

Challenges of Teaching Academic Writing Skills in EFL Classroom

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Abstract – Writing is one of the compulsory modules in the program of English linguistic training which students have to take at any university. In fact, students have many difficulties in understanding and writing all kinds of documents in English, making their learning results not as expected. Writing skills include conceptual development, language expression, and experience in a wide range of writing topics and the fact that each student has his own ideas, language proficiency makes teaching writing skills become a big challenge for English lecturers. To properly assess the current situation, the author has conducted an investigation in which students are surveyed and taught in a writing class and found that students had difficulties with vocabulary, grammar and writing skills. The cause of these difficulties stems from both subjective and objective reasons. Through that, the author proposes a number of solutions that teachers can apply to help students improve their writing skills through describing and contrasting two popular, yet very different approaches – a product approach and a process approach: advantages, disadvantages and some recommendations in the hope that teachers can find the most effective direction and method of teaching writing skills, contributing to successful completion of the subject as well as the need to use in future work.

Keywords – Writing skills, teaching and learning situations, problems, solutions, process-oriented teaching.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the trend of labor mobility between countries in the period of globalization today, the need for human resources who can use English fluently is more urgent than ever. Facing that fact, Dong Nai Technology University where the author has been working has implemented a bachelor's degree programs in English linguistic training. This training program is rated as a standard training program, in which freshmen and sophomores must be proficient with the modules of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. In fact, in the process of learning any language, writing skill is usually the last skill learned after listening, speaking, reading and this is also the most difficult skill for learners. Therefore, students, especially freshmen, often have difficulty in learning how to write right. Overcoming these obstacles requires time and persistent practice, which sometimes discourages students. This leads to unexpected learning results and students lose confidence in the writing process.

In this article, the author presents the difficulties of teachers in the process of teaching writing skills, and proposes two popular, yet very different approaches – a product approach and a process approach for teachers to motivate students and better their writing skills, contributing to improving learning outcomes and improving effectiveness of training programs. Both approaches mentioned are implemented to teach students to find out how students react to the program. This study examines the following research question: What are students' perspectives on learning writing skills through the application of product approach and a process approach?

II. DIFFICULTIES THAT TEACHERS ENCOUNTER WHEN TEACHING WRITING

Lecturers assigned to teach writing module are those who have experience in teaching writing skills to students in previous courses of the university. During the teaching process, in order to motivate and engage students in the learning activities of the

subject, the lecturers always try to develop the appropriate teaching materials to create opportunities for students to access with rich and varied writing activities. However, teachers encounter many obstacles that make teaching effectiveness not as expected. Some of the contents in the textbooks are not attractive enough to attract learners to participate. Besides that, students' limitations of vocabulary and grammar make teachers spend a lot of time explaining how to use the necessary grammar structures according to the requirements of the lessons. It influences the amount of time spent on teaching and practicing writing. Moreover, students' self-consciousness is not good enough, along with the nature of writing is often "static" and somewhat dull, so students easily become unwilling to take part in the lessons. Along with that, the ability of students to work in groups is still limited, making the writing and correcting in groups not really effective.

In the history of teaching English Writing, there are two main directions that are commonly applied by educators as well as researchers, namely the product approach and the process approach. The two directions of teaching Writing skills above are two completely different methods of guiding learners to approach and practice writing skills. If the direction of teaching Writing skills by product focuses on the accuracy of the language, the direction of teaching Writing skills in the process focuses on how to deploy, organize ideas as well as evaluate learners' progress in writing. Applying the direction of teaching Writing skills depends on each student's object as well as the type of writing. So, the author implements two ways of teaching to explore the most effective one for her students.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Product Based Approaches to Teaching Writing

Product Based Approaches to Teaching Writing has appeared since the mid-1960s. The purpose of this method is to develop model-based accuracy in academic writing. Product-oriented teaching is a traditional tendency in which learners are encouraged to imitate a sample passage / text used by the teacher for analysis earlier. Thus, during the lesson in which writing skills are taught by product-oriented style, learners are provided with a sample lesson / paragraph; From there, learners consider it a standard lesson and learn to write in the same way as the model.

According to [4], product-based teaching includes four stages:

Stage 1: Students are provided with sample paragraphs / articles with stylistic characteristics, writing style of the article format. For example, during a class on formal letter writing, the teacher will focus on the introduction, letter structure, sentence structure, and formal vocabulary for students to apply in their letter writing.

