

# Using Collaborative Dictogloss Strategy to Enhance Al-Azhar Preparatory Stage Efl Students' Writing Skills

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## **Abstract**

*The present study aimed at investigating the effect of using collaborative dictogloss strategy (CDS) on improving Al-Azhar first year preparatory stage students' EFL writing skills. For the purpose of the study, three instruments were used; a checklist to determine the writing skills appropriate for the participants, a pre-post writing test to measure students' improvement in writing, and an analytic scoring rubric to score students' writing. A quasi-experimental design was adopted for the present study. The participants consisted of sixty four students at Nekeita Preparatory & Secondary Institute for Boys in Dakahlia governorate. Two intact classes were randomly assigned to an experimental group and a control group; each group consisted of thirty two students. Results of the study revealed that the experimental group students outperformed their counterparts of the control group in their post EFL writing level. Accordingly, it was concluded that CDS improved Al-Azhar first year preparatory stage students' EFL writing skills.*

**Key words:** Dictogloss, collaborative writing, strategy, Collaborative Dictogloss Strategy (CDS)

## **1. Introduction**

In an age overwhelmed with revolutionary advances in information technology, artificial intelligence, augmented and virtual reality, learning English as the most used medium of communication is so important. Writing English, in particular, has become necessary for those who intend to catch up with the rapid changes in our modern world in general and language students in particular. However, mastering the skill of writing in English is not an easy task. Lots of students suffer greatly

while writing; their style of writing, developing paragraphs, sentence structure and even their word choice need a lot of work. The students' inability to write effectively may be attributed to various factors; their cognitive background, their linguistic deficiency, first language interference, academic writing problems in designing and planning paragraphs cohesively, or even teaching methods. All these problems and difficulties necessitate applying more

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sophisticated teaching approaches and methods.

Collaborative Learning can be used as an effective approach to improve students' writing skills. Theoretically, the importance of collaboration as a means of second language learning has been based on sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). Pedagogically, interaction among peers is supported by communicative approaches to second language learning. However, Pica (2000) indicated that neither traditional methods nor communicative approaches, used alone, have been able to achieve the level of English proficiency required for participation in today's global community. It seems reasonable to integrate both. Moreover, a lot of second language acquisition scholars argue that exposure to language alone is not sufficient; they advocate a more form-focused approach. So, some sort of form-focused activities, such as DG, in a communicative context have to be included.

DG was first introduced by Ruth Wajnryb in 1990 as a classroom dictation activity where students listen to a text, write down key words and then reconstruct it. Lexically, DG is derived from the prefix 'dicto' or 'dictation' and 'gloss' which means a way of explaining or interpreting

something. DG differs from dictation in both procedures and objectives. In DG students listen to a text at normal speed and reconstruct a new version, but in dictation students only write down what is read by the teacher or an audio source verbatim. Dictation in this traditional form has been criticized as learning by rote method in which students merely make a copy of the text the teacher reads without performing any type of thinking skills, thus producing a mechanical form of literacy (Jacobs, 2004).

DG has several advantages. DG can provide multiple opportunities to draw students' attention to target linguistic forms in a meaningful context (Lapkin & Swain, 2013). During dialogues in collaborative tasks, students can be prompted to notice linguistic problems and then engage in discussing language forms so that meaning can be made clearer. Also, DG can affect students' motivation, anxiety and sense of responsibility. Furthermore, DG provides learning opportunities for students to integrate reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills through social interaction (Stewart et al., 2014). In addition, DG encourages students' autonomy, cooperation, curricular integration, diversity, thinking skills, and alternative assessment techniques (Cardona et al, 2013). It

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is an effective method of combining individual and group activities. Students are actively involved in the learning process and there are multiple opportunities for peer learning and peer teaching.

