

New Trends in Reading-Writing Integration to Enhance Students' Performance in Writing. Case of Second year Students of English in the Teachers' Training School and the University of Constantine 1

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Abstract: Reading and writing are often seen as integrated skills. Actually, one does not go without the other. Some thinkers consider that they ought to be taught as a single subject, while others see them better as separate skills. In our immediate environment, we notice that in the Teachers Training School they are taught as separate subjects; while in the English department of Constantine 1 university there is no room for 'reading'. This study aims primarily at investigating the relationship between reading and writing and how they affect each other in teaching English as a foreign language. We hypothesize that if Reading and Writing were taught as integrated skills, the students' performance in Writing would be enhanced significantly. To test our hypothesis, the descriptive method has been chosen. Two questionnaires were administered to teachers of Constantine 1 and the Teachers Training School English departments (containing special sections for Reading Techniques and Written Expression teachers). Therefore, we want to prove that Reading Comprehension needs to be taught as a separate subject in the English Department of Constantine 1 university to help students improve their writing skill.

Key words: Reading, Writing, Integration, Students' Performance.

الملخص: تعد القراءة و الكتابة غالباً كمهارات مترابطة تكمل الأخرى. يوصي بعض المفكرين بضرورة تدريسيهما معاً فيما يرى آخرون أنهما مهارات مترابطة. من خلال ملاحظتنا لمناهج التدريس نرى أنهما تدرسان كوحدتين منفصلتين في المدرسة العليا للأستاذة في حين أننا نسجل غياب مادة القراءة في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة قسنطينة 1. لذلك فإن هذه الدراسة تهدف أولاً إلى التعرف على العلاقة بين القراءة والكتابة وكيف تؤثران على بعضهما البعض في عملية تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. نفترض أن طريقة تدريس القراءة و الكتابة معاً من شأنها أن تعزز أداء الطلبة في الكتابة بشكل ملحوظ. من أجل اختبار هذه الفرضية، تم اختيار المنهج الوصفي بتوزيع استبيان على كل من أستاذة تقنيات القراءة وأستاذة التعبير الكتابي في المدرسة العليا للأستاذة بالإضافة إلى أستاذة التعبير الكتابي بقسم اللغة الإنجليزية في جامعة قسنطينة 1. وبالتالي فإننا نريد أن نثبت أن القراءة تحتاج أن تدرس كوحدة قائمة بذاتها في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية في جامعة قسنطينة 1 لمساعدة الطلاب على تحسين مستواهم في التعبير الكتابي.

Introduction:

Reading and writing are fundamental skills to the building of language comprehension. However, reading has received less interest in the nineteenth century where writing dominated the language classes. It was until the turn of the century that both skills were connected in the curriculum in different universities like Harvard which declared that reading was critical to learning to write. Advocates of the idea that reading influences writing claim that reading inspires and informs students' writing; in other words, they are introduced to new ideas and given something to write about. They believe that both skills are to give better results when one informs the other. Much empirical work has been studied with respect to the relationship between reading comprehension processes and written texts production from the same cognitive perspective (Eisterhold, 1990; Parodi, 2007).

In the English department of the Teachers Training School, reading and writing are compartmentalized into two separate programs. Generally, teaching reading includes presenting the reading techniques and the analysis of writers' styles and perceptions, whereas the writing program focuses on the students' abilities to produce well-written and comprehensible productions along with process-writing instruction. Quite the opposite, in the English department of Brothers Mentouri University, Constantine 1, reading as a separate program does not exist in the curriculum. It may be, depending on the teachers, included in other subject matters like writing and literature. This, and after examining the level of second year students in both institutes, led us to think of a comparative study to examine what reading adds to the students when it is an integral part of the curriculum and what its absence deprive them of. The analysis of the questionnaires in the practical part of this article shows that by being exposed to different models of written texts, students overcome their previous difficulties in understanding reading material and in the same time develop their writing skills.

Literature Review:

Reading and writing were considered as simply behavioral responses and separate acts before theories of causal relationships were studied. The question was: which leads to the other, reading or writing? Until recently, the movement of 'reading and writing are related activities' showed with many studies that each may help the other (VanDeGrift, 2005).

