(A Case Study for Secondary female Students in Al Madinah Al Monawarah - Saudi Arabia)

تطوير وتطبيق طرق تدريس مهارة الكتابة لطالبات المرحلة الثانوية

(دراسة حالة : لطالبات الصف الثالث الثانوي العرب المدينة المنورة – السعودية)

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Abstract:

Writing as a productive skill requires application of the correct writing methodology. This study aims at investigating the problem of the declining standard of grade three -Saudi students in the writing skill at female governmental secondary schools in Al Madinah Al Monawarah. As second language learners, these students face the greatest challenges in writing skills. The study also tries to find some solutions that help to improve this skill. To achieve the aims of the study, the researcher tried to detect the practices of the teachers in the ELT class. To collect the required information for this study, the teachers and the students' questionnaires were designed. Added to that an interview for experts. The questionnaires were answered by 20 teachers and 65 students at five schools. The data was analyzed by the Statistical Package of the Social Science (SPSS). Results presented in the fourth chapter. Most of those results matched the hypotheses of the research. In other words, correct techniques of prewriting, editing, corrections and feedback are not followed by teachers and students in writing class. Consequences of inaccurate practices of teachers and students were confirmed by the observations of the supervisors who answered the interview. To promote performance of teachers and students in this skill, the researcher recommended some practical applications based on new approaches to ELT of the writing skill.

KeyWords: New strategies – Process Approach- Effective feedback- Autonomy learning

المستخلص :

تتطلب مهارة الكتابة في اللغة الإنجليزية التطبيق السليم لطرق تدريس هذه المهارة، هذه الدراسة تهدف لبحث أسباب تدني مستوى طالبات الصف الثالث ثانوي في المدارس الحكومية بالمدينة المنورة، فالطالبة تواجه تحدي كبير وهي تدرس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية خاصة في مهارة الكتابة ،كما تهدف هذه الدراسة لوضع بعض الحلول لتطوير مستوى الطالبة في هذه المهارة. لتحقيق هذه الأهداف وضعت استبانتين تتقصى اتباع المعلمة والطالبة للأساليب الناجحة في حصة مهارة الكتابة، كما استعانت الدراسة بحوار مع موجهات مكتب الإشراف التربوي في المدينة المنورة... أجابت على الإستبانتين 20 معلمة و 65 طالبة في خمس مدارس وبعد التحليل الإحصائي ومناقشة النتائج وجد أنها تطابق افتراضات هذه الدراسة التي افترضت عدم اتباع الأساليب الصحيحة أثناء مراحل درس التعبير في اللغة الإنجليزية وهي : النشاطات التحضيرية،التحرير الصحيح، ومهارات ما بعد التصحيح. نتائج هذه الأساليب توافقت مع افتراضات الدراسة و إجابات الإشراف التربوي المستندة على الزيارات الصفية، اختتمت الدراسة بتوصيات عملية يمكن تطبيقها لتطوير مهارة الكتابة.

Introduction:

Writing is one of the primary skills that students have to learn. Every day, Arab secondary School students have many different tasks, such as: extracurricular writing materials of different subjects. It is through writing that they express much of their knowledge and understanding of the different subject areas .Moreover, writing often forms the basis of follow-up work such as class discussions or homework tasks. It is for these reasons it is essential for learners to have good English writing skills in order to convey their understanding of what they learn. Building up correct writing ground for Arab secondary students is an essential stage before moving to higher education where autonomous learning depends largely on writing tools. The researcher noticed the weak standard of grade-three female Saudi students, when she corrects students placement test, required for the admission of preparatory year at Taibah University where the researcher is working .Most of the students pass the test because they usually do well in the other parts of the test .Tricia Hedge commented "*In the 1990s, methodology for teaching of writing in ELT classrooms made dramatic departures from traditional approaches.*" *(2000 p. 300).* Therefore, the research was directed to investigate the situation of teaching the writing skills at the secondary schools. In an attempt to make the students achieve the required characteristics of acceptable writing successfully through the appropriate, employable and effective writing strategies.

