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Investigating the Usefulness of Thematic Learning Approach to Improve EFL Learners' Writing Performance

Case Study: Middle School EFL Teachers at Abu-Baker Moustapha Ben-
Rahmoun, Biskra

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Declaration

I, BOUDOUNET Thellali-Ryme, do hereby declare solemnly that this submitted work is solely my own effort, and has not previously been submitted for any institution or university for a degree.

Certified.

Miss. Boudounet Thellali-Ryme

Dedication

I, Thellali-Ryme Boudounet dedicate the work to:

➤ *My precious family who believed in me, and who have done EVERYTHING for my Happiness and Success. I hope this will make you proud.*

&

➤ *All the struggles and situations that I encountered, and that helped in shaping my person and made the Ryme I am today.*

With all sincerity, Thank you

May this be the start, not the end.

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Abstract

The writing skill is considered the most challenging task for learners in all levels, especially for beginner learners of English due to many reasons; mainly, the difficulty to make connections between different themes they are being taught. Accordingly, the aim of the present study was to investigate the effectiveness of using Thematic-based Learning to improve learners' writing performance. Therefore, the study hypothesized that the more teachers use Thematic Instructions, the more learners enhance their abilities in writing. Methodologically, the study adopted a qualitative approach using a case study as a research design. As for testing the validity of the hypothesis, a semi-structured questionnaire was designed to gain as much as possible of information about teachers' attitudes towards using Thematic Learning. Correspondingly, the required data for the study were collected via an online survey (Google Form). The current study surveyed 20 randomly chosen middle school teachers from Biskra. Ultimately, the study findings revealed that teachers agree upon the usefulness of Thematic-based Learning approach to learning and its effectiveness to promote learners' writing performances. Thus, the study results confirmed the validity of the research hypothesis set out at an early stage in this study.

Key Words: Thematic-based Learning; the writing skill; English language; middle school learners.

List of Abbreviations

CBI: Content-Based Approach

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

ESL: English as a Second Language

L1: First Language

L2: Second Language

PBL: Problem-Based Learning

PjBL: Project-Based Learning

TBA: Thematic/Theme-Based Approach

TBL: Thematic/Theme-Based Learning

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Introduction

Writing is an important skill for the competence of producing language. However; it is considered as the most difficult one; particularly in English as a foreign language (EFL). For this, learners should improve this skill, and teachers mainly should help them to overcome the difficulties they face in terms of grammar, lexis, sentence structure, and mechanism. Thus, one of the effective used strategies to overcome these challenges that EFL teachers face in the teaching-learning process is the Thematic-based Learning strategy.

1. Statement of the Problem

Middle school EFL learners are taught in English different sequences along their curriculum. Each sequence is about theme-related tasks and activities that deal with different grammar, lexis, and vocabulary related to a theme with the aim to enable the learners to write effectively. But still those learners face some serious difficulties when producing compositions of their own because of the insufficient linguistic proficiency which is due to the insufficient time that is devoted to practice.

Via this research study, it is aimed to understand the potential role of implementing Thematic Learning approach as a strategy which is according to Harris and Rooks (2010) an effective way to help learners develop their capacity in linking concepts and making logical connections within the activities to finally write effectively.

2. Research Questions

This study intended to answer the following questions:

RQ1. Is Theme-based approach an efficient strategy to help learners improve their writing performance?

RQ2. How would learners react to the use of this strategy?

3. Research Hypothesis

From the questions above, it is hypothesized that:

RH. Theme-based Learning approach can be an effective strategy for EFL teachers to use in their classrooms to help learners improve their writing performance.

4. Research Aims

Main Aims

The present study sought to investigate the effectiveness of Thematic Learning to enhance learners' writing performance. That is, it aims to provide a clear picture of the issue in order to better understand it.

Specific Aims

- To investigate the role of implementing Theme-based Learning to enhance middle school learners' writing performance.
- To seek for improvement in EFL learners' writing abilities
- To highlight how learners would react to the use of the Thematic Instructions in their learning process.

5. Significance of the Study

The present study provided an opportunity to better understand Thematic Learning issue in language teaching. Besides, it aimed at contributing the enrichment of research about this issue since there is a limited number of sources targeting it. A further contribution of the study was to draw middle school teachers' attention to the importance of the writing skill and also to highlight the usefulness of implementing Thematic-based approach as an effective and efficient strategy for EFL learners in middle school classrooms to improve their writing abilities and to overcome the difficulties they encounter in learning how to write.

6. Research Methodology

6.1. Research Approach

As the nature of the present study determines, the qualitative approach was used for its appropriateness since the major aim of this study was to describe the usefulness of Thematic based Learning to improve learners' writing skills.

6.2. Research Design

In relevance to the qualitative research approach, a case study design was considered the most suitable for this type of research since its role is to collect data on a specific topic from a limited number of participants through a semi-structured questionnaire over a sustainable period.

6.3. Population and Sample

In order to fulfill this study, the targeted population is middle school EFL teachers who were randomly chosen to help for the accomplishment of this study by answering a questionnaire and get their views about the topic under investigation.

6.4. Data Gathering Tools

To collect data, the research utilized a semi-structured questionnaire for teachers as data collection methods. The choice of this tool goes in parallel with the nature of this study, which is purely qualitative.

6.5. Data Analysis Methods

To analyze the data collected, the study adopted a descriptive method for the questionnaire for its appropriateness.

7. The Selection of the Writing Style

The American Psychological Association (APA 6th edition) writing style was used for the study. This choice was nurtured by the nature of the study, the field of research that is educational research. In addition to the agreement between the candidate and the supervisor.

8. Limitation of the Study

The present study aimed to investigate the use of Thematic-based Learning to improve middle school learners' writing performance. Even though the study achieved its intended aim, it; however, represented some pedagogical issues while conducting it. Initially, due to the current sanitary situations; the pandemic Corona Virus caused the forced shutdown of the educational institutions which in turn led to our inability to conduct a quasi-experimentation as the second data collection tool as was planned for this study. Moreover, the questionnaire was supposed to be handed to middle school teachers, but many teachers showed unwillingness to answer it; therefore, we chose to post it online for others to have a chance to gather the necessary data to accomplish the study. Finally, in terms of reviewing the literature, there were a lack of research studies and references on the topic, especially the ones concerning Thematic Learning.

9. Structure of the Dissertation

The present dissertation will be organized into three main chapters. The first and second chapters will review the related literature. The third chapter will be concerned with the practical part of the study.

Chapter One provides an in-depth discussion of the Thematic-based approach. It provides its definition and conceptualization, its significance. It also highlights its main steps and basic elements. Additionally, this chapter will tackle the impact of this strategy on the skill of writing.

Chapter Two provides a better understanding of the writing skill, its definition, different types of writing, its elements, and its importance. As it discusses the ways teachers assess learners' writings and the major challenges they encounter in writing.

Chapter Three will be about the detailed analysis of the data collection methods, findings and conclusions.

Chapter One: **Thematic Learning**

Chapter One: Thematic Learning: Revisiting the Related Literature

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Introduction

There was a time when the classroom was considered a monotonous place for young learners to learn; the teacher taught a certain subject, wrote about it on the board, and learners were expected to just listen in a passive way; therefore, their learning progress and their grasping was not as successful as expected. As a consequence, many educationalists and teachers started to look for new approaches and strategies to use in the classroom for the refinement of the teaching-learning process. Theme-based approach which is one of Content-based-instructional models, is a suggested approach by educationalist that tends to suit young learners because it is based on the idea that the teacher selects appropriate themes related to real-life situations according to his learners' levels and interests and allow them the time and opportunity to participate in classroom activities and to be physically and mentally involved. By doing so, learner's motivation gradually increases, their skills, both general academic and cognitive develop. And more importantly, the classroom becomes a more cheerful place for them to learn.

This chapter attempts to provide insights about what thematic learning is and its implementation in EFL classrooms, as it also sheds the light on the characteristics, effectiveness, and guidelines of the approach. In addition, it spots the lights on the main steps to follow in designing themes. The chapter ends by outlining the roles of the teacher using theme-based learning and regards the major issues around this approach.

1.1. Definition

Thematic Teaching (also known as Thematic Instruction or Theme-based Approach) is the selecting and highlighting of a theme through an instructional unit, course, or multiple courses. It is often interdisciplinary, highlighting the relationship of knowledge across academic disciplines and everyday life. It is largely used in elementary and middle classrooms whereby many areas of the curriculum are connected together and integrated within a theme and provide learners with the opportunity to explore the subjects they are learnt.

For Okoro & Okoro (2016) Thematic Instruction is based on the idea that people acquire knowledge, best when learned in the context of a coherent whole and when they can connect what they are learning to the real world.

Thematic-based Approach, according to Sutirjo and Sri Istuti Mamik (2005, p.6 as cited in Halidjah et al, 2018): “is an effort to integrate knowledge, skills, values, or learning attitudes, as well as creative thinking using themes”. In other words, TBA is an activity through which teachers use different materials as skills, values, and creative thinking to teach different subjects.

Halidjah et al, in the same year (2018) state that:

Thematic Learning is learning that uses themes in linking several subjects so as to provide meaningful experiences to students. It is said to be meaningful because, in thematic learning, students will understand the concepts they learn through direct experience and relate them to other concepts that they have understood (p. 86).

They continue explaining that “this approach departs from the theory of learning which rejects the process of training / memorization (drill) as the basis for forming children's intellectual knowledge and structure. Thematic Learning Approach emphasizes the application of the concept of learning while doing something (learning by doing)” (Halidjah et al., 2018, p. 86).

Moreover, Brinton, Snow and Wesche (2003) point out: “theme based course: self-contained course taught by language instructors that incorporate target language usage from one or more disciplines”. They consider TBA the most widespread model of content-based approach and it is believed to be the theoretical basis for designing particular content and topic to improve the skills of language. Therefore, learners can learn the knowledge of the specific content area and increase their language skills naturally.

To summarize, Thematic-based Instruction is a teaching strategy that uses connected themes or topics taken from real-life contexts as a primary material to improve learners' learning progress.

1.2. Historical Overview

The integration of Theme-based Instruction can be tracked back to 1960 in The United Kingdom. According to Cameron (2001, p. 181), the most common figure who talks about TBI, singles out that this language teaching originates from general primary education and “Has been practiced since the 1960s in UK primary classrooms, where children typically spend all day with the same teacher”. This integration “Was due to recommendations from the Plowden Report

(1967) emphasizing that children learn better finding out information for themselves rather than being taught directly and supplied with information direct from a teacher” (Essays, 2018, n.p).

The approach has its origins in Content-based Instruction (CBI) along with sheltered and adjunct models. Singer (1990, as cited in Yildiz-GENC) emphasizes that when learners are exposed to thematically organized materials, they learn and remember better the information presented. Additionally, Dewey stresses that in contrast to traditional schooling; “schools and classrooms should be representative of real life situations, allowing children to participate in learning activities interchangeably and flexibly in a variety of social settings” (Dewey, 1938; Gutek, 2014, as cited in Williams, 2017, p. 92).

Stoller and Grabe (1997) also in their review of CBI point out: “all CBI is fundamentally theme-based” (p. 82). This statement can be interpreted in the way that Theme-based Approach to learning is, indeed, the core of content-based instruction and “it contains scientific learning, problem-based learning (PBL) and project-based learning (PjBL)” (Retnawati, Munadi, Arlinwibowo, Wulandari, & Sulistyaningsih, 2017, p. 202).

1.3. Thematic Learning in EFL Context

Shin (2007, p. 2, as cited in Essays, 2018, n. p) states that: “when teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at any level, the classroom has to be a place in which language is not only taught but also used meaningfully”. This means that learners should be provided with authentic materials such as authentic topics from real situations so as to make sense of their learning.

The interest in Content-Based Instruction has spread to EFL classroom situations because teachers believe that the language education in EFL contexts should be similar to that of ESL to some extent. Even though the approach cannot be applied in the same way, an alternative form called the theme based model” has been introduced in some countries (Davies, 2003, as cited in Yugandhar, 2016, p. 88).

For Davies an EFL teacher can use the Theme-based CBI, the content is not as limited or specific as in an ESL classroom. However, it is generally used in ESL, and the teacher can design a syllabus of broad and various topics which learners would be interested in, and offer

additional supplements from the Internet, newspapers, and other diverse reading sources organized by topics. (as cited in Yugandhar, 2016, p. 88).

Many scholars discussed and supported the idea of using Thematic Instruction in EFL classrooms; for instance, Haas (2000) states: “planning thematic units allows the teacher to incorporate a variety of language concepts into a topic area that is interesting and worthy of study and that gives students a reason to use the language”. Also, Brown (2001) points out that the use of Theme-based Instruction can be effective for EFL because it promotes automaticity, meaningful learning, intrinsic motivation, and communicative competence, which, he says, “Put principles of effective learning into action” (p. 236). In addition to Brinton (2003) who accounts that “using this type of instruction provides optimal conditions for language acquisition because “(1) language is being continually recycled throughout the unit and (2) students are given multiple opportunities to use the new language they acquire as they read, discuss, and write about the topics” (p. 201).

From the above citations, the Theme-based Model is organized around selected topics from one area or across the curriculum to develop learners’ general academic skills of the language. These academic skills are “either language-based (i.e., with a focus on vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar) or skills-based (i.e., with a focus on listening, speaking, writing, or reading)” (as cited in Essays,2018, n.p)

Furthermore, Stoller and Grabe (1997) and Stoller (2002) identify the “Six-T’s approach to language and content instruction” which are respectively as follows:

1. Themes (central ideas that organizing curricular units),
2. Texts (content resources which drive the basic planning of unit themes)
3. Topics (subunits of content which explore more specific aspects of the theme),
4. Threads (linkages across themes which create curricular coherence),
5. Tasks (basic units of instruction), and
6. Transitions (planned instruction which provides coherence across topics in a theme and across tasks within topics) (p. 83-85).

The six T’s are usually found in EFL contexts and taught by an EFL teacher or team taught with a content specialist (Davies, 2003). And using them in any curriculum design

“cannot only ensure the coherence and internal logic in a curriculum, but can also realize the continuation and gradual advance of instruction for both language and content knowledge” (Stoller & Grabe, 1997; Stoller 2002, p. 72).

1.4. Implementing Thematic Instruction

Theme-based Language Instructions represents the most common model in CBI because it can be implemented within virtually any existing institutional setting. It is with the aim to make sense for the learning process, and to make school a more cheerful place to learn.

