($n1=n2=n3=20$) were randomly assigned to two experimental groups known as the cloze-task group (CTG), the input-enhanced group (IEG), and the control group (CG2). The participants' age range was between 22 and 30 in the different phases, and all were taking an advanced writing course in the first semester of their MA program in TEFL at Islamic Azad University, North Tehran Branch. All classes were held over 15 sessions within an academic semester and met once a week for a 90-minute duration.

3.2   Instrumentation

The following instruments were used in each phase: a teacher-made general English Proficiency Test (EPT), a writing grading rubric, a writing pretest, three writing posttests, and a retrospective questionnaire.

The first instrument was the EPT, the items of which were adopted from TOEFL iBt Test (Philips, 2015). It included 10 grammar items, 10 vocabulary items, and 3 reading passages followed by 20 comprehension questions. Two university instructors verified its content validity. A group of 20 MA first year university students took part in pilot testing. The item facility and item discrimination indexes were calculated, and no malfunctioning item was detected. The reliability index ($r=0.84$), computed through the KR-21 formula, was high enough to confirm the function of the test, which was examining the homogeneity and normality of the samples in different phases.

Moreover, a writing grading rubric developed by the College of New Jersey (Allen, 2009) was used for grading the participants' writings during the different phases of the study. The rubric examined the students' writings for five different characteristics, including claim, logic and organization, audience, evidence, citations, and control of language. We had two reasons for selecting this instrument. First, its components conformed to the purpose of teaching argumentative writing. Second, it contained elements that usually other rubrics do not take into account (e.g. citation and logic). It is worth mentioning that two experienced university instructors who had taught writing courses for more than 10 years approved its use.

An argumentative five-paragraph essay on "*To what extent do you think ELT has been successful in Iran*?" was the pretest for all groups. Two university instructors who had taught writing courses for more than 10 years scored the students' writings during the different phases. The inter-rater reliability for the pretests in the three phases were quite acceptable ($r= 0.84$, $r=0.85$, $r=0.88$, respectively). The inter-rater reliability for all posttests in the three different phases was computed, and the indices showed that the raters were quite consistent in scoring the writings. Thus, the mean of the two sets of scores was considered as each learner's writing pretest score. The purpose of the test was to examine the participants' ability in using LBs and to ensure that the groups were homogeneous in regarding to their writing skill.

In each phase, three different types of posttests measured the learners' writing improvement. The first posttest had the same general topic as the pretest, the second posttest was a writing composition on a topic practiced during the treatment sessions (*The role of dynamic assessment in language teaching*) and the third composition was on an unrehearsed topic (*Real life versus pedagogic tasks in TBLT)*. The reason for having three posttests was to control different variables that could affect the results. The first posttest could determine the writing improvement of the participants before and after the treatment, because the subject of the pretest was a general one to control the impact of lack

of content knowledge. However, topic familiarity (writing on the same subject on the pre and post-tests) could influence performances on the posttest; thus, we decided to have an unrehearsed posttest with an academic topic to be consistent with the type of the treatment. To control the effect of the lack of content knowledge and forgetting on the writing performances, a posttest on a rehearsed topic was employed, as well. An outline prepared by the teacher, which reflected the characteristics of real life and pedagogic tasks assisted the learners in writing the unrehearsed posttest. It is worth mentioning that the second and third posttests in the first phase of the study were only analyzed qualitatively and were used as data-gathering tools.

The next instrument was an open-ended questionnaire, which aimed to probe the students' perceptions regarding the treatment. The respondents could use the blank space at the end of the questionnaire for any additional comments. Two university instructors confirmed its content validity (see Appendix A).

3.3 Materials

The topics for the writings were mainly selected or adapted from *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* (Richards & Rodgers, 2014), *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagog*y (Brown, 2015), and *Dynamic Assessment* (Lantolf & Poehner, 2010). For teaching characteristics of academic writing, we utilized *Academic Writing and Plagiarism* (Pecorari, 2010), and *The Research Project How to Write it* (Berry, 2004).

Additionally, we designed writing tasks for teaching LBs. They were in cloze format in the first and second phases for EG1, EG2, and CTG. However, CG1 in the second and CG2 in the third phases did not employ any tasks. In the third phase, IEG used tasks that contained enhanced LBs. Table 1 shows the topics.