The Problem of the Study

Arab students as second language learners of English are faced with many linguistic problems, almost in all the skills of the English language ; reading, writing, speaking and listening. However, the most challenging one is the writing skill. The researcher and other teachers, who teach English as a Second Language (ESL)**,** noticed that the majority of female secondary students find writing boring, so they tend to copying pieces of writing from any available sources, such as magazines, internet websites or classmates. Copying from other sources indicates lack of confidence in the skills of writing. Most of these students are not able to produce rich ideas, which indicates weak practice in prewriting activities. Their writing often lacks the basic sentence structure and accuracy in grammar, as well as spelling and punctuation. The weak language cohesion is also obvious, which shows inability of using suitable discourse markers. Even the form and the organization need to be improved. Written works of students seem to be delivered without editing the first draft or checking mistakes. Therefore, this study tried to investigate this problem through a sample from the third grade, female Saudi secondary students in AlMadinah Al Monawarah.

The Significance of the Study

Getting secondary students to write with less hesitancy, fewer errors and more confidence is a dream for all teachers who teach ESL. Thus, this research aims at:

(a) Investigating the present situation of teaching writing skills among the female secondary students at AlMadinah Al Monawarah schools.

(b) Offering teachers and students with structured approaches for good writing and techniques that help to improve writing process and to make it more

interesting .Thus, raise the awareness of teachers, researchers and syllabi planners.

(c) Building teachers' capacity to respond flexibly to students' needs when they give feedback.

Questions of the Research

To meet the foregoing stated objectives, the following research questions are raised:

1. What is the present situation of teaching writing skills to the third grade, secondary schools students in AlMadinah Al Monawarah, Saudi Arabia?

2. How do Saudi female teachers as non –native speakers act appositively and effectively in the ELT classroom?

3. What are the better practical techniques and strategies of effective feedback that supposed to be applied when responding to students' writing?

The Hypotheses

1. Most secondary third - grade Saudi female students are demotivated to write enthusiastically due to teachers' inaccurate instruction practices.

2. Recent techniques for good writing are not followed by most secondary Saudi female teachers.

3. Motivating feedback strategies to students' writing are ignored by most Saudi female teachers.

Procedure and Population of the Study

This study was based on statistical analysis method which was carried out through two questionnaires. The first one was designed for the Saudi female teachers, who teach English at five secondary schools and the second one was for the third grade- students at the same schools. The study was supported by experts' interview answers as a third tool of research.   As teaching process depends largely on teachers, the teachers' questionnaire was designed to examine the teachers' awareness of writing skills and the reasons of the declining standard of students' written work. The students' questionnaire was meant for detecting the students' attitudes towards writing skills. The material of these tools was based on 'Process Approach' and basis of ELT methodology to writing skills. A part of the teacher's questionnaire was about the teacher's feedback after writing .The questionnaires were objective and valid as they avoided leading, ambiguous or complex questions.

The Teachers' questionnaires were distributed to twenty Saudi female teachers who teach at five governmental secondary schools at AlMadinah Monawarah , The students' questionnaires were distributed randomly to 65 students at those schools. The data collected through the two questionnaires was processed by computer through Statistics Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). This was recommended by Meiraf (2005 p. 57) who referred to Seilger and Sohamy (1989 p.238). The results of the questionnaires were shown in forms of tables and graphs. The questionnaires reliability results shows consistency between the questionnaires and the responses of the teachers and the students.

The Population of the Stud y

The Teachers' Sample

The Teachers' questionnaire was distributed to 20 Saudi female teachers, who teach English language at Al Madinah governmental secondary schools. Two areas related to population are discussed below:

a.The Teachers Experience

Nearly half of those teachers have taught English for more than 15 years as it can be seen in the Chart below:

