

Promoting Literacy and Writing Proficiency through a Reading-Based Method

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Abstract

The present study examines the writing proficiency of Algerian EFL undergraduate learners (Applied Language Studies) at the university of Constantine 1, Algeria. As a very important language skill, the ability to write stretches of discourse that are communicatively successful is one of the major concerns of language teachers. The main aim of the study is to see whether there is a positive relationship between the use of connective expressions in the argumentative type of text and the students' overall writing quality, reflected by the teacher's assigned marks to students' essays. Two groups of students were tested before teaching intervention to have a general idea about their level (pre-test) in writing and the use of connectives. The two groups received the same teaching intervention during a period of 9 weeks (quasi-experimental design), then they have been given a post-test. The results of the pretest and the posttest have been analyzed using the correlation coefficient test. The results have shown that there is an improvement in the students' proficiency in writing after the teaching intervention. The analysis of the students' essays with regard to the use of connective expressions and the students' overall mark has shown that there is a positive relationship between the students' frequent use of connective expressions and their marks (quality of texts). The hypothesis upon which the research was based on was, hence, confirmed.

Key words: Writing proficiency, connectives, argumentative writing, writing quality

Introduction

As a language skill, writing is very important especially in EFL contexts. EFL students do usually face problems in producing acceptable and communicative stretches of discourse. The aim of this study is to use a method of teaching the skill of writing on a reading-based level and adopting the genre approach to teaching writing. The reason behind that is the belief that texts differ from each other in the way they are written and in the linguistic features writers use to produce communicative texts that are acceptable by a given discourse community. The main linguistic feature that characterizes the argumentative type of writing is the use of connective expressions to show the logical relationship between ideas, to achieve coherence and to show the writer's moves through her/his text. Accordingly, we claim that the more the students use connective expressions in the argumentative type of writing, the better the quality of their texts will be, reflected by the teacher's assigned marks.

1. The Relationship between Reading and Writing

Writing is one of the major skills emphasized in learning a language. This skill is relatively related to the notion of literacy, which, according to Stern (1983), refers to one's ability to write and read. In the Algerian context, literacy and the writing ability are usually emphasized at the early stages in an educational syllabus at university, namely, at the beginner and intermediate levels of language learning.

There has been a paradigm shift in the notion of literacy. The tendency to consider reading and writing as the determining factors in boosting one's literacy level stands no longer. The reason behind this is that this tendency which concentrates on reading and writing reflects a limited view of literacy as a dynamic concept that encompasses several social and cultural aspects in reading and writing practices. According to Stern (1983:171), "Reading and writing are intrinsically linked, complementary processes. Writers are their own first readers, and their ability to read closely is essential to their ability to write coherently." Besides that, in the act of writing, writers go through cognitive processes which promote a sensitivity to language, making, thus, analytic reading possible. (*ibid.*)

1.1. Types of Reading in EFL Context

1.2. Extensive Reading

There are two reading approaches that language teachers seem to adopt in their courses. They are referred to as "intensive" and "extensive" reading approaches. Some teaching programs and materials may use one approach, though, Grellet (1981), and Ferris and Hedgcock (2005) call for a combination of both approaches if time and resources permit. Extensive reading is said to fit into "meaning-focused input" and "fluency development". According to Nation (2008: 49), "Reading is a source of learning and a source of enjoyment. It can be a goal in its own right and a way of reaching other goals." Reading is a good means of learning since it can establish and reinforce previously learned vocabulary and grammar. Moreover, successful learning of these aspects of language can encourage the EFL students to learn more. Reading can even be a source of enjoyment as students gain skill and fluency in it.

Extensive reading involves incidental learning. That is to say, focus is on reading as such (story, for instance), and not on items to learn. It involves large quantities of varied

reading texts (inside/outside classroom), and focus is usually placed on the learning of vocabulary. To use Nation's (*ibid.*:50) words, "Extensive reading is a form of learning from meaning-focused input." Focus in reading is on the meaning of the text rather than on learning the language features of that *text*.

1.3. *Intensive Reading*

The following are the main characteristics of the *intensive reading approach* adopted in the present research:

- The texts to be studied are selected by the teacher (perhaps with input from students).
- All students read the same text at the same time and complete in-class or out-of-class exercises and assessments designed or assigned by the teacher.
- The teacher highlights specific linguistic features and content dimensions of the text, introducing and reinforcing selected reading strategies through whole-class instruction and activities.
- Assessment of student comprehension, reading development, and reading efficiency is facilitated by the fact that all students work simultaneously with the same text and activities.