Table 1. Topics of the compositions

Sessions	Topics
Pretest (General)	EPT, and writing on *"To what extent do you think ELT has been successful in Iran"*
Session 2	On the comparison of Grammar Translation Method and Audio Lingual Method
Session 3	What is Suggestopedia method and what is its contribution to ELT?
Session 4	Compare and contrast focus on forms, focus on meaning, and focus on form
Session 5	Natural Approach and ELT
Session 6	Contribution of CALL to the English language teaching
Session 7	Communicative Language Teaching
Session 8	Critical reflective teaching
Session 9	What is Dynamic Assessment and how does it help language teaching practice?
Session 10	What are the characteristics of good language learners?
Session 11	What is the use of Priming language teaching?
Session 12	Characteristics of language centered methodologies
Sessions13, 14, 15	Posttests

3.4 Designing writing tasks

Based on the data collected from the essays of 100 graduate students in different universities located in Tehran, we could deduce that Iranian EFL learners' academic writings were disorganized and multi-topical, lacking the proper use of LBs. The main problem seemed to be in the use of prepositional phrases, passive + prepositional phrases, anticipatory it + verb/adjective, adverbial clause fragment among structural LBs; that is, the majority of students had made mistakes in using at least two of these bundles. Regarding functional LBs, most of the students failed to use discourse organizers and attitudinal bundles correctly, while a smaller number misused referential bundles. Consequently, 11 writing tasks (compatible with the number of sessions in a semester) were designed to address these problems. To prepare the tasks, first, we used the books mentioned in the

Materials Section, as Iranian ELT instructors usually include them in their course syllabi. Second, we selected essays of about 1500 words, and omitted the LBS. Then, we employed the tasks in the first phase. However, based on the feedback received from the participants and the analysis of the writing posttests, we concluded that it was difficult for the students to complete the tasks. Therefore, they were modified, and a list of LBs from which the students could select the best choice was added to the tasks to reduce the level of difficulty and the ambiguity of the original cloze tasks (O'Reilly & Streeter, 1977). Likewise, based on the participants' comments and responses to the questionnaires, we decided to add a set of referential questions at the end of the tasks (see Appendix B). The underlying assumptions were that referential questions would stimulate thinking (Mills, Rice, Berliner, & Rosseau, 1980), boost focus on the content of the tasks (Mehan, 1979), and could encourage the students to engage in the tasks meaningfully (Richard & Lockhart, 1996). The questions were general, mostly asked students for their opinion about the topic of the task, and sought to motivate them to read about the topic.

It is worth mentioning that the tasks served two functions. The first function was to make students familiar with LBs, and simultaneously to exemplify the structure of academic essays and show how thesis statements could expand into paragraphs. The function of bold LBs in the third phase (see Appendix C) was to compare the effect of cloze tasks (which deletes and raises consciousness) and enhanced input (which makes salient and raises consciousness) in enabling the participants to learn LBs. Another rationale for the manipulation of cloze tasks was to enhance focus on the organization of the writings rather than the content. They also could provide a controlled framework for word choices. Table 2 shows the type and frequency of LBs in the tasks.

Table 2. Type & frequency of LBs in cloze tasks

Structural Bundles	Examples	Frequency in Cloze Tasks	Functional Bundles	Examples	Frequency in Cloze Tasks
Noun Phrase+ of	The----- aim of the The implication of the	66	Referential	At the beginning In practical terms To this end	70
Prepositional Phrase+ of	Of high importance Of all aspects mentioned	70	Discourse Organizers	Additionally By the same token As a result of Ultimately	141
Passive+ Prepositional Phrase	was used for, are shown in ….,	60	Attitudinal	An important aspect of this The primary concern of …	81
Verb Phrases	Consists of Direct attention to put the emphasis on	88			
Anticipating it + Adverb	It is also known as It should be borne in mind that	36			

3.5 Procedure

As mentioned above, the participants took the EPT, the writing pretest, and three writing posttests in each phase. Except for the type of treatment, all conditions, including the number of sessions, brainstorming before starting to write, the time allocated to writing, the teacher who instructed the courses, and the topics were the same for the groups across the different phases.

3.5.1 Phase 1

In each session, the participants read a cloze task, filled in the blanks, identified three main ideas, and wrote a 1000-word essay related to the topic of the task.

3.5.2 Phase 2

Two intact classes (n1=n2=13), which were randomly assigned to the experimental and control groups, sat the EPT and the pre-writing test. The writings showed that they could not efficiently use the LBs. During the treatment, the participants were expected to complete the modified cloze tasks, identify three thesis statements, and write an essay after delivering the tasks to the teacher. The control group read the same passages, took notes, identified three thesis statements, and wrote an essay after the teacher collected the reading passages. It is worth mentioning that using notes was allowed during the writing. The time allocated for brainstorming in the control group was longer than the experimental group to compensate for the duration the experimental group spent on task completion. Both groups received instructions on how to write coherently and cohesively during the treatment. Furthermore, some explanations were provided regarding the rhetorical differences between English and Persian.

