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Full Length Research Paper

Efficient free writing realization in the light of contemporary ELT orientation

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This study is intended to investigate the problems of teaching and learning free writing at the secondary level in the Sultanate of Oman. The study aims at highlighting the difficulties that face learners as well as methods for helping them to get a good mastery and command of producing free writing. The study also emphasizes the adoption of a pupil-centered teaching and learning process taking into consideration the new trend of ELT and the integration of modern technology into teaching free writing. In addition, much emphasis has been placed on grading and integrating the three types of composition (controlled composition- guided composition- free composition). One hundred and eighty learners and fifty teachers were selected randomly to carry out the investigation. Two versions of a questionnaire, an observation and a writing test were selected as data gathering tools. According to the collected data, learners have much difficulty in writing English composition. It has been verified that they are weak in the form and content of composition writing. Moreover, a great number of teachers do not adopt the appropriate techniques for teaching composition. The result of the experiment showed that by adopting group work technique and PowerPoint, learners' interest and achievement can be enhanced. In the light of these findings, the researcher suggests, among other, that teachers should put into practice the highly recommended techniques for teaching controlled, semi-controlled and free composition. Adequate motivation and contextualization are found key factors, both of which can help improve learners' achievement in composition writing. The researcher hopes that the findings of this study would be helpful and beneficial for both teachers and learners.

Keywords:Pupil, Composition, Teacher, Schools.

INTRODUCTION

This study is carried out in Salalah in the southern region of the Sultanate of Oman. The researcher has noticed that the standard of secondary school learners in composition writing is very low. Moreover, the students never stop complaining about their weakness and inability to write a composition efficiently. Hence, this subject has been chosen by the researcher to investigate the real reasons that lie behind this underachievement, hoping that this study will come up with effective solutions.

Statement of the Study

The one area of ELT in which there is an obvious underachievement in Salalah secondary schools, is composition writing. It appears to be a neglected area, which

may have its effects on the learners' performance. Many students' achievement in composition writing is noticeably very poor. They seem to get stuck for words and develop mind blocks when they write a composition. In addition, their writing product seems to lack both fluency and accuracy. It is worth mentioning that a lot of students often write compositions that lack in solid reasons, clear examples and vivid ideas.

Hypotheses of the study

- i- The majority of Omani students are weak in writing English composition.
- ii- Most teachers of English are not teaching English composition properly.

- iii- A large number of students do not receive effective feedback from their teachers on their written compositions.

Procedure

Methodology of the study

The researcher uses the descriptive and empirical method to investigate the problems of the learning and teaching of composition writing. Two versions of a questionnaire one for students and another for teachers have been designed. The questions were carefully set to ensure liability and validity in the investigation process.

Literature Review

This chapter incorporates theoretical background of teaching free composition in the light of contemporary ELT orientation. It also highlights the importance of integrating modern technology into teaching free writing.

Definition of composition

In general, "composition" can be defined as a writing product that has the unity of thoughts in all sentences within a paragraph. It must be coherent, with sentences and ideas logically ordered. It also must be clear and correct, involving the careful use of vocabulary, correct spelling, punctuation, good use of grammatical structures and a good conclusion. Highlighting the components of productive writing, Morris (1956:132) argues that "matter form and style sum up the features of productive writing at the level of original composition." This indicates that a good composition involves unity, coherence, emphasis, clarity and correctness. However, Raimes, (1983:7) maintains that, "Some teachers and researchers have stressed quantity of writing rather than quality." In other words, teachers should lay emphasis on content and fluency rather than focusing on the form when teaching composition.

Comparing communicative writing to speaking, Harmer (2004: 3) states that "However long ago writing really started, it has remained for most of its history a minority occupation." This implies that all human beings speak their first language as a matter of course, whereas writing has to be taught. Hence, being a neglected area, the majority of people tends to communicate orally, while the minority practices communicative writing. Pointing out the complexity of writing, Willis (1981:171) stresses the point that "composition is generally the most difficult task." This statement implies that composition writing needs real efforts so as to be taught properly.

Types of English composition

There are three graded and integrated types of English composition: Controlled composition, semi-controlled composition (guided composition) and free composition. Secondary school students should be familiar with two graded steps of composition writing, these steps are:

Controlled composition

Semi-controlled composition

If teachers exposed learners to the above-mentioned types, with sufficient practice on a regular basis, learners are expected to write a free composition effectively.