According to Wajnryb (1990), DG should have four stages: Preparation, dictation, reconstruction, and analysis and correction. Also, Wajnryb stated that there are eight types of DG. These variations are: Negotiation, Student-Controlled, Student-Students, Summary, Scrambled Sentence, Elaboration, Opinion, and picture DG. After reviewing related literature, previous studies and watching a lot of pedagogical videos about DG, it was found that there are other variations and modifications to DG that recommended using (DG) as a means to improve writing skills. Most of these studies looked at DG as a focus on form (F on F) or an output activity with little emphasis on collaboration. DG hasn't been done as a whole collaborative strategy. Only recently there has been a tendency to highlight collaboration as crucial and distinct feature of DG (Shin& Park, 2018). Integrating both DG and collaboration can benefit from both in a way where DG can serve as an instructional technique capable of enhancing L2 acquisition while collaboration serves as a context

that provides students with the opportunity to produce language related episodes (LREs). Thus, some modifications were added to the original version of DG. These modifications were based on recent studies which suit the target participants. Finally CDS was ready for students to use. Therefore, the present study benefited from all types of DG and presented a new version of DG based on language acquisition theories (LAT) and different writing approaches through integrating a collaborative strategy; namely, Homogeneous\ Heterogeneous groups into a modified version of DG variation and then call this new version Collaborative Dictogloss Strategy (CDS). So, the present study investigated the effect of using CDS on improving Al-Azhar first year preparatory stage EFL students' writing skills.

## **2. Writing Skill**

Writing has some challenges that can be divided into two main categories; one of them is concerned with writing challenges in general, the other is concerned with writing EFL English in particular. An example for English writing challenges is its orthographical system. There is no exact letter-sound correspondence. Taking Arabic orthographical system into consideration, where

there is nearly a one-to-one letter-sound correspondence, it becomes clear how difficult writing in English is, especially to Arab students. Ibrahim (2015) stated that Egyptian students face a lot of problems during writing in general and in writing composition in particular. There is a huge discrepancy between students' verbal skills and their writing ability. Students fail to write what is going on their heads lest they should make mechanical mistakes which are highly valued in their schools.

Writing approaches can be classified into four main categories: product-based approaches, process-based approaches, communicative approaches, and integrative approaches. These approaches witnessed a paradigm shift in

accordance with the prevailing theories. They moved forward from focusing on the product of writing which was affected by behavioristic view and skill acquisition theory, towards a focus on the processes and strategies of writing, which was going side on side with cognitive theory. Sociocultural theory paid more attention to the purpose of writing; that is to say, communication. This shifted the focus to the audience and the environment, shedding more light on the type of writing with the emergence of genre approaches. Recently, there has been more focus on integrating more than one approach together in one single systematic approach. Figure (1) classifies the most important writing approaches.

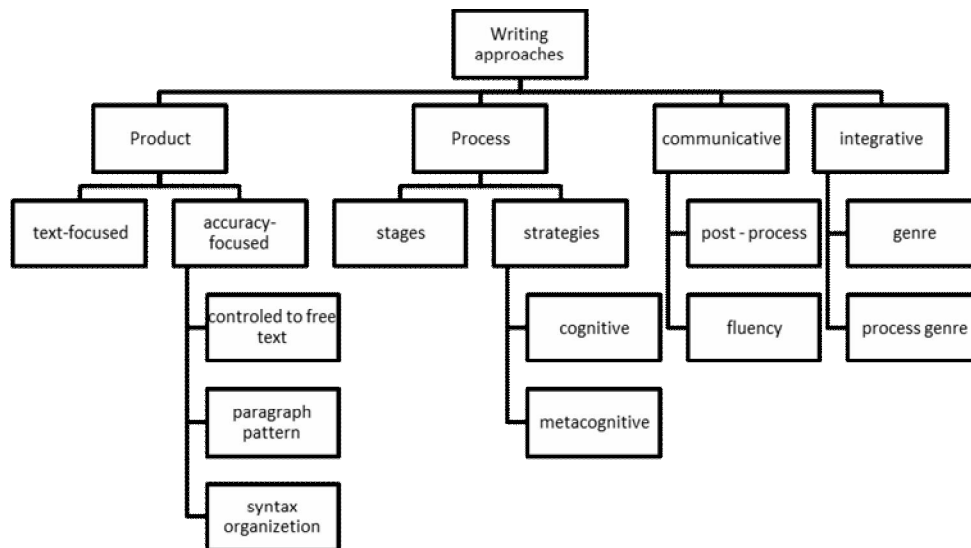


Figure (1) Writing approaches

CDS design tried to benefit from all writing approaches. Taking into consideration the participants' low level in writing, CDS depended highly on integrative approaches; the product was organized in the Graphic Organizer& Template Worksheet, and the processes of writing were divided into two systematic stages, homogeneous and heterogeneous groups.

