

A Case Study on “Writing Difficulties” Specifically Focusing on “Product and Process-Oriented Writing” Considering Undergraduate Students of Cox’s bazar, Bangladesh.

J.D. Milton

Lecturer, Department of English
University of Science & Technology Chittagong

Md. Azim Uddin

Assistant Professor
Department of English, BGC Trust University

Abstract

This study focuses on the observations and findings of a written test of eighty students of English language course at Foreign Language Training Center in Cox’s Bazar Government College. The test has highlighted two types of questions in case of writing considering creative type-“Process Oriented Writing”;e.g. Answering several questions of a paragraph on “Your Parents” and Preparing dialogues between two persons about the “benefits of learning English” and stereo type-“Product Oriented Writing”;e.g. Job Application with Personal profile and writing a composition on “Science and Technology”. The main target of this study is to find out how many students follow the process and product oriented writing in a class.

Background

As English language trainer at Cox’sBazar Govt. College, I had the practice of giving careful guidance to students in their English writing tasks. Most of us believed that learners were unable to write without careful guidance from trainer. Participants were used to doing guided writing, which led to extremely structured and boring written work. However, I discovered that such kind of guided writing destroyed learners’ interest and creativity. Learners’ writings were almost identical in content as well as in presentation. They were not able to perform in the English writing tasks of the final fifty marks test that require participants to write freely in response to contextual cues. In view of the weak performance in the writings of many trainees, I sought to improve their skills and abilities in writing by exploring different teaching strategies and approaches. On reviewing literature on the teaching of writing, I was aware of the process approach in the teaching of writing and also introduced to the role reading which could aid a lot in the writing process. I came to realize that substantive input in various literary texts could promote students’ language competence and it was a springboard to writing.

Nevertheless, some of the English language teachers in our college are not subject-trained. We rely heavily on textbooks and we do not have enough skills to tailor, modify or integrate the curriculum to suit the ability levels of students. Indeed, I do not possess a working knowledge of process writing. I need professional support in developing a Language-based curriculum catering for the successful implementation of process writing. In view of the limitations, I hope that through collaborating with an external agent, I can work out how process writing can be integrated into the English curriculum to improve our trainees’ writing competence. I aimed to find out: whether and how students’ competence in writing English can be enhanced through the Process Writing Approach, and whether teachers’ professional development can be promoted through collaborative planning and teaching.

Introduction

A product approach is a traditional approach, in which students are encouraged to mimic a model text, which is usually presented and analyzed at an early stage. A model for such an approach is outlined below:

Stage 1 Model texts are read, and then features of the genre are highlighted. For example, if studying a formal letter, students' attention may be drawn to the importance of paragraphing and the language used to make formal requests. If studying a story, the focus may be on the techniques used to make the story interesting, and students focus on where and how the writer employs these techniques.

Stage 2 This consists of controlled practice of the highlighted features, usually in isolation. So if students are studying a formal letter, they may be asked to practise the language used to make formal requests, practicing the 'I would be grateful if you would...' structure.

Stage 3 Organization of ideas. This stage is very important. Those who favor this approach believe that the organization of ideas is more important than the ideas themselves and as important as the control of language.

Stage 4 The end result of the learning process. Students choose from a choice of comparable writing tasks. Individually, they use the skills, structures and vocabulary they have been taught to produce the product; to show what they can do as fluent and competent users of the language.

On the other hand, process approaches to writing tend to focus more on the varied classroom activities which promote the development of language use: brainstorming, group discussion, re-writing. Such an approach can have any number of stages, though a typical sequence of activities could proceed as follows;

Stage 1 Generating ideas by brainstorming and discussion. Students could be discussing qualities needed to do a certain job, or giving reasons as to why people take drugs or gamble. The teacher remains in the background during this phase, only providing language support if required, so as not to inhibit students in the production of ideas.

Stage 2 Students extend ideas into note form, and judge quality and usefulness of ideas.

Stage 3 Students organize ideas into a mind map, spider gram, or linear form. This stage helps to make the (hierarchical) relationship of ideas more immediately obvious, which helps students with the structure of their texts.