Techniques of Guided and semi-guided composition

Controlled writing

Stressing the importance of controlled writing, Al-Matawa and Kailani (1989:131) point out that "In controlled writing, pupils are usually provided with the needed keywords and expressions or a model of some type with directions for manipulation in rewriting the model" This shows that, pupils at this stage need much support from the teacher as they cannot write independently. Kral (1999:170) advocates the above mentioned viewpoint stating that, "sometimes those grammar exercises are disguised as composition writing." Hence, controlled composition incorporates techniques such as: missing words, word ordering, and re-arrangement of sentences, parallel paragraph and guided writing using pictures. The aim of these tasks is to help learners provide grammatically correct writing products.

Techniques of teaching controlled writing

1. Missing words

According to Raimes (2013:107), missing words is an effective technique for learning composition writing. It trains secondary school learners to supply correct grammatical items. When they have enough practice, learners are expected to produce correct grammatical sentences. Learners should start this technique at the preparatory and reinforce it at secondary level. The researcher thinks that if the teachers use the PowerPoint program creatively in introducing this technique, the learners' writing ability can definitely be enhanced. For instance, the teacher may organize the students into heterogeneous groups of five. Then the teacher tells students that they are going to have a competition. The group that wins will be awarded a prize. After that, the teacher displays the example using the PowerPoint. Group leaders are then invited to take over displaying sentences. The group that provides the correct answer is awarded one point. Each group is given a name or a letter (A, B, C, D). The group with the most points is the winner. The teacher's role is just to guide and monitor students' performance. Alternatively, groups may be asked to do the exercises on the computer. The teacher monitors the groups' performance from his computer (the server) and announces the winning group. To further the practice at home, group leaders can be asked to e-mail their group members asking them to do the tasks and get feedback from them. Moreover, groups can be asked to design similar exercises at home and show them to the teacher the next day. The teacher after having checked the exercises can ask students to chat with one another practicing this technique. This technique can be displayed creatively by using the PowerPoint using different colors to highlight the target grammatical points. The teacher should make sure that the objective is very clear and students know exactly what to do.

Example: (look) I.....at our classroom.

I can see Ali and Omar.

(Read, write) Ali.....but Omar

This is my room. There.....four walls and.....(number) windows. There.....one door.

2. Word ordering

The correct order and sequence of words in a sentence is very significant. Hence, word ordering technique helps learners to practice syntax. Learners are given some jumbled words which they have to re-arrange to make correct meaningful sentences. e.g. (speak, she, English, can, well) She can speak English well. Can she speak English well?

Learners can start practicing this technique at elementary, and it can be consolidated at preparatory and secondary levels. The teacher can follow the previously mentioned steps to apply this technique. In other words, by dividing students into heterogeneous groups, using the PowerPoint innovatively and giving handouts. Learners can be encouraged to carry out and practice this technique through competitive ornaments. The winning group should be awarded a prize. Alternatively, such a technique can be practiced effectively if teachers get groups compete with each other. The teacher may further the practice of getting learners to work in their groups to do the tasks on computer. The teacher can go round helping and guiding where necessary. For homework, group leaders e-mail their group members and receive a prompt feedback. The teacher should ask groups to design various tasks to carry out in class. The teacher may encourage the learners to explore the Internet and find similar exercises, do them and bring their answers to the teacher for checking.

<http://www.slideshare.net/MeibisN/techniques-to-teach-english>

3. Rearrangement of sentences

To point out the significance of the correct sequence and coherence of sentences, Al-Matawa&Kailani (1989:131) ascertain that rearrangement of sentences is a practical useful technique for learning composition. They go on to clarify that it is commonly used in preparatory and secondary schools. Besides, it can give learners insights into the correct sequence and coherence of sentences. It also familiarizes the learners with the unity of the paragraph and they can also practice making a good ending through it. However, to achieve a recognizable progress, teachers must see to it that, students do it independently and on their own. However, teachers may put into practice the aforementioned competitive techniques using the PowerPoint and distributing handouts to learners. Initially, students may work in groups, when they have had enough practice they can be asked to work individually. Finally, learners should be encouraged to design their own exercises to be practiced in class by all the students.

4. Parallel paragraph

Parallel paragraph is a highly efficient technique for learning composition writing. However, it is never used in secondary schools in Oman. Learners are provided with a model paragraph and are asked to rewrite it by making some substitutions. Students should change some words in the model paragraph putting in other words to build a new paragraph grammatically parallel to the one provided. Teachers need to bear in mind that, all passages they select for applying this technique should be highly interesting for the learners, and they should be compatible with their knowledge and experience.

This technique enables learners to change the subject, or the subject and adverb either to the plural or singular. However,

the technique in question could be more effective if it is introduced by PowerPoint then consolidated by exercises in handouts. Learners should do the exercises in groups. They can use the computer to write a paragraph or an e-mail monitored by the teacher. Group leaders may e-mail their group members asking them to do the task and email back.