Ferris and Hedgcock (2005) point out that the intensive approach to reading is the most predominant approach to ESL/EFL reading instruction. To frame the discussion of intensive reading, they make the following assumptions:

- Intensive reading lessons should in most instances be based on entire texts, not just excerpts (e.g., a newspaper or journal article, a chapter from a textbook or novel, rather than just a few paragraphs) Ferris and Hedgcock (2005)
- Overall purpose of an intensive reading lesson is only secondarily the comprehension of text content—the overriding goal is to build students' skills and strategies for reading authentic texts beyond the reading classroom.
- Texts for intensive reading lessons have already been carefully selected by the teacher (either from a textbook or other source) using text selection considerations (Ferris and Hedgcock (2005)

According to Nation (2008:25), "Intensive study of reading texts can be a means of increasing learners' knowledge of language features and their control of reading strategies". Intensive reading has been the classic procedure in the grammar-translation approach. Teachers who used to adopt this approach work with their students on texts using their first language to explain the meaning of the text, going through the text sentence by sentence. This procedure can be a useful one if used with appropriate texts and appropriate principles as being a part of the reading program.

A very important goal of intensive reading is that of *determining the language features of a particular text to draw the students' attention to them* in the teaching course. Teachers adopting this method of teaching have the language features characterizing each text as the main focus of syllabus for their courses. This, Nation (*ibid.*) argues, has various positive aspects. He (*ibid.*) suggests that if the identified language features are set in a communicative context of a text, one can show how these

latter can contribute to achieve the communicative purpose of the text. If done appropriately, this method of teaching can help teachers to prepare some writing activities. Thus, Nation (2008:25), points out, can rule out any interference between decisions to include vocabulary items or grammatical features in syllabus design.

Special focus on certain grammatical features can be determined by both the topic and the genre of the text, thus, giving rise to the use of certain salient language items rather than others. As such, we deduce that teaching can be directed towards the text and what linguistic features it necessitates for use. This point has been made clear by Nation (2008) in the following statement, “If intensive reading is to be done well, the major principle determining the focus of the teaching should be that the focus is on items that will occur in a wide range of texts.”

The focus of intensive reading in a text can be on the following aspects:

- **Cohesion:** Learners can practice interpreting what pronouns refer to in the text, what the conjunction relationships between sentences are, and how different words are used to refer to the same idea.
- **Information structure:** Certain texts contain certain kinds of information. Newspaper reports, for example, can describe what happened, what led to the happening, what the likely effects will be, who was involved, and when and where it happened. Learners can be helped to identify these different kinds of information.
- **Genre features:** The vocabulary, grammatical features, cohesive features and information will contribute to the communicative effect of a text. Intensive reading can focus on how the text achieves its communicative purpose through these features and what this communicative purpose is.

When using intensive reading, in teaching and explaining the texts in the foreign language, the teacher’s aim is to make understanding much easier for students. The effect of this is to let students notice and learn the specific linguistic features of the text that they may encounter in the future in other texts, thus, have a greater chance to learn and use them.

In more practical terms, Nation (2008) points out that ‘language-focused learning’ through intensive reading can take the form of written exercises accompanying a text. He (*ibid.*) states that a good reading exercise should draw the students’ attention to language features in the studied texts that can be found in other texts too. The aim of this is to give students strategies of how to deal appropriately with texts to help them develop the ability of comprehension (Davies and Widdowson, 1978). In other words, the aim behind getting students to read and analyze a text is to help them gain some important linguistic knowledge which can help them understand what Nation (2008) termed “tomorrow’s reading texts”. The rule of thumb is that students should learn what is applicable to all texts. On that basis, Nation (*ibid.*:28) argues that exposure to language features through the use of texts is a necessary and important requirement for learning. To use his (2008) words,

We want [students] to gain knowledge of the language and ways of dealing with the language rather than an understanding of a particular language. If a reading exercise does not focus on generalisable features of a text, it does not provide much opportunity for any useful, cumulative learning to take place. (p.28)

Another important aspect of reading exercises based on texts is that they provide teachers with information about the learners' performance on the exercise. This can guide the teacher also to improve his/her teaching on the basis of the learners' performance. However, if students were unsuccessful in some exercises, the teacher can take some action and interfere by re-considering some exercises, or drawing the students' attention to the importance of certain salient language aspects that are crucial to the production of communicatively successful argumentative writing, in our case.

