

## Developing Students' Writing Abilities through Reading: The Case study of 2<sup>nd</sup> year LMD students at Bejaia University

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### **Abstract:**

Reading provides students with an opportunity of being exposed to well written pieces of writing which can help them improve their language abilities and writing schemata.

The present article investigates the effectiveness of teaching writing through reading to develop students' writing abilities. The participants are second year LMD students at the University of Bejaia. To carry out the research, a quasi- experimental design is adopted to test the hypothesis that teaching reading and writing integratively enhances students writing competence compared to teaching the writing skill alone. For this purpose, two groups displaying similar performance on the writing proficiency pre-test were randomly assigned into an experimental group and a control groups. The experimental group (n=16) was taught reading and writing integratively while the control group (n=16) received no manipulation.

At the end of the program, both groups were administered a writing proficiency post-test. Statistical analysis procedures were applied to the test scores of both groups.

The results of this study indicate that there is a statistically significant difference between the control and experimental groups' at the level of the posttest. Furthermore, the scores obtained from the pretest and posttest, concerning the experimental group, indicates that the students' abilities in writing improved after implementing our reading/writing program

**Key words:** writing, writing abilities, reading, reading/writing connection, reading/writing program, pretest, posttest.

### الملخص:

تسمح القراءة للطلبة بالتعرض لنماذج متعددة من الكتابة، والتي يمكن أن تساعد على تطوير قدراتهم اللسانية إلى جانب كتاباتهم؛ حيث يتناول هذا المقال فاعلية تعليم الكتابة عبر القراءة، قصد تطوير مؤهلات الكتابة لدى لطلبة، أما المشاركون في هذه العملية فهم طلبة السنة الثانية نظام (ل م د) بجامعة عبد الرحمن ميرة. بجاية..

تبيننا لإنجاز هذا البحث منهجية شبه تجريبية لمقارنة هذه الفرضية وفقا لمعطيات تعلم الكتابة وحدها، وقد أبرز فوجان اختيرا بشكل عشوائي ضمن فوج تجريبي وآخر تقويبي؛ كفاءات متشابهة من خلال تقييم أولي في مقياس (التمكن من القراءة)، حيث درس الفوج التجريبي الكتابة عبر القراءة، لاسيما وأنه الفوج الذي لم يتلق أي استغلال.

كما أجري في نهاية البرنامج تقييم بعدي للفوجين قصد تقييم كتاباتهم والتوصل إلى تحليل إحصائي. فلقد أبرزت نتائج هذه الدراسة اختلافا إحصائيا تعيينيا بين الفوجين (تقييما وتجريبا على المستوى البعدي).

الكلمات المفاتيح : الكتابة/ مهارات الكتابة و القراءة/ الربط بين(الكتابة/القراءة)، برنامج القراءة كتابة، التقييم القبلي/ التقييم البعدي.

### **Introduction**

English language teaching encompasses the teaching/learning of four skills, namely: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Throughout English language teaching history, some skills were given more importance than others. If reading on one hand, received the lion's share of attention at the expense of other skills with the advocates of the grammar translation method, on the other hand, the communicative approach, on the other one, put a great emphasis on speaking and listening skills. However, all these skills

are in fact interrelated as the fingers of the same hand. They are complementary; a development in one skill consequently fosters the development in another. Educators and researchers have clearly established that reading and writing abilities develop together (Tierney and Shanahan 1991). In this sense, it has been noted that the links between reading and writing for example, have been emphasised to such an extent that it is now normal to see them referred to as "literacy". Teaching reading and writing together is an effective way of increasing literacy and language development, with a strong impact on vocabulary, grammar and writing.

### **The relationship between reading and writing**

For many years, reading and writing researchers (Tierney, Soter, O'Flahavour and Mc Ginley, 1989) have acknowledged the importance of the connection between reading and writing processes. This idea was previously suggested by Chomsky (1976) who argued that children can learn complex language patterns from reading. Accordingly, Smith (1983) proposes that a great part of the writing conventions enter into our memory without awareness of the learning that is taking place. In this context, three main statements have been made from research findings (Grabe, 2000)

- Better readers are better writers
- Better writers read more than poorer writers

- Learners exposed to more models of print text tend to produce better texts in syntactic and rhetoric terms.