As a response to the basic writing 'crisis', Goen and Gillotte-Tropp (2003) presented 'the Integrated Reading/Writing Program to help at-risk students of San Francisco State University after they failed in basic writing. This program was implemented to place these students into a single year-long course where reading and writing instructions are interconnected unlike the basic writing program where reading instruction is isolated from writing instruction. After two semesters, students could accomplish the requirement of first year written composition. In fact, they could complete in two semesters what would normally take three semesters to fulfill.

The program planners agreed on the principle that for the course to be integrated truly, reading should not always precedes writing. This could reduce writing to a simple act after reading is complete and comprehension is achieved whereas even writing can contribute

to the development of reading. The aim was to engage students in an exploratory study of text (including their own writings as well as their classmates' and other authors).

Goen and Gillotte-Tropp (2003) set six principles extracted from more than thirty years of research on basic writing and reading being: *integration*; both skills must be taught together, *time*; this integration reduces the time of teaching every subject alone (two semesters instead of one), *development*; teachers follow the development of their students' learning activity and decide who needs small group and/or individual tutoring, *academic membership*; the integrated course satisfies the freshman composition requirement for graduation, *sophistication*; teachers can help students engage in sophisticated literate activities required for success at the university, finally *purposeful communication*; the curriculum was designed to guarantee communication in the class not only teach about the language. This program proved successful when 97% of the enrolled students passed the integrated course and were ready for the next level course.

The influence of reading on writing is often said to be a positive one. Reading informs writing, that is to say; learners get a number of benefits from reading a text. They may learn new styles, new vocabulary and expressions, or even correct their false ideas or grammar mistakes. This area of research is described by Grabe et al. (2013:9-10) as

“... relatively underexplored even though it is commonplace in most academic contexts and critical for academic success... Survey studies have shown that teachers, institutions, and students all recognize the importance of learning to write from reading input of various types”

Cobine (1995) argues that when learners are encouraged to write about their readings, this will result in fulfilling a large set of learning styles. It is by synthesizing ideas and assessing them critically that university students learn to read texts and skillfully write about them. That is to say, presenting model reading texts to the students help them gain knowledge and language forms related to the topic in order to use them in their writings. In this vein, Hirvela (2004) and Grabe et al. (2013) agree that it is impossible to be a skilled writer without being a skilled reader and that reading is at the heart of writing.

The idea of transferring knowledge and strategies from one skill to the other has been widely discussed reporting that more common transfer occurs from reading to writing because reading texts are generally taken as models for writing. Research emphasized the necessity for direct instruction which is actually an integral part to raise learners' awareness of the structural components both in reading and writing (Eisterhold, 1990; Kroll, 1993; & Hirvela, 2004). In fact, when the teacher clarifies the instructions in a standardized order moving from reading comprehension questions to modeling the text in writing, the students will internalize these patterns of analysis and get used of using reading in writing.

Method:

Subjects: A total of 24 teachers from both the Teachers Training school and Brothers Mentouri University, Constantine 1 kindly participated in the study. Questionnaires were

delivered to 12 teachers of Written Expression in Brothers Mentouri University, 6 teachers of the same subject and 6 other teachers of Reading Techniques in the Teachers Training school.

Three teachers from brothers Mentouri University got a PhD and an experience of more than 20 years in teaching Written Expression. The other nine teachers got MA with experiences ranging from 1 to 10 years. As for the teachers from the Teachers Training School, they all have MA level from 1 to 10 years of experience in teaching Reading and Writing.

The descriptive method has been chosen to analyze the teachers' questionnaire. Sixteen questions were part of a larger study containing more other questions and statistical procedures to investigate the effectiveness of using reading to improve writing. These questions were addressed to both Reading Techniques and Written Expression teachers and analyzed according to the number of responses to find out about their perceptions concerning the implementation of reading in the program of second year students in both institutes.

Research Questions and Hypothesis:

The questions of this study are:

- Is there any relationship between reading and writing as language skills?
- If there is any, does it help students develop their writing skill?
- Is it necessary to integrate both skills in the university curriculum as two independent subject matters?

