

# **Moving Towards an Action Research: The Effect of Fake High Scores Using Dictogloss Task on Four to Seven Year Old Children's Dictation Ability**

**Batool Faghani**

Department of English Language Teaching,  
Gorgan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Gorgan, Iran  
&

Department of English Language Teaching,  
Golestan Science and Research Branch,  
Islamic Azad University, Gorgan, Iran

**Ali Derakhshan**

Department of English Language and Literature,  
Golestan University Gorgan, Iran

**Abstract:** In its rising and falling trend through the history of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), dictation has been utilized as a tool in both teaching and testing language proficiency. Moreover, implementing dictogloss task in the process of language learning and testing seems practical and flexible enough to account for the needs, interests, and learning preferences of the learners. Given the background of an unsatisfactory number of studies on improving children's language learning performance, especially, their writing in the pre-school age, the present study attempts to juxtapose assigning fake high scores in a time series design with dictogloss tasks to unearth their effects on children's dictation ability. To this end, a one-group time series design study was followed by selecting 25 four to seven-year-old weak learners at an intermediate level as the participants, who were learning English as a foreign language through Jolly Phonics series and were instructed through dictogloss tasks for 10 sessions. Two experienced teachers scored all the tasks with real scores, regarding the rubric given to them, and reported as holistic scores. The researchers rated the tasks utilizing fake scores which were boosted up to

37.5% higher than their real ones. An inter-rater reliability test to assess the degree to which different raters agreed on their assessment decisions, a normality test to make sure that all the data came from a normal distribution and a paired t-test to find out any significant improvement in real scores following the treatment were implemented. The results demonstrated that regardless of the noticeable weakness of the learners at the beginning of the study, they showed significant improvements in performing their tasks during the treatment sessions. It is concluded that fake high scoring along with permanent dictogloss tasks could be a suitable, applicable, and appropriate device for EFL teachers and learners to achieve their educational aims. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers can provide their students with these incentives so that their learning is augmented even though their students are weak or have difficulties learning the language.

**Keywords:** fake high scores, dictogloss task, dictation ability

## INTRODUCTION

Traditional methods of teaching English as a foreign language, without any attention to the detailed prescriptions for Situational Language Teaching, often include translating structures from the target language to the mother tongue. Although this teaching method may seem outdated, it is still commonly practiced. Indeed, those teachers who were taught by traditional methods tend to continue teaching with the same methods they had been taught with. Without a doubt, teachers normally tend to teach the way they were taught (Anderson, Standerford & Imdieke, 2010; Britzman, 1991; Goodlad, 1984; Hansen, 1995; Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Prabhu, 1987; Stewart, Silva & González, 2014; Walia, 2012). Many English teachers around the world may still prefer direct instruction even though they are often free to select from a variety of methods or strategies (Bollin, 2003). Moreover, students in the most comfortable classroom

with the most modern equipment will nevertheless remain unsuccessful if they believe that they will not learn, or if they identify themselves as poor foreign language learners. This will be the case in spite of attempts by the teacher to teach them efficient behavioral routines and learning strategies (Herbert, 2010). Coopersmith (1967) defines self-esteem as a personal judgment of worthiness which is expressed in attitudes that the individual holds towards himself, and shows the extent to which the individual believes in himself. The researchers believe that learners' self-esteem would be increased by giving them fake higher scores. Similarly, de Andres reports a research on the value of self-esteem in language learning (de Andres as cited in Tomlinson, 2010, p. 90). Moreover, Kaga (1991) and Savignon (1982) suggested dictation as a relatively simple yet reliable and valid indirect measure of functional language skills, and it is gaining popularity as a test of placement and proficiency in L2 programs of all kinds. Teachers must be open to the new methodologies and teaching tools that are now available to us, and through us, to the children we teach. We must also stop blaming the children for having learning difficulties. It is time to turn the spotlight - the searchlight - on our own teaching difficulties (Nevola, 2002).

