



Developing EFL Writing Skills through a suggested program based on the Communicative Language Teaching Approach among second year Faculty of Specific Education Students

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Ahmed Abdelfatah Abdelhameed

EFL Instructor at October 6 University

Supervised by

Dr. Azza El-marsafy

Professor of Curricula and Methods
of teaching English as a foreign language,
Faculty of Education, Zagazig University

بحث مشتق من الرسالة الخاصة بالباحث

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to develop EFL writing skills among Faculty of Specific Education students through a suggested program based on the communicative language teaching approach in the light of academic standards. The quasi-experimental design was used.

The participants were 80 students who were randomly divided into two groups: experimental (40) and control (40) from the Faculty of Specific Education, Zagazig University in the first term of the academic year 2019/2020. The instruments of the study were: a) writing skills checklist, b) writing skills test, c) Rubric for grading the writing skills test and the program based on the communicative language teaching approach was taught for two months during the first semester of the academic year 2019/2020. The experimental group was taught through the program based on the communicative language teaching approach (CLT). On the other hand, the control group was taught using the regular method.

The results indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of both groups in the writing skills, in favor of the experimental group. It was concluded that the present study proved that the program based on the communicative language teaching approach had a positive effect on developing writing skills for the second year Faculty of Specific Education students.

Keywords: Writing skills – Communicative Language Teaching Approach.

Introduction

Writing is considered one of the productive skills that should be mastered in teaching and learning language .This is because writing has significance in improving a communicative competence of learning the language. Student-writers learn and acquire language through both written and spoken ways so that they can improve their communicative competence. EFL writing has become a basic requirement for participation and interaction with the global community in which English is the prevalent language. Thus, learners (student-writers) who are proficient in EFL writing will be able to express themselves efficiently, share ideas, stimulate feelings, persuade and convince other people and have more privilege when applying for future jobs compared to other people. So, writing is no longer seen as an option for EFL learners. Therefore, student-writers' ability to present information and ideas through their writing has an integral role in academic and professional success (Abdel-Rahman, 2017)

Hamadouche (2010) also asserted that EFL writing is one of the most difficult skills for many students. Developing writing skill is more complex than listening, speaking and reading .What makes writing a very difficult task for EFL student-writers is that it requires using different aspects of writing skills which include content, organization, vocabulary, language use, word spelling, punctuation and accurate capitalization.

Moreover, Abu shawish (2009) conceived that writing is a complex skill because it involves different mental activities such as thinking, composing, creating ideas, checking the relation between these ideas and the main idea of the topic, memorizing and organizing these ideas according to their importance. Writing as a skill encourages thinking and learning for communication and makes ideas available for reflection. When thoughts are written down, ideas can be checked, organized, rearranged and changed

Nunan (2003:88) states that writing is an intellectual activity of finding the ideas and thinking about the way to express and arrange them into a statement and paragraph that is clear to be understood by the people. This indicates that student-writers are demanded to show the thoughts and organize them into a good composition.

According to White and Arndt (1991) in Hammad (2013:1), writing is a thinking process which demands intellectual effort, and it involves generating ideas, planning, goal setting, monitoring, evaluating what is going to be written as well as what has been written and using language for expressing exact meanings.

For highlighting the importance of writing, Tynjala (2001) stressed that writing helps students remember new items of English language. It also allows students to see how they are progressing and to get feedback from the teacher to monitor and diagnose problems.

Despite the great importance of writing performance for the students, it is not surprising that a great number of students experience difficulties with writing. Thus, for overcoming the problems of writing performance faced by students, Lindsay (2000) emphasized that teachers need to focus on what students need to practice in order to improve these writing skills. Therefore, writing tasks should help students as follows:

- 1- Transitions: writing helps students connect the language and make transitions between words .Students learn to write smoother sentences using words like "and", "but", "although", "so", "therefore"etc.
- 2- Punctuation: To write, students must be able to use punctuation marks correctly.
- 3- Spelling: Writing is one of the routes to improve spelling (as well as punctuation .Dictation is useful for drawing attention to English spelling and punctuation .
- 4- Organization: organization is the key to develop a writing topic.
- 5- Grammatical skills: The ability to write correct sentences
- 6- Mechanical skills: The ability to use correctly those conventions peculiar to the written language.
- 7- Judgement skills: The ability to write appropriate manner for a particular purpose with a particular audience in mind .They are also the abilities to select, organize and order relevant information.
- 8- Stylistic skills: The ability to manipulate sentences and use language effectively .Thus, the previous skills are very important for overcoming the problems of writing.

Difficulties of writing

Writing is a complex activity, a social act which reflects the student writer's communicative skills which is difficult to develop and learn, especially in an EFL text.

