A problem-Based learning" Program to Enhance EFL Creative Writing Skills of Secondary Stage Students

Prepared by

Prof.
Mohamed Hassan
Professor of TEFL
Department of Curriculum and Instruction Faculty of Education
Zagazig University

Dr.
Ahmad Abdel Slam Edris
Lecturer of (TEFL)
Department of Curriculum and Instruction Faculty of Education
Zagazig University

Athar Abdul- Hakeem Amer
A teacher of English Language
El-Hussinia Commercial School for Boys

بحث مشتق من الرسالة الخاصة بالباحثة

EFL Creative Writing Skills of Secondary Stage Students

Prepared by

Prof.
Mohamed Hassan
Professor of TEFL
Department of Curriculum and
Instruction Faculty of Education
Zagazig University

Dr.
Ahmad Abdel Slam Edris
Lecturer of (TEFL)
Department of Curriculum and
Instruction Faculty of Education
Zagazig University

Athar Abdul- Hakeem Amer
A teacher of English Language
El-Hussinia Commercial School for Boys

Abstract

The Purpose of this study was to enhance EFL second year secondary stage students' EFL creative writing skills through problem-based learning program. The participants of the study included 60 students who were randomly divided into two groups. The instruments of the study were: a) EFL creative writing skills questionnaire, b) EFL creative writing test. The research was conducted over a period of three months approximately. Data were collected and t-test was used for the statistical analysis. Results indicated that there were statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group and those of the control group in their EFL creative writing skills favoring the experimental group.

Key Words: Problem-based learning (PBL) EFL Creative Writing Skills.

1- Introduction

Writing is a way to explore thoughts and ideas to make them evident and accessible. It is a difficult skill for both native and nonnative speakers in a similar way, because any writer should make a harmony among several issues such as content, organization, purpose, audience, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling, and mechanics . When thought is written down, ideas can be scrutinized, reassessed, rearranged, and changed, hence, it is fair to say that writing encourages deep thinking (Jahin & Idrees, 2012). Creative writing may be defined as: Having the power to create an imaginative, original literary production or composition (Ramet,2007)

Creative writing is the process of inventing or rather presenting your thoughts in an appealing way. The writer thinks critically and reshapes something known into something that is different and original. Each piece of writing has a purpose and is targeted at an audience. It is organized cohesively with a clear beginning, middle and an end. Attention is paid to choice of apt vocabulary, figurative use of language and style. (Premchandran,2013)

Creative Writing in Teaching English

Maley (2012)   in his article Creative writing for students and teachers   compared the main characteristics of creative writing with characteristics of expository writing as he believed that these two modes of writing are contrasting to each other. He proposes the following chart: Table (1)

Expository writing	Creative writing

Instrumental	Aesthetic
Facts	Imagination
External control	Internal discipline
Conventions	Stretching rules
Logical	Intuitive
Analytical	Associative
Impersonal	Personal
Thinking mode	Feeling mode (plus thinking!)
Appeal to the intellect	Appeal to the senses
Avoidance of ambiguity	Creation of multiple meanings

Problem based learning (PBL) as it is generally known today evolved from innovative health sciences curricula introduced in North America over 30 years ago. PBL is an instructional methodology, and like all instructional methodologies, is not universally applicable to different learning problems. The primary goal of PBL is to enhance students' application of knowledge, problem solving, and self-directed learning skills by requiring them to actively articulate, understand, and solve problems. PBL is problem focused, where learners begin learning by addressing simulations of an authentic problem. The subject matter content and skills to be learned are organized around problems, rather than as a hierarchical list of topics, so there is a reciprocal relationship between knowledge and the problem. Learning is stimulated by the problem and applied back to the problem. PBL is also student centered, requiring learners to self-direct their learning in order to determine what they know and do not know about the problem .PBL as an approach is diametrically different from the conventional didactic and teacher-centered approach to teaching. The approach is primarily student centered and the student assumes the major responsibility for his or her learning. The following table shows the potential benefits of PBL versus the traditional classroom based educational approach: (Wee, 2004). Table (2)