One of these teaching and testing spotlights is dictation which is an effective means of helping teachers and learners during language teaching processes to promote learning if it is utilized in a proper procedure while considering all four skills in learning a foreign/second language (Ghaffarzade, 2013). Alternatively, according to Brodkey (1972), dictation can be used as a device for testing foreign-language proficiency. Rhimi (2008) points out that dictation, though widely known as a testing device, can be considered as a good learning technique to improve learners' proficiency. The researchers as teachers believe that the time of passive technician teachers, those who just follow the teaching instruction in a program that concentrates more on the education part than on the teacher part (Kumaravadivelu, 2003), is over. Teachers should contemplate upon new methods of teaching or new tasks to involve more in the process of learning.

One of these techniques is dictogloss which is a relatively recent procedure in language teaching. It borrows a little from traditional dictation, but it differs from dictation in both procedure and objectives (Wajnryb, 1990). According to Mehdiabadi and Arabmofrad (2014), among a variety of several tasks that may affect learners' behaviors such as motivation, anxiety and sense of responsibility, dictogloss is known as one of the well-known output oriented activities and a type of focus-on-form task. The procedures demonstrate a learning approach where students have the opportunities to integrate reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills through social interaction (Stewart et al., 2014).

Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to assign fake high scores to learners' dictations, and hence, their hypothesized increased proficiency level of kids of four to seven years old at a college in Iran. The researchers were interested to find any effect or relationship between ignoring weak learners written mistakes and making them motivated to be more active in performing well in their dictation. In other words, this study was planned to give EFL teachers an impetus to prevent their students from being low confident, less motivated and low performed.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Dictation which is an activity of decoding sounds or writing down what is orally said can be practiced both as a useful device for testing and a helpful activity for learning (Davis & Rinvoluceri, 2002; Farhady & Malekpour, 1997; Savignon, 2006). Hence, it can also be employed as a teaching device (Whitaker, 1976) or even more reliable and more valid than any other types of traditional methods of testing language proficiency (Oller, 1992). However, Lado (1961) believes that dictation is not a proper device to measure any aspect of language because almost everything is dictated to the testees. According to Afsharrad and Sadeghi Benis (2014), nowadays, dictation has been drawn on both as a tool to improve language skills and as a device to measure language

improvement. They state that dictation has been used as an instrument in both teaching and testing. It has been employed as a tool for either helping learners with some language skills or testing their language proficiency such as listening and writing (Jafarpur & Yamini, 1993).

Ghaffarzade (2013) in her paper on active vs. passive dictation, elaborates on some new dictation strategies such as consulting, brainstorming, listening and answering, trans-dictation, correcting the mistakes, cleaning-rewriting, cheating, and artto reduce the deficiencies of traditional dictation and to assist learners using the language productively. A dictogloss is a task which can involve different factors such as those mentioned by Ghaffarzade (2013).

Dictogloss, introduced by Wajnryb (as cited in Abbasian, 2013, p. 1371), can be considered as a way for integrating form and meaning in the learning context. According to Nunan (1995) and Vasiljevic (2010), the dictogloss technique provides a useful bridge between bottom-up and top-down processing. Some researchers consider dictogloss as a type of focus-on-form task which proposes to provide a focus-on-meaning context to raise learners' awareness of the discursal use of the target linguistic feature (Shak, 2006; Jacobs & Small, 2003). In addition, dictogloss, which has its roots in traditional dictation exercises, typically consists of four procedures: *a) Preparation*: a warm-up related to the topic or a preliminary speaking or writing exercise; *b) Dictation*: learners listen to the dictation and take notes. The language used in the text and the length of the text depend on the learners' level of English proficiency; maturity level; and interests, needs, and learning preferences; *c) Reconstruction*: students work individually or in groups to produce their versions of the original text, capturing the essence of the text and generating correct grammar; and *d) Analysis with Correction*: students self-assess their own texts and then form groups in order to conduct peer assessments. Either individually or as a group, students notice differences between their own texts and the original in regard to form, meaning, and language use (Mehdiabadi & Arabmofrad, 2014; Wajnryb, 1990). According to Qin (2008) and Rashtchi and Khosroabadi (2009), different adaptations of dictogloss task have now become popular in order to meet specific

