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The Effect of The Problem Solving Approach on Developing Prep Stage Students' EFL Writing Skills

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Abstract

The Effect of The Problem-Solving Approach On Developing Prep Stage Students' EFL Writing Skills

The current study aimed at investigating the effect of the Problem-Solving Approach in developing the prep stage students' EFL writing skills, especially EFL creative writing skills. The participants were (48) male and female students; 24 students represented the experimental group and 24 students were the control one. They were nominated randomly from Abu-Tisht Prep School. They were classified as an experimental group and a control one. Instruments included a list of some EFL creative writing skills, the proposed program designed by the researcher to train the experimental group students on the specified EFL creative writing skills and a pre-post test to measure the first year students' EFL creative writing skills. The design applied in the present study was the pre-post test control/experimental groups design. A treatment and a non-treatment groups were exposed to pre-post means of getting data (pre-post test of EFL creative writing skills). The participants of the experimental group were trained on the proposed program of developing EFL creative writing skills while the control one received no such training. Results revealed the effect of the proposed program on developing first year preparatory students' EFL creative writing skills. The members of the experimental group performed much better on the post test in the overall EFL creative writing skills than the control group subjects.

Key Words:

Problem solving - EFL creative writing

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Chapter 1

Problem

1.1 Introduction:

A creative mind is one of the most desired needs in this age. So, educators are interested in developing this talent of creativity among children looking for every leading path to achieve that aim. **Fisher, R. and Williams, M. (2004**) pointed out that "creativity is central to improving the functioning and development of society and of school", adding that the importance of creativity in daily life is likely to escalate.

"Creativity is one of the unique powers that the human being is born with" **(Toffler, A. 1980).** Creativity is not confined to genius persons, but it exists in every individual. **"**It is an innate ability of human beings that raises them above all the other living species. Creative abilities exist in every body in varying degrees among people, as do other kinds of mental abilities. Some people are a little more creative, some a little less. None is totally uncreative**" (Shallcross, N. 1981 and Wolf, K. 1991).**

Constantinides, M. (1996) indicated that creativity has four abilities: fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration. She pointed out fluency is the ability to produce lots of ideas, flexibility is the ability to imagine and produce ideas of various types, originality is the ability to create uncommon and new ideas, and elaboration is the ability to embellish and expand existing ideas with more details.

The current knowledge explosion urges the researchers to equip students with the creative skills. Creative minds are needed to face the problems that emerge and need high-creative solutions. **Kund, D. (1985)** set another reason for emphasizing learning creative behavior when he stated that **"**creativity gives dignity to human mind in the age of inventions. Even a computer which can work at amazing pace can not match it, as it can only repeat the mechanical orientations but can not produce original ideas which the human mind is capable of doing**"**. Developing individuals' creativity to respond positively to opportunities, challenges and responsibilities tops priorities of most communities in the world, especially that our knowledge-based age has shifted power from those who own war materials to those who have intellectual capacity, the capacity to create and produce knowledge.

Considering these challenges encouraged researchers and teachers to look for the ways of supporting students with activities that may improve their ability of creativity. As for creativity in writing in EFL, French, J. and Rhoder, C. (1992) stated that writing could be viewed as the main area in the curriculum that we associate with creativity, noting that we can be asked to perform.

"Creative writing is one of the school activities through which creativity manifests itself in many different ways. Creating original ideas, choosing the right words, playing with words which tease the senses and the mind, using correct spelling, writing well-constructed paragraphs - all this is an indication of the creativity in writing." **(Hennings, D. 1982).**

In terms of its topics, **Shorofat, A. (2007)** indicated that writing could be classified into two kinds: functional and creative. Creative writing is that kind through which individuals convey what they have in their minds to others in an attractive literary style. It includes several genres such as writing stories, poems, plays and essays. On the other hand, functional writing is that kind which aims at conveying a direct, clear and specific message to a specific audience.

Thus, developing students' creative writing is believed to be one of the most important skills which EFL learners need to develop throughout their schooling. It could contribute to enhancing learning and increasing students' self-confidence, a fact that might be reflected on the teaching-learning process.

In addition, the stages of creative writing: pre-writing, during-writing, and post-writing are expected to contribute to strengthening students' thinking skills because they engage them in processes such as connecting, analyzing and evaluating ideas, a fact that leads to sharpening students' thinking skills.

In spite of the importance of the activities included in the various writing stages, many teachers give little or even no attention to such stages. **Colantone, L. (1998)** cited that many EFL teachers follow the traditional method in teaching composition concentrating on the final product rather than on the process of writing. "In writing classes, teachers emphasize mechanics, spelling, punctuation, grammar, sentence structure, width of margins, and so on, with little attention to development or style."

During their schooling, EFL learners need to develop some creative writing skills such as: the ability to write complete and meaningful sentences, coherent, clear and well-organized ideas, use communicative language, choose suitable words and idioms and use writing mechanics appropriately.

As for the role of the educational system in facilitating the learning process and developing students' creativity **Ibrahim, A. (2002)** assured the necessity of creating a climate that encourages students' creativity, noting the importance of formulating the curriculum in a way that contributes to developing students' creative thinking skills.