### 3. Collaborative Dictogloss Strategy (CDS)

CDS is an integration of a collaborative strategy; Homogeneous\Heterogeneous groups and other types of DG to form a modified version of DG variation that is called CDS. Furthermore, it should be clear that three types of collaborative output tasks are integrated together; that is to say, reconstruction cloze task, editing task and a jigsaw task. During the design of CDS, it was considered to benefit, as much as possible, from previous studies, theoretical background and contextual factors, and most importantly, students' proficiency

level and their linguistic background. The design of CDS tried to shift the focus from merely detecting and correcting errors to an integrated and collaborative writing process.

Keeping the individual stage before collaborating aimed at helping students discover the mismatches between their own perception of English and standard one. It also worked as an incentive resource for collaboration. As Gass, Mackey, and Ross-Feldman (2005) stated that a lot of studies are now demonstrating a relationship between various types of interaction and L2 learning, dividing the process of reconstruction into two stages was hopefully assumed to improve metacognitive skills and ensure more than one type of interaction. There are two types of groups; that is, Homogeneous\Heterogeneous groups, and three types of interaction types; that is, low level interaction, high level interaction, and combined levels interaction (Table1).

**Table 1.** Types of interaction effects in different groupings

Grouping		Interaction effect type
Homogeneous grouping	Low level grouping	Stumbling effect
	High level grouping	Climax effect
Heterogeneous grouping		Collaborative effect

Every type of interaction was supposed to enact different metacognitive processes; a *stumbling* effect, a *climax* effect, and a *collaborative* effect. Low level students are thought to stumble; this grouped stumbling will enhance a need for an answer. The reach for an answer will push those students not only to think of the answer per se but of the stumbling blocks of thinking that hinders them from reaching the answer on the one hand and the others that helped their classmates

to reach the answer on the other hand. The opposite effect was thought to happen to high level students. This type of interaction was thought to get the best results. Heterogeneously regrouped was hopefully supposed to create a collaborative effect. It was also recommended to use both heterogeneous and homogeneous groups. Although most studies prefer heterogeneous grouping, it was stated that high level students express resentment towards it.

**Table (2) Collaborative Dictogloss Strategy (CDS)**

Wajnryb's Model (1990)	Redfern's Collaborative Strategy(2015)	Collaborative Dictogloss Strategy
Preparation	Homogeneous group	<b>Preparation</b> • Warm up • Discussion
Dictation		<b>Individual Stage</b> • Graphic Organizer • Template
Reconstruction	Heterogeneous group	<b>Homo Stage</b> • cloze
Analysis and Correction		<b>Hetero Stage</b> • Jigsaw • Reconstruction • Peer correction • Analysis • Reporting • Feedback

#### 4. Problem of the study

Students are not doing well in writing skills in general and in composition and paragraph writing in particular. The present study investigated the effect of

using CDS on improving Al-Azhar first year preparatory stage EFL students' writing skills.

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## 5. Questions of the study

The present study tried to answer the following questions:

1. What are the characteristics of the CDS?
2. To what extent will the CDS improve the targeted EFL students' writing skills?

## 6. Hypotheses of the study

The main Hypothesis is:

Using CDS will improve Al-Azhar first year preparatory stage EFL students' writing skills.

For reasons of feasibility of data analysis, the following two sub-hypotheses are supposed:

1. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and the control groups on the post writing test in favor of the experimental group.
2. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group on the pre and post writing test in favor of the post administration.

## 7. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the present study is to:

1. Show the difference between the CDS and Wajnryb's original model.
2. Identify how to implement the CDS.

3. Measure the effectiveness of CDS in improving Al-Azhar first year preparatory stage EFL students' writing skills.

## 8. The Study 's Delimitations :

The present study proceeded within the following delimitations

1. A sample of Al-Azhar first year preparatory students at Nekeita Preparatory & Secondary Institute for Boys.
2. Some EFL writing skills and sub skills required for the targeted sample.
3. An adapted collaborative writing strategy; Homogeneous\Heterogeneous Groups.
4. A modified version of DG variation; CDS.

## 9. Methodology of the Study

The methodology of the present study includes the participants, instruments and the design followed to carry out the study

### 10.1 Participants

The participants in the present study consisted of two 1<sup>st</sup> year preparatory stage classes at Nekeita Preparatory & Secondary Institute for Boys. One class included 32 students representing the experimental group which received

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the treatment by using CDS. The other class included 32 students representing the control group which received regular teaching methods.