classroom contexts. As suggested by Stewart et al. (2014), an alternative to creating an original text is to find an authentic text that is appropriate for the learners. Abbasian's (2013) findings confirmed the previous study by Linden (1994) who considered dictogloss as a powerful technique for learning spelling and punctuations. It also has a positive effect on EFL learners' general writing (Abbasian, 2013).

Jacobs et al. (1981, p. 16) indicated that "there is no completely reliable basis for comparison of scores on a test unless all the students have performed the same writing task(s)". Students' outcomes can be assessed objectively if a reliable rating scale is utilized (Mazdayasna, 2012). Fulcher and Davidson (2007) note that "how we score is the link between the evidence we elicit from the task on the one hand and the construct and domain on the other" (p. 91). A *holistic scoring* method may often be the choice of writing capability for L2 writing assessment (Wiseman, 2012). The *holistic rating* is usually based on an explicit scoring guide that is a list of specific linguistic, rhetorical or informational features of writing that the rater keeps in mind while rating the piece of text (Charney, 1984). Based on the units of scoring, the following six scoring procedures were developed by Farhay and Malekpour (1997, p. 207): 1. *Letter Scoring Method (LSM)*, 2. *Syllable Scoring Method (SYSM)*, 3. *Morpheme Scoring Method (MSM)*, 4. *Traditional Scoring Method (TSM)*, 5. *Standard Scoring Method (STSM)*, and 6. *Chunk Scoring Method (CSM)*. In this method, every chunk which constituted a natural discourse boundary was taken as an item. In this method, misspelling was not taken into account as long as the meaning of the chunk was preserved.

Melvin and Warehime (1971) have administered the Personal Orientation Inventory (POI) twice to 95 undergraduates, first under ordinary testing conditions and then under a "fake good" condition. Farhady and Khany (1997) state that dictation can be scored quite objectively. Vargo and Semple (1984) have used the Attitudes Toward Disabled Persons (ATDP) Scale twice in one sitting, responding once with their honest views and once with the responses that they believed would yield the highest (the most positive) score. The results showed the mean fake score to be significantly higher than the mean honest score,

indicating that students were able to “fake well”. Similarly, Peeters and Lievens (2005) had released that the scores of students in the fake condition were significantly higher than those of students in the honest condition. Alternatively, Stein and Graham (1995) had administered the students under instructions to fake good, fake bad, or score honestly and reported significant ( $p < .001$ ) difference on all validity scale scores of the three groups of respondents.

Regarding the fact that there are unclear and controversial results originating from other studies conducted on dictation and dictogloss, and given the fact that only a few studies have focused on the effect of fake high scores on dictation ability using a dictogloss task, the main purpose of this research was to investigate whether or not there is any effect of fake high scoring using a dictogloss task on dictation ability of EFL learners.

## **METHODOLOGY**

A total number of 25 weak students, studying at levels 5 and 6 of Jolly Phonics (Lloyd & Wernham, 1995), which is considered as the intermediate levels of the named book, were chosen from all available EFL students of a college in Iran. Their weaknesses were in their general proficiency on their final score of their final exam, and their dictation level. Students with 37.5 - 75 % of the score were chosen as the participants. Based on Jacobs et al.(1981) framework, there is no completely reliable basis for comparison of scores on a test unless all the students have performed the same writing task(s). Hence, all the participants were provided with the same dictation test under the same condition.

In order to examine the research hypothesis of this study, we used a dictogloss pre-test just as the first session of the treatment method and scoring was performed only by two raters (two experienced Jolly Phonics teachers with academic degree in TEFL who had enough experience, capability and knowledge with the named teaching method) and the mean of two real scores were recorded and reported.

