

Using fairy tales as a model to enhance learners' writing organization skill

Gamze Yavaş Celik, School of Foreign Languages, Balıkesir University, 10145, Balıkesir Necatibey.

Fatih Yavuz*, Department of English Language and Education, Faculty of Education, Balıkesir University, 10145, Necatibey, Balıkesir.

Suggested Citation:

Yavuz, F. & Celik, G.Y. (2017). Using fairy tales as a model to enhance learners' writing organization skill. *International Journal of Learning and Teaching*. 9(3), 349-353.

Received February 27, 2017; revised May 10, 2017; accepted July 5, 2017.

Selection and peer review under responsibility of Prof. Dr. Hafize Keser, Ankara University, Ankara, Turkey.

©2017 SciencePark Research, Organization & Counseling. All rights reserved

Abstract

Writing is one of the most difficult skills for both teachers and learners in that it is interfered with many factors, especially the cognitive ones. In a writing process, along with the grammar and vocabulary knowledge, organization is a crucial tool that achieves the 'flow' of writing. A well-prepared organization scheme makes the writing process easier for teachers to manage and for learners to write. The purpose of this paper is to present some theoretical information about improving writing organization skill with the help of fairy tales' plot line as a model. After an extensive review of literature about the topic, some conclusions were drawn and recommendations were made for further studies.

Keywords: Writing skills, writing organization skill, fairy tales.

*ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: **Fatih Yavuz**, Department of English Language and Education, Faculty of Education, Balıkesir University, Necatibey, Balıkesir
E-mail address: fyavuz@mail.com / 0551 905 47 90

1. Introduction

Writing has always been a challenging skill for both learners and teachers. By its cognitive, creative and practical nature, it varies from other skills at the same time having a connection with them. It requires a considerable preparation process for both teachers and learners. It could be claimed that, among other skills, teachers make great effort in writing classes both in presentation and evaluation parts. Writing skills have a multi-dimensional nature in that a clear and correct writing needs using correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, vocabulary and also the organization of the writing task to convey ideas clearly and adequately. There are several components of a writing contributing the coherence of it. If all these components cannot be presented in a harmony in a writing task, the message cannot be conveyed thoroughly and a good flow cannot be achieved.

Several factors can be enumerated on what makes writing important. The most important one is that writing is a means of communication. Though it is not in the foreground as much as speaking skills in terms of communication, it serves for communication in target language. Along with speaking skills, writing means production and communication. Considering the reality that many learners have serious problems in communicating orally, writing, as the other communicative skill becomes prominent. Another important factor that makes writing important is that writing reveals a great deal of crucial information for teachers about learners ranging from vocabulary and grammar use to attitudes and personality of learners. Even an unelaborated writing of a learner reveals much about learner's language use which is a great opportunity for teachers to make a pre-evaluation. Writing skills are also learner-centered and, when compared to speaking skills, less worrisome. In a writing process learners feel less anxious because they have time to make production, not worrisome like speaking which requires instant production.

The key point of a good writing is presenting the information in a structured format. A writing process is pre-defined by teacher by clearly setting the boundaries in terms of grammar use or content. Accordingly, this pre-defined frame of writing process makes it less worrisome because learners know where to start, where to end and what to do in each part of writing. In a normal writing process, learners are expected to organize introduction, development, conclusion, grammar and vocabulary in a frame set by instructor and then, they are required to write out their ideas successfully in this frame. This means that they should have the capability of making organization. Besides the presented scheme, they need to know how to write an appropriate introduction, how to support their ideas in development part, how to choose the right grammar structures and vocabulary and how to finish their ideas in coherence with the introduction and development parts. In this context, organization skill constitutes the vital part of writing skill, because having an organization skill supports learners' fluency in writing and at the same time makes their ideas and messages clear for the readers. At this point, teaching students how to organize their writing task can be regarded as the main priority of teaching how to write.

In a writing process both teachers and learners experience several problems hindering the building up of a clear organization for their writings. These problems can be grouped under four main parts; productivity problem, structural problems, vocabulary problem and prejudices against writing. Productivity problem, which nearly all beginner learners go through, generally emerges because of the lack of writing experience or unfamiliarity to the topic. When learners are given a subject and asked to write about, it is more likely possible to hear complaints such as there is nothing in their mind or they have nothing to write about the given topic (Phillips, 1986). The topic and learners' attitudes may not be harmonic which results in demoralization of learner and loss of motivation. Another problem is about structures learners need to use in their writings such as grammar, expressions or idioms. Because of the different grammatical structures that they require, extensive writings can create confusion for learners. Because of the problems they experience while choosing the correct structure or trying to use them correctly, they end up with a great confusion which holds them back to move on. Lexical diversity is an important component of a good writing. It is crucial to choose the right words and use them appropriately to convey the message correctly. The problem here mainly occurs in finding the right words and discriminate them according to the type and level of writing. Convenient vocabulary selection is the point where most learners fail to do. Along with these cognitive problems, having a prejudice against writing is a considerable emotional and somewhat motivational problem. Writing is a heartfelt skill which means that who doesn't feel to write doesn't tend to write resulting with inexperience in writing for most people. This inexperience in writing makes learner keep away from writing and in an open-framed writing process learners mostly don't

know how to start, how do develop the writing or how to end it. Undoubtedly, this problem can be gotten over with practice but at the very first phases it is inevitable to face with this problem. A clearly set frame would help solve this problem effectively.