	Traditionalclassroom learning	**Problem-based learning**
Focus	Curriculum coverage Learning for classroom Academic rigor	Holistic development Learning for life Lifelong learning
Curriculum	Calendar defined Content segmentation and accumulation	Outcome defined Content integration

PBL and Language Learning

Learning a language is, for apparent reasons, very different from learning anything else; normally language is a tool when learning – not the actual subject of it. This difference has several implications from the point of view of PBL. For example, it results in the need for an entirely different view on the facts vs. understanding issue. When learning a language, understanding is of course paramount – it is what languages are about. Despite this, learning raw facts (eg. in the form of vocabulary) plays a larger part than in many other subjects.

How should one, then, go about giving the students enough of these "raw facts" without violating the PBL principle of not feeding the students knowledge without context? One of the main objections to Problem-Based Learning has, after all, been that courses taught in that way cover less actual content than traditional lecture-based ones. Though it has been said that the concepts of PBL can be applied to any academic discipline, languages obviously constitute a large challenge. The advantages are nonetheless many. (Larsson,2001)

There are many researchers about creative writing and problem based learning such as :

El-Enany(2009) designed a study to upgrade the EFL students' creative writing skills by using a program based on predictive reading. The study had an experimental design. Seventy fourth year EFL students at Damietta Faculty of Education participated in the study. The researcher constructed the following tool: a creative writing test to

measure the students' creative writing skills before and after the program. The training program consisted of three units dealing with: an introductory session on creative writing skills and predictive reading activities, techniques for generating ideas, and predictive reading activities. . Findings of the study indicated that the performance of students' creative writing skills was improved; the predictive reading strategy had a significant effect on developing fourth year EFL students' creative writing skills; and the program was effective.

Lin (n.d) examined whether or not the PBL approach can improve students' knowledge of verb complements   by comparing the data collected from two types of instruction: (1) PBL instruction with 26 participants and (2) non-PBL instruction with 30 participants. All participants attended a course that used the same textbook and the same Internet resources. The grammar pre- and post-tests were administered at the beginning and end of the study. the statistical results showed that the PBL group achieved significantly higher post-test mean scores than its pre-test mean score. The study implies that PBL in university English courses has the potential to enhance acquisition of grammar knowledge. Haroon (2014) investigated the effect of using problem solving strategy on developing creative writing skills and interests of preparatory pupils towards EFL. The sample of the study consisted of 60 second year preparatory female pupils . Tools of the study included a checklist to identify creative writing skills needed for second year preparatory pupils in paragraph, composition writing and a pre-post creative writing test and its scoring scale and an interest scale .Results revealed the positive effect of Problem solving strategy on developing second year preparatory pupils' creative writing skills, but there was not enough evidence of a significant improvement of the pupils' interest towards EFL.

2- Context of the Problem

Despite the importance of creative writing skills they are not given proper attention in TEFL at the secondary stage .Teaching English is really done in schools as students do their best to get good marks. Students practice, writing individually not in groups where they can share ideas and peer correct each other. in addition , Teachers are not trained to practice, creative writing ,so they could not enhance students' skills to sum up, second year secondary stage students lack EFL creative writing skills, so the researcher proposes problem-based learning program for enhancing their creative writing skills.

3-Statement of the problem

In spite of the importance of EFL creative writing, second year secondary stage students lack these skills, thus, there is a need for an effective program for enhancing some EFL creative writing skills among second year secondary stage students. So, the flowing study aimed at enhancing some EFL creative writing skills by using a problem-based learning program.

4- Questions of the Study

To face this problem, the present study answered the following questions.:

1- What are the EFL creative writing skills required for EFL second year secondary stage students? .

2- What is the current level of EFL second year secondary stage students in EFL creative writing?

3- What are the features of a problem - based learning program?

4- To what extent is problem based learning program effective in enhancing EFL creative writing skills?

5- Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of using problem based learning program in enhancing second year secondary schools students' creative writing skills.