When implementing the Thematic Instruction at primary level or middle school, the first step is to determine the commonalities of L2 objectives with the content areas of the school curriculum. Consequently, the L2 objectives can then be arranged in accordance with subject area objectives, and a theme-based syllabus matching language form and function with these educational objectives may be designed to cater to the needs of L2 learners. This means that L2 learners can transform the knowledge they have from their L1 to express in L2 using what they learn by thematic approach (Alptekin, Erçetin, Bayyurt, 2007).

Chumdari et al, (2018) note that the implementation of thematic instruction necessitates four main elements:

1. Professional teachers who meticulously utilize devices inter- and intra-disciplinary of study,
2. Teachers who master the subject matter and instructional method,
3. Teachers who have broad educational insights, able to take appropriate measures to achieve the goal of education as a whole, and
4. Teachers who have high spirit or dedication.

While Kucer, Silva and Delgado-Larocco (1995, as cited in Aguiar, 2018) present three conditions to be used in TBA in order to provide a suitable environment for learners to better acquire the target language they are being taught. These conditions are:

1. Risk-taking, that is defined as “The learner explores learning even as he or she knows that mistakes are natural characteristics of the learning process” (Kucer et al. 1995, p. 12).

2. Reflection, that is the way learners can perceive different inputs from the world and compare them to their own understanding.
3. Collaboration; it is about the formal patterns of relationships that are established in a community of learners (p. 13). This condition is used when learners are asked to work in groups in tasks like: role-plays, games, discussions.

In its implementation, the Thematic Instruction departs from a theme chosen and developed by the teacher who should pay attention to its relevance with what is intended to be taught (Ministry of National Education, 2008, as cited in Chumdari et al, 2018). In the same vein, (Anitah, 2009; Collins & Dixon, 1991, p. 24) suggest two main requirements that should be considered when selecting a theme, they are:

1. Must be broad hence learners can investigate various related concepts,
2. It must be in accordance with:
 1. Students' interest,
 2. Teacher's interests,
 3. Students' need,
 4. Time, including season and special events,
 5. Students' knowledge and range of the explored theme,
 6. School curriculum,
 7. Availability of learning resources, including books, films, tapes and resource persons.

1.5. The Effectiveness of Theme-based Approach

“When themes are well chosen, students will be more engaged with the learning because they can see its purpose and find it interesting -and fun”. (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2010, p. 2, as cited in Essays, 2018, n.p). Because those learners are learning by themselves when provided with appropriate selected topics that willingly give them the opportunity to explore and discover more.

Language educationalists, such as Van Lier (1996) and Swain (1996), suggest that L2 instruction at school is quite beneficial if it is linked to curricular content. The effectiveness of Thematic Instruction stems from two main factors. First, language is learnt effectively when the

focus is on content rather than form. And second, the contexts in which learners find themselves provide interesting resources for learning language that serves in first place a medium for learning relevant content. As such, content offers a motivational and cognitive basis for language acquisition, with students actively constructing meaning both conceptually and linguistically by relating the new data to what they already know (as cited in Alptekin et al, 2007).

Cameron (2001, p. 180) acknowledges that “effective theme-based teaching is extremely demanding on teachers in both planning and in implementation; knowledge of wide repertoire of activities types and resources is needed”. Here, Cameron insists on the planning and implementation of the theme in order to guarantee the effectiveness of the approach.

Moreover, the efficiency of the TBA is well-recognized at the level of L2 learning. The model allows learners to engage in higher-level language processing and thinking skills using authentic teaching materials and tasks which can be a motivating factor for learners to reprocess words and forms and stimulate them to construct their knowledge by creating meaning from their prior knowledge (Allen, 2004; Pally, 2000). This kind of higher-order thinking allows learners to gain true language proficiency (Kabilan, 2000, as cited in Hsu & Lo, 2009) and to relate learners’ past experiences with their new knowledge (Dantas-Whitney, 2002).

The author Clive Stack, who has more than 30 years of experience in teaching at primary schools, explains: “themes are really helpful for a child’s learning because they tap into children’s interests and help them make the important connections between various skills across multiple subjects; in this case they make the link between grammar and punctuation and their own creative writing” (The Importance of Themes For Teaching Grammar, n.d). The author here depicts that learners best understand meanings of a concept that they create for themselves out of the data by linking ideas altogether referring to their prior knowledge to make sense of them. As the approach helps those learners to grasp new knowledge, it also enables them to retain more information since “it encourages the involvement of all abilities of children through topics relevant to them and their learning needs” (Essays,2018, n.p).

Another contribution that supports this sense Theme-based Instruction is made by Gao in 2011 who believes that “the students in a theme-based classroom accomplish a diversity of

communicative tasks in cooperative groups in which they share a common goal working productively” (as cited in Essays,2018, n.p). This statement can be interpreted in the way that using Thematic Instructions creates motivation and self-esteem within learners and encourages them to put their best efforts together in group-works and participate in collaborative activities which inevitably leads to reinforce their sense of belonging.

Finally, in the same vein, this model of instructions develops language skills at the level of pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and writing, it also encourages learners’ collaborations, creates motivation and helps in information retention. It additionally allows learners to demonstrate critical thinking; Curtain and Dahlberg (n.d) assert that activities in a Theme-based Approach engage learners “in complex thinking and more sophisticated use of language” (p. 4, as cited in Essays, 2018, n.p). Topics in Thematic Approach are carefully chosen by the instructor as they cover learners’ needs and interests, so the teacher-learners’ discussions around those topics may develop more complex ideas that require from them to use more cognitive skills such as: analyzing, synthesizing, contrasting, and comparing.

1.6. Nature of Activities

Activities may be directed by the teacher or, occasionally, by the students themselves. Whether an activity is more effective with whole-class, small-group, or individual instruction depends upon the difficulty of the reading selection, the nature of the activity, and the abilities and interests of the learners.

“Thematic instruction avoids the use of isolated exercises with grammatical structures, practiced out of context” (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2010, as cited in Essays, 2018, n.p). In other words, the activities and tasks chosen should be related to real-life situations.

According to Grabe and Stoller (1997): “the use of coherently developed content sources allows students to call on their own prior knowledge to learn additional language and content materials” (as cited in Filice, 2016, p. 125). Activities in TBA work as a trigger that elicit learners’ prior knowledge for the development of skills and abilities.

Additionally, as cited in Essays, 2018, Strong (1995) emphasizes that: “ideally, the kinds of activities teachers design for the materials should move from comprehension activities to such production activities as making presentations to the class, or writing reports, creating a class anthology of stories, or even publishing a newspaper.”

Also, Geoff Ward (n.d, n.p) writes a chapter entitled « Using Theme Cycle » identifies stages in the sequencing of activities, in which there are three main stages. The first stage is the initiating activities; it provides connections with what learners have seen earlier to what they will see as a new topic or theme. This stage aims at orienting learners in order not to lose focus and to retain as much information as possible. The second stage is called enhancing activities, most of the learning takes place in this stage. It fulfills two main functions that are: 1- The modes of language (i.e. the four skills of the language: listening, speaking, reading, and writing), and 2- Language art teaching; to enable learners to use the language they acquire appropriately in its suitable contexts. In this stage, teacher can vary the means of communicating messages. The last stage is the synthesizing stage, it is in this stage when the teacher assesses and evaluates his learners, his methods of teaching, and his theme or lesson plan to check the effectiveness and the successfulness of his teaching program.

Cameron (2001) exemplifies a figure that represents different activities that might be used in different subject areas:

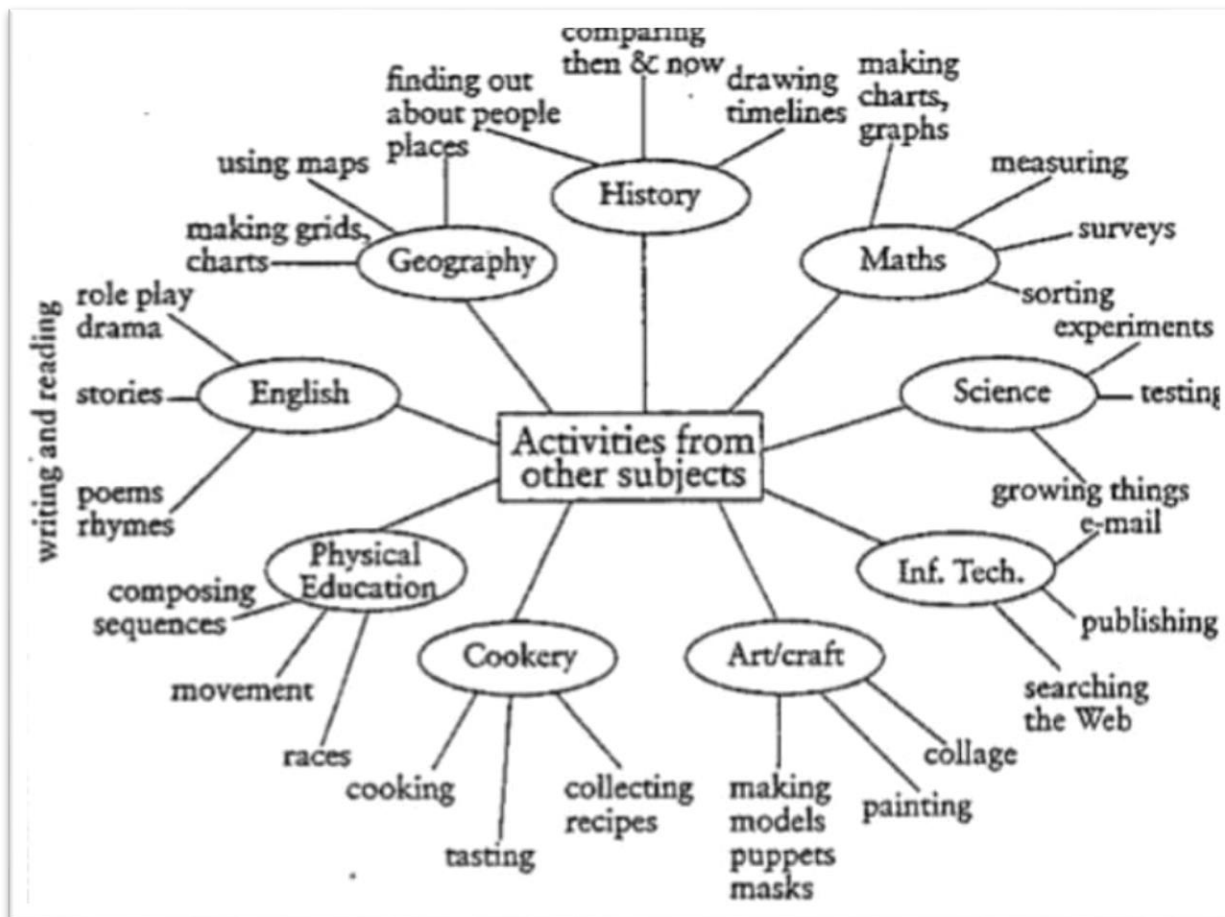


Figure 1: Subject Area Activities to Use in FL Classroom (Cameron, 2001, p.183)

1.7. Sources for Planning a Theme

When the teacher chooses a theme, it is important that he considers the availability of resources to select what is appropriate for the learners in accordance with their age, level, ability, and, for sure, interest and need.

For that an article titled «The Primary Program: Growing and Learning in the Heartland Integrated Curriculum » (p. 261-262) classifies types of themes into four main categories:

1.7.1. Teacher Team and Class Initiated, Team Planned and Supported This type of theme is developed by teachers who seek direction from the children and then collaborate to plan for the children's learning.

1.7.2. Child Initiated, Child and Teacher Planned and Supported Topics for integrated class themes may develop from the interests of one or two children. Their enthusiasm may spread to all the children in the class. Based on the response, the teacher(s) plan(s) further. If the theme is broadly developed, there are usually enough choices to sustain the interests of all the children for an extended period.

1.7.3. Teacher Initiated, Planned, and Supported This type of theme study is usually short in duration and specific in purpose. The theme suggestions may be used to teach other skills and strategies such as brainstorming, clustering, making lists, working cooperatively, recording, and ways of representing ideas which children need in order to embark on independent studies. And,

1.7.4. Teacher Team Initiated and Planned Whole Staff Supported with this type of theme, the structure and the duration will vary according to the resources available. The topic and the activities are set.

Whereas, Yugandhar (2016) identifies four basic types of texts that are proved to be useful in TBA to allow learners to develop their general language skills. These types are namely: “1-Teacher-compiled content resources, 2-Teacher-generated content resources, 3-Task-generated content resources, and 4- External content resources” (p. 88).

He continues to suggest different sources from where the teacher can plan for a theme:

Texts of various genres, audio-visual materials, Lectures, worksheets, graphic representations, PPT’s, Manuals, Handouts, Student scripts, discussions, activities, student-gathered materials and Guest speakers by the subject experts, Material from the library and websites would be appropriate material as content resources (p. 88).

1.8. Guidelines of Thematic Instructions

As mentioned before on the effectiveness of TBA; learners work together, participate in activities and tasks, and most importantly, feel motivated. But to achieve that, teachers should consider some guidelines that are as suggested Janelle (2020):

1.8.1. Find an Engaging Theme Themes can be planned around books, benchmarks, skills learners need to develop, or just from student interest. Find a theme that will motivate and

captivate learners' interest. Units are typically longer than a week, so it is important to find a theme that will keep the learners engaged.

1.8.2. Create Entertaining Activities The activities the teacher chooses are the essence of the unit. These activities need to cross the curriculum and keep learners' interest.

1.8.3. Evaluate Learners' Learning While finding a central theme, and creating engaging cross-curriculum activities, comes the phase where learners should be evaluated on what they have learnt. Portfolio-based assessment is a great way to see learners' progress throughout a period of time. For example, a habitat portfolio can be created to document the progress the learners made throughout the unit of habitats.

Whereas John (2015) presents eight steps to use to create effective classroom:

1. The Theme: select the topic of the unit based on curriculum standards, student interests or student experience.
2. Grade Level: select the appropriate grade level.
3. Objectives: identify the specific objectives to be mastered during the unit.
4. Materials: determine the materials for use throughout the unit.
5. Activities: develop the activities for the thematic unit. Make sure to cover activities across the curriculum.
6. Discussion questions: create a variety of discussion questions to help students think about the theme of the unit.
7. Literature selections: select a variety of books that correlate with the activities and central theme of the unit.
8. Assessment: evaluate student progress throughout the unit. Measure student growth through rubrics or other means of assessment.