Chart Represents Teachers' Experience
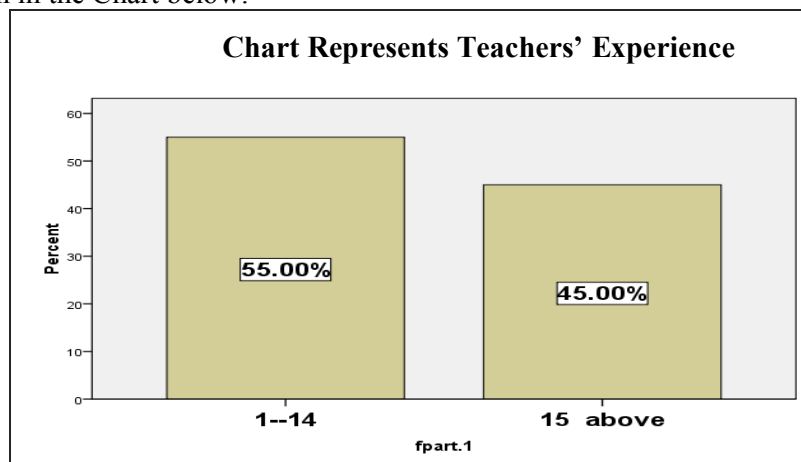
b. The Chances of Teachers' Training:

It was found that 80% of those teachers have attended training courses in teaching methods and 64% have attended courses in writing skills. Table (1) and (2) show these percentages.

Table (1) No. of Teachers who Attended Courses in Teaching Methods

Training Courses		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	15	75.0	75.0	75.0
	No	5	25.0	25.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Table (2) No. of Teachers who Attended Courses in Teaching Writing Skills

The Students Sample

Concerning the student sample, it consisted of 65 students. All of them were females of Saudi nationality. The Subjects were in the third grade of secondary at

Writing Courses		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	13	65.0	65.0	65.0
	No	7	35.0	35.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	

governmental schools, where they studied in perfect educational environment. The number of the students in the classrooms is one of the areas that affect learning and teaching process. This area was examined and the results showed suitable number of students in classrooms for most of the students, 76.9% (F: 50). Only 23% (F: 15) were in classrooms which had relatively big number of students.

See table (3)

	Number of students	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	20 — 30	50	76.9	76.9	76.9
	30 — 40	15	23.1	23.1	100.0
	Total	65	100.0	100.0	

Table (3) No. of Students in Classrooms

Consequences of Writing Skills Practiced by Teachers

The results of the writing techniques practiced by the teachers implied certain facts about prewriting activities. The first investigated one, is '*making students read a related topic before they start writing'*. For this technique, only half of the teachers stated that they practice it, whereas the rest are not keen or never make their students read before writing. '*Brainstorming ideas in pairs or groups*' is one of the essential prewriting techniques that encourage students to be engaged in the thinking process. Regarding this technique, it was found that 60 % of the teachers always lead their students to follow this method. Others practice it sometimes or never follow it. Good writing depends primarily on the step of prewriting. Educators refer to this step by using different terms. Cunningham and Allington (2003 p.96) called this step '*thinking aloud* 'and sometimes they refer to it by using the term" *brainstorming*". Elkurud (2005 p.122), states that students in Saudi Arabia find writing periods boring and do not need intelligence. She suggested two ways of performing brainstorming ideas. '*Listing related sentence structures'* is another helpful practice, especially when the teacher elicits them from students. It was found that 30% are not keen about discussing and listing sentence structures. '*Writing a draft to be corrected is an essential technique'*. Yet, it was found that only 50% of the teachers answered that they always ask the students to make a draft to be corrected. Hogue (1996 p.18), sees writing as a process that starts with learning and practicing the structure of the sentences. Although writing the final copy directly is a negative practice. However, a considerable percentage, 54% of the teachers make the students to do it. This result shows that most of the teachers ignore prewriting techniques. '*Focusing on the editing skills'* is not a recommended practice. Nevertheless, half of the teachers reported that they always concentrate on editing skills, such as spelling and grammar. This means less concentration on thinking, gathering of ideas and other communications skills. Mahili (1994 p.24) following the process approach, observes that when correcting the first draft, the teacher must not waste time correcting language errors. This author recommends focusing on the content at this stage.

 As for the practice of '*writing the final copy at home',* which is a negative practice as well, it was found that 45% of the teachers always practice it and 55% sometimes practice it .No one teacher says she never practices that .It is recommended to make the students write the final copy in class and have peer final revision if the previous stages are well performed. Peer evaluation of writing helps learners to become aware of an audience other than the teacher.

