

Writing Feeds Literature

Abstract

The place of writing in any training syllabus at all educational levels is essential. As all other language skills, writing has proved to be the cornerstone in the complex process of learning a language. The requirements for all subjects constituting the curriculum to be evaluated in the written form make the mastery of writing indispensable and the knowledge of its rules a prerequisite for learning and success. In the English language more than in Arabic and French which prevail in the Algerian school, the rules which govern the paragraph appear as numerous and rigid, and often influence negatively on the students' outcome in the subjects of literature, linguistics, civilisation and whatsoever. This situation has motivated the modest study at hand which aims to measure and compare the freshmen and sophomores' students' proficiency in writing and literature. The procedure consisted in collecting their marks in writing and comparing them to those obtained in literature. The comparative analysis revealed that the students' marks in writing and literature reflect a logical correspondence between the learners' performance in both modules. In other words, good students in writing are dominantly good in literature, and this is quite understandable because writing in literature class does not require any type of gift; it is simply a meticulous practice of the teachers' instructions with negligible reference to creativity which is the basic substance of literature.

Key Words: writing, literature, transfer, correspondence, rules, correlation.

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ملخص

تحتل الكتابة مكانة هامة في اي منهج تدريب وفي جميع المستويات التعليمية. وككل المهارات اللغوية الأخرى فإنها تعتبر حجر الزاوية في عملية تعلم اللغة المعقدة. تتطلب كل المواد الدراسية التي تشكل المنهج الدراسي والتي تقيم كتابيا مهارة الكتابة بحيث تعد معرفة قواعد هذه الأخيرة من المتطلبات الأساسية للتعلم والنجاح. تتميز قواعد كتابة الفقرة في اللغة الانجليزية (مقارنة مع كل من اللغتين العربية والفرنسية اللتان تهيمنان على المدرسة

Introduction

In a scholastic situation, the product of writing has numerous aims, and one of its numerous final destinations is literature. The teaching of writing builds up the future writer in order to communicate correctly in formal situations according to pre-established rules and conventions. Writing is

الجزائرية) بكثرتها مما يؤثر سلبا على نتائج الطلبة في مواد الأدب واللسانيات والحضارة... وغيرها. هذا الوضع كان دافعا لانجاز هذه الدراسة التي تهدف الى قياس ومقارنة مدى اتقان طلبة السنة الاولى والثانية جامعي للكتابة والأدب. وقد اشتملت الدراسة على جمع نقاط الطلبة في الكتابة ومقارنتها مع النقاط المتحصل عليها في الأدب. بحيث اظهر التحليل المقارن ان علامات الطلبة في الكتابة والأدب تعكس التوافق المنطقي بين اداء الطلاب في كلتا الوجدتين. وبعبارة أخرى الطلاب الذين وفقوا في الكتابة هم نفس الطلاب الذين وفقوا في الأدب وهذه النتيجة منطقية لان الكتابة في وحدة الأدب لا تتطلب اي موهبة بل هي مجرد تطبيق شديد التدقيق لتعليمات الاساتذة مع استناد متواضع للإبداع الذي يشكل المادة الأساسية للأدب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: كتابة، أدب، نقل المعرفة، توافق، قواعد، علاقة متبادلة.

the inescapable tool used for exploring mind and expressing imagination. Literature without writing cannot investigate feelings and emotions, narrate stories, describe death and love, anticipate on dreams or change destiny. Literature represents human experience in the very specific individual terms of a story or a poem. The function of literature is to make the reader feel what the character of the novel has felt. Students should be able to exercise their imagination and produce pieces of writing similar to those they read. The way literature is taught in our universities is not the best because, in our viewpoint, identifying the theme, detailing the setting, listing or describing the main characters, commenting on the denouement etc., are not the only means that would conduct the learner to become a good author. There are formal and aesthetic issues to pick up from literary texts, and there is

also a specific vocabulary of literary analysis. All of these need to be combined in coherent and unified pieces of writing; otherwise they would never make the reader explore the writer's imagination.

The immediate consequence of such inevitable connection between writing and literature is that the former is the principal feeder for the latter.