The teacher can check groups' performance and award a prize for the group whose members have done the task correctly and satisfactorily. Learners can be asked to resort to the Internet for further practice. They should be able to add adverbs such as: yesterday, tomorrow, now, etc. They also should develop their ability of changing the point of view of the paragraph, affirmative to negative and the opposite.

<http://www.cod.edu/people/faculty/pruter/film>

5. Guided writing using pictures:

Exploring controlled writing techniques, Morris (1956: 76), argues that, guided writing using pictures is a commonly used composition writing technique. It involves a proper, efficient teaching on the part of the teacher. It also requires providing the learners with the necessary vocabulary and structures beside the picture. Moreover, it requires brainstorming of the topic. It can be introduced in the preparatory and secondary levels.

If learners are put into groups, communication of ideas could result in a good production. Also, if the teachers prompt individual pupils to answer questions about the picture, it will be a successful alternative. Thus, required statements that form a composition could be elicited. Finally, all the classes would be given an insight into the topic. Teachers should make sure that tasks in the handouts are crystal clear, and then they have to use the PowerPoint to attract the learners' attention. Learners will be highly motivated when they look at such enjoyable pictures being displayed by the projector. Similarly, it would be more fascinating if the tasks are prepared on computer. In addition, learners are expected to practice this technique more enthusiastically in groups. They could exchange e-mails monitored by the teacher or group leaders. Harmer (2007:120)

Techniques of teaching semi-controlled (guided) writing

The secondary school teachers have to adopt the techniques which can best suit their learners. In this way, they can better their learners' writing ability, through a pupil-centered teaching and learning process.

1. Pictorial exercises

Morris (1957:134) advocates the adoption of the pictorial exercises technique; he explains that, in this technique the teacher gives the class some pictures or film strips. Then he explains the objective and elicits from learners what they will do in this task. After that, students are asked to write about the content or the sequence of events in the displayed pictures. The teacher then asks guide questions. He can use the PowerPoint program with handouts, or prepare the exercises on the computer. Learners can be asked to explore the Internet in their groups and prepare a variety of exercises, adding suitable and appropriate vocabulary and expressions.

By adopting this useful technique at secondary level, teachers can develop their students writing skill. It helps learners to work in groups to build up and generate sentences based on

the provided pictures. Learners can be able to practice the correct ordering of sentences and provide a good opening and ending to their paragraphs. Morris (1957:135) thinks that, "Pictures that tell a story without words are an excellent means for prompting both oral and written composition." This shows the importance of pictures that tell a story, but the writing should follow the oral treatment.

2. Narrative exercise

Teachers can adopt this helpful technique at the preparatory stage and reinforce it at secondary level. The teacher reads a story to the class, and then he/she writes some good questions on the blackboard or issue handouts. Learners are then asked to retell or summarize the story in writing. After the teacher has given the model, learners are invited to practice telling stories and writing guide questions. As homework, learners can practice this technique by chatting via the facebook. Students in groups could prepare different exercises by resorting to the Internet and show them to the teacher the following day.

<http://lps.lexingtonma.org/Page/2254>

3. Short story completion

This technique is considered very important as it trains secondary school learners to deal with a dialogue completion of which the first few lines are provided. Alternatively, learners could be asked to write an ending to a story. Teachers have to encourage and prompt the learners to think carefully, as this technique develops imagination and originality of thought. Learners need to bear in mind that a good ending to a short story must draw the paragraph together. By using the PowerPoint and distributing handouts this technique can work out successfully. It can also be practiced on the computer in class, or at home via email. By exploring the Internet through Google, learners can prepare nefarious exercises and bring to the class to show them to the teacher.

Jurgen Wolff (2007:23)

4. Letter writing

Letter writing is a supportive technique that can improve the learner's communicative writing competence. David (1994:22) claims that, letter writing is a significant technique which can be introduced at the preparatory and secondary levels. The teacher reads an interesting letter to the class. Students are shown how to write a letter (address, salutation and ending). Then the teacher gives some guide clues and the aim of the reply. Students write a letter based on the information provided. It would be better at this stage to start with personal or friendly letters.

Teaching letter writing can be much effective if students are given handouts and the PowerPoint is applied, highlighting the address, salutation and ending. Learners in their groups could be asked to write a letter to a friend. The group that writes the best letter should be given a prize. The teacher may ask each student to write a letter to his friend via e-mail or facebook. For further practice teachers can show the learners a model of an e-mail and get them practice in groups. Then the teacher may ask each group to write an e-mail to a friend. For homework, each student could be asked to write an e-mail to a friend. Learners should bring their homework and hand it to the teacher for checking.

5. Cued dialogue

Cued dialogue is one of the important techniques for writing guided composition. Students can start learning this technique at the preparatory level. It would be much helpful if students are encouraged to use it at secondary level as well. Learners should be provided with some cues for a dialogue.

