The Effect of Mind Maps Strategy on Developing the Writing Skills among the Secondary Stage Students

أثر إستراتيجية الخرائط الذهنية في تنمية مهارات الكتابة لدى طلاب المرحلة الثانوية

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ABSTRACT

The present research aimed at finding a feasible solution for one of the sophisticated problems faces EFL learners in the secondary stage, namely writing. The problem summarized in that the written products of the EFL learners demonstrate a low writing proficiency. The problem is due to the traditional methods of teaching utilized; consequently, the present research made use of mind maps as a visual strategy for helping the EFL learners enhance their writing skills. The research utilized the analytical method for investigating the literature available about the two research variables, namely writing skills and mind maps. The results attained revealed that the mind maps strategy is an effective strategy due to its many merits for developing the EFL learners' writing skills. The research recommended making use of the mind maps strategy for developing the EFL learners writing skills.

Keywords: *Mind Maps, Strategy, Writing Skills, Secondary Stage.*

الملخص

يستهدف البحث الحالي تناول احدى المشكلات المعقدة التي يواجهها متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في المرحلة الثانوية وهي الكتابة، وتتمثل مشكلة البحث بصورة دقيقة في أن المنتج الكتابي لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية يظهر ضعف في الكفاءة، وتعود المشكلة بصورة رئيسة إلى أساليب التدريس التقليدية التي يستخدمها المعلمون في تدريس الكتابة؛ ومن ثم، استخدم البحث الحالي الخرائط الذهنية كاستراتيجية بصرية لمساعدة متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية على تحسين مهاراتهم الكتابية، ولقد استخدم البحث الحالي المنهج التحليلي لتقصي الأدبيات الموجودة عن متغيري البحث وهما مهارات الكتابة والخرائط الذهنية، ولقد أظهرت النتائج التي تم التوصل إليها البحث إلى أن استراتيجية الخرائط الذهنية هي إحدى الاستراتيجيات الفعالة تبعاً لمزاياها العديدة، والتي قد تسهم بصورة فعالة في تنمية مهارات الكتابة لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، ولقد وأوصى البحث بضرورة الاستفادة من استراتيجية الخرائط الذهنية لتنمية مهارات الكتابة لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الخرائط الذهنية، الإستراتيجية، مهارات الكتابة، المرحلة الثانوية.

Learning a Foreign Language

Learning language is an essential characteristic of most successful figures in the globe. Furthermore, acquiring a language and being able to communicate effectively is a principle objective of most citizens in the twenty century especially as the globalization has changed everything in the planet and it became a small village.

Another important point is that English is the language of the world and the first language to be spoken all over the globe. The educational systems all over the world place learning a foreign language especially English to be a priority. Using language accurately enables the language user to communicate effectively with the native speakers of the language (Mercer, 2002).

Using language in a productive context especially writing helps in bringing a plethora of benefits for the learners. Over and above most of the educational systems around the world seek to brush up the language of its learners and speakers. The four language skills are of crucial importance to be mastered by the learners; however listening and reading the EFL learner can decode and comprehend the oral or the written messages. On the other hand, through writing and speaking, the learner can produce the language in a meaningful context expressing his ideas opinions and thoughts. Thus, developing the EFL learners' language is not a trivial job but it is a must imposed by the importance of learning a foreign language, especially English (Morsi, Seleim, Nazir, 2015).

Writing: An Advanced Skill

Learning to write whether in the native language or the foreign one is a distinguishing characteristic of the person. A good command of writing means linguistic intelligence, critical thinking and assessment skills. Over and above, the development in the writing skill means development in the language skills in general. Added to that, to be able to write mean that you are able to professionally access the modern technology devices and facilities; besides, you can use the new means of technology effectively and professionally (Huy, 2015).

With this in mind, writing as one of the advanced skills needs the coordination of many skills together for producing accurate piece of meaning. Being a good writer means that the person is able to functionalize the knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, paragraph organization, the graphomotor skills, the thinking skills and others which place a cognitive load on the learner and requires much attention. Furthermore, the writing mechanics, capitalization, spelling, coherence and cohesion, unity of thought and organization of ideas. Thus, writing is an advanced skills and the production of intelligible piece of writing is hindered by a plethora of deficiency of many sub skills. Among such skills are the mastery of the grammatical and lexical skills (Hastini, 2014).

It is undeniable fact that the skills of using correct grammar when writing is part and parcel of any successful piece of writing. Without grammar nothing can achieved in the delivered message as meaning is basically based on grammar. The grammar mastery inevitability is part and parcel of producing any successful linguistic product, consequently, grammar teaching at schools must ensure the practicality of using the grammatical skills when using the language to attain the purpose of studying the language, especially writing (Cuellar, 2013).

