

# JETA Vista

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A venue for English teacher professional development

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## TEACHING WRITING FOR STUDENTS OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS WITH THE USE OF THE PROCESS APPROACH

MARGANA<sup>(11)</sup>

### ABSTRACT

Writing is one of the four macro-language skills which should be taken into account by English teachers in the process of English language teaching and learning in the secondary school levels beside the other macro-language skills such as listening, reading, and speaking on the grounds that writing provides students of secondary school levels to express their ideas, feelings, and the like with the use of English. Through writing practices, students of secondary school levels can activate their linguistics competence and communicative competence as reflected in the selected texts that students produce. This implies that English teachers of secondary schools have to give an emphasis on writing with regard to students' writing ability beside other language skills.

To teach writing, however, English teachers need to know ways of how to teach writing as teaching writing is not a matter of asking students to write some topics given, then asking them to submit their writing works, and discussing the mistakes which focus on grammatical issues. As far as the writer concerns, such a way of writing does not drive students to maximally gain the writing ability of secondary school students as it does not challenge students to apply their higher thinking skills. As a result, students find difficulties to generate ideas.

In reference to the above issue, this article presents how to teach writing for students of secondary schools. It aims to provide an outline of how to teaching writing with the use of the process approach.

### A. Introduction

In teaching English as a foreign language, English teachers deal with two types of language skills, namely macro-language skills and micro-language skills (Hammer, 2003). The macro language skills embody listening, reading, speaking, and writing. The four macro-language skills are essentially classified into two types, namely (1) receptive language skills which consist of listening and reading and (2) productive language skills which embody speaking and writing. Those four macro-skills play an important role in English language teaching and learning as they become the targeted skill focuses.

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To successfully teach those four language skills, English teachers are encouraged to provide students with sufficient micro-language skills or the linguistic components such as vocabulary, grammar/structure, spelling, pronunciation, orthography, and the like. The micro-language skills serve as the language aspects to be learned under the discussion of the four macro-language skills. In short, both macro-language skills and micro-language skills cannot be separated each other.

Of the macro-language skills, teaching writing seems to be less taken into account by English teachers in the process of English language teaching and learning as it is very complicated in nature. Teaching writing for students of secondary schools demands English teachers to be familiar with micro- and macro-writing skills as those skills become prominent issues in teaching writing. In other words, English teachers are demanded to promote both micro and macro writing skills when they are engaged in teaching writing so that students of secondary schools are able to produce good writing of various English texts as targeted in the curriculum of secondary school levels. Added to this, English teachers of secondary schools tend to focus on the application of the product approach advocating the analysis of the systemic knowledge or the form of language such as vocabulary, grammar/structure, spelling, and the like. Rarely do English teachers drive students to deal with process approach which advocates students to take into account how to generate their ideas with regard to their schematic knowledge. Consequently, students of secondary schools get frustrated in their writing practices as they spend their time to analyze the language forms.

In reference to the above issue, this paper deals with how to teach writing for students of secondary schools. It aims to provide English teachers with practical techniques of teaching writing for students of secondary schools.

## **B. The Nature of Writing**

Many experts have their own definition of writing. For example, Spratt et al. (2005: 26) define writing as one of the productive language skills, which deal with conveying messages with the use of graphic symbols. According to them, writing is an activity to communicate one's ideas by using letters, words, phrases, and clauses to form a series of related sentences. This definition shows that writing is conveying a message through a written text. In other words, writing is a communication between a writer and a reader with the use of printed symbols. Brown (2000: 335) states that writing is a written product of thinking, drafting, and revising that require specialized skills on how to generate ideas, how to organize them coherently, how to use discourse markers and rhetorical conventions to put them cohesively into a written text, how to revise text for clearer meaning, how to edit text for appropriate grammar, and how to produce a final product. This definition implies that writing is a complicated skill requiring both systemic knowledge (the knowledge of the language learned which include vocabulary, grammar/structure, spelling, orthography) and non-systemic knowledge (the knowledge of non-language which include the knowledge of the field, the cultural context, and the like).

