

The Process of Writing in Educational Settings (EFL Students of English Language)



Linguistics

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Abstract

Writing is one of the most important skills of teaching and learning a particular language, in this case English. Teaching writing is a hard task which can often be frustrating. Therefore, the teacher must use different writing strategies and techniques in order to create a stress-free and motivated writing classroom. In fact, by writing students improve their way of thinking day-after-day by practice; their writing will seem more successful as Bean (2000:17) claims: "good thinking provides good writing".

Introduction

Today, one of the most critical issues in the educational system is writing. Many students, as well as teachers see the process of learning and teaching writing as a difficult issue. Therefore, writing in English classes is avoided or used very rarely. Similarly, many English language teachers at university level pay attention mostly to reading, speaking, and to listening, whereas, writing in most cases is neglected. Moreover, some teachers only instruct their students to write about a particular topic; afterwards, they give the paper back to the students having corrected only the grammatical errors or punctuation.

Because of neglecting the teaching of writing, many students suffer from an inability to express their clear ideas in the foreign language. Students also have problems in topic selection, cohesion, developing ideas on a particular topic or using their critical thinking while writing. This is because many teachers were taught to teach students mainly proper grammar usage or language structure, and not for parts of the paper such as: introduction, body, conclusion, or quotes, and the other important points of a good academic paper. As a result, students see writing classes as boring because they are not encouraged to write using different strategies, which motivate them also to think more carefully and deeply about particular topics, which help to develop students' critical thinking therefore making them more critical of the surrounding area.

Many teachers teach using different strategies according to their own beliefs, but since teaching is an evolving field which requires changes to reach to the highest points, teachers must not hesitate to use different strategies in their classrooms. Teachers' aim should be in creating enjoyable classroom environment by using appropriate writing strategies in order to get students involved in their learning and be active in most of the time. Thus, teachers should choose teaching strategies which reduce the stress and passiveness in the class and instead motivate and challenge students. After all, researchers are there to help teachers and course designers, and teachers are there to help students.

There has been much debate about the role of writing, or the strategies of writing and the emphasis on developing critical thinking in many countries around the world. In fact, many researchers attempt to investigate different strategies helpful for teachers' teaching methodology for engaging all the students to write and to fulfill their needs. Accordingly, by writing, students improve their way of thinking day-after-day by practice; their writing will seem more successful as Bean (2000:17) claims: "good thinking provides good writing".

Taking consideration of the influence of researches on the development of English Foreign Language (EFL) teaching, there are provided many writing strategies for various EFL students especially for Japanese, Chinese, Turkish and other settings. The recommended writing strategies can be used as a guide for different groups of students with the aim of writing improvement. Nevertheless, there is a need of additional research for students of other particular countries such as Macedonia and neighbors, which will add other pieces to the field of writing strategies in the EFL context.

Writing Strategy

In the field of teaching and learning, the term *strategy* is used very often in order to describe a particular situation or plan. For writing issues usually the term *writing strategies* is used where many researchers have investigated different writing strategies to find the most effective strategy in order to help learners learn writing. In addition, the term critical thinking is used very often to describe a particular process of thinking, where critical thinking works especially through writing, in order to clarify writers, in this case students' thinking.

In order to understand the meaning of writing strategies, first it is necessary to understand the term strategy. The term strategy comes from the Greek *strategia*, meaning "generalship" (Holec, Little & Richterich, 1996: 42). First, the term strategy was used in the military, and then adopted from military was used in many different fields. In fact, the term strategy was used to refer to tactics as the enemy was engaged in order to succeed (Oxford, 1990).

According to the dictionary, the term strategy means a general plan or the art of planning the best way to achieve success, especially over a long period of time (Collins Cobuild, 2003, *Advanced Learner's English Dictionary*). Whereas, Brown (2000) claims that strategies are specific methods for achieving a particular goal or aim, where each person chooses few of them. From the teaching point of view, strategies are plans or techniques for achieving the goals or the aims of the assignment. Therefore, a strategy is a complex phenomenon and according to Bange, (1992 In Holec & Little & Richterich, 1996: 43) "it includes the idea of a hierarchy of aims and means, and the action concept associated with it is a complex one and is a series of actions chosen and planned with a view to achieving the ultimate goal".

According to many researchers (Arndt 1987, Beare 2000), writing strategies mainly separate successful from less successful writers. In fact, writing strategies help teachers find appropriate strategies for their students in order to encourage them to write and like writing, where Hsiao and Oxford (2002: 372) claim that strategies help to "pave the way toward greater proficiency" and "self-regulation".