We hypothesize that: If Reading and Writing were taught as integrated skills, the students' performance in Writing would be enhanced significantly.

Procedure: The teachers from both institutes were asked to fill in two questionnaires; one for Written Expression teachers in both institutes, and another one for Reading Techniques teachers in the TTS. The questionnaires contained four sections: Section one; general information, section two; reading (for Reading Techniques teachers), section three; writing (for Written Expression teachers), and section four; reading-writing connection (for all the teachers). In the effort to avoid teachers of one subject answer questions addressed to the other subject teachers; we delivered separate questionnaires with the appropriate questions for each. Most questions were multiple choice questions with a few open-ended questions when teachers are asked about their opinions or for clarifications.

Data were collected at the end of the first semester before the holidays of spring and after the teachers have finished correcting the exams. They were given a long time to answer the questionnaires, considering their responsibilities; some took more than a month to give them back, while others returned them in the same day.

Analysis and Interpretation of the Results:

Section One: Reading (For Reading Techniques teachers at the TTS)

1. Do you think reading is an active or passive process? Please justify your choice?

The aim behind this question was to understand the teachers' perspective about reading in order to picture their method of teaching reading and dealing with their students. Teachers who believe reading is a passive process may think that the act of reading entails only the visual movement of the eye on the arranged words in a given text, regardless of the different steps and effort that the students make to achieve comprehension. In fact, no one of the respondents thinks so; they all agree that reading is an active process.

Nearly all the respondents believe that reading is an active process because the reader does not only receive passively what the writer has encoded, rather he responds to the writer's ideas, feelings, ideology, and culture. In addition, the reader always tries to reconstruct meaning and make sense of the reading material in his own manner each time he reads a text. Moreover, the reading process entails different stages through which the reader is expected to perform certain activities starting from recognition to interpretation, until comprehension.

Only one respondent did not agree on either choices and preferred to say that reading is

"an interactive process based on the reader-text relationship, reader-author relationship, and reader-life relationship. It is a meaning making process related to linguistic, cognitive, and social factors. It cannot be passive or just active."

2. Do you use comprehension questions after reading every text?

This question aims at investigating whether teachers of Reading Techniques assess their students' comprehension after presenting a reading material and help them correct or clarify the points of misunderstanding. All the respondents seem to use comprehension questions in their classes with equal choices between 'very often' and 'often'. This indicates that comprehension questions are indispensable for any reading activity in the classroom in order for the teacher to guarantee that his students got the message properly.

3. What aspect do you emphasize most when presenting a model text?

Meaning Structure Style

A model text is generally presented to give students new ideas and guide them to write in the shadow of the writers' thoughts, style, or the text's structure (example: agreeing/disagreeing with the writer's point of view, writing in response to a romantic story, modeling an argumentative essay). The respondents from the TTS focus more on clarifying meaning and exploring the structure of the text to introduce students to different structures in order to make them write using the same structures. None of the respondents chose the style. This might be due to the belief that every student has a preferred style and can develop it on their own.

4. What strategy do you opt for to present the reading text?

We often hear some students claiming their shyness when teachers ask them to read aloud, others feel confident when they make their classmates hear their accurate reading. It is

up to the teacher to decide what strategy suits better his/her class. Most of the informants (four teachers) use both strategies, whereas one teacher uses reading aloud only and another one prefers reading silently.

5. Please, explain your choice.

The teachers who opt for both strategies believe that they are of equal importance in that silent reading promotes comprehension and outloud reading develops reading fluency. Moreover, silent reading builds students' own understanding of a text, while outloud reading helps correct wrong pronunciations they may utter.

The one respondent who prefers to use reading aloud thinks that the time allocated for the reading and the number of students do not allow for both strategies. So, students are asked to read the text at home to construct meaning and when they come to class, they directly read it aloud.

The other respondent who opts for reading silently justifies this choice with the idea that students at this level (second year) are trained to be independent, not guided, and modeling reading is best suited for lower levels of instruction.

