

Attitudes Towards The Importance of Teaching Writing among Teachers and Students

الآراء حول أهمية تدريس مهارة الكتابة بين المعلمين والطلبة

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الملخص: إن هذه الدراسة ما هي إلا عبارة عن محاولة لتسليط الضوء نحو الآراء حول أهمية تدريس مهارات الكتابة للطلبة الجامعيين الدارسين باللغة الانجليزية من قبل المعلمين و الطلبة على حد سواء . و حيث انه تم سابقا تقديم دراسة من قبل الباحث حول مشاكل الكتابة لدي طلبة الطب الدارسين باللغة الانجليزية في مايو 2008 م و التي من خلالها تم تحليل تلك المشاكل و الصعوبات التي كانت تواجه الطلبة أثناء محاولتهم تقديم نص كتابي صحيح .

و استنادا إلي تجربة الباحث في تدريس مادة الكتابة و صعوباتها لدى الطلبة بقسم اللغة الانجليزية و التي بدورها قد تكون عائقا في سبيل تحسن مستوياتهم في دراسة اللغة أو حتى عرقلتهم عند وصولهم لمرحلة كتابة مشاريع التخرج , لذا كانت هناك حاجة لإعطاء نظرة حول أهمية تدريس مهارة الكتابة و محاولة إيجاد طرق مناسبة للحل .

تأتي هذه الدراسة لتتضمن مقدمة عن المشكلة موضوع البحث متبوعة ببعض الكتابات السابقة ذات العلاقة مع تعريف لمهارة الكتابة . و من تم استبيان لمعلمي مادة الكتابة , بالإضافة إلي استبيان للطلبة الدارسين للمادة للوقوف على آرائهم حول الموضوع. و أخيرا تحليل لنتائج الاستبيان و خلاصة الدراسة مرورا ببعض التوصيات التي خلص إليها الباحث.

الكلمات الدالة: الآراء، أهمية التدريس، مهارة الكتابة

Abstract

This study is an attempt to shed lights on the attitudes towards the importance of teaching academic writing among teachers and students. Since it was investigated before that there was problematic writing encountered by Libyan Medical students who are studying through the medium of English presented in my study conducted in May/ 2008 , problems that hinder students producing a good piece of writing.

According to the researcher's experience of the students writing problems of English department students, and the difficulties in carrying out different writing duties. This may be considered as an obstacle hindering them to get advance in English and even in conducting their research projects at the end of study.

Therefore, it is a need now to give an overview to some attitudes towards the importance of teaching writing in an appropriate way in order to solve those problems in writing. So, this study consists of an introduction followed by a literature review about the problems and needs of teaching writing starting with the question what is writing? To give a definition to the reason of the study. Later there is a questionnaire distributed to the writing teachers, with another students' questionnaire as a sub component to the study. Finally, there is an analysis of the two questionnaires and it ends with a conclusion and some of the teacher's recommendations.

Keywords: opinions, importance of teaching, writing skill

1- Introduction

For a long time, managing academic writing skills has been an important issue which has engaged the attention of many writers for a long time, may be because academic students are not only required to communicate,

understand and memorize their knowledge , but they are also required to master a set of skills : listening, speaking, reading, and writing . Thus , the mastery of written academic English is a basic goal of students of English because English is the language of instruction in some scientific departments in Arab universities such as (Basic sciences, Medicine, Engineering.etc) In addition to(English language department) Here students need to use English for different written purposes like: taking notes ,writing reports , answering examination papers and also for writing their thesis (Doushaq, 1986:27).

(Byrn,1988:151) Writing is one of the skills which is most overlooked in different ESP lessons. It is one of the skills that students are scared of , and the skill that everyone finds difficult for a variety of reasons. Many see it as a huge problem because when they start to write or get their ideas together, students face problems with; organization, style, register, coherence, cohesion and are an able to put the text together.

Therefore; a lot of research has been conducted regarding this subject and that was the reason the researcher has conducted a research study about writing problems facing 5th year medical students studying through the medium of English / Arab medical university in may 2008 as a sample .The results confirm that for most students writing is the global issue and problem, and most research should focus attention on it, and teachers must also not to be inattentive of local language problems in the writing of our under graduate students which they suffer from while charring out different skills prescribed by their teachers.