Another component which is of considerable importance is the mastery of the lexical skills. Memorizing and functionalizing a repertoire of vocabulary when writing is an important feature of every successful writer. Added to that, without vocabulary nothing of the intended message can be delivered and the meaning can not be achieved. Vocabulary is the building blocks of the language whether spoken or written. Apart from that, mastering the lexical features when writing means the writer is able to choose the best word for the context and can deliver the meaning precisely and accurately without lapses or much effort form the reader to figure out the intended meaning (Hastini, 2014).

Genres of Writing

There are four main genres of writing as depicted in the literature of language learning. Such genres are descriptive, narrative, expository and argumentative. The following lines depict the meaning of such genres and how their most common features (Devitt, 2004).

1) Descriptive Writing

Descriptive writing is one of the old genres of writing which mainly intends to portray an imaginative picture in the mind of the reader about a person, a place, or an object. Such genre of writing made use of creative descriptive language. The piece of writing should contain lots of adjectives and adverbs to provide vivid details about the target object of description (McCarthy, 1998).

2) Narrative Writing

Narrative writing is another advanced genre of writing which is devoted to providing a sequence of actions about an important event. Th piece of narrative writing provides a detailed description about the event, the exposition, the plot and the resolution. It mainly provides many cohesive devices that assist in linking the events together and made the meaning clear (Ross, Rolheiser, & Hogaboam-Gray, 1999).

3) Expository Writing

Expository writing, also called informative writing, is another sophisticated genre of writing which goals at providing information or detailed explanation of a topic of interest for the reader. It does communicate a number of facts and figures about a specific topic for the reader. The writer should mainly aim at providing accurate, precise, specific pieces of information for the reader depicted in a logical sequence (Sasaki, & Hirose, 1996).

4) Argumentative Writing

Argumentative writing is considered by many as the most advanced and sophisticated genre of writing. It mainly intends to provide a point of view and provides compelling evidence for the reader to lead him to persuasion. It entails lots of critical thinking skills and necessitates using a lot of examples, evidence, refutation for defending the writer's viewpoint and convince the interlocutor to comprehend that the writer has a solid background (Ferretti, & Graham, 2019).

EFL Learners Problem with Writing

Writing skill in general regardless of the genre has posed many problems for students in their native language; however, the problem becomes severer when it come to the foreign language. The students always fail to accomplish the requirements of the piece of writing due to their low proficiency in language in general and writing in particular. Furthermore, when it comes to the genre, the problem becomes worse as the effort is increased and the student will not be able to orchestrate such skills together to produce the target piece of writing.

Writing skill acquisition can be classified into two main types which reflects the learner's proficiency (Du, 2009):

(1) Higher-level writing skills

(2) Lower-level writing skills

- Higher level writing skills focus mainly on the content of the piece of writing which includes the planning skills, the development of ideas skill, the revising skill and the editing skills. Such skills are related closely to the content of the pieces of writing.

- Lower-level writing relates directly to the form of the piece of writing which addresses the primary main component and skills such as: grammatical skills, lexical skills, mastery of the writing mechanics and the other sub writing skills.

With this in mind, a plethora of studies verified that the many-focused studies on writing skills tackled the lower-level writing skills and verified unfortunately that the students are suffering from many problems and unable to produce meaningful pieces of writing. The studies enumerated the number of such problem which summarized in grammatical accuracy, lexical richness, writing mechanics, organization, coherence and cohesion and development of ideas (Huy, 2015; cuellar, 2013; fareed, 2016; fikron, 2018).

On the other hand, a number of studies revealed that the source of the problems encountered by the EFL learners in writing is summarized in the traditional methods of teaching which focus mainly on memorizing language chunks or the whole piece of writing to be written on the traditional exams. Furthermore, writing is taught isolated from context and the grammar and vocabulary are taught decontextualized. Another critical point which is not

taken inconsideration by those who are responsible for teaching writing is that creativity, which is the main feature of the writing skill as a productive one, is neglected and it is not paid the due attention (Durukan, 2011; Grainger, Goouch, & Lambirth, 2005; Samiullah, 2019).

Mind Maps Learning Strategy

One of the promising methods of teaching writing is mind map, which was developed by Tony Buzan (2018). The mind maps strategy enables the learners to categorize the main and sub-ideas in the writing task. The mind maps strategy makes use of the right side of the brain which is relatedly connected with the visual language which is mostly used and preferred by the learners in the different learning context. Over and above, the mind maps strategy enables the learners to display both sides of the brain which might produce high quality learning outcomes among learners (Mohaidat, 2018).