Stage 4 Students write the first draft. This is done in class and frequently in pairs or groups.

Stage 5 Drafts are exchanged, so that students become the readers of each other's work. By responding as readers, students develop an awareness of the fact that a writer is producing something to be read by someone else, and thus can improve their own drafts.

Stage 6 Drafts are returned and improvements are made based upon peer feedback.

Stage 7 A final draft is written.

Stage 8 Students once again exchange and read each other's work and perhaps even write a response or reply.

Fundamental Differences:

Process-driven approaches show some similarities with task-based learning, in that students are given considerable freedom within the task. They are not curbed by pre-emptive teaching of lexical or grammatical items. However, process approaches do not repudiate all interest in the product, (i.e. the final draft). The aim is to achieve the best product possible. What differentiates a process-focused approach from a product-centered one is that the outcome of the writing, the product, is not preconceived.

Process writing	Product writing
text as a resource for comparison	imitate model text
ideas as starting point	organization of ideas more important than ideas themselves
more than one draft	one draft
more global, focus on purpose, theme, text type, i.e., reader is emphasized	features highlighted including controlled practice of those features
collaborative	individual
emphasis on creative process	emphasis on end product

Which approach to use & When

The approach that a learner decides to use will depend on him, the teacher, and on the students, and the genre of the text. Certain genres lend themselves more favorably to one approach than the other. Formal letters, for example, or postcards, in which the features are very fixed, would be perhaps more suited to a product-driven approach, in which focus on the layout, style, organization and grammar could greatly help students in dealing with this type of writing task.

Other genres, such as discursive essays and narrative, may lend themselves to process-driven approaches, which focus on students' ideas. Discursive activities are suited to brainstorming and discussing ideas in groups, and the collaborative writing and exchanging of texts help the students to direct their writing to their reader, therefore making a more successful text.

One or the other

The two approaches are not necessarily incompatible. I believe that process writing, i.e. re-drafting, collaboration, can be integrated with the practice of studying written models in the classroom.

What I take from the process approach is the collaborative work, the discussion which is so important in generating and organizing ideas. Once students have written their first drafts, model texts can be introduced as texts for comparison. Lightbown found that learning appeared to be optimal in 'those situations in which the students knew what they wanted to say and the teacher's intervention made clear to them there was a particular way to say it.' Teacher intervention through model texts could thus aid the learning process.

I also like to incorporate the exchanging of drafts, so that the students become the readers of each others work. This is an important part of the writing experience as it is by responding as readers, both during the collaborative stage of writing in groups, as well as when reading another group's work, that students develop an awareness of the fact that a writer is producing something to be read by someone else.

As Lewis Carroll makes clear in Alice's adventures in Wonderland....

"I haven't opened it yet," said the White Rabbit, "but it seems to be a letter, written by the prisoner to somebody."
"It must have been that," said the King, "unless it was written to nobody, which isn't usual, you know."

Target participants in the study

This is basically a qualitative research supplemented with quantitative data. All eighty English language participants were involved in the research. In order to obtain a wide and general picture on the effectiveness of process writing, all students were required to respond to a questionnaire administered at the end of the test. Comparison between their pre-task and post-task conducted at the beginning and at the end of the test were also made to help identify changes in students' knowledge, skills and dispositions in writing. In order to elicit more in-depth understandings of students' changes in abilities and attitude in writing, a group of twenty students of high, average and low abilities identified through their performance in the test were chosen for interviews between action cycles. They were prompted to reflect on changes in their competence and also in their attitude towards writing. Portfolios were also kept to review their continuous performance throughout.

As teachers' reflections were important sources of data, teachers' journals and discussion notes, especially after peer observation and writing tasks, were kept to trace changes in the course of the action cycles. A third source of data collected through observations and discussions came from the Curriculum Development Trainer and the project coordinator from National Academy of Educational Management (NAEM). The data collection procedure lasted from 15 November 2015 through to February 2016.