Reading exercises and students' performance can provide teachers with useful feedback. Exercises can tell the teacher what aspects of language are being focused on and taught, and what linguistic features she is trying to teach. This, we maintain, places the teacher in a better position to judge the value of the exercise with regard to the aspects she believes they are important in teaching reading and/or writing. A good reading exercise is also easy to make. That is to say, the teacher chooses texts that meet her students' needs. The exercise should reflect the learners' needs not aim at satisfying them. Moreover, Nation (2008) claims that if the texts do not provide exercises that are of interest to learners, teachers must make their own.

Encountering these important textual features (connectives/conjunctions in this case) and getting used to analyze and learn them is of central importance for learners to understand where and how they are used in texts to organize ideas and convey information. Learning and analyzing conjunctions from one text can help learners to transfer them alongside the different meanings they carry to convey particular messages from text to text. These features are said to focus the learners' attention on the message of the text beyond the sentence boundaries.

As salient linguistic features that characterize different types of texts, conjunctions (Halliday and Hassan, 1976 taxonomy of conjunctive cohesion) lie at the heart of 'grammatical cohesion'. They gained lot of importance and received attention because of the significant role they have in expressing meaning relations between the different parts of a text. Nation (*ibid.*:44) suggests that carefully designed exercises focusing on cohesive devices are easy to make, and their implementation can result in positive effects on both *reading* and *writing*. On the basis of that, the exercises about conjunctions in the present research experimental design are based on the types proposed by Nation (2008).

2. Teaching Writing Through Reading

Taught together, reading and writing are said to enrich the students' language and thinking capacities. Taken together, reading and writing are the hallmarks of a literate person. It only makes good sense, then, that they be integrated in teaching for students to get the most of each. What is also essential is how these processes are taught. For instruction to be effective, students need to have some choice—about what to read and the topic of their writing. When students have some control over what they choose to read, they are more likely to invest themselves in developing a full understanding of the text, and so work hard to comprehend what they are reading. Similarly, when writers have some choice over what to write about, they will probably work harder to communicate simply because the topic is meaningful to them.

In order to make the connection between reading and writing plain to EFL students, the two processes should be taught together. There needs to be a sense of

process; both reading and writing are, after all, to be an initial understanding of the text that may hold up or may need to be revised as the text unfolds. Writers, too, revise. They produce early drafts that may need only a little tinkering with or—more typically—may need substantial revision to communicate adequately and well. There also needs to be an effort from the teacher to make the reading/writing relationship explicit, through genre knowledge and understanding of language structure, and to establish expected behaviors—habits of good readers and good writers—that guide what students do (Cole, 2008).

To summarize, the relationship between reading and writing is important for the learning process of ESL/EFL students. The two processes are almost two sides of the same coin, and knowledge of one supports the learning and development of the other. Drawing on their understanding of sound/letter correspondence, readers decode messages. Also, drawing on the same skills to form the words that tell their stories, writers encode messages. Moreover, sounding out a word helps students to read and to spell it; knowledge of signal words and phrases allows writers to join ideas in an appropriate way, and allows readers to connect ideas and understand the relationship between those ideas (*ibid.*).

3. The Genre Approach To Teaching Writing

The notion of genre has been established by Swales (1990), and the introduction of genre pedagogy is a reaction to the widespread emphasis that has been placed on the planning-writing-re-viewing framework, i.e., on the learners' strategies for writing and the cognitive process they go through. This over-emphasis has been at the expense of teaching and raising students' awareness about the necessary linguistic resources to express and communicate effectively in different social contexts. The discovery-based approach failed to take into account the social authority of powerful text forms. On the one hand, it succeeded, up to an extent, to provide students with the freedom they need to encourage and boost their writing fluency, but, on the other hand, it could not free them from the grammatical and social constraints involved in the construction of social meanings in different contexts.

Over the last few decades, a good deal of attention has been given to the notion of genre and its application in language teaching and learning. This interest in the notion of genre is due to the changing views that characterized areas of discourse and teaching composition. Understanding how language is structured to achieve different social purposes in given contexts of use has become a central focus.

For language teachers, genre-based pedagogies offer principled ways for assisting writing teachers to provide their students with targeted, relevant, and supportive instruction. By enabling teachers to ground their courses in the texts that students will need to write in occupational, academic, or social contexts, they help guide learners to participate in the world outside the ESL classroom (Hyland, 2007).

