



Investigating EFL Teachers' Familiarity with Effective Writing Approaches in Jordan

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Abstract: The present study aimed to investigate EFL teachers' familiarity with Effective Writing Approaches. The sample consisted of 100 EFL teachers in Jordan. An instrument was used to collect data: a questionnaire used to identify EFL teachers' familiarity with Effective Writing Approaches. Research findings revealed that EFL teachers' familiarity with the instructional strategies was middle, That is, teachers used eclectic ways of teaching writing; but they often use the product approach, as it does not need much preparation and time and teachers are not often prepared to apply the process approach. Based on the findings, it is recommended that in-service training programs focusing on how and when to use effective writing approaches should be provided.

Keywords: EFL teachers, effective writing approaches, writing practices, product and process approaches.

1. Introduction

English as a foreign language (EFL) is a tool that students employ to communicate effectively with the world around them. To help learners communicate effectively, the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing are of utmost importance. All learners must master and use them not only during their schooling but throughout their lives to meet the demands of their later employment (Al-Sawalha and Chow, 2012).

In learning situations, writing is the main determinant of the success of learners in mastering curricula. Maclellan (2004) stated that the written products of learners reflected the level of students' achievement because they could display the extent of a students' learning progress.

Writing is no longer viewed as a simple skill consisting of several sequenced stages; it is, in contrast, a complex process that includes

several interactive steps. According to Al-Souqi (2001), writing reflects the creation of ideas and their logical and coherent expression. Zamel (1983), in turn, described writing as the process which helps learners explore their thoughts and construct and assess meaning ; that is, attention should be paid to the meaning and content and then to the form. Therefore, one of the main aims of teaching English as a foreign language in any educational system is to help learners master the skill of writing and to enable them to write effectively and clearly.

This requirement is not an easily attained aim due to the challenges that students face either in Jordan or on an international level.

In this regard, the findings of the report of Lee et al (2007) about National Assessment of Educational Progress showed that American students performed below their grade level in writing. These findings led to calls to develop the teaching of writing by equipping English



language teachers with effective practices for teaching this complex skill. The situation in Arab countries and in Jordan is no longer different; that is, Zughoul and Taminian (1984) found that Jordanian EFL students commit serious lexical errors while communicating in English. Similarly, Rabab'ah (2003) revealed that Arab students face problem with acquiring English such as the limited opportunities they have to learn English through natural interactions. Hisham (2008) also highlighted students' challenges in studying the English language by revealing that students face problems in vocabulary register, grammar, and expressing themselves in written contexts. Additionally, Al-Khasawneh (2010) revealed that students have many problems when writing in English like not knowing how to organize their ideas because they seldom write in English. He agreed with Rabab'ah (2003) that for students to be able to write effectively, they need to be exposed to the English language as much as possible. However, in the case of Arab students, they have few chances to use the English language in their schools or homes.

As a result of this, EFL teachers find teaching writing a difficult job, and they need to be well-equipped with strategies that have been proved to be effective in teaching writing skills. According to Banat (2007), writing is of prime importance among the four language skills, and it helps students communicate and understand how language components go together. Consequently, acquiring various methods and strategies for teaching writing is important for an effective writing teacher; that is, EFL teachers should be familiar with the historical orientations in teaching writing. In this regard, many studies have investigated the effective ways of writing (Mozaheb, 2013). In this vein, Graham and Perin (2007) and Rogers and Graham (2008) conducted meta-analyses to identify the most effective practice for teaching writing. They showed that the instructional method that is probably appropriate for teaching writings is the process writing approach or writers' workshop. Teaching writing according to this method no longer focuses on the teacher who prescribes an approach for how to follow

a model of writing (Kang, 2006). That is, most traditional writing classes emphasize the writing of separate sentences, spelling, controlled composition, and grammar accuracy. These are deemed the most important aspects of language learning. Additionally, most of the time in learning to write, students work individually without interacting with one another about their writings so they do not have the chance to express opinions and exchange ideas.

According to Onozawa (2010), process writing is an approach to writing in which students focus on how to produce writing more than the products themselves. Therefore, students understand themselves better, discover how to work through the writing, and explore strategies that harmonize with their their learning styles. Brown (2001) states that writing is a cognitive process, as students produce their composition based on their ideas and thinking processes. According to Onozawa (2010), the writing process involves five steps: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and evaluating. This approach has gained wide popularity due to the fact that it allows students to manage their own writing and think while writing. In this vein, (Brown 2001) claims that this approach has positive effects on students because students invent the language, ideas, and thoughts.

