

The Effect of the Stepping Stone Technique on EFL Intermediate School Students' Performance in Short Story Writing

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Abstract

Writing is an active way to connect and express opinions, thoughts and feelings to others. Thinking skills play an effective role in developing one's writing and enhancing learning.

The problem of this work is that Iraqi EFL short story teachers highlight the conventional techniques and give little attention to the practical aspects. Consequently, there is a new technique of thinking that emphasize the practical aspects in teaching short story writing.

The present study aims at investigating the effect of using stepping stones technique on intermediate school students' performance in short story writing.

To achieve the aim of the study, it is assumed that there is no statistically significant difference between the mean score of the experimental group, which is educated by stepping stone Technique and that of the control group, which is taught by the conventional techniques in their short story writing performance.

The research concludes that using stepping stone technique improves students' performance in short story writing, and motivates the learners to shape their ideas. According of these results, recommendations and suggestions for further studies are presented.

Keywords: Stepping Stone Technique , Short Story Writing , EFL Intermediate School Students' Performance

أثر استخدام (تقنية ستينيك ستون) في كتابة القصة القصيرة لطلبة المدارس المتوسطة العراقيين دارسي اللغة الإنكليزية لغة أجنبية

المدرس المساعد خلود ناصر فراك

وزارة التربية

المستخلص

الكتابة هي طريقة فعالة للتواصل والتعبير عن الأفكار، والمشاعر، ووجهات النظر مع الآخرين. تؤدي مهارات التفكير دوراً فعالاً في تطوير الكتابة، وتعزيز التعليم. إن المشكلة التي تعالجها هذه الدراسة تعود إلى حقيقة مفادها أن مُدرسي مادة (كتابة القصة اللغة الانكليزية) العراقيين يركزون على الجوانب النظرية في المناهج الدراسية، ويمنحون أهمية قليلة للجوانب العملية؛ لذلك فإنّ طلبة المتوسطة في العراق غير قادرين على استخدام مهارات عالية في التفكير. وبناءً على ذلك فإنّ هنالك حاجة ملحةً للتحري عن أنموذج جديد في التفكير؛ لتعزيز الجانب العملي في تدريس كتابة القصة القصيرة. إنّ هدف البحث هو التحري عن أثر استخدام تقنية ستينيك ستون في كتابة القصة القصيرة لطلبة المدارس المتوسطة العراقيين دارسي اللغة الانكليزية بوصفها لغة أجنبية، ولتحقيق هدف هذا البحث وضعت الباحثة الفرضية الصفرية الآتية: ليس هناك فرق ذي دلالة إحصائية بين المجموعة التجريبية التي تدرس كتابة القصة على وفق تقنية ستينيك ستون والمجموعة الضابطة التي تدرس كتابة القصة على وفق الطريقة التقليدية. واستنتجت الباحثة أنّ استخدام تقنية ستينيك ستون في تدريس كتابة القصة يُحسّن من أداء الطالبات في كتابة القصة ويعمل على إعطائهنّ فرصة باستخدام التفكير الابداعي في الكتابة، وتحفيزهنّ لتنظيم الأفكار، ومساعدتهنّ ليتمكننّ من المشاركة الفعّالة داخل الصف. وفي ضوء النتائج قامَت الباحثة، بتقديم بعض التوصيات والمقترحات لدراساتٍ أخرى. الكلمات المفتاحية: تقنية ستينيك ستون ، كتابة القصة القصيرة ، طلبة المدارس المتوسطة ، دارسي اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة اجنبية

Section One

1.1 The Problem and Its Significance

Writing is an important skill that can be used in learning other skills (Zhu, 2004:13). "Students of writing and their teachers, experience a variety of unfavourable emotions, ranging from fear, to trepidation to elation" (Arnold, 2007:46; Byrd, 2010:3) which possibly "hinder the development of writing skills. writing plays an essential role in promoting language acquisition as learners experiment with words, sentences, and large amounts of writing to communicate their ideas successfully and to support the grammar and vocabulary they learn in school " (Bello 1997:8) .