In support of the above statement, Richard and Renandya (2002:303) claim that writing is the most difficult skill for second language students. The difficulty lies not only in generating and organizing ideas but also in translating these ideas into readable text. This is supported by Blanchard and root who state that writing involves sub-skills that students should learn, practice, and master.

In relation to sub-writing skills, Brown (2004: 220-221) identifies a list of micro-skills and macro-skills in developing writing ability. The former deal with the systemic knowledge of the target language while the latter is concerned with non-systemic knowledge of the target language. The micro-skills of writing include (1) producing graphemes and orthographic patterns of English, (2) producing writing at an efficient rate of speed to suit the purposes, (3) producing

an acceptable core of words and using appropriate word order patterns, (4) using grammatical system, (5) expressing a particular meaning in different grammatical forms, and (6) using cohesive devices.

The macro-skills include (1) using rhetorical forms and conventions of written discourse, (2) accomplishing the communicative functions of written text according to form and purpose, (3) convey links and connections between events and communicating such relations as main ideas, supporting ideas, new information, given information, generalization, and exemplification, (4) distinguishing between literal and implied meanings when writing, (5) conveying culturally specific references in the context of the written text, (6) conveying links and connections between events, and (7) developing and using a battery of writing strategies, such accurately assessing the audience's interpretation, using pre-writing devices, writing with fluency in the first drafts, using paraphrases and synonyms, soliciting peer and instructor feedback, and using feedback for revising and editing.

In reference to the above sub-writing skills, English teachers are encourage to promote those two sub-skills of writing when they are engaged in teaching writing which focuses on producing written texts, descriptive text in particular. Through emphasizing both micro- and macro- sub writing skills, students of secondary schools are expected to maximally gain their writing ability.

### **C. How to Teach Writing**

#### **1. The mode of teaching writing**

To teach writing, English teachers can apply two modes, namely segregated-skill instruction and integrated-skill instruction. In the segregated-skill instruction, the mastery of discrete language skills such as reading and speaking is viewed as the key to successful learning, and language learning is typically separated from content learning (Mohan, 1986). Skill segregation is reflected in traditional ESL/EFL programs that promote classes giving an

emphasis on segregated language skills. An extreme example is the employment of the grammar-translation method, which drives students to analyze grammar and to translate (usually in writing) from one language to another. This method restricts language learning to a very narrow, non-communicative range that does not prepare students to use the target language in everyday life. The application of the segregated-skill instruction is initiated with two reasons. First, it is logistically easier to present courses on writing separated from speaking, or on listening isolated from reading. Second, it is instructionally impossible to focus on more than one skill at a time.

The application of the integrated-skill instruction is based on the assumption that teaching English involves two aspects, namely primary language skills which embody listening, reading, speaking, and writing and linguistic components which include knowledge of vocabulary, grammar/structure, spelling, pronunciation, meaning, and usage. The two aspects should be presented in the integrated mode because both aspects are interrelated each other. For example, when English teachers teach writing skill, of course, they also activate other language skills such as listening, reading, and speaking. They also employ linguistic components: vocabulary, grammar/structure, pronunciation, and others. Oxford (2001) states that the integrated-skill approach, as contrasted to the purely segregated approach, exposes English language students to authentic language and foster them to interact naturally in the target language. English language students rapidly attain an exact portrait of the affluence and complexity of the English language as utilized for communication practices. In addition, the followers of this integrated-skill instruction urge that English is not just an object of an academic interest nor merely a key to passing an examination. Integrating the language skills also promotes the learning of a real content, not just the analysis of language forms.

In reference to the above idea, teaching writing should be performed in the integrated way in the sense that writing should be integrated with other macro



and micro-language skills. The following presents how to teach writing for students of secondary school level.

## **2. The difference between writing and speaking**

It is evident that writing is one of the productive language skills. It is like speaking. The difference between writing and speaking mainly lies on the product. In teaching speaking, the product is a spoken text which may be in the form of a monologue or dialog. In writing, on the other hand, the main product is a written text. Johnson (2008:294-295) differentiate between writing and speaking as performed in the following points.