### **Theoretical approaches to reading-writing connection**

A growing body of research on the reading-writing relationship used varied approaches to provide insights into this relationship. These approaches can be grouped into three main theoretical approaches:

- Rhetorical relations
- Procedural connections
- Shared knowledge and cognitive processes

### **Rhetorical relations**

From this perspective, reading and writing are considered as communication activities. Readers and writers gain insights into communication by being both sender and receiver (Fitzgerald and Shanahan, 2000). This approach considers both reading and writing to be meaning-making activities. As described by Tierney and Pearson (1983:33)

Reading and writing are essentially similar processes of meaning construction. Both are acts of composing. From a reader's perspective, meaning is created as a reader uses his background of experience together with the author's cues to come to grips both with what the reader decides and creates for himself. As a writer writes he uses his own background of experience to generate ideas and in order to

produce a text which is considerate to his idealized reader, filters these drafts through his judgments about what his reader's background of experience will be, what he wants to say and what he wants the reader to think or do.

### **Procedural connections**

The procedural connections approach treats reading and writing as functional activities that can be combined to accomplish external goals (Fitzgerald and Shanahan, 2000). This approach is interested in how the combination of both writing and reading activities can impact positively the learning process.

In this context, Some studies have shown that additional reading can improve components of writing such as grammar and writing performance generally more than writing practice alone (Elley, Barham, Lamb and Wyllies, 1976).

#### **a) Shared Knowledge and cognitive processes**

This approach is based on the view that reading and writing are connected because they "depend on identical or similar knowledge representations, cognitive processes and contexts and contextual constraints." (Fitzgerald and Shanahan, 2000:40). Moreover, shared knowledge and cognitive processes combine elements from the two previous approaches, namely: rhetorical relations and procedural connections. According to the proponents of this

approach as Fitzgerald and Shanahan, readers and writers rely on four common knowledge bases:

- Domain or content knowledge: it refers to the topic about which one is reading or writing.
- Procedural knowledge: it refers to the knowledge and skills needed to negotiate reading and writing (Langer, 1986). This can include relatively automatic processes, such as recalling information from memory, or more intentional strategies such as predicting, summarizing or questioning (Kellogg, 1994). Procedural knowledge is also described as the cognitive process employed by readers and writers to access, use and generate information during reading and writing (Shanahan, 2006).
- Knowledge of specific features or components of written language: this part includes a wide range of knowledge, from the word level to the text level, including phonemic, orthographic, morphological, lexical, and syntactic and discourse features.
- Meta-knowledge: includes knowing about the functions and purposes of reading or writing, knowing that writers and readers interact, monitoring one's own meaning-making and monitoring word identification strategies (Fitzgerald and Shanahan, 2000).

## **The reading-writing relationship in L2 context**

According to Grabe (2003), the reading-writing relationship in L2 context is mainly viewed in terms of directionality (i.e. the directional hypothesis proposed by Eisterhold), this view implies that the transfer of structure occurs in one direction: from reading to writing. Accordingly, this hypothesis presupposes that the emergence of composing skills must be preceded by the establishment of sound reading skills which occurs through practice and exposure to print.

A growing body of research in L2 supports the notion of directionality, for example: Spivey and King, 1989; Carson and Leki, 1993; Flower and Hayes, 1994; Hivela, 2004. In the light of these studies, it has been acknowledged that reading has actually become the basis of writing because the information acquired through reading contains print encoded messages as well as clues about how messages grammatical, lexical, semantic, pragmatic and rhetorical constitute and combine to make the message. Thus, Krashen put forth that comprehensible input in the form of reading stimulates language acquisition because reading is primarily responsible for much of our competence in vocabulary, reading comprehension and writing style. (Krashen, 2004)

### **Research Methodology and Research Design**

**Research questions:** The current research study investigates the possible effects of integrating reading and writing on students' writing abilities.

So the research questions that are posed and the corresponding hypotheses that are proposed in this research are as follow:

- 1) Will a reading/writing intervention program have any impact on the students' writing abilities?
- 2) Are there any differences in students' achievement scores in paragraph writing between the experimental and the control groups in the post-test?

### **HYPOTHESES:**

This study questions the influence of students' reading on their writing development so we hypothesize that:

**H1)** the students of the experimental group after implementing the treatment, will perform better in the posttest

**H2)** the students of the experimental group where reading and writing are taught together will show better writing ability than those of the control group where writing is taught as an individual subject.

