

ABSTRACT

Assessment covers all sorts of activities that teachers engage in to evaluate their pupils' progress and learning needs. Though it is an integral component of teaching, it is regrettable that many programmes in EFL teaching do not require assessment courses. Thus, several teachers enter the classroom without a thorough grounding in assessment issues.

Yet, courses on teaching writing often devote a limited amount of time to the discussion of assessment. Therefore, it is too complex to choose rating scales and delineate criteria for valid and reliable essay evaluation. Furthermore, teachers need to determine an effective and formal method of assessing writing ability and specify an appropriate rating scale to serve in the teaching-learning assessment process in the writing classroom.

The present study is an attempt to investigate the pedagogical tools for improving our pupils' writing ability through an atomistic assessing system. In terms of the general layout, the work comprises four chapters.

Chapter one introduces the purpose of this study and offers a contextual background and pedagogical instructions related to the textbook New Prospects. It also describes variables, tools and procedures the researcher has relied on to shed light on the problematic.

Chapter two reviews relevant studies related to the research topic. It explains test approaches, formats and specifications in assessing writing ability. It also introduces attributes of grading methods, describes the holistic and analytic scoring scales. The second method has been given clear emphasis.

Chapter three addresses the methodology, describes the study participants, data collection procedures and the data analysis. It offers conclusions and implications based upon study results with an emphasis on the different essay tests.

Chapter four makes recommendations regarding the findings mentioned in chapter three. It calls for an attempt to realize an effective writing teaching and assessment through testing and scoring guidelines.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Algeria is aware of the importance of English and its national charter (1976) notes that it is a means to facilitate a constant communication with the world to gain access to modern sciences. The use of English in particular social spheres is linked with political influences, economic opportunity resulting from the globalization process that is steadily gaining ground worldwide. Thus, English allows individuals to open the linguistic gates to international diplomacy, business negotiations, scientific research, academic conferences and tourism. Furthermore, the use of computer-assisted linguistic devices and other tools such as multimedia and websites have significantly affected the field of English Language Teaching worldwide, and Algeria is no exception.

Algeria has adopted English as a foreign language in its schools and higher educational institutions. The introduction of EFL as a compulsory subject-matter in the overall school curriculum regardless of the streams, adds an important facet to the general learning of pupils. Hence, in our specific context, the linguistic level is our main concern. English education tries to cater for the cultural needs of Algerian learners. It allows them to be aware of the world around them and overcome cultural hurdles. Most importantly, it prepares the individual as a world citizen. However, the field of teaching English as a foreign language is always a subject to different researches which aim at improving its learning process in general and teaching skills in particular.

Learning to write has for a long time been claimed as a very difficult skill to acquire and dreaded by EFL pupils. Writing has become a burden, and produces shallow, boring output. Our pupils are sorely lacking in practice and stimulus for imagination and creativity. So, our pupils generally fail in acquiring this expertise.

Language testing is an important element in the teaching-learning assessment process in the writing classroom. The purpose of the composition task is significant in deciding which scale is chosen to motivate and guide pupils to learn. It is therefore the teacher's responsibility to find a reliable and valid method of measuring the writing ability of an individual or a group. Two important issues in composition evaluation are

choice of an appropriate rating scale and setting up criteria based on the purpose of the assessment. In other words, reliable and valid information from both holistic and analytic scoring instruments can tell us much about our pupils' proficiency levels. Findings; however, show that our pupils would benefit more from analytic measures.

In testing written language, pupils are asked to write short compositions occasionally. The focus in writing classes is on the form of the written product rather than on how the learner should approach the process of writing. Compositions are corrected in terms of grammatical and punctual errors. In a cloze test or a free-response test; the teacher doesn't make efforts to discover his pupils' weaknesses. As a result, his evaluation is approached to be broad, invalid and unreliable. Two simple research questions are formulated to guide this study:

1. Can the holistic scoring provide useful diagnostic information about our pupils' writing ability?
2. How can analytic scoring promote our pupils' writing abilities?

The questions guiding this study have structured information about the unreliability of the holistic assessment. Therefore, the present study aims at finding a method that gives exact and reliable feedback to the teachers and the pupils by providing a hypothesis which calls for an analytic scoring scheme capable of assessing pieces of writing as effective and as objective as possible. The researcher hypothesizes that:

1. The inefficiency and unreliability of the holistic scoring adopted by teachers may lead to pupils' weak performance in written expression.
2. The ability to design effective, fair and valid writing assessment through analytic scoring.