Fairy tales are fictional stories intending to give a moral lesson for the reader using the conflict between good and evil at the end of which the good always wins. Fairy tales take place in a magical, enchanted world where is the product of a limitless imagination, containing humans, animals, giants, witches, royals, poor etc. They try to convey the universal truths via striking stories using the common motifs that are special to fairy tales such as magical words, talking animals, curiosity, very difficult tasks, supernatural characters, pure good and pure evil, common terminology and so on. Fairy tales have a common frame, common words, common expressions, common plot, common ending, common messages and common characters which make them familiar to the reader. Also fairy tales have a secure plot in that in the end the reader is absolutely sure the good will win and evil will lose. The point in fairy tales is not who to win but how good will win and in this 'how' part a universal truth or a moral lesson is subordinated.

Fairy tales can be assumed as a great model for learners in writing in that, as mentioned above, fairy tales has a clearly-set frame, has a pre-defined terminology, a limited structure, a lively atmosphere and a familiar setting and plot. Everybody is familiar with fairy tales and their language, in other words everybody has background knowledge about fairy tales (Favat, 1977). By its nature fairy tales can eliminate the above-mentioned problems about writing. As mentioned above, one of the basic problems learners experience is productivity problem. Fairy tales can eliminate this problem somehow by triggering learners' imagination. A free expression of imagination means that there is no right or wrong which also means that not being criticized by their production and this makes them feel less anxious and they feel more secure. They can hide the characters they create. They can freely take the side of benevolent or malevolent. Another problem which writing learners experience is structural confusion. In fairy tales, from beginning to end, only one grammatical structure is used; the simple past tense (which is the most common one), or the present simple tense. This structural limitation makes learners feel more secure and less anxious about structural patterns and also being an effective exercise of the grammatical structure chosen. Learners also have difficulty in finding the correct words and use them conveniently in their writings. As mentioned, fairy tales has its own terminology containing common words and expressions such as 'once upon a time', 'happily ever after'. This means that learners have the background knowledge of core vocabulary beforehand making them to be more fluent when they write. Learners don't have difficulty in describing the characters because characters and their descriptions will be at present in learners' background. The last problem mentioned above is the prejudices of inexperienced learners. However inexperienced they are, writing a fairy tale is fun and not scary at a first look because everyone is familiar with fairy tales and when the notion of writing a fairy tale is assigned there comes several ideas about the plot, the characters and the setting. By this way, because of the familiarity of fairy tales, learners cannot be resistant at first. All these solutions of fairy tales in a writing process serve for the organization of a writing. The familiar plot, the familiar characters, the familiar terminology, the familiar structures and the familiar setting serve as a pre-defined organization frame for writing learners. Learners are aware of what to write and how to write in introduction, development and resolution parts beforehand, even using their imagination freely. While fairy tales make the process more learner-centered, uncomplicated and enjoyable, at the same time making the teacher decide the level of the writing according to learners' level.

2. Literature Review

Fairy tales have been used for long as a productive resource in language teaching. Their lively and familiar nature charms both teachers and learners. Below is the review of literature containing studies on how fairy tales can be used as a tool in writing sessions. Each research touches one topic mentioned in introduction part and presented in chronological order.

The study of Phillips (1986) looks for an answer to the question what are the effects of a teaching approach which use literature as a way of development and whether this approach assist the students to use the patterns in literature successfully in their writings. Philips hopes to find that randomly chosen experimental group which uses literature would be more successful than the other control groups not using literature. In pretest and posttest applications, experimental group members, 18 first graders, wrote and read some literature examples such as poetry and fairy tales. The study evaluated the outputs under six

titles: form, content, vocabulary, sentence structure, writer reaction and originality. Results present that literature approach assists to extent students' experiences beyond their own restricted world and enhances the performance of writings for the length, flow and literary quality. Results also show that literature approach can be used with the children in all ages to develop their writing skills.

The usefulness of various forms of folk literature as grammatically, literary, historical and cultural sources in foreign language learning is discussed by Bagg (1991) in her study. The reasons of using fairy tales as a tool to teach a foreign language, grammar structures that are used in fairy tales and the ways of developing writing and oral skills via fairy tales are explained. The ways of engaging students to the process of storytelling with the help of specific fairy tale elements and five principles of fairy tales are presented. As a result, an unfinished fairy tale is given to make the reader realize the process and the results of fairy tale usage and the world fairy tales means to the students.