### **Method of the study and Procedure**

As stated before, the research method employed in this study is a quasi-experimental design. Quasi-experimental designs are constructed from situations which already exist in the real world, and are probably more representative of the conditions found in educational contexts (Campbell and Stanley 1963). This category of designs is frequently used in the evaluation of teaching programs when random assignment is not possible or practical. This



method involves three basic components of experiments as presented by Seliger & Shohamy (1989, P.136) that is the population (2<sup>nd</sup> year L.M.D), the treatment (the program of integrating reading and writing teaching) and the measurement of the treatment (t. test).

The study took place during the academic year 2014/2015; two groups were selected and assigned to an experimental group and a control group. The two groups were taught by the same teacher in order to avoid instructor related variables. Both groups received a pretest as well as a posttest. The control group had courses without any treatment; in other words, they fulfilled the normal requirements of the curriculum for B.A students of English, whereas the experimental group were administered a treatment.

### **Population**

In this study, the population is second year LMD students. They are 210 students, enrolled in the academic year 2014/2015, who have been taught English for at least seven years (three years at the middle school, three year at the secondary school and one year at the university). They share the same academic background, having taken the same academic course during their first year as far as written expression credit is concerned.

### **Sample /Participants**

The present study explores the performance of two groups of 2<sup>nd</sup> year LMD students. The experimental group (n=16) was taught the reading and

writing skills in an integrated approach of instruction. The control group (n= 16) completed their ordinary written expression courses.

### **Contextual setting:**

The educational setting in which this study took place is the department of English, faculty of letters and languages, university of Bejaia during the academic year 2014-2015.

### **Data collection**

#### **The instruments**

#### **Pre- test and post- test.**

In education contexts, tests are considered as the most appropriate tools of research since they provide the researcher with data concerning the target population. In the framework of this study, we have elaborated a pre-test as well as a post-test.

#### **a) Pre-test: Diagnostic test**

It is the measurement of the dependent variable before the introduction of the treatment.

The diagnostic test is used to assess the students' writing level before starting any teaching program. Hence, this type of testing is designed to "identify strengths and weaknesses in a student's knowledge and use of language." (Alderson, 2006:11)

Through this diagnostic test, we want to explore 2<sup>nd</sup> LMD students' writing proficiency, and thus to diagnose their deficiencies in writing. The participants were required to write a paragraph about the importance of learning English, the time allotted is 01h30.

### **b) Post-test**

It is the measurement of the dependent variable after the treatment has been introduced into the experimental situation. As a matter of fact, the post-test was used with both the experimental and control group so as to compare the scores and see whether the independent variable had any effect on the dependent one. Hence, the aim of this post-test is to evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching program.

### **The Reading-Writing program**

The first stage of the experimental field was the selection of a wide range of different texts: narrative, descriptive, argumentative etc. The selection of texts and tasks was guided by the content of 2LMD written expression program and students'. In other words, this selection is tidally related to the aim of the writing course itself.

### **The procedure**

The procedure aims to gauge the effectiveness of a program where both reading and writing are taught in a connected way to one group which represents the experimental one with more emphasis on reading for writing.

The courses run for 16 weeks. The first two weeks were devoted for pre-testing and explaining the procedure. By the end of the second semester, both the experiment group and the control group were tested.

## Reporting the main Results

### I. Descriptive statistics of the Experimental and Control Group in the t-test

This section presents a descriptive statistics results in order to have an overall view of our results:

**Descriptive Statistics**

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre-experimental group scores	16	8,00	6,00	14,00	9,1875	3,10309
Pre-control group scores	16	10,00	4,00	14,00	8,7500	3,15172
post-experimental group scores	16	7,00	8,00	15,00	11,3750	2,27669
post-control group scores	16	8,00	6,00	14,00	9,0000	2,47656
Valid N (listwise)	16					

The scores of the **pre-experimental** group are between 6 (**Min** score) and 14 (**max** score) with a **range** (difference between the largest and the lowest scores) of 8. The central tendency or the average of their marks are 9.1875 (**mean** score) with the dispersion degree of 3.10309 (**Std. Deviation**).

The scores of the **post-experimental** group are between 8 (**Min** score) and 15 (**max** score) with a **range** (difference between the largest and the

lowest scores) of 7. The central tendency average of their marks are 11.3750 (the **mean** score) with the dispersion degree of 2.27669 (**Std. Deviation**).

