

Bridging the Gap between Theory and Practice

Enhancing the Students' Writing Performances through a Four-Phase Process

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Abstract: Throughout the course of time, the realm of teaching and learning has long been undergoing in the traditional fashion, wherein the teachers are monopolizing the lectures; while the students are bench-bound listeners. So, since we are living in a world that requires changes in all domains, especially in education, new ways of teaching and learning are then highly recommended. In writing classes, for instance, teachers are most often focusing on the final product rather than the different stages that the students should go through during the realization of their written assignments. Correspondingly, teachers are supposed to help their students to recognize that a well-crafted piece of writing is never complete. The present study, therefore, aimed to help the students to reflect, discuss their writing, and to write successive drafts until they reached the required written output. The paper aimed as well to measure the effect of these phases on developing the students' writing abilities. To this end, a pre-experimental design was seen appropriate to reach that end, wherein a group of 32 students enrolled in the English section at Cheikh Larbi University (Tebessa/Algeria) were exposed to a treatment for nearly two months after being trained on how to work within the tenets of the four-phase process (drafting, reviewing, editing, and writing the final copy). For a more in-depth study, a focus group interview was conducted right after the intervention to serve the purpose of validating the quantitative data. Results revealed two major findings; (a) a noticeable improvement in the students' writing abilities, and (b) the students' eagerness toward the use of the four-phase process in writing classes.

Keywords: Drafting, Editing, Four-phase, Reviewing, Writing

Introduction

Trying to keep up with today's rapid changing world, different domains (politics, economic, education, etc.) witnessed some changes in their different orientations. Education as a good case in point has recently put much emphasis on the concept of students' competency; where the implementation of new curricula and new approaches based on competencies seems to be of a paramount importance to reach such an end (students' competency). So, in an attempt to modernize and develop the educational system, different approaches have been put into practice to help the students to be able to solve the different educational situations by their own. In writing classes, for example, we can see that the writing skill is a very important tool of communication as the students tend to accomplish the different scholastic activities through such a skill. However, it seems that the teaching of that skill is not fully covered as it entails more practice, which itself requires both time and feedback to be done well. Owing to many constraints in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching context, teachers are most often focusing on the final product rather than the different drafts that precede its realization. Teachers are, therefore, required to help their students to discuss their writing and to write successive drafts until they reach the final product. Within the process approach tenets, the researcher aimed to measure the effect of the four-phase process (drafting, revising, editing, and writing the final

version) on developing the students' writing abilities in terms of coherence, content, grammar, and mechanical skills¹. From a practical standpoint, the following questions have been addressed;

- How does the four-phase process influence EFL students' writing abilities?
- What the students liked best about the four-phase process in writing classes?

On the basis of the addressed questions, two hypotheses have been formulated;

- H1: There might be a statistically significant difference in the students writing scores with regard to coherence, content, grammar, and mechanics after the exposure to the intervention.
- H0: There might be no significant difference in the students writing scores with regard to coherence, content, grammar, and mechanics after the exposure to the intervention.

I. Literature Review

Theoretically speaking, writing is among the most important skills in learning any language. It has a communicative nature (Hayes & Flower, 1986) which helps the students to share and communicate their thoughts to their readers (teachers, peers, or others). From a cognitive standpoint, writing is a complex activity in which the writer tries to control different variables simultaneously (Nunan, 1989). These variables include control of content, vocabulary, organization, sentence structure, mechanical skills, and other writing aspects. In fact, the control of those variables cannot be achieved consecutively; it rather requires a careful revision which can be planned through different steps. These steps falls within the principles of the process approach. This approach helps language learners to focus on "the process by which they produce their written products rather than on the products themselves" (Onozawa, 2010, p. 154). From this definition, it can be seen that this process denotes that writing can be only achieved by respecting a particular sequence of stages (drafting, revising, editing, and publishing) in order to produce a well-thought-out piece of writing.

II. Methodology

As the researcher's aim was to investigate the effect of the different stages of the process approach on developing the students' writing performances. The present endeavour, therefore, followed the pre-experimental design (the pre-test-post-test research method) which adheres to the principles of the quasi-experimental nature. In response to that nature, 32 second-year students enrolled at the department of Letters and English language in Cheikh Larbi University (Tebessa, Algeria) were involved in the intervention for two months. Before and after the intervention, the researcher measured the students' writing abilities (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018) by the use of a pre and a post-test. Afterwards, a focus group interview was conducted with 10 of them.

A. Procedures

¹ The aforementioned writing aspects were considered to be the most difficult writing areas as the students have verbally declared them by themselves prior to the intervention.

Prior to the application of the suggested intervention, the students were trained for two weeks (intensive courses/ 08 hours) on how to respond to their teacher's feedback respecting the given sequence (drafting, revising, editing, and publishing). During the realization of this small-scale study, the researcher followed the four major steps of the process approach. First, she gave the students the paragraph topic and gave them time to make individual reflection (writing their first drafts) at the classroom on the basis of their knowledge (content) and the nature of the question (paragraph type). Second, she gave them some feedback concerning their writing performances. At this stage, she asked them to fix their paragraphs according to her feedback with due regard to coherence and content². The third is the editing step. During this step, the students were concerned with correcting both grammar and mechanics as a final step toward the refinement process. Forth and finally, the students were required to write the final copy of their papers.