Stage 2: This phase includes a "controlled" practice of the structure and characteristics of the writing. During a letter writing lesson, the teacher might ask learners to write formal sentences and structures like "I would be grateful if ..."

Stage 3: In this stage, it is important for writers to arrange ideas to form the writing using the language, the structure which has been provided in the steps above

Stage 4: The stage eventually forms the "product" of the writing. Learners use provided skills, language, and structure to write independently, individually.

Process oriented Approaches to Teaching Writing

The teaching method according to the process is the method used to teach different types of writing. In the course of process teaching, learners write through a cyclic approach, rather than an individualized approach. The teacher does not hope that learners can create a perfect product in terms of language and structure without having to go through the stages from drafting to getting feedback from classmates and teachers about the article. Then learners will edit the article to complete it.

Accordingly, the process of teaching Writing in the process focuses on diverse activities in the classroom to enhance the ability to use language such as: "brainstorming" (brain activity); Group discussion and rewrite activities to complete articles.

According to [4] the process of teaching in a process consists of eight stages:

Stage 1: "Brainstorming" - (Brainstorming). This is the first stage to form an article concept, during which learners will write down any ideas related to the topic's requirements.

Stage 2: "Planning": is the period when learners exchange ideas with each other, then assess which ideas are suitable and which ideas are not suitable to the requirements of the topic.

Stage 3: "Mind-mapping": Learners arrange ideas according to mind maps. This method helps the writer to determine what the main idea is, what the secondary idea is, thereby determining how to develop the idea in the article

Stage 4: "Writing the first draft": learn to write your first draft. Usually, this stage is done in class and learners may be asked to write in pairs or in groups.

Stage 5: "Peer feedback": The draft is exchanged for the first time among groups, whereby learners can comment on and give feedback to each other.

Stage 6: "Editing": The first draft is sent back to groups / individuals and the writer is then asked to edit the draft based on feedback from classmates.

Stage 7: "Final Draft": Participants are asked to complete their writing.

Stage 8: "Evaluation and feedback from the teacher". The teacher evaluates and responds to the student's writing.

It can be seen that the path of teaching Writing skills in the process is a cyclic method, in which the stages are related, interacting with each other.

Advantages- Disadvantages of the Product Based Approaches and Process oriented Approaches

Thus, it can be seen that, in the direction of teaching Product-based Writing skills, teachers often focus on accuracy and perfect language structure required in student's writing. Teachers often pay little attention to the writing style of learners. In other words, product oriented articles are evaluated on the basis of grammar, grammar or structure in which learners create sample articles with the same language and structure as sample articles. Thus, learners merely imitate the sentences in the sample and from there convert the sample into their own writing. Therefore, teachers as well as learners do not take much time to achieve their product writing. The product-based writing approach is considered to be quite effective for learners who are not good at English level because learners can create a fairly accurate article in terms of language by imitating the writing. Thus, the direction of product-based Writing is the traditional writing teaching method, whereby the article focuses more on the form rather than the meaning. Furthermore, a complete essay in all aspects when submitted to the instructor is more important than the writing process and the author's progress. The article is thus marked by the instructor instead of evaluating the learner's writing process. Accordingly, the article focuses more on the form rather than the meaning.

In contrast, in the process oriented approaches, teachers often encourage learners to use resources to write from their own abilities. Teachers support learners in developing draft writing skills, with clear ideas in expressing ideas rather than the linguistic accuracy of the writing. According to [1] and [3] the Process of Writing Teaching focuses on "brainstorming" to form and develop ideas. According to writing is the result of using multiple strategies to control the writing process, thereby gradually developing the writing, including many activities during writing hours such as setting writing goals (setting goals); generating ideas; organizing information; selecting appropriate language (selecting appropriate language); writing the first draft; reading and reviewing it; and revising and editing. Besides, also argues that the process of developing ideas and expressing emotions in the article is also more important for the development of the article than focusing on a perfect article in the first place.

According to [1] in the classroom, both learners and teachers are learners because both learners and teachers can read texts and ask suggestions and support in terms of ideas, words, help writers know how to make their writing clearer, their ideas are arranged more coherently and logically; sentences are used more accurately. The teacher not only evaluates the article in the final version but evaluates based on the progress of the learner. The teaching path of Writing follows the process, so it is quite suitable for learners with pre-intermediate English proficiency or higher.