The 2013 curriculum (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2015. As cited in Halidjah et al. 2018) agree with John's guidelines, but also added the school identity (i.e. the contextual factor in which learning is taking place), the learning media; through which the theme is being delivered (orally, written on board, audial, or visual), and the steps to be followed while presenting the lesson.

1.9. Characteristics of Thematic Instructions

Thematic Learning Model is an instructional model designed based on specific themes to provide a meaningful experience to the learners. It departs from the idea of the Natural Method, as suggested by Stephen Krashen (2003) that “learners acquire language best through the modified input of the teacher”. This means that the teacher adapts their language to the level of the student, and in one-to-one classes the amount and type of input can be maximized by the teacher to benefit the student (as cited in Meldrum & Clandfield, n.d).

Halidjah et al (2018) described a set of characteristics as follows:

1.9.1. Student-Centered Learning: or Thematic-Centered Learning: that goes in accordance with the modern learning approach which places learners more as the subject of learning while the teacher acts more as a facilitator, providing guides to learners in conducting learning activities.

1.9.2. Provide Direct Experience: Thematic Learning can provide direct experiences to learners. They are proved with something tangible (concrete) as a basis for understanding things more abstractly.

1.9.3. The Separation of Subjects: this is a way to simplify lessons and make it clear for learners to understand. The focus of learning is directed at discussing the themes that are most closely related to learners’ lives.

1.9.4. Presenting Concepts: teacher should select items from various subjects to enables learners to understand the concepts in their entirety. It is needed to help them solve problems faced in everyday life.

1.9.5. Flexibility: it is the teachers’ responsibility to be flexible; to associate teaching material from one subject to another, even linking it to learners’ lives and the environment in which the school and those learners are located.

1.9.6. Learning Outcomes: results of learners are related to their interests and needs. If they perform well in classroom activities, this means that their needs are fulfilled. This also means that themes selected are appropriate and the teaching methods adopted by the teacher are suitable.

1.10. Stages for Designing Instructions

After implementing the Thematic Approach in the classroom, and finding enough sources to plan for a theme that goes hand in hand with the learners' interests, levels, and needs, comes the phase whereby the teacher designs the instructions. Many educationalists highlight the steps to be followed:

Esu, for instance, in 2016 suggests four steps that are respectively as follows:

1. Choosing a theme which should match real situations: themes should be related to real-life situations that connect learners to their real world.
2. Designing the integrated curriculum: the teacher, here, organizes learning objectives of the curriculum both process skills and content knowledge around the theme chosen.
3. Designing the instruction: this usually involves making changes to the class schedule combining hours normally devoted to specific topics, organizing fieldtrips, and teaching in teams.
4. Encouraging presentation: Thematic Instruction is often project oriented. It frequently involves learners doing collective presentations to the rest of the school. This allows for the teacher to evaluate their learning progress, and his teaching practices.

In the same vein, Wolfinger (1994, as cited in Chumdari et al, 2018, p. 24) proposes other steps that are namely : 1- The selection of specific theme, 2- Determination of specific concepts, 3- Determination of learning activities, 4- Determination of subject matters to implement the activities, 5- Review the activities and subject matters attributed in the theme, 6- Development of lesson plan to ease the distribution and implementation, 7- Determination of the order of classes for the presentation of learning activities, and 8- Follow-up with discussion.

It can be understood from the stages suggested by Esu and Wolfinger that the starting point to design any instruction is that the teacher should work according to the educational authority and what is determined by the curriculum. After that he can start working on designing the instructions by identifying appropriate topics that meet learners' language abilities and serve as a vehicle to develop their skills. The selection can be from a direct experience, a book, web investigation, or from a unit of another teacher that has found to be successful. In addition to that, the teacher should take into account the number of hours and the amount of information to deliver as to devote enough time for learners for activities, presentations and further discussions.

1.11. The Role of the Teacher in Thematic Approach

The use of Theme-based Units in teaching offers the possibility for learners to decide what topics to cover. Once the theme is launched, learners begin to engage in reading and writing, in discussing and researching, in creating and generating. Therefore, the role of the teacher changes with the advanced integration of the learners.

According to Cameron (2001, p. 191): “the teacher should always be aware of the unpredictability of the development of the lesson. The teacher must be flexible and able to handle situations that arise out of a context. Especially the offering of choice-points leads to new, unknown language situations”. She continues describing the role of the teacher in thematic instructions saying that: “the teacher has the role of coordinator or facilitator especially young children need someone to help them reflecting their learning process”. During the lesson, he is also often needed as the one “commenting on what they [the children] are making and suggesting alternatives” (Cameron, 2001, p. 196).

Whereas Vogt (n.d) adds another role “...at others to provide explicit instruction, and sometimes simply to serve as a resource... Teachers may also help students acquiring English by providing careful modeling, demonstrations, and scaffolding, and by having reading materials available at various levels of difficulty.”

Overall, teacher plays important roles in the process of teaching and learning. On the one hand, he is knowledge provider; his primary role is to deliver classroom instructions. On the other hand, he is a facilitator, coordinator, and a resource. All these roles necessitate from the teacher to be flexible and always ready to change roles to adapt the learning instructions, and his learners’ needs.

In accordance with using theme-based approach to teach English, it is recommended from the instructor to employ different strategies. Walmsley (1996, as cited in Fristiara & Rahmawati, 2017, n.d) outlined seven ways to improve teaching that are as follows:

1. Do not try to integrate every subject area into every theme.
2. When teaching the theme, focus on the skills to be developed.
3. Balance teacher generated and learners centered approach.
4. Avoid long treatment of themes.
5. Choose themes from different contexts.

6. Approach yearlong and school wide themes with caution.
7. Collaborate with other teachers to design appropriate themes.

To conclude, from the above suggested ways of teaching, it is assumed that the teacher is the key for the success in Thematic Learning. To implement the curriculum to fit the design, some readiness is needed, especially the readiness of the implementer (i.e. the teacher). No matter how good the design is, but its success depends on the teacher. If he has the ability, enthusiasm, and high dedication, the results will be as expected.

1.12 Major Issues around Thematic Instructions

Despite the fact that Theme-based Approach can be highly effective and useful for both teachers and learners in the classroom, it still has its drawbacks and an equality issue may arise. As stated in Essays (2018, n.p) Some learners may lose interest in the theme being selected; using one theme for a month may become boring and repetitive, as it also decreases their motivation level to learn and get easily distracted. Another point is that it can be hard for the teacher to face some difficulties to find enough resources to cover every aspect of the topic, it can also be easy for him to miss out some contents that could be covered in the theme.

Assessment also can be a problem for the teacher because learners are being taught different themes in relation to contextualized settings, so assessment should not be isolated; however, they should “complete discourse level tasks” (Yugandhar, 2016, p. 89). Crandall (1999) also mentioned that “it would be impossible for teachers to separate conceptual understanding from linguistic proficiency in CBI when they want to evaluate students’ learning” (p. 111).

1.13. The Relationship between Thematic-based Instruction and the Writing Skill

To start with, no one can deny the importance of the writing skill in achieving learners’ academic goals; as a consequence, the teacher has a great responsibility to look for the suitable methods to use in the classroom and to create an appropriate atmosphere for learners so that they can improve their language skills. Due to that, many researchers agree that it exists a strong relationship between the use of thematic learning approach and learners’ writing skill improvement.

A study conducted by Libby in 1991 on the use of thematic instruction to improve literature and writing for learners of primary grades; however, the researcher acknowledges that the study results can be generalized on intermediate learners (i.e., middle school learners). After several weeks of treatment, learners become able to link the different aspects of the writing skill and can finally write short passages by themselves. As he states: “With thematic units to integrate the learning areas, the curriculum naturally flows together and students see relationships between subjects” (1991, p. 22).

Another research study is done by Song Jiang (2017) at university of Hawai’i at Manoa, the study entitled “The Impact of Thematic-based Language Instruction.” Following Stoller and Grabe’s methodology of selecting themes, the researcher conducts a study on 108 learners using as data collection tools pre and post-tests, and a survey for learners’ opinions on themes and topics chosen. The results of the study show that thematic-based language instruction provides learners with educational opportunity to acquire context knowledge related to their real world, and superior level in language skills as it enhances their writing performances.

In relation to the previous studies, Siti, Erny, and Kamaruzaman (2009) also fulfill a study on the effectiveness of thematic-based instruction as a suitable method to improve the writing skill for 36 pre-degree ESL learners in a Malaysian institution. The study findings prove that implementing thematic learning can effectively enhance learners’ writing proficiency. Additionally, the study highly recommends EFL teachers to inculcate this approach to learning for the development of language skills; precisely, the writing skill.

In general, it is apparent that thematic-based learning and the writing skill are interrelated. For this, teachers should be aware of the appropriate way to use this approach to teaching to help learners improve their writing performances; therefore, to achieve their academic goals.

Conclusion

Theme-based Learning is considered a suitable approach in the process of language teaching and learning for young learners. Its effectiveness lies in bringing the world outside to learners inside the classroom, and linking it to their real interests and enthusiasms. This approach helps learners not only learn, but also make sense of their learning which eventually paves the

way for them to develop different skills, critical thinking, creativity, and to become active parts in the teaching and learning program.

Chapter Two:

The Writing Skill

Chapter Two: The Writing Skill: Fundamentals

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Introduction

The purpose of learning a language is to improve the learner's four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, to achieve the ultimate goal of mastering the language. Along with that, The Writing skill is one of the central pillars of language learning. It is often considered the most difficult and the most challenging skill for both teachers and learners as it requires special attention and efforts, also it is seen as an indispensable means of communication that learners have to master and develop an appropriate level of linguistic competence that consequently enables them to produce coherent and comprehensible writings.

This chapter is devoted to the speaking skill, it deals with the influential definitions of writing, its importance and its commonly most used types. It also tackles different components and the process followed for effective writing. And finally, this chapter ends with highlighting the major difficulties most learners encounter and hamper their ability to write effectively.

2.1. Definition of The Writing Skill

Many scholars and researchers proposed a number of views and definitions for the skill of writing; however, there is no ultimate inclusive definition. Pincas defines writing as broad and clear as it is generally known by most learners and educators, he says: "writing is a system of graphic symbols, i.e., letters or combination of letters which relate to sounds we produce while speaking" (1992, as cited in Homsy, p. 20). Moreover, Widdowson (2001, p. 62) rightly says: "writing is the use of visual medium to manifest the graphological and grammatical system of the language." That is to say, writing can be said to be the act of forming symbols that have to be arranged, according to certain conventions, to form words, and words have to be arranged to form sentences.

Furthermore, Crystal states that: "writing is a way of communicating which uses a system of visual marks made on some kind of surface. It is one kind of graphic expression" (2006, p. 275), while, Linse identifies writing as a combination of process and product. In which, the process refers to the act of gathering ideas and working with them until they are presented in a manner that is polished and comprehensible to readers.

Learners may communicate their ideas and different attitudes in written form. Every time they compose, they also have to take into consideration the writing style that largely

depends on a particular topic, i.e., the form and manner of expression of ideas. This idea is explained by Harmer (2004): “writing is a way to produce language and express idea, feeling and opinion.” Furthermore, he states that “writing is a process that what people write is often heavily influenced by the constraints of genres, and then these elements have to be present in learning activities” (p. 31). For Broadman, writing is more than a way of communication, or a system of symbols and graphs, but it is a whole process that encompasses all the features mentioned before, he believes:

writing is a continuous process of thinking, organizing, rethinking, and reorganizing. The mastery of vocabulary, spelling, grammar, punctuation, appropriate content, word selection appropriate to the audience, topic and occasion, are required in writing. However, the ability of thinking and the ability to organize are crucial in order to make you express your idea in well-organized sentences, which have a good coherence and cohesion. That’s why many peoples and students find it difficult to write (2002, p. 4, as cited in Pardosi).

All in all, these definitions highlight the fact that writing is the activity of being able to communicate ideas using graphic representations of the language being used. However, it is much more than these productions. It is a difficult, sophisticated, and prestigious activity of communication and an important skill for language users and learners.

2.2. Importance of The Writing Skill

Writing has always been considered as an important skill in ESL/EFL teaching and learning, and great interest is given to its importance due to its significant role in the learning process.

Olshtain (1991, p. 235) acknowledges the integration of writing in the teaching-learning process: “writing as a communicative activity needs to be encouraged and nurtured during the language learner’s course of study.” Walsh also tackled the same point, he claims that “Writing is important because it is used extensively in higher education and in the workplace. If students don’t know how to express themselves in writing, they will not be able to communicate well with professors, employers, peers, or just about anyone else.”

On the other hand, Maley (2009), emphasizes the following benefits of writing:

1. It aids language development at all levels: grammar, vocabulary, phonology and discourse; it requires learners to manipulate the language in interesting and demanding ways as they attempt to express uniquely personal meanings;
2. It requires a willingness to play with the language; and
3. It concentrates more on the right side of the brain, with a focus on feelings, physical sensations, intuition and musicality; it also affords scope for learners who in the usual processes of formal instruction are therefore often at a disadvantage.

As a conclusion, Harmer summarizes the importance of the writing skill that it can be used for a variety of purposes, ranging from being merely a “back up” for grammar teaching to a major syllabus strands in its own right, where mastering the ability to write effectively is seen as a key objective for learners.

2.3. Writing and Other Skills of the Language

2.3.1. The Four Language Skills Working Together

Writing is not an isolated skill. The four language skills work together to enhance the development of each other: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. According to Johnson (2008) language skills enhance each other, i.e., the development of individual language skills improves the development of others. But still, writing has a unique position in language teaching since its acquisition involves a practice and knowledge from the afore mentioned skills.

2.3.2. Writing and Speaking

Although both writing and speaking are productive skills, but they differ in a number of dimensions including patterns of the cognitive process, socio-cultural norms, and the linguistic aspects of the language as proposed by Weigle (2002).

These differences are further explained by many authors; for instance, Raimes states that “we learned to speak our first language at home without systematic instruction, whereas most of us had to be taught in school how to write that same language” (1983, p. 4). Harmer (2004) in the same line agrees that the difference between the two skills lies in that the speaking skill is acquired subconsciously through imitation; whereas, writing is a conscious process that requires efforts and formal instruction. While Yule in 1983 asserts that “speech is less richly

organized than written language, containing less densely packed information, but containing more interactive markers and planning fillers” (as cited in Guidoum, 2019, p. 11).