From here, it became an importance to focus more attention on writing teaching methodology and the suitable way to teach academic students how to write and to give them the best writing strategies and techniques, which is the subject of this study that deals with teachers and students as two components of the writing teaching process.

2- Literature Review

2.1. Definition of writing

Writing is an important productive skill as well as speaking, but writing a text has a number of conventions which distinguish it from speaking. One of these conventions is grammar and vocabulary .There are issues of letters, words, and also text formation, manifested by hand writing, spelling and punctuation(Harmer,2001:255). Writing is a complex skill ; it is more than writing words. It includes comprehension of meaning bearing words, phrases, clauses, sentences, unity and coherence. Writing is a process of communication which uses a conventional graphic system to convey a message to a reader.(Lindeman, 1982:11).

Therefore; Writing is clearly more than the punctuation of graphic symbols , but these symbols should be arranged according to certain conventions to form words, and these words should be arranged to form sentences.

2.2 The Importance of Academic Writing

The first use of the term " English for Academic Purposes" started in 1974 (John,T.F 1981). Then it has became more used in 1975 at Birmingham University in a seminar on' the English language of overseas students problems in Higher Education in UK'.It then changed to " English for Academic purposes " , which was mainly used by the British Council(ETIC 1975) as a title for collected papers, mostly in English for science and technology. One of these papers was " Developing Study Skills in English" (Jordan, 1997:1).

Quality witting skills are essentional for dissemination of ideas, procedures and results in different academic studies and should be taken very seriously in order to get a good achievement in many academic tasks.

Academic writing is a very important skill that require through their academic study, and there are a lot of approaches and studies which have been conducted about it. Showing that writing skill can be that ticket to better grades and greater academic achievements and so many different results have of previous studies enhanced the need

of even the professional writing skills for scientific and technical fields such as Engineering , Chemistry, Pharmacy and others.

In the past decade or so, a number of surveys have addressed the question of what kind of writing NS (native speakers) and NNS (no native speakers) colleges

students are required to do. What writing skills do students actually need in college.

Brasewell (1981:412) points out that writing is often not as important to many students as speaking and it tend to get rather neglected in our schools. This seems to affect students' writing process which is available for observation, in the hope that it will illuminate some of the complexities involved in creating writing texts- the task which for many is the surprisingly difficult one of putting together content of language to achieve extended sequences of coherent text.

Therefore; the importance of writing can be conveyed to other purposes in which writing skills for academic studies will be the standard for their success in the future.

2.3- The Importance of Teaching Writing

Cited in (Whiteman,1981:15) In a study was conducted at the university of London, Institute of Education in 1966-1971 by Britton asking and his colleagues a basic question and they commented in the following:

How important is writing , anyway? It is often claimed that in this telecommunication age , the importance of writing is declining rapidly; indeed, that may be young people leaving school today with seldom need to use it , and then only in its simplest form... The rest , it is said, will be said , will be done by word of mouth , even if this prophecy proved largely true, we should still want to claim that a development role for writing in school- that the talk by which children will govern their lives will require mental abilities that will best be developed by the practice of writing .(Ibib,2001).

Because writing is a form of problem- solving which involves such processes as generating ideas , discovering 'voice' and what to write , planning, goal setting, monitoring and evaluating what is going to be written and searching for language with which to express exact meaning (Whiteman and Arnd,1991:2). In their model, process writing is an interrelated set of recursive stages which include :

- Drafting.
- Structuring(ordering information, experimenting with arrangements, etc.)
- Reviewing (checking context, connections, assessing impact, editing).
- Focusing (that is making sure you are getting the message across you want to get across).
- Generating ideas and evaluation(assessing the draft and/or subsequent drafts).

For the above reasons and many others , teaching writing skills is very important and essential to academic students , not just as classes, but practicing writing in particular has to be intensive and concentrated.