The scores of the pre-control group are between 4 and 14 with a range of 10. The average of their marks are 8.7500 (the mean score) with the dispersion degree of 3.15172 (Std. Deviation).

The scores of the post-control group are between 6 and 14 with a range of 8. The average of their marks are 9.0000 (the mean score) with the dispersion degree of 2.47656 (Std. Deviation).

## II. The Paired t-test Results : Comparing pre- and post t-test results

A paired t-test was conducted to compare the experimental group and control groups' mean scores. Our hypothesis suggests that teaching writing through reading has affected positively the experimental group in the post study.

The results are shown in this table:

	Pre-test		Post-test		N	95% CI For mean difference	T	Df	Sig. (2tailed)
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD					
Experimental Group	9.1875	3.10309	11.3750	2.27669	16	[-4.12562, -.24938]	-2.406	15	.029
Control group	8.7500	3.15172	9.0000	2.47656	16	[-1.86039, 1.36039]	-.331	15	.745

Table1: the Paired t-test results for both experimental and control groups

If we observe the first table, we can see that the mean score of the post experimental group (M=11.37 (SD=2.27)) is higher than the of pre experimental group mean (M=9.18; This table shows that there is ***a***

**significant difference** in the scores of the post experimental group ( $M = 11.3750$ ,  $SD = 2.27669$ ) and the pre experimental group ( $M = 9.1875$ ,  $SD = 3.10309$ );  $t(15) = -2.406$ ,  $p = .029$ . We observe that  $p < .05$ ,

Consequently, there is a **statistically significant difference** in the scores of pre and post experimental group scores in the post-test. Therefore, we **have found a strong evidence** ( $t = 2.82$ ,  $p = .029$ ) that the solution we have used improves our dependent variable.

In addition, another comparison is shown in the first table where we can see that the mean score of the post control group ( $M=9$  ( $SD=2.47$ )) is higher than the of pre control group mean ( $M= 8.75$  ( $SD=3.15$ )) in the post test. So through the t-test we can see whether the difference is statistically significant or it is just by chance.

This table shows that there is **not a significant difference** in the scores of the post control group ( $M = 9.0000$ ,  $SD = 2.47656$ ) and the pre control group ( $M = 8.7500$ ,  $SD = 3.15172$ );  $t(15) = -.331$ ,  $p = .745$ . We observe that  $p > .05$

Consequently, there is **no statistically significant difference** in the scores of pre and post control group scores in the post-test.

To conclude, the T-test suggests that writing which represents our dependent variable has been developed through the reading/ writing program, our treatment which represents the independent variable.

## **Recommendations**

Writing is one of the four skills which needs special attention, especially in EFL context since it is considered as the most difficult one to be acquired. In fact, when learners write, they are expected to find and organize ideas, consider many issues such as content, organization, purpose, target audience, appropriate vocabulary, correct spelling, and mechanics (Atkinson, 2003; and Kim & Kim, 2005) In the light of the results obtained from this study it can be argued that reading might have the potential to help students of English improve their writing abilities. Indeed, reading offers a good opportunity for students to gain new vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, and different styles of writing which they will be able to use in producing different pieces of writing. Therefore, teaching writing through reading may offer an alternative to help students overcome the difficulties they encounter when writing in English. Furthermore, teachers need to provide a literacy environment where the students know that they are being involved in reading and writing (Shanahan, 1988) Besides, the role of the teacher is also to build schemata for writing by exposing students to a rich and varied panel of texts which will serve as an input as advocated by Krashen in the "input Hypothesis" According to his view, Krashen explains that the determining acquisition of competence in an L2 is exposure to large amounts of meaningful, interesting or relevant L2 material.

## **Conclusion**

This paper is an endeavor to examine the extent to which teaching writing through reading is beneficial to EFL students' writing performance. Comparing the results of the experimental and the control groups, we have observed significant differences in students' achievements scores in favor of the experimental group. Indeed, students in the experimental group performed better than their peers in the control group. Furthermore, another comparison revealed that the students in the experiment group performed better in the posttest, thus we can deduce that writing which represents our dependent variable has been developed through the reading/ writing program, our treatment which represents the independent variable.

Moreover, it can thus be concluded that the findings of this study are consistent with studies conducted by researchers and practionners in the field of ESL/EFL who have acknowledged the importance of reading in developing writing skills (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996; Scarcella & Oxford, 1992; Carson and Laki, 1993; Hirvela, 2004).

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