As to conclude, Finnegan (1994, p. 120) summarizes the differences between speaking and writing in four major points:

1. Speaking can be delivered by using various gestures, intonation, voice and pitch whereas; writing has only words and syntax.
2. Planning in writing takes time than speaking.
3. Speakers and addressees have a direct communication to get closer to them but writers and reader are not.
4. Speaking tends to rely on the context of the interaction more than writing.

2.3.3 Writing and Reading

It is said that a good reader tends to be a good writer, McDonald et al. (2015, p. 1) praise this correlation saying that “together, reading and writing make a conversation between the reader and the writer.” And Thomas (1976) supports that: “a significant relationship exists between writing achievements and the amount and variety of reading experiences. In addition, writing and reading are two complementary and similar processes; they include the same cognitive process.”

Reading and writing are completely different skills among the four language skills; reading is a receptive skill, and writing is productive, but the two influence one another. Notably, many studies insist on the strong relationship between the reading achievements and the writing ability.

Eventually Barrs (2000), Shanahan (2008), and Shen (2009) agree that “reading and writing are interdependent” (as cited in Alkhaldi, 2018, p. 175). Similarly, Johnson (2008) demonstrates that reading can develop the learners’ writing proficiency through exposure to reading patterns which eventually develop their grammar and enrich their vocabulary.

Moreover, Reading is a source of ideas for learners to enable them to write because as stated in Zainal, Husin, and Pendidikan (2010, p. 5) “the majority of the respondents have difficulty in getting started on the writing because of lack of ideas.” Therefore, reading is the main driver that provides learners the motive and equips them with the necessary information to write as it expands and deepens their knowledge, and broadens their outlooks.

Whereas, Harris (1993), on the inter-relationship between reading and writing, suggests five relationships to teach reading to improve writing:

1. Reading and writing are personal and social activities that are used in order to communicate. Writers need a response to what they write; readers need to respond to what they read and get responses to their analysis of the text.
2. Reading and writing are reciprocal. Writers can learn much about writing by reading; readers can learn much about reading by writing.
3. Reading and writing are interdependent. Readers cannot read if writers do not write. Likewise, writers cannot write if readers do not read.
4. Reading and writing is parallel. Both having purpose, depend on the background knowledge, and focus on the construction of meaning.
5. Reading and writing help discover the world around us. As writers write, they need to read. And as readers read, they often need to write.

2.4. Types of Writing

Broadly speaking, writing is a way to express thoughts and ideas and each individual has his own way of writing which reflects his way of thinking. Consequently, each piece of writing requires different style and tone that can decide on the basis of its content besides the purpose the writer wants to attain. Therefrom, there are mainly five categories of writings that are identified by Callella (2001):

2.4.1. Expository Writing: The author intends to inform, explain, describe or define their subject to you. This is the most common type of writing found in text books. In this type of writing, the author is mostly trying to tell the readers about the subject by stating facts and figures

2.4.2. Descriptive Writing: It uses a lot of great visual words to help the readers see the person, place or thing they are writing about. The writing can be poetic at times, and explain things in great detail. When reading a descriptive writing, the reader feels as if he is there or can actually pictures in mind what the writer is describing. Metaphors, similes and symbols are often used in descriptive writing.

2.4.3. Narrative Writing: It is very common in novels, poetry and biographies. The author puts himself in the character's shoes and writes as if he is that person. he tells life stories and involves plots and storylines.

2.4.4. Persuasive Writing: The essence of persuasive writings is to try to defend an opinion. This type is considered a biased material and it is most often found in advertising.

2.4.5. Creative Writing: It is seen the most fun type of writing. The writer can write anything that comes to his mind in any way he creates. Creative writing is often thought provoking, entertaining and more interesting to read and it includes: short stories, poetry, novels and plays.

2.5. Effective Writing

In order to produce a good a piece of writing, learners need to consider different elements of the writing skill, in this context, Jacobs at al. (1981, p. 90) highlight the following components needed for writing:

2.5.1. Content: The substance of writing, the experience of the main idea, i.e., groups of related statements that a writer presents as unit in developing a subject. Content paragraph do the work of conveying ideas rather than fulfilling special function of transition, restatement, and emphasis.

2.5.2. Organization: It is scarcely more than an attempt to place together all condition of fact and confusing ideas. Even in early drafts it may still be searching for order, trying to make patterns in its materials and working to bring particulars of its subject in line with what is still only a half-formed notion of purpose.

2.5.3. Vocabulary: The selection of words that is suitable with the content. It begins with the assumption that the writer wants to express the ideas as clearly and directly as he can. As a general rule, clarity should be the prime objective, besides choosing precise words that express meaning.

2.5.4. Language Use: The use of correct grammatical form and synthetic pattern of separating, combining, and grouping ideas in words, phrases, clauses, and sentences to bring out logical relationship in paragraph writing.

2.5.5. Mechanic: The use of graphic conventional of the language, i.e., the steps of arranging letters, words paragraphs by using knowledge of structure and some other related to one another.

Mechanics according to Harmer in his book “How to Teach Writing” (2004) is divided into three main sub-components: hand-writing, spelling, and punctuation. And insists on its importance for learners to pay attention to when writing because any failure or misuse can lead to failure in understanding (Harmer, 2004, p. 49).

2.5.5.1. Hand-Writing: Guidoum provides a broad and general definition of what hand-writing is, he says: “handwriting is a physical act which transforms human sounds into meaningful symbolic forms” (2019, p. 21). While Levine (2002) gives a more complex definition as: “it is a sensory experience that develops fine motor skills and connects cognitive and physiological activity” (Levine, 2002, p. 55).

On the other hand, Harmer (2004, p. 44) emphasizes the significance of hand-writing. He states: “although a lot of writing is typed on computer keyboards, handwriting is still necessary and widespread... in world terms, a minority occupation.”

2.5.5.2. Spelling: It is a complex and regular process of writing words correctly, this process is governed by clear rules that make a spelling acceptable or not (Harmer, 2004, p. 46). He continues to say that although there are rules to help for correct spelling, but it is still difficult in one way or another for many learners because of the absence of complete correspondence between sounds and symbols.

2.5.5.3. Punctuation: It is as defined by Merriam Webster Dictionary: “the act or practice of inserting standardized marks or signs in written matter to clarify the meaning and separate structural units.” In other words, punctuation is the practice action or system of inserting points or other small marks into texts in order to aid interpretation or to show division of text into sentences or clauses. Some of these marks are shown in the following table with their purpose and an example of each mark of how to use it properly:

Punctuation	Purpose	Examples
period [.]	End a sentence	Most sentences end in a period.
question mark [?]	Indicate a question	"What time is it?" she asked. "How much longer?" he asked.
Exclamation point [!]	Express emotion	"I hate you!" he shouted. "I love you!" she shouted.
semicolon [;] or comma [,] + conjunction [and, or, nor, for, so, but, yet]	Connect complete sentences (two independent clauses)	It is raining; the dog is wet. or It is raining, and the dog is wet.
comma [,] but if one or more items in that list already have a comma, use a semicolon [;]	Connect items in a list	My lunch is a sandwich, an apple, and a bag of pretzels. <i>but</i> My dinner is a salad of spinach, carrots, and tomatoes; a bowl of pasta; and two breadsticks.
quotation marks [" "]	Indicate a quotation	"To be or not to be" is one of the most famous lines from <i>Hamlet</i> .
comma [,] or, less commonly, colon [:]	Introduce a quotation (words directly spoken)	She yelled, "Let's get out of here!" The president declared: "We will prevail."
apostrophe [']	Show possession or contraction	Why is Lisa's wallet in Ben's backpack?

Figure 2: Punctuation Marks (Source: Teaching and Learning Center, 2016)

2.5.6. Clarity

Another component for effective writing is clarity. It is defined by Starkey as: "an effective piece of writing is the one that is... clear" (2004, n.d.). She acknowledges that clarity is a crucial element that helps writing to be readable and guarantees the understanding of what has been written (2004, p. 11). Consequently, she identifies some guidelines that help learners to achieve clarity:

1. Eliminate ambiguity by avoiding words and phrases that carry more than one meaning. The learner has to carefully choose the appropriate word that convey what he intends to say.
2. Use of modifiers that add powerful meaning and originality in writing by using specific adjectives and adverbs.
3. Be concise: In the same line, Starkey states: "wordiness is boring, and it takes up valuable time and space." Therefore, learner should be direct and right to the point by eliminating unnecessary words and phrases, and using the active or the passive voice whenever possible

2.5.7. Coherence

Along with clarity, coherence also is an important element in writing, where success or failure can depend on the learner's ability to communicate his ideas and arguments with his reader clearly. Whatever inspiration or originality of these concepts, they are lost in their meaning and value if they cannot be expressed in a simple, logical manner.

Jones (2007, p. 134) believes that “writing is coherent if the ideas flow smoothly from one sentence to the next sentence and the parts of the text logically relate to one another.”

2.6. Approaches to Writing

Teachers may only use one approach, or combine certain approaches in teaching writing. This depends on the teacher's skill in teaching writing. Raimes (1983, p. 11) claims that “there is no one way to teach writing, but many ways.”

2.6.1. The Product-based Approach

The product approach in writing was of the very first approaches that emerged in the early eighties, where the focus of the teacher was merely on the learner's final production and the accuracy of their writings in terms of mechanical aspects such as grammar and syntax.

2.6.1.1. Definition

Product Approach is basically the traditional way to teach writing and one of the earliest approaches, frequently used since 1960. According to Nunan (1999), in this approach the focus is on the final product which should be a coherent, error-free text and learners initiate, copy and transform models provided by textbooks or by teachers. Therefore, modeling is at the center of this approach and it has always been regarded as a beneficial source for providing feedback to students as well as being an effective teaching tool, models can lead students to be aware of various aspects of writing such as style, vocabulary, organization and structure.

2.6.1.2. Stages

Pincas in (1984) identifies four stages in the product approach which are respectively as follows: familiarization, controlled writing, guided writing, and free writing. (as cited in Namoushi, 2008).

2.6.1.2.1. Familiarization: Learners are exposed to a model text, then they analyze the text by looking at the features, such as organization of ideas, use of language.

2.6.1.2.2. Controlled Writing: Learners do controlled activities to practice the features highlighted in the analysis of the model text.

2.6.1.2.3. Guided Writing: Learners prepare to imitate the model text by organizing a pre-determined set of ideas to fit the model.

2.6.1.2.4. Free Writing: Learners do the writing task by using the skills, structures and vocabulary they have practiced to produce the expected written product.

To conclude, it is undeniable that the product approach in writing is important and mostly significant in supplying linguistic knowledge to learners in terms of structures and rules. However, as Tangpermpoon (2008), it tends to overemphasize the importance of grammar, syntax, and mechanics and gives little attention to the text content, its purpose, and the audience. Consequently, learners will lack motivation in learning and have high pressure in creating their writing tasks.

2.6.2. The Process-based Approach

The process-based approach was introduced in EFL classrooms in 1970's as an alternative to process-based approach in which teachers and instructors start to employ it in teaching writing with attention to content prior to form.

2.6.2.1. Definition

In English as Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, process writing has dominated the teaching writing. This approach shifted the attention from the traditional view of looking at writing purely as a product to emphasize the process of writing.

Nemouchi (2008) states that the major aim of this approach is to train learners how to generate ideas for writing, plan these ideas, take into account the type of audience, draft and redraft in order to produce a final written paper that is likely to communicate their ideas.

Murray (1992, p. 16) defines the process approach as follows:

The process-oriented approach refers to a teaching approach that focuses on the process a writer engages in when constructing meaning. This teaching approach concludes with editing as a final stage in text creation, rather than an initial one as a product-oriented approach. The process-oriented approach

may include identified stages of the writing process such as: pre-writing, writing and re-writing. Once the rough draft has been created, it is polished into subsequent drafts with the assistance of peer and teacher conferencing.

2.6.2.2. Stages

Harmer (2004, p. 4-6) suggests that the process writing has four main elements. They are planning, drafting, editing (reflecting and revising), and final version.

Johnson (2008, p. 179) also cites the five steps in the writing process. They are prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing which further were explained by Coffin et. al. (2003, p. 34-34):

2.6.2.2.1. Prewriting: It is to find the ideas, collect information, and organize the thoughts. Prewriting strategies include brainstorming, free-writing and journal writing. After that, the next stage is that learners begin to organize ideas by mind mapping, clustering, and branching.

2.6.2.2.2. Drafting: In drafting, learners develop the meaning using ideas in pre-writing strategies, narrow down the broad focus, and remove or add information.

2.6.2.2.3. Peer Review: In this stage, learners seek and respond to others while a text is under development. Peer review can be in the form of oral or written comment by peers using guidelines from the teacher.

2.6.2.2.4. Reflection: It means that letting the piece of writing sit for a while before coming back to it with fresh mind. Reflection time allows the learners to find the gaps in the writing task.

2.6.2.2.5. Editing and Proofreading: Learners should attend with the mechanic of writing, including formatting and language accuracy. The final stages include polishing the text.