Through analyzing the data collected in my study conducted in' 2008' about writing problems , there were different conclusions to be mentioned here and there must be results to be based on for some recommendations ; starting with the low level of the students in the English language. This low level includes the four skills of the language, specially the two productive skills speaking and writing , furthermore ; the language courses in Medicine finish in the first year and there are no writing classes taught through the following years. Despite of that Medicine is a domain where where a huge number of written texts play a significant role , and one of the first things that a

medical student will discover is that academic writing is different from writing learnt in high school which sooner or later be useful for her/him in some way.

In different universities around the world ; within teaching English for academic purposes , teachers maybe native speakers (NS)or non-native speakers(NNS). The course might be preessional , taken before starting a special academic courses , these courses are usually of 4-8 or 12 weeks length and full- time in the summer, focusing on mostly all aspects of (EAP) or they can be in-sessional i.e. taken during term time for students who are registered for their subject- specialist course, that focusing on more specialized skills such as: essay writing , taking notes while listening to subject- specific lectures ,etc. There are also courses including formal teaching programmers ,self-access situations, distance-learning materials or CALL (computer assisted language learning) . (Jordan, 1997:2)

2.3.1- Process of Teaching Writing in the English Department

Whereas within Benghazi university (Faculty of Languages) in which writing classes lasts for 12 weeks during the semester , and where teaching writing skills go through three different stages (courses). During the first semester students take over (writing A) ; a course which includes focusing on the basic elements of writing such as : capitalization, punctuation, conjunctions and some grammatical rules needed while writing to relate sentences together within a paragraph and this is a review to what has been taken during high school' English -Specialized' .

In the second semester students go through (Writing B) course , that there will be more practicing from sentence to paragraph structure, parts of paragraph and also different kinds of paragraph .In addition to practicing writing paragraphs during class time . When students move the 4th semester , they take (Essay writing) course from paragraph to essay level. This presented in the moving from the paragraph writing ability to the essay writing , with more and more written assignments. Sarah, 21 years old, a student in the 3rd semester , studying essay writing course says that: "studying different writing skills through English specialized high school, and then taking more writing practice in the department of English gives weak students more strength and makes writing easier and easier for them" . When students finish this course they will be able to answer essay questions in the other different courses take notes during lectures , or even writing Research Project in the final semester in the department.

For what written above , using the right way in teaching writing skills for academic students intensively with practice is an important issue to be concentrated upon.

3- Methodology

As the researcher has mentioned before, writing was a neglected skill though out all the previous years of the study (High school)since there was no focus on the way students should write and explain different topics or even express their answers in exams and suddenly writing becomes an important skill to students in the English department after being neglected , in which students need to write notes during lectures, answer their exams or write related summaries. Therefore; the way we use to teach writing can affect students writing abilities.

In this sense, the researcher has adopted a structured interview which was distributed to the writing teachers , and some other teachers whose students need writing to answer essay questions. in addition to students structured interview as a subcomponent of the teachers one.

The main aim of the interview was to reveal the following points:

1- How teaching writing is important to students

2- If teachers need more training in writing

3-Do the writing courses used are enough, and is the way we use in teaching writing can affect the students' writing abilities .

4- whether the students level determines the type of writing syllabuses should be used and others

3.2 - Administration of the Interview

3.2.1- Teachers structured interview

The first structured interview comprises of 9 questions was distributed to the course teachers , with no names or ages were mentioned, but there were two squares on the top of the paper to determine the sample gender .

In the 9 questions teachers have to choose one answer, either(strongly agree, agree or don't agree). The first question asks about the importance of teaching writing to academic students , the answer to this question may be the basis of the whole writing teaching problems. The rest of the questions provide information about finding the reasons of the right way to teach writing.

Q1: Teaching writing is a base of many other of the teaching skills.

This question basically questions how writing is related to other skills ,therefore ; 90% of the teachers agreed that writing is strongly a crucial skill for other language skills like Reading or Grammar clarifying that , if students can use grammatical rules perfectly ,so he/she can write sentences which are grammatically correct and consequently can develop these sentences into a paragraph . And if he/she can write a paragraph they can read it and so on. Whereas 10% said that write is a separate skill depends only on the writing techniques.