However, according to researchers and teachers, teachers who use the process of writing teaching approach face many difficulties in teaching Writing. One of the problems is that this method is time consuming. Scholars say that this writing approach requires learners to draft more than once before completing the completed writing. Therefore, with limited classroom instruction, many teachers cannot complete their teaching in an hour or two of writing lessons per week. In addition, the teacher may need to spend a lot of time reading and editing student drafts, which creates quite a lot of work for the teacher. The teacher's failure to promptly

respond to learners' drafts for learners to edit and rewrite makes drafting of learners useless. Besides that, according to the researchers, the articles on the writing direction of the process have many errors in terms of grammar, words, and structure. These errors can become systemic errors if the learner is not corrected in time. Besides, it is argued that teachers sometimes do not agree between writing assessment method and writing direction. Some teachers apply the teaching path according to the process, and at the same time evaluate the writing according to the criteria of the writer's progress in the process, but in fact, when evaluating, the teacher focuses on the structure and language used in the article - one of the characteristics of the product-based article. That situation leads to inadequacies in teaching and assessment.

IV. METHODOLOGY

Data collection tool

The study used questionnaire to collect quantitative data from the participants. In this study, questionnaire which consists of 2 closed-ended Likert scale statements was designed and delivered to all sophomores in the academic year 2020-2021. This questionnaire had the partakers respond to each items in a five point Likert scale which descend the meaning respectively from strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree to strongly disagree. This design is helpful to figure out students' reaction, attitude, and ideas towards the application of a product approach and a process approach to learn writing skills.

Participants

The questionnaire was sent via email to 100 sophomore English majored students from Faculty of Foreign Languages at Dong Nai Technology University. Totally, there are 70 questionnaires were completed by participants and returned. Actually, 70% return rate was large enough to ensure the validity and reliability of the results of the study.

Data Analysis

After gathering and grouping information from questionnaire, all quantitative data was analyzed using Microsoft Excel Program in which the responses of participants were displayed by graphs and tables.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Participants were asked to express whether they feel engaged in the utilization of product-based approach in the first question. It can be seen clearly in the below pie chart that the minority of the students revealed their agreement including 5% of strong agreement and 40% of agreement. It is assumed that they are interested in learning writing with the style of controlled practice. On the other hand, only 10% of the students disagreed with this statement and 15% of the responses were strong disagreement. However, there was a large amount of neutral feedback (30%), these figures show that some students are still passive in the classroom