Then students are asked to write the complete conversation. First teachers should give out handouts to all learners. Teachers may display the clues using PowerPoint or write them on computer for learners to work in their groups. Groups can be prompted by the teacher to think of good clues to display using the projector. The group with the best cues wins and gets a good prize. To further the exercise, learners may work at home e-mailing each other and getting prompt feedback. Finally, learners could be asked to prepare more cues for the whole class to practice.

<http://www.meritnation.com/ask-answer/quest>

Factors that may influence English composition writing

Tricia Hedge, (2003:302) claims that, there are three major factors which affect the English composition.

1. A learner's previous experience

It is quite obvious that the first language interferes with the target language. Ellis (1986:19) argues that, "It is also a popular belief that the role of L1 in SLA is a negative one." It is clear that, L1 interferes with the learning of L2. Consequently, features of the L1 are transferred into L2.

2. The mother tongue influence

Nancy, (1976:112) & George Yule, (2003:175) states that, children usually master their mother tongue by imitating utterances produced by adults. So, children build up knowledge of the patterns or habits of their first language and when they start SLA or FLL, they do the same. Al-Matawa and Kailani (1989:29) advocate this belief, stressing that, "Arabic and English are not cognates, and they differ in sound, structure, vocabulary and writing systems." Hence, problems are highly expected in writing composition.

3. The way composition is taught

The third factor that may affect English composition learning is the way composition is taught. Teaching of composition writing should be graded. Teachers must adopt the most appropriate techniques for each of the three types of composition. In addition, they must adopt the techniques of teaching composition as a process. Thus, learners can be expected to tackle free composition successfully, and they can provide error-free writing products. Destructive techniques of feedback should be discouraged. Tricia Hedge (2003: 302)

Considerations in writing a good composition

Having practiced controlled, semi-controlled and free composition, students are expected to develop originality of thought and can provide error-free writing. In other words, common mistakes may completely be eliminated. Learners must understand the orthographic system at earlier stages. In

other words, they should know the relationship between sounds and written symbols. Students have to practice capitalization, punctuation, paragraph indentation and syllable division. Learners also should master the skill of sentence-combining to build an effective paragraph. In addition, they also need to be shown how to organize the whole composition. Learners should consider pre-writing, drafting, editing, proofreading and publishing when writing composition. John Langan (1997:35)

Style: Formal and informal

Teachers should remind their learners to avoid the following errors:

Mistakes due to wrong order of words
Omission of necessary words
The use of unsuitable words or expressions

In addition to the above, teachers should stress the point that students should consider the following points:

1. **Ellipsis:** If the words which are omitted are easily supplied, the ellipses are allowed. E.g. either the boy or the girl must come (Must come after the boy is omitted).
2. **Redundancy:** e.g. the reason of his failure was because of his laziness. The reason of and because of carry the same meaning, one of them should be omitted.
3. **Conversational style:** Learners should not end their compositions with expressions, such as: "That is all I have to say on the subject" or "Here I end my composition". So, learners should avoid informal expressions that are used in an ordinary conversation, they should use formal style and provide a good ending that holds the paragraph together.
4. **Affectation:** Learners should avoid the use of phrases such as e.g. "canine specimen" or dog; "culinary department" for kitchen; etc.
5. **Colloquialisms:** Colloquial phrases should be avoided, although they are not disreputable, like slang, but better to be avoided when writing composition. e.g. To end in smoke; tons of money; a good for nothing fellow; etc.
6. **Slang:** Learners should avoid the use of informal words such as e.g. kid, dad, nosy.
7. **Pedantry:** Students should not use the following phrases as their meaning is not clear enough to understand. E.g. He prefers to say "The custodian of the law" instead of "policeman" "lunar effulgence" instead of "moonlight."
8. **Irrelevancy:** e.g. As I am ill and as I have visited the doctor, I cannot meet you today. The clause "as I have visited the doctor" is not necessary.
9. **The colorless style:** E.g. People, such as teachers, students, doctors, lawyers, ministers, carpenters, visited the shop. It is called 'colorless' because it does not give good sense. It is opposite to 'colorful style' which means the use of fancy and pretentious words.
10. **Similar words:**
Pupils often make mistakes because of the confusion between words of similar form. E.g. beside, besides farther, further later, latter loose, lose.

11. Cliches: Students should avoid expressions that have been out through constant use. E.g. pain in the neck had a hard time of it at a loss for words.

12. Pretentious words: Sometimes students tend to use fancy and elevated words rather than simple and natural words: e.g. While partaking of our morning meal, we engaged in an animated conversation. Milon Nandy (2004:34)

Teachers could exhibit their competence and proficiency in using the PowerPoint when tackling the above mentioned mistakes in style. It would be a good idea if they prepare handouts containing different types of mistakes in style. Learners in groups should be asked to find out these mistakes. The first group to finish the exercise correctly is the winner.