6- Sample of the study

A random sample of 60 female students of second year secondary stage from El-Hussinia Secondary school for Girls were chosen. The students were divided into two groups: an experimental group and a control one. The experimental group was consist of 30 students and the control one was consist of 30 students.

7-Definition of Terms

▪ Problem-based learning (PBL)

Problem-based learning (PBL) is problem focused, where learners begin learning by addressing simulations of an authentic problem. The subject matter content and skills to be learned are organized around problems, rather than as a hierarchical list of topics, so there is a reciprocal relationship between knowledge and the problem.(wee,2004

Problem-based learning can be operationally defined as" online problems from different websites. They are a melding of fantasy , educational content , learning principles, competition, motivation, rewards and feedback" .

▪ creative writing

According to Mason (2015) creative writing was defined as "an open and imaginative writing in which the authors freely express their unique thought and feelings".

Operationally creative writing in the present study can be defined as" the productive process through which the ELS second grade secondary students express their own feelings, emotions and thoughts to others in an interesting literary language characterized by original ideas and expressions that entertain the reader and achieve interaction with the writer.

8- Tools of the study
- ▪ An EFL creative writing skills checklist.
- ▪ An EFL creative writing test.

9- Hypotheses of the study

Based on the theoretical background, the review of the previous studies and the general discussion, the study hypotheses could be formulated in as following:

- There are a statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the treatment group and those of the non-treatment group in the post administration of the EFL creative writing test in favor of the treatment group.

- There are a statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the treatment group in the pre and the post administrations of the EFL creative writing test in favor of the post administration.

- Problem- based learning program is effective in enhancing the treatment group students' EFL creative writing skills.

10- Procedures of the study

To answer the questions of the study and to verify the credibility of its hypotheses, the following procedures would be attempted.

- Reviewing relevant literature and previous studies related to creative writing skills to determine the skills needed for this stage.

- Reviewing the relevant literature and previous studies related to Problem-based learning to design the experiment.

- Designing the instruments

- Analyzing the content of the EFL course of the second year at the secondary stage.

- Submitting the creative writing test to a jury of EFL specialists to verify its contents and modify it to reach its final forms.

- Selecting sample of second year secondary school EFL students and dividing them into two groups (the treatment group and non-treatment group).

- Pre administering the creative writing test to both groups.

- Teaching the experimental treatment material to the treatment group.
- Post administering the creative writing test to both groups .
- Compering the results of both
- Collecting and analyzing data .
- Providing the study conclusions, recommendations and suggestions for further research.

11- Findings of the Study

This study aimed at examining the enhancement of problem-based learning program on creative writing skills of second year secondary stage students .SPSS was used for analyzing the data of the post administration of the tool. One way ANOVA was used for comparing the means of the experimental group and the control group.

Before presenting results of the study and analyzing them according to the hypotheses of the study, a comparison between the control and experimental groups on the pre-test was conducted using t-test for independent samples to examine if there were any statically significant differences between the two group before implementing the program.

Table (3): T-test comparison of the control and the experimental group students' scores on creative writing Pre-test.

Variable	Groups	N	M	S.D	T-Value	Sig(2tailed)
Creative writing	experimental	30	11.3667	6.99622	0.063	0. 01
	control	30	11.5333	8.39739		

As shown in table (2), the T-value of creative writing skills is (0.063) which is not statistically significant at 0.01 level hence, it may be safe to say that the differences between the two groups on the pre-test were not statistically significant. Thus, it can be concluded that the two groups were almost at the same level of creative writing skills and therefore, any variance between the two groups that may occur after implementing the program will be attributed to it.

Hypothesis one:

There would be a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the treatment group and those of the non-treatment group in the post administration of the EFL creative writing test in favor of the treatment group.

