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The Use of Appropriate Pedagogy in the Teaching of Writing in the Primary School

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Abstract

The appropriate method which can be employed by the primary teacher to enhance teaching skill towards getting the pupils have good writing skills is here presented. Problems associated with effective writing which include poor methodology, lack of motivation and oral competence have been discussed. By developing a writing programme through aims definition, selecting experiences and organizing experiences, the effective teaching of both the speaking and writing skills can be achieved. A summarized procedure with examples has been listed for the writing skills teaching.

Keywords: *pupils, writing skills, oral competence, guided writing, controlled writing, composition, essay*

1. Introduction

Writing is a very essential communication skill in second language learning. By definition writing is the ability to represent one's thought competently in black and white.

Pupils begin to write early in the primary school. During the first year of their primary education, they would have begun to scribble on paper. This effort is sustained and developed at each level of the primary education. However, despite the fact that instruction in writing begins at an early stage in the educational system, examiners reports reveal that most pupils leave primary school with no appreciable sign that they ever went through primary school. This is due largely to the lack of a good pedagogical tool for the writing skill (Pollyn, 2000). Thus, in this paper, it is aimed at presenting the appropriate method which can be employed by the teacher to enhance his or her teaching skill towards getting the pupils have good writing skills.

2. Problems Of Effective Writing

In an attempt to look at methods of teaching writing, problems associated with effective writing must be examined.

2.1. Poor Methodology

The problem of effective writing may be attributed to poor methodology adopted by most language teachers in the classroom. Most teachers are not aware of any procedures for teaching writing (Buenyn, 1994).

2.2. Lack of Motivation

The problem of effective writing may also be attributed to lack of sufficient motivation in pupils. Writing is a restricted social activity. Its relevance in later life is limited to a few professionals who engage in constant writing of reports, business letters, newspapers etc, it is the task of the teacher to make the writing class more meaningful by providing pupils with a variety of experiences, which they would need in later life.

2.3. Oral Competence

However, in a second language situation, the problems associated with writing go beyond teacher competence and pupil motivation. It is a problem that is caused by a situation where the learners do not have an effective control of the spoken form of the language before being introduced to the task of writing (Chibok, 1998). Writing and speaking are two related skills, but unidentical skills. Both language skills (writing & speaking) are different forms of expressing thought in a given language. Both of them draw from the same grammatical system patterns of correct usage for effective communication. Naturally, speech proceeds writing. It is only logical that the learner would be expected to possess a fair command of spoken English by the time he is initiated into the odious task of writing. The second language learner's problem is unique because he does not possess the fundamental oral competence, which he needs as a base for any meaningful progress in the writing task. He is therefore, compelled by circumstances to cope with the unnerving task of combining instruction in oral communication with learning to communicate effectively in writing.

It is the duty of the teacher to ensure that these dual goals are achieved in the language classroom. Since the teacher is faced with no other option, but to cope with the situation, the language programme, especially at the beginning stages, should be deliberately planned in order to accommodate the effective teaching of both the speaking and the writing skills.

3. Developing A Writing Programme

3.1. Defining Aims

Every writing programme must have clearly defined aims. This is necessary so as to give a sense of direction and to build-up clearly defined purposes into the writing programme. The absence of aims has resulted to a total neglect of writing as a language skill in most language classrooms. Most teachers hardly give composition exercise to their pupils, where it is expected that such exercise be given from time to time.

Secondly, most language programmes emphasize the teaching of grammatical structures by means of pattern substitution drills. These drills are more appropriate at the lower class level. But for primary four, to six, in order to improve the writing ability of pupils and to prepare them for greater task ahead it is advisable for the teacher to aim writing that will make the pupils to produce sequences of sentences that are coherent and unified and at the same time generate ideas by pupils.

Thirdly a characteristic of the writing task is that it must have a linguistic focus. The linguistic focus of a writing task may be on the teaching of the organization of paragraphs, punctuations and the use of appropriate registers.

