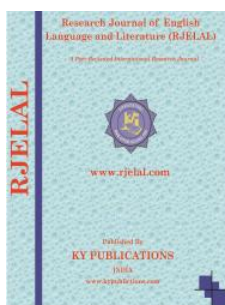**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

ENHANCING STUDENTS' WRITING PERFORMANCE BY DEVELOPING THEIR POSING QUESTIONS ABILITIES

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ABSTRACT

The role of language performance is evident in creating a real-life situation for learner to practice language performance. According to the study of both Nation and Newton (2009), learners should write and speak about issues that they are familiar with and use communication strategies so as to convey messages to someone else.

The researchers identified through their experience in teaching TEFL students' general weakness in both the written and oral performance; hence they carried out a training program that included 115 TEFL students in AlAzhar University in Gaza. The training program focused on enhancing students written performance by developing the student's posing questions abilities.

The researchers adopted a test after conducting a pilot group to examine the validity and credibility of the test. Following to that, the researchers conducted a pre-test and analysed the students answers to develop the training program. These ansers were kept to be compared to the post-test results.

The results show that the training program was effective and the students developed better written performance as they enhanced their posing questions abitlitis. The researchers found out that the students after the training program were able to provide a space for thinking and conceptual understanding, carry out Inquiry investigataion process to easily get the main idea and pose questions which is considered an essential part of narration.

The researchers recommend that university teachers and educators in general should focus on developing the students posing questions abilities as they would develop the students thinking as well as their written performance.

Key words: Writing Performance, Posing Questions, Questions, Abilities, Students' Abilities

Introduction

Language performance integrates both oral and written areas such as arguments, questioning, group dynamic activities through the students' preparation of providing evidences, comparing cases,discovering contradictions, criticizing, and asking questions (Harpaz, 2013).

It is worth mentioning that writing comes out naturally with oral activities. Also, it could be helpful for some inspiration after oral activities.

However, oral performance may follow writing which makes the discussion more evidence-based(Berland& McNeill, 2010; Jimenez & Erduran, 2008).

The significance of using writing performance to assist students in the construction of knowledge is emphasized by Torrance, Galbraith and Waes (2007) who stated that writing is not just a speech written down. But it also includes understanding the processes involved in producing and evaluating thoughts rather than the processes involved in translating thoughts into the language.

Context of the Problem

Writing performance is important for students. Most EFL majors in Palestine lack a clear understanding of writing performance. This may be due to the lack of applying strategies and techniques in an authentic context focusing on this type of writing performance. Within the previous frame, the following studies show the weakness of students' writing performance and the reasons behind such situation which could be attributed to several reasons such as:

- The interference of the mother tongue. Nik et al. (2010) and Derakhshan & Karimi (2015).

- the deficiency of writing argumentative texts Ibrahim (2015).

- The difficulty of extracting ideas Chin (2016).

- The teachers unawareness of the current writing strategies. (Kakandee, 2017).

Writing Performance

The function of writing is not just to translate what students think about a suggested topic; it also serves to help students construct and evaluate their knowledge.Woolfolk (2013, p. 357) and(Harris & Jones, 2016) ensured the importance of developing writing in order to help students express and perform their knowledge.

A corpus of studies {Fahim and Seifodin (2015), Mohamed (2010), Ibrahim (2015), Bahgat's (2014), Lackey's (1997), Eldesouky's (2018), Mirlohi et al. (2012), Abed (2014), and Elsoud 's (2016)}on

teaching and learning writing performance asserted the importance of writing performance.

Writing Performance and EFL

Writing cannot take place in isolation, however, it comes out as an integration process through which students can interact orally, raise questions, solve problems, engage in conversations and discussions and take notes, or write some stories, or write various viewpoints.

Posing Questions

Writing is related to questioning which is based on the dialogic nature of academic writing as they allow writers to involve readers, addressing the perceptions, interests, and needs of audience. It is also used to express writers' purposes, organize texts, evaluate arguments and set up claims because the distribution of these functions differs across disciplines and genres and depends on participants' perceptions of rhetorical context (Hyland, 2002).

According to Davenport (2007, p. 61) as quoted by Dewi (2013) common types of question found in reading comprehension include the following: identifying main idea, main point, author purpose, the tone of the passage or identifying the style, finding supporting details and inference meaning. Therefore, it is recommended to use main idea for educational purposes in order to overcome common problems when posing deep questions.

The basic idea of inquiry is that the question refers to thinking and understanding, which may be established by students, teachers or by negotiation among them (Levy et al., 2009). Seifert (2009, p. 201) illustrated that teachers use inquiry approach so that students act actively and get a chance to check their answers by themselves instead of arranging structures in the traditional way.