Mason, Harris and Graham (2011) claim that teaching writing to student-writers with writing difficulties can be a challenge for teachers. They mention that student-writers with writing difficulties tend to spend little time in process writing .Those students also tend to focus on handwriting, word spelling, punctuation marks and capitalization .These factors affect their performance because they spend more time on correcting than producing.

Tessema (2005) added that student-writers lack motivation needed for language learning because of the difficulty of writing. They often lose interest and don't complete the simplest exercises in writing. Tessema attributes the difficulty of writing to the following reasons:

- 1- It requires knowledge of grammar and vocabulary.
- 2- It requires clear organized presentation of ideas

Huy (2015) identified the problems and reasons that student-writers often have in learning EFLwriting:

- 1- Student-writers lack linguistic competence, immature mastery of rhetorical structure of the English text .
- 2- Student-writers lack writing reports that result from gathering, investigating, and organizing facts and thoughts on a topic.
- 3- Lacking of vocabulary:

Many student-writers have a limitation of vocabulary because they don't know any effective ways to study vocabulary. They rarely look for dictionary, and they usually ignore new words and do not look up meaning as well as the way to use them.

- 4- The topics of writing are difficult for student-writers to do. The topics and exercises of writing are inappropriately designed to many student-writers' linguistic level.
- 5- The correction limitation of student- writers' written works:

The time for writing is too little. Therefore, a teacher can't correct all written works for students. Moreover, many teachers are busy with their teaching, so they do not have time to correct student writers' written works.

6- Student-writers lack material sources to improve their writing skill. This will influence the learning's result of students. When teachers don't have time for teaching student-writers how to write effectively, those students can consult more on advanced books or other essential materials. This leads to problem that many student-writers have difficulties in ordering ideas in writing or lack of grammar knowledge. Most of student-writers do not know much what is the material sources.

7- Student writers do not have time for learning writing .The time of learning writing is not enough for most student-writers and other subjects take a lot of student-writers' learning time. Finally, Maltin (2005) added that there are some difficulties that affect the writing learning processes as follows:

1- Psychological difficulties:

The student-writer usually works in isolation and has no immediate contact with the student-reader.

2- Linguistic difficulties:

The student-writer has to write carefully, concisely and coherently to convey the message to the student- reader.

3- Cognitive difficulties:

The writer has to carry out many cognitive processes. The students have to generate ideas, translate them into sentences, take care of the correct form, mechanics and orthography and think of the readers and social setting of writing.

To shed light on the importance of the writing skills and the problems that the students face, the researcher conducted a pilot study on a group of fifteen students selected randomly from the second year Faculty of Specific Education, English section at Zagazig University, where he designed a test related to EFL reading comprehension .The findings showed that there is alack in the following sub-skills of EFL

reading comprehension (Determining the main idea, Inferring cause and effect relationships, providing supporting details that develop the main idea, and detecting the new concepts) as shown in table (1).

Table (1) Pilot Study Results of EFL Writing Skills Test

The EFL writing Skills	The piloted students' number	Percentage of Frequency errors (%)
▪ Utilizing grammatical rules correctly	11	74%
▪ Inferring the meaning of unknown words	12	80%
▪ Apply correct sentence structures	13	87%
▪ Avoiding mistakes in mechanics of writing (spelling and punctuation marks)	12	80%

It was concluded that the EFL students lacked the sub-skills of writing performance; therefore the present study was an attempt to develop the level of these students in the writing skills through a suggested program based on the communicative language teaching approach .This approach is believed to enhance students' performance and achievement in the sub-skills of writing performance and overcoming the difficulties they face.

Communicative language teaching (CLT) is an approach to language teaching that emphasizes interaction in both the means and the ultimate goals of study .It plays an important role in our life, because it helps us know all skills of language and allows the students to apply them properly.

Richards (2006) Refers to Communicative Language Learning as a " set of principles about the goals of language teaching, how learners learn a language, the kinds of classroom activities that best facilitate learning, and the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom.

Bax & Stephen (2003) asserted that CLT also focuses on the teacher being a facilitator, rather than an instructor. Furthermore, this approach is a non-methodical system that does have oral/ verbal skills prior to reading and writing. The objectives of communicative teaching should be clear to both to the teachers and the students.

Many teachers suggested that the basic goal of CLT to be able exchange message in English without paying too much is attention to details or linguistic forms (Sakui 2002) .To achieve this objective, Liao (2000) declares the following guidelines:

- Teaching should start with listening and speaking
- Drill on language form should not be excessive
- Teachers should be aware of the individual differences among students in the learning process
- Appropriate encouragement should be given to students to reinforce their initiatives.