To enhance score validity of the above hypotheses, the researcher has used a variety of tools. The study has been conducted during the academic year 2009 / 2010, included 32 pupils from 3rd Year Literature and Philosophy stream in Bab El Assa secondary school. Three main factors have contributed to the choice of the above-mentioned participants mainly timing (4 hours per week), high coefficient that attributed to English (03), and teaching the same population for two consecutive years. In fact, the participants have been assigned to an experimental test and data have been collected from questionnaires, writing samples and observations. Both qualitative and quantitative analyses have been used to prove the efficiency of the analytic scoring.

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

The assessment of writing ability is the single most important snag to practical progress in composition teaching and research. Finding a reliable and valid method of measuring the writing ability is still a matter under investigation. Testers have turned to holistic rating aiming at producing reliable results; unfortunately, holistic assessment is a quick and impressionistic qualitative procedure for ranking samples of writing and not designed to diagnose its weaknesses. In contrast, analytic scoring provides useful diagnostic information about pupils' writing abilities. In other words, it provides more information about the strengths and weaknesses of pupils, and thus allows teachers to tailor instruction more closely to the needs of their pupils. The explicitness of analytic scoring guides offers teachers a potentially valuable tool for providing pupils with consistent feedback. The teacher would benefit from the second strategy over the first one.

To determine the problem that hinders the assessment procedure namely the causes behind the pupils' weak performance in writing, the researcher has used the following tools: data analysis of some written expression samples and questionnaires addressed to third year Literature and Philosophy pupils.

The first chapter is divided into two parts. The first part sets the purpose of this study and offers pedagogical instructions related to the organisation of the third year textbook New Prospects. It also provides approaches of teaching namely Competency-Based Approach which is based on the situation of integration used in written expression tasks. The chapter sheds light on the new writing activities in the textbook and the new guidelines for building tests. The researcher emphasises on third year Literature and Philosophy pupils' written expression results during the academic year 2009 / 2010. As for the second part, it introduces the specific research questions to be answered. It describes variables, tools and procedures the researcher has relied on to shed light on the problematic and highlights how the hypotheses have been tested.

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CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite the significant effect of Competency-Based Education on English language teaching in Algeria, pupils' writing ability is still very weak both due to a lack of time allotted to writing and difficulty to teach and assess it.

In assessing the writing ability, it is of paramount importance that teachers need to be aware of the potential of the evaluation criteria being adopted. This chapter focuses on the factors of assessing writing ability. It describes the attributes of grading methods, the two ways for test marking and distinguishes between the two types of scoring instruments, holistic and analytic. These instruments are not only used to indicate the pupils' achievements of the instructional objectives of a specific study but to measure the extent to which pupils have mastered the specific skills acquired in a formal learning situation as well. Subsequently, pupils either pass or fail the test. In a rather practical way, the degree of success or failure is deemed important to both the pupils and the teacher. Testers turned to holistic rating aiming at producing reliable results; unfortunately, some educators regard holistic grading as lacking uniform precision since there is a requirement to globally judge pupils' compositions and not designed to diagnose their weaknesses. Indeed, without precise assessment tools, teachers may assess written compositions subjectively and inconsistently. By contrast, analytic grading involves the breaking down of a written composition into components. Each component is assessed separately and then amalgamated with the scores from other components to derive an overall grade. Analytic grading can provide a comprehensive outline of the strengths and weaknesses of pupils' writing performance. Thus, it allows teachers to tailor instruction more closely to the needs of their pupils. The explicitness of analytic scoring guides offers teachers a valuable tool for providing pupils with consistent and direct feedback.

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CHAPTER THREE

DATA ANALYSIS

The assessment of pupils' written expression in a way that presents more information in terms of their weaknesses and strengths has not been investigated as it

matters. The gap in classroom assessment of writing is growing wider due to the fact that less amount of attention has been paid to evaluating the effect of scoring scales from the perspective of compromising the teachers and pupils' goals. To enhance score validity of the research questions and hypotheses set forward in the first chapter about the poor performance of his pupils in written expression, the researcher employed considerable experimental tools to achieve effectiveness in assessing. To reflect the effectiveness of scoring scales in writing classes, the present chapter seeks to renovate an instructional method of writing through data collected from both teachers and pupils' questionnaires, writing samples and observations.

To create a guideline to assess pieces of writing as objectively and as informatively as possible, the analytic scoring scale was employed for rating the writing samples. The analytical model gives the most objective information about improving teaching and feedback because all the components are evaluated separately. The inclusion of such a method may help us know exactly why our pupils write poor compositions and what kind of assistance is needed.