By making explicit what is to be learnt, providing a coherent framework for studying both language and contexts, ensuring that course objectives are derived from students' needs, and creating the resources for students to understand and challenge valued discourses, genre approaches provide an effective writing pedagogy. (p.148-149)

Genre instruction, in contrast to other previous teaching pedagogies, stresses the fact that genres are specific to particular cultures, reminding us that our students may not share this knowledge with us, hence, urging us to go beyond syntactic structures, vocabulary, and composing to incorporate into our teaching the way language is used in specific contexts. It assists students to exploit the expressive potential of society's discourse structures instead of merely being manipulated by them.

Genre pedagogies appear more promising for the learners' benefits since they take into consideration language, content and context. The same can be said for teachers since those pedagogies represent a good means for making it explicit to the learners how writing works to communicate through systematic explanations (*ibid.*).

In support of the genre-based pedagogy, Hyland (2003:10-16) enumerates the following advantages of the genre pedagogy:

- **Explicit** : Makes clear what is to be learnt to facilitate the acquisition of writing skills.
- **Systematic** : Provides a coherent framework for focusing on both language and contexts.
- **Needs-based** : Ensures that course objectives and content are derived from students' needs.
- **Supportive** : Gives teachers a central role in scaffolding students' learning and creativity.
- **Empowering** : Provides access to the patterns and possibilities of variation in valued texts.
- **Critical** : Provides the resources for students to understand and challenge valued discourses
- **Consciousness-raising** : Increases teachers' awareness of texts to confidently advise students on writing.

Hyland (2007) points out that by stating these advantages, he makes no claim that "all these characteristics are unique to genre pedagogy". He (*ibid.*) claims, however, that the most important feature in the genre-based writing instruction is the fact that it makes it clear to students how target texts are structured. It is the explicitness which, to use Hyland's (2007) words,

[...] gives teachers and learners something to shoot for making writing outcomes clear rather than relying on hit or miss inductive methods whereby learners are expected to acquire the genres they need from repeated writing experiences or the teacher's notes in the margins of their essays. (p.151)

The genre-based pedagogies shift the teaching focus from the implicit and exploratory instruction to a 'conscious manipulation of language and choice', by providing teachers with useful knowledge of appropriate language forms. The main aim of genre pedagogy is to address ESL/EFL learners needs. It calls for teachers' attention to the way texts actually work in communication. This, Hyland (2007) argues, require a good knowledge of language on the part of teachers in order to be able to make appropriate linguistic choices, appropriate organization of their topics, and so on. Knowledge and focus on grammar, for instance, is necessary since it gives learners the ability to codify meanings in 'distinct and recognizable ways'(*ibid.*).

One of the central matters emphasized by Hyland (*ibid.*) is the fact that genre is not prescriptive, hence providing learners with descriptions of how texts are written. According to Hyland (2007):

Selecting a particular genre implies the use of certain patterns, but this does not dictate the way we write. It enables us to make choices and facilitates expression. The ability to create meaning is only made possible by the possibility of alternatives. By ensuring these options are available to students, we give them the opportunity to make such choices, and for many L2 learners this awareness of regularity and structure is not only facilitating, but also reassuring. (p.151)

3.1. *The concept of genre*

According to Hyland (2007:149), genre refers to “abstract, socially recognized ways of using language.” Members in a given discourse community are said to share some concepts, notions, conventions and knowledge that help them recognize similarities among texts. Based on certain shared knowledge as well as repeated experience, people can read, understand and even write those texts easily. Within the realm of genre pedagogy, writing is seen as being based on the readers’ expectations. The interpretation of the writer’s purpose is based on the latter’s ability to anticipate what his/her reader might expect on the basis of repeated experience gained from reading texts of a similar kind (*ibid.*).

The reader understands the text on the basis of his/her anticipation and by making connection to prior texts. Texts are recognized as belonging to the genre of poetry, recipe and so on, and the reader can, as a result, respond to them immediately. To use Hyland’s (2007:150) words, as members of a given discourse community, “we process a schema of prior knowledge which we share with others and can bring to the situation in which we read and write to express ourselves efficiently and effectively.

Hyland (*ibid.*) argues that genre application in classroom is a result of the communicative approach to language teaching which emerged in the 1970s. It has as its main focus the role of language in helping students achieve particular purposes in given contexts.

