

THE EFFECT OF BRAINSTORMING AS A PRE-WRITING STRATEGY ON IRAQI EFL MA LEARNERS' WRITING ABILITY

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to study the impact of the use of brainstorming and its subcategories (listing, questions and answers, sketch) as a pre-writing strategy for Iraqi EFL MA students. Participants in the study were 60 Iraqi EFL MA learners, both male and female. The instruments of the study were the pre-test, the instruction, the post-test and a questionnaire at the end of the treatment to measure the attitude of the students toward teaching. The results of the study showed that there was no meaningful relationship between brainstorming, its subcategories and the written development of EFL learners. Moreover, the results showed that there was no significant difference between men and women in terms of brainstorming usage and the three subcategories.

Keywords: brainstorming, instruction, listing, outlining

INTRODUCTION

According to Brown (1987), the natural order in which a second language is taught is listening, speaking, reading and writing. Reading and writing must be taken into consideration as an advanced step in language development. A very complex and challenging process for most second language learners is writing. Despite its difficulties, it is very important to many students because by writing they can show their knowledge in the subject areas (Hinkel, 2006). According to Richards (2002), one of the hardest skills to master for level 2 learners is certainly writing. This difficulty is not only in the facets of generating and organizing ideas, but also in translating these ideas into a readable text. Very complex abilities are involved in writing. L2 writers should be mindful of higher level competencies, such as planning and organizing, and lower level competencies.

such as spelling, punctuation, word choice and so on, and if the language proficiency of writers is low, the difficulty becomes more obvious. According to Mogahed (2013), for many people, particularly young writers, beginning to write is a problem. Tomkins (2001) believes that prewriting is the most neglected stage. Thorne (1993) mentioned that the most important skill to enhance and practice intensively in basic writing classes is preliminary writing. The very commencement of writing for many authors is a difficult part of writing. It is worth spending a lot of time and attention on pre-writing because it helps to solve a problem called the author's block. Go (1994) debated that in

order for teachers of English as a second language to assist learners to acquire good language skill, they could employ pre-writing activities at the beginning stage of instruction. Pre-writing encourages student participation in thought, conversation, group interaction and skeletal writing activities that become parts of the writing task. Writing readiness activities help learners learn the target language more effectively and develop interpersonal, thinking and planning skills that can be applied in other areas. Mogahed (2013) believed that whenever and wherever we want, we could use of pre-writing activities because what occurs in pre-writing is handling and arranging Shameem's (1988) view of writing is a non-linear and reformulated process that consists of four steps: prewriting, composition/writing, editing, and proofreading/revision. The first step of writing is the pre-writing in which the writer begins to think, find and do the ideas to use in the next step. The author has to write his first draft in the second phase. In the third step, the student is required to monitor consistency and cohesion, styles and syntax as well as grammar while s/he made the proofreading. In order to ensure that the trial is perfect in the edition of the last step is done. Students need to be familiar with these four steps in order to be informed about the writing process. Prewriting is the first phase of writing recognised as a source of composition (Huff & Kline, 1987). All activities between the first drafting decision and the start of a first draft maintained are related to the pre-drafting phase so designated as pre-drafting. Many investigators begin to insist that students use different ways in order to explore a topic before writing a draft, such as making use of mediation, journals, analogies, brainstorming, clustering, grouping and free writing (Ashwell, 2000; Barnnet, 1989; Davis, 2005; Crawford & Smolkbwski, 2008; Muncie, 2002).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Brainstorming strategy

According to Scane, Guy and Wenstrom (1991), brainstorming activities encourage students who usually dislike writing by creating a stress-free atmosphere. Thus, in an EFL environment where students usually make efforts to accomplish their writing tasks, a non-threatening atmosphere may help them develop their writing skills. Good writers are the ones who may think well; therefore, one way to express thought is to write (Harmer, 2001). It seems useful to prepare situations where students reflect on the subject before they begin composing. The brainstorming strategy can help students use their previous knowledge in their writing activity and to recognize the skills and information they possess and what they need to know (Rao, 2007). Moreover, teaching students different brainstorming techniques in class is reasonable because it might assist them to cultivate their writing and create ideas that are necessary in second language acquisition (Harmer, 2001). Although the ideas created in this stage may or may not be directly related to the topic, brainstorming is a valuable technique in developing students' ideas before they actually start their writing task (Harmer, 2001). One of the most important features of brainstorming is that it does not need any preparation and it can be used at any level of education and under any circumstance (Buzan, 1993). The brainstorm was made popular in 1953 by Osborn in his book. He said trainees can improve their

creative production through brainstorming. A number of rules should be taken into consideration in the brainstorming session:

- No reviews of ideas.
- Based on what other people have suggested.
- Strange and wild ideas are accepted.
- Receive large quantities of ideas.