To reach the main objective of this experimental research, the pupils' compositions have been thoroughly analysed. To reinforce the credibility of data analysis, both teachers and pupils have completed two questionnaires intended to investigate the problems pupils generally encounter in written expression. Then, the findings of the questionnaires are compared to those of the tests administered to the researcher's pupils.

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CHAPTER FOUR

SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the use of several assessing methods in the teaching – learning process, the field of writing assessment is still a problematic.

In assessing EFL composition, analytic rating has proved to provide more consistent and efficient results as it separates and weights different features of the pupils’

performance on a writing task and assigns separate scores to each feature. Therefore, it provides them with feedback and useful diagnostic information about their writing abilities. The effectiveness of such an assessment is highly dependent upon the classroom teacher who is in charge of planning, directing and assessing procedures and techniques in the classroom writing instruction.

The present chapter will propose some recommendations and suggestions which may help pupils overcome the difficulties they encounter in written expression. It calls for an attempt to realize an effective writing teaching and assessment through testing and scoring guidelines. This chapter will be divided into three main parts. The first part will be concerned with pedagogical implications. The second part suggests some remedies to the existing hardships related to the writing process. This part will endeavour to recommend adequate ways to teach pre-writing and while-writing strategies. The third part will propose the analytic scoring scheme, criteria and procedures to improve the writing effectiveness and bring positive change in the teaching – learning of the writing skill.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The importance of English on political, economic and communicative grounds has led Algeria to reform its educational system through the adoption of Competency – Based Approach in 2003. Yet, despite the introduction of this new approach, our pupils generally fail to use the foreign language and acquiring the expertise of the writing skill is far from satisfactory. Writing has become a burden, and produces shallow, boring

output. Our pupils are sorely lacking in practice and stimulus for imagination and creativity.

The present research is an attempt to investigate the pedagogical tools for improving our pupils' writing ability through an atomistic assessing system. Finding a reliable and valid method of measuring the writing ability is still a matter under investigation. The traditional assessment (holistic rating) of pupils' writing still has a legitimate place in the English language arts, but could not be the secure means of assessing writing since it is a quick and impressionistic qualitative procedure for ranking samples of writing and not designed to diagnose its weaknesses. In contrast, analytic scoring provides useful diagnostic information about pupils' writing abilities since it involves the breaking down of a written composition into components. Each component is assessed separately and then amalgamated with the scores from other components to derive an overall grade. Analytic grading can provide a comprehensive outline of the strengths and weaknesses of pupils' writing performance. Thus, it allows teachers to tailor instruction more closely to the needs of their pupils. In terms of the general layout, the work comprises four chapters.

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Chapter four makes recommendations regarding the findings mentioned in chapter three. It calls for an attempt to realize an effective writing teaching and assessment through testing and scoring guidelines.

Writing is a complex task and not something that automatically happens. Classroom instruction, guidance and individual feedback are needed for best results. As a result of the findings of this research, there has been an improvement in the overall quality of the pupils' writing mainly due to the analytic assessing criteria and procedures. An emphasis has been given to writing conventions, maturing into a process that is able to accommodate a pupil's need to plan, brainstorm, seek feedback, and revise his / her work. Most importantly, A few key determinants of producing quality pupils stand out, including teaching them how to plan for writing (via pre-writing), to combine sentences, and to engage in the process of inquiry as they learn to write. Teaching them to use even one or two stages of the writing process enhances their writing abilities significantly. Together, these findings provide a compelling rationale for using the writing process as a method of instruction in all classrooms and in so doing, helping our pupils develop the skills they need to communicate for the future.

This dissertation has been an attempt to show that writing instruction has been ignored. Therefore, the quest for an atomistic assessing system may increase adequate attention to classroom writing instruction and develop activities that cater to all learning styles. Teachers should not deprive pupils of the opportunity to learn to write. They should also be open-minded so as to receive more training and information about updated pedagogies and theories. On the other hand, teachers are unable to fight against

preconceived notions and conventions by themselves but need support from governments, schools, their peers, pupils and parents. Governments and schools should encourage teachers to overcome any obstacles and actively offer necessary assistance. With their support, teachers are able to improve themselves and then benefit their pupils.

The first research question of the present study shows that the traditional method of evaluating written language proficiency is insufficient and that no other type of assessment is completely reliable. To close this gap, future research can be devoted to

investigating valid, reliable, and non-biased means of assessment that can be easily implemented in schools. Although the second research question has been introduced to show the benefits of the analytic assessment over the holistic one, further research can be conducted on how the analytic type of measurement can be modified to suit EFL writing needs.