3.2. *Genre and writing instruction*

Genre teaching pedagogies are based on a set of principles which, according to Hyland (2007), can be translated into syllabus goals and teaching methodologies. He (*ibid.*) maintains that:

- **Writing is a social activity:** Communication is always purpose-driven, has a context and directed to given audience. These latter are said to form the basis of both writing tasks and syllabuses. Teachers should engage their students in a variety of “relevant writing experiences which draw on, analyze, and investigate different purposes and readers.”
- **Learning to write is needs-oriented:** Effective teaching recognizes learners’ wants, prior learning, and students’ current level of proficiency. Genre-based courses make a further addition by emphasizing the kinds of writing learners will be in need of in their TL, thus, incorporating them into their courses.

- **Learning to write requires explicit outcomes and expectations:** Learning will be more effective if teachers are more explicit about what is taught, why it is taught, and what will be expected of students at the end of each course. (*ibid.*:152)
- **Learning to write is a social activity:** To use Hyland's (*ibid.*:153) words, "Learning to write is supported within familiar routines, or cycles of activity, and by linking new contexts and understandings to what students already know about writing. Teaching is, therefore, always a series of scaffold developmental steps in which teachers and peers play a major role" (*ibid.*:153).

In line with Hyland (2007), and over the few last decades, there has been a considerable movement in literacy curriculum in many places all around the world. In the late 1980s, genre-based approaches emerged and started to underpin many ESL/EFL English syllabuses. They represented a move away from the naturalistic models of language learning that framed such approaches as the process approach to teaching writing, which has dominated the teaching of writing throughout the late 1970s and well into 1990s. These approaches were seen as progressivist that were closely aligned with principles of developmental psychology. Moreover, such kind of movement (process approach) is based on the assumption that language learning is an individualized phenomenon. Genre approaches were a reaction to the formal instruction of grammar and language features. The central focus of genre-based curricula is on an explicit teaching of grammar and text (Hyland, 2003).

4.

Questions

Research

The research questions that guide the present research paper are as follows:

1. What is the most useful teaching approaches adopted in teaching Written Expression to EFL students at the university of Constantine 01?
2. Is there a relationship between increasing reading-based tasks, adopting the genre approach to teaching Written Expression to EFL students, and the students' writing proficiency ?

5.

Hypothesis

Research

Teaching writing on a reading-based method and adopting the genre approach will develop EFL students' writing proficiency as well as their communicative competence vis-à-vis the use of the linguistics feature that characterize each genre of writing (connectives).

6. Research Methodology

6.1. Subjects

The subjects of the present study are third-year-LMD (Licence/Master/Doctorat) students at the English Department, Constantine University 01, of the year 2010-2011. The reason behind choosing this particular year (i.e., third year) is simply the fact that students are in their last year of study. This is of due importance for the aim of the

study since at this level, students may be involved in different kinds of jobs either in the academic domain, if they aspire to have higher educational degrees, or otherwise. Given this fact, it is usually expected that, before leaving university, students should have possessed the most important skills of language amongst which writing forms the cornerstone. As such, this study has been set at this level of study to test how successful students' written texts will be in terms of communicating ideas and conveying meaning.

Two group of students, each group consisting of 28 students, were selected in the present research experiment. Both groups have been tested before any teaching intervention for their proficiency in writing and with regard to the use of connective expressions as textual markers that are specific to each genre of writing. Both groups have received a teaching intervention (quasi-experiment) and have been both used as experimental groups.

6.2. Materials

This study is based on a corpus of students' written compositions. The texts were obtained from the students' first and second semester exam in Written Expression. The corpus used for the analysis consists of essays selected from 112 argumentative essays written in an exam and under exam conditions by third-year students attending a three-year degree in English. The participants were all Algerian native speakers, with just one exception which has been ruled out from the analysis, and they all aged between 21-27.

In the first two years of their studies, students attend compulsory writing classes with focus being placed on the acquisition of the basics of English writing. Efforts on developing the students' competence vis-à-vis certain types of writing are also being emphasized. In their second year at university, students are introduced to the expository and narrative and/or descriptive types of writing. Efforts are done to help them master knowledge of writing these texts, and in their third year, teachers move to the more complicated type of writing, i.e., the argumentative type.