Q2: Students face different kinds of problems while fulfilling a piece of writing:

This question states that some SL students find difficulties when writing such as : punctuation, grammar, spelling, word order and others ... that hinder them of fulfilling good piece of writing . The results of this question comes like that 100% of writing teachers confirm that their students have a lot of individual writing problems which emphasis the importance of teaching writing .

Q3: Writing courses used in the department are not enough :

Since there a number of writing courses have been taught in the department of English , there was a need to know whether these courses are enough to develop undergraduate student's writing , or they still need more . But the results show that 100% of the teachers agree that the 3 courses taught in the department are enough for students to be good writers .

Q4: Students levels determines the type of syllabus chosen to teach writing :

80% of the teachers agree that weak students need to be involved in separate levels or sessions in order to improve their writing . whereas only 20% of them said that students should use the determined syllabuses taught in the department, since the syllabuses graduating from the bases of writing (from sentences up to essay writing)

Q5:teachers need more training workshops in strategies of teaching writing :

The question here takes into consideration levels of teachers themselves , since they are the mean to convey the idea to students and the way to developing students writing abilities . But the result came as 50% said (don't agree) and 50% said (agree) that teachers need constant training.

Q6: Some students are more active with some writing practices and inactive in others :

It is noticed that some students can excellently respond to some kinds of exercises and on the other hand, they don't respond to others. This question seeks to find out whether this is common among all students or it is individual differences .60% responded that some students are active in some exercises and inactive in others because of their

writing abilities which differs from one student to another. Therefore , for any writing practicing should contain a Variety of writing duties.

Q7: Different kinds of writing should be worked on during class :

As mentioned above types of writing exercise can affect the student's writing ability , that is choosing the right kind of written duties enables students of developing their writings and therefore to put them on the right bath. Hence 100% of respondents strongly agree that.

Q8: Strategies of teaching writing should be updated:

It Is known that any syllable should be updated since knowledge always needs a sustainable development, in order to develop the students' mentality and to deal with the individual differences in the student's levels . Here the result was 100% of the teachers strongly agree that any kind of syllabuses should always be renewed.

Q9: Do you enjoy teaching writing:

The last question comes to emphasis that the desire of doing anything, is the base of any successful or failure result. Thus the damaging result here is that 905 of the candidates don't enjoy writing ,whereas 10% they do .This reflects the negative results of most of the previous questions; which explains that if the teacher enjoys teaching writing it means he/she will be able to enable students to write a good piece of writing, but if he doesn't students absolutely will not.

3.2.2- Students' Structured Interview

As for the students' structured interview , it comprises of 8 questions was distributed to 50 of the 4th semester students whom were studying" Essay Writing". they were randomly chosen , no names or ages were mentioned ,but only the sample's gender was mentioned here to them more freedom to in answering the questions .

The first question was the same to the one given to the teachers which asking about the importance of teaching writing , and the others investigating the students needs in teaching writing, and the reasons of their writing problems from the student point of view which can help in finding the right teaching methodology.

Q1: If students agree that writing is an important skill :

This question questions if students recognize the importance of writing ,because if students know how writing is curial ,they will probably do better .Therefore; 50% replied that writing is not important, while 30% agreed writing is important and 20% strongly agreed that writing skills are very necessary .

Q2: Because SL learners face different writing problems such as: punctuation , spelling, grammar,...etc so 95% of candidates response that they strongly agree that they have a lot of problems when producing any piece of writing.

Q3: According to the results of the previous question that students face a number of problems , so they need more practicing in writing in order to overcome these problems; 80% strongly agree that they need more and more practicing during class time.

Q4: 60% of the candidates see that their teachers need more training workshops in writing in which can be reflected on the way they can help students writing abilities . Whereas 40% replied that they are satisfied about the teachers level.

Q5:Thought writing skills are the base of many other skills , it is highly ignored skill during studying high school ,which is reflected on undergraduate students and their weakness .Therefore; 100% of the students strongly agree this fact that they haven't received any writing improvement in high school stages , and this emphasizes that again on the need to shed light on the importance of writing .