The purpose of brainstorming is to guide people to new ways of thinking and to break with the common way of thinking. Brainstorming is the automated act of taking notes of ideas in preparation for the various stages of writing. Some confirm to be helpful, others can be rejected (Ledbetter, 2010). Moreover, MacDowell (1999) defined brainstorming as “the act of defining a problem or ideas and proposing anything related to the topic. No matter how remote a suggestion may be. All these ideas are recorded and assessed only after the brainstorm” (p. 5). Then the author looks at the result for reasons or other useful data on the subject. A major point about brainstorming is that there should be no tension on the author. Learners should simply open their minds to what emerges in their brains. Learners should simply open their minds to whatever pops into their brains. As a matter of fact, the issue of teaching writing EFL/ESL by starting with brainstorming and its relation to learners’ motivation has become increasingly important to instructors as well as to learners. It is important to consider a number of possible solutions in order to arrive at the best solution. So one of the best ways is brainstorming. Brainstorming is an advantageous way of beginning or generating new ideas. When students are familiar with the process, they can apply this activity on themselves when they are stuck, review their work, or switch to a new phase. When students are familiar with the process they can apply this activity on their selves when they are stuck, revising their work or moving on to a new phase. This in turn leads to greater autonomy in learning and responsibility. However, more importantly, it develops the quality of student activity and production in class. According to Mogahed (2013), asking questions is one of the most commonly used ways to raise the issue. The journalist uses those simple questions: who, what, when, where, why and how. It does not seem very difficult to answer these questions as a first step. However, it is precisely when the author has difficulty answering a «why» question that a real document begins. Students focus on the listener as they think of what the readers need to know. Answering these questions will form the basis of the make-up. Therefore, questions from journalists are an influential means to expand much information on a topic very quickly. Although learning to ask suitable questions that are related to the topic takes practice. In addition, Gorrell (1996) argues for the application of a targeted and carefully formulated question as a basis for pre-writing and writing. Instead of a thesis that can make them more easily confused. Another type of prewriting activity that authors find useful is the list. This means doing only what his name suggested: possible topics are listed after subtitles of things that the author could mention on each topic. Review of Empirical Studies Fawzi and Hussein (2013) conducted a comparative study on improving the motivation of pupils to write essays through brainstorming.

Twelve students participated in the study after it was established. Participants in the study were twelve students at the post-foundation level, The study instruments included free brainstorming sessions and guided brainstorming sessions. After classifying the students into (3-4) groups, two sheets were given to each group and asked them to choose a subject and complete the brainstorming sheets. As the study proved that both types of brainstorming were motivating to students, participants preferred guided brainstorming. Ibnian (2011) reviewed a study on the impact of using the brainstorming technique on writing EFL class trials. Ninety-four junior high school students from public schools in Amman participated in the study. They were categorized in control and experimental groups. The study tools were pre- and post-test writing and a checklist. The results of the research indicated that the brainstorming technique had a positive effect.

effect on the writing skill of EFL students in such aspects as content and organization, mechanics of writing, language use and skills emerged from creative thinking abilities (fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration). Rao (2007) conducted a study on the impact of the brainstorming strategy on learners' literacy performance and perceptions. One hundred and eighty second-year students from the Jiangxi Normal University College of Foreign Languages in Chinese participated in this study. The research topics are divided into three groups. Two of them were experimental groups and another one was a control group. The tools of the study were pre- and posttest studies and attitudes. The results of the study highlighted the significant impact of explicit instruction of the brainstorming strategy on writing performance and the questionnaires indicated positive attitudes of learners towards the brainstorming strategy. Maghsoudi and Haririan (2013) believed that brainstorming strategy applied as controversial issue in history of ELT and it has long been considered with suspicion by language teachers therefore, it has been neglected as a valid activity for language practice and development. However, regarding the nature of brainstorming and creative thinking we can mention that there are important elements in teaching process which causes it appropriate for being applied in language teaching procedure. According to Osborn (1953), brainstorming can help learners transfer their ideas from the brain to language or numbers related to literacy specifically. In the writing process as a way to increase learners' motivation to write dissertations. Manouchehry, Farhangi, Fatemi and Qaviketf (2014) conducted a study on the effect of two brainstorming strategies on the improvement of writing skills of intermediate EFL learners in Iraq. Results of the study revealed that teaching brainstorming strategies had positive effects on PSEA learners' writing performance. They were also held accountable for their best learning. Shorofat (2007) study on the effect of brainstorming and 'synergy' in developing the creative writing skills of ninth female students and their attitudes towards writing in Arabic. The results indicated that applying brainstorming and "synergy" was effective in improving students' creative writing skills in terms of content, organization, style and mechanics of writing. Results also revealed that the strategies implemented had no effect on students' attitudes toward writing. Maghsoudi and Haririan (2013) carried out a study on the impact of brainstorming strategies on EFL learners writing skills regarding their social class students. Results of the study provided evidence that the teaching of the

brainstorming strategy had a positive effect on improving the writing of EFL learners and also made them more active. With respect to the objective of the study, the following research questions were asked:

- Is there a relationship between brainstorming, its teaching subcategories and LFA writing development?
- Is there a gender difference in the use of the brainstorming strategy and its subcategories? Based on these research questions, the following assumptions were made.
- There is no relationship between the teaching of brainstorming and learner achievements in EFL writing.
- There are significant gender differences in the use of the brainstorming strategy and its subcategories.