3.2. Selecting Experiences

Every meaningful writing programme should be concerned with selecting experiences that learners would like to write about. It is not wise to force learners to write on experiences they consider dreadful or they cannot perceive. Second language learners like to express in writing their personal experiences things they have thought about and things they can perceive around them. For instance, it would be a misnomer to ask learners that have never left Bauchi to write a composition about Lagos city or Port-Harcourt city. But topics such as my home, my school, my best friend, etc can be given to them to write on.

3.3. Organizing Experiences

The range of experiences that children have depends on age and environment (Wogu and Nwoke, 2002). Similarly, the ability of learners, especially in a second language learning to relate their experiences in writing depends also on age and environment. In most cases pupils in the lower classes would have relatively fewer experiences and are not so much exposed compared to those in the upper classes.

Similarly, children from rich cultural-educational settings would have more experiences than those from poor or disadvantaged cultural-educational settings. Ability for oral and written expression is to a large extent determined by these variables. Therefore, learning experiences selected for developing a writing programme should be properly graded according to class, and sequenced to reflect progression in the learning process.

4. Teaching Writing Skills

Writing is regarded as the most difficult language skill to acquire. However, the task of learning to write can be made less difficult if appropriate methods are employed in teaching pupils to write.

One of the characteristics of writing tasks generally is that they have a product as an end result.

The product of the writing tasks at the primary school level should emphasize the following:

- Knowledge of the English alphabets,
- Knowledge of simple sentence structures in English
- Knowledge of friendly or informal letters,
- Knowledge of the form of a formal essay.

There are three stages involved in the production of written language.

- Manipulation,
- Structuring and
- Communication.

Manipulation involves learning to deal with the alphabets as a means of decoding and encoding sequence of letters; learning to deal with the order of writing sentences from left to right or right to left.

Structuring has to do with the organization of sentence and paragraph structure. Structuring is taught by the use of intensive pattern practice and substitution table drills.

Communication is the stage when learners are taught to write sequences of well organized sentences that communicate a theme using appropriate register and style.

There are two essential elements in writing, which are:-

- Learning how to write and
- Actual writing.

The first element is concerned with inculcating in the learner, a body of principles, theories and technicalities of effective writing. The second stage involves dramatizing or actualizing the principles on paper. These two aspects of writing must proceed simultaneously during a writing lesson.

Methods of Teaching Writing

There are three methods identified in the teaching of writing which are:

- Controlled writing
- Guided writing and
- Free writing.

Each of these methods represents a progression in the level of difficulty of the writing task, and of the level of mental and linguistic maturity of the learners.

4.1. *Controlled Writing*

It is the form of writing in which the teacher determines the linguistic content of the final product. In other words, the teacher controls the vocabulary and sentence pattern to be used by the learners. The aim of teaching controlled writing is to limit as much as possible, the number of mistakes which learners could make in their writing. Thus, learners are motivated to write a lot more than they ordinarily would if they had not been controlled. Controlled composition is considered ideal for teaching beginners. Controlled writing requires learners to perform grammatical exercises, controlled tasks and manipulation before they are allowed to attempt a paragraph of their own. This task is achieved by the use of the following drills:

- Pattern drills,
- Substitution table drills and
- Controlled writing frames.
- Pattern drills could consist of filling the gaps in show unrelated sentences with vocabulary or grammatical forms that will be determined by the teacher should provide alternative answers from which learners could select.

Examples:

Write out the following sentences on the board with missing words. Provide the missing words either at the bottom of the write up or before the write up at the top and ask learners to complete the gaps with the most appropriate words from the list below.

(My, From, Like, I, Come, in)

..... am a girl

.....name is Hauwa

I am primary two

I from Bauchi State

I my school very much.

The learners can be given an opening statement and clue and asked to predict an appropriate following statement:

- I normally visit the Yankari Game Reserve every year, however (I will visit this year/I will not visit this year).
- We did not want to go to the party, and (we want to stay at home/we did not want to stay at home).

Substitution table drills, could also be used to teach writing, both at lower and upper classes of our primary schools. It is a device for generating correct sentences (Lassa, 1992). Substitution table drills (see Tables 1 and 2) provide useful practice for learners in the transcription to the writing of sentences on a given pattern, with the words being chosen by the learners. However, substitution table drills are only used to generate isolated sentences.