While Coffin et al. (2003, p. 33-34) explain that writing process includes eight different stages. They are pre-writing, planning, drafting, reflecting, peer or tutor reviewing, revising, and editing/proofreading. The following figure shows the stages of process writing approach:

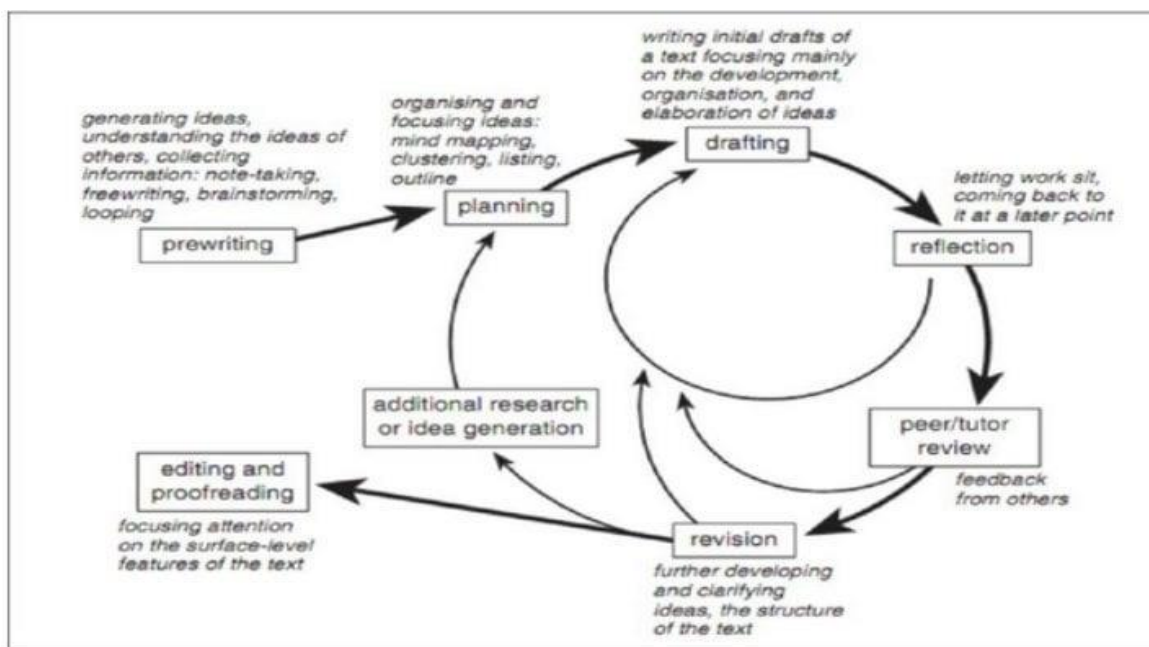


Figure 3: Stages of the Process-based Approach (Source: Coffin et al., 2003, p.34)

Despite the fact that it is widely used in EFL/ESL classrooms, it still has some limitations, as Badger and White (2000) point out that learners have no clear understanding about the characteristics of writing and are provided with insufficient linguistic input to write in L2 successfully in a certain text type. They also have to spend quite a long time to complete one particular piece of writing in the classroom. Furthermore, Bayat (2014) adds to the list of disadvantages the fact that the process-based approach does not account for the mental processes used by the learners during text production, and that it ignores grammar structure and the written product which may cause inconveniences. Pritchard & Honeycutt (2006) also support this position as they claim that when people write they do not follow a fixed order.

2.6.3. The Genre-based Approach

There are two main reasons why genre-based approach to teaching writing has a specific interest. Firstly, it is a more useful starting point to give insights to learners of how to replicate successfully a particular genre because it attempts to identify the features of successful writings, and then teach them to learners. Secondly, these learners need and want to reproduce certain written genres by themselves to achieve academic success.

2.6.3.1 Definition

“Genre” is used in linguistics study and becomes a kind language object to study. Martin (1999) states that: “genre is communication activity having and orienting goal.” Then, Christie Dan Martin (2000, as cited in Dirgeyasa, 2016) adds that: “genre is the particular usage of the language in a certain social circumstance such as interview genre, media genre, or advertisement genre, and so forth.”

According to Byrne (1984, p. 28), genre based approach is defined as a framework for language instruction based on examples of a particular genre. Genre-based approach is an approach which is also known as text based instruction. Hyon (1996) claims that genre-based approach places great emphasis on the relationship between text-genres and their contexts.

2.6.3.2. Stages

Cope and Kalantzis (1993, p. 10-11) explain the stages (the wheel as they called them) a learner goes through by following the genre-based approach. The approach is divided into three phases; in the first modelling phase the learner is exposed to a number of texts of the genre he has to produce, this is followed by joint construction of the text in which the learner participates in the process of writing guided by the teacher. Finally, in the last phase the learner independently constructs his own text.

2.6.3.2.1. Modeling: It is the stage where a certain genre is given to the learners by the teacher. They analyze it in order to know the nature of its features in terms of linguistics features, structures of the text and the communicative purpose. It is important to know because each type of genre has its own linguistic features, structural patterns and communicative purpose as well.

2.6.3.2.2. Joint Construction: The learners in this phase do the exercise by manipulating and modifying the text given in terms of relevant language usages.

2.6.3.2.3. Independent Construction: In this stage, the learners try to produce a certain genre type by using their previous understanding and knowledge.

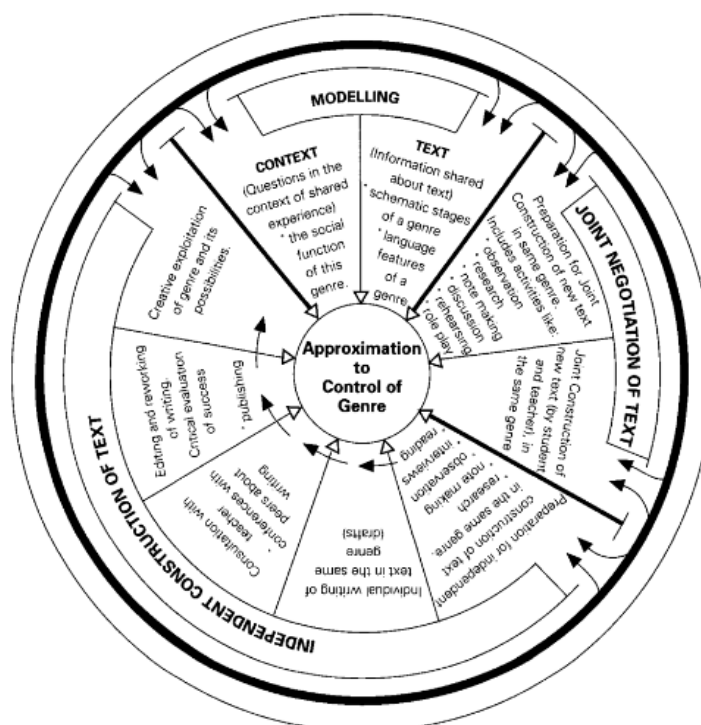


Figure 4: The Martin/DPS "Wheel" Model of Genre Literacy Pedagogy (Source: Cope & Kalantzis, 1993, p.11)

Although the genre-based approach has been well received in EFL teaching, it is not without its critics. There are two areas of debate that can be identified as Badger and White (2000) state; firstly, the negative side of the genre-based approach is that learners may not have enough knowledge of appropriate language or vocabulary to express what they intend to communicate to a specific audience. Secondly, the genre approach undervalues the writing skills which learners need to produce a written product and ignores the writing abilities they have in other areas.

2.7. The Process of Writing

The process of writing is viewed as a result of a complex process of planning, drafting, reviewing, and revising. For Richards and Renandya (2002, p. 315-316) the term "process writing" in EFL classrooms is no more than just an approach to teaching writing to learners and how to produce written products through different stages, but also a construction of a process-oriented writing instructions that affects learners' writing performances.

2.7.1. Planning: In this stage, learners are asked to generate ideas using some techniques such as: brainstorming, clustering, free-writing, and Wh-questions. Also, with the help of activities provided by the teacher.

2.7.2. Drafting: The focus in this stage is on the fluency of writing rather than the accuracy of grammatical structures or the neatness of the draft. In this stage, learners are expected to link ideas together and create a comprehensive content based on the ideas gathered in the first stage.

2.7.3. Reviewing: Learners now share what they have written by themselves with the writing groups formed in the classroom to get feedback from their peers or from their teacher while discussing. This feedback helps them to expand their writings and rearrange their content in terms of adding some new ideas and eliminating unnecessary parts.

2.7.4. Revising: In the last stage of the writing process, learners check the mechanical aspects of writing. Before submitting their final productions to the teacher, they should review their drafts in terms of spelling mistakes and punctuation rules to ensure its readability.

However, the process from Gentry and Mcneel's view (2014) is as follows:

1. Pre-writing (planning): The learner identifies everything what he needs to do before he starts drafting. In this stage, he should find the ideas, build on the ideas, make the plan and the structure of writing ideas.
2. Writing after having planned: The learner is ready to start writing. He drafts with some kind of directions and rules, identifies the best time and location to write, and eliminates potential distractions.
3. Revising (organizing): When revising the work, many writers naturally adopt the A.R.R.R. approach; Add: for additional scenes and any additional details. Rearrange: consider the flow, pacing and sequencing of the content. Remove: he may need to eliminate passages that do not quite fit, and Replace: try to look for different resources, and if there is something better for the draft, he rewrites it and replace it.
4. Editing: (Making sure that sentences themselves are sentences, the words used are the right words, the spelling and punctuation are correct). Check for repetition, clarity, grammar, spelling and punctuation.
5. Proofing: (Making sure no little mistakes are left). Using these five steps does not mean to write five drafts. Write one draft, leaving space for correction, work on the existing draft, and copy the finished product on a paper.

2.8. Teaching the Writing Skill

Teaching is showing or helping someone to learn how to do something providing with knowledge, causing to know or to understand (Brown, 2007). It means that teaching is a process that helps the students to know or to the material easily

Therefore, teaching writing is for Raimes (1983, n.d.) “a unique way to reinforce learning. Teaching writing is the process of transferring knowledge of writing from the teacher to the learners; the teacher does some actions to make them know and understand about how to write something correctly.”

2.8.1. The Role of the Teacher

Teacher plays an important role in the process of teaching and learning of the writing skill, his primary role is to deliver classroom instructions that help learners to acquire knowledge. To accomplish this, the teacher should prepare effective lessons, manage the classroom (i.e., time, materials, environment, learners, and himself). But being a teacher involves much more than executing lesson plans; in addition to ensuring that learners experience academic success, teachers should also function other roles in the classroom. Harmer (2001, p. 261-262) says that although the teacher need to deploy some or all of the usual role when learners are asked to write, the ones that are especially important are as follows:

2.8.1.1. Motivator: One of the teacher’s principal role in writing task is to motivate the learners, creating the right condition for the generation of ideas, persuading them of the usefulness of the activity, and encouraging them to make as much as effort as possible for maximum benefit. This may require special and prolonged effort on the teacher part for longer process-writing sequences

2.8.1.2. Resource: Especially during more extended writing task, teachers should be ready to supply information and language where necessary. They need to inform their learners that they are available and be prepared to look at their work as it progresses, offering advice and suggestions in a constructive way. Because writing takes longer than conversation, for example, there is usually time for discussion with individual learners, or learners working in pairs or groups.

2.8.1.3. Feedback Provider: Giving feedback on writing tasks demands special care. Teachers should respond positively and encouragingly to the content of what their learners have written. When offering correction, teachers should choose what and how much to focus on based on what learners need at this particular stage of their studies, and the tasks they have undertaken

2.8.2. Techniques for Teaching Writing

According to Brown and Douglas (1980, p. 346) The specific principles for designing writing techniques emerge:

1. Incorporate practices of “good” writers.
2. Balance process and product.
3. Account for cultural/literary background.
4. Connect reading and writing.
5. Provide as much authentic writing as possible.
6. Frame your techniques in terms of prewriting, drafting, and revising stages.

2.8.3. Reasons for Teaching Writing

According to Byrne writing is mainly taught for pedagogical purposes:

1. The introduction and practice of some form of writing enables us to provide for different learning styles and needs. Some learners, especially those who do not learn easily through oral practice alone, feel more secure if they are allowed to read and write in the language. For such students, writing is likely to be an aid to retention, if only because they feel more at ease and relaxed.
2. Written work serves to provide the learners with some tangible evidence that they are making progress in the language. It is not likely to be a true index of their attainment, but once again it satisfies a psychological need.
3. Exposure to the foreign language through more than one medium, especially if skills are properly integrated, appears to be more effective than relying on a single medium alone.
4. Writing provides variety in classroom activities, serving as a break from oral work (and is therefore a quieter and more relaxed time for both learners and teachers. At the same time, it increases the amount of language contact through work that can be set out of class.

5. Writing is often needed for formal and informal testing. Although in general oral ability should be measured through oral tests, in practice we are often obliged by circumstances, such as the amount of time we have at our disposal and the number of students there are in the class, to use some form of written test. In some cases, a written test may even be appropriate.

Whereas Harmer (2001, p. 79) illustrates that teaching writing is derived from many reasons, such as:

1. Reinforcement: Some learners acquire languages in a purely oral/aural way, but most of them benefit greatly from seeing the language written down.
2. Language development: The mental activity learners go through in order to construct proper written texts is all part of the ongoing learning experience.
3. Learning style: For many learners, producing language in a slower way is something they appreciate. Writing provides time and ease for learners more than face-to-face communication does.
4. Writing as a skill: Learners need to know how to write essays, how to put written reports together and how the writing system operates (for example, in terms of conventions such as punctuation, paragraph construction) just as they need to know how to pronounce language appropriately.

2.9. Assessment and the Writing Skill

Assessment has a vital impact in the education process and play a critical role in the teaching-learning process. Since writing is a productive skill and considered according to Hyland (2003) the most difficult language skill to learn, it requires a great degree of accuracy. It is therefore the most difficult language skill to teach, and to assess. Through appropriate assessment, teachers can classify and grade their learners to improve their level, and give feedback to structure and shape their teaching practices accordingly.

2.9.1. Definition of Assessment

Assessment is a general item consists of methods and techniques used to gather information about learners' abilities, knowledge understanding and motivation (Allan, 1999; Ekbatani & Pierson, 2000; Lambert & Lines, 2000). It is broadly the gathering of information

about learners' learning. While in its fundamental sense, assessment in language teaching and learning refers to the "act of collecting information and making judgments about the learner's knowledge of a language and ability to use it" (Chapelle and Brinley, 2002, p. 267). In the same vein, Black and Williams (1998, p. 1) describes it as "any activity adapted by teachers that provides information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching-learning process". Thus, assessment involves teachers' observation and analysis of learners' works. It is also, defined by Carr and Harris (Carr and Harris, 2001, p. 35) as: "an integral part of instruction... effective classroom assessment is relevant to immediate learning."

On the whole, assessment is accepted as one of the very crucial parts of teaching process whereby teachers can determine the level of skills or knowledge of their learners, identify their strengths and weaknesses to raise their motivation, and allow for teachers the opportunity to adjust their teaching methods.

2.9.2. Types of Assessment

2.9.2.1. Formative Assessment

This type of assessment often called on-going or assessment for learning. As the name suggests, it is used to form and change the learning process in order to achieve better results. According to Voinea (2018, p. 9) formative assessment is a continuous process that is a constant companion of the instruction process and which has as a main aim the development of learning by orienting and guiding. Along with that, Black and William (1998, p. 7) state: "it is to be interpreted as encompassing all those activities undertaken by teachers, and/or by their students which provide information to be used as feedback to modify teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged."

Through these definition, it can be said that formative assessment is an uninterrupted process that focuses mainly on learning development and mastery, and on guiding learners in becoming skillful in their own learning.