The problem considered in this research lies in the weak performance of Iraqi EFL students in short story writing. Therefore, Iraqi EFL students in intermediate school lack using creative thinking skills in their short story writing performance. Thus, there is a

need to a new technique to emphasize the use of creative thinking skills in short story writing. Accordingly, this study is conducted as an attempt to observe the effect of stepping stone technique in improving students' performance in short story writing.

The significance of the problem of the present study lies in helping Iraqi students improve their short story writing skills and learn how to use creative thinking in their writing and to be open minded to the ideas and views of others and using creative thinking in their writing.

1.2 Aim

The present study aims to discover the effect of the stepping stone technique on intermediate school students' performance in short story writing.

1.3 Hypothesis

The following null hypothesis is: there is no statistically significant difference between the mean score of the experimental group, which is trained by stepping stone technique, and that of the control group, which is taught by the conventional techniques in short story writing test.

1.4 Value

It is hoped that this study will be beneficial to:

1. Curriculum designers and experts in ELT, since they have the opportunity to review the available textbooks and to add the stepping stone technique, in short story writing when designing EFL course books.
2. EFL teachers of intermediate schools to make use of stepping stone technique.
3. EFL students, to learn how to use stepping stone technique in their short story writing

1.5 Limits

The present study is limited to:

1. Second class students in Intermediate school
2. The school year 2016-2017.
3. Baghdad Governorate.
4. Teaching of short story writing

Section Two

2.0 Theoretical Background

The theoretical background is mainly concerned with Short story writing, the elements of the short story, and the story stepping stone technique

2.1 Short story writing:

Murdoch (2002) showed, "short stories can, if selected and exploited appropriately, provide quality text content which will greatly enhance EFL courses for learners at intermediate level of proficiency." Essex (1997) submitted "seven reasons why students should write stories: 1- to entertain, 2- to foster artistic expression. 3- to explore the functions and values of writing. 4- to stimulate imagination. 5- to clarify thinking. 6- to search for identity and 7- to learn to read and write."

2.3 The Stepping Stone Technique

Stepping Stones is a powerful and innovative way to teach students story writing. This technique is widely used in classroom activities to help students create motivating stories that have literary and depth advantage. It is also in touch with much of the new way of thinking.

The stepping stone technique lets the teacher address the practical aspects of writing, grammar, syntax and spelling, Because students have a deep connection to their story, they are much more willing to tackle the ‘boring’ bits. This needs the teacher to operate flexibly, spotting chances to teach technicalities when they arise. In fact, this technique has been rich in schools where students want to learn English as their foreign language.

Many students find it difficult to write genuinely motivating stories, especially if writing a story is taught in a progressive manner and that's happen to random learners. Stepping Stones technique is the art forms of acted and written fiction. Besides, to the common ideas of characters and settings, Stepping Stone technique introduces students to the vital ingredients of problems and tensions, which create literary and interest value.

Stepping Stones shows "students how to devise a story from almost any stimulus by following a series of steps, one step for each key ingredient or ‘fiction feature’. Each step draws on visual, kinaesthetic and dramatic devices which give students lots of options for developing their ideas. In this way, the technique stimulates creative thinking and ultimately develops students’ independence as writers by putting essential tools into their hands, tools which they first acquire, then refine and finally manipulate". (Margaret Cooling, 2011)

Section Three

Procedures and Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This section presents the procedures to achieve the aim and to confirm the hypothesis of this study.

3.1 The Experimental Design

The experimental design characterizes the plan, which is fixed by the study to gather the important information and control the variables, which may affect this information and finally carrying out the suitable analysis to test the hypothesis of the research within a comprehensive plan. The study should select an experimental design, which provides effective conclusions about the relations between both independent and dependent variables (Brown and Rodgers, 2002:210).

To achieve the aim, the study has used Quasi- Experimental Design, the Nonrandomized Control –group Pretest– Posttest Design (Van Dalen, 1973:295). The design form is:

Table1
The Experimental Design

Groups	The test	Independent Variable	The test
The Experimental Group	T ₁	Stepping stones technique	T ₂
The Control group	T ₁	_____	T ₂

The experimental group is taught short story writing by using stepping stone technique while the control group is taught by the conventional techniques.