The treatment process was repeated and continued for

10 times, and the scoring was performed in two ways: 1. Real scoring which was done by two raters (the same raters who have just been introduced in the previous paragraph) and the mean score was reported. 2. Fake scoring in which the dictation papers were corrected by the researchers (in front of the testees' eyes) according to a combination of Strict Chunk Scoring method (Farhady and Khany (1997) in which every chunk that constituted a natural discourse boundary is taken as an item and misspelling was not taken into account as long as the meaning of the chunk was preserved and the Traditional Scoring method (Farhady and Khany (1997) in which any misspelling is considered as wrong and the participants saw a 37.5%, three stages, higher than real score on their papers.

The scoring participants' papers consists of one which was done by two raters (papers were corrected on the basis of a combination of Strict Chunk Scoring Method and Traditional Scoring Method, and scores were given according to Jacobs et al. (1981) scoring profile or holistic scores) and the other sort which plays the role as the treatment was done according to colored correction codes and a false higher than real score at the end on the paper of students to make them aware of their mistakes and not to let them be disappointed with the low marks. This is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1** Colored Correction Codes

<b>Color</b>	<b>Message</b>
Black	Word order error
Blue	Add something
Brown	Punctuation
Green	Subject-verb agreement
Orange	Wrong word
Pink	Spelling error
Purple	Singular-plural
Red	Omit this
Yellow	Capitalization

In the first session, the participants were read five

sentences. Each sentence was read three times, and learners were supposed to listen carefully and write the sentence individually. This was repeated for the four other sentences. The next step was to give them five words among the new words they had learned recently, and they were supposed to make a sentence with them. The words were just read to learners and the sentences had to be corrected structurally, contextually, and correct punctuations. The participants' papers were corrected according to the colored correction codes. Though the correcting process could have been easier done by the symbol correction codes, it has been done by using colored correction codes since the participants were not mature enough to focus on and fully recognize the codes. So, it was decided to use the colored ones in order to make it more noticeable for kids of pre-school age. While the researchers were doing so, the learners were asked to pay attention to what had been done. And the final step was to consider the real score and to calculate 37.5 percent higher one in order to put on the testees' papers, while both real and fake scores were recorded. In spite the fact that we tended to video-tape some parts of the treatment sessions, the authorities of the institute did not let us do it.

Like the first session, the second session was carried out using the same procedure. The only difference was that there were some new words that were included in the provided dictogloss. In a similar line, the same process as the second session has been pursued for sessions 3 to 10 and the results were recorded.

## **RESULTS**

As the dictogloss tasks were corrected by two raters, the inter-rater reliability was used to assess the degree to which raters made consistent scores of the same situation.

**Table 2** Reliability Statistics

Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
S1.Raters 1 & 2	0.997	0.997	2
S5.Raters 1 & 2	1.000	1.000	2
S10.Raters 1 & 2	0.999	0.999	2

Table 2 shows that Cronbach's alpha reported for the first session pair of scores is 0.997, for the fifth session pair of scores is 1.00 and for the last session is equal to 0.999. According to Pallant (2007), as the amount of Cronbach's alpha goes higher than 0.7, the data would be satisfactory. So, it can easily be understood that the data recorded were in great shape. The most common indicator of internal consistency is Cronbach's alpha coefficient which ideally supposed to be above 0.7 (De Vellis, as cited in Pallant, 2007, p. 95), and it was so, hence, the data reported by two raters were reliable enough.

### **Normality Test Hypotheses**

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov<sup>a</sup> test shows, all the data were of normal distribution. Regarding Brown's (2005, p. 118) statement, "... as the number of outcomes increase, the distribution will tend to look more and more normal", likewise, Birjandi and Mosallanejad (2010) believe that by lengthening the test, it will be more reliable, as well, Fulcher and Davidson (2007, p. 104-105) are certain that "the most reliable ranking will be obtained when there is greatest possible spread of scores".