2.9.2.2. Summative Assessment

Summative assessment is considered the most common type of assessment used to assess learning in education. It is according to Butterfield and Riding (1990, p. 59) "used to determine the extent to which a candidate has achieved the intended outcomes of a course". It is therefore a way to make judgements about learners' achievements at the end of a course. In relation to the formative assessment, summative assessment can be used to great effect in conjunction and

alignment with it; as Knight (2002, p. 277) identifies a series of similarities between formative and summative assessment: “all assessment looks for evidence of achievement; judgements are made about the match between evidence and criteria. The difference lies in the timing the teacher chooses to assess his learners, Brown (2003, p. 6) assert that this type “...aims to measure or summarize what a student has grasped and typically occurs at the end of a course or a unit of instruction.”

As a conclusion, summative assessment is a form of appraisal that occurs at the end of an instructional unit that helps teachers to evaluate mastery of learning and offers information on what learners know and do not know.

2.9.3. Writing Assessment

In educational settings, the writing skill has a special status and it is more valued than the other skills of language for its standardized nature. However, many teachers struggle when it comes to assess learners’ writings, this is due to two principal factors. On the one hand, the variety of writing purposes, styles and genres makes writing ability so extensive. On the other hand, the bias of the judgments made on samples of writing is most of the time inevitable Weigle (2002). For this, teachers should look for effective ways to assess writing and help learners improve their writing competencies.

One of the techniques to assess writing is the use of valid writing test that is, according to Hughes (2003, p. 83), a test that contains a variety of writing tasks and gives a more representative picture of a learners’ writing abilities than one that contains only one writing task and then score is given for different aspects of the piece of writing, such as grammar, choice of words, and mechanics. Another way for assessment is the use of Portfolios “A collection of students’ writing, assembled over time” (Richards, 2020, n.d.), this collection usually contains learners’ best works and writing samples that show learners’ progress and self-assessment of their strengths and weaknesses in writing. This technique is used for summative assessment to give learners their final grade. Additionally, a teacher can opt for a direct test, here the teacher has to directly evaluate and score his learners’ writings. This type of tests involves production of sample writings where the focus is mainly on learners’ writing competence in terms of grammar, punctuation, content, and vocabulary (Drid, 2018, p. 300).

2.10. Writing Difficulties

Byrne Donn (1984) identifies that there are several problems that learners face when writing, they are as he suggests: Psychological, cognitive, and linguistic factors.

2.10.1. Psychological Factor: Speech is the natural and normal medium of communication in most circumstances and accustoms people both to having someone physically present when they use language and to getting feedback of some kind. Writing, on the other hand, is essentially a solitary activity and the fact that people are required to write on by themselves, without the possibility of interaction or the benefit of feedback, this makes the act of writing difficult.

2.10.2. Cognitive Factor: Writing on the other hand is learned through a process of instructions, learners have to master the written form of the language and to learn certain structures which are less used in speech, or perhaps not used at all, but which are important for effective communication in writing. They also have to learn how to organize their ideas in such a way that they can be understood by a reader who is not present and perhaps by a reader who is not known to them.

2.10.3. Linguistic Factor: In writing, learners have to compensate the absence of these features (repeating, backtracking, and expanding the speech): they have to keep the channel of communication open through their own efforts and to ensure both through the choice of sentence structure and by the way sentences are linked together and sequenced that the text we produce can be interpreted on its own.

2.10.4. Language Interference in Foreign Language Writing

Another difficulty that learners may encounter in learning how to write is mother tongue interference. Weigle (2002, p. 37) states that “in order to write good English, I know that I had to be myself actually meant not to my Chinese self. It meant that I had to create an English self and be that self.” That is to say, when learners are asked to write in English, the first step to do is to ignore and forget about their mother tongue and try to come up with all the information they have learned.

As Brown (1987, p. 82) points out:

It is clear from learning theory that a person will use whatever previous experience he or she has had with language in order to facilitate the second student language learning process. The native language is an obvious set of

prior experiences. Sometimes the language is negatively transferred, and we say then that negative interference has occurred.

Berthold et al in 1997 identify that interference happens at grammatical level in terms of word-order, pronouns, verb tense, and mood. As well as at lexical level that, according to the same authors, refers to the borrowing of words from first language and attempting to make them sound more alike to L2.

Conclusion

Writing in a foreign language is a complex task. It necessitates knowledge, attention, and commitment from both teachers and learners in order to reinforce and ease the teaching-learning process. Additionally, teachers should be aware of the various approaches to teaching writing as well as the effective methods that can help to increase learners' ability to writing. They should also select appropriate materials (texts) and guide their learners during the process of writing through the different stages; from brainstorming and organizing ideas, through drafting, to finally submitting their written productions. Therefore, teachers offer for their learners the opportunity to take control and responsibility for their learning.

Chapter Three:
Data Analysis and Interpretation

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Introduction

The two previous chapters of the present study conduct the theoretical parts which are related to Thematic-based Learning and the writing skill. While the current chapter deals with the field work through investigating the usefulness of Thematic Learning Approach to improve EFL learners' writing performance to find answers for the raised research questions and to check the credibility of the hypothesis. Furthermore, this chapter provides a detailed description of the research methodology followed in the under-investigated study in terms of research approach, design, sampling, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures. Furthermore, it presents a detailed analysis and interpretation of the gathered data through an online semi-structured questionnaire designed for middle school teachers.

3.1. Research Approach

The present study mainly aims to investigate the use of Thematic Learning strategy in enhancing EFL learners' writing performances, as it also seeks to highlight some improvements in their writing abilities. Therefore, the research approach adopted to carry out this study is the qualitative approach because it serves the nature of the study. Besides, this approach is appropriate to answer the research questions and ensure the realization of its aims.

3.2. Research Design

In relevance to the qualitative approach adopted for the present study, a case study design is considered the most suitable to provide a clear description to understand the current issue. As Kumar (2014, p. 155) states: "this design [case study] is of immense relevance when the focus of a study is on extensively exploring and understanding rather than confirming and quantifying." Accordingly, the case study strategy is used since the present study aims to understand and describe the interrelationship between the use of Thematic Learning and learners' writing skill's improvements.

3.3. Sampling

The questionnaire is designed as an online form for twenty (n=20) teachers of middle school. This sample is randomly chosen and it is based on the consideration that middle school

teachers will help to conduct the necessary data that serve the topic since they have a significant role in selecting what is a suitable technique in teaching writing.

3.4. Data Collection Methods

The nature of the research study dictates what research approach, research design, and data collection methods to use. For the sake of accomplishing the present, a semi-structured questionnaire is used as a data collection tool that goes in parallel with the nature of the study to achieve the desired results.

3.4.1. Questionnaire

The questionnaire is a method of data collection that is used by most of social sciences researchers because it suits most of their studies. It can be described as a booklet (more than two pages) that contains researcher's personal information and a series of questions divided into sections. Moreover, the questions can be (open-ended, close-ended, or mixture between them) and this determines the type of the questionnaire (structured, semi-structured, or unstructured).

3.4.1.1. Aims

The most important aim behind using a questionnaire for teachers is to know about their attitudes towards the benefits of using Thematic Instructions to enhance learners' writing skills in EFL classes.

3.4.1.2. Description of the Teachers' Questionnaire

This study uses an online survey website called Google Form (www.google.com/forms/) which provides an online service for collecting and organizing information. And it is chosen because it is easy to use, trusted, and widely known.

The online questionnaire is published on the second of April, 2020. The process of collecting answers took some time (about ten days) to obtain finally the required number on 19th, April, 2020. It is designed as follows: first, a cover page which consists of a short passage as an introduction in which it presents the current research and the instructions for teachers to answer it as required. In addition to both the researcher and supervisor's name are stated, also the researcher's e-mail in case of any enquiry.

The body of the questionnaire is composed of twenty-three (23) questions that vary between close-ended questions for which teachers are supposed to give a “yes” or “no” answer, or to choose the appropriate answer from a predetermined set of answers. In addition to this type of questions, there are open-ended questions, also called “follow-up” questions that take the form of “justify your answer” or “explain please”. These questions leave room for the respondents to freely express their opinions, offer suggestions, or make comments.

The questionnaire is organized in three (3) major sections which are: background information, writing skill, and the Thematic-based Learning.

Section one: Background Information

This section consists of four (4) questions to gather some personal information about the teacher’s qualification and teaching experience.

Section two: The Writing Skill

This section is devoted to collect information about the skill of writing. It includes twelve (12) questions which are varied between close-ended and open-ended questions. These questions aim to gather information concerning the importance of the writing skill, the approaches of teaching the teachers follow in teaching writing, as well as the teachers’ opinions concerning learners’ level in writing, the time allotted to teach them how to write. Moreover, teachers are asked to make suggestions about the frequency the learners are asked to write, and what are the common difficulties they encounter when they write. Additionally, some questions concerning teachers’ strategies in assessing writing and correcting errors and mistakes. At the end of this section, teachers are asked about their satisfactions with their learners’ level in writing, and to provide or suggest some strategies or solutions that are, for them, better alternatives that might help learners overcome their difficulties and therefore improve their ability to write effectively.

Section three: Thematic-based Instructions

The last section is about the Thematic-based Instructions, it contains seven (7) questions that aim to determine the effectiveness of this type of instructions and prove its efficiency to improve learners’ writing performance. The questions are close-ended for teachers to tick in the corresponding answer. These questions seek to know whether the participant teachers do use

this way of teaching in their classes or not, whether the themes chosen are: first, drawn from real-life contexts. Second, useful for learners to develop their writing skill or not. The questions also are asked to know learners' reactions on the use of this method, and finally to collect teachers' opinions if implementing this way of teaching in middle school classrooms can be suitable for learners to enhance their writing performance.

At the end of the questionnaire, some space is left for the respondents to make comments, offer suggestions, or give opinions about the questionnaire's form and questions, additional information about the skill of writing or the Thematic Learning, or personal observation in class that might help during the process of analysis and interpretation of the questionnaire.

3.4.1.3. Validation and Pilot Testing of the Questionnaire

The piloting stage is an important process in research, it is a tool to avoid any ambiguity or redundancy. Before administering the questionnaire to the sample chosen, it was first validated by the supervisor who said that no changes are required. Then, it was piloted with five (5) teachers who were randomly chosen from the target population, but they did not take part in answering the revised version of the questionnaire. Their recommended answers were taken into consideration and they were as follows:

Question one: How did you find the questions in general?

When teachers were asked this question, they all reported that the questions are direct, interesting, clear, and easy to answer.

Question two: Did you find any question needless or ambiguous?

Regarding this question, all teachers said that they did not notice any unusual questions and that there is no question that is needless or should be omitted.

Question three: Have you detected any grammar mistake, misuse of words, or punctuation marks?

All teachers agreed that the questionnaire is well-written and free from any mistake.

Question four: What do you think of the questionnaire in terms of form, organization, and questions?

The majority of the respondents reported that the questionnaire is well-formed, well organized, and that the questions are logically and smoothly ordered moving from general to specific. Only one teacher said that there are too many questions and the questionnaire is a little bit long to be answered.

Question five: feel free to make any suggestion to help improve the questionnaire

Through this question, we asked the respondents to write down any suggestions that enable us to improve the questionnaire. One teacher suggested to explain in what sense themes in Thematic Learning can help improve learners' writing skill. His suggestion was taken into consideration in which we have added a paragraph explaining to make it simpler and easy to understand for the respondents.

3.5. Data Analysis Procedure

The data obtained from the questionnaire is analyzed through counts, and percentages by using statistics, besides a descriptive analysis to see teachers' attitudes towards the use of Thematic Learning in relation to learners' writing performance improvement.

3.5.1. Analysis and Interpretation of the Teacher's Questionnaire

Section one: Background Information

Question one: Would you please specify your degree?

Degree	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)
License	10	50%
Master	9	45%
Magister	0	00%
Graduated from ENS	1	5%
Total	20	100%

Table 1: Teachers' Educational Qualification

The table above shows the general information about the teachers' professional qualification. As it is illustrated, 50% of the participant teachers have License degree, 45% of others declare that they have a Master degree. Whereas, only one (1) teacher, who represents

the last 5% as shown in the figure, states that he/she is a graduate from ENS (L'école Nationale des Enseignants).

Question two: How long have you been teaching English?

Years of teaching	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)
From 1 to 5	11	55%
From 7 to 13	5	25%
From 16 to 32	4	20%
Total	20	100%

Table 2: Teachers' Teaching Experience

The results indicate that more than half of teachers (55%) say that they have been teaching English in middle school for one (1) to five (5) years. while (25%) of them have experienced teaching English for seven to 13 years, whereas only one teacher (20%) have been teaching English for 16 to 23 years. As a conclusion, the majority of them have considerable experience in teaching English.

Question three: How do you consider teaching writing?

Option	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)
Very important	17	85%
Important	3	15%
Unimportant	0	00%
Total	20	100%

Table 3: Teachers' Attitude Towards the Writing Skill

Table three (3) demonstrates the importance of the writing skill, whereby 85% of the teachers acknowledge that this skill is very important, while 15% of them say that it is just important for learners to develop their writing abilities.

Question four: What are the major difficulties you face when teaching writing?

Option	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)
Time allotted	7	35%
Class size	4	20%

Both	9	45%
Total	20	100%

Table 4: Teachers' Major Difficulties in Teaching

The aim of this question is to find out the major difficulties teachers face in teaching the writing skill; 35% of them state that time allotted is the problem and that it is not sufficient. 20% say that the size of the classroom is the problem; where the class is overcrowded (about 45 learners) it is difficult for the teacher to teach. Whereas the majority of teachers (45%) determine that both time scheduled and class size pose obstacles for the teachers.

Section two: The Writing Skill

Question one: How important the writing skill is?

Option	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)
Very important	14	70%
Important	6	30%
Neutral	0	00%
Unimportant	0	00%
Not important at all	0	00%
Total	20	100%

Table 5: Importance of the Writing Skill

Relying on the results displayed in table five (5), the majority of the respondents (70%) assert that the skill of writing is very important to be taught, while 30% of them agreed that it is important.

Question two: Which approach do you follow in teaching writing?