Structure and Lexis employed in composition writing

Omani learners often commit the aforementioned faults in style, except affectation and pedantry, which are mostly committed by native speakers.

Lexis

Learners must be familiar with both grammatical referential, cataphoric and anaphoric connectors. They also need to be familiar with lexical connectors, e.g. Repetition of key words or the same word in different forms (deciding/decision), or the use of synonyms, e.g. mad, insane and antonyms, e.g. good bad etc. Learners should have an adequate control of syntax and vocabulary in order to put ideas into writing. Vocabulary is considered vital in learning composition. Scott, (2004:13) believes that, "Without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed. Morris, (1957:140) advocates this viewpoint confirming that: "Without vocabulary no style can be truly effective." This indicates that learners have to acquire as much appropriate vocabulary as they can to improve their writing, however, it should be graded for easier learning. Students can develop their word power by regular reading, vocabulary word sheets and vocabulary study books. Through reading a good deal, learners can learn words by experiencing them a number of times in a variety of sentences.

Useful structures and expressions for composition writing

Identifying the learner's need for good structure, Milon (2004), holds the view that, For the sake of emphasis, however the adverb clause is sometimes placed at the beginning of a sentence. e.g., because he was hungry, he stole some money. This example represents the periodic sentence. The normal sentence order is represented by the loose sentence which has the subject or principal clause at the beginning. In a balanced sentence, the parts are similar in form but the contrast in meaning, e.g. He talks too much and works too little.

Learners ought to be reminded that, after the conjunctions "either... or" and "neither... nor". The verb agrees with nearer subjects. E.g., either they or she has to say it. When two subjects are joined by "as well as" the verb agrees with the former subject. Learners also have to master the ability of combining sentences. e.g. he came here, he saw me, and he was pleased. These three short sentences should be combined to make a single sentence:

Seeing me, after coming here, he was pleased. He failed, he was sad, he could not sleep. The previous short sentences can

be combined to form the following sentence: As he felt sad after his failure, he could not sleep. Being aware of the learner's need for developing their writing ability; Oshima&House (1997) maintain that, students can use a compound sentence when they want to give equal weight to two closely related ideas (coordination). A complex sentence is used to emphasize one idea over another in a sentence (subordination). When a collective noun is regarded as a unity, it takes a verb in the singular, e.g. the crew was a good one.

Learners need to be reminded that in composition writing, repeated nouns become pronouns, e.g. Ali is a mechanic. He has a big garage. If there may be misunderstanding, the full noun is used to avoid confusion. Singular nouns are first introduced with an indefinite article (a) or (an) or zero article if they are plural. The definite article (the) is used when the (an) noun is mentioned for the second time. Hence, pupils really need to be equipped with the above-mentioned writing conventions.

Realizing the learners' need to ameliorate their writing standard, Milon (2004) states that, if learners try to speak carefully and correctly, they will have little difficulty in writing good composition and they can avoid making serious mistakes. Tenses should not be confused, sometimes the present tense has to be used in a sentence which starts in the past tense, especially when references are made to "facts" and "habits" e.g. She said that the world is round. His sister bought some fish because she likes fish very much. Learners should realize that the infinitive without 'to' is known as 'Bare Infinitive' and it is used after 'bid', 'let', 'make', 'see', 'hear', 'feel', 'watch', 'know' e.g. Let him do the work.

When writing free composition learners must pay attention to grammar, punctuation, and style. Style entails the following points:

1. Clearness

Having identified the necessity for learners to master the process approach, Milon (2004:26) points out that clarity in composition writing can be achieved if learners practice punctuation, spelling, and the mechanics of free composition. Words, phrases, and clauses must be placed in the right order. Facts and ideas should be well arranged before pupils start writing their composition.

Ambiguity and absurdity should be avoided when writing composition. All pronouns (i.e. he, she, it, they, etc.) must be clear in their reference. E.g. Rami told Ahmed he had made a mistake. The meaning is not clear as the pronoun 'he' can refer either to Ahmed or Rami. Another example of ambiguity is "The men hunt lions and when they are killed by them, they are brought home." The pronoun "They" can refer to the men or lions, which make the sentence confusing.

Repeating the meaning of words must also be avoided. e.g. He gave her the gift free gratis for nothing. The two phrases "Free gratis" and "for nothing" carry the same meaning. One of them should be omitted. Words must be chosen accurately. The abbreviation (shortened words) such as, didn't, can't, exam, photo need not be used. The date should be written in figures. As a composition is supposed to be a writer's own thoughts, expressions such as: "I think," "in my opinion". "I shall now deal with" should not be used.

