

Enhancing Reading Comprehension to Overcome Learner's Writing Deficiencies

Dr. Louahala Nadia
U- UDL – Sidi Bel Abbes (Algerie)

Abstract:

Reading skill is considered by researchers as the key to develop learners culturally, socially and emotionally because reading enables them to acquire knowledge, to construct what they know and to develop their imagination. Furthermore, it increases learners' vocabulary because whenever they read, they encounter new words they would rarely hear. Thus, E.F.L learners must be encouraged to read texts, novels, poems, magazines... etc in order to develop not only their knowledge and enthusiasm, but also their writing abilities. This paper focuses on the reading comprehension skill as an effective technique to help the learners reach the mastery of writing skill and overcome their difficulties. It tends to answer key questions such as: how can reading comprehension contribute to the development of learners' writing abilities? Is there any connection between reading and writing? ...etc. It attempts also to explore the different strategies that might be used by teachers to solve students' writing deficiencies.

Key words: Reading, Writing, Skills, writing difficulties.

As it is well known, teachers in their E.F.L classrooms are required to teach the four skills notably speaking, listening, reading and writing not only to make their learners be able to communicate or interact easily with others, but also to help them express their feelings, share their thoughts, convey their purposes and exchange ideas with them. But, many teachers tend to consider writing as a complex and difficult task to teachers for a great number of their learners still got difficulties in grammar, vocabulary and mechanics. These learners, indeed, are usually afraid to write essays in English for they may face a set of difficulties such as: they usually do not know how to start writing, how to generate and organize ideas, how to make grammatical sentences, how to use the techniques of writing or simply because they need time to think about the topics they are asked to deal with.

In this context and according to certain researchers:

'the writing skill in foreign languages is complex and difficult to learn for not only the learners do not have the ability to use structures but also conceptual of varied skills such as the stylistic and mechanical skills'. (Heaton, 1979:138)

In this sense, stylistic skill is the ability to manipulate sentence and use language effectively, while mechanical skill is the ability to use correctly those conversations related to the written language such as punctuation and spelling.

Other researchers identify certain neurodevelopment problems which may affect the learners' writing notably the Memory and Attention problems. For instance; Melvin in his book *Developmental Variation & Learning Disorder* (2002) explains both problems as follows:

Memory Problems: Because so many writing processes need to be automatic, active working memory is critical. Learners may have difficulty in recalling spelling, grammar & punctuation rules, accessing prior knowledge while writing or organizing ideas. A memory problem may mark in a student's writing as poor vocabulary, many misspelled words, grammar errors and frequent capitalization and punctuation.

Attention problems: Learners, who struggle with attention may be inattentive and impulsive. An attention problem may manifest itself as: difficulty getting started on writing assignments, easy distractibility during writing, mental fatigue or tiredness while writing, inconsistent legibility in writing, irregular writing tenses, many careless errors and poorly planned papers and reports.

Overall, there are some of the main reasons why a learner's writing may be difficult to understand or defective in some other way:

- Ideas may not be grouped together into distinct paragraphs, or the learner may begin practically every sentence on a new line. Again, a paragraph or a longer text may not begin with introduction that starts the reader in the right direction or may not end appropriately.
- Ideas may not have been presented in an order that easily makes sense to the reader, or the relation between the ideas may not be clear because of the absence or inappropriate

use of linking words such as: on the other hand, for instance...etc.

- Sentences may not have clear punctuation, i.e. there may be commas and full stops without any good reasons, or there may be no punctuation where it should be done.

For those reasons stated above and in order to overcome most of the learners' difficulties, certain methodologists tend to focus on the reading skill as an effective technique to improve the learners' skill in writing. For them the relationship between the reading & writing skill is really strong. They, in fact, suggest that there is a link between good readers & good writers. So, reading is an interactive process of communication & the interaction between the writers and the readers made possible achievement to the text. It is through the text that the writer encodes his message and it is also through the text that the reader gets the meaning of the messages by decoding it.

However, writing skill cannot be acquired successfully by the practice of writing alone but also need to be supported by reading whether assigned or voluntary. Reading is considered being positive influence on composing skills at various stages of proficiency; this is because both processes increase the individuals in constructing meaning through the application of complex cognitive and linguistic abilities. Reading may also equip for student new knowledge within the text, in other word, it can supply a great deal of knowledge of traditional feature of written texts including grammar, vocabulary and so on.

Krasher (1993: 76) stated that:

‘Free voluntary reading is a powerfully effective way for second language learners to develop language skills including reading comprehension, writing, grammar, vocabulary and spelling’.

Texts should also be read for the purpose of language study. This means:

‘to take a text, study it line by line referring at every moment to our dictionary and our grammar, comparing, analyzing, translating and retraining every expression that it contains’ (Palmer, 1964:111).

There should be also:

'A tendency among foreign language learners to regard a text as an object for language studies and not as an object for factual information, literary experience or simply pleasure, joy and delight'. (Simensen, 1987:42).

Susan Brindley (1994: 85) added:

'Reading is a language activity and ought not to be divorced from other language activities... Reading, writing, talking and listening ought to work in harmony'.

Airthermore Harmer (2004: 90) asserted that:

'Receptive skills (reading and listening) and productive skills (writing and speaking) feed off each other in a number of ways';

that is to say what we say or write is influenced by what we hear and read. Thus, it is worth mentioning that reading affects writing and writing affects reading. Reading instruction is then most effective when it is related with writing instruction and vice versa.

What should teachers do in order to solve the learners' writing deficiencies?

For the purpose of improving the learners' writing abilities, and in order to form lifelong readers and writers, E.F.L teachers are required to:

- Ask their learners to read extensively both in and out of the classroom. It should be done first in order to motivate students with negative attitudes towards reading to do the reading. It is not a matter of making them read in quantity but of developing and encouraging in them a reading habit.
- Choose the appropriate reading material (simple and suitable) in order to improve students' attitudes, motivation, understanding & responsibility for one's own learning.
- Provide the learners with the material to be read: books, short stories, tales, articles, poems...etc asking them to write their reports, to give their oral reports or to expose them to their classmates & asking the latter to give their comments. The result is that they are promoting the students' language

proficiency not only in writing but also reading, speaking and listening.

- Create a classroom environment that values and encourages reading. For instance, they can set up a class library and encourage the students to make their selection, for the reading of a variety of genres helps students learn text structures and language that they can transfer to their own writing. Thus, getting students motivated to read is a first step of writing.

Notes:

- Harmer, J. (2004), How to teach writing, England: Pearson Educated Limited.
- Heaton, J.B. (1979), Writing English Language Test, London: Longman.
- Krasher, S. (1993), The Power of Reading, insight from the research Englewood, CD: Libraries Unlimited.
- Melevine, (2002): Developmental Variation and Learning Disorders,
<http://www.pbs.org/w.gsh/misunderstoodminds/writingdiffer.html>
- Palmer, H.E (1964),The Principles of Language Study, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Simensen, A.M (1987), Adapted Readers: How are they adapted? Reading in a foreign Language, 4(1), 41-57.[6]