3.2 The population and The sample of the Study

To achieve the aim of the study, the researcher has randomly chosen Zainab Intermediate School for girls. Two classes out of eight have been randomly selected. Section (A) has been selected randomly as an experimental group, which includes 44 students. Section (B) has been randomly selected as a control group, which includes 45 students. The total number of the sample subjects is 89 students. (See Table 2)

Table 2
Subject's number in the Sample

<i>Second Class in Al Zainab Intermediate School.</i>		Sample of Students
Group	Class	No.
Exp.	A	44
Con.	B	45
Total		89

3.3 The pre-test- post test

To achieve the aim of this study, a short story writing pre-post test has been used. The pretest is conducted to ensure the equalization of the groups selected in the study and the posttest is used to measure the effect of the experimental procedures

3.3.1 Scoring Scheme

An analytic scoring scheme has been assumed and adapted from Brown (2004:244) for scoring rating short story writing. (See Table 3)

The jurors agree on the tests and the scoring scheme as being suitable for measuring the short story written performance.

Table 3
The Analytical Scoring Scheme for Composition Writing

SCORE	Excellent	Good	Adequate	Acceptable	Unacceptable
1- Organization: Introduction, Body and Conclusion	Effective introductory paragraph;; logical and complete conclusion	Good introduction, conclusion and body of composition writing is also good,	Mediocre proplems with introduction and conclusion: and also with the ideas in the body	Shaky Introduction; and conclusion Organization can hardly be understood	Lack of introduction and conclusion; no organization of the ideas of body.
2- Logical development of ideas: Content	The ideas are concrete and thoroughly developed; composition writing reflects thought	Ideas could be complete and developed ; some extraneous ideas is present	Development of ideas is in completed; paragraphs aren't divided exactly right	The ideas are incomplete; composition does not reflect thinking or was quickly written.	Composition is completely poor; no effort to consider the subject carefully
3- Grammar	Correct use of relative clauses; prepositions, modals, tense sequencing	Some grammar problems don't influence communication	Ideas in progress but grammar problems have a bad effect on communication;	Numerous serious grammar problems interfere with communication of the writer's ideas.	Many grammar problems hinder
4- Punctuation and spelling	Good use of English writing conventions: all needed	There are problems with writing conventions; paper is neat and legible	Uses general writing but there are errors in ;spelling and punctuation	There is Serious problems with format of paper; parts of composition not legible; punctuation and;	Complete disregard for English writing paper is illegible; obvious
5- Vocabulary	use of parallel constructions; concise; register good	Attempts diversity; good vocabulary	The vocabulary is misused; absences of awareness of register.	Poor expression of ideas; There problems in vocabulary; lacks variety of structure	Inappropriate use of vocabulary; no idea of register or sentence diversity

3.3.2 Face Validity of Tests

Validity denotes to “the extent to which a test correlate with some criterion external to the test itself” (Sax, 1979:220). To confirm face validity, the scoring scheme and the tests have been exposed to specialized jury members.

3.3.3 Pilot Administration of the Pretest

The pilot administration of the pretest has been occurred on Sunday, the 16th Oct.2016 and after confirming its validity. The pretest has been applied to 50 second-class Intermediate students from Intermediate School Zainab for girls, other than the sample of the study. This administration has been showed in order to:

- 1- Check the clearness of the test;
- 2- Estimate the time allotted for responding to the test;
- 3- Compute the reliability coefficient of the test.

Thus, no serious uncertainty is found about the clarity of the test, as for the time chosen for answering the test, it has found that EFL intermediate school students want 25 minutes to answer the test.

3.3.4 Pre Test Reliability

Reliability is “the degree to which a test consistently measures whatever it measures” (Gay et al, 2010:144).

1-Alpha Cronbach Formula is used to get the internal consistency among the five components of the test. The reliability coefficient is found to be 0.84.