Due to the importance of this writing approach, it is necessary to encourage and train EFL teachers to employ it in the classroom. It is also important to investigate if EFL teachers are familiar with these effective ways of teaching writing departing from traditional method of following a writing model and instead letting students think freely, generate ideas creatively and write coherently. Therefore, this study will come to explore EFL teachers' familiarity with proven effective writing practices.

2. The rationale of study:

The significance of this study arises from the lack of data that researchers, educators, and decision makers in the educational systems on the international level have about what writing instruction looks like in schools. They do not know about what and how students write, what



writing skills teachers employ while teaching writing, and how they assess students' writing progress (Graham and Wolsey, 2011).

In Jordan, the situation is quite similar; that is, teachers present the writing skills while focusing on the final products, which is to be free of grammar and spelling mistakes.

Teachers' practices during their writing instruction have received no attention from researchers even though the teacher is the catalyst of learning. He /she lets students write either by focusing on following a writing model in order to avoid mistakes, resulting in students' writings being copies, or by letting students think, generate ideas, exchange ideas with classmates, and review written forms.

3. Literature review:

Several studies have investigated the effectiveness of various methods and strategies in teaching writing skills, but writing skills are deemed absent in classroom instruction according to Graham and Cutler (2008). Therefore, researchers have little data on what writing instruction looks like in schools; that is, they do not have any idea about what and how students write. They also do not know what methods teachers use to teach writing (Graham and Perin, 2007).

In this regard, Graham and Cutler (2008) conducted a study to investigate American teachers' classroom instructional practices in writing. The sample was about 178 teachers. A questionnaire was used to collect data, and they found that most teachers followed an eclectic approach to writing instruction including the process approach and the product approach. The study also revealed that although teachers reported using most of the writing instructional practices that were included in the survey, their ways of using them and how often they used them differed. They recommended that professional development for writing instruction be enhanced.

Kiuhara, Graham, and Hawkin (2009) found that the most common writing activities that students engaged in were writing short

answer responses to homework, responding to and summarizing the material they read, and completing worksheets. The study revealed that these activities involved little extended analysis, interpretations or the process of writing. The study also revealed that most teachers from different American states were not adequately prepared to teach writing. Half of them indicated that they had received little preparation to teach writing. Therefore, their teaching practices did not help them to teach writing effectively. Additionally, Ahlsen and Lundh (2008) conducted a study to examine the practices of teachers teaching writing in Sweden. To collect data, classroom observations and interviews were used. The results showed that all of the teachers seemed to use aspects from several theories and that their familiarities with teaching practices varied in terms of focusing on grammar or on generating ideas.

McCarthy and Ro (2011), in turn, conducted a study to investigate the teaching practices of 29 teachers from the US to understand their approaches to writing instruction. By observing the teachers, they revealed that teachers are familiar with the process approach, traditional skills, and the eclectic approach. The study showed the importance of the professional development of teachers to improving their writing instruction and reducing their traditional practices that focus on producing flawless forms of writing.

Additionally, Grisham and Wolsey (2011) surveyed teachers' knowledge of writing instruction; the study revealed that little writing instruction occurred in the schools where teachers focused on teaching reading comprehension. The study recommended that professional development be provided for new teachers in the area of writing instruction.

In Jordan, the situation is no different from that of the rest of the world; according to Tabbalat (2007), EFL students lacked the necessary strategies to help to write their first drafts and outline their ideas due to the teaching practices of their teachers. The study recommended that teachers in Jordan need to reconsider the way they are teaching writing.



Additionally, Alhaddad (2014) stated that writing is considered the skill in which most students are least proficient. The study revealed that teachers should use the process approach rather than the product approach in teaching writing in the Arabic language, and teachers should encourage students to enjoy writing and find it relevant to their lives. The study also showed that teachers lack the skills for teaching writing, such as supporting students' ideas and meaning, and teaching the skills of writing, such as writing a first draft, revising, and editing writing with help from classmates and teachers. The study recommended that teachers be trained in how to employ the writing process approach.

All in all, teaching writing depends on the preparation and the experience of teachers who could help their students to be strategic writers by using effective practices while teaching writing.