2. Unity of the topic

Learners must keep the unity of sentences and ideas within each paragraph. Every paragraph should be an integral part of the whole composition. It must add a new

idea to the reader and show the progress of the topic. All ideas in the different paragraphs should be well linked. Learners should avoid redundancy, ambiguity and absurdity. A good conclusion is of paramount importance. Alice& Ann (1997:98)

3. Emphasis

According to Langan, (1997:89) learners can obtain a proper emphasis by proportioning their treatment to the importance of their ideas and by placing the most important ideas in the most emphatic positions (the beginning and end of the paragraph).

Depending upon the nature of the material, students may choose one of these general methods for developing, individual paragraphs and series of paragraphs within a composition. They may arrange their material:

- i. In chronological order
- ii. in spatial order
- iii. in order of importance
- iv. by providing examples to support a topic sentence
- v. by examining causes and effects of an action
- vi. by comparing and contrasting two things
- vii. by division and classification

Sentence Variety

If students follow the same pattern when writing sentences, their writing product may become boring and monotonous. To create variety and interest in their writing style, learners can use four different methods.

- i. Add a second complete thought (coordination) e.g. Ahmed turned all the lights off, and then he locked the door.
- ii. Add a dependent thought (subordination) e.g. Even though I was tired, I stayed up to watch the horror film.
- iii. Begin with a special opening word or phrase.

Students can use five openers to start their sentences.

- a. Past participle: -ed word, e.g. Tired from a long day of work, Adel fell asleep on the mat.
- b. Gerund: -ing word, e.g. Using the fax machine, Nadir sent the message quickly.
- c. Adverbs and adjectives: -ly word, e.g. reluctantly, she agreed to write the letter.
- d. Word group: e.g. to get to the airport on time, you must leave now.
- e. Prepositional phrase: e.g. With Omar's help, Fatma painted very beautiful pictures.
- iv. Place adjectives or verbs in a series. e.g. Khalid put the big brown bag into his small yellow car, Before the Eid, Nadia made some cakes, decorated the house, and bought a lot of sweets. Langan (1997:537)

2-16.Group Work

As the adoption of a pupil-centered learning process is one of the aims of this study, teachers need to lay much emphasis on group work. Group work can make learners more interactive and confident. Exchange of ideas among the group members can help learners become more communicative and productive. The communicative skill is of great importance for both oral and written products. Moreover, learners can practice English in context through role play, dialogues or interviews. Kral (1999:160)

Secondary school students can also develop their spelling ability through group work activities, dictation and games such

as “hangman out”. Alternatively, learners can be exposed to a variety of exercises such as: plurals of nouns, of numbers, of letters of words ending in ‘y’ doubling final consonant, suffixes, combinations and abbreviations. Learners can also improve their spelling by

- i. Using the dictionary
- ii. Keeping a personal spelling list
- iii. Mastering commonly confused words
- iv. Understanding basic spelling rules
- v. Studying a basic spelling list

To help students write a coherent composition, teachers need to equip their students with transitional words or phrases such as:

Addition: e.g. and, furthermore.

Comparison: e.g., likewise, similarly.

Result: e.g. accordingly, hence, therefore, etc.

Contrast and concession: e.g. although, but, even if, whereas, however.

Passage of time: e.g. at least, afterwards, then.

Enumeration: e.g. first, second, finally etc.

Example: e.g. for example, in other words, namely.

Summary: e.g. in brief, in conclusion.

Other connecting words: e.g. repeated words, pronouns, synonyms, etc. Group work can be an effective technique if it is applied correctly and properly. It is not only motivating learners, but it fosters active learning and develops critical thinking. In addition, communication and decision-making skills could be enhanced through it. However, it involves careful planning, or else, it may turn out to be so frustrating to both learners and instructors.

If teachers would like to implement group work successfully in their classrooms, they should be aware of the objective of the activity. They should start by giving a relatively easy task in the beginning of the term to arouse student's interest in group work and encourage their progress. Collaborative exercises should be stimulating and challenging.

Groups of 4-5 tend to balance well the need for diversity, productivity, active participation and cohesion. The less skillful the group members, the smaller the groups should be. The teacher ought to have students form groups before he gives them instructions. Students work best together if they know or trust each other.

Correcting English Compositions

Part of ineffective teaching also is the negligence of common mistakes. White (1980:109) argues that, “We can learn a lot from our students' errors since they are often a better guide to improve our teaching.” This shows that learners learn some of the teacher's knowledge, while teachers can learn from their learners' mistakes.