2-Intrascorer method by the researcher herself. The papers of the Students are scored by the researcher herself according to the scoring scheme. The researcher scores the same papers after two weeks. Pearson Correlation Coefficient Formula is used to calculate the correlation coefficient of reliability, which is found to be 0.97.

3-Interscorer reliability method. Two scorers * score the paper of the students using the scoring scheme have been asked to score the pretest. After using Pearson formula, the result has indicated that the correlation coefficient of reliability is 0.95.

3.3.5 The Pilot Administration of the Posttest

**The following are the names of the two scorers:*

1. Teacher Saja Zainab Intermediate school for girls.
2. Teacher Sara Zainab Intermediate school for girls.

The pilot administration of the posttest occurred on Tuesday, the 18th Oct.2016 and after confirming its validity. The post-test has presented to 100 second class intermediate students from Zainab Intermediate School for girls other than the sample of the study. This administration has been conducted in order to:

- 1- Check the simplicity of the test.
- 2- Approximate the time fixed for answering to the test;
- 3- Investigate the items test in terms of the discriminatory power and difficulty levels;
- 4- Compute the reliability coefficient of the instrument.

Thus, no serious ambiguity is found concerning the clarity of the test. As for the time allotted for answering the test, it is found that EFL intermediate school students need 25minutes give answers to the test.

3.3.6 Item Analysis

" Item analysis determines the effectiveness of the different items involved in the test .This is a technique used to define whether an item is difficult or easy and to what extent it is able to distinguish between high and low achiever" (Singh et al, 2008: 157). According to the effects obtained from the pilot study, item analysis seems to be necessary.

3.3.7.1 Difficulty Level

In order to know the level of difficulty of each part of the scheme. Therefore, the researcher separates two subgroups of test papers, The upper group 27 students who have gained the highest scores contain 27% of the number of students. The researcher choose 27 students who get the lowest scores to represent 27% of the number of pilot sample students. So, the method of difficulty level has been calculated. The results show that all the components are of suitable level of difficulty," since the suitable level of difficulty of a written test ranges from 0.25 to 0.75" (Bloom, 1971:66). (See Table 3.3)

3.3.7.2 Discriminatory the Power

"The discriminatory power of the test means the degree to which the item discriminates between learners with high and low performance" (Gronlund, 1976:268). In order to show the discrimination power of each component, the method of discriminatory power is used. After the application of the method of the item discrimination power, it is found that the discrimination power of the test components range between 0.0.40 to 0.53 which are considered, according to Ebel (1972:397), It is a appropriate discrimination level. (See Table 3.3)

Table 4
The Difficulty Level and Discrimination Power of the Scheme

The Component of the scheme	Analysing the Results of Students' Writing										Difficulty Level	Discrimination Power
	Upper					Lower						
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5		
1. Organization	2	2	2	1	20	15	5	4	2	1	0.61	0.48
2. Logical development of ideas	2	1	2	4	18	17	4	4	1	1	0.60	0.51
3. Grammar	3	3	1	1	19	16	5	4	1	1	0.59	0.45
4. Punctuation, spelling,	4	4	4	3	12	21	3	1	1	1	0.50	0.44
5. Vocabulary	5	4	3	1	14	20	4	1	1	1	0.50	0.41

3.3.8 Post Test Reliability

Methods that are used to confirm reliability:

1. Alpha Cronbach Formula is used to get internal consistency among all components of the test. The reliability coefficient is found to be 0.87.
2. Intrascorer method by the researcher herself. Students' papers are checked by the researcher herself according to the scoring scheme. The researcher scores the same papers after two weeks. Pearson Correlation Coefficient formula is used to calculate the correlation coefficient of reliability, which is found to be 0.92.
3. Interscorer reliability method. Two scorers* score according of the scoring scheme have been asked to score the posttest. After using Pearson formula, the result has indicated that the correlation coefficient of reliability is 0.96.

3.4 Equivalence of the Sample

The names of the two scorers:

1. Teacher Saja Zainab Intermediate school for girls.
2. Teacher Sara Zainab Intermediate school for girls.

To increase the sensitivity of the experiment, the researcher equates the subjects on the basis of two variables.