4. Methodology:

The study followed a quantitative approach to achieve its main aim. Data was collected using a questionnaire. Some studies define quantitative approach as the process of gathering information to describe a phenomenon across a larger number of participants, thereby providing the possibility of summarizing characteristics across groups or relationships. This approach surveys a large number of individuals and applies statistical techniques to recognize overall patterns in the relationships of processes. Given that definition, the aim of using a questionnaire in this study was to explore the current practices that Jordanian EFL teachers employ while teaching writing skills. In this case, the sample of the study consists of all female EFL teachers teaching upper basic stage (7th, 8th, 9th and 10th grades) to have a comprehensive idea about current EFL teachers' practices while teaching writing.

5.1 The Main Research Question

This research is based on the following question:

Are Jordanian EFL teachers familiar with effective writing approaches?

5.2 Research process and research design

The research process began with a question to be answered, followed by data collection, and then by data analysis.

5.2.1 Population of the Study

The population of the study included all EFL female teachers who teach the upper basic stage (7th, 8th, 9th and 10th grades) in Zarqa, one of the governorates in Jordan located in the northeast of Amman. They are 200 EFL female teachers who teach lower and upper basic grades.

5.2.2 Sample of the study

The sample of the study was chosen randomly from those who teach only upper basic grades: it was 100 EFL female teachers who agreed to participate in the current study.

5.2.3 The Instrument of the Study

The researchers used a quantitative method of data collection. A questionnaire was designed by the researchers in light of the findings of current educational research in teaching writing. It was used to explore the current instructional practices used by EFL teachers while teaching writing skills. This questionnaire was answered with a 5-point Likert scale that showed which instructional strategies were best known and used by EFL female teachers (e.g., always (5), usually (4), sometimes (3), rarely (2), never (1)).

Validity of the Instrument

The questionnaire for identifying EFL teachers' familiarity with effective instructional practices of writing skills: it was given to a jury of six specialists, one of them specializing in English Language, three of them specializing in Curriculum and Instruction, and two of them specializing in measurement and assessment. Most of their comments recommended rewording some items. All of their comments were taken into consideration in the final version of the instrument.

Reliability of the Instrument

To measure the reliability of the questionnaire of EFL teachers' familiarity with



instructional strategies for writing skills, the researchers conducted a pilot study that used the Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

Table 1. Reliability of the EFL teachers' familiarity with instructional strategies for writing skills questionnaire using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient

No	Tool	No. of items	Cronbach Alpha
	EFL teachers' familiarity with instructional strategies for writing skills questionnaire.	20 items	0.877

As shown in table (1), the internal consistency of the questionnaire items in teaching writing was deemed appropriate for the purposes of this study.

5. Data analysis

As the main source of data collection was the questionnaire, descriptive statistics were mainly used to explore what teaching practices

EFL teachers in Zarqa employed while teaching writing. To ensure the ethics of the research, an official letter was sent to school principals to inform them about the topic of the research, the respondents were not required to write their names, and the researcher explained that the findings of the research were only for scientific purposes.

6.1 Finding analysis

Descriptive statistics were implemented using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 19)

The main Question: Are Jordanian EFL teachers familiar with proven effective writing approaches?

Means and standard deviations were computed for each item in the questionnaire. In order to make it easier to interpret the findings of the study, the following criteria (out of 5) were adopted to identify if teachers were familiar with proven effective practices while teaching writing: 5- 3.69 : high, 3.68-2.60 : middle, 2.58-1: low. The results are reported in table (2).

Table 2. Means and standard deviations of the teachers' responses to the degree of familiarity with effective writing teaching practices:

No	Item	Mean	Standard deviation	The degree of familiarity with the practices	Rank
1	I establish a purpose, audience, and situation for writing.	3.81	.987	High	Sixth
2	I employ the techniques of the cooperative learning strategy.	3.52	.974	Middle	Twelfth
3	I provide students with timely feedback.	4.19	.278	High	Fourth
4	I start teaching students writing using brainstorming.	3.81	.987	High	Seventh
5	I encourage students to imitate a model text.	3.7	.977	High	Eighth
6	I develop students' understanding and practice of the process of writing.	2.00	.912	Low	Eighteenth