The mind maps enable the teacher to categorize the ideas in meaningful presentation. A lot of knowledge and ideas can be put together including all the elements which attract the attention of the learners and create an enjoyable environment for the learners. The mind map is considered a mirror of the inner thinking which is represented visually in an ordered manner addressing compatible with the mechanics of the brain (Wang, 2019).

Significance of Mind Maps

Fun and Maskat (2010) listed a number of merits of mind maps in the teaching learning process as follows:

- Mind maps order the ideas and information and categorize the target knowledge into headings and sub-headings.

- They make use of symbols in presenting the ideas targeted by the mind map which speak louder the theoretical information.

- Mind maps increase the learners' motivation and assist them to generate ideas and link them visually.

- Using mind maps is convenient for all the learners in all levels and stages; in addition, it can be used in content areas and many subjects.

- They enable the learners to summarize the ideas and categorize them in order to reach a decision or provide a conclusion.

- Mind maps develop the learners' critical, analytic, creative, reflective and logical learning skills through the ideas which are linked together in meaningful context.

- They increase the learner's participation in the teaching learning process through the images and the multimedia elements.

- Mind maps also increase the learners' motivation for learning as it is not a traditional method of learning.

- Mind maps which can be used in the teaching process can be used easily in the learning process as the students may make use of such maps for studying his school subjects.

- The electronic mind maps can be used effectively on computers and mobiles which provide a suitable environment for learning especially for the current technology-savy generation.

Mind Maps and Writing

Mind maps can be used effectively to produce developed pieces of writing as they can be used prior to writing. When developed before producing the target text, they represent a hierarchical relationship between the target ideas instead of just writing down the ideas as they come to mind without order or without coherence and cohesion. Making use of the brain storming abilities, the learner can easily produce a number of ideas which can be organized easily. As the ideas are generated and written in the mind map, it became easy for the student to transform such ideas into draft to be developed later int the next stages.

The literature available revealed that there are two main mind maps that can be used in teaching writing (Mercer, Dawes, Wegerif, Sams, & Fernandez, 2007):

1. Drawing mind maps using pens and papers as the learner making use of the available ideas tries to categorize the ideas and divide them into heading and sub-headings.

2. Drawing an electronic - maps using computerized software to draw the maps digitally instead of using pen and paper and using the facilities provided by the technology.

Research Problem and Approach

The present paper main problem is that the EFL learners in the secondary stage are suffering from severe low of writing proficiency which is reflected in their errors in producing accurate pieces of writing. Such inability to produce interactive piece of writing is summarized in the usage of the traditional uncontextualized teaching methods which might not be effective when teaching writing. Thus, the present research sought to answer the following question:

What is the effect of mind maps strategy on developing the writing skills among the secondary stage students?

Subsequently, the current research paper tested a new interactive strategy of teaching, namely mind maps for testing their effectiveness in developing the writing skills among the secondary stage learners. The researcher reviewed many sources of the available literature about the writing skills and mind maps strategy answering the research question.

The researcher used the "the analytical method" for analyzing the available literature and the descriptive method for writing down the finding of the current research based on the literature review.

Result of the Research

Based on the findings of many studies reviewed tackling the writing process, it was revealed that mind maps strategy is considered one of the most effective strategies in developing many linguistic components, such as grammar, vocabulary and mechanics, in general and the writing skill in particular. Thus, it was proved by many research that mind maps strategy has significant effectiveness in the EFL learners' affective components such as motivation to learn, confidence to participate and enjoyment to take part in the teaching learning process. More than that, mind maps have the potential of developing the students' abilities to think critically, logically, creatively specifically when planning the pieces of writing. The learners' abilities to plan the piece of writing are affected positively and developed drastically due to the usage of the mind maps strategy. Thus, it was concluded that mind maps strategy, whether electronic or pan and paper, enhances the learners and develop their writing taking into account knowledge domains which are part and parcel of producing successful pieces of writing, namely the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains.

Research Conclusions

Based on the findings attained in the present study, the following conclusions were drawn from the literature review and the findings of the research:

- Writing is one of the most important productive skills which should be paid the due consideration in the teaching learning process.

- Mind maps strategy is one of the feasible tools which can be employed in the teaching learning process to enhance the linguistic skills among the EFL learners.

- Mind maps strategy has considerable effectiveness in developing the writing skills especially when such maps are used in the planning phase of writing.

- Mind maps strategy can be used as a teaching tool by the teacher or as a learning tool by the students.

- Mind maps strategy is an effective way of developing the different thinking skills among learners.

- Mind maps strategy develop the learners cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally.

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