In order to verify the validity of this hypothesis, a T-test was used to compare the mean scores of the two groups on the post-test. The results of the t-test proved to be statistically consistent with the hypothesis. See table (4)

Table (4)T-test comparing the mean scores of both the experimental and control groups on the EFL creative writing post- test

	Number	Mean	S.D	T-Value	Sig(2tailed)
Experminal Group	30	19.466	8.455	5.59	0.01
Control Group	29	8.724	6.052		

This table shows that there was a statistically significant difference at 0.01 Level in EFL creative writing skills between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group .The T-test value indicated that the experimental group made an enhancement, as the mean score of the experimental group was higher than that of control group. Therefore, this provided a valid evidence to support the first hypothesis.

Hypothesis two:

There would be a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the treatment group in the pre and the post administrations of the EFL creative writing test in favor of the post administration.

To determine the relative extent of change fostered by the implantation of the Problem-based learning program from the pre-test to the post-test for the experimental group, a paired samples t-test was used. This t-test aimed at comparing the mean scores of the experimental group on the pre-test and the post-test in creative writing see table (5)

	Number	Mean	S.D	T-Value	Sig(2tailed)
Experimental Group	29	14.6207	8.3341	8.560	0.01
Control Group	29	19.9655	8.14372		

Hypothesis three:

Problem- based learning program would be effective in enhancing the treatment group students' EFL creative writing skills.

To test this hypothesis "Cohen's formula was used.

$$\eta 2 \quad \frac{t}{t2+df}$$

$$\eta 2 = \frac{8.560}{73.27+2} = \frac{73.27}{101.27} = 0.723$$

$$Es=d= 2\sqrt{\frac{\eta 2}{1- \eta 2}}$$

$$Es=d= 2\sqrt{\frac{0.723}{1 - 0.723}} \quad 2\sqrt{\frac{0.723}{0.277}} = 2 \times 1.616 = 3.231$$

The referential framework for identifying the effect size of t-values is presented by (Cohen's standard) as follows : Table (6)

Effect size (d value)	Interpretation
From 0.2 till less than 0.5	Small
From 0.5 till less than 0.8	Medium
From 0.8 till less than1.10	Large
From1.10 till less than1.50	Very Large
1.50 or more	Huge

The value of the gain ratio was 3.231. According to Cohen's standard ,the problem-based learning program would be effective. This indicates that the problem-based learning program has a huge effect on

developing creative writing skills .Therefore, the third hypothesis was accepted.

12- Discussion of the results

First of all as shown previously, the pre-test statistical analyses results indicated that there were no significant differences between the experimental and control groups in EFL creative writing -skills.

More importantly, the post-test results revealed that the problem-based learning program proved to be effective in developing the experimental group students' creative writing skills. Taking into consideration that both the experimental and control group were almost at the same level in creative writing on the pre-test, therefore, any variance that occurred between the two groups after the application of the problem-based learning program was attributed to it.

The students' enhancement on the EFL creative writing post tests could be a result of the usage of the problem-based learning program as they contain cartoon graphics, interactivity, music, native speakers, stories, feedback and entertainment , goals ,   challenge , fantasy, competition , rules and regulation. The students gained confidence while learning through problem-based learning program .Their attention was not focused only on repeating or writing words and sentences many times but on how to solve online problems by acquiring and learning the intended skills.

On the other hand, the control group students' scores were low. They enhanced ,EFL creative writing in the classroom environment which made them feel anxious about their learning EFL creative writing. The students encountered some problems, i.e. hesitation in front of their classmate and the fear of writing, being shy to read what they wrote. They were not able to master creative writing skills. This may be due to the difficulty of enhancing EFL creative writing skills through the traditional teaching methods. Thus the learners' confidence had to be maintained within a non-threatening environment.

The result of the effect size which was huge provided confirmation that the problem-based learning program enhanced the creative writing skills .The students were exposed to additional activities after solving each problem .To sum up ,the present study has proved that the problem-based learning program was effective in enhancing the students' EFL creative writing skills .

13- Conclusions

Based on the results of statistical analysis of data, it could be concluded that the experimental group students' EFL creative writing skills were enhanced as a result of participating in the problem –based learning program compared with the control group students who studied through traditional methods. The experimental group students could practice the EFL creative writing g skills in a safe and enjoyable environment which gave the opportunity for the students to enhance the specified skills and This is consistent with the results of El-Enany(2009) , Lin, L. (n.d), Haroon , (2014) and Gorjian(2012)

14-Recommendations:

In the light of the present study significant results, the following recommendations are presented:

1- Training EFL teachers on the use of problem-based learning while teaching EFL to their students .

