Improving second year preparatory school students' writing skills via the discussion method

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تحسين مهارات الكتابة لدى طلاب الصف الثاني الإعدادي باستخدام طريقة المناقشة

المستخلص:

هدفت الدراسة الحالية إلى التعرف على فاعلية استخدام أسلوب المناقشة في تحسين مهارات الكتابة لدى طلاب الصف الثانى الاعدادى بالوادى الجديد. كان المشاركون ٢٤ طالبًا من الصف الثانى الإعدادى تم اختيارهم عشوائيًا. تم تعليمهم طريقة المناقشة. استخدمت الدراسة التصميم شبه التجريبي لمجموعة واحدة والتي تم اختبارها قبل وبعد التجربة للتحقق من فعالية استخدام الطريقة. اشتملت أداة الدراسة على أداء كتابي اختبار قبلي–بعدي. أظهرت نتائج الدراسة الحالية أن أداء طلاب المجموعة التجريبية كان أفضل بكثير في الاختبار البعدي. أشارت النتائج أيضًا إلى وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين متوسطات درجات ما قبل وما بعد التجربة. أثبتت طريقة المناقشة فعاليتها في تحسين مهارات الأداء الكتابي لديهم.

الكلمات الدالة: مهارات الكتابة، طريقة المناقشة، طلاب المرحلة الإعدادية

Improving second year preparatory school students' writing skills via the discussion method

Abstract

The present study aimed at investigating the effectiveness of using the discussion method to improve second year preparatory stage students' writing skills. The participants were 24 second-year preparatory stage students who were randomly chosen**.** They were taught through using the discussion method. The study employed the quasi-experimental design of one group which was tested before and after the treatment. The instrument of the study included a writing performance pre-posttest. The results of the present study showed that the students of the treatment group performed much better on the post testing. The discussion method was proved to be effective in improving second year preparatory stage students' writing skills**.**

Key words: Writing skills, The Discussion Method, preparatory school students

Introduction

Writing is a human means of communication. The way to communicate with people is very interesting. Communication helps to spread knowledge and information among people. It helps people to develop relationships with others. People are capable of sharing ideas and feelings. Communication plays an important role in organizing people's writing. Writing enables human beings to communicate and express their feelings. Effective written communication requires several skills and competencies in language and vocabulary use. Written communication is suitable for long-distance correspondence. Thus, learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) should focus on these skills.

Students are always in need of writing performance. They need sufficient time to think, act and react through writing. Writing performance allows students to use new vocabulary and structures. The ability to write is an essential part of language development. Writing includes the ability to express students' thoughts. The students identify the importance of writing by dealing with written text. Writing skills help

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students to become independent, comprehensible, fluent and creative in their abilities to write. Writing can help learners put their ideas in a meaningful form.

Among the four language skills, writing is the most difficult one. Writing is difficult because of some problems such as organizing ideas, vocabulary, spelling, cohesion and coherence of the essay or the paragraph. Yan (2005:5) states that "writing is an essential but difficult skill for English foreign language students (EFLS) to accomplish". Richard and Renandya (2002:303) state that "writing is the most difficult skill for students to master. The students have less experience with written expression. The students try to generate ideas and construct sentences and paragraphs". They face difficulties writing in expressing ideas. Kellogg (2008) shows that students have to think about the content of their text before they could start writing. Some students face problems in deciding on the content and how to put it into correct sentences.

There are many modern methods that can solve the problems of students' written performance skills. One of these methods is the discussion. It is a method of teaching in which the students are actively in a classroom activity. The discussion involves an interchange of questions and ideas among the students through situations. It develops students ' ability to discuss. It increases the self-confidence of students. It brings out the different points of view of students to solve problems. It can lead groups to work out plans of action. The discussion method is a way to present the learning material where the teacher gives a chance to students in groups for talking in order to collect opinions, make a conclusion or arrange kinds of problem-solving alternatives. That can give students the chance to express themselves freely without being afraid of making mistakes. Wilkinson (2009) mentions that the discussion method is a variety of forums for the open-ended, collaborative exchange of ideas among a teacher and students or among students for furthering students thinking, learning, problem-solving and understanding. Rotenberg (2010) clarifies that participation in a class discussion can be voluntary to avoid the embarrassment of shy or introverted participants and will be achieved by creating a supportive climate.