Option	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)
Product-based approach	7	35%
Process-based approach	7	35%
Genre-based approach	0	00%
All of them	6	30%

Total	20	100%
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Table 6: Teaching Approaches Used by Teachers

The table above indicates that 35% of teachers state that they use the product-based approach; they justify their choice saying that it is effective for beginner learners of the English language because it provides models whereby they reinvest what they have learnt before as grammar rules, word-choice... through producing an organized piece of writing as shown in the model provided. In addition, the same rate (35%) of teachers claim that they use the process-based approach; in this, they state that by following this approach learner receive the input first through different lessons such as listening and reading practices, so that they can later produce a written message. Also, some add that the process approach gives learners a chance to think of what to write and how to organize ideas moving through different steps of creating the first draft, through revising to presenting the final text. Moreover, the rate of 30% is given to the “all of them” option; that is to say, these teachers use many approaches in teaching writing. In their opinion, teaching writing necessitates from the instructor to be flexible to choose the suitable approach depending on the situation of integration (i.e., through the topic chosen, the teacher decides the approach to follow). They also add that teaching writing requires sometimes a combination of all approaches that together serve the objectives of the writing activities and enables the mastery of the skill.

Question three: Do you allow sufficient time for the writing skill?

Option	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)
Yes	12	60%
No	8	40%
Total	20	100%

Table 7: Time Allotted for Teaching the Writing Skill by the Teacher

Table seven (7) shows whether the respondents allow sufficient time for teaching writing or not. The majority of answers collected (60%) reveal that teachers do allow enough time for the skill justifying their answers by saying that a teacher should get to know his learners and their individual differences first, then try to integrate them into groups and set up all the prerequisites, then explain to them what and how to write by reinvesting what these learners have seen in previous lessons to finally ask them to write individually. Whereas the other

proportion of teachers who represent 40% state that they do not give enough time for the skill of writing simply because the time allocated for that is very limited as scheduled in the curriculum.

Question four: During writing, do you give learners the opportunity to write:

Option	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)
Individually	1	05%
In pairs	2	10%
In groups	1	05%
Depending on the writing activities	16	80%
Total	20	100%

Table 8: How Learners Are Asked to Write

From the above table, it is noticed that the majority of participant teachers (80%) prefer to ask their learners to write depending on the writing activities; whereas the second percentage (10%) belongs to those teachers who choose to make their learners work in pairs during writing activities. While the rate of 5% is given equally to the two other options separately.

Question five: Do you think time scheduled for the writing skill is enough for learners to develop their competencies in writing?

Option	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)
Agree	2	10%
Disagree	14	70%
Neutral	4	20%
Total	20	100%

Table 9: Time Allotted for the Skill in the Curriculum

The aim of this question is to elicit teachers' opinions about the time allocated to the writing skill. 70% of respondents disagree and suffer from the time scheduled. 10% of them agree with that. While 20% of the teachers are neutral in their answers. However, they justify their choices as follows:

- a) Teachers who disagree with time planned say that one hour of writing per week in a class of about 45 learners is not enough because time passes by explaining the task, and usually learners are asked to submit the final draft at the end of the session which is difficult because only expert learners can write few lines. Whereas the others have to complete the task at home.
- b) Teachers who agree that time is enough state that in middle school time devoted for writing is four hours per sequence that is sufficient for learners to develop some writing skills.
- c) Teachers who tend to be neutral in answering the question view that learners are not alike. They have different competencies, abilities, and learning skills, and because writing can be challenging; therefore, teachers should focus more on how to integrate all the language skills to help learners to write effectively.

Question six: How many hours per week do you suggest are sufficient for learners to be able to write correctly, and effectively?

All teachers express their opinions concerning the number of hours that is sufficient for learners to write correctly and effectively as follows:

- a) Some agree on two hours per week in which: in the first hour, the teacher performs the lesson, and the second hour to give them written tasks to do.
- b) Others suggest three hours per week divided between reinvesting the prerequisites, performing the lessons and allowing the last hour for learners to produce pieces of writing.
- c) The last category of the participant teachers says that ninety (90) minutes per session can be sufficient, as they propose a strategy to consume the time as follows: one hour for the teacher to explain the lesson and thirty (30) minutes for the learners to some writings.

Question seven: How often do you ask learners to do writing tasks?

Option	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)
Always	6	30%
Sometimes	13	65%
Rarely	1	05%

Never	0	00%
Total	20	100%

Table 10: Frequency of Writing Tasks

The above table illustrates the frequency of writing tasks given to learners. As it is shown, more than half (65%) of the respondents ask learners to write sometimes, 30% of them always give writing tasks to their learners. While the last proportion of 5% which represent one teacher as summarized in the table rarely do so.

Question eight: what are the major difficulties that most learners find when writing?

Option	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)
Content and organization	10	50%
Grammar	2	10%
Vocabulary	6	30%
Mechanics	2	10%
Total	20	100%

Table 11: Learners' Difficulties in Writing

In the eighth question, the participant teachers are asked to choose the one option that they think is the major problem that impeded learners' ability to write. Through their answers, it is concluded that most learners (50%) find difficulties in gathering ideas and information of what to write about, and also a difficulty in how to organize them logically and coherently. Moreover, some learners (10%) have lack in the rules of grammar; in the same rate, other 10% of learners have difficulties in punctuation and mechanics. Whereas the last 30% of them lack vocabulary and word choice.

These results explain the complexity of the writing skill for learners to learn, and determine that this skill is, indeed, a challenging task.

Question nine: How do you assess learners' writings?

Option	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)
Underline the mistake	7	35%
Use correction codes	1	05%
Rewrite the word, phrase, or sentence correctly on the margin	4	20%
Collect different mistakes made by the learners, write them on the board, and then open discussion with them and allow the opportunity to correct the mistakes by themselves.	7	35%
Other strategies	1	05%
Total	19	95%

Table 12: Learners' Writing Assessment

The table above demonstrates the teachers' assessment of learners' writings, in which:

- a) 35% of the respondents prefer to underline the mistakes their learners make;
- b) 5% of them use correction codes;
- c) 20% choose to rewrite the words, phrases, or sentences correctly on the margin of the paper;
- d) And another 35% of teachers prefer to open discussion with their learners in which they select some mistakes made by learners, write them on the board, and then open free discussion with the learners and give them another opportunity to correct their mistakes.

In case you use other strategies, please specify and explain:

In this section, only one teacher (5%) mentions that she/he uses a different strategy from the suggested answers in the questionnaire. She/he says that the correction is related to the flow of ideas, relevance, and coherence of the piece of writing. She/he furthermore details that she/he

circles the mistake if it is related to grammar, and underline it if it is related to vocabulary and word choice.

Question ten: On which aspect of the language you focus more when correcting?

Option	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)
Vocabulary	1	05%
Content and organization	0	00%
Grammar and mechanics	1	05%
All of the above	18	90%
Total	20	100%

Table 13: Aspects that Teachers Consider in the Correction of Learners' Writings

Regarding this question, it aims to identify the aspects on which the participant teachers focus more when they correct their learners' writings. As the table illustrates, equally 5% of the respondents focus on vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. While the majority (90%) of them choose the option "all of the above" (i.e., these teachers consider every aspect of the language in their correction).

Question eleven: Are you satisfied with your learners' level in writing?

Option	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)
Yes	3	15%
No	17	85%
Total	20	100%

Table 14: Teachers' Satisfaction with their Learners' Level in Writing

It is noticeable that most of the participant teachers (85%) are not satisfied with their learners' level in writing, while just three teachers, who represent 15% of the proportion, are satisfied with that level.

Question twelve: In your opinion, what strategy can you suggest that might help your learners overcome their difficulties and improve their writing abilities?

In this question, teachers suggest different strategies that can enhance learners' writing skill:

- a) Collective brainstorming: select some topics that seem interesting for learners, then integrate them in group works, then allow them some time to collaborate together to brainstorm and gather ideas in relevance with the topic they choose.
- b) Ask learners to practice writing at the end of every session by writing short sentences, and try to teach them how to think in English to write acceptable and meaningful sentences.
- c) Regular reading: encourage learners to read as much as possible in class as well as at home, because reading is the key of writing.
- d) Use games sometimes: choose educational games that enhance grammar, mechanics, use of connectors, and vocabulary.

Section three: Thematic-based Instructions (TBI)

Question one: Do you use Thematic Instructions in your class?

Option	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)
Yes	19	95%
No	1	05%
Total	20	100%

Table 15: Teachers' Use of TBI in the Classroom

The purpose of this question is to verify whether the participant teachers use Thematic-based Learning or not. By checking the table above, the results indicate that the majority of the respondents (95%) use this strategy of learning in their classroom. While only 5% of them answer by "no".

Question two: Thematic Learning allows learning to be more natural than the fragmented school activities, what do you think?

Option	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)
Agree	18	90%

Disagree	1	05%
Neutral	1	05%
Total	20	100%

Table 16: Teachers' Attitude Towards the Use of TBI

The table above reveals teachers' attitude towards the use of Thematic Instructions in the classroom. To summarize the yielded data, one respondent (5%) is neutral in his answers, he/she neither agrees nor disagrees with the fact that Thematic Learning allows learning to be more natural than the fragmented school activities. Whereas another respondent (5%) points out that he/she disagrees with that.

However, the highest percentage of (90%) represents those who agree with the aforementioned statement.

Question three: How do learners react on the use of this strategy?

Option	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)
Positively	19	95%
Negatively	0	00%
Neutral	1	05%
Total	20	100%

Table 17: Learners' Attitude on the Use of TBI

From what is mentioned above in table 17, the majority (95%) of teachers state that when using Thematic Instructions in the classroom, learners are more active and dynamic, as they also show positive reaction to that. Nevertheless, a percentage of (5%) indicates that learners show no reaction, this may be due to their lack of motivation.

Question four: Are the chosen themes drawn from real-life situations?

Option	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)
Yes	18	90%

No	2	10%
Total	20	100%

Table 18: Themes in TBI

As it is illustrated in table 18, the highest percentage (90%) of respondents agree that the themes chosen for learners are drawn from real-life situations. Yet, 10% provide negative answers.

If “yes”, do they orient learners to the lesson in line with the content and the skill to be mastered?

Option	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)
Yes	19	95%
No	1	05%
Total	20	100%

Table 19: Themes in Relation to Both Content and Skill Mastery

This question aims to identify the relationship between the themes provided with the content understanding and the writing skill mastery. As the table reveals, on one hand, one teacher (5%) provides a negative answer. While on the other hand, (95%) of the answers prove that, indeed, themes are related to both content and skill mastery.

Question five: Do the teachers’ years of experience affect the use of Thematic Learning in teaching middle school learners?

Option	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)
Yes	15	75%
No	5	25%
Total	20	100%

Table 20: Teaching Experience in Relation to Using TBI in Middle School Classes

The question is designed for the sake to discover teachers' opinion about the existence of a relationship between years of teaching experience and the use of Thematic Instruction (yes or no). Then, these teachers are asked to justify their choices. As it is shown in the table above, the majority of respondents (75%) agree upon the idea that teaching experience and Thematic Learning use are inter-related. However, 25% of them point out that there is no such a relation, they highlight that novice teachers can develop flexibility in teaching through training and practice.

Accordingly, the majority of teachers who stress on this relationship justify their answers by stating that the more teaching experience the teacher has, the more competent he/she is when dealing with different learners' differences and learning strategies. Whereas the other proportion of respondents say that sufficient training, quick adaptation, and knowledge of the class atmosphere as well as learners' differences are factors that affect novice teachers to be competent and flexible in teaching.

Question six: How do you consider the use of Thematic Instructions?

Option	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)
Useful	20	100%
Unuseful	0	00%
Total	20	100%

Table 21: Teachers' Consideration on the Usefulness of TBI

This question aims to identify teachers' consideration on the usefulness of Thematic-based Instructions. As it is clearly demonstrated in the table above, all the participant teachers (100%) assert that Thematic learning is a useful strategy of teaching for middle school learners.

Question seven: Do you think that Thematic Learning can improve learners' writing performance?

Option	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)
Yes	20	100%

No	0	00%
Total	20	100%

Table 22: Teachers' Attitude Towards the Effectiveness of TBI on Learners' Writing Performance

According to the above table, it is noticeable that all teachers claim that Thematic Instructions can improve learners' writing performance because it provides them with real-life situations and contexts that make them aware of their learning of the English language, as it also raises their motivation and dynamism in classroom activities.

If “yes”, do you believe that it should be implemented in middle schools as a better alternative than the traditional teaching planned?

Option	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)
Yes	20	100%
No	0	00%
Total	20	100%

Table 23: Teachers' Attitude Towards the TBI Strategy

Based on the results obtained, it is concluded that (100%) of the participant teachers have a positive attitude towards the implementation of the Thematic Model as a better alternative for learners in middle school rather than the traditional teaching planned. They appreciate this new strategy because it is more useful, interesting, and beneficial for novice learners of English as it gives them more opportunity to take part in the language learning activities during class time.

Feel free to add any comment, opinion, or suggestion

To deduce, the participant teachers are asked to freely express themselves in case they want to add any further comments or suggestions. In this part of the questionnaire, different answers are received:

Teacher 1: “The most important tools in every learning process is creating an atmosphere of safety, motivation, and fun that together work for the successfulness of implementing any method and approach of teaching.”

Teacher 2: “We are already using Thematic teaching in middle schools. For instance, learners are asked to write about different themes related to their real-life contexts such as: family, home, friends, and memories. The only problem exists in teaching writing is the lack of time allocated in the curriculum and the classroom size.”

Teacher 3: “In teaching, dealing with real-life situations pushes learners to respond positively and try to express their feelings freely.”

Teacher 4: “Learning a foreign language through a context is the natural way to acquire a language.”

Teacher 5: “Applying Thematic learning would certainly raise the learners’ interest in the process of learning as it enhances their feelings of involvement in their learning.”

Teacher 6: “Teaching writing is very difficult, especially when teaching a foreign language. Teachers are faced with many obstacles (class size, time constraints, and the curriculum). However, if the teacher is always ready to implement new strategies and bring new ideas into the classroom, he may, indeed, have a great impact on learners’ writing skill.”

Teacher 7: “There is no perfect method, a teacher’s way of teaching should fit the learners’ needs, wants, and levels.”

Most of the participant teachers show that they have a positive attitude towards the Thematic Model of teaching because it makes learning more entertaining, easier, and can help learners improve their language skills and writing styles.

3.5.2 Discussion and Interpretation of the Findings:

To review, the objective of the present study is to investigate the effectiveness of implementing Thematic Learning to improve learners’ writing performance. Based on the findings obtained from the analysis of the online questionnaire which is designed for middle school teachers, we confirm that the results are part of the current research which is entitled “Investigating the Usefulness of Thematic Learning Approach to Improve EFL Learners’ Writing Performance”. According to the analysis, it is deduced that teachers are highly aware of the importance of the writing skill in the process of teaching and learning. As they also show appreciation to the usefulness of Thematic-based Learning as a better alternative method of

teaching to improve learners' writing abilities. The analysis of the questionnaire provides different and valuable responses that support the research hypothesis that Theme-based Learning can be an effective strategy for EFL learners to improve their writing performances.