To the question: what is literature? We are tempted to answer: literature is spoken or written material. It is used to express some creative writings like poetry, drama, fiction and non-fiction. Webster's dictionary (2004) defines it as "all writings in prose or verse, esp. those of an imaginative or critical character, without regard to their excellence: often distinguished from scientific writing, news reporting, etc." Oxford Dictionary (2005) sees it as "acquaintance with letters. The term has generally come to identify a collection of texts or works of art, which in Western culture, is mainly prose, fiction and non-fiction, drama, and poetry." Similarly, Britannica Encyclopaedia (2005) reads: "a body of written works. The name has traditionally been applied to those imaginative works of poetry and prose distinguished by the intentions of their authors and the perceived aesthetic excellence of their execution. Literature may be classified according to a variety of systems, including language, national origin, historical period, genre, and subject matter."

In short, we notice that all definitions above, and many others we read on line, bring up the coexistence of literature with the written text. Such coexistence is seen from two different angles. The first and most debated one is that which considers literature as a reading material which is used to improve writing. This type of literature comes *a priori* to writing. The second type which comes *a posteriori* and which is our main concern is taught to learners, and it requires the knowledge of the rules of writing.

From this angle, literature is no more seen as a feeder for writing but as a recipient. In other words, in order for the students to write adequately in the module of literature, they need to be guided successfully through the process of knowledge transfer from writing to literature.

Consequently, one needs to know how the process of knowledge transfer operates between two close modules.

1. Literature and Writing Classes

In any ESL/EFL context similar to that of the Department of English Letters and Language, at Constantine 1 University, the teacher of writing serves his colleague in charge of literature in the sense that he supplies his students with the techniques of writing to make them able to analyse, describe and produce literary texts. Similarly, the teacher of literature completes the work of the teacher in charge of writing by making the students practise, analyse and produce literary texts according to what they were taught in writing classroom. The obvious complementary work between both teachers requires from them to meet and synchronise their progress in their respective courses.

There are important differences in approach and content when teaching students about literature as an art and when teaching them effective writing with its rules and techniques. For example, a course in literature that focuses only on the writer's imagination would not be of great benefit for the student in improving his own writing. Students in a literature course would need to analyse the structure of the text they study in the same way students in a composition course use literary texts as a source of raw material from which they pick up various strategies that illustrate what they have been learning. In this course, for example, students would practice and discuss the literary aspect of the text, and they would also see how the thesis statement operates as well as the way 'coherence' and 'unity' have been achieved.

In other words, one should see writing as a module which prepares for literature and literature as one that practices writing. To do that, we need and should teach these modules in close collaborative work. The battery of instructions given by both teachers to their students should reinforce what each one teaches. They should be constructed with the perspective of facilitating the knowledge transfer from one module to another. The course of writing should respond to the literary problems, and conversely, the course of literature should be an exercise for the course of writing. In fact, the second year students in the Department of English Letters and Language, Constantine 1 University, do not need to extend over professional critics of the literary texts they study. In a similar context, E. Corbett (N.D) makes the following analogy:

In order to write a paper on 'Willy Loman's Failures as a Father,' students would not have to operate as little literary critics, producing the kind of highly technical critical papers; they would have to respond to the literary text simply on a layman's level--on the same level that they would respond to an automobile accident that they had witnessed on the way home from school or to an account of that accident in the evening newspaper. (182)

Erika Lindmann (1993) goes further when she suggests:

We discussed literature in a way similar to the way non-literary readings would be discussed. That is, we looked at what was happening and at the choices the writer made. Group editing, strategies for prewriting, composing and revision, issues of audience and purpose, the rationale for, and organizational techniques of, various rhetorical modes were all central to the course. Assignments included such tasks as analyzing the structure of the readings, argumentation and rebuttal, and comparison and evaluation. (p. 314)

Finally, we would like to end this passage on the close relationship between teaching writing and literature with R.M Mueller's quotation (1986), which explains the present and projects the future of literature teaching: "Teaching writing through teaching literature gives students a rich and valuable knowledge base and brings together the technical skills of composition and the cultural content of literature. The future of literature in the composition class will depend on how we approach the related areas of reading, writing, and critical thinking. We can integrate literature and writing by teaching them as learning activities that foster communication, cultural literacy, and critical thinking skills." (p. 42)

2. Data Collection

The comparative analysis of the students' marks obtained in writing and literature has been achieved exactly in the same way as we did in a precedent article published in 2008 and which aimed at measuring the impact of the Grammar subject on the students' proficiency in writing. This article aims at determining the rate of correlation between writing and literature as taught in the Department of English Letters and Language, Constantine 1 University. The analysis is limited to freshmen and second year students and the marks are those obtained in 2010 and 2011. By rate of correlation is meant the extent to which the teachings of writing reflect on those of literature. Nobody would deny the important necessity of connecting between modules belonging to the same teaching unit (T.U.) because of the single final objective of the training process. The results we expect from this comparative analysis will certainly shed some light on what is being done for the writing/literature connection and would probably allow us to bring teachers of the modules closer.