1-The age of the students.

2-Students' performance in pretest in short story writing.

3.4.1 The Age of the Students

By applying t-test method for two independent samples, it is found out that the computed t-value 1.447 is lower than the critical t-value 2 at 87 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups for the age variable (see Table 5)

Table 5
The age of the students

Group	No.	Mean	SD	t-values		d.f	Level of Sig. 0.05
				Computed	Critical		
Exp	44	185.16	9.296	1.447	2	87	Not Significant
CG.	45	182.331	9.128				

3.4.2 Students' Pretest Performance in Short Story Writing

The *t*-test formula is also used to find out whether there is any statistically significant difference between the scores of the experimental and control groups in the pretest (see Table 6)

The results indicate that the mean score is 8.14 for the experimental group, and 7.67 for the control group. The computed *t*-value is 0.850 which is less than the critical *t*-value 2 under 87 degree of freedom and at 0.05 level of significance. This means that there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups in their pretest score.

Table 6
The Means, Standard Deviations, and t- Values for the Students' all Performance in the Pretest Short story Writing

Groups	No.	M.	S.D	t- value		d.f	Level of Sig. 0.05
				Computed	Critical		
Experimental	44	8.14	2.809	0.850	2	87	Not Significant
Control	45	7.67	2.393				

3.6 The application of Experiment

The experiment is take place on Sunday the 23 of October 2016 and lasted for 10 weeks during the academic year 2016-2017 to end up on the 1th of January 2017.

After administering the pretest, the researcher introduces the students (the experimental group and the control group) to:

3.6.1 The Experimental Group

The researcher specifies a lesson to the experimental group to clarify some general outlines to the stepping stone.

Stepping Stone

The researcher introduces the stepping stone to the experimental group. Thus, the researcher teaches the experimental group following the procedures mentioned in each lesson plan. However, the procedures followed in employing the stepping stone are

Date: ----- ----. 2017

Time: 45 minutes

Topic: short story writing

Level: Second class Intermediate School

Goals: To enable students to write a short story.

Objectives:

a- Working individually, the students will be able to describe what they are thinking about a given picture which is related to a story orally within 5 minutes.

b- Listening to the story, the students will be able to identify the story within 5 minutes.

c- In groups, students will be able to break the story down into the key events. Arrange the different events on papers stepping stones within 10 minutes.

d- Individually, students will be able to arrange the events on the board within 5 minutes.

g- Individually, students will be able to write a short story in 20 minutes.

Materials

Story text. Student listen to the story website here:

<http://learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org/en/short-stories/ali-and-the-magic-carpet>

Paper stepping stones (papers that arranged as steps), pencils and coloured crayons, coloured charts.

Procedure

1. Warmer (5 minutes)

The researcher will give students pictures of a story and ask *What's this?* Have a class discussion about stories.

- The researcher uses a few of these questions to generate ideas:
- What is your favourite story?

- What kind of stories do you like?
- What kind of characters appear in stories?

2. (5 minutes)

The researcher tells learners that they are going to listen to a story and they should try to imagine everything they hear. If they want to close their eyes to help concentrate, I read the story aloud, pausing after each section for learners to assimilate the information.

3. (10 minutes)

The class is divided into groups. Sheet of paper is given to each group (papers are arranged as steps). Students discuss how the plot develops. Together, break the story down into the key events. Arrange the different events on papers stepping stones.

4. (5 minutes)

The researcher draws these steps on an interactive board. (Students can be moved around the board into the correct sequence). Students can add more information, questions and responses from their papers.

I will not worry if they are not using much English at this stage. The main point is for learners to have an opportunity to be creative and transfer the information from the story they have listened to (and imagined) onto paper. There should not be any 'rules' and it is not important if the story looks different in different illustrations.

5. (20 minutes)

The researcher explains to his students that they will write a short story with the help of the stepping stones papers. Individually, students will write a short story.