3.5.3 Phase 3

Three first-semester TEFL major classes (n1=n2=n3=20) participated in the third phase. They were randomly assigned to two experimental groups (CTG and IEG) and a control group (CG2). As expected, the qualitative analysis of the participants' prewriting tests demonstrated similar problems regarding the use of LBs. CTG practiced writing via the cloze tasks (with choices and two additional distracters in a box), while IEG received the same passages with bold LBs. The purpose was to investigate whether the format of the tasks could increase the learners' focus on LBs. However, 11 intact reading passages were given to the control group. Some referential questions at the end of the three types of tasks aimed to enhance the participants' attention to the form and content of the passages. After completing the tasks, all groups identified three thesis statements and wrote an essay.

4 Results

4.1 Phase 1

To answer the first research question of the study, "Does teaching LBs through consciousness-raising cloze-type tasks affect Iranian EFL learners' discourse management in academic writing in the first and second phases of the study?", a series of statistical analysis was conducted. To ensure that EG1 was homogeneous regarding the English language proficiency, the participants took the EPT. Descriptive statistics (M= 15.1, SD=2.8) were computed, and the skewness ratio (0.334, falling within ±1.96), obtained from dividing the statistics by the standard error of skewness, revealed that the assumption of normality was observed. Accordingly, the paired sample t-test run to test whether there was a difference between the pre- and post-writing tests showed a significant gain in the post-test scores, t(9)=10, p<.001. The result suggested that teaching LBs had a statistically significant impact on the learners' academic writing.

The comparison between the pre- and post-writing tests revealed that students were able to use a broader range of words. While the compound and complex sentences showed an increase in number, it seemed that changes in the format of the tasks could enhance students' use of LBs in the subsequent phases. Finally, students' responses to the questionnaire emphasized the role of explicit instruction on LBs. They believed that finding appropriate LBs for the blanks in cloze tasks was difficult and time-consuming, as one of the participants stated, "*I like practicing via cloze tasks but*

I really did not know what words or phrases I should use." Their suggestions triggered some considerable changes in both the format of the tasks and the classroom procedure of the next semester; that is, a list of appropriate words with two additional options was provided to facilitate the "fill-in-the-blanks" activity. Additionally, the teacher explicitly addressed the application of different types of LBs in producing coherent texts.

4.2 Phase 2

The independent samples t-test run to compare the means of the experimental and control groups on the EPT [EG2 (M=14.23, SD=1.92) and CG1 (M=13.33, SD=1.69)] showed no statistically significant difference between the means at the onset of the study (t(24)=1.70, p=.101). The skewness ratio (EG2=0.99&CG1=1.94, falling within ±1.96) showed the normality of the distribution of scores. Additionally, to ensure that the groups belonged to the same population regarding their writing, another independent samples t-test was run between the pre-writing tests of the groups [EG2 (M=12.88, SD=1.44) and CG1 (M=12.763, SD=2.05)]. As shown in Table 3, F(24)=.1.33, p>0.05 signified the homogeneity of the variances. The result of the independent samples t-test, t(24)=.16, p=.87, indicated no significant difference between the writing mean scores of the groups before the treatment.

Table 3. Independent samples t-test, pre writing

Groups	Leven's test for equality of variances		t-test for equality of means				95% confidence interval	
Equal variances assumed	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (two-tailed)	Mean diff.	Std. error diff.	Lower	Upper
	1.331	.260	.165	24	.87	.117	.697	-1.324	1.554

The descriptive statistics of the rehearsed post-writing test for EG2 (M=17.67, SD=1.73) and CG1 (M=16.76, SD=1.92) were computed. The skewness ratio (EG2=0.185 & CG1=.001) demonstrated that the assumption of normality was observed. As Table 4 shows, there was a statistically significant difference between the writing of the groups after the treatment, t(24)=4.150, p<0.001, on the rehearsed topic. That is, classroom practices regarding teaching LBs had affected EFL learners' academic writing.

Table 4. Independent samples t-test, post writing (rehearsed)

Groups	Leven's test for equality of variances		t-test for equality of means				95% confidence interval	
Equal variances assumed	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (two-tailed)	Mean diff.	Std. error diff.	Lower	Upper
	.015	.902	4.150	24	.000	0.91	.361	.753	2.46

The result of the independent samples t-test on the means of the EG2 (M=16.61, SD=1.26) and CG1 (M=15.84, SD=1.46) on the unrehearsed post writing test (see Table 5) showed a significant difference between the groups, t(24)=.5.76, p<.001. Thus, teaching LBs could improve the participants' academic writing, and thus the answer to the first research question was positive.

Table 5. Independent samples t-test, post writing (unrehearsed)

Groups	Leven's test for equality of variances		t-test for equality of means					95% confidence interval	
Equal variances assumed	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (two-tailed)	Mean diff.	Std. error diff.	Lower	Upper
	1.679	.207	5.765	24	.000	0.77	.480	1.77	3.76

Qualitative analysis of the posttests revealed considerable progress regarding the use of LBs, grammar, and academic words in the experimental group's essays. However, the disorganized compositions and multi-topical paragraphs suggested to us to extend the treatment. The participants' answers to the questionnaire indicated that the tasks were helpful. However, as they asserted, some ambiguities required additional instruction, particularly concerning passive + prepositional phrase, noun phrase + of, and verb phrase constructions. The participants also had some suggestions on the format of the tasks. The control group, nonetheless, showed little progress in using LBs.