Literature Review

Many students find writing to be the most complex and difficult skill, because of the complexity in syntactic, semantic, morphological and phonological aspects. Various studies find the difficulty of writing skills in English. There are several previous studies that dealt with writing skills and the discussion method such as: Nasser (2018), Anh (2019), Derakhshan and Shirejini (2020), El-Sayed (2021), Alqasham and Hassan (2021), Afifi (2023), Putri and Hamzah (2023) and Mahfoodh and Wakkai (2023)

Nasser (2018) aimed to identify the way that the students could write no spelling or punctuation mistakes, compose meaningful sentences and using suitable conjunctions. The participants were 30 female first-year students in the department of English at the University of Baghdad. The study conducted an experimental group design of pre and post-tests to assess the experiment. A written test form was selected as the instrument of the study. The researcher perceived that it was necessary to enhance students’ skills in writing. The results of that study revealed that students’ errors could be classified into grammar, punctuation, spelling, and handwriting errors.

Anh (2019) focused on examining the difficulties of the students in high-quality training class K14 in learning English writing skills at TUEBA. The data collection was carried out through questionnaires. The participants were 22 students and 3 lecturers. The analysis of students' writing mistakes and lecturers' observation were to examine student's attitudes and motivation during writing lessons. The study tried to find solutions to help quality training students overcome difficulties and improve writing skills.77% of students find it difficult to learn writing skills due to the lack of

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motivation. The results showed that the students faced many difficulties and often make mistakes in writing, especially, 55% of students said that they were influenced by the mother tongue writing styles, which made the development of English writing skills much more difficult.

Derakhshan and Shirejini (2020) investigated Iranian EFL learners' perceptions of the most common writing difficulties. The participants were 120 Iranian EFL learners from Golestan University. The instruments of the study consisted of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews for teaching grammar and punctuation. The results of the interviews revealed that grammar, spelling, punctuation, choice of words and organization of the writing tasks were difficult. Also, the results reported that spelling and punctuation were difficult for them to write sentences and specifically paragraphs.

El-Sayed (2020) a study was conducted to investigate the effectiveness of using a task-based program taught through the discussion method to improve secondary-stage students' argumentative paragraph writing skills and self-esteem. Ninety-two students were randomly selected. They divided into a control group and an experimental one. The experimental group was trained in a task-based program taught through the discussion method. The instruments included an argumentative paragraph writing skills test and a self-steam scale. The results showed that the program was effective in improving the students' argumentative paragraph writing skills and it was effective in positively improving the students' self-steam.

Alqasham and Hassan (2021) investigated the effectiveness of mind mapping in improving students ' writing attitudes and performance. The instruments of the study were a pre-posttest and a questionnaire. The study employed an experimental research design. The participants were 40 male English students at Qassim University, Saudi Arabia. The results revealed that the use of mind mapping improved the writing interest of the students. The remarkable benefits are accruing from mind mapping as a digital brainstorming technique in enhancing the attitudes of Saudi EFL learners toward writing skills.

Afifi (2023) investigated the effectiveness of design thinking in developing the secondary stage students' EFL writing performance**.** A randomly selected group of secondary-stage students (N=14) in Al Borg School in Al Khanka in Qalyubia Governorate received training throughout a proposed program based on using Design Thinking for developing writing performance. A pre-posttest was designed. The instruments of measuring the students' progress include the writing performance components list, the pre- posttest and a questionnaire. The results revealed that design thinking has an effective influence on promoting EFL writing performance.

Putri and Hamzah (2023) a study was conducted to find students' perceptions of the implementation of small group discussions in English-speaking classes. The study used a descriptive design. The data was collected by using a questionnaire, and interview. The participants of this study were the students of the second grade of SMP N 1 Palembayan. There were 95 students. The result of the study showed that students had a positive perception of the implementation of small group discussions in English-speaking classes.

Mahfoodh and Wakkai (2023) conducted a study to investigate the effectiveness of the discussion method of teaching Nigerian secondary school students' performance in English test of orals. The participants were 24 students. The study employed an experimental research design. The instrument of the study was a pre-posttest. The results revealed that the discussion method of teaching was effective in improving the students' performances in the 'Test of Orals.

ISSN 2735-5209

Context of the Study

The researcher observed that many prep-school students' writing performance skills were poor. To identifying the weak skills in writing performance for students, the researcher had informal interviews with ten teachers who teach English to preparatory stage students. The teachers mentioned that the students encounter difficulties in writing performance skills. The researcher designed a pilot study to identify second year preparatory stage students' writing performance skills. A test was administered to 24 second year preparatory stage students at Salah-Eldein preparatory school, El-Kharga city in new valley governorate. The results of the pilot study indicated that there was a weakness among second year preparatory stage students in several writing performance skills such as writing meaningful sentences, word order of sentences, use of the adjectives and cohesive ties properly.

Several authors stated that most learners of EFL encounter difficulties in writing skills. They advised teachers to use modern strategies such as Fareed, Ashraf and Bilal (2016), Ibnian (2017), Alfaqiri and Nasser (2018).