When correcting pupils' compositions, the teacher may circle all the mistakes, or selected ones would be enough. The teacher may circle the mistakes which he/she thinks they will not reappear, as the correct forms have been mentioned during the discussion stage. On no account should the teacher write the correct alternative form of the learners' papers, as spoon-feeding can negatively affect learning composition. Teachers must make sure that their learners have corrected their mistakes.

Alternatively, every teacher can develop his/her own correction symbols and get his/her students well acquainted with them. Teachers must underline mistakes and they must write in the

margin some symbols which indicate the different types of mistakes: SP= spelling, S-V=subject-verb agreement, prep= wrong preposition, tns=wrong tense, //= new paragraph, ww= wrong word, neg= wrong negative form,

Johnson, (1976,101) argues that, “In a majority of cases, dull writing probably can be traced back to the teacher.” This purports that; any underachievement in composition writing could be attributed to the performance of the teacher. In other words, inefficient writing can indicate improper teaching. Morris (1956: 138) asserts that for achieving a good performance in free composition writing, teachers need to discuss the subject orally and make notes. This shows that, what pupils say orally constitutes the form of their writing. Al-Matawa and Kailani(1989:137) raise the point that pupils may write a rough draft of their composition at home, but the final copy must be written in class. This would ensure that pupils use their own knowledge and ideas, because they may resort to outside sources such as parents or friends for the sake of help.

Harmer (2000:263) states that, “interest is a primary ingredient of motivation.” So, if teachers of English would like to get their pupils adequately motivated to improve their writing skill, they have to choose topics of interest in composition writing.

Kral (1999:172) supports this idea, stressing that, “It is much more difficult for students to write if they are required to write about something they have no interest in.” This implies that learners should be provided with topics that lend themselves to facility of expression. It would be better if teachers start with descriptive and narrative topics or letter-writing, and later they can introduce argumentative, expository or abstract writing.

Being a highly complex area of ELT, composition needs to be taught properly. Believing that composition is a rather complicated activity, Amiran and Mann (1982:3) claim that “Students do not and cannot write well.” Teachers should remember that a high level of proficiency can be achieved through a pupil-centered learning process. In other words, a teacher should engage the whole class in a lively discussion, to get across ideas and facts. To allow for individual practice, the teacher's talking time should be minimized. If learners are adequately motivated and well taught, teachers can ensure fruitful results. This can presumably be achieved if teachers adopt and foster the use of PowerPoint in a creative way. In addition, modern technology and technological media such as e-mail can cleverly be exploited. Morris, points out that, “Written mistakes left unchecked tend to become habitual.” This necessitates the immediate checking and rectification of mistakes.

2-18.Feedback

Although it has been agreed that the teacher's written feedback should cover form content and organization. However, it is still debatable which elements must feedback focus on and emphasize. According to Ferris (2002), grammar comes first since it can help learners improve their language accuracy in the short term. Hence, this short-term improvement is important for the long-term progress of learners.

Reid (1993:218) advocates the view that “error feedback must help students improve their writing by communicating feedback detailed enough to allow students to act, to commit to change in their writings.” Nevertheless, some researchers have a quite different attitude towards teacher error feedback. They hold that excessive attention to student errors could be offensive and discouraging to student writers. In addition, it could also be as harmful as it can change the shift of students and teacher's

time and attention from more significant aspects of writing, such as process, development of ideas and organization.

2-19. Remedial Work

The final step in composition writing procedures is the reinforcing or re-teaching process. In order to reinforce some grammatical organized constructions or other items involved in composition writing, the teacher after having finished with marking, may re-teach the composition and provide the learners with exercises (oral or written).

Al-Mutawa and Kailani (1989:139) stress that, alternatively, learners could be organized into 'buzz' groups of four or five to discuss the outlines. They should be asked to prepare a rough draft of their composition. They may be asked to refer to appropriate books and newspapers, or they can consult friends or family members.

Punctuation

The teacher can ask a good student to display the rules for using punctuation marks. Teachers provide learners with clear meaningful sentences. Using the PowerPoint groups do an exercise by rewriting sentences with full punctuation. The group that has the fewest mistakes is the winner. Punctuation marks must be highlighted.

Another bright student displays sentences that are wrongly punctuated. This exercise of error analysis is very important. Students in their groups are asked to rewrite the sentences with correct punctuation. The group that writes all the sentences correctly is the winner.

For further practice and consolidation, teachers can ask a group to design a task for its reciprocal group to do. The group that doesn't commit any mistake is the winner; hence, it should be awarded a prize on condition that the teacher makes sure that each group member can do the task correctly on his own. Alternatively, groups have to do a task on computer. They have to add the correct punctuation missing. Teacher walks round giving help and guidance where needed. Groups are assigned a task to do for homework by exchanging e-mails or by chatting whichever they find easier and more interesting.