6.3. The Experiment

This study is a type of evaluation which aims to determine whether a new program or teaching intervention will have certain positive effects on the participants' performance. Data have been collected to determine the participants' level of proficiency in writing prior to any kind of intervention to take place as a part of pretest. Data have also been collected from the same sample of participants after the teaching intervention (post-test). The present study looks at two groups of participants (108 essays) who received a teaching intervention; we call it the treatment group. The pre-test allows us to make inferences about the effects of our intervention by looking at, and comparing the pre/posttest results.

6.4. Procedure

The texts contained in the sample were typed using a computer, but the different types of mistakes (punctuation, tense, grammar and spelling) found in the texts were kept as they were in the original texts of students. In addition to that, incomplete conjunctions were counted and considered as mistakes. These include expressions such as

even (though), despite (the fact) and so on. Mistakes of spelling were also counted such as *also, in one hand* and so on.

The essays (112) were scored on the basis of (a) **overall quality**, as measured by **holistic scores**. Writing samples and data scoring rubrics are used to make it clear what factors led the raters to award higher holistic scores to certain essays rather than to others. Two independent raters have been called to score the students' essays each one separately. The following are the criteria of holistic scoring given to both raters to consider before starting to score students' essays:

1. The rater goes through the essay as a whole (usually from 2 to 4 minutes).
2. The task is taken as a whole and the rater assigns a score on the basis of an overall impression about the performance.
3. The rater's attention should be placed on the overall communicative ability of the student.
4. The rater takes account of all language aspects together especially coherence in writing.
5. Minor mistakes that do not impede or create reading problems are overlooked if reading is still eligible and communicative.

To avoid the intervention of scorer external variables that might affect ratings, features such as handwriting has been ruled out by typing all essay samples and keeping the same mistakes found in them. We believe that teachers adhered to the identified factors: (a) content, (b) development, (c) organization, (d) the degree to which the writer effectively addresses the task, (e) coherence.

The assumption underlying holistic scoring is that higher scores indicate greater quality of writing. We also maintain that **connective expressions** as markers of discourse organization, coherence and the writer's moves, contribute to writing quality. Accordingly, focus will be placed on the notion of **coherence** and **cohesion**, namely, **conjunctive cohesion**. We examined and analyzed the 112 essays on the basis of one discursive feature: conjunctions. Our reason for choosing to focus on connective expressions stems from our experience as teachers and as discourse analysts who seek to explore how language functions and what features lead to successful communication.

6.5 Methodological Procedures

To test the research stated hypothesis, a quasi-experimental study has been carried out. As such, two different methods of teaching Written Expression have been used. Two groups of third year students have been chosen as the sample for this study, both of which were used as an experimental group. In the first semester, students were taught using the ordinary method of teaching with given focus on different matters. The ordinary method of teaching involved teaching students writing by delivering the course to students in a theoretically-based way. Even if students were given texts to read, the focus of teaching has been very broad put mainly on language structure such as the thesis statement, the topic sentences, the supporting details and so forth. This method of teaching was the one practiced in the Department of Foreign Languages at the university

of Constantine 01. The new method of teaching writing, which differs in terms of teaching focus and teaching approach, has been used in the present study experiment, and it aims at testing the research stated hypothesis, was introduced and applied on a reading-based method adopting the genre approach to teach the subject of Written Expression. Besides other aspects of writing, the main focus of teaching has been on discourse structure, discourse moves, coherence and the use of conjunctions. As such, the tasks, activities and method of assessment were determined by, and dependent on, the objectives of the teaching content.

The main aim of the present research is, in the first place, to test the efficacy of a given method of teaching Written Expression to EFL students at the university of Constantine 01, on the basis of greater exposure of students to written material in the argumentative type of writing (through reading, analyzing, and highlighting features of the English prose) will improve EFL students' writing proficiency and increase their linguistic, rhetorical and stylistic knowledge of the text-type at issue. Prior to the application of the new method of teaching, students were given a pretest to elicit information and gain some knowledge about the level of their writing proficiency in writing in general, and their use of connective expressions in their writing in particular. Thereafter, the teaching intervention took place, and a post-test followed in due course. During the period of teaching, students' level of proficiency and progress vis-à-vis certain linguistic features and norms of writing was also observed and evaluated on a regular basis.

7.Results: Quantifying the Association between Two Variables: Correlation Coefficient

In order to test the research stated hypothesis and to explore the relationship between the use of connective expressions and the students' proficiency in writing, reflected by the marks they received on their essays, the statistical test which has been used is Pearson product moment correlation coefficient test. The results of the test are discussed below.