Statement of the Problem

Second year preparatory stage students had a low level of writing skills. Their writing performances seem poor. Therefore, the researcher used the discussion method to improve second-year preparatory school students' writing skills.

Significance of the Study

This study is expected to be significant in many ways for;

(A) For English as a foreign language (EFL) Students

* Second-year prep stage students are expected to improve their writing performance. Students improve their writing of logical arrangement of sentences, the use of cohesive ties and the use of adjectives

(B) For teachers

* Teachers can be trained on how to teach using the discussion method for the benefit of their students.

(C) For course-designers

* Course-designers are expected to include the relevant activities in the course book of the stage.

Aims of the Study

The study aimed mainly at investigating the effectiveness of using the discussion method in improving second year preparatory stage students' writing skills.

-There are sub-aims as follows:

a) Investigating the effectiveness of using the discussion method in improving second year preparatory stage students' meaningful sentences

b) Investigating the effectiveness of using the discussion method in improving second year preparatory stage students' logical arrangement of sentences

c) Investigating the effectiveness of using the discussion method in improving second year preparatory stage Students’ use of cohesive ties properly

d) Investigating the effectiveness of using the discussion method in improving second year preparatory stage Students’ use the adjectives properly

Questions of the Study

The present study attempts to answer the following major questions:

- What is the effectiveness of using the discussion method in improving second year preparatory school students’ writing skills?

-That can be divided into:

a) What is the effectiveness of using the discussion method in improving second year preparatory school students’ meaningful sentences?

ISSN 2735-5209

b) What is the effectiveness of using the discussion method in improving second year preparatory school students' logical arrangement of sentences?
c) What is the effectiveness of using the discussion method in improving second year preparatory school students' use of cohesive ties properly?
d) What is the effectiveness of using the discussion method in improving second year prep school students' use of adjectives properly?

Hypotheses of the study

In order to reach the purpose of the study the following hypothesis are formulated:
There is a statistically significant difference at 0.05 levels between the mean score of the treatment group on pre-post administrations of the writing test in favor of the post administration.

That divided into:

a) There is a statistically significant difference at 0.05 levels between the mean score of the treatment group in writing meaningful sentences.
b) There is a statistically significant difference at 0.05 levels between the mean score of the treatment group in arranging of sentences logically.
c) There is a statistically significant difference at 0.05 levels between the mean score of the treatment group in the use of cohesive ties properly.
d) There is a statistically significant difference at 0.05 levels between the mean score of the treatment group in using the adjectives properly.

Delimitations of the study

The present study delimited to 24 second year preparatory school students at Al-Amal prep-school in Elkharga.
The study was delimited to:

a) Students' writing of meaningful sentences
b) Students' writing of logical arrangement of sentences
c) Students' ability to use cohesive ties properly
d) Students' ability to use adjectives properly

Definitions of terms

Writing skills

Amin (2016:8) defines writing skills as "a production of EFL students' written essay with clear organization of paragraphs' ideas; adequate, sufficient, relevant development of topic and content and correct conventions (i.e. sentence structure, word usage and mechanics".
For the present study, the researcher defines writing skills as a product of writing in meaningful sentences, arrangement of ideas, using proper adjectives and using cohesive ties properly.

The discussion Method

Brookfield and Preskill (2005: 6) define the discussion as "an alternately serious and playful effort by a group of two or more to share views and engage in mutual and reciprocal critique ".
For the present study, the discussion is a procedure through which the students express their own experiences about an idea.

Instrument of the study

- A paragraph writing skills pre-posttest for second year prep stage students.

Design of the study

ISSN 2735-5209

The present study adopted the quasi-experimental design of one treatment group.

Variables of the study

The study had two variables:
The independent variable is the discussion method.

The dependent variable is writing skills that are relevant to the second year preparatory stage students, they are:

a) Students' writing of meaningful sentences
b) Students' writing of logical arrangement of sentences
c) Students' writing of use of cohesive ties
d) Students' writing of use of adjectives

Participants of the study

The participants of the study were twenty four students. They were randomly chosen from the second year at El-Amal preparatory school in El-kharga city at New Valley Governorate. Their age ranged from thirteen to fourteen years old. They were all from a public school. They lived in the same district. They came from the same linguistic background. They have been learning English as EFL. Therefore, they were homogenous.