4.3 Phase 3

In the third phase, different statistical analyses were performed to answer the second research question that stated: "Does teaching LBs through consciousness-raising cloze-type tasks, input-enhanced tasks, and no-task instruction similarly affect Iranian EFL learners' discourse management in academic writing"? To test the homogeneity of CTG, IEG, and CG2, the EPT was administered, and descriptive statistics showed that the means of the three groups were close to one another [CTG(M=26, SD=7.04); IEG (M=24.70, SD=7.78) & CG2(M=23.1, SD=6.54)]. The skewness ratio for all groups confirmed normality. Moreover, the Leven's test indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was not violated, $F_{(2, 57)}=.77$.

The results of the one-way ANOVA (see Table 6) illustrated that the there was no statistically significant difference among the means of the groups before the advancement of the study [$F_{(2, 57)}=.82$, p=.44]. Furthermore, another one-way ANOVA (see Table 7) calculated on the writing pretests indicated no significant difference [$F_{(2, 57)}=2.66$, p=.078].

Table 6. One-way ANOVA, EPT

Pretest	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	84.400	2	42.200	.829	.441
Within Groups	2.900	57	50.877		
Total	2984.4	59			

Table 7. One-way ANOVA, pre writing test

Pretest	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	15.433	2	7.717	2.663	.078
Within Groups	165.150.	57	2.897		
Total	180.583	59			

A multivariate analysis of variance (M ANOVA) was conducted to examine the mean differences of the groups on the three posttests.

Table 8. Descriptive statistics, the posttests

Groups		Mean	SD	N
Post writing General topic	CTG	14.950	1.276	20
	IEG	14.225	0.802	20
	CG2	13.875	1.049	20
Post writing Rehearsed topic	CTG	17.475	0.895	20
	IEG	16.150	1.039	20
	CG2	14.600	1.187	20
Post writing Unrehearsed topic	CTG	16.700	0.817	20
	IEG	15.650	0.670	20
	CG2	14.675	0.977	20

It is apparent from Table 8 that the means of CTG and IEG on rehearsed post writing is higher than other conditions.

In the next step, it was necessary to ensure that, for each of the levels of the between-subject variable (i.e. type of the treatment), the pattern of intercorrelation among the levels of within-subjects variables (i.e. three posttests) was the same. That is, Box's M statistic tested the null hypothesis that the observed covariance matrices of the dependent variables were equal across groups. Table 9 indicates that the assumption was met (F=1.196, p>0.05).

Table 9. Box's test of equality of covariance matrices

Box's M	15.542
F	1.196
df1	12
df2	15745.15
Sig.	0.279

Table 10 indicates that there was a change in the writing performance of the participants in the posttests. The finding is illustrated by Wilks' Lambda values (see the associated probability values given in the column labeled Sig). As shown, Wilks' Lambda specified that F=14.634, p< 0.001, Wilk's Lambda=0.309. Thus, it can be concluded that there is a statistically significant effect for teaching LBs, suggesting that there was a change in the writing ability of the participants after the treatment. The eta squared value for teaching LBs is 0.444, showing a large effect size (utilizing the commonly used guidelines by Cohen, 1988, namely, 0.01= small, 0.06=moderate, 0.14=large).

Table 10. Multivariate tests

Effect		Value	F	df	Error df	Sig.	Partial eta Squared($\eta2$)
Inter-cept	Pillai's trace	.999	12360.20[a]	3.000	55.000	.000	.999
	Wilks' Lambda	.001	12360.20[a]	3.000	55.000	.000	.999
	Hotelling's trace	674.193	12360.20[a]	3.000	55.000	.000	.999
	Roy's largest root	674.193	12360.20[a]	3.000	55.000	.000	.999
Groups	Pillai's trace	.698	10.000	6.000	112.000	000	.349
	Wilks' lambda	.309	14.634[a]	6.000	110.000	.000	.444
	Hotelling's trace	2.211	19.899	6.000	108.000	.000	.525
	Roy's largest root	2.201	41.082[b]	3.000	56.000	.000	.688

a. Exact statistic
b. The statistic is an upper bound on F that yields a lower bound on the significant level.

Table 11 shows the results of the Leven's test for homogeneity of variances (F>0.05) which legitimizes conducting the test of between-subjects effects.