Posing questions helps students direct their learning as they try to integrate their prior knowledge and new information in their attempts to make sense of current ideas; which enhances their understanding. Students' questions play an important role in meaningful learning and motivation and can be very revealing about the

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quality of students' thinking and conceptual understanding, their alternative frameworks and confusion about various concepts, their reasoning, and what they want to know. Student questioning, particularly at the higher cognitive level, is also an essential aspect of problem solving. Also, interesting and productive answers are dependent on being able first to come up with good questions for eliciting them. Low levels of questioning and explaining on the part of the students have been found to be correlated with lower achievement (Almeida, 2011).

Thus, this technique helps students become the center of the learning process which strengthens the idea of inquiry process. Arauz (2013, p.483) and (Gallavan, 2009, p.19). agree that posing inferential questions is one of the most effective learning techniques.

Posing Questions and Deep Thinking

Using question techniques are widespread in the real world either in surveys, investigations, courtrooms, counseling, journalism, interview, sales conversations, political and religious discussion. These questions are used as probes to extend thinking by supporting assertions. During the questioning, students learn to search for motives, assumptions, cause, effect, and relationships of elements for organizational purposes. Most of the previous research concluded the positive effects of teachers questioning as a means to influence learning, thinking and interactions of students (Maxfied, 2011; Wilen et al., 2004).

The National Research Council (2012) integrated posing questions and deep thinking as a process through which a learner becomes able to take what has been learned in one situation and then apply and transfer it to new different occasions. Effective self-questioning improves students' awareness and controls their thinking, which in turn may improve their learning. It provides long-term retention of knowledge and skills. It also engages and motivates students by making them active participants in the learning process (Corley & Rauscher, 2013, p.3).
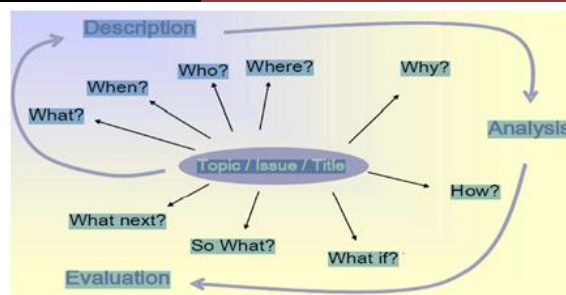

***Figure 1.* Model of Critical Thinking (Hilson, 2010)**

Figure 1. illustrates the different ways students would go through when dealing with reading tasks using critical thinking. The wh questions given above for sure help participants show deep understanding of the topic. The students of critical thinking classes as Murawski (2014, p.1) described are more thoughtful, effective, and they ask more challenging questions.
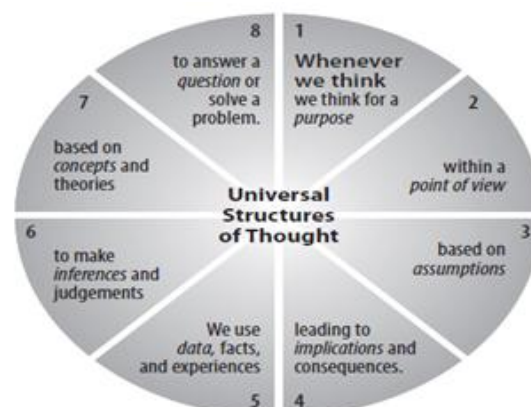

***Figure 2.* The Thinker Analytical Thinking Guide (Elder & Paul, 2012, p.7)**

Figure 2. shows thinking components: generating purposes, raising questions, using information, utilizing concepts, making inferences, making assumptions, generating implications, and embodying a point of view (Elder & Paul, 2012, p.7).

Literal vs. Inferential Questions

There are different types of questions. Albrecht (2009) clarified that questioning consists of asking the student to answer comprehension based questions after reading a passage. These questions were grouped into two categories: Literal and inferential questions; while Literalquestions include correct answers that are directly stated somewhere within the passage, inferential questions include

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answers that are inferred by the reader (Urquhart, 2002).

The students' ability to generate good questions varies from one to another. A teacher has a main role in guiding students to master asking self-question through modeling and coaching. There are some questions that stem to encourage dialogue in reciprocal questioning as Woolfolk (2013) stated:

- *What is an everyday application of….?*

- *How would you define……..in your own words?*

- *What are the advantage and disadvantages of..?*

- *What do you already know about….?*

- *Explain why…..applies to……?*

- *How does……influence…..?*

- *What is the value of…..?*

- *What are the reasons for……?*

- *What are some arguments for and against….?*

- *What is your first choice about….? Your second choice?....why?*

- *How would …..be different if….?*

- *Do you agree or disagree with this claim…..? What is your evidence?*

Based on what has been mentioned above, posing questions involves different levels of thinking; literal and inferential. They differ from surface thinking to deeper thinking. Thus, the present research adopts inferential questions to show deep understanding of the provided text.