### **Paired Sample T-Test**

As Table 3 shows, the output of the first, second and third paired *t*-test respectively for the initial-, mid-, and final-

progression data indicates that fake high scoring stimulates an increase in the learners' real scores during the treatment. Due to the means of the two session scores and the direction of the t-value, we can conclude that there was a statistically significant improvement in real scores following the treatment program, since  $p < 0.05$ .

**Table 3** Paired Samples Statistics

		Paired Differences							
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	S1.R	-17.18800	15.40226	3.08045	-23.54574	-10.83026	-5.580	24	0.000
	S5.R								
Pair 2	S1.R	-32.71000	9.26303	1.85261	-36.53359	-28.88641	-17.656	24	0.000
	S10.R								
Pair 3	S5.R	-15.5220	14.83439	2.96688	-21.64534	-9.39866	-5.232	24	0.000
	S10.R								

## DISCUSSION

This study shows significant improvements in performing dictogloss tasks during the treatment sessions, despite the noticeable weakness of the learners at the beginning of the study, and it got verified that giving fake high scores to kids' dictogloss tasks during a permanent process would lead them to be more capable of writing dictation.

At the time when this research was being conducted, there were many studies which have implemented dictogloss task or dictation ability such as Habibi, Nemati and Habibi (2012). The study has focused on and proved the positive effect of listening comprehension on dictation ability. This study has also yielded similar results. Shamshiri, Aziz Mohammadi and Madani (2014) have investigated the effect

of oral dictation method on EFL learners' spelling accuracy and similar to the results of the present study, they showed improvement in their participants' performance on dictation. Correspondingly, Afsharrad and SadeghiBenis (2014) believe that improving learners' ability in taking dictation improves their language proficiency. They have proved their claim by performing transcription that has a significant positive effect on learners' dictation and recommended that transcribing exercise is a technique which could help elementary learners to improve their language proficiency which parallels this study's results with some small differences. That is, here, fake high scores using dictogloss, which also contains transcribing, has been shown to have a positive effect on young learners' dictation ability.

Equally, on dictogloss case, Mehdiabadi and Arabmofrad (2014) have done a study to prove the significant effect of collaborative dictogloss on emotional intelligence (IE). While a few studies have focused on fake high scoring none of them was in the EFL or any other language learning field. Farhady and Malekpour (1997) have done many studies on dictation ability, with the similar pathway to the present study, though different results.

In a similar line, Farhady (1997), Farhady and Khany (1997) used and suggested dictation as a language proficiency test. Ezenwosu (2011), regarding the results, concluded that there should be consistent application of dictation activities to help make significant contributions to the current school reform project of the learners which is alike the present research which showed the positive outcome of dictogloss combined by fake scoring on learners' performance improvement. But with a different aim, Marzban and Abdollahi (2013) have revealed that dictation had a significant effect on the listening comprehension ability of the learners. The weight of their study was mostly on listening comprehension through a regular practice with partial dictation. The results showed an improvement in learners' listening comprehension, while in the present study, dictation ability was dependent on receiving fake high scores.

According to Farhady and Malehpour (1997) findings through investigating the effect of different scoring methods

on the psychometric characteristics of dictation tests, there must have been a weak relationship between the method of scoring and the reliability and validity of dictation tests; moreover, trait structures of dictation tests would have been independent of the scoring methods but related to the students' proficiency level. And regarding the last important result, there should have been no relationship between the scoring methods and the students' performance. Though, in the present study it is proved with the  $p$ -value = 0.0005, which shows a very high level of significance, that fake high scoring, which can be considered as a scoring method, has had a very great effect on the learners performance and caused them a significant improvement in dictation ability, and even a strongly positive correlation between fake high scores and learners' improvement. This discrepancy could be justified on the ground, that different participants in Farhady and Malekpour (1997) study were in university age and level, but in the present study, they were at pre-school age, so they were not aware enough of the validity of scores given to them. Another difference between these two studies is that Farhady and Malekpour (1997) had investigated the effects on whole proficiency level, but present study focused only on dictation ability.