The number of students involved in the comparative analysis is 120 taken equally from 1st and 2nd year, the same as for grammar and writing connection. The analysis deals with 240 marks: 120 marks obtained in the 1st year and 120 others obtained in the 2nd year in both writing and literature modules.

| | 1st Year Students | 2nd Year Students | TOTAL |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------|
| Marks in Literature | 60 | 60 | 120 |
| Marks in Writing | 60 | 60 | 120 |
| Total | 120 | 120 | 240 |

Table 1: Number of Students' Marks Investigated

For the sake of limiting the investigation to a single purpose, we have grouped the marks in the following way: from 00 to 05, from 05 to 10, from 10 to 15 and finally from 15 to 20. The analysis of the marks has been conducted moving from writing to literature because it aims essentially at checking to what extent students transfer knowledge from writing to literature. Again, we have to specify that we did not investigate the types of tests administered to the students; instead, we have just compared their marks.

| Writing Mark Range | Percentage of Students in Literature Mark Range | | | | |
|--------------------|---|-------|-------|-------|---------|
| | 0-5 | 5-10 | 10-15 | 15-20 | Total |
| 0-5 | 80.2% | 15.3% | 4.5% | 0,00% | 100,00% |
| 5-10 | 10.5% | 38.5% | 50.0% | 01.0% | 100,00% |
| 10-15 | 01.7% | 17.5% | 60.2% | 20.7% | 100,00% |
| 15-20 | 02.0% | 17,1% | 22.4% | 58.5% | 100,00% |

Table 2: Ranges of Corresponding Marks obtained in Literature and Writing

Findings and Discussion

As shown on table 2, the students' marks in writing on the left column have been grouped in four categories to which correspond similar categories of marks obtained in literature and expressed in percentage under the heading 'Percentage of Students in Literature Mark Range'.

| | 0-5 | 5-10 | 10-15 | 15-20 | Grand Total |
|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------------|
| 0-5 | 80.2% | 15.3% | 4.5% | 0,00% | 100,00% |

Table 03: 0-5 Range in Writing

- The first line in table 02 reproduced above indicates that the students who have got between 00 and 05 in writing remain in majority in the same range in literature (80.2%). If we combine this percentage to the 15.3% obtained in the 05-10 literature category, we will get more than 90% of the failing students in writing who have also failed in literature. Only 07% among the weak writers have got the average in literature with marks ranging closer to 10 than to 15. We notice that none of those who ranked in the 00-05 category in writing has obtained more than 15 in literature. This is highly significant in that it shows that there is no chance of 'accidental' success in literature for those who have failed in writing.

| | 0-5 | 5-10 | 10-15 | 15-20 | Grand Total |
|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------------|
| 5-10 | 10.5% | 38.5% | 50.0% | 01.0% | 100,00% |

Table 4: 5-10 Range in Writing

- The logical correspondence which prevails in table 3 is not reproduced in the next (table 4). We notice that the majority of the students who have scored in the

05-10 writing group have obtained the average in literature (above 10). Only 49% of those who failed in writing with marks ranging from 05 to 10 have also failed in literature. It is difficult to justify such a situation when we depart from the idea that a student who does not know the elementary notions of writing cannot produce successful papers in literature whatever creative, descriptive or analytic they are. The only probable explanation we are tempted to suggest is that teachers of literature evaluate content rather than form.

| | 0-5 | 5-10 | 10-15 | 15-20 | Grand Total |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------------|
| 10-15 | 01.7% | 17.5% | 60.2% | 20.7% | 100,00% |