- (1) Everyone learns to speak but not everyone learns to write as it needs to be taught.
- (2) Writing is more organized than speaking.
- (3) The language use in writing is more formal than speaking.
- (4) Writing relies on the punctuation and the use of the well-organized language to clarify meaning. It does not employ the intonation, stress, and gestures.
- (5) Writing is much more complicated than speaking in the sense that the writer has no opportunity to directly communicate with their readers when some mis-communications or mis-interpretations occur due to the use of inappropriate language constructions.

With regard to the above issues, English teachers should be aware that teaching writing is much more challenging than teaching speaking as in writing students need to pay attention on some writing processes which include drafting, focusing, evaluating, generating, structuring and reviewing (Johnson (2008: 297).

## **3. Approaches of teaching writing**

In teaching writing for students of secondary school levels, there are two approaches that can be applied by English teachers. They are product approach

and process approach. The product approach is defined as a type of writing approach which gives an emphasis on the product rather than the process. It means that English teachers tend to only deal with analyzing the systemic knowledge of the target language. Pincas (1982b) states that writing activity should deal primarily with analyzing and constructing linguistic knowledge giving an attention on the appropriate use of vocabulary, syntax, and cohesive devices. Further, she states that in the product approach, learning to write has four stages. They include (1) familiarization, (2) controlled writing, (3) guided writing, and (4) free writing. The familiarization stage is targeted to drive students aware of certain features of a particular text by seriously looking at the language use. In the controlled and guided writing sections, students activate their skills with increasing freedom until they are ready to deal with the free writing section, when they 'use the writing skill as part of a genuine activity such as a letter, story or essay' (1982a: 22). The following presents the example of the use of the product approach.

For example, English teachers want to teach students how to describe an object of a house. A typical product class is conducted by asking students to familiarize themselves with a set of descriptions of houses, a set of prepositions and the names of rooms used in a description of a house. At the controlled stage, students are then guided to produce some simple sentences about houses from a substitution table. They then generate a piece of guided writing based on a picture of a house and, finally, at the stage of free writing, a description of their own home.

In reference to the above example, Pincas (1982a: 24) claims that the use of the product approach drives students to deal with 'assisted imitation' by adopting many techniques, for example substitution practices where students respond to a stimulus provided by the teacher. At the stage of free writing, students should feel as if they generate the targeted texts with their own ideas, which suggests that students are ready to perform their writing ability rather

more initiative. In short, product-based approaches give an emphasis on seeing writing as mainly concerned with systemic knowledge about the structure of language, and writing development as mainly the result of the imitation of input, in the form of texts provided by the teacher.

Different to the product approach, in the process approach English teachers tend to promote how to generate students' ideas by doing scaffolding practices before they create targeted texts. Tribble (1996:37) suggests that the process approach sees writing activities as driving students to generate their ideas and collecting data through to the 'publication' of a finished text. With the use of the process approach, students deal with sub-writing skills such as planning and drafting before they create the targeted texts. There is much less emphasis on the analysis of the linguistic knowledge such as vocabulary, grammar, and text structure. Tribble (1996:39) promotes four stages of generating a piece of writing. They include (1) prewriting, (2) composing/drafting, (3) revising and (4) editing. This is a cyclical process in which students may return to pre-writing activities, for example, after doing some editing or revising.

More comprehensive stages of the process approach, Spratt et al. (2005:27) promote 7 steps of writing which include (1) brainstorming, (2) making notes, (3) planning, (4) writing a draft, (5) editing, (6) producing another draft, and (7) proof-reading. Further, Spratt et. Al (2005:26) documents sub-writing skills which facilitate students to gain good writing. They include spelling the words correctly, forming letters, punctuating, choosing the appropriate words, joining sentences, using paragraphs, and others.