So, having an environment "full of ideas, experiences, interesting materials, and resources and in a relaxing atmosphere" is believed to play an essential role in developing students' creativity and facilitating the learning process. **(Craft, A. and Jeffery, B. (2001)**

On the other hand, **Loehle, C. (1996)** cited that "Despite their essential role in developing students' creativity, school systems tend to emphasize single correct answers and provide few opportunities for exploratory learning , problem solving, or innovation."

Through creative writing, students can express themselves, their feelings, ideas and plans. It is the tool by which an individual can turn imagination and inspiration into visible words. Mainly by writing creatively, the student can communicate thoughts to others. By creative

writing, the student can play with ideas and look for new relationships. Writing creatively helps students investigate, argue and report on the base of thinking and dealing with ideas.

"The ability to communicate ideas in creative writing is a highly valued skill in society**" (Perez, S. 1983**). "Writing provides the pleasure of sending a personal message to a friend. It assures career and financial importance in the composition of a resume or a business letter" **(Gunn, T. & Teraski, D. 1982)**. Written language, as stated by **Freedman, S. et al. (1987)**, allows the human to know and understand human nature, to chronicle history and culture, to learn in all disciplines. It also allows the students to communicate with each other and to express their experiences and thoughts. "The human has distinguished himself with this intense desire to communicate and record thoughts and experiences" **(Stephens, T. et al. 1983)**. Writing also helps students to be creative in the use of the language. The product may be a poem, essay, letter, report, story, short paragraph, composition …etc.

The process of learning creative writing begins in young age. The positive oral and written language experiences children have at home, day care, preschool, and kindergarten contribute to the developing capacity to communicate in writing. Adults in day care settings and preschools can promote the development of writing skills by offering numerous informal opportunities for children to observe, explore, and experiment with writing. When children observe that adults are writing in order to accomplish real tasks, they learn the value and function of writing. It is a good idea to have a box of writing tools and materials available for children to use when they want to write their own way **(Strickland, D. & Morrow, L. 1989**).

Many educators and parents assume that young children must progress through a sequence of clearly defined skill areas to acquire listening, speaking, reading, and, finally, writing facility. As a result, young children often are not encouraged to write until they have learned how to read and have mastered the mechanics of writing (grammar, capitalization, and punctuation). Recent studies in emergent literacy--the early stages of learning to write and read-have shown that young children compose before they know much about the conventions of writing and reading or have the skill to control the formation of letters. As young children gradually realize the usefulness of writing-even unconventional writing-they are encouraged to develop related literacy skills. **(Maeher, J. 1989).**

Creative writing activities should be designed to increase the students' interest in solving word problems and to improve their problem solving skills. They should be taught problem-solving strategies such as patterns, charts, and graphs. When students are taught problem solving strategies and how to read word problems with understanding, they will be successful in solving word problems and will enjoy solving the problems **(Wilborn, B. & letta, G. 1994:35).**

In the process of creative writing, writers experience different types of vocabulary problems (competence-based and performance-based problems) that they were aware of. In order to solve these problems they use different strategies with different degrees of effectiveness. The type and frequency of the vocabulary problem, the strategies writers used to overcome these

problems and the rate of effectiveness of the strategies appeared to be related to the writers' proficiency **(Hemmati, F. 2002:12).**

When teacher and student co-construct meaning involved in the adoption and implementation of a specific cognitive writing strategy, writers have a better understanding of how to use the strategy as a means to problem solve contextualized writing task. The most focused needs appeared to be planning and organisation during the writing process (**Vitagliano**, **R. 2001:171)**

Creative writing task and the writer's background knowledge strongly influence planning and composing strategies. Although there are differences in how writers adapt technologies to their needs, each individual's basic schema persists regardless of the medium. The second language writers exhibit a wide range of composing and planning styles, which may reflect their underlying orientation towards idea generation, as well as their problem solving heuristics **(Couch, A. & Pamela, J. 2000:277).**

Since (EFL) writers face both linguistic and rhetorical problems, English language skills alone do not guarantee proficiency in (EFL) writing. Writing is basically a process of cognitive problem solving. Studies comparing second-or foreign-language writing process with that of first language writing demonstrated many similarities between first and second-or foreign-language writing process. However, the transfer of writing skills from a first to second or foreign language is possible only when the writer posses an adequate level of second or foreign language. The focus of (EFL) writing instruction should vary depending on the student's English language proficiency. For low English language proficiency students, the focus of (EFL) writing instruction should be developing their English language skills. For advanced English learners, the focus of the instruction should be on developing their writing skills rather than their English language skills **(Ryu, H. 1997:158).**

By investigating the role of metacognitive skills in young (EFL) students' writing revisions using the computer as a writing tool, it was found that metacognitive skills are important in identifying one's writing weakness and generating alternatives. Both self-regulation training and problem solving techniques proved to be significantly effective in enhancing the young (EFL) students' metacognitive and writing skills. Though there have been few reports of attempts to teach young (EFL) students metacognitive strategies, the results were very promising. With the metacognitive training, the (EFL) students developed a problem solving view of writing revisions **(Kim, W. 1991:269).**

Nowadays, because of the obvious vision of the inability of students to express themselves in writing, there is a great concern by the researchers to solve this problem which is mainly due to the inefficiency of teachers to teach creative writing. This inefficiency may be due to the little amount of training on such skills during their faculty stage. It may be due, too, to the great concern of teachers to finish their syllabus on time, so there is not enough time to teach EFL creative writing. With regard to means to enhance students' creativity, **Manktelow, J. (2003)**