### **10.2 Instruments**

1. *A checklist* that identified the EFL writing skills and sub skills that participant students need to master.
2. *An analytic scoring rubric* to assess students' writing
3. *A pre-post writing Test* that measured the effectiveness of using the CDS in improving Al-Azhar first year preparatory stage EFL students' writing skills.

### **10.3 Design**

The design adopted in the present study was a quasi-experimental one. The participants consisted of two groups; control and experimental. The control group used regular teaching methods, but the experimental group used CDS as a treatment.

## **10. Definition of terms**

### **11.1 Writing:**

Sokolik (2003) described writing as "the mental work, which involves inventing ideas, thinking about how to express them, and organizing them into sentences and paragraphs that will be clear to readers"(p.30)

So, operationally, writing can be defined as a collaborative process where a small group of students manipulates many skills, such as conventions, word choice, description and organization.

### **11.2 Collaborative writing (CW):**

Storch (2011) defines collaborative writing as "the co-authoring of a text by two or more writers" (p. 2)

Operationally, Collaborative writing can be defined as a process where two or more people, through discussion, work together to construct written documents.

### **11.3 Dictogloss (DG):**

"Dictogloss is a classroom dictation activity where students listen to a passage, note down key words and then work together to create a reconstructed version of the text".(Wajnryb, 1990 cited in Vasiljevic ,2010:41 )

For the purpose of this study DG is defined as a writing strategy that ensures content, well organized context, systematic development and collaborative interaction.

### **11.4 Collaborative Dictogloss strategy (CDS):**

For the purpose of this study CDS is operationally defined as a multi stage-based collaborative writing strategy where students reconstruct a text after a series of systematic homogeneous and



heterogeneous group activities, which are then used as a basis for a new construction. It is a new type of DG based on integrative components of various language acquisition theories (LAT) and different DG types.

## 11. Results of the Study

### 12.1 Verifying the First Hypothesis

The first hypothesis stated that "There is a statistically significant difference between the

mean scores of the control group and that of the experimental group on the post application of the writing test due to using CDS in favor of the experimental group".

To verify the first hypothesis, T-test for independent groups was used to compare the differences between the mean scores of the students' post administration of the writing test for the experimental and control groups. Table (3) shows these results.

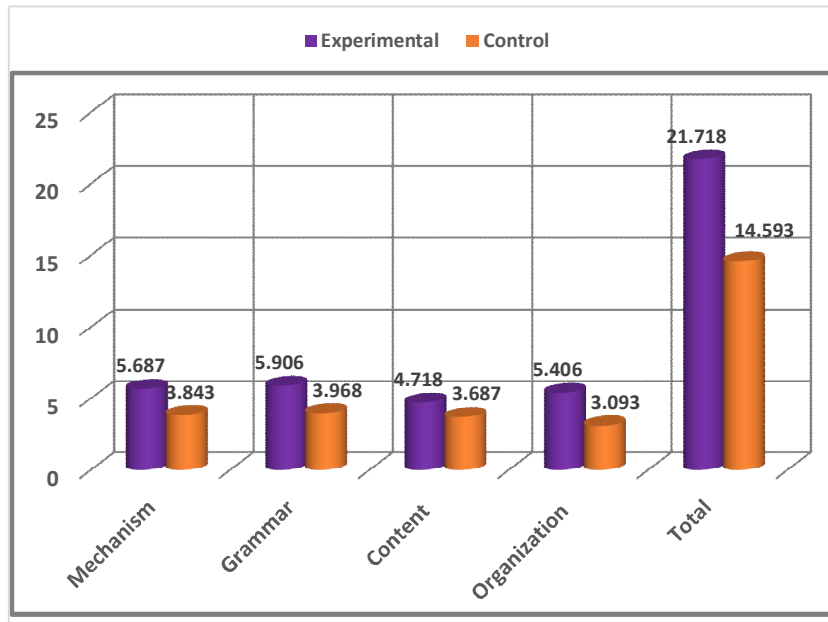
**Table (3)** *t*-test results of the control and experimental groups on the post administration of the writing test.