A brief review on process writing literature

Writing is an extremely important means of communication in the modern world, whether in the form of traditional paper-and-pen writing or through e-mail (CDC syllabus for English Language, 2002). However, second language learners usually run into difficulty in writing and such unsuccessful experience discourages them from writing competently with confidence. Many prominent researches claim that good writers go through certain steps in the process of composing a piece of written work (Calkins 1986; Graves 1983; Raban 1987). Process writing assures students that most of the first attempts at writing are not perfect. A first attempt is simply a beginning step in a process and it will become a piece of finished work with time, thought and effort. Writing, according to CDC syllabus for English Language, emphasizes both the process as well as the product.

The process writing approach involves teaching pupils strategies to help them express themselves in writing through the act of writing. (Mahon, 1992) Students experience five interrelated phases before the final products come out. The five important steps in process writing include pre-writing phase, brainstorming, drafting, revising and editing, and publishing.

Process writing breaks the writing acts into manageable parts and it integrates oral language, reading and writing in meaningful writing task. It allows students to concentrate on one task at a time and to experience the value of peer feedback in developing their ideas for effective written expressions. Since students need to publish their writing, they need to tailor the message for a particular audience and purpose. A great deal of excitement is generated when they know that they will share their final product with others. 'As the students see their writings read by others, the sense of achievement is great and this will encourage them to write more. Displays and sharing their works make their writing authentic and it is a good way to promote writing. (Peregoy and Boyle, 1993) Indeed, these echo Graves' (1983) well quoted research on primary students' writing. His basic premises include the need to encourage children to write with an audience in mind, for a particular purpose and a style appropriate to the purpose. Children must have ownership of the writing process and they should have the opportunity to produce draft, revise their work and present their work for others to read.

In view of the clear procedures embedded in the writing process, I decided to adopt the process approach in our endeavor in developing students' writing. In addition, we also took on board the view that sufficient stimulation and language preparation were needed before students could produce a piece of writing (CDC syllabus for English Language, 2000), and that wide reading was necessary for developing knowledge of a language and should be emphasized at all levels of learning. Knowing that reading was a stepping stone to developing good quality writing, I explored different English reading materials and old epic type literature such as big book, stories, poems, and songs and tried to integrate them into our English curriculum when preparing students to write. With varied reading experiences, I hoped that students could have more to write and could be more creative. Before I put process writing into practice, I had examined the limitations of guided writing.

Brainstorming ideas for the writing tasks

Our students were generally short of ideas in writing. In the past, they were trained to answer guiding questions or fill in the blanks with words provided. They wrote sentences rather than paragraphs. I decided to help them share their ideas, gather information and build up vocabulary through group activities. I wanted to make writing more interactive and let them identify a purpose and the audience for their writing. I involved students in reading, talking and making lists of useful words in the brainstorming activities. For example, in preparation for the writing task for the project "Bangla New Year", I used PowerPoint to introduce a story talking about activities of Bangla New Year. Electronic storybook, big book and magazines on the topic 'Bangla New Year' were introduced to students since I believed that reading laid the foundations to writing. In order to arouse their interest in the topic and expose students to different text types on Bangla New Year, students were guided to search the Internet for information on traditional customs, food, decorations and activities about Bangla New Year. They were also requested to interview people for the food they ate in the festive season. All these preparation work culminated in the brainstorming activities in the writing lessons. Students were able to generate ideas on food, activities, and things to do in the Bangla New Year and put them down in the mind map.

Problems with English guided writing:

On reviewing our guided writing exercises I designed the test quite interestingly mixing both product and process writing elements, I discovered the following difficulties similar to Mahon's (1992) observations identified in the students' writing:

We emphasized too much on the product mainly requiring students to write grammatically correct sentences. We put strict control on such things as sentence patterns, vocabulary, spelling and punctuation. This drove students to pay meticulous attention to the more mechanical aspects of writing.

The coursebook guided writing exercises we employed for use by students focused very much on manipulating language items through copying, transforming, or substituting discrete items. Such exercises made the writing disconnected and un-contextualized and students were not able to add thoughts and ideas of their own. They lacked a purpose for writing.

The backwash effect of such a strong emphasis on grammar was strong. Usually, works of weaker students were full of red correction marks. It was detrimental to students' confidence in writing.

