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A Proposed Strategy Based on Service Learning to Develop English Functional Writing Skills for Secondary Stage Learners

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for MA Degree in Education

(Curriculum and Instruction of English as a Foreign Language)

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Abstract

The present study investigated the effectiveness of a proposed strategy based on service learning in developing the EFL functional writing skills for the secondary stage. The study employed a quasi-experimental design, in which twenty three students in second secondary at Mostafa Kamel Governmental Language School, Omrania zone, Giza Governorate, participated. The instruments of data collection included a checklist for determining the required EFL functional writing skills and sub-skills, a pre-posttest of EFL functional writing skills and a scoring rubric. The experiment lasted for 10 weeks in the second term of the academic year 2017-2018. Results indicated that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the study group on "overall EFL functional writing skills" pre- posttests in favour of the posttest. Hence, it was concluded that using service learning was effective in developing the EFL functional writing skills of the second secondary students.

Key words: EFL Functional Writing, Service –Learning

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CHAPTER I

Background of the Problem

1.1 Introduction

In the age of globalization, the widely used networking sites, the increasing multinational companies as well as the rapidly advanced knowledge, sciences and technologies, the need for good communication in English has become a pressing necessity internationally. Consequently, a huge worldwide demand for EFL high quality learning and innovative teaching approaches, techniques and strategies has been created.

The Ministry of Education (MOE) in Egypt embraces the same earlier perspective of the significance of EFL learning, which is featured in The National Curriculum Framework for English as a Foreign Language for grades 10–12, as follows; “English is the principal international language of diplomacy, knowledge, business and tourism. Thus, it has a dominant position in international media, in science, and in modern technology. A high percentage of world publications in science, technology and commerce are published in English.” (2012, p.,4).That is the reason English is the first and most commonly used foreign language in Egypt

in both public and private Egyptian schools; accordingly it was introduced as a mandatory subject to first year primary in 2003/2004.

Likewise, employers ensure that their employees should have good English language command, which is considered a prerequisite for success and advancement in many fields of employment in today's world (Graham & Perin, 2007; MCllwraith & Fourtune, 2016).

Therefore, The EFL curriculum in Egypt is designed to equip learners with the necessary English language skills to communicate effectively in speaking, listening, reading and writing English that will enable them to participate actively in a global society, and pursue their higher studies or to enter the labour market.

When writing skills are needed in everyday communications, either in school or after school, they take an instrumental or a functional role and are therefore referred to as functional writing skills. A functional approach to language in general and writing in particular takes language further into a more realistic contextual realm that involves everyday-life situations. Hence, acquiring the EFL functional writing skills requires learners to be able to communicate in ways that make them effective, operate confidently and convey their ideas and opinions clearly in a wide range of meaningful contexts in their communities, workplace and educational settings. (Abdallah, 2014; Onchera & Manyasi, 2013)

Accordingly, the National Curriculum Framework for English as a Foreign Language for MOE: grades 10-12 (2012) requires mastering EFL functional writing skills among the EFL learning outcomes required for secondary school students in Egypt, as EFL functional writing skills prepare secondary students for academic writing, which is the medium of written communication in most universities in Egypt. Moreover, it prepares them for pursuing their higher studies and joining the severely competitive labour market.

To fulfill the aforementioned goals, recent researches conducted locally in the field of teaching and learning EFL writing skills (Bahgat, 2011; Elsayed, 2012; Ibraheem, 2016; Khodary , 2010; Salem, 2013; Shadi, 2015; Suleiman, 2015) emphasized that more attention should be given to teaching and learning writing skills at schools. In addition, they recommended innovative and engaging teaching methodologies to be fostered for teaching the EFL writing skills in the classroom.

Scholars suggest service-learning as pedagogy to promote the content, cross-cultural, and language-learning of ESL students. Service learning focuses on enabling and enhancing students' learning through experience, reflection and connection to academic learning. Accordingly, service learning includes three main elements: course content, service project, and student reflection (Brail, 2016; Heuser, 1999; Kaye, 2010). Service learning is shaped by education reform

principles that encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning. It is also inspired by the belief that the academy has a fundamental responsibility to prepare students for lives of active citizenship (Nodoushan & Pashapour, 2016; Stanton, Giles & Cruz, 1999).

Service learning provides experiential learning opportunities that can create a space conducive to socialization and language acquisition, for it "emphasizes learning from firsthand, personal experiences rather than from lectures, books, and other second-hand sources" (Ravitch, 2007, p., 91). By creating reciprocal, experiential, and communicative inquiry spaces such as service learning, learners can reap the benefits from being deeply engaged. Crick stated that in contrast to passive engagement, "deep engagement in learning requires personal investment and commitment—learning has to be meaningful and purposeful in the life of the learner". (2012, p., 676). This affords students a platform to access multiple new skills unrelated to the actual classroom-based language learning (Knutson, 2003), as well as it brings together the realms of academia, civic learning, and personal growth to produce such "widely valued outcomes as intercultural competence and team- work" (Felten & Clayton, 2011, p., 77)

Moreover, academics argue that service-learning contributes to developing students' language (Heuser, 1999; Marlow, 2007; Minor, 2001; Spack, 2006; Wurr, 2002, 2009); enhancing their intercultural awareness (Askildson, Kelly, &

Mick, 2013); increasing their engagement in learning and their local communities (Grassi, Hanley, & Liston, 2004; Russell, 2007); and developing their linguistic self- confidence (Hummel, 2013). Another work claims that service-learning leads to deepened understanding of social issues and civic engagement (Perren, Grove, & Thornton, 2013). Similarly, Elwell & Bean (2001) ensure that service learning helps English Language learners recognize that their academic work holds real-world value.

Apparently service learning could be a catalyst for achieving the Egyptian MOE's vision for education: "providing a quality educational service in a non-traditional learner-centered school environment and benefiting from active learning tools and using information and communication technology (ICT) with the hope to provide the learners with self-learning and creative thinking and life skills." (Education for all 2015 National Review, p., 2).

Hence the present study is an attempt to explore the impact of implementing service learning on developing EFL functional writing skills for second year secondary school students.

1.2 Context of the Problem

Out of her experience as an expert EFL teacher, the researcher observed the low level proficiency of EFL functional writing skills for second secondary students through tracking their scores in their monthly tests and term exams.

Additionally, by revisiting the previous studies on the EFL Functional Writing Skills locally, the researcher was informed of the lack of teaching and learning EFL Functional writing in the classroom. (Bahgat, 2011; Elsayed, 2012; Ibraheem, 2016; Khodary ,2010; Salem,2013; Shadi,2015; Suleiman,2015). Additionally, the researcher realized the necessity to expose EFL students to different fields of EFL functional writing with different purposes and audience, and the urgency to employ innovative approaches while teaching EFL functional writing. (Abdallah, 2014; Onchera & Manyasi, 2013; Shaath, 2015)

To further investigate the problem, the researcher interviewed 74 EFL second secondary students and 22 EFL secondary teachers from state schools and governmental language schools in the first term of the academic year 2017/2018, to explore their opinions and beliefs with regard to teaching and learning EFL Functional Writing Skills in the classroom.

The interviews with the students showed the following; the majority of the students assured the insufficiency of learning the EFL functional writing in the