Table 11. Leven's test for equality of error variances

Groups	F	df1	df2	Sig.
Posttest General	1.336	2	57	.271
Posttest rehearsed	.992	2	57	.377
Posttest unrehearsed	1.386	2	57	.258

As Table 12 indicates, there is a significant difference between the groups regarding the general topic on the posttest (p=.007), the rehearsed topic (p<.001), and the unrehearsed topic (p<.001). Also, F is significant for the three groups (F<0.05). The partial eta squared values for the general topic ($\eta2$=0.158), the rehearsed topic ($\eta2$= 0.57), and the unrehearsed topic ($\eta2$= 0.51) demonstrate a large effect size. The amounts of the eta squared in the three cases show that teaching LBs by itself accounted for almost 15.8% in the general topic, 57% in the rehearsed topic, and 51% in the unrehearsed topic of the overall variance.

Table 12. Tests of between-subjects effects

Source	Dependent variable	Type III sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial eta Squared ($\eta2$)
Corrected model	General topic	12.025[a]	2	6.013	5.344	.007	.158
	Rehearsed topic	82.82[b]	2	41.412	37.715	.000	.570
	Unrehearsed topic	41.025[c]	2	20.513	29.685	.000	.510
Intercept	General topic	12355.350	1	12355.350	10982.53	.000	.995
	Rehearsed topic	15504.338	1	15504.338	14120.19	.000	.996
	Unrehearsed topic	14742.338	1	14742.338	21334.52	.000	.997
Groups	General topic	12.025	2	6.013	5.344	.007	.158
	Rehearsed topic	82.825	2	41.413	37.715	.000	.570
	Unrehearsed topic	41.025	2	20.512	29.685	.000	.510
Error	General topic	64.125	57	1.125			
	Rehearsed topic	62.588	57	1.098			
	Unrehearsed topic	39.387	57	.691			
Total	General topic	12431.500	60				
	Rehearsed topic	15649.750	60				
	Unrehearsed topic	14822.750	60				
Corrected total	General topic	76.150	59				
	Rehearsed topic	145.413	59				
	Unrehearsed topic	80.413	59				

a. R squared= .158 (Adjusted R Squared=.128)
b. R squared= .570 (Adjusted R Squared=.554)
c. R squared= .510 (Adjusted R Squared=.493)

As Table 13 shows, CTG outperformed IEG and CG2 on the posttest with a general topic; also, IEG did significantly better than CG2 on the same posttest (p<.05). Regarding the rehearsed topic, CTG outperformed IEG and CG2, while IEG had a higher mean than CG2 (p<.001). On the unrehearsed topic, CTG outperformed IEG and CG2 (p<.001).

Table 13. Pairwise comparisons between the posttests

Dependent variables	(I) Groups	(J) Groups	Mean diff. (I-J)	Std. error	Sig.	95% Confidence interval for difference[a]	
						Lower bound	Upper bound
Posttest general	CTG	IEG	.725*	.335	.035	.053	1.397
		CG2	1.075*	.335	.002	.403	1.747
	IEG	CTG	-.725*	.335	.035	-1.397	-.053
		CG2	.350	.335	.301	-.322	1.022
	CG2	CTG	-1.075*	.335	.002	-1.747	-.403
		IEG	-.350	.335	.301	-1.022	.322
Posttest rehearsed	CTG	IEG	1.325*	.331	.000	.661	1.989
		CG2	2.875 *	.331	.000	.2.211	3.539
	IEG	CTG	-1.325*	.331	.000	-1.989	-.661
		CG2	1.550*	.331	.000	.886	2.214
	CG2	CTG	-2.875 *	.331	.000	-3.539	-2.211
		IEG	-1.550*	.331	.000	-2.214	-.886
Posttest unrehearsed	CTG	IEG	1.050*	.263	.000	.524	1.576
		CG2	2.025*	.263	.000	1.499	2.551
	IEG	CTG	-1.050*	.263	.000	-1.576	-.524
		CG2	.975*	.263	.000	.449	1.501
	CG2	CTG	-2.025*	.263	.000	-2.551	-1.499
		IEG	-.975*	.263	.000	-1.501	-.449

* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

5   Discussion

The results obtained from the statistical analysis in the first phase showed that the use of tasks was effective in improving the academic writing of the participants. However, the qualitative scrutiny of the students' compositions after the treatment showed their insufficiency in the use of LBs. Regarding discourse organizers, for example, the frequent use of "in addition to," "furthermore," and "moreover" was observed, which led to unnatural writings. Prepositional phrases (e.g. "in other words," "as a result of") were overused or misused by most of the students. The participants asserted that they thought, by using prepositional phrases at the beginning of each sentence, they could strengthen their argument and make themselves more expressive. For example, one of the students stated, "I thought 'in other words' could help me clarify myself … and make my writing more convincing'", and another student believed, "whatever I wrote ... I thought was not meaningful enough … or not clear; so I used 'in other words' and 'as a result' to make myself understood." Thus, the learners believed that the phrases could help them reinforce their argumentation. However, the use of attitudinal bundles ("the fact that," "it should be noted that," "it is worth mentioning that") had improved considerably, and it seemed that the tasks were quite useful in teaching them. One of the students stated, "The tasks reminded me that I could use the phrases to move from one idea to the next." In general, we deduced that some changes in the format of the tasks and the classroom procedure could enhance the students' writings. The conclusion was that more focus on LBs was necessary to convey the core meanings of LBs in the English academic writing.