6. How would you estimate their level in reading?

'Good' and 'average' were the two choices in agreement between the teachers of Reading Techniques. Five teachers out of six said that their students are good at reading; only one teacher considers his students' level average. It may be due to the amount of reading they are exposed to in class and the assigned at-home readings. Besides, the Teachers Training School is a strict institution with an average of 23 students per class to help the teacher monitor the class and create a proper environment for learning, unlike in Brothers Mentouri University where the number of students may 60 students per class which makes it impossible for the teacher to follow each and every student.

Section Two: Writing (For Written Expression teachers in Univ1 and TTS)

7. Do you think that the amount of time devoted for Written Expression is enough to develop your students' ability? Yes/ No

In the second year of both institutes, Written Expression is given three hours per week (two sessions) during two semesters. Most teachers from Brothers Mentouri University find it insufficient for such a complex skill. Only two teachers out of twelve are satisfied with this amount. On the other hand, 50 % of the respondents from the TTS agree with the majority of the teachers from the other institute, while the other half are also fine with three hours per week.

The number of students per class determines the need for more hours in such sensitive subject. Needless to say that with a large number of students, the teachers will not be able to control the whole class especially in written tasks which need teacher's assistance.

Hence, in Brothers Mentouri University, more time should be allocated to Written Expression if the number of students per class is always beyond the norms.

8. Do you follow: *the Product Approach* *the Process Approach* *Both Approaches?*

The product and process approach are the mostly used approaches among teachers of Written Expression. Some teachers believe that the end product of the student determines his capacity, while others emphasize every step of the writing process and prefer to accompany their students from the beginning of the writing activity until the final written product. Both approaches proved to be successful with some limiting conditions, like time constraints for the process approach and the teacher's absence during the act of writing for the product approach. The number of students also determines what approach to use. All the teachers of Written Expression from Brothers Mentouri University and 50% of the TTS teachers use both approaches while the rest of the TTS teachers follow the process approach.

9. Please explain the reasons behind your choice.

Both approaches are important and complementary; 'a good successful product is related to a good planning' as agreed by all the respondents of the English department at Mentouri University. Besides, in the second year, students are at their training stage, so they need to learn to generalize their ideas, plan, draft, and redraft to come to their final products after analyzing model texts so that teachers can recognize their students' weaknesses and help them ameliorate their writing.

However, although they chose the third option (both approaches), two teachers said that they use the product approach more than the process approach due to time constraints and the overcrowded classes which make it difficult to follow each and every student's writing process and final product. In addition, the process approach requires conditions that are not available in our classes.

On the other hand, Teachers' Training School informants have another point of view concerning the process approach since three of them opt for it. They believe that the writing steps need to be emphasized so that students become aware of the importance of each step and its positive effects on the development of the writing skill. Likewise, the process approach engages students in the writing task so deep that their product would improve automatically. The other three teachers who opt for both approaches agree with Mentouri University teachers in the importance of both approaches together.

10. Where do you see your students' severe problems in writing?

For the informants from Brothers Mentouri University, they chose all the options with nearly equal chances for each, whereas the most severe problem, as seen by the TTS teachers, is writing techniques, then spelling and vocabulary, and grammar to come last.

(Others, Specify)

For Mentouri University, the respondents mentioned other problematic aspects like organizing ideas, style, conventions of the English writing system, and sentence structure. The latter is very critical in that most of the time the teacher finds himself in front of scrambled sentences where he has to guess the meaning.

One teacher from the TTS added content (topic analysis) and style as severe problems faced by the TTS students in writing.

11. How would you estimate your students' level in writing?

While all the TTS teachers affirmed their students' level in writing was average, only seven teachers from the other institute agreed with them; four teachers claimed their students were weak and another teacher went further to say it was very weak.

From these opinions, we notice a disparity in the students' level in Written Expression. When asked personally, all the teachers from Brothers Mentouri University agreed that the level of TTS students is higher than their students' (it is worth noting here that some of these teachers were previously teachers in the TTS). They attributed this to the strict instructions and the adequate environment including the small groups in the TTS.