METHOD

Participants and Setting

The participants in this study were 60 Iraqi students from EFL MA. They were men and women as well as experimental and control groups. The treatment groups included (14 men and 18 women) and the control groups (13 men and 15 women). Everyone has studied English as a foreign language at the University of Baghdad, Iraq. The average age of women was 28 to 36.

Instruments

The instruments which applied in the present study were written tests as a pre-test and post-test in the first phase of the study. In addition, the data for the second part of the research were collected through a questionnaire. This questionnaire was created by the researcher and was completed at the end of the period in order to obtain written information. The questionnaire was administered and tested in advance of the start of the study. It was valuable and reliable at the same time. This questionnaire included 15 statements that were categorized into the following sections: Attitudes to the Brainstorming Strategy and its subcategories: List, Description and Questions and Answers. Each element of the questionnaire was evaluated according to five points, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Design

In this study, the researcher used quantitative and qualitative tools to collect data. In the first part of the study a pretest and posttest used as a qualitative instrument and the data in the second part collected through a questionnaire which considered as a quantitative tool for data collection.

Procedures

Sixty Iraqi EFL MA learners contributed to this study. Before starting the instruction, an online pre-test was administered in order to learner write based on their background knowledge and compare the results of the instruction at the end of period. Brainstorming as a pre-writing strategy and its sub-categories, such as lists, questions and responses, and descriptions, were taught to learners during the sessions. In the first session, the researcher generally spoke about early writing strategies and their impact on writing improvements. In the second session, instruction on pre-writing strategies started. At the beginning of each session, the strategy was defined and its benefits and effects on editorial improvement were discussed. Then, several examples were written on the table and the following three tasks were given to them during three more sessions. During each session, participants were given 5 minutes to write on the subject. Before they began writing, they had to use the associated pre-writing strategy that they learned in their drafts. After that, they developed their ideas on the subject. Then their papers were corrected and returned to them in order to know their errors and avoid them in their future writings. Regarding the topics, the students were supposed to write on several topics from the book by Bagheri, Riasati and Rahimi (2012) were selected and the advisor confirmed topics, then the researcher gave the topics to an IELTS teacher, and selected the best 10 of topics together that were considered to suit students' interest, personal information and they had enough ideas, information, and knowledge about the topics in order to develop them.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study examined the relationship between basic instruction on pre-writing strategies and the development of EFL writing. The investigator carried out the t-test of the independent samples. As previously stated, all participants passed the IELTS writing test. In order to examine whether the writing notes were reliable or not, a second reviewer was asked to rate the pre-test and the post-test. Then, a Pearson correlation was performed to obtain the degree of go-togetherness between the two sets of writing scores for the pre-test and the post-test.

To monitor the effect of strategy instruction on writing, the researcher compared the performance of the groups at the end of the program by running an independent samples t-test comparing the mean scores of the two groups on the post-test.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of pre-writing strategy instruction brainstorming and its subcategories namely- listening, outlining and question and answer on the improvement of Iraqi EFL learners writing skill. Findings from the study revealed that there is no significant relationship between brainstorming and teaching its subcategories. Second results of the study also indicated that there is not any significant difference between males and females in terms of using brainstorming and its subcategories (listing, outlining, question and answer). In light of the above mentioned results, the study has considerable implications that I assist learners, instructors, and program designers in EFL settings to increase and improve their performance. For learners to

become policy writers, they need to be aware of different writing readiness strategies. Consequently, teachers should teach learners different pre-writing strategies to equip them with sufficient knowledge of the strategies. In future forward-looking studies, it is recommended increasing the number of participants to make the results more generalizable. It is recommended to include other important factors such as age, the impact of other strategies and other sub-categories of brainstorming such as clustering, word mapping, etc. on writing development. Another recommendation could be teaching pre-writing strategies to learners at different levels of proficiency and education e.g., intermediate, upper intermediate, school age, university students, as well as those who learn English for specific purposes and students with different educational backgrounds. There were several limits to this study. First, the length of the experience was not sufficient to fully determine the effectiveness of pre-strategy teaching. Due to time constraints, the researcher did not have enough time to make use of all different pre-writing strategies and students could not effectively practice strategies which were introduced in the classroom because the study was conducted during a portion of class sessions. Second, participants differed in their age and social status. Finally, the level of education and scope of study of the learners were different. Only they had a similar level of language ability.

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