7	I realize ways of activating students' prior knowledge about the topic of writing.	3.64	.974	Middle	Tenth
8	I focus on students to work alone to produce their written text as soon as possible.	3.7	.977	High	Ninth
9	I engage students in summarizing and questioning to process the writing text.	3.64	.974	Middle	Eleventh
10	I build student research skills so they can find, read, understand, and use sources appropriately.	2.00	.912	Low	seventeenth
11	I encourage students to work together to plan, write, edit, and revise their writing.	2.46	.641	Low	Fifteenth
12	I explicitly teach students to write using correct grammar..	3.97	.988	High	Fifth
13	I focus on the end product that students submit.	4.38	.586	High	Third
14	I implement a practical classroom routine that provides students with opportunities for practicing planning, writing, and reviewing their compositions.	2.46	.641	Low	Sixteenth
15	I encourage students to act as a peer reviewers.	3.2	.235	Middle	Thirteenth
16	I teach students how to arrange their ideas visually before writing.	2.87	.878	Low	Fourteenth
17	I focus on grammatical and spelling mistakes in students' writing texts.	4.5	.623	High	First
18	I provide models for students of what good writing looks like for particular assignments.	4.48	.691	High	Second

As shown in table (2), the means of teachers' responses to the questionnaire items ranged from (4.5 to 2), this means there is a huge variety in teachers' responses about their familiarity with the effective teaching writing practices. It is noticeable that teachers' responses revealed that teachers followed an eclectic approach of teaching writing with a special focus on using the product approach, for

instance, items numbers (17, 18, 13) which are: focusing on grammatical and spelling mistakes in students' writing texts, providing models for students of what good writing looks like for particular assignments, and focusing on the end product. They came in the first three ranks with the highest means (4.5, 4.48, and 4.38) respectively. This reveals the fact that teachers are familiar, to a high degree, with the product



approach of teaching writing, which mainly focuses on language. That is, writing is seen as a means of reinforcing language which has been presented in the spoken form, and their main aim in writing is on correctness and the copying of a model. This leads to frustrating results in which all students blindly copy the model and mechanically produce similar pieces of writing with minimal errors. This product approach is deemed a constraint on students' ability to think critically and innovatively.

Additionally, the lowest means of teachers' responses were items (6, 10, 14, 16) which are: developing students' understanding and practice of the process of writing, building students' research skills so that they can find, read, understand, and use sources appropriately; implementing a practical classroom routine that provides students with opportunities for practicing planning, writing, and reviewing their compositions, and teaching students how to arrange their ideas visually before writing. This unveils the fact that teachers are not familiar with the teaching practices of the process approach which focuses on idea development and research skills. Furthermore, teachers' responses reveal that they do not employ the teaching practices that motivate thinking while teaching writing like planning ideas, writing the first draft, and reviewing it. Generally speaking, teachers' responses showed that they are familiar with the teaching practices that create an environment for learning writing, like establishing a purpose, knowing the audience and situation for writing, cooperative learning, providing feedback, brainstorming, activating prior knowledge, and using the strategy of summarizing. All in all, the results of the current study revealed that teachers lack deep knowledge supporting their teaching of writing skills. In contrast, they are more familiar with the teacher-centered practices that they acquired from observing their own teachers. In this vein, the average mean of the 18 items was 3.34 with a standard deviation 0.839. This means that the degree of teachers' familiarity with effective writing practices is at the middle level bearing in

mind that 27.7 % of the teaching practices in the research instrument are traditional. This inclusion of traditional strategies was intended to discover if the respondents could differentiate between effective and traditional strategies, and to investigate what they actually employ in the classroom while teaching writing. In a nutshell, teachers reported that they use an eclectic approach but with a great tendency to employ the product approach due to limited time during the semester or their own lack of training.

It is important to mention that these findings are consistent with the results reported in previous studies, like those of Graham and Perin (2007); Kiuahara, Graham, and Hawkin (2009); Ahlsen and Lundh (2008); McCarthy and Ro (2011); Grisham and Wolsey (2011), and Haddad (2014). Most of their findings agree with the results of this research. That is, teachers reported that they use eclectic ways of teaching writing; but they often use the product approach, as it does not need much preparation and time and teachers are not often prepared to apply the process approach.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Developing students' writing skills of writing is considered one of the educational priorities in Jordan and all over the world as it is the gateway for successful work and life. Thus, teachers should receive more appropriate professional development programs that focus on effective teaching practices and convince them to cease impractical ones even though they save time and are easy to implement. Based on these results, it is concluded that teachers' practices in teaching writing should be reviewed and their current knowledge should be updated. EFL teachers' supervisors' awareness of the importance of using effective practices and strategies while teaching writing should be raised, and EFL teachers should be provided with practical and ongoing training courses on how to employ these effective practices. It is also recommended that further studies be conducted in this field to investigate the effects of such variables in determining which practices teachers employ.



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