Table 1: Correlation between the score and Connective expressions use (pretest I Group 1)

Pearson Product Moment Correlation		
Statistic	Variable X(Conjunction)	Variable Y (Mark)
Mean	31.5714285714286	9.76785714285714
Biased Standard Deviation	9.02547415227972	1.70990884707522
Correlation	0.0930634914103043	
T-Test	0.476600922708735	
Number of Observations	28	

Comments:

Pearson moment-product correlation coefficient test is used to measure the strength of a liner association between variable (x) and variable (y). Pearson moment-product correlation coefficient (r) value in the first pre-test of group 1 was 0.09. This value reflects a positive relationship. Though this is a very small association between variable (x) which is the number of connective expressions and variable (y) which is the overall grade the student got in her essay, but the relationship is nevertheless positive to some extent.

Table 2: *Correlation between the score and Connective expressions use (pretest 2 Group 2)*

Pearson Product Moment Correlation		
Statistic	Variable X (conjunction)	Variable Y(Score)
Mean	37.9642857142857	10.6517857142857
Biased Standard Deviation	10.675345905594	1.75298124342388
Correlation	0.155829052677176	
T-Test	0.804401923465313	
Number of Observations	28	

Comments:

The result of Pearson moment-product correlation coefficient test in the second pretest (group 2) is 0.15. The (r)value here reflects also a positive association between the dependent variable (y) and the independent variable (x). The degree of association reflects also a weak, tough positive relationship, meaning thus that the association is not strong.

Table 3: *Correlation between the score and Connective expressions use (posttest 1 Group 1)*

Pearson Product Moment Correlation		
Statistic	Variable X(Conjunction)	Variable Y(Score)
Mean	30.5714285714286	10.1785714285714
Biased Standard Deviation	7.79390133111676	1.81001324834479
Correlation	0.319983690387982	

T-Test	1.7221483890509
Number of Observations	28

Comments:

The correlation coefficient results in the first group posttest is 0.31, which means that the association between the two variables (the number of connective expressions and the final mark) is medium positive. The closer the (r) to +1, the more positive the association is, and the closer the (r) is to -1, the more negative the association is. In this case, the association is considered positive but it is not very strong enough to claim anything about the effectiveness of the teaching intervention.

Table 4: Correlation between the score and Connective expressions use (posttest 2 Group 2)

Pearson Product Moment Correlation		
Statistic	Variable X(Conjunction)	Variable Y(Score)
Mean	30.2857142857143	10.1339285714286
Biased Standard Deviation	11.4824622261739	1.74038447986504
Correlation	0.398407471651446	
T-Test	2.21485889744835	
Number of Observations	28	

Comments :

With the second group posttest, the value of (r) is 0.39, which means that despite being positive but the association between variable (x) and variable (y) is medium. In this case also, the degree of positivity cannot be considered as significant, and hence conclude that the teaching intervention has brought significant effect on the students use of conjunctions and their overall marks.

So, the results of the correlation coefficient test show in both groups in the experiment (pretest and posttest), that the relationship between the use of connective expressions and the essays marks is positive, but the strength of association between the two variables (variable x and variable y) was not strong enough. The strength ranged between 0.9 and 0.39. This reflects a small or medium value of (r).

Conclusion

The present research has been based upon the assumption that the students' writing proficiency can be improved if writing is taught on a reading-based method and adopting the genre approach to writing, with emphasis being placed on connective expressions as textual markers of the argumentative genre. The students' involved in the present study have been tested before teaching intervention and after the teaching intervention, and then the results of the pretest and the posttest have been compared for the association between the use of connective expressions as features of the argumentative genre and the students' writing proficiency reflected by the score they received on their writing.

The results of correlation coefficient test have shown that there is a positive association between the use of connectives and the students' writing proficiency in both experimental groups. Accordingly, the hypothesis upon which the present research has been based was confirmed. Increasing reading-based tasks and adopting the genre approach to teach the argumentative writing to students have led to positive results in the proficiency of students in writing.

About the Author:

Nassira BOUDERSA is a 4th year Ph.D candidate in applied Language Studies at the university of Constantine 01-Algeria, and a part-time teacher at university from 2008 till now. Nassira BOUDERSA is interested in doing research in Discourse Analysis and the translation of poetry from Arabic into English and vice versa.

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