Worksheet**Character****Who was in the story?** -----**What was the story about?** -----**Setting****Where did the story take place?** -----**Problem****What was the problem in the story?****Beginning****What happen at the beginning of the story?****Next****What happen after the beginning?****Then****What happen in the middle of the story?**
-----**Finally****What happen at the end of the story?****3.6.2 The Control Group**

The control group receives no treatment. Fraenkel and Wallen (2003:269) state that

"In educational research the control group is the group of subjects closely resembling the experimental group in many demographic variables but not receiving the independent variable under study and thereby serving as a comparison group when treatment results are evaluated".

3.7 The Final Administration of the Posttest

Finally, the students at both groups have been tested on 3rd of Jan. 2017. The same testing ways have been followed in conducting the test. Both groups are tested in a comfortable environment.

Section Four

Results, Conclusions, Recommendations, and Suggestions for more Studies

4.0 An Introductory Note

Chapter four covers the comparison between the experimental and the control groups in the post-test scores, discussion of results, conclusions, recommendations, and also the suggestions for more studies.

4.1 The Results

To achieve the aim of the study, to verify its hypothesis, and to compare the experimental and control group's performance in short story writing, The results are illustrated in Figure 4.1, Table 4.1,.

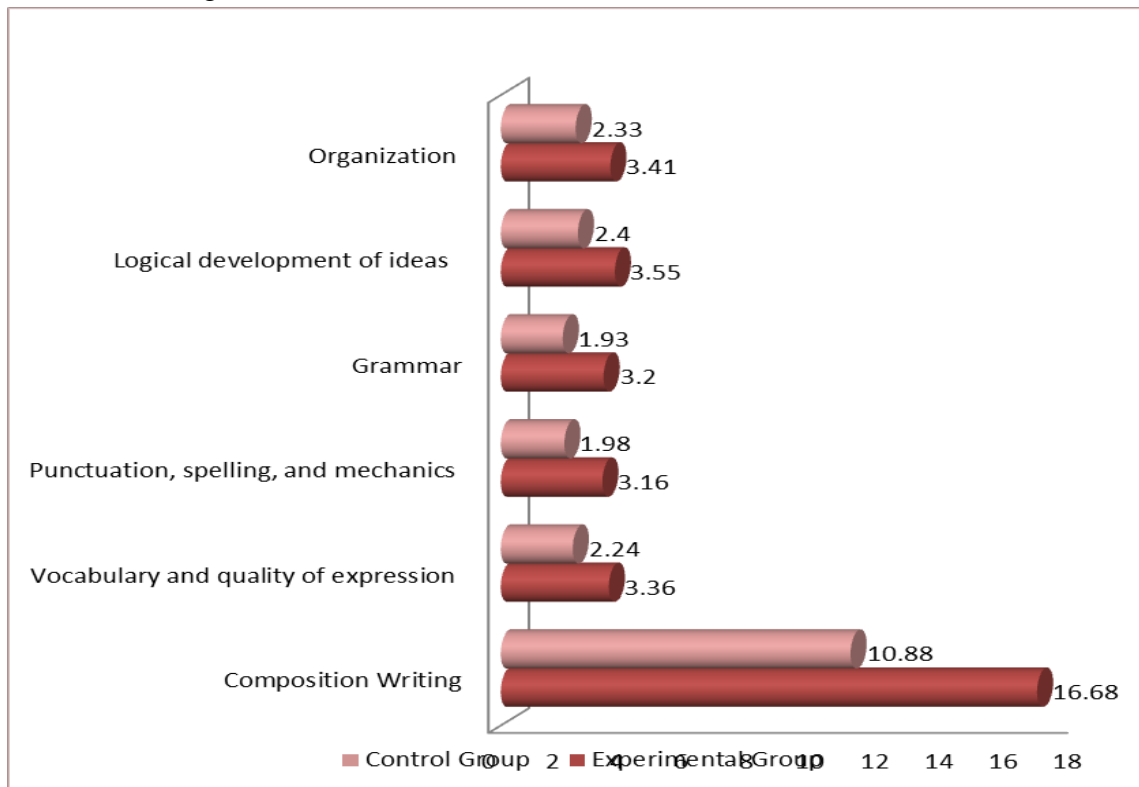


Figure1

The Means, Standard Deviations, and t- Values for the Overall Performance in Short Story Writing Posttest