Q6: The last question might give an overview of weather writing is taught to students in an appropriate way .since when students enjoy writing they can produce good writing , but 75% of the selected students responded that they do not enjoy writing at all (which is a damaging result) needs to be recovered.

4-1- Conclusion:

Through analyzing the data collected in my study conducted in May 2008 , and this study with other research in relation to essay writing problems , we have found that student have got no idea about the parts and structure of essay . Students did not practice writing reports in Medical high school , and there were no courses related to their specialization or to the general writing skills during their academic study ; which was the reason behind their low writing level

Therefore; there was a need to shed light on the right way to teach writing at the under graduation level , especially in the department of English to avoid the weak points prevent students to write , and to give an idea about the need to more different writing courses to teach in writing; Courses that take students from a level to another and from a stage to the other in order to enable them produce good writing in some recommendations at the end of this study .

4-2- Recommendations :

There was a need to focus more attention on writing skill of our students and try to add different courses specialized in teaching writing (focusing on grammar in the first position)with suitable materials concentrating specially on writing techniques.

Therefore, students need to write summaries and assignments as much in English as they can and there teaching staff should have a role in helping students by the following:

- 1- Students need courses concentrating only on the skills and mechanics of writing.
- 2- Students need more writing assignments and a lot Essay and report projects duties.
- 3- The use of team teaching in the class room that is a student can enjoy the work and classmates can help each other.
- 4- There might be good if there are pressitional intensive writing courses before starting the first semester with easy writing assignments preparing them to more difficult ones later.
- 5- Finally, we should prevent students from making mistakes in writing , by being given a great deal of guidance in the early stages , and not being asked to do exercises they have not been sufficiently prepared for.

Student Structured Interview

Gender: Male Female

Q1-Do you agree that writing is an important skill

strongly agree agree don't agree

Q2- Students face a lot of problems when working on any piece of writing

strongly agree agree don't agree

Q3- Students specialized in English need more writing practicing during their study

strongly agree agree don't agree

Q4-Teachers need more training in teaching writing

strongly agree	agree	don't agree
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Q5- Writing was ignored during high school stages ,and this a reason of students' weaknesses :

strongly agree	agree	don't agree
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Q6- you enjoy writing

strongly agree	agree	don't agree
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Thanks for cooperation

Abstract

An Overview about the importance of teaching writing

This study is an attempt to shed light on the importance of teaching academic writing . Since it was investigated that there was problematic writing encountered by Libyan Medical students who are studying through the medium of English presented in my study conducted in May/ 2008, problems that hinder student producing a good piece of writing .

According to the researcher's experience of the students writing problems of English department students, and the difficulties in carrying out different writing duties. This may be considered as an obstacle hindering them to get advance in English and even in conducting their research projects at the end of study.

Therefore; it is a need now to give an overview to the importance of teaching writing in an appropriate way in order to solve those problems in writing. so, this study consists of an introduction followed by a literature review about the problems and needs of teaching writing starting with defining writing ? to give a definition to the reason of the study . Later there is a structured interview distributed to the writing teachers in addition to some other teachers whom use essay writing questions through their courses in English ,with another students structured interview as a sub component to the study . Finally, there is an analyses of the two structured interviews and it ends with a conclusion assures the importance of teaching academic writing.

Teachers Structured Interview

Male	Female
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Q1- Teaching writing is a base of many other teaching skills

strongly agree	agree	don't agree
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Q2- Students face different kind of problems while fulfilling a piece of writing

strongly agree	agree	don't agree
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Q3- Writing courses used in the department are not enough

strongly agree	agree	don't agree
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Q4- Students level determines the type of syllabus chosen to teach writing

strongly agree	agree	don't agree
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Q5- Teachers need more training workshops in writing

strongly agree	agree	don't agree
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Q6- Some students are more active with some about how to teach writing practices and inactive in others

strongly agree

agree

don't agree

Q7- During each class different kinds of writing should be done

strongly agree

agree

don't agree

Q8- Writing teaching strategies should be updated

strongly agree

agree

don't agree

Q9- You enjoy teaching writing

strongly agree

agree

don't agree

Thanks for Cooperation

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