Test Dimensions	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T-test for Equality of Means		
					t	df	Sig.
Mechanism	Experimental	32	5.687	0.997	6.295	62	0.05
	Control	32	3.843	1.322			
Grammar	Experimental	32	5.906	1.088	7.014	62	0.05
	Control	32	3.968	1.121			
Content	Experimental	32	4.718	1.300	3.475	62	0.05
	Control	32	3.687	1.060			
Organization	Experimental	32	5.406	0.797	10.926	62	0.05
	Control	32	3.093	0.892			
Total	Experimental	32	21.718	3.795	7.496	62	0.05
	Control	32	14.593	3.808			

of control group. In addition, table (3) reveals a clear variance between the post writing total scores both the control group and its counterpart of the experimental group. While the control group's total score was (14.5), its experimental counterpart was (21.7). For more indication look at the figure (2).

Results in table (3) indicate that there was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the control group and that of the experimental group in favor of the experimental group.

The means of all writing domains in the experimental group's post administration of the writing test were higher than those



**Figure (2)** Results of the experimental group and control group on the post administration of the writing test.

The significant difference between both groups (experimental and control) concerning the values of the *t-test* and total writing mean scores, make us approve the study's first hypothesis.

## 12.2 Verifying the Second Hypothesis

The second hypothesis stated that "There is a statistically significant difference at (0.05) between the mean scores of the experimental group's pre and post administration of the writing test

due to using CDS in favor of the post administration".

To investigate the second hypothesis, T-test for paired samples was used to compare the difference between the experimental group's mean scores in their writing test before and after administering the study intervention (CDS). Also, the effect size of Eta square ( $\eta^2$ ) was used to determine the effect of the study intervention on writing sub-skills of the experimental group. Table (4) presents the results.

**Table (4)** *t*-test and ( $\eta^2$ ) of the experimental group on the pre and post administration of the writing test

Test Dimensions	Groups experimental	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T-test for Equality of Means			$\eta^2$	Effect size
					T	df	Sig.		
Mechanism	Pre	32	3.531	1.135	-	31	0.05	0.85	High
	Post	32	5.687	0.997	13.263				
Grammar	Pre	32	3.750	1.218	-	31	0.05	0.86	High
	Post	32	5.906	1.088	13.800				
Vocabulary & Content	Pre	32	3.375	1.157	-7.830	31	0.05	0.64	Medium
	Post	32	4.718	1.300					
Organization	Pre	32	2.812	0.931	-	31	0.05	0.93	High
	Post	32	5.406	0.797	20.605				
Total	Pre	32	13.437	3.758	-	31	0.05	0.94	High
	Post	32	21.718	3.795	22.007				

Table (4) shows a significant variance between the mean scores of the pre and post administration of the writing test concerning all the four writing main domains as well as the total score favoring the post administration. There is a variance of (2.2) between the pre and post administration of the writing test concerning mechanics. While the mean score of the pre administration was (3.5), the mean score of the post administration was (5.7). Also, there is the same variance of (2.2) between the pre and post administration of the writing test concerning grammar. While the mean score of the pre administration was (3.7), the mean score of the post administration was (5.9). As for vocabulary and content, there was a variance of (1.3) between the pre and post administration of the writing test. While the mean score of the pre

administration was (3.4), the mean score of the post administration was (4.7). As for organization, there was a variance of (2.6) between the pre and post administration of the writing test. While the mean score of the pre administration was (2.8), the mean score of the post administration was (5.4). Concerning the total scores of the mean scores, there was a variance of (8.3) between the pre and post administration of the writing test. While the total mean score of the pre administration was (13.4), the total mean score of the post administration was (21.7). All the previously mentioned paired t-test results show significant differences between the mean scores of the pre and post administration of the writing test in favor of the post application at (0.05).

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Also, results in table (4) illustrate the eta square for each writing domain and the total of these domains. The effect size values are (0.85, 0.86, 0.64, and 0.93). It is obvious that all of these values exceeded 0.50 which refer to a high and medium effect size for all the writing sub-skills in the experimental treatment. The effect size could be indicated as follows: In mechanism, the value of Eta square was (0.85) which indicates a high effect and it also indicates that 85 % of the variance in students' improvement in the mechanism dimension can be attributed to the experimental treatment. As for grammar, the value of Eta square was (0.86) which indicates a high effect and it also indicates that 86 % of the variance in students' improvement in the grammar dimension can be attributed to the experimental treatment. With regard to content, the value of Eta square was (0.64) which indicates a medium effect and it also indicates that 64 % of the variance in students' improvement in the content dimension can be attributed to the experimental treatment. Concerning organization, the value of Eta square was (0.93) which indicates a high effect and it also indicates that 93 % of the variance in students' improvement in the organization dimension can be attributed to the experimental

treatment. As for the total value of the effect size for all the four domains, the value of Eta square was (0.94) which indicates a high effect and it also indicates that 94 % of the variance in students' improvement in all the writing domains can be attributed to the experimental treatment.