One problem was that the rhetoric of Persian was quite dominant in the writings, and there were numerous examples of students using more than three main ideas in the post writings. However, the significant difference between the pre- and post-compositions presumably was partially due to the participants' familiarity with the content of the topics and writing mechanics, and partially due to some improvement in the use of LBs. As observed, the use of academic words had improved considerably. The participants' responses to the fourth question of the questionnaire (see Appendix A),

showed that it was difficult for them to complete the tasks. Also, they wrote that they were not sure which LBS to use when filling in the blanks. Thus, we modified the format of the writing tasks in the following phase.

In the second phase, some LBs (listed before the task) were suggested to facilitate the completion of the tasks. Moreover, the teacher focused on the application of LBs in sample sentences and expected the participants to identify three main ideas of the passage after taking the cloze tasks. This activity was employed both to help learners avoid writing multi-topical paragraphs (frequent among Iranian EFL writers), and to enhance their focus on the English writing style. As the results of the independent samples t-test showed, EG2 outperformed CG1 in the three posttests. The statistical analysis revealed that cloze tasks could improve the participants' writing ability. This finding is in agreement with Flose (2006), who stated that when exposed to fill-in-the-blank vocabulary tasks, individuals test a variety of words to find the appropriate choices. Thus, unlike many educators who consider cloze tasks superficial, we, consistent with Folse (2006), regarded them as cognitive processing activities that require "multiple target word retrievals" and help learners to enhance their vocabulary knowledge.

Additionally, all of the participants in the experimental group positively responded to the first question of the questionnaire (see Appendix A). They thought that using LBs could help them organize their writings (Question 2). In response to the third question, one of the students wrote, "Writing is a difficult task, but the cloze tasks gave me a model to follow while I was writing." Another student believed, "my repertoire of LBs seems amazing, I could not guess that one day I would enjoy writing in English." Another student maintained, "I had not noticed that part of my problems in writing came from different organization patterns of English and Persian." In response to the third question, a student wrote, "I learned to stick to a unique idea in a paragraph." Students answers to question four, such as "at first, cloze tasks were difficult to do, but gradually they seemed easier," showed that practicing with the tasks could help the participants improve their writing.

Nevertheless, the qualitative scrutiny showed that the paragraphs of many of the students in the post-writing tests were bi-topical. Although some progress was conspicuous in the use of discourse organizers, the participants, similar to in the first phase, showed a tendency to overuse this category of LBs. It is worth mentioning that "prepositional phrase + of" and "passive + preposition" constructions seemed to be the most problematic LBs in the writings. The presumption could be related to the negative transfer from Persian to English. Some studies showed that Persian speakers are apt to translate from Persian to English (e.g. Jafari, 2014). The comparison between English and Persian shows that in Persian /e/ or /ye/ which are simply sounds added to the end of words to relate two words or phrases take the role of the preposition "of" in English, and thus affect the correct use of "prepositional phrase + of" in English (Jafari, 2014). Regarding "passive + preposition" constructions, the assumption could be due to the absence of the passive voice (Moyne, 1974), or the preference of active to passive voice in Persian (Lambton, 1983), which results in a delay in Iranian EFL learners learning them. However, the use of "noun phrases + of" and "anticipatory it + adverb" constructions was more accurate than in the first phase. The writings of the most students did not provide any evidence of insufficiency in the use of such structures.

Another point to mention is that multi-topicality and the use of different forms of parallelism that makes Iranian EFL learners' writings different from the English native speakers had reduced, which could be due to the explicit teaching of LBs and overt explanations about the structure of Persian and English writing systems. One of the participants, in response to the second question of the questionnaire, wrote, "I learned that in English they do not use redundant words …. they try to follow a single idea in each paragraph." The writings in the second phase reflected an acceptable level of the participants' knowledge about the topics. However, regarding developing and supporting ideas and combining the sentences, the writings were unsatisfactory, although some improvement in all aspects was evident.