Procedures of the Study

:The procedures were conducted

1-Reviewing literature and relevant studies related to writing skills and using the discussion method

2-Developing a pre-post writing skills test to measure the students' writing performance skills and submitting it to a jury of specialists to determine its validity and administering the writing pre-posttest to the treatment group

3-Designing the units, the lessons and the materials based on the discussion method

4-Treating data statistically

5-Discussing the results of the study

6-Drawing conclusions, providing recommendations and Suggestions for further research

Results

The participants of the study were pre-tested through the writing test. The results of pre-testing showed that the students were poor at writing skills. In light of the following table, it is showed the results indicated that there was no statistical differences significance at .05 level of the treatment group. To test the hypothesis, there is a statistically significant difference at 0.05 levels between the mean score of the treatment group on pre-post administrations of the writing test in favor of the post administration. T-test was used to calculate and compare the mean scores of the treatment group. The results are presented in the following tables. This verified the main hypothesis.

Mean scores, Standard deviations and T-value of the sub-skills of writing sentences (Pre-Posttesting)

Sub-Skills	Group	Number of students	Mean Scores	Standard Deviations	Degree of freedom	T-Value
Word order	Pre	24	2.92	0.72		35.48
	Post		5.71	0.55		
meaningful	Pre		3.00	0.72		33.09

ISSN 2735-5209

sentences	Post		5.62	0.57		
Using adjectives	Pre		1.42	1.21		28.05
	Post		5.25	1.03	23	
cohesive ties	Pre		0.17	0.56		23.89
	Post		2.67	1.13		
Total Score	Pre		7.50	2.33		39.83
	Post		19.25	2.59		

Total score (24 Marks) T. Value at (0.05) level

Based on this table, there are statistically significant differences between the means of scores of the pre and the post performances on the Writing Test. The t-values were (35.48, 33.09, 28.05, 23.89 and 39.83). Thus, the students achieved a remarkable performance compared to their performance in the pre-testing.

Discussion

The students showed better performance during post-testing. The treatment group showed a remarkable performance in these sub-skills respectively. the students showed better performance in their use of the technicalities of writing, the sub-skills of writing performance skills 1- word order, 2- meaningful sentences, 3- using adjectives and 4- using cohesive ties. It was found that most of the students used to write several sentences showing remarkable performance. Participating in the writing activities made them feel having shared responsibility. The results support the results of El-Sayed (2020), Putri and Hamzah (2023) and Mahfoodh and Wakkai (2023) who showed the effectiveness of using the discussion method in teaching writing performance skills. It is also consistent with the results of Alqasham and Hassan (2021) and Afifi (2023) who stated that students in the concept mapping group showed greater achievement in writing skills than students in the traditional method. The results indicated that the treatment group achieved progress in improving writing performance skills after administering the discussion method.

This study investigated and measured the effectiveness of using the discussion method to improve second-year prep stage students' writing skills. The students' performance improved effectively. Participating in the writing activities made them feel having shared responsibility. It was shown through the results of the test. Through answering a writing skills test for second-year prep stage students, the results indicated that the treatment group achieved progress in improving writing performance skills after administering the discussion method. Through in-depth analysis of the data, the researcher attributed the results of the treatment group to the effectiveness of using the method.

Based on the results of the study, it can be stated that the discussion method has proven its effectiveness in improving the level of written performance of the second year preparatory stage students. The discussion method was more effective in improving the skills of identifying using adjectives and cohesive ties properly, arranging sentences in sequences, writing meaningful sentences.

Conclusion

The students showed better performance as shown in the post-testing. They showed remarkable performance in the form of writing skills respectively with regard to the sub-kills of writing sentences such as Word order, writing meaningful sentences, using adjectives and cohesive ties, the students' achieved better performance. It was found that most of the students used to write several sentences showing remarkable performance.

ISSN 2735-5209

Most of their incomplete sentences decreased with time. They used to think while writing and many times ask for help to develop their writing. They cooperated to achieve the aims of the method. They used to write meaningful sentences with proper use of cohesive ties. Participating in the writing activities made them feel having shared responsibility. It was evident the discussion method was found remarkably helpful in improving the students' writing skills. That shows that the method was very effective and the administration of the method could help the students perform better on the writing test.

Recommendations

In light of the results of the study, it can be recommended that:

1. Students should study writing skills through using the discussion method.

2. Teachers should be aware of the prominence of using the discussion method in teaching writing skills to make the students active in the classrooms.
3. Teachers should use modern strategies in teaching writing skills.

4. Course designers should include effective methods in the curriculum and pay attention to the use of new methods such as the discussion method in EFL classrooms to increase the students' motivation towards learning English through developing the textbooks to satisfy their needs.

Suggestions for the further future studies

Based on the study, the following studies are suggested:

1-Investigating the effectiveness of using the discussion method to improve second-year preparatory school students' creative writing skills

2-The effectiveness of using the discussion method to improve preparatory stage students' grammar skills

3- Using another recent method to improve preparatory stage students' writing skills

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