

Brainstorming as an effective tool to tone down wild ideas

“It is easier to tone down a wild idea than to think up a new one” (Osborn, A.1979).

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Abstract:

Brainstorming is a technique that can be used by writers to generate possible solutions to problems. That's why it is important for teachers in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing to encourage their students to use it to collect ideas for their essays or topics. The present study aims to collect students' attitudes towards the use of such a tool and whether they find it helpful in improving writing, and tries to shed light on its types and benefits. A questionnaire has been conducted to collect data from a group of third year students who belong to the department of English at Chadli Bendjedid University Eltarf. The results of the questionnaire proved that the majority of the students agree that brainstorming is an effective writing technique in the development of writing, and that the most preferred type is listing as it is simple and less time consuming and more organized than mind mapping .

Key words: writers, brainstorming, listing, mind mapping, English, the writing skill.

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Research questions:

1. To what extent does brainstorming contribute to the development of writing ?
2. Do students prefer listing brainstorming?

Research Hypotheses:

1. Brainstorming has a positive effect on the development of writing.
2. Listing brainstorming is the preferred type by students.

Aims of the study: The purpose of the study is to explore the types of brainstorming that students prefer to use, and how brainstorming is employed to promote students' writing in the English as a foreign langue classroom and mainly third year EFL students at Chadli Bendjedid University El-Taref. Finally, the study also aims to gather students' perceptions and attitudes towards the use of brainstorming activities to promote their writing skill.

Research Design

This study employed a mixed method approach (Creswell, 1999) that involves both collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data. The population of this study comprises two groups of third year EFL students at Chadli Bendjedid University for the academic year 2021/2022. The students were asked to fill a questionnaire consisting of three sections. Section one is devoted for gathering general information. Section two is about the types of brainstorming used in writing and students' attitudes towards them. The last section is devoted to students' suggestions.

Introduction

Writing has always been a challenging skill for both first language (L1) and EFL learners. Teachers sometimes focus on certain stages of the writing process and mainly the initial one because they think that giving importance to the first stages of writing plays a critical role in the success of writing in general. In the language classroom context, brainstorming is often used in teaching writing as part of the pre-writing phase (Richards, 1990