The participants found the tasks helpful for learning LBs. One of the students, in response to the first question, stated, "I had not noticed that they were combinations, I had looked at them as sepa

rate words." Also, excerpts from participants' answers to the third question shows their positive views: "… with tasks writing classes are not boring anymore," and "you know what to do and how to write because there is a model to follow every time you start writing." Answers to the fourth question indicated that the participants preferred explicit LB instruction. It could be asserted that the possible answers and the blanks in the cloze tasks could draw the learners' attention to the use of LBs. Also, parallel to research findings (Coxhead, 2008; Pang, 2010; Shi, 2010), information regarding the number and frequency of bundles in each paragraph could boost learners' writing skill. The finding could also be verified by Schmidt's (1995) Noticing Hypothesis, which asserted that to restructure the interlanguage system, learners must consciously notice the linguistic input. However, the substandard performance of the participants regarding the use of LBs in this phase is in line with Kachru (2005) and Wray (2008), who stated that formulaic language is not part of EFL learners' universal grammar and thus needs explicit instruction.

In the third phase, CTG outperformed IEG and CG2, which seems to be justifiable considering the use of cloze tasks for teaching LBs. The active cognitive involvement of the learners while completing the cloze tasks could support the results. Cloze tasks seem to require a stronger "conscious activation of a complex network of cognitive and linguistic processes" (Buettner, 2011, p.3) than input enhancement. As Buettner argued, it is difficult to "conceive of anyone engaging in cloze without a high degree of active cognitive engagement." For completing cloze tasks, learners need to activate their background knowledge and use contextual cues to understand the texts (Steinman 2003, as cited in Lu, 2006). This study presumes that cloze tasks can trigger learners' active cognitive involvement in the input they receive as one of the students wrote, "to complete the tasks I need to focus and be cognitively alert … doing tasks needs meaningful involvement." Moreover, another student stated, "I had to read the tasks carefully and think before starting to complete them … They opened my eyes to the idea that I have to think in English before starting to write in English."

Moreover, the referential questions presented at the end of the tasks could be influential in urging the learners to refer to the text and take notice of its rhetorical patterns. Cloze passages entailing complicated psycholinguistic and constructive language processes facilitate the process of selection of input by L2 learners (Sharwood Smith, 1993), and therefore contribute to the development of writing ability. This result finds support from Sharwood Smith (1991), who argued that cognitive processing of the input could positively affect the process of learning. Similarly, Randall (2007) maintained that the level of cognitive processing which requires attention to a variety of features results in the formation of stronger neural connections at several levels. Therefore, this level of processing contributes to strong connections in episodic and semantic memories, and increases the probability of data processing in long-term memory, which has been shown to be a more effective means of promoting vocabulary retention (Schmidt, 2010).

Moreover, as the results of post-hoc comparisons indicated, CTG and IEG outperformed CG2 on both rehearsed and unrehearsed post writing tests, whereas there was no statistically significant difference between CG2 and IEG on the post-writing test with a general topic. The justification could be that, although input enhancement increases learners' intake and contributes to the development of L2 proficiency (Sharwood Smith, 1993), it is not sufficient for the improvement of general writing ability. This finding is consistent with research findings (Karabacak & Qin, 2013; Pang, 2010) stating that EFL learners might not acquire some of the language bundles merely through exposure, and suggested some amount of teacher or even learner intervention is required. As regards CG2, it could be hypothesized that reading the plain texts had an impact on the participants' writing ability.

The present study verified that explicit LB instruction could improve the tone and organization of the English language learners' academic writings. However, the findings of the present study are in contradiction with Kangli (2011) and Kuntjara (2004), who found that the cultural patterns of L1 do not affect the rhetorical patterns used in the writings of EFL/ESL learners.

6 Conclusions

Writing is a complex task, and Iranian EFL learners have to deal with too many variables, including coherence, cohesion, and organization, besides grammar and content, while engaged in the activity. Focusing on the use of LBs in English via cloze tasks can enhance learners' understanding of the writing style and patterns of the target language L2. This study showed that explicit LB teaching could be beneficial in the process of academic discourse management. LBs, apart from enabling non-native writers to confront the challenge of finding accurate words for expanding ideas and giving the correct impression to readers, allows writers to utilize a discourse which is appropriate for the context.

Furthermore, contrary to free writing activities, tasks could prohibit the occurrence of errors. In fact, when learners write freely without the manipulation of tasks, the probability of committing errors may increase. The use of tasks shortens the time and energy necessary for teaching writing, and reduces the negative impact of too many corrections. Teachers should devise techniques and strategies to draw learners' attention to the use of LBs. Also, material developers should strongly take learners' L1 into consideration when developing textbooks and learning materials. It is worth mentioning that EFL/ESL learners' native language yield considerable influence on the use of LBs in writing, and thus, it is necessary to focus on their application while practicing writing.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Retrospective Questionnaire

Dear All!

Your precise answers to the following questions will help me improve my classroom activities.

1. Do you think the phrases provided during the semester were helpful for writing your essays? Why or why not? Please explain.
2. Do you think using LBs helped you organize your writing?
3. Do you think the writing tasks were helpful? In what ways? Please explain.
4. Suggest on the classroom procedure of your writing class.
5. What additional activities do you prefer?
6. Please write your additional comments in the box below.