The other approach of teaching writing is offered by Johnson (2008:297) who documents some processes of writing, namely drafting, focusing, evaluating, generating, structuring and reviewing. White and Ardnt (1991) in Johnson (2008:298) documents four steps of writing. They are brainstorming, focusing a particular topic, loop-writing, and conferencing. Brainstorming is defined as

thinking quickly to develop a few buzz words and ideas. Each student is guided to express his own ideas which are written on the whiteboard. Focusing means selecting and determining a particular idea which is going to be written. Loop-writing is doing fast-writing to produce a few lines of a text. Conferencing is communicating what students have written to their teacher and fellow students. Banchard and Root (2003) simplify the writing process into three steps, namely pre-writing, writing, and revising. In pre-writing, students are guided to think about the topic and to organize ideas. To do so, students may conduct clustering the selected topic and deciding what topic to be written. In the second stage, students are asked to make a first draft with regard to the selected topic. In the last stage, students are driven to improve their writing by revising their first draft made. In reference to describing house as performed above, the following presents the example of the use of the process approach.

A typical prewriting activity in the process approach would be for students to brainstorm on the topic of houses. At the composing/drafting stage students would select and structure the result of the brainstorming session to provide a plan of a description of a house. This would guide the first draft of a description of a particular house. After discussion, students revise the first draft working individually or in groups. Finally, the students edit or proof-read the text.

More clearly, English teachers of secondary schools may apply three stages of teaching writing which include (1) pre-writing, (2) whilst-writing, and (3) post-writing. Each is presented below.

In the pre-writing activity, English teachers may conduct the following issues.

- (1) Asking students to start with writing broad topic.
- (2) Asking students to write down as many ideas about the topic as they can in a piece of writer or on the whiteboard.
- (3) Guiding students to add more items to their list by answering the questions what, how, when, where, why, and who.

- (4) Asking students to group similar items on the list together.
- (5) Crossing out the items that do not belong to the selected topic.

In pre-writing, English teachers may also conduct clustering activities by drawing a diagram of the ideas. The following presents some steps of clustering activity.

- (1) Asking students to write their own topics in the centre of a blank piece of paper and draw a circle around it.
- (2) Asking students to write their ideas that come into their mind about the topic in circles around the main circle.
- (3) Asking students to link the ideas to the centre word with a line.
- (4) Guiding students to think about each of his/her new ideas, write more related ideas in circles near the new ideas, and then connect them.
- (5) Asking students to repeat the process until they run out of ideas.

After having pre-writing activity, English teachers ask students to write the selected topic. The following presents issues when the students conduct a writing activity.

- (1) Starting with a topic sentence that states main idea,
- (2) Including several sentences that support the main idea.
- (3) Sticking to the topic.
- (4) Arranging the sentences so that the order of ideas makes sense.
- (5) Using signal words to help the reader understand how the ideas in your paragraph.

After doing the writing stage, students deal with revising activity or post-writing with the use of the following revising checklist.

- (1) Asking students to make sure that students have a topic sentence.
- (2) Asking students to cross out sentences that do not relate to the main idea.
- (3) Asking students to check to see if the sentences are in the right order.
- (4) Guiding students to add new ideas if they support the topic sentence,

- (5) Asking students to make sure students have included signal words to help guide the reader.
- (6) Asking students to check the punctuation, spelling, grammar, choice of words, and the like.

In reference to the above explanation, the use of the process approach in teaching writing facilitates students to maximally acquire their writing skills. The process approach sees writing primarily as the exercise of linguistic skills, and writing development as an unconscious process which happens when teachers facilitate the exercise of writing skills. Therefore, English teachers are encouraged to apply the process approach when they are engaged in teaching writing as the use of the process approach guides students to easily generate their ideas related to the targeted texts.

#### **D. Final Remarks**

In reference to the explanation above, the use of the process approach can be one of the alternatives to teach writing for students of the secondary schools on the grounds that such an approach views writing as a series of stages which lead from a particular situation to a text. Added to this, the application of the process approach facilitates students to activate their appropriate input of knowledge and skills to maximally gain their writing skills.

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