Thus, the purpose of Communicative Language Teaching is to help students produce authentic language and communicate with others. To produce authentic language does not mean developing speaking skills only, CLT integrates multiple skills, such as listening, reading and writing.

Statement of the problem:

The problem of the current study is that the majority of EFL students of the second year Faculty of Specific Education are inefficient in the writing skills; therefore the current study was an attempt to develop the level of these students in EFL writing skills through a suggested program based on the communicative language teaching approach.

Hence, the following questions were an attempt to tackle such a problem:

What is the effect of a suggested program based on the communicative language teaching approach for developing EFL writing skills in the light of academic standards among Faculty of Specific Education students?

The following sub-questions were derived from the above main question:

- 1- What are EFL reading comprehension skills required to the Faculty of Specific Education students?
- 2- How far do the Faculty of Specific Education students have adequate writing skills?

- 3- How could the suggested program based on the communicative language teaching approach be designed to develop EFL writing skills?

Hypotheses of the study:

The present study has the following hypotheses:

- 1- There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group participants on the pre-post administrations of the writing skills test, in favor of the post-administration.
- 2- There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control group participants in the post-administration of the writing test, in favor of the experimental group.
- 3- The suggested program based on the communicative language teaching approach has a positive effect on developing EFL writing skills of the experimental group.

Purpose of the study:

This study aimed at developing EFL writing skills through designing a suggested program based on the communicative language teaching approach in the light of academic standards among faculty of specific education students.

Delimitations of the Study:

This study was delimited to:

- 1- A sample of second year of the Faculty of Specific Education students in the English section, Zagazig University.
- 2- Ten EFL writing skills appropriate for the second year Faculty of Specific Education students, Zagazig University.
- 3- The First semester of the 2019 /2020 academic year.

Significance of the study:

This study was hopefully expected to be useful to:

1- Faculty of Specific Education students:

This study was expected to help EFL Faculty of Specific Education students use communicative language teaching approach in developing EFL writing skills.

2- EFL supervisors and teachers:

This study might provide them with a new instructional model to develop their methods in teaching writing skills.

3- Curriculum developers:

Directing the attention of curriculum developers to the importance of communicative language teaching approach to develop teaching writing skills.

Procedures:

In order to achieve the aims of the study, the following procedures were adopted:

- 1- Reviewing relevant literature and previous studies related to:
 - a) EFL Writing Skills to determine the skills needed for the second year of Faculty of Specific Education students, Zagazig University.
 - b) The program based on the communicative language teaching approach to design the experiment.
- 2- Designing the following instruments:
 - a) Writing Skills Checklist.
 - b) Writing Skills Test.
 - c) Writing Skills Scoring Rubric.
- 3- Submitting the writing skills tests to a TEFL jury of specialists to validate their content and modify them to reach their final form.
- 4- Selecting the study participants of the second year Faculty of Specific Education students and randomly dividing them into two groups: experimental group and control one.
- 5- Pre-administering the writing skills test to both groups of the second year of Faculty of Specific Education students.
- 6- Designing a program based on the communicative language teaching approach to the experimental group participants.
- 7- Administering the program based on the communicative language teaching approach only to the experimental group participants.

- 8- Post-administering the writing skills test to both groups after applying the program based on the communicative language teaching approach
- 9- Comparing the results of both administrations.
- 10- Using the appropriate statistical treatment for analyzing the results and discussing them.
- 11- Drawing conclusion, recommendations and suggestions for further research.

Definition of terms:

1- Writing Skills

Berninger et al. (2002) considered writing as an active creation of text which involves on the one hand lower – order transcription skills such as handwriting, punctuation and spelling and on the other hand, higher-order self –regulated thinking processes such as planning, sequencing and expressing the content of writing into good composition.

Writing performance were operationally defined as a process in which second year of Faculty of Specific Education students produce a good piece of writing in terms of using grammatical rules correctly, applying correct sentence structures, inferring the meaning of unknown words and avoiding mistakes in spelling and punctuation marks.

2- Communicative language teaching approach:

According to Harmer (2001:85), the communicative approach is closely associated to the notion that " language learning will take care of itself " by plentiful practice .The communicative method emphasizes the interaction in both technique and purpose of learning a language. It is more important to produce language and communicate effectively than to be correct.

Communicative language teaching approach were operationally defined as an approach which aims at developing procedures for the teaching of the four skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication. It aims to make students communicatively competent

Appendix (1)

The Writing Skills Checklist

Name

Date

Dear professor,

The researcher is conducting a research entitled " Developing EFL Writing Skills through a suggested program based on the Communicative Language Teaching Approach among second year Faculty of Specific Education Students".