I also found that our students were not thoroughly prepared for the writing task. Our usual practice of giving them some samples sentences and then asked them to write at home posed difficulties to students. Despite our efforts in providing them with vocabulary and suggested sentence patterns, they lacked the requisite skills to transfer their ideas onto paper. In fact, they were not confident enough to write on their own.

In the guided writing test items that I prepared for the participants, I emphasized too much on the production of neat and grammatical correct pieces of compositions using structured sentence patterns and controlled vocabulary. Students were not encouraged to write freely with their ideas. Indeed, they did not have room for free writing. Their only objective for writing was to avoid making grammatical mistakes when completing the writing task. The only reader was the teacher and it appeared that students did not have a purpose in writing at all. The guided writing exercises could neither stimulate students' interest nor enable them to communicate their ideas and imagination through writing. Although guided writing exercises could serve as a bridging step between controlled writing task and free writing, they were not effective in preparing students to write meaningfully and independently. The following excerpts captured how students from the target group perceived English writing:

Guided writing was like homework. We had to follow others' examples and fill in words. We did not need to think of new ideas. We usually copied from teachers' example. We did not enjoy that because we did a lot of cut and paste work in guided writing.

I did not like writing English because I did not find meaning in writing English. I did not even know what and why I was writing. It was just writing sentence, not writing composition. You had separate meaning for each sentence and they were not connected at all. It was not like a piece of composition. But in writing composition, we knew what we were writing. We write with a purpose.

Students' performance in the test

In an attempt to establish a reference point for comparison purposes, I designed two sets of writing tasks for students to work on. Both tasks were based on stories and concepts familiar to students such that they could have ideas to cling on in their writing. On completion of the writing task, I came up with the following findings.

In the writing task, they were required to complete the given ideas and stories and topics. Clues and open-ended questions were provided as hints for students. My marking criteria focused on three areas: ability to respond to the questions and clues, creativity and accuracy. As this was the first time students responded to comparatively more open-ended questions, the writing task was quite difficult for them. Students tried very hard to follow the storyline in their writing. In the interview, they said:

I liked to have clues. I could guess what to write. I could also guess the pictures for meaning. Teachers told me the story and used sentence to explain the pictures. It was easier. I could write more freely this time because we were given some open questions.

On the other hand, low ability groups found that it was very difficult and they preferred guided writing. They didn't know how to express their idea in suitable vocabulary and appropriate sentence structure most of the time. In their words:

I liked guided writing. We did not need to know too much grammar rules. Teachers gave us examples and vocabulary to follow. But we needed to write on our own. The vocabulary was new to me and I did not know how to use them in the writing. It was difficult to complete the writing on our own.

We did not know the grammar rules. English was more difficult than other subjects. Sometimes I was confused by the Bengali and English structure. For example, we put verb word at the end in Bengali writing but we had to put verb word in the middle of English writing. (SOV in L1 & SVO L2) It was quite confusing.

Some samples of their response to the writing tasks were captured as follows:

Their difficulties and weaknesses were identified as follows:

- *Word confusion:* happen = happy; said = sad = side
- *Lack of understanding of key words in the instructions:* a few, wakes, caught, end, would
- *Misunderstanding sentences:* "If you were a millionaire" taken as "If you wanted to be a millionaire"
- *Direct translation from Bengali to English:* e.g. I can do your friends. My father wants help the family. We all are English afraid. The family is all friends now.

Students were able to use the right words in the context, though spelling errors were made at times. But the wrongly spelt words did not blur the meaning of the sentences. For example, 'frist' for 'first'; 'caughted' for 'caught'; 'got' for 'god'; 'helf' for 'help'. They were able to use the right language forms to express meaning. Not surprisingly, there was confusion in the use of tenses, particularly in dialogues.

When students were free to create their own ending to the story, they able to generate novice ending to the familiar story. Students' creativity could be unleashed when they were given the right task within the reach of their language competence and ideas.