To sum up, the results of the T-test for paired samples indicate that there were statistically significant differences at level 0.05 between the mean scores of the experimental group on the pre and posttest administration and that the effect size was high. So, each sub-skill of the students' writing skills has been improved after applying the CDS. Therefore, the second hypothesis can be accepted. The second hypothesis stated that "There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group's pre and post administration of the writing test due to using CDS in favor of the post administration".

## **12. Discussion of the Results**

Although results of the writing test indicated that the T-test values were significant at 0.05 level for the four writing dimensions and the effect size of the experimental treatment on these dimensions was high, a closer look at table (4) reveals that the most improved dimension among the four domains

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was organization (93%). During applying the CDS, it was observed that some students were more interested in graphic organizers as it organized their thoughts and their writing. Thus, this high increase in organization may be attributed to incorporating graphic organizers into CDS. Also, Mechanism and grammar domains have high effect size (85%, 86%). These results are compatible with those of (Abdelfatah, 2017; Murad, 2017; Shin&Park, 2018).

However, table (4) indicates that content dimension was the least in t-test values. Also, it is observed that it has a medium effect size (64%). This result goes in line with Abassian and Mohammadi(2013), where content has not improved significantly. This may also be attributed to students' medium proficiency level as a whole. It may also be attributed to students' inclination to use and sometimes keep by heart specific sentences when they write paragraphs.

The increase in the students' scores in writing skill after administering the CDS training was due to incorporating activities that increase organization, thinking and co-operation. Graphic organizer taught students to organize their thinking and to order ideas in the context. The CDS gave the students opportunities to practice discussion,

giving feedback, answering questions and making suggestions. The students got benefit through idea exchange with their partners.

Furthermore, the following points about the experimental group were noticed during training. The students were curious about CDS, especially the graphic organizer activity. In spite of the mediocre level of the students in writing, some of them were brilliant during the lesson; they presented many unexpected organization of their ideas. Also, students were active and motivated during applying CDS because thinking in every step they do and reflecting on these thoughts in solving writing problems was a new experience for them. Some students mentioned some positive comments during the administration. For example, some students said that “having the opportunity to practice CDS helped them organize and convey their thoughts more quickly”. Another student said that “through the organized steps of CDS they were able to gather ideas and come up with a plan to guide them through their writing”. On the other hand, it was noticed that the students in the control group were not paying attention to the writing lesson and they only cared about the exams' score.

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### **13. Findings of the Study**

The previous results and discussion led to conclude that EFL Al-Azhar preparatory stage students' writing skills have been improved. The experimental treatment (CDS) was effective in improving students' writing skills.

The present study led to the following findings:

1. The experimental group students outperformed their counterparts of the control group in the writing skill test. This was indicated by the significant differences between the mean scores of the two groups.
2. The experimental group students' mean scores in the post application of the writing test were better than their mean scores in the pre-application of the test. So, the CDS was effective in improving Al-Azhar first year preparatory students' writing skills.

### **14. Conclusion**

With reference to the previously mentioned results, it was concluded that the present study provided evidence regarding the positive impact of using CDS on improving Al-Azhar first year preparatory students' writing skills. CDS improved all writing sub-skills; namely, writing mechanics,

grammar, vocabulary choice and content, and organization. Integrating graphic organizer had a high significant effect on improving students' organization of their ideas. However, vocabulary choice and content had a medium effect size which is thought to be attributed to students' low proficiency level.

### **15. Recommendations**

According to previously mentioned results, findings and conclusion, the following recommendations are presented:

- 1- More appropriate attention should be provided to writing skills, especially to primary and preparatory stages.
- 2- Curricula designer and instructional pedagogy providers should integrate more collaborative and focus on form techniques and strategies, such as CDS, in teaching.
- 3- Evaluating skills, especially writing, should employ more continuous and regular tasks rather than an end product ones.

### **16. Suggestions for Further Research**

The following suggestions are recommended to be considered for further research:

- 1- Conducting a follow-up study

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on this research in order to see whether CDS has the same influence on other language skills (reading, listening and speaking).

- 2- Administering CDS learning to different stages (i.e., primary and secondary).
- 3- Applying the experimental treatment on larger samples.

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