Appendix B

Cloze task

Choose the best choice from the box to fill in the blanks. Some items may be used interchangeably. Please, use each item once. The box has two more options than necessary.

> However, a number of, response to, to describe, aspects of, the main features of, is done, before the class, Hence, to bring about, For example, By and large, certain aspects of, is administered to, going to be explained, the fourth, The advantage of, Last but not least, by their nature, in which, To restate, that is, observation by, could be used, account of , obtained from, a way of, consist of, attitudes toward, Furthermore

Critical Reflective Teaching

Richards and Lockhart (2007) proposed **……….** simple procedures that **……….** to help teachers investigate classroom teaching. Each procedure has advantages and limitations, and some are more useful for exploring **………….** teaching than others. These procedures **……..** teaching journals, lesson reports, surveys and questionnaires, audio and video recordings, observation, and action research which are **………………..** .

A journal discusses a teacher's or a student teacher's written **…………….** teaching events. Keeping a journal serves two purposes**; ………,** writing the events occurred during the class time for later reflection and gaining teaching insights from these recordings. The next procedure is a lesson report that is a structured inventory or list enabling teachers **…….** their recollections of **…………** a lesson. Although some may consider a lesson report and a lesson plan identical, the former one **………** after the class, but the lesson plan is written **………….** .

Then is a survey or a questionnaire that can examine some aspects of teaching. **………..**, a teacher may wish to investigate students' **……………** group work. A questionnaire **……………** the class that asks students to indicate how useful they find group work activities and for what content areas or skills they think group work is most appropriate.

Audio and video recordings are **…………** items of six possible procedures in teacher reflection. **…………..** the preceding procedures is that they are relatively easy to carry out. **………,** a disadvantage is that they obtain subjective impressions of teaching and **……………** can capture only recollections and interpretations of events and not the actual events themselves. **………..,** other procedures are also necessary. The fullest **……….** a lesson is **…………** an actual recording of it, using an audiocassette or video recorder.

The fifth procedure is observation, which involves visiting a class to observe different **………..**teaching. **………..,** observation is **……….** gathering information about teaching, rather than a way of evaluating teaching. There exist two kinds of observation encompassing **…………….** student teachers of a cooperating teacher's class, and peer observation **……….** one teacher observes a colleague's class.

…………….., is the action research which refers to teacher-initiated classroom investigation seeking to increase the teacher's understanding of classroom teaching and learning, and **………..** changes in classroom practices.

Answer the following questions:
1- In what ways do you think critical reflective teaching can improve teaching practice?
2- What do you think about critical reflective teaching?

Appendix C

Input enhancement task

Read the following passage carefully. Then answer the questions.

Richards and Lockhart (2007) proposed **a number of** simple procedures that **could be used** to help teachers investigate classroom teaching. Each procedure has advantages and limitations, and some are more useful for exploring **certain aspects of** teaching than others. These procedures **consist of** teaching journals, lesson reports, surveys and questionnaires, audio and video recordings, observation, and action research which are **going to be explained**.

A journal discusses a teacher's or a student teacher's written **response to** teaching events. Keeping a journal serves two purposes**; that is,** writing the events occurred during the class time for later reflection and gaining teaching insights from these recordings. The next procedure is a lesson report that is a structured inventory or list enabling teachers **to describe** their recollections of **the main features of** a lesson. Although some may consider a lesson report and a lesson plan identical, the former one **is done** after the class, but the lesson plan is written **before the class**.

Then is a survey or a questionnaire that can examine some aspects of teaching. **For example**, a teacher may wish to investigate students' **attitudes toward** group work. A questionnaire **is administered to** the class that asks students to indicate how useful they find group work activities and for what content areas or skills they think group work is most appropriate.

Audio and video recordings are **the fourth** items of six possible procedures in teacher reflection. **The advantage of** the preceding procedures is that they are relatively easy to carry out. **However**, a disadvantage is that they obtain subjective impressions of teaching and **by their nature** can capture only recollections and interpretations of events and not the actual events themselves. **Hence,** other procedures are also necessary. The fullest **account of** a lesson is obtained from an actual recording of it, using an audiocassette or video recorder.

The fifth procedure is observation, which involves visiting a class to observe different aspects of teaching. **To restate,** observation is a way of gathering information about teaching, rather than a way of evaluating teaching. There exist two kinds of observation encompassing **observation by** student teachers of a cooperating teacher's class, and peer observation **in which** one teacher observes a colleague's class.

Last but not least, is the action research which refers to teacher-initiated classroom investigation seeking to increase the teacher's understanding of classroom teaching and learning, and **to bring about** changes in classroom practices.

Answer the following questions:
1- In what ways do you think critical reflective teaching can improve teaching practice?
2- What do you think about critical reflective teaching?

Please, note that the above samples are half of the tasks to save the word limits.