Little understanding of what a sentence is Number of lines provided dictate the amount of writing: For the pupils, the number of lines provided indicates teachers' expectations and they would respond accordingly

I found that students' understanding of sentence structure depended very much on their understanding of the vocabulary. Yet, their usual strategy in reading English was to translate the English words into Bengali and pasted them together for meaning. The differences in Bengali and English sentence structure created interference and difficulties in understanding. It was very hard for them to link words together into sentences. Their writing competence was weak.

Number of Students for Process and Product Oriented Writing:

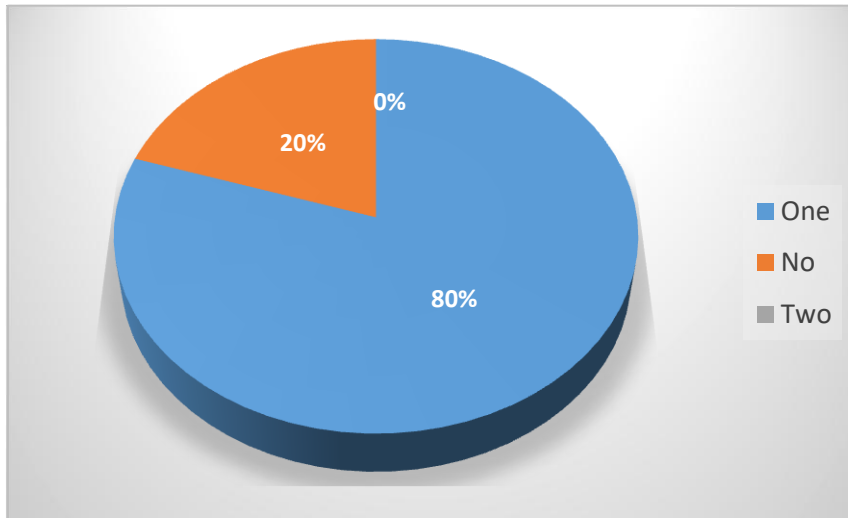


Fig: 1- 20% Process and 80% Product

Study and Discussion

Participants: 80

Evaluation Criteria: 50 marks written test

Test Result:

- Score above 35: 5 Participants
- Score above 30: 15 Participants
- Score above 25: 22 Participants
- Score above 20: 13 Participants
- Score below 20: 25 Participants

Evaluation in the Test:

Percentage of Successful Writers: 25%

Percentage of less successful Writers: 30%

Percentage of unsuccessful Writers: 45%

Participants who attempted to write their own and tried to use their background knowledge and classroom information have followed model ideas to produce their own standard stepping forward to a self created strategy.

Process Oriented Writers: 35%

Participants who attempted to write from the model text and haven't tried to apply their background knowledge rather applied classroom sentences from the model text in order to produce their attempted answers regardless towards self-created strategy rather they look forward to sequencing preplanned similar idea sentences.

Product Oriented Writers: 65%

Difficulty in Comprehending the Writing Instruction:

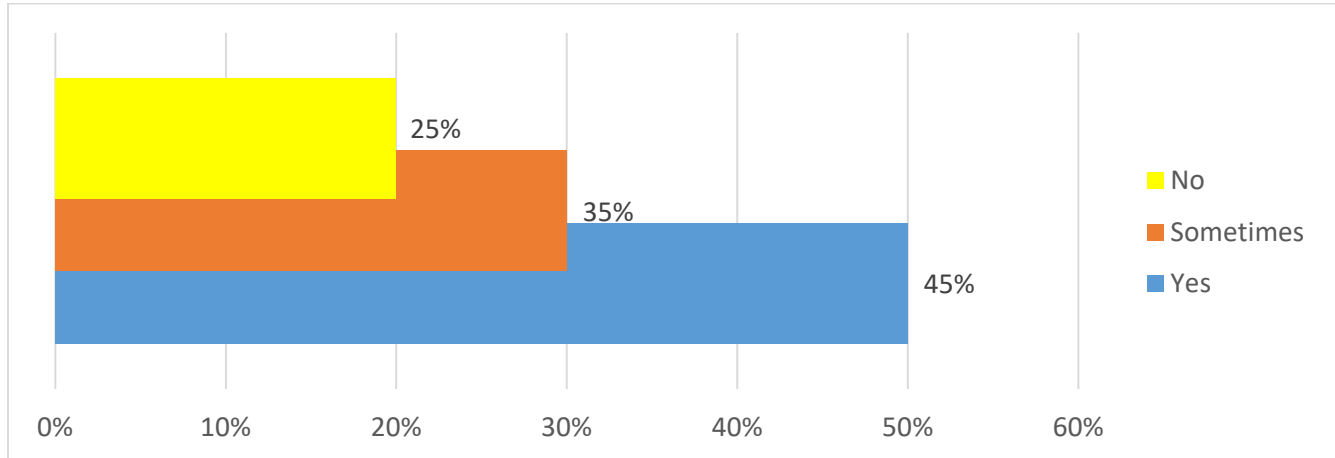


Fig 2: Performance the Writing instruction

Reviews on students' responses in the questionnaires

In an attempt to elicit students' views on their process writing experiences, a questionnaire was administered to all students at the end of the school term. The questionnaire focuses on three aspects of their writing experiences, namely, quantity and quality of writing, confidence in writing, and views on the different processes in writing. The cumulative percentage of students who agreed with the statements are tabulated as follows:

Research Questions:

- a) How do the participants respond to Process-oriented writing?
- b) Why do they prefer Product-oriented writing?

<i>Questionnaire statements</i>	<i>Cumulative Percentage (Strongly Agree and Agree)</i>
1. I write more than before	82.9
2. I write better than before	82.8
3. Writing is fun	78.9
4. I am good at writing	69.9
5. I am able to finish a piece of writing by myself	74.8
6. I like free writing more than guided writing	80.3
7. I find brainstorming useful in helping me write.	72.1
8. Mind mapping is good for organizing my ideas	93.5
9. Peer editing makes me be more aware of common mistakes	84.6
10. I feel good when I present my work before my classmates	81.3

In general, students had very positive attitude towards free writing. Over 80% of the students agreed that “I write more than before”, and “I write better than before.” Students became more confident in their writing. Students wrote more and they could organize their ideas in a more logical way.

About 80.3% of the students liked free writing more than guided writing. 93.5% of the students found that mind mapping was useful in helping them organize their ideas. 84.6% of the students agreed that peer editing raised their awareness in grammar. Presenting their writings to peers is also very important to them. About 80% of the students thought that the presentations gave them great satisfaction.

We discovered that there were three sets of data positively correlated to each other. “My writing was better than before.” vs. “I write more than before.” (.591) This reflected that students’ confidence was built on the number of words they wrote. Students with more ideas and language support could write more and could write better. “I am good at writing.” vs. “I write better than before.” (.392). It is also found that “Mind map can help me organize my ideas.” and. “I think brainstorming help me in my writing.” are correlated and are complimentary to one another.

Of all the four classes, the more able class had the highest percentage of students developing positive attitude towards writing. 100% of the students agreed that their writings were better than before. They wrote more and their writing was substantial in terms of ideas and presentation skills. The fact that they were high ability students might have contributed to the mastery of the writing skills. In fact, they were more motivated in own learning through reading more books. This accounts for their eagerness to write. On the other hand, close to 70% of the other three classes had developed more positive attitude towards writing. The results were encouraging since this was the first year for the students doing process writing.

Students were also encouraged to express their views freely on open-ended questions: *What impressed you most in the process writing lessons? What did you learn in the lessons? How did the process help you write? Other opinions?*

Students were quite willing to respond to these open-ended questions. Nearly all students from the two more able classes responded to the open-ended questions while about two-thirds of the less able classes made their comments. The most impressive processes were the learning activities associated with mind mapping. They also welcomed the discussion, group writing as well as peer editing. *‘The best free writing lesson should be working in groups. Everyone has his ideas and these ideas can be pooled to give a piece of good work. We could help one another when we run into difficulties The most impressive moment was when everyone was thinking hard to generate ideas for the mind map’.*

On the learning they achieved in the process writing lessons, nearly half of the students considered that the lessons increased their vocabulary and understanding of grammar. They also learned how to use mind mapping to organize ideas and make meaningful sentences. They also learned collaborative skills and learned to respect others. For some students, they thought that process writing *‘greatly increased our interest in writing English. It also enhanced our writing ability and creativity. Our writing is better. We make less mistakes in the choice of words and in grammar’.* Indeed, the most frequently expressed ‘Other Opinions’ was that they would like to have more process writing lessons in the new school year. It is indicative of a positive change in their attitude towards writing.