Initially, the data obtained in the first section that provides general information about teachers' qualification reveals that 50% of the participant teachers have License degree, 45% have Master degree, and 5% graduate from ENS whereby 55% of them report that they have been teaching in middle school from one (1) to five (5) years, 25% teach from seven (7) to thirteen (13) years, while 20% are divided between sixteen (16), twenty (20), twenty-five (25), and thirty-two (32) years; this means that the majority of teachers are qualified and competent in teaching which can help to find reliable results.

As the findings show, it is concluded that teaching writing is a challenging task for beginner middle school learners of English due to the challenges these teachers face. To mention some, the number of hours devoted for English in the curriculum is considered an obstacle which makes the teacher unable to balance between teaching all the skills of the language (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Also, the number of learners in the classroom makes him unable to organize writing activities frequently for learners and correct their writings to know their lacks and find appropriate solutions to reduce the difficulties and therefore improve their writing skills.

The gained results from the second section indicate that most teachers (70%) agree on the importance of the writing skill, and that it should be given sufficient time to encourage learners to develop their competencies and abilities in writing. In the same path, teachers are asked to suggest a number of hours that they think are enough for beginner learners of English language to be able to write correctly. The majority of them urged to define two hours per week, by this: the teacher has time to perform the lesson tackling its different aspects, also allows the learners to write whether freely or depending on what the teacher chooses.

Teachers use different approaches to teach writing; to define that, 35% is equally given to teachers who use the product approach, and the process approach. Whereas, 30% of the participants prefer to combine approaches. It can be said that both the product and the process approaches are more recommended by teachers because they provide learners with models and outlines that facilitate for them the task of writing; however, those respondents who prefer to

combine many approaches in teaching find it more suitable for both learners and the learning objectives. In addition, the participant teachers vary the methods of work during writing activities; some of them ask their learners to write individually, others integrate them in pairs or groups, and other teachers follow the instructions of the writing activities.

More importantly, when teachers are asked to select the major difficulties learners find when correcting, most of them point on content and organization which may be resulted from learners' unfamiliarity with English language before, or their lack of practice due to time constraints. Therefore, teachers should develop their learners' writing skill by assigning writing tasks more frequently inside the classroom, and outside (i.e., at home).

According to both questions nine (9) and ten (10) about writing assessment, most respondents (90%) indicate that in correcting learners' writings they focus on all the different aspects of the language such as: vocabulary and word choice, content and organization, grammar, and mechanics using different strategies such as: underlying the mistakes, use of codes, direct correction, and class discussion.

As a final say; concerning teachers' satisfaction with their learners' level, the majority of them (85%) claim that they are not satisfied with the level of their learners' in writing which; consequently, necessitates from the teacher to work more on their learners' skill improvement in order to reach the required level.

In the third section, the collected answers show that the majority of teachers (95%) from the total sample demonstrated use Thematic-based Learning model in the process of teaching and learning and they agree that using it in the classroom allows learning to be more natural for learners due to the themes selected that are driven from real contexts and situations that attract their attention and facilitate for them the process of understanding and information assimilation. Additionally, learners become more active and dynamic in the class, as they also take part in the activities and show positive attitudes. Moreover, all teachers, (100%) assert the practicality and usefulness of Thematic Instructions not only in improving learners' writing performances, but also in raising their interaction, motivation as well as their interest, and overall learning.

To sum up, this questionnaire is a useful tool of gathering data from middle school teachers, and providing deeper insights about the topic in general and the implementation of

Thematic Learning in particular. The findings obtained through this study answer the research questions and achieve the study aims; thus, the research hypothesis is confirmed. Initially, teachers highlight the importance of the writing skill which is a pillar of success in learning a language. In addition, the study divulges the positive attitude of both teachers and learners the use of Thematic Instructions. Moreover, it is concluded that learners' inability to write effectively is due to time constraints and lack of practice; therefore, adopting Thematic strategy can help to some extent to minimize learners' difficulties and improve their writing competencies.

Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter discusses the fieldwork of the present study that aims at investigating the use of Thematic Learning strategy in enhancing middle school learners' writing performance. The chapter provided a clear description of the methodology adopted namely: research approach, research design, sampling, data collection methods, and data collection procedures. Besides, it displayed the data gathered through the study and followed by a detailed analysis of the findings. The results obtained showed that the large majority of the participant teachers have a positive attitude towards the implementation of Thematic Instructions strategy in their classrooms, and it is a suitable technique that can facilitate the teaching-learning process for both teachers and learners. However, teachers also declared that using this strategy necessitates choosing appropriate real-life themes that connect learners to real-life contexts. By doing so, learners will gradually improve their writing performances by themselves. Based on the data analysis, the research hypothesis is confirmed and the research questions are answered.

General Conclusion

To restate, this study was based on the problem that both teachers and learners in middle school classrooms have difficulties in teaching and learning the writing skill and this is due to, the traditional approach used by the teachers to select the appropriate themes that matches learners' interest, age, and cognitive abilities. Therefore, the present study sought to investigate the usefulness of the thematic learning in improving learners' writing performance.

The current study consisted of three chapters, where two chapters were dedicated to the theoretical part, and one chapter was allocated to the practical part. The first chapter provided a holistic overview concerning the Thematic Learning and all the tenets revolving around it, its definitions and background, effectiveness, implementation in EFL contexts, main characteristics, and some major problems of using this strategy. Meanwhile, the second chapter was devoted for a general representation of the Writing Skill; it highlighted the writing skill as the most important means of communication where most learners seek to improve and develop. In addition, the chapter provided a historical background along with main framings of the writing skill; its main approaches, types, the stages of the writing process, the major roles a teacher plays in teaching writing and the most prominent methods used to assess it, enclosing by outlining the main reasons that result in learners' low levels in writing. As for the third chapter, it dealt with the practical part of the study. It was concerned with the description and analysis of a semi-structured questionnaire that was administered to middle school teachers. The reason behind this questionnaire was to gather qualitative and descriptive data concerning teachers' attitude toward the use of Thematic Learning on learners' writing proficiency.

After a careful analysis of the data obtained, it was clear that teachers were receptive to the Thematic Approach and had positive outlooks towards it. As they welcomed the its implementation inside the writing classrooms. In addition, the results indicated that TBL could help learners to improve their writing abilities, that, accordingly, offered a positive answer to the research questions and confirmed the research hypothesis.

As a final say, the dissertation provided some pedagogical recommendations for both teachers and learners to incorporate this approach as an essential part of teaching writing in the classroom.

Pedagogical Recommendations

In light of the results of the current study, further recommendations and suggestions can be highlighted. For later proceeding studies:

➤ For teachers

- The themes used in Thematic Learning should be appropriate for the environment conditions where the learners live. Teachers should also vary the themes to keep their learners' interests.
- Thematic Learning is done by connecting the material to everyday life. Besides being more entertaining to make it easier for learners to understand the material presented.
- Thematic Learning should be done with a variety of learning methods and supported by adequate media and learning facilities, so that the essence of thematic learning is achieved.
- The choice of activities should always be fitting the learners' age, level, and needs so that the teacher can ensure a better effectiveness in the learning process. Thematic Learning should be done by exploring learners' experiences and encouraging them to develop their knowledge independently. Teachers should only be facilitators in the teaching-learning process.
- Thematic Learning should be done by focusing the lesson on learners. The teacher, as the facilitator, should fully supports the learners by preparing the appropriate learning media, creating an interesting learning atmosphere, and increasing learners' participation in the language classroom.

➤ For learners

- Learners should have a sense of responsibility for developing their level in the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing).
- Learners should spend more time in reading and make efforts to write whenever they get the opportunity to improve their writing abilities.
- Learners should follow the instructions provided by the teacher to help them do their activities easily, and correctly.

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Appendices

Teacher's Questionnaire

Investigating the Usefulness of Thematic Learning Approach to Improve Learners' Writing Performance

Dear teacher,

We would be so grateful if you answer this questionnaire which is an attempt to gather information needed for the accomplishment of a Master dissertation. Through this work, we attempt to investigate "Investigating the Usefulness of Thematic Learning Approach to Improve Learners' Writing Performance." Your answers are extremely crucial and will be of great help for the completion of this work. Therefore, you are kindly requested to give precise answers as you can, put a tick (✓), underline, or highlight the corresponding answer, and make a full statement whenever is necessary. Be sure that the answers you provide will remain confidential and will only be used for research purposes.

Thank you for your collaboration

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Academic Year: 2019-2020

Section One: Background Information

Q1. Would you please specify your degree?

- a) License
- b) Master
- c) Magister

Q2. How long have you been teaching English?

.....

Q3. How do you consider teaching writing?

- a) Very important
- b) Important
- c) Unimportant

Q4. What are the major difficulties you face when teaching writing?

- a) Time allotted
- b) Class size
- c) Both

Section Two: The Writing Skill

Q1. On a scale from one (1) to five (5), how important the writing skill is?

- a) Very important
- b) Important
- c) Neutral
- d) Unimportant
- e) Not important at all

Q2. Which approach do you follow in teaching writing?

- a) Product-based Approach
- b) Process-based Approach
- c) Genre-based Approach
- d) All of them

Please, state why?

.....
.....
.....

Q3. Do you allow sufficient time for the writing skill?

- a) Yes
- b) No

Please, justify:

.....
.....
.....

Q4. During writing sessions, do you give learners the opportunity to write:

- a) Individually
- b) In pairs

- c) In groups
- d) Depending on the writing activities

Q5. Do you think that the time scheduled for the writing skill is enough for learners to develop their competencies in writing?

- a) Agree
- b) Disagree
- c) Neutral

Why?

.....
.....
.....

Q6. How many hours per week do you suggest are sufficient for learners to be able to write correctly, and effectively?

.....
...

Q7. How often do you ask learners to do writing tasks?

- a) Always
- b) Sometimes
- c) Rarely
- d) Never

Q8. What are the major difficulties that most learners find when writing?

- a) Content & organization
- b) Grammar
- c) Vocabulary
- d) Mechanics

Q9. How do you assess learners' writings?

- a) Underline the mistake
- b) Use correction codes
- c) Rewrite the word, phrase, or the sentence correctly on the margin
- d) Collect different mistakes made by the learners, write them on the board, and then open discussion with them and allow the opportunity to correct the mistakes by themselves

In case you use other strategies, please specify and explain:

.....
.....
.....

Q10. On which aspect of the language you focus more when correcting?

- a) Vocabulary
- b) Content and organization
- c) Grammar and mechanics
- d) All the above

Q11. Are you satisfied with your learners' level in writing?

- a) Yes
- b) No

Q12. In your opinion, what strategy can you suggest that might help your learners overcome their difficulties and improve their writing abilities?

.....
.....
.....

Section Three: Thematic-based Instructions

Okoro & Okoro (2016) state that: “Thematic instruction is based on the idea that people acquire knowledge, best when learned in the context of a coherent whole and when they can connect what they are learning to the real world.”

According to Clive Stack (n.d), as the globe is becoming more connected, learning through themes gives learners an opportunity to see learning as a connected process that has application to real life. Themes in this approach can be about “animals, family, friends, food, belonging, ...” these themes help those beginner learners of English to tap into their interest and make important connections between different parts of the lessons.

Q1. Do you use thematic instructions in your class?

- a) Yes
- b) No

Q2. Thematic learning allows learning to be more natural than the fragmented school activities, what do you think?

- a) Agree
- b) Disagree
- c) Neutral

Q3. How do learners react on the use of this strategy?

- a) Positively
- b) Negatively
- c) No interaction

Q4. Are the chosen themes drawn from real-life situations?

- a) Yes
- b) No

If “Yes”, do they orient learners to the lesson in line with the content and the skill to be mastered?

- a) Yes

b) No

Q5. Do the teacher’s years of experience affect the use of thematic learning in teaching middle school learners?

a) Yes

b) No

Please, justify:

.....
.....
.....

Q6. How do you consider the use of thematic instructions?

a) Useful

b) Unuseful

Q7. Do you think that thematic learning can improve learners’ writing performance?

a) Yes

b) No

If “Yes” do you believe that it should be implemented in middle schools as a better alternative than the traditional teaching planned?

a) Agree

b) Disagree

Feel free to add any comment, opinion, or suggestion:

.....
.....
.....

Thank you for your time, effort and collaboration.

الملخص

جاءت هذه الدراسة لتسلط الضوء على أبرز الصعوبات والتحديات التي يعاني منها المتعلم والمعلم على حد سواء في تعلم وتعليم مهارة الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. بناء على ذلك، يعد هذا البحث دراسة وصفية للدور الذي يلعبه التعلم القائم على المواضيع في تحسين مهارة الكتابة لدى تلاميذ الطور المتوسط، حيث تنقسم هذه الدراسة الى جزأين: جزء نظري، يتناول مختلف الأدبيات حول استعمالية هذه الإستراتيجية في القسم ومهارة الكتابة، وجزء تطبيقي يناقش الدراسة الحالية وتحليل المعطيات وإستخلاص النتائج. إنطلاقاً من هذا المنظور، إعتمدت هذه الدراسة فرضية ان تطبيق إستراتيجية التعلم القائم على المواضيع في القسم يمكن أن يحسن من الأداء الكتابي لدى التلاميذ وللتحقق من صحة هذه الفرضية اعتمدنا على وسيلة الإستبيان في بحثنا. حيث قدم هذا الإستبيان لأساتذة التعليم المتوسط بهدف معرفة إنطباع التلاميذ حول الدور الذي تلعبه إستراتيجية التعلم القائم على المواضيع في تحسين مهارة الكتابة لدى تلاميذهم، إضافة الى معرفة آراء ووجهات نظر الأساتذة حول مستوى التلاميذ في الكتابة والصعوبات التي تواجههم. بعد تحليل النتائج المتحصل عليها من الإستبيان والتي كانت إيجابية تم تأكيد صحة الفرضية المذكورة سابقاً حيث أن أغلبية الأساتذة أكدوا فعالية الإستعمال الملائم لإستراتيجية التعلم المواضيعي في تعزيز الأداء الكتابي لتلاميذ الطور المتوسط.

الكلمات الأساسية: التعلم القائم على الموضوع، مهارة الكتابة، اللغة الإنجليزية، متعلمي المرحلة المتوسطة