The aim of the research is developing EFL students' writing skills using a suggested program based on the communicative language teaching approach. Therefore, the researcher prepared the following checklist for identifying EFL writing skills required for those students.

You are kindly requested to tick (√) in front of each writing skill in space provided to determine how far each one is important for the sample concerned. Your suggestions and comments are highly appreciated.

The researcher

Ahmed Abdelfatah Abdelhameed

Writing Performance checklist

number	Standard writing performance	Very important (3)	Important (2)	Less important (1)
1	When writing ,EFL Specific Education Students should be able to: use different tenses correctly			
2	use prepositions and articles precisely			
3	Use correct grammatical rules (e.g. subject/verb agreement.			
4	avoid mistakes in mechanics of writing (word spelling and Punctuation marks).			
5	generate a variety of vocabulary items fairly, quickly and freely			
6	apply correct sentence structures.			
7	Provide supporting details that develop the main idea.			
8	set the main idea suitable for the topic			
9	use the appropriate idioms and expressions correctly.			
10	write readable handwriting			

Appendix (2)

The EFL Writing Performance Test

Dear professor,

This test is a part of a study entitled "Developing reading comprehension and writing performance skills among faculty of specific education students through a suggested program based on communicative language teaching approach in the light of academic standards".

The study mainly aims at developing EFL reading comprehension skills for the second year Faculty of Specific Education Students through a suggested program based on the communicative language teaching approach .You are kindly requested to respond to the following:

- 1- The appropriateness of the content to the level of the sample in terms of language length and number of questions related to writing.
- 2- The suitability of the number of items to cover all the writing skills in this study.
- 3- The suitability of items to measure writing skills.
- 4- The suitability of test's time limits

If there are any items that need to be added, omitted or modified, please suggest them.

The Results of the Study

To prove the homogeneity between the experimental and control groups in the writing performance before the experimentation ,the writing performance test was pre administered to both groups in the first semester of the academic year 2019-2020.It was equivalent before carrying out the experiment. t-test for independent samples was used firstly to find out if there were statistically significant differences between both groups in the pre administration of the writing performance test, secondly to find out if there were statistically significant differences between both groups in the pre –administration of writing performance test .(See table 1).

Table (1): Comparing both groups before treatment in the writing performance pre-test.

Group	N	Mean	SD	D.F	t-value	Sig
control	40	19.4	1.33	78	1.31	0.20
experimental	40	19.7	1.22			

Table (1) indicates that there was no a statistically significant difference between both groups on the pre-administration of the reading comprehension test. t-value is (1.31) with significance (0.20).This value is not significant. Thus, both groups were homogeneous in the writing performance.

Hypotheses of the study:

Hypothesis one:

To test the first hypothesis of the study which states that "There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group in the pre - post administrations of the writing performance test, in favor of the post-administration ".The researcher analyzed statistically the results of the pre -post administrations of the writing performance skills test for the experimental group participants. He also used paired-samples t.test to identify the differences between the mean scores of the experimental group in the pre-post administrations of writing performance skills test.

Table (2): Comparing the pre to post administration results of the experimental group on the writing performance test.

Administration	N	Mean	SD	D.F	T-value	Sig
pre	40	19.7	1.22	39	43.2	0.05
post	40	43.65	2.78			

As indicated in table (19), the estimated t-value for writing performance is (43.2) .It is significant at (0.05) level in favor of the post administration of the experimental group participants. This means that the level of participants in writing performance improved. So, this hypothesis has been accepted.

Hypothesis two

"There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in the post-administration of the writing performance skills test, in favor of the experimental group"

To validate this hypothesis, the researcher analyzed statistically the results of post administration of the writing performance skills test to both groups. Moreover, he used independent samples t.test to identify the difference between the mean scores of both groups in the post administration of writing performance skills test.

Table (3): Comparing the writing performance post test results of both groups.

Group	N	Mean	S.D	D.F	t-value	Sig
EXP	40	43.65	2.78	78	51.22	0.05
Cont.	40	18.7	1.29			

***Significant at 0.05**

Results in table (3) indicate that t-value is 51.22.It is significant at 0.05 level of significance in favor of the post-administration of the experimental group participants. The fourth hypothesis has been accepted.

Recommendations:

Based on the results of the present study, the following could be recommended:

- 1- Student-writers are recommended to share responsibilities in their writing performance by asking questions about details in writing and give more ideas in writing.
- 2- Student-writers are recommended to share information in writing essays, emails and paragraphs.
- 3- EFL teachers should concentrate on the mistakes of students during writing any topic through explaining the grammatical rules and punctuation marks.
- 4- EFL teachers are recommended to conduct discussion groups with students as a way of sharing their thinking about writing in order to enhance their understanding of what they write.