Findings:

- Learners are too much dependent on given information.
- They are more prone towards model data and information previously provided than their knowledge and experience.
- Memorization and copying the model sentences are preferable to creativity.
- Successful writers have simply dependent on preplanning and previous knowledge along with strong preparation.
- Unsuccessful writers haven’t simply established a set balance for organizing their ideas, model sentences and learnt information.

- Comprehending the test question has been quite tough for some participants as they answered some questions briefly and some broadly without balancing ideas.
- Applying a proper beginning or introductory paragraph for a writing task has been a great difficulty.
- Consistency and integration of ideas after another have also created troubles because linking concepts and appropriate linkers have been missing.
- Many participants have become quite unsuccessful to apply correct sequence of sentences and information when they have used their own sentences.
- Most of the participants have used one or two types of sentences and combination of simple, complex and compound sentences are very few and lexical elements are repeated.
- In case of Product Oriented writing like Preparing Curriculum Vita (CV), Success rate is very high.
- On the other hand, Process Oriented writing like writing a paragraph on “Where I want to see myself after ten years”, success rate is very low although model information has been provided in the class.

Recommendation:

- Learners must cope with both types of writing or they won't be able to flourish successfully in case of writing.
- The learners who are too much dependent on creativity lack information as they are unwilling to recollect or remember specific data or information. So, storing data and vital resources are obligatory for this type of writers.
- The learners who are too much dependent on memorization fail to produce standard writing as they are not ready to accept creative or redesigned or transformed concepts. so learning to produce creative ideas and sentences is vital for this type of writers
- Gathering required information and applying them in connection with a proper organization will be a great help for the development of writing.
- Proper application of diction and various types of sentences will add a texture in a writing piece.

Limitations:

- Participants are from various background varying 19 to 40 years old.
- Learners' differences may hamper the accuracy of the results.
- Topic based writing task may judge participants but accuracy cannot be assured.
- Learners are quite known to the evaluator and the test results may be subjective.
- Learners may perform less successfully if they don't have model information previously given.
- Mixed group learners accompanying students and professionals may not evaluate the success rate accurately as practicing students will usually do better than the non-practicing professionals.

From process to product: concluding remarks

The journey from process to product in writing is enjoyable and yet challenging. Quantitative changes are identified in both students and teachers. For writing to occur more naturally to students, we learn from students that they want their teachers to teach them how to write in the lessons. The diversified and well-structured input in terms of clear teaching and demonstration, a wide variety of teaching and learning materials, mind mapping, modeling and continuous feedback all contribute to students' mastery of writing skills. The process they underwent has equipped them with the skills and confidence in writing. A change in the marking criteria has released teachers from putting too emphasis on the technical aspects of writing. When teachers become more tolerant of "minor" mistakes, student feel more at ease and are more willing to take risks in their work. Peer editing and teacher editing makes room for self-correction and students become more aware of their own accuracy in writing, a product teachers obtained unintended.

Indeed, audience in the peer editing was extended in the publishing or presentation session. Students were given the chance to share their own product and this adds incentives to writing.

As for the changes in teachers in the process of implementing a curriculum initiative into the college curriculum, working up a collaborative culture through collaborative lesson planning and associated co-teaching help trigger an inquiry into their own practice. Indeed, external input from outside agency are also effective intervention strategies in the development process. The change from doubt to certainty in teachers' attitude towards process writing is built on continuous reflections in the meetings, and it taps strength from students' growing competence in writing. Teachers learn to believe that students are able to work independently if they are given a share in owning the learning. Authentic tasks closely associated with their daily life provide a very nurturing platform. It is through the process taken place on the secure platform that learning to write occurs to students. The research starts process writing in the college, and process writing sparks off new learning cycles for students and teachers. The process will go on.

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