12. Some teachers complain about poor writings in style and techniques. In your opinion, what is this poorness due to?

This open-ended question aims at determining the teachers' perception concerning the causes of weakness in their students' writing styles and techniques. The informants provided us with a number of elements cited below:

- Lack of practice and mother language interference,
- Lack of reading,
- No desire to write; lack of interest and motivation,
- Teachers' over attention to grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics on the cost of style and writing conventions,
- Lack of writing practice,
- Lack of grammar knowledge and practice,
- Students' irresponsibility,
- Students are not patient while writing; their first draft is the most of the time the last one,
- Lack of teachers' effective feedback.

Section Four: The Reading- Writing Connection

13. While writing, students are inspired by what they read. Do you agree?

It is common sense now that reading feeds the soul by introducing the reader to new cultures, ideas, and for some people, reading becomes a way of life. All the teachers, except one from Brothers Mentouri University, agree with the statement. They believe that students

get inspired by the new ideas, writers' styles, expressions, and motivation to write as well, that is why good readers are said to be good writers.

14. Would you draw a clear-cut boundary between reading and writing? Yes/ No

All the teachers from both institutes (except one from Brothers Mentouri University) agree that reading and writing cannot be apart one from the other; they should rather be interconnected in instruction in order to get the most benefits from both skills when taught together. They see that both skills overlap a lot and one informs the other.

15. Do you refer to some writing techniques during the activity of reading? Yes/ No

The majority of the informants do refer to writing techniques during a task of reading, only four teachers from Brothers Mentouri University and two from the TTS replied negatively to this question.

Reminding students of previous information when occurring again in another task, often helps them recall and connect the tasks besides practicing. For instance, when dealing with a comparison-contrast essay, we draw our students' attention to the expressions that indicate comparison and those which indicate contrast. Moreover, the writer's technique in comparing point by point, then contrasting point by point as well can be a practice for this type of essays.

16. Do you have any other suggestions related to reading and writing connection?

All the respondents to this question, both from the university and the TTS, agree that reading has a great importance as a subject. Besides, students should undergo a Reading Technique class since their first year at university in order to experience the real language and take the given reading texts as models for their writings. Some teachers described their students as 'lazy and irresponsible' and whatever method they used to persuade them to read did not work, yet others insisted on the need to revive the habit of reading in their students and give it a great importance in the curriculum. They also emphasized the written response to reading which encourages learners to respond whenever they read and keeps them always aware about the strong connections between reading and writing.

All in all, most teachers believe that reading and writing should be taught in close connection because one does not go without the other, and they recommend the implementation of an integrated reading-writing instruction where the two skills are melted in integrated classroom activities. Consequently, when students feel the importance of the connection, they become aware of the necessity of both skills together to the betterment of their written productions as well as their language.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

In this paper, we emphasized the role of reading in enhancing second year university students writing abilities. Compared to the Teachers' Training School, the English Department in Brothers Mentouri University does not include reading as a subject in the

program of second year. It depends on teachers of Written Expression to integrate some reading activities which are most of the time model texts to analyze the structure and the flow of ideas. After analyzing the teachers' questionnaires, we could come out with some recommendations concerning the need for integrating reading and writing:

- Reading is an active process, just like writing, where students pass through different cognitive stages before attaining comprehension. During these stages, the teacher's role is that of a guide, directing them to the full meaning using comprehension questions which may be written to practice writing by answering these questions.
- The model texts give students insights about new topics, styles, structures of texts, and even shape their ideas. Teachers should draw their students' attention to new styles to avoid writing always in the same way. They should always remind them of techniques and structures they studied before and met in the model text, to help them connect theory to practice.
- When engaging students in silent reading, they will have the opportunity to listen to their inner voice and examine the meaning in their own way before reading with the whole class. Meanwhile, outloud reading helps develop their reading fluency and correct wrong pronunciations.
- TTS students' level in reading is good, as declared by their teachers, this is mainly due to instruction and the time devoted to reading. Both in-class and at-home readings help students become good readers. This resulted in their good scores in Written Expression compared to those of Brothers Mentouri University who are deprived from the subject of Reading Techniques.
- In relation to the students' achievement level in writing, it is important to emphasize the fact that the allocated time for both skills in the second year program do not seem to lead to the expected levels of language performance.

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