Table 1: 10-15 Range in Writing

- The logical correspondence we observed in table 3 (taken from the third row of table 2) is confirmed in the third one of the same table where the significant majority of those who have succeeded in writing because ranking in 10-15 scale, have also succeeded in literature with 60,2% and 20,7% respectively in 10-15 and 15-20 category of literature. To say it differently, a total of 80,9% among those who obtained between 10 and 15 in writing have got between 10 and 20 in literature. Again the tendency is toward more success in literature in spite of the difficulty of the latter which combines both the mastery of structural rules and creativity. On the other side of the table, we notice that less than 20% (17,5 + 1,7) of the 10-15 scale in writing have failed with marks below the average in literature.

| | 0-5 | 5-10 | 10-15 | 15-20 | Grand Total |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------------|
| 15-20 | 02.0% | 17,1% | 58,5% | 22,4% | 100,00% |

Table 2: 15-20 Range in Writing

- What the fourth row (table 2) displays for the 15-20 category in writing confirms the high rate of success in literature for those who are good in writing. More than 80% have got the average in literature (10-20). It is not very surprising that 58,5% dangle between 10-15 and not 15-20 as in writing because usually teachers of literature set a top grading limit which rarely exceeds 15. We all admit how subjective it is to grade creative works. Ultimately, we note that less than 20% among the best students in writing have not got the average in literature with a majority of them ranking close to 10.

The immediate conclusion one jumps on after this brief comparison of the students' marks in writing and literature is that there is a logical correspondence between the learners' performance in both modules. In spite of the significant results displayed on table 3 and 6, for example, we may globally deduce from other tables that good students in writing are dominantly good in literature. This is quite understandable because writing in literature class does not require any type of gift; it is simply a meticulous application of the teachers' instructions related to the use of what he teaches outside the classroom. The hand-in-hand-going between writing and literature is largely proved and the contribution of the former in learning the latter is a subject of great interest for

both students and teachers. Students need to be aware of the complementary combination of the two modules within the same teaching unit so that they envisage a mutual interactivity between two different contents. Similarly, teachers need to keep constantly in mind that their teachings are to be exported to other modules; and thus, they have to develop a battery of instructions which would facilitate the transfer.

Conclusion

This article has treated the module of writing as close to literature. As explained in the introduction, the former feeds the latter and the latter uses the former as a reservoir. Fortunately, in the Department of Letters and English Language, Constantine 1, where the modules being taught coexist in the same teaching unit because of their likenesses in purpose, the modest research we have undertaken reveals that the results obtained from the comparative analysis of the students' marks are related; there is a positive and encouraging relationship between teachers of different modules. The relative successful matching between grammar and writing as proved in a preceding article, and the logical connection between writing and literature in this one, demonstrate the ingenuity behind grouping modules in the same Teaching Unit. The latter shelters modules which share common objectives to differing degrees. In other words, the grouping of certain modules within the same teaching unit as recommended by the LMD system is not a vain decision. The frequent meetings of teachers and the synchronisation of the contents they teach are likely to facilitate the knowledge transfer from one module to another. None of us would ever deny that the logical correspondence between results obtained between writing and literature is merely the side effect of a successful knowledge transfer from one subject to another.

Consequently, the ensuing question would be: how did teachers come to obtain such success in knowledge transfer?

Our active involvement in the implementation of the LMD system allows us to say that the reasons for this success are numerous, but the most plausible ones are:

- Ingenuity in the elaboration of the programmes for the different modules.
- Synchronisation of progress in teaching.

When developing the courses that we teach, most of us are concerned with designing courses that will sharpen our students' mastery of the rules and thinking skills. We accomplish this aim by providing our students with scientific knowledge and pedagogical instructions. If we want the former to be used out of the classroom, we have to mould it into appropriate discourse; this is the battery of instructions we have been mentioning before.

As teachers, we should never omit that lectures and assignments by themselves do not insure that our students will improve their writing skills. Many students know the rules and techniques passively because they have been absorbing information, but they do not know how and when they should 'regurgitate' them; i.e., they do not reliably use the material they are given.

The interaction between grammar and writing is much easily traced than that between writing and literature. The former is unidirectional; it goes from grammar to writing; while the latter is bidirectional and more difficult to trace. It is concerned with rules, rhetoric and creativity from writing to literature and vice versa. The teacher of writing should provide his students with raw data so that they can understand and write a literary text conveniently; and the teacher of literature should use this raw data to explain that literature is an art. There is a world of difference between the task devoted to the teacher of grammar and that devoted to the teachers of writing and literature.

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