Many studies, though, have focused on different aspects or effects of dictation and dictogloss tasks, for example, Xiangdong and Chunyan (2012) have worked on validity of dictation tests and they revealed that learners' actual performance does not apparently relate to the instructions given in the compound dictation test, which may raise doubts over the effectiveness of the instruction and may pose a potential warning to test validity.

Foulds and Warehime (1971) managed the Personal Orientation Inventory (POI) twice, 1st under regular testing situation and then under a fake good condition and at the end of their study, they suggest that POI scores are unlikely to be inflated by the endeavors of students to make a good impression on the inventory. Likewise, Vargo and Semple (1984) have studied on the Attitudes Toward Disabled Persons (ATDP) Scale - Form A twice in one sitting, once with honest views and once with those that believed to gain the highest (i.e., most positive) score. Their results showed that

fake scores were meaningfully higher than the mean honest score, proving that students did fake well. Although these studies seem to have no relation to the language learning area, they can show the potential of fake scoring to be used in academic studies. However, none of the studies have focused on the fake high scoring in this task, nor did not any of them have included preschool-aged participants whereas the present study was paid attention to. The combination of these two factors was first identified and implemented by this study.

It should be stated that our learners are the key part and the base point of any learning process, so we need to provide some techniques to make them more eager and active with a strong feeling of capability of learning and being successful. In this research, the learners could achieve a sense of success and victory and felt to have the ability that they can do what other students actually can and according to Mehdiabadi and Arabmofrad (2014, p. 137) “they will gradually be more engaged in showing their competence” and “enrich their self-confidence, motivation to learn and the individual’s ability to solve the learning problems” especially in dictation writing, which was the aim of this study.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

The main purpose of this research was to investigate whether or not there would be any effect of fake high scoring using a dictogloss task on dictation ability of EFL learners. To do so, this study attempted to show a way to help very young language learners in their dictation writing or, perhaps, other writing activities; and indicates a useful technique into the language teaching activities. The findings from analyzing the data were elaborated and discussed and showed significant improvements performing the dictogloss tasks combined with fake high scoring. This is confirmed through the  $t(24) = -5.23$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.0005$  which does not exceed the magnitude of significance level (0.05). The output also suggests that fake high scoring using dictogloss task

had a strongly positive effect on weak learners' real scores in their dictogloss performance. Based on the findings of this study, it could be argued that, despite the noticeable weakness of the learners at the beginning of the study, they could show a great significant improvement in performing their tasks during the treatment sessions, and it got proved that giving fake high scores to kids' dictogloss tasks during several sessions (ten sessions, in this study) will lead them to be more capable of writing dictation. That seems to be caused by improving their sense of confidence and inspiration which made them motivated and more active in performing their tasks.

Several pedagogical implications appeared from the results of the present study. To begin with, the study could be an endeavor to add to the children EFL learners' reform process, encouraging an effective method of engaging and improving very young EFL learners which indeed, implies good handling of difficulties and challenges due to being patient and tolerant that might impede the teaching implementation. It will also need adjustments and adaptations in teachers' role regarding the atmosphere in the classroom in order to allow some opportunities for learners to be more confident and be able to rely on themselves as well as being more motivated. Nevertheless, the authority of teachers' traditional character is required to be lessened. Overall, the results indicated that some amount of lowering the strictness would help a lot in learners' learning process. Having the knowledge of motivating and engagement necessitates the teachers to put their viewpoint conception of education aside so that they can engage their learners in learning and being capable of success. Teachers are also expected to apprehend that they are not in bondage of a fixed method; hence, they can bring necessary supplementary and remedial treatments into their classrooms. Further studies can be conducted with modifications such as on the number of participants, other language components and subjects rather than dictation ability, as well as other levels of studies.

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