III. Results and Discussion

Before displaying the obtained results, it should be noted that the interpretation of the quantitative data was achieved by the help of the Statistical Package of the Social Sciences (SPSS Version 23.). Whereas, the students' answers were coded and summed up into two major headings.

A. Quantitative Data

In statistical terms, the following table (Table 01) shows the difference between the two mean scores (the one of the pre-test and that of the post-test). It can be seen that there is a difference between both of them which is estimated approximately 3.7187 which is in fact considered to be a significant difference. Initially, this result reflects the success of the suggested intervention on developing the students' writing abilities.

Table 01

Paired sample statistics

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre-test	9.0313	32	1.59605	.28214
Post-test	12.7500	32	2.00000	.35355

To prove what has been found in the above table, a detailed evaluation has been made for every single writing aspect before and after the intervention. Figure 1 below demonstrates that the students' performances in every single aspect have been improved after the intervention. Hence, the researcher can safely confirm the alternative hypothesis and reject the null hypothesis. To this end, she has been also able to answer the first stated question *"how does the four-phase process influence EFL students' writing abilities?"* Based on the numerical data, it can be said that writing within the principles of the process approach can help the students to improve their writing abilities if they carefully follow all the received instructions.

² Coherence stands for the logical development of ideas, while content refers to the knowledge of the subject

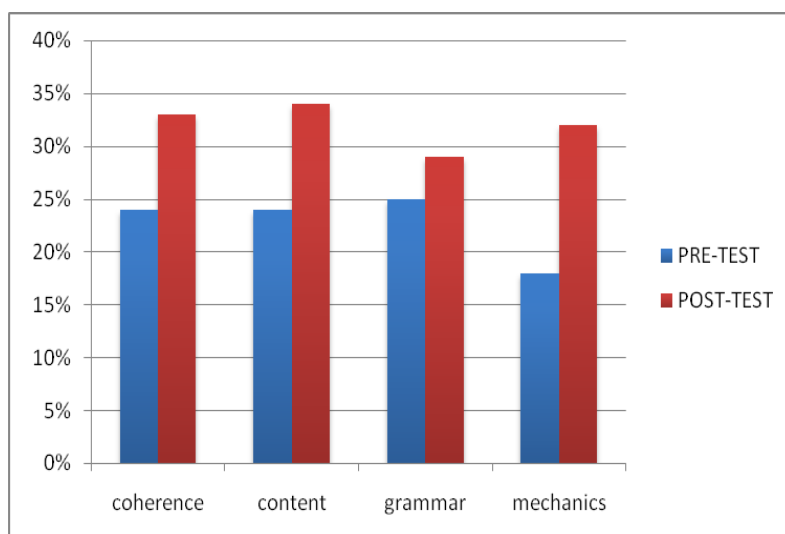


Figure 01 : Detailed evaluation of the different writing aspects

B. Qualitative Data

The students' responses have been gathered and summarized in the following points. Reaching this step in the present small-scale study enabled the researcher to answer the second question which was *“what the students liked best about the four-phase process in writing classes?”* The following points and excerpts summarize the answer of this question.

1. A rich learning atmosphere

The interviewees reported that writing within the four-phase process provided them with a rich opportunity to practice their writing as often as they can. They recognized that writing is not only a symbolic system, but also a whole process that holds many aspects which need a careful planning. The following excerpt better exemplifies;

Excerpt [Student 1]:

“... during each step in the four-phase process.... I was able to learn many things many things concerning how to write a coherent, well punctuated, and a well planned paragraph, before.... I mean before writing in that way, I was writing only once without thinking about these aspects.... I was just putting words next to each other.....but now.... I become aware that writing is not the act of putting words next to each other..... but it is more than that..... it is governed by a set of aspects that should be carefully taken into consideration...”

2. The critical thinking skills

The majority of the students reported that the quality of their thinking has been improved after being exposed to the suggested intervention. The process approach has noticeably fostered their critical thinking skills. In fact, they become more reflective than ever before. The following excerpt better explains.

Excerpt [Student 10]:

“....moving from one step to another helped me a lot in thinking in a critical way toward my paragraphs... the fact of ... trying to fix my writing according to my teacher’s suggestions makes me able to look at my papers within a critical eye.... I started recently to think in a way that helped me to improve both the quality of my thinking and the quality of writing as well.... ”

Conclusion

To sum up, the obtained results revealed that both quantitative and qualitative data are compatible in the sense that both of them showed positive results concerning the use of the four-phase process. This proves the students’ readiness to discover a much engaging way of learning through which they become more motivated and independent. In essence, since writing is a skill which is social in nature, teachers, therefore, have to adopt a teaching approach that is compatible with that nature. They have to adjust to the new circumstances and make their students feel challenged and not bored in order to develop their knowledge and other skills such as the critical thinking skills, and to enable them to survive in a globalized world.

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