Consequences of Correcting Skills Practiced by Teachers

'*Reviewing content separately from editing skills'* is a fair tool that makes teachers evaluate students' ideas and thinking ability. However, only 30% of the

teachers practice this technique, 30% sometimes follow it and 40% never review content. to Al Mutawa and Kailani (1989 p.147)state that: "*It is desirable to correct serious mistakes and to overlook insignificant ones.* Although '*underlining all mistakes of students*' is a very discouraging practice. Nonetheless, it is always practiced by 70% of the teachers and sometimes by 30% of them. '*Correcting some mistakes and overlooking the small ones*' is a recommended activity .Yet it is always practiced by only 20% of the teachers , 20% never do it and 60% sometimes follow this strategy. According to Al Mutawa and Kailani (1989 p.147), the teacher is not advised to correct all mistakes.' *Circling mistakes which students can correct themselves* is a skill that helps much in building up the ability of recognizing related mistakes. Results for this activity show that only 45% of the teachers reported that they always practice it and the others do not tend to follow it. '*Writing the corrected item for each error*' is a negative practice that does not help students to learn how to correct their own errors. Yet, only 30% of the teachers reported that they never write the corrected items for errors, whereas, 70% of them always or sometimes follow this negative strategy. The questionnaire also tested the strategy of '*using a check list*' which is also used to build student's ability for autonomous learning. Results show that only 25% of the teachers said that they always follow this technique. A percentage of 35 practices it .While 40% of them never try it. When the results of teachers' practices compared with their students' comments about the way of correction, it was found that the percentages reported were nearly the same. This is on the other hand matches the comments of supervisors who answered the interview .These experts conduct classroom visits twice a year at the schools.

Correction Practice	Teachers' Results	Students' Results
Underlining all mistakes	70.0%	70.8
Writing correct items	25.0%	26.0
Using check list	25%	3.1%

Table (4) Comparing Teachers and Students' Results about Correction Practices

Consequences of Feedback Techniques Practiced by Teachers

Positive response after correction is a complementary skill that affects the student's future work. The teachers were asked about five techniques the researcher had thought that teachers may use after correction. '*Discussing common mistakes in class*' is one from those responses. Referring to the results, it was found that 70.0% of the teachers always discuss common mistakes in class .The rest of the teachers do not care much about this essential technique. '*Reviewing bad writing in class*' is a negative practice that must be avoided and substituted with correction of students' common mistakes. When this practice was investigated, 55.0 % of the teachers reported that they sometimes follow it. It is very encouraging feedback technique to '*comment on student's good writing*' and ask her to read what she writes. However, when teachers were asked about practicing this technique of reviewing good writing in class, it was found that only 20.0% of the teachers always follow it, 60.0% sometimes follow it and 20.0% of the teachers said that they never do it. The questionnaire also investigated the practice of '*discussing student's mistakes individually*' .This practice wastes the teacher's time and destroys the students' confidence. Yet a

cumulative percentage 65.0 reported that they always or sometimes discuss students individually about their mistakes. The rest of the teachers, 35.0% said that they sometimes follow this practice. When investigating the negative technique of '*making students correct all their mistakes'*, it was found that 80% of teachers always make their students correct all mistakes. While 20% sometimes ask them to do so. The mentioned results denote that teachers waste their time and the students' in following insignificant practices. Whereas, this precious time should be invested in brainstorming, developing thinking ability and doing more remedial language exercises.

Comparing Results of Students' Prewriting and Writing Techniques
The students' answers for the items prewriting activities, show relatively positive results, which are supposed to grantee a solid base for the coming step of the final copy. Nevertheless, results of the last two items concerning the individual ability of writing the final copy were found to be quite negative. Which make the researcher concluded that the techniques of good writing are practiced by some teachers but may be without making sure that all students are well instructed, engaged and applied them or may be these techniques are totally ignored by the teachers. The last possibility matches the observations of all the female English language supervisors, who reported that the majority of the teachers followed traditional techniques of teaching writing. Ms.Wedad Awwad, head supervisor comments on the present situation at the governmental secondary schools:
"No *change. The same old fashion is used. Some teachers struggle to find effective methods to teach this skill, but others just ignore it*"

Recommendation
So far, the study has summed up the consequences of the techniques used by female Saudi teachers in teaching writing skills as well as the consequences of negative factors that affect teachers work at some schools of the Arab world. According to these findings a group of recommendations are suggested. Many of them can be applied to promote the present situation for female teachers and the schools. The suggested recommendations are hoped to solve some problems of teaching in Arab schools generally and the problems that affect teaching writing skill in a specific way.