Finally, all groups e-mail the teacher giving feedback. Learners are advised to highlight their punctuation marks. The winning group must be awarded a good prize provided that every member should convince the teacher by giving an adequate evidence of his understanding of the task. Jean Wyrick (2002:499)

The teacher may divide the class into groups and gives each group a set of cards containing nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. The teacher makes four columns on the whiteboard and writes nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. The game goes like this: Each group try to sort out the jumbled words as quickly as they can. The quickest group to sort the cards is the winner. Alternatively, the teacher sticks the cards at random into the four columns. Then he encourages each group to rearrange them as quickly as possible. The winning group is the one which is the quickest to finish. Another technique is to stick the cards face down at random into the four columns, then each group try to rearrange the cards faster than the other groups.

The three above techniques can be adopted when dealing with infinitive, past and past participle (irregular verbs). For further practice, teachers can stick the verbs with missing infinitives, past form or participle. Students provide the missing words by writing them correctly. The teacher may think of displaying the

regular and irregular verbs, sometimes omitting the infinitive, the past form or the participle.

Alternatively each group carries out the exercise differently and the correspondent group has to provide the missing words. The group with the fewest mistakes is the winner. The teacher assigns the groups an exercise on computer and lets them work on their own. Then the teacher allows them two minutes to finish. The teacher monitors them and goes round giving help and guidance where necessary. The group with the fewest mistakes is the winner.

For homework, group leaders exchange emails or chat with each other practicing. Finally, each group sends feedback to the teacher. The winning group must have all its members fully understand the task. The teacher checks and makes sure each student in the winning group can give the correct answers orally and in writing. Jermy (2000:243)

2-14. Capitalization

Teachers ought to make learners aware that a title is used to attract attention and generally tells the reader what to expect. It is usually a phrase, not a sentence. Although a one-paragraph composition does not require a title, students should use one for each writing assignment. A title will help them keep their mind on the topic as they write. It would be more effective if the PowerPoint is used with capital letters highlighted. Teachers should distribute handouts containing examples and tasks. Then the teacher explains the objective and what the learners are expected to do.

Learners should capitalize the first, last, and important words in a title.

e.g. Chose Vacation Spot

They should not capitalize short prepositions such as: on, to, in, and for; short, e.g. How to Fight Stress. Conjunctions such as and, or, and so; and the articles a, an, and the should not be capitalized.

e. g. Winning the Lottery

Learners ought to be reminded to capitalize a short word if it is the first word in a title. The problem of Single Parenting, the Advantages of Public Transportation. Alice & Ann (1997:10)

Statistical Analysis

Guttman

This model computes Guttman's lower bounds for true reliability. Kindly note that each of the 20 cases has been tested separately, then all 40 tested together to show the degree of the correlation between all cases that should fall between 1 & -1 i.e. when there was positive correlation the result will be nearer to 1 and vice versa.

In the cases of this study correlation were all positively reported near to 1 by using different types of correlation. The analysis of the data has revealed that English composition is not taught properly in many secondary schools in Salalah, which supports hypothesis number 1.

Recommendations

According to the conclusions drawn in the previous part of the study, the researcher suggests the following recommendations:

1. Teachers should focus on teaching controlled composition effectively by adopting various appropriate techniques.
2. Teachers should adopt effective techniques for teaching guided composition.
3. Teachers should follow up pupils' exercises.
4. Learners should develop their word power by regular reading, vocabulary word sheets and vocabulary study books. Learners need to develop their spelling ability through group work activities, dictation and games such as 'hangman out'. Teachers need to get their learners to practice exercises such as plurals of nouns, of numbers, of letters, of words ending in 'y', doubling final consonant and practicing suffixes.
5. Learners should be trained to use the dictionary, keep a personal spelling list, master commonly confused words and helped to understand basic spelling rules.
6. Learners should be exposed to the highly recommended techniques for teaching free composition such as discussion, oral composition, writing a composition draft, writing composition in class, getting feedback on their composition, mistakes corrected, practicing unity and coherence.
7. Learners should be adequately motivated by providing them with interesting and familiar topics, so that they may not lose interest. Teachers can create the desire for learning composition among learners through group work and by choosing interesting topics and award prizes for winning groups. Learners need to practice a variety of classroom activities such as.
8. Role-playing, problem-solving, mock interview, classroom debates, contests in writing stories. Teachers should make learning composition more pupil-centered.
9. Feedback is of paramount importance to improve the learners' writing ability.

10. More time should be allotted for free composition lessons and English must be taught in context at earlier stages so as to help learners become communicative and express themselves in real life situations adequately.
11. Teachers need to adopt the process writing techniques, use group work technique, exploit the PowerPoint media, foster e-mail writing and encourage their learners to explore the Internet to further their achievement in free writing.

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