Ockey and Ogden(1997) question the effectiveness of process approach while generating students' interest in their study. They have found that it can be difficult to keep the students attention for a long time because this approach seems slow and unexciting. So, by taking into consideration this problem, they use two promoters- video and fairy tales- to support an efficient learning process and enhance motivation. The videos are animations of western fairy tales due to new, more dynamic and interesting to the students. They begin the class with the short summary of the fairy tale and then continue with these videos to focus on vocabulary, listening, reading, speaking, and writing. The results are beyond their expectations. By using this combination, they managed to perform a successful process approach as well as preparing students to produce their own original discourse. What they believe at the end of research is that fairy tales are a powerful device in bringing back the feeling of comfort and childhood memories helping them in their language learning process.

Brickman (1998) conducted a similar study focusing on an ESL class writing and discussion project in which students retell and explains their favorite folk tale. The subjects were sixteen advanced level ESL students from different countries at a university. The study adopts a clear method. Teacher asks students to write down their favorite folk tale by going into details as much as possible. Then, by peer learning, learners check their peers' writings and make corrections and offer alternative suggestions. At the end of the study Brickman (1998) concluded that the folk story writing project encouraged cross cultural understanding of students since the class was multi-cultural and learners overcame their writing fear because the subject was familiar.

In his study, Gabrielatos (2002) draws a cyclical framework for the question how a good writing can be achieved in both of aspects, product and process. The components of "product" (language, layout and organization, relevance to the task, regard for the reader, and clarity) and "process" (task/title analysis, planning, writing the first draft, evaluating and improving the first draft, and language problems versus writing problems) periods and four-part framework in a cycle for teaching writing skills are explained (awareness raising, support, practice, and feedback). This study analyzes the examples of Greek students' writing and identifies common English-as-a-Foreign Language writing programs. Finally, it emphasizes the importance of recycling, active participation, individual teaching for an effective learning.

Looking at the outputs of these researches, it can easily be claimed that using fairy tales as a modal is a powerful tool in enhancing learners' writing skills, specifically on organization skill. Familiar terminology, familiar story line, restricted grammatical structures, lively atmosphere, clearly defined scheme and familiar characters help learners feel positive for the writing process beforehand and feel enthusiastic to produce something.

3. Conclusion and Recommendations

It seems as strongly supported evidence that fairy tales have a considerable positive effect on writing skills from many aspects. Each study above reveals one aspect of the fairy tales on writing skill such as structural advantage, familiarity, lively atmosphere, pre-defined vocabulary or creative nature. All these factors serve, directly and indirectly, for the organization of a writing process. In a writing process, it is crucial to prepare a layout before beginning writing. Preparing an appropriate layout makes it pretty easier for learners to finish writing process successfully. Here, the point is knowing how to prepare a layout for your writing process. In a writing layout, basically there is an

introduction part, development part and a conclusion part and each part can vary within itself. So, the most concrete representation of this layout model can be seen in fairy tales. Everybody is familiar with the structure of a fairy tale which also makes them be familiar with a written text layout. It would be an easy and a promising task to index the layout of a fairy tale, which also can be regarded as an encouraging starting point for learning how to organize writing. Apart from the main parts of a layout (introduction, development and conclusion), the details of these main parts such as characters, setting, core vocabulary, structure and plot can be clearly realized and defined in fairy tales. Any learner who needs to create a layout of a new, original fairy tale can easily do it because they already know spectrum of the characters and setting, they know what kind of vocabulary and phrases to be used and they know how to start, how to develop and how to end the story with the help of their imagination. Here, the keyword about how fairy tales help in enhancing organization skill is familiarity as Gao (2012) validated in his research that familiar topics generate better critical thinking.

To conduct such an experimental study requires extensive preparation. The training process can be divided into two parts; preparation and production. In preparation learners can be introduced certain fairy tales and the organization scheme in details. In the production part learners are expected to create a fairy tale layout and write a fairy tale considering the layout they created. The sample group may be chosen from all age groups and levels because fairy tales address to everybody. Also the difficulty level of the materials can be prepared according to the level of the samples.

References

- Bagg, M. B. (1991). *Folk literature in the foreign language classroom*. Paper presented at the Meeting of the Indiana Foreign Language Teachers Association (Indianapolis, IN, October 25, 1991).
- Brickman, B. (1998). A moral to the story: Folk tales in the ESL writing class. *Teaching English in the Two Year College*, 25(1), 67-78.
- Favat, F. A. (1977). *Child and tale: The origins of interest*. US: NCTE Committee on Research Report No. 19.
- Gabrielatos, C. (2002). EFL writing: Product and process. *ELT News*, 133, 1-15.
- Gao, L. (2012). Investigating ESL graduate students' intercultural experiences of academic English writing: A first person narration of a streamlined qualitative study process. *The Qualitative Report*, 17(12), 1-25.
- Ockey, G., & Ogden, D. (1997). *Tapping Student Interest with Fairy Tales*. *Mihri Napoliello*, 4, 58-62.
- Phillips, L. M. (1986). Using children's literature to foster written language development. *Early Writing; Newfoundland*, 1, 2-49.