Design of the Study

This study employed the one group pretest/posttest design along with a mixed research approach incorporating quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

Participants

The participants of this study were third year English majors (n=115) enrolled in the English Department, Faculty of Education, Al-Azhar University, Palestine.

Settings

The experimental part of the current study took place at the Faculty of Education, Al-Azhar University, in the academic year 2017-2018, Palestine.

Instruments

The following instruments were used in the study:

- The Writing Performance Components List,

- The Pre/post-test,

- The Writing Performance Rubric.

Piloting of the Test

To pilot the test, it was administered prior to teaching the writing performance course to a group of English majors (no=50) who did not participate in the study. The purpose of that piloting procedure was to:

- Establish the reliability of the test;

- Determine the appropriate time needed to answer the test;

- Ensure the validity of the test; and

- Check the suitability of the test to third year students in the clarity of the questions.

Description

The program is based on the inquiry approach. It consists of five sessions of posing question. The following are the general procedures of the program:

- All the activities focused on posing question and aimed at developing writing performance.

- All the activities were tackled through the following:

  1. In each session, the instructor or the students, as requested by the instructor, used interenet research, posed a question or an issue or read books from library to start the inquiry approach process.(Warming up)

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2. Paraticipants were involved in the didactic discussions or debate to start convincing the others.

3. Participants and the instructor tried to reach consenssus about the suggested issue. (Conclusion)

Sources

In order to prepare the program's activities, the researcher made use of several resources research online. All the activities were selected to suit the program's objectives to develop writing performance.

Teaching the Program

The program was taught by the researcher herself.

Duration of Experiment

The program was conducted in the first term of the academic year 2017-2018. The experimentation started on 1st. to 28th of Oct. It took 15 hrs. And5 sessions over 3 weeks.

Assessment

Assessment of the student' writing performance development through the program was as follows:

- Every activity aimed to assess the studens' writing performance whether by themselves or others

- Throughout the program, the students' tasks and oral discussion were checked regularly and the instructor provided them with regular feedback on their writing performance.

- Summative assessment was applied at the end of thhe program through the writing performance test.

Qualitative analysis

Posing questions

The following examples are extracted from the students' writing in the pretest; participant A, participant B and participant C wrote the questions below before the application of the program:

Pretest Answers:

Answer: Participant A wrote:

1. How could we understand the emotion of the pigeons?
2. How could we communicate with pigeons?
3. Can the pigeons learn like us?
4. Can the pigeons identify the faces of human?

Answer: Participant B wrote:

① How do the pigeons have been taught to recognize human facial expressions?
② What does the experiments at the University of Iwa show?
③ Why humans developed special nervous systems that are capable of recognizing subtle expressions?
④ Is this work come as any surprise to anyone?

Answer: Participant C wrote:

① can the Pigeons distinguish or know any idea about the human expressions and what does it mean?!
② can the pigeons develop special nervous systems which is capable to recognize subtle expressions.
③ can the pigeons evolve the sophisticated nervous systems need to perform such a feat.
④ Are the pigeons facial expressions of emotion necessarily to be innate for the pigeons.

From the previous examples, it can be inferred that most participants showed less practice in grammar and this is beyond the study's aim. Also, the participants started posing questions through prediction to direct one. Therefore, most participants' efforts were out of inferring questions which reflected their inability to pose deep questions.

Posttest Answers: (After treatment)

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Answer: Participant   A   wrote:

Answer: Participant B wrote:

Answer: Participant C wrote:

Commentary:

Many participants were able to pose questions focusing on inferring as the following examples ofparticipant A, participant B and participant C, for example, wrote infered questions. However, they could reach analytical, evaluation and prediction questions. While some participants still could not ask or infer question who asked direct questions.

Based on statistical analysis of post test results has also shown significant increasing in asking infer questions in compared to pretest where most participants asked direct ones.

Furthermore, the previous examples show different kinds of questions which were differentiated from the surface to deep ones. The participants gradually did their best in showing their deep understanding. This is obvious when they passed three stages; brainstorming the ideas, identifying the main ideas, and then trying to pose deep questions. At first, most participants posed surface and direct question first then they start asking prediction questions and infer ones. Therefore, the progress had slightly appeared that is because of posing inferring question. This means posing infer question needs time to develop due to the need of deep understanding of reading passage. This is consistent with the study of Mcgee and Johnson (2003) who assessed the positive impact of inference training on reading which influences their writing performance.

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