2- EFL teachers should check and monitor the level of students' creative writing individually from time to time in order to diagnose points of weakness and thus identify the methods of suitable remedy so that creative writers can make sense of what they write..

3- EFL teachers should be aware of the tools and rating scales necessary for measuring and monitoring the students' creative writing progress in all its components so as to be able to measure progress of each student in creative writing..

4- The present program can be adopted for teaching creative writing skills to pupils' at the primary stage and other stages taking into considerations students' age, needs, interests and levels.

5- Curriculum designers should make use of problem-based learning program when designing English language courses.

15- Suggestions for further researchers:

The following areas are suggested for further research:

1- Investigating the effect of problem-based learning on other language skills such as speaking and listening.

2- Studying the effect of using problem-based learning on EFL students' motivation , attitudes towards studying English and reading a wareness.

3- Examining the effectiveness of using other programs on developing creative writing skills.

4- More research is needed to propose and design more scales and rubrics for measuring the students' creative writing in a way that is more relevant to be applied in EFL .

References

El-Enany,N.(2009).The Effectiveness of A Program Based Upon Predictive Reading on Developing The Creative Writing Skills of The English Department Students at Faculties of Education. unpublished PhD dissertation. Damietta Faculty of Education . Mansoura University.

Gorjian,B.(2012) Teaching Vocabulary through Web-Based Languag Learning (WBLL) Approach, Procedia Technology ,1 ,334 – 339

Haroon ,S(2014) The effect of using the problem solving strategy on developing the creative writing skills and interests of preparatory pupils towards EFL,unpuplished MA thesis, cairo university.

Jahin ,H. & Idrees,W. (2012) EFL Major Student Teachers' WritingProficiency and Attitudes Towards Learning English, Journal of Taibah University, KSA, 9-72.
 Larsson,j.(2001) Problem-Based Learning: A possible approach to language education?

Lin, L.F(n.d) The Application of the Problem-Based Learning Approach to Teaching English Grammar through the Internet

Maley, A. (2012). Creative Writing for Students and Teachers Humanising Language Teaching, 14(3). Retrieved from http://www.hltmag.co.uk/jun12/mart01.htm

Mason, J. (2015). Creative Writing. Queensland: ACS Distance Education

Premchandran,(2013) General Principles of Creative Writing Vardhaman Mahaveer Open University, Kota

Ramet,A(2007)Creative Writing :How to unlock your imagination,develop your writing skills and get published ,7th edition,Oxford: How to books

Wee, K. N. (2004). Jump start authentic Problem-Based Learning. Singapore: Pearson Prentice Hall

Prof. Mohamed Hassan, Dr. Ahmad Abdel, Athar Abdul- Hakeem

A problem-Based learning'' Program to Enhance

ملخـــــــص البحـــــــث

يهدف هذا البحث الى تنمية مهارات الكتابة الابداعيه لطلاب الصف الثانى الثانوى بواسطة برنامج قائم على التعلم المتمركز حول المشكلات .تكونت عينه الدراسة من 60 طالب تم تقسيمهم بشكل عشوائى الى مجموعة تجريبية (30 طالبة) ومجموعة ضابطة (30 طالبة) تكونت أدوات الدراسة من أ) استبيان لمهارات الكتابة الابداعية ب) اختبار لقياس مهارات الكتابة الابداعية واستغرقت الدراسة ثلاثة أشهر ثم تم تجميع البيانات وتم أستخدام أختبار ت فى التحليل الاحصائى. أشارت النتائج الى وجود فرق دال إحصائياً بين متوسطي درجات طلاب المجموعة التجريبية وطلاب المجموعة الضابطة في التطبيق البعدي لاختبار الكتابة الابداعية لصالح المجموعة التجريبية .