I believe that writing strategy is a tool, or a plan of action the learner develops to achieve his or her goals and objectives in a writing class. A writing strategy is the way which shows the path towards better and better results. Mainly, writing strategies are used to be as effective as possible in helping learners to write, and to achieve the best results possible. In writing classes, strategic tactics are well thought out plans organized and prepared in detail for accomplishing the goal, which is success; where success is when the students are aware of the importance of writing and learn to write as much as they can.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is that mode of thinking in which "the thinker improves the quality of his or her thinking by skillfully taking charge of the structures inherent in thinking and imposing intellectual standards upon them" (Paul & Elder, 2008). In other words, critical thinking is self-guided thinking which tries to give the best ideas and reasons for any problem or content. Moreover, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) compiled several definitions for

critical thinking. They stated that critical thinking involves the individual's ability to do the following: "identify central issues and assumptions in an argument, make correct inferences from data, deduce conclusions from information or data provided, interpret whether conclusions are warranted on the basis of the data given, and evaluate evidence or authority" (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991 : 118).

Similarly, many educators use the term critical thinking in the learning processes. However, it is important to know what critical thinking is by giving important theories and definitions of it. Therefore, from the 1990s, "critical thinking was viewed as problem solving, creative thinking, or what John Dewey (1933) termed 'reflective thinking' " (Harrington& Terry, 2009:212). Dewey (1933), an early advocate in the study of thinking, emphasized the necessity of education to combine the teaching of subject matter with the teaching of thinking.

Another important historical source on critical thinking is Bloom's cognitive taxonomy of educational objectives where the three categories, analysis, synthesis and evaluation, are equated with critical thinking (Idol & Jones, 1991:13-14). Moreover, Ennis (1962: 83), another educator, defined critical thinking as "the correct assessing of statements" by thinking clearly, independently, and reflectively. According to Harrington and Terry (2009), critical thinking helps to improve and strengthen the arguments.

Relating critical thinking to the classroom setting, one of the most effective learning skills, which develop critical thinking, is writing. According to the above mentioned educators and their theories, through writing, students have time to think clearly, to identify and evaluate arguments and also to think why they are thinking in that way. By writing, students are motivated to think clearly, and by thinking clearly, students improve the way in which they express their ideas in their papers. However, critical thinking should not be misunderstood by using the word critical, because critical thinking does not mean to be critical of others, but to be argumentative and give reasons of the ideas the students present. Though, through critical thinking, students are more analytic, expressing clear and accurate ideas.

In my opinion, critical thinking is a well-reasoned thinking; the ability to recognize problem or an issue and to solve it and give well thought analysis and conclusions. A good critical thinker is a person who evaluates or is critical to his own ideas and thoughts before presenting them, in this case through written words. Usually, teachers use exercises and tasks that develop critical thinking in order to develop their students thinking skills, be reflective and responsible on what they believe and write or say it. Thus, critical thinking is an ability that needs to be taught or learned. One of the best ways to be taught is through writing exercises because the purpose of writing is reacting to something or someone and expressing our ideas and feelings through words. In short, I believe that critical thinking is a mental operation where the person who uses critical thinking while writing, thinks deeply and provides reasonable ideas and comments on the issue he or she writes.

Taxonomy of writing strategies

Looking back from the history of EFL studies to the present, there are considerable studies on EFL writing strategies. Many educators like Emig (1981), Kroll (1990), Silva (1990), Wenden (1991), Victori (1995) and others, present different classifications of writing strategies with the aim of helping learners to easily acquire and develop their writing abilities.

Educators have researched exactly writing strategies, where some of them (Emig, 1980; Kroll, 1980) address their findings to course designers advising on how to structure academic writing courses; others (Silva, 1990; Wenden, 1991; Victori, 1995) present different writing strategies for teachers whose students may not have the writing skills or motivation to deal with that ability. Moreover, some educators concentrated (Bloom, 1956; Silva,

1980) especially on writing strategies, which develop critical thinking. Nevertheless, all of these educators have one goal and that is to help students to learn how to write in a proper way, which is useful and important throughout all their lives.

Conclusion

For many EFL students in university level, the process of writing in English is a very difficult issue. There are several of reasons for finding writing in English as difficult. One of the reasons is that students are not well prepared from their previous education; also, another reason is that teachers do not present and use different writing strategies to motivate students to write and involve them in their own learning. Moreover, some teachers use wrong strategies, which do not encourage students to write, instead students see writing as a complicated task; for example, teachers concentrate more on grammar errors and punctuation rather on processes of writing and essay organization. Finally, some students avoid writing in English because writing asks them to use their critical thinking, thus students need to be concentrated and do a job.

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