The recent situation in Saudi secondary schools indicates that unless a big change in teaching policies are carried out; these schools will continue graduating students whose academic standard is weak and whose knowledge beyond classrooms is very limited. These teaching policies in Arab countries generally and Saudi Schools in Madinah Secondary School specifically can be promoted by:

1. Adopting developing programs such as the programs of the Total Quality Management, which raises the efficiency of the educational institutions. The basic standards of the Total Quality programs grantee promotion for the whole teaching process including: buildings and laboratories, administration staff, syllabus, teachers, students and assessment. Adopting such programs requires big budget, not affordable for most schools. However, the programs have already started in some countries such as Egypt and some cities in Saudi Arabia. To apply these programs more widely so as to have effective results, the researcher suggests transforming education from a governmental system into a business under the private sector which can provide the necessary expenses for such a big

change. The change should consider the middle and the low economic sectors of students.

2. To improve writing ability for the students, some suggestions are recommended in order to promote the instruction procedures of teachers and consequently the students' performance in the writing skill. These are:

❖ Teachers should continue to be students of teaching by updating themselves with the most recent teaching strategies as well as the known basic ones.

❖ It is wise to make use of the advanced information technology represented in computer compact disks and the internet, which are both considered to be rich sources for teaching ideas, material and models. Internet websites offer everything that develop teaching and learning ideas like ; the latest teaching strategies, teaching books and magazines, recommendations of conferences and workshops about teaching and education policies including previous experiences of other countries .

❖ Reading is an effective means that provide students with many thoughts and information. To create classrooms in which students can write well, reading must be encouraged.

❖ To build students' confidence towards free expression, it is recommended to maximize thinking and brainstorming sessions and minimize the correction time.

❖ Fluency and good standard in the language encourage students to write more giving more supporting language exercises that deal with general trouble spots in grammar and mechanism to raise students' standard.

❖ Teachers should give regular writing tasks, preferably every day. Giving daily writing is the most challenging task for both teachers and students. Yet it is the only effective means for developing students' ability of thinking and writing.

❖ To motivate students and make writing an interesting task, teachers should give authentic material for writing.

❖ To achieve both daily writing and authentic material, the researcher suggests daily writing through a form entitled "My Daily Ideas, Views and Achievement. The form should be used as an additional or daily assignments, the teacher may photocopy thirty pages of the form for each student to fill by them daily. To encourage the students, the school or the teacher may specify a monthly prize for the best three works. Filling out such form serves many aims simultaneously: it makes students cautious watching what is going around and thus, develops the ability of assessing situations and events and learns to express themselves freely to describe such events. The collection of these forms may be used as memories for future, which is also very motivating. An Arabic version of the form can be used to enrich writing in the Arabic language; too.Wrting in L1 enhances thinking ability for both Arabic and English languages.

❖ To strengthen the rapport between the teachers and students, it is recommended to use internet ideas, the teacher can communicate freely with her students through the following :

a. Shared e-mails for the teacher and her students with a known pass words. In these e-mails students can communicate and interact with their teachers or classmates academically or socially. They can be encouraged to write private problem thoughts or send their written work to be corrected. Teacher's feedback is essential to confirm her presence.

Interactions can be performed through blogs which are sites used by the teacher and her students. Bloggers can express their ideas freely.

Smart phones can be another means of written interaction between teachers and students through certain programs. The mentioned technology means can evolve students' writing if students use them effectively.

❖ Correction of writing can be a tool of building or destroying. It depends on the skills used. Therefore, when correcting a student's piece of writing, the teacher should not respond to it as though it is his last product. He should bear in mind that there are still time for the students to practice more and to do much better.

❖ Peer correction of the first draft, should be encouraged to promote the students' ability to recognize grammatical and lexical errors as well as problems of content. A peer correction also minimizes the teacher's correction effort and enhances the autonomy learning.

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