How many	children	are there	in your family?
	boys		in your class?
	girls		in your Village?

Table 1: Substitution table drills – Example I

I am not as	intelligent	as	Shade	but I can	work better
	lucky		Habu		jump higher
	old				run faster
	big				swim better

Table 2: Substitution table drills – Example II

My School	Is was	A very big small		school
It has	Many few	Halls Classrooms building	and	Pupils teachers
There is	a Football Netball Volley ball	Field Pitch ground	And many few	Beautiful flowers
The Headmistress	In my school Of my school	is		Mrs. Bako

Table 3: Example of controlled writing frame

Unlike the substitution tables, controlled writing frames generate sentences which could be put together as a composition and so provide practice for learners to write contextually. Therefore, the learner is given the option to choose from alternative language items, which he considers contextually appropriate as well as formally correct. Controlled writing frames enable learners to write long sentences and to compose short compositions. Table 3 is an example of a controlled writing frame:

4.2. Guided Writing

This is the form of writing in which the teacher provides the context and helps the class to prepare the written work. The teaching of guided writing is based on the rationale that the main task of the teacher in teaching is to establish the context of learning. He can do this by guiding the learner so that he is free to invent his own ideas, put them into sentences and paragraphs and then organize them. Therefore in teaching guided writing, the content of the composition must be considered. In order to achieve this, the teacher should choose topics that are interesting and challenging to the learners.

The context of a guided composition is usually provided in the form of a model paragraph to which learners are expected to respond by inventing and organizing their responses drawing from their experiences and interests. The model paragraph should not be longer than the paragraph learners would be expected to write. Topics such as My School, My Family, My Best Friend, etc, could form useful starting points. Later learners could be introduced to more difficult topics such as: A festival I have witnessed; Farming in my Town; etc. The model paragraph should use vocabulary and grammatical structures that are within the experiential level of the learners. After introducing the paragraph and showing learners how to write on the topic the teacher should make a brief outline of the paragraph to show the learners how the paragraph is organized

Example of a guided composition

4.2.1. My School

The name of my school is ATBU Staff Primary School, Bauchi. It is located in Yelwa, Bauchi town. It was founded in 1980.

ATBU Staff Primary School is a large school. There are six classroom blocks. All the six classroom blocks accommodate all the four arms of primary one to six. There is also the headmistress office and two staff rooms for all the teachers.

My school is popular in debates and quizzes. The school had won many prizes in debates and quizzes, both at state and federal levels.

This model composition can be used to teach guided writing. The learners would be required to write about their own school based on their experiences.

Guided writing can also be taught through the use of the following.

- Oral compositions,
- Class compositions and
- Class dictations.

4.3 Oral Composition

Here the teacher provides a model paragraph and learners are asked to present an oral composition based on the model. The teacher can help learners with expression problems by asking them questions during oral composition. This should be brief so as to allow as many pupils as possible the opportunity to participate.

4.4. Class Composition

In a class composition exercise, the teacher provides a model as usual. He appoints a pupil to act as a secretary. Based on the model the teacher asks useful questions to individual pupils in the class and the secretary writes out the answers on the board. At the end of the exercise the pupils copy the final product in their exercise books.

4.5. Class Dictation

In this type of activity, the teacher dictates a paragraph or model to the class. He appoints one pupil who goes to the board and writes the dictation. At the end of the dictation, learners look at the board and suggest corrections in what the pupil at the board has written.

5. Free Writing:

This is the final stage in the teaching of writing skills. It is the form of writing in which students determine the linguistic and syntactical arrangement of sentences, the logical organization of paragraphs and the content of what they compose.

Free writing can be truly referred to as composition. It involves knowledge of the syntax and rhetoric of a given language. It also involves invention, arrangements and style to be able to write freely. The learner must devise a means of finding something to say. He must be able to organize materials effectively and must be able to say what he has to say well with correct grammar, diction, etc.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is necessary for language teachers to pay attention to the methods being discussed if their pupils are to excel in writing. Thus problems of effective writing, developing a writing programme and teaching writing skills should be complied with if meaningful goals are to be achieved.

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