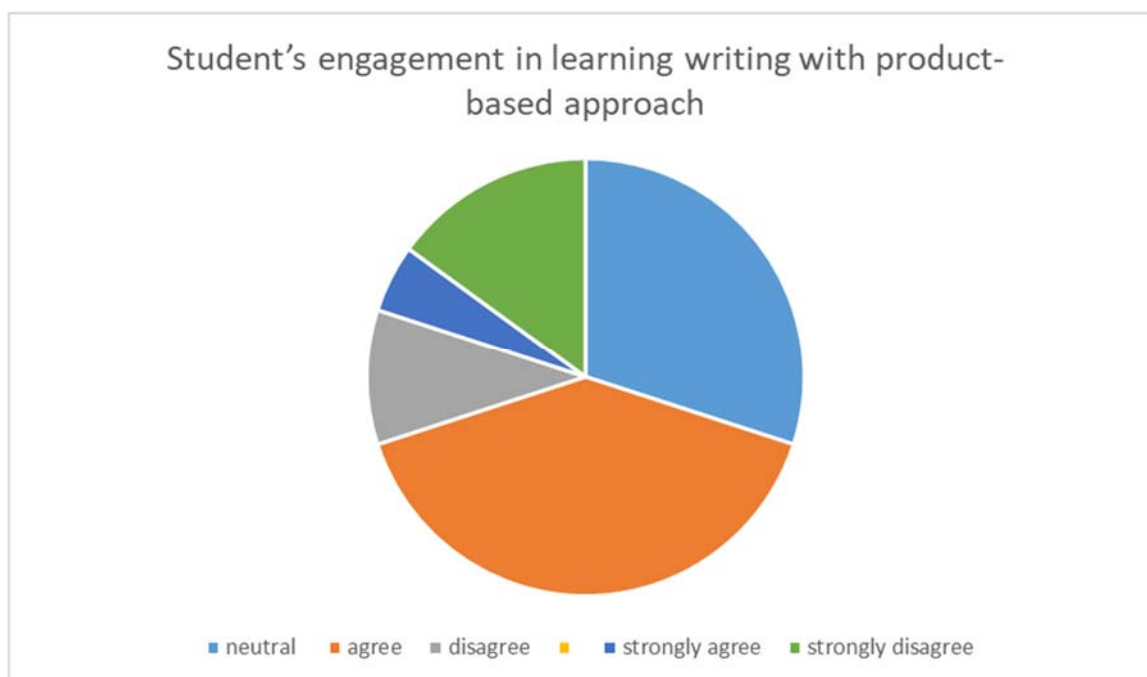


Figure 1. Student's engagement in learning writing with product-based approach

From the below pie chart, it is indicated that the highest rate of the students agreed (70%) and strongly agreed (10%) with the idea that process-oriented writing classroom is engaging. This is no doubt that students have experienced a totally different type of learning environment in comparison to traditional teaching and learning approaches. In addition students have countless new learning experiences with this style. Nevertheless, the total number of students expressed disagreement and strong disagreement was 10 out of 70 participants occupied 10%. Anyway, there are 10% of students showed their neutral opinion which means that students become more interested in learning writing.

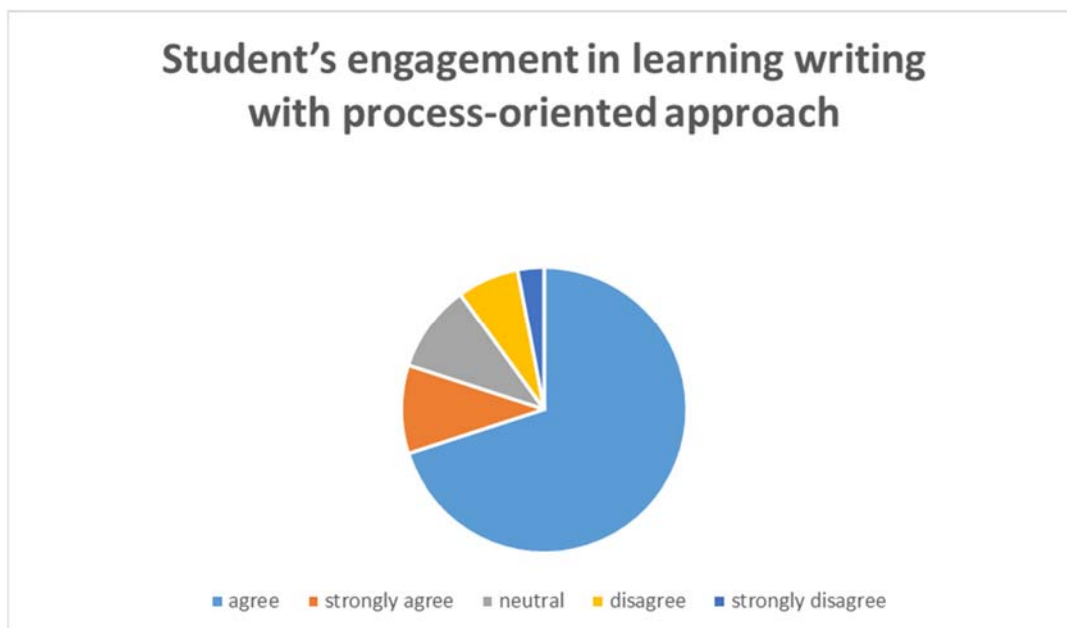


Figure 2. Student's engagement in learning writing with process-oriented approach

VI. CONCLUSION

It can be seen that the direction of teaching writing skills by product and process have certain advantages and disadvantages. Choosing which direction depends on the teacher, the student's interests and the type of writing. For example, for letter-writing or report-writing lessons, the product-based approach to writing is preferred because these types of articles often use paradigms in the use of structure, language, etc. . On the contrary, for writing lessons about the essay or descriptive genre, the process-oriented writing instruction takes precedence. [2] has pointed out the simultaneous application of the product-based writing approach for learners to "control the language of the writing" and the process-oriented writing direction for learners to "use the language as a creative way in writing" is essential. For English language students at Dong Nai Technology University, both directions should be employed at the same time for students to improve their accuracy in writing and arouse their engagement in learning.

According to [3] and [5] teachers can apply a combination of product-based Writing with process-oriented writing patterns.

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