Table 7
The Means, Standard Deviations, and t- Values for the Sample’s Performance in Short story Writing Posttest

Components	Groups	No.	M.	S.D	t-value		d.f	Results
					Computed	Critical		
<i>Organization component</i>	Experimental	44	3.41	1.128	4.866	2	87	significant
	Control	45	2.33	0.952				
Logical development of ideas Component	Experimental	44	3.55	1.229	5.096	2	87	Significant
	Control	45	2.40	0.863				
Grammar component	Experimental	44	3.21	1.091	5.831	2	87	Significant
	Control	45	1.93	0.963				
<i>Punctuation and spelling, component</i>	Experimental	44	3.16	1.119	5.283	2	87	Significant
	Control	45	1.98	0.988				
<i>Vocabulary and quality of expression component</i>	Experimental	44	3.36	1.331	4.247	2	87	Significant
	Control	45	2.24	1.151				
Overall Performance	Experimental	44	16.6818	3.33949 cvdf22 wqw	8.333	2	87	Significant
	Control	45	10.8889	3.22083				

42 Discussion of the Results

All the findings of the present study prove the positive effect of stepping stone technique on students’ performance in short story writing. Using stepping stone technique provides opportunities for students to think deeply with creative and valuable ideas.

This technique enhances students to better thinking, to better decision and better performance. This technique also motivates the learners to organize their thoughts and helps them become active participants in the interaction process, by listening carefully to other students point of view, judging on those utterances, analysing students' own ideas in connection with the ideas of others students' personal thoughts, allowing them to eliminate the weak points in their ideas, and by making the best decisions about their short story writing.

During the stepping stone technique, the progression in the students' thinking process encourages them to develop all components in short story writing. The results of the experimental group which trained using to this new technique stepping stone reveal that thinking skills can be developed at intermediate school. This comes from their self-awareness, which arises from the ability to think critically.

Being critical thinker entails making judgments on the information the learner has at the time. It also means being positive and supportive, commenting in a thoughtful way. This model gives students chances to think critically develop their writing ability and encourage a greater degree of participation and

4.3 Conclusion

The findings of the study indicate that the experimental group achieved much better on the post short story writing test than the control group. Therefore, stepping stone technique has a good effect on developing third-class intermediate students' performance in short story writing in terms of organization of the body, logical development of ideas, grammar, punctuation, spelling, vocabulary, and value of expression and thinking skills especially creative thinking.

The researcher think that the use of stepping stone technique extremely contributes to enable learners generate opinions exchange ideas, and develop new views about the raised subjects; a fact that is positively affects their performance on the post-short story writing test. In addition, using stepping stone technique motivates learners to get involved in the learning process and prompt their point of views.

Thus, to foster thinking skills and creative thinking in particular is a challenging task nowadays. Hence, teachers should promote cognitive challenge, collaborative learning, and metacognitive discussions in their classes. Teachers can help students become better writers not by simply telling them what or how to write but by helping them understand how writing works.

4.4 Recommendations

Based on the results of the study, the researcher recommends to:

- 1- Support the Iraqi Educational system in thinking skills.
- 2- Take stepping stone technique into account while designing English language curricula due to its role in motivating the students to get involved in the learning process.
- 3- Give explicit attention to the creative thinking skills as an instructional goal at all levels of the schools.

4.5 Suggestions for Further Studies

Based on the current study findings and conclusions, further studies are suggested to be conducted:

- 1- A study can be conducted to examine the effect of stepping stone technique on Intermediate School students' performance in Reading Comprehension.
- 2- A study is recommended to examine the effect of stepping stone technique on Intermediate School students' achievement with respect to their thinking style.
- 3- A study is recommended to investigate the effect of stepping stone technique course of study skills on university students' achievement.

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Appendx1

Pre- post test

Directions: Write a creative story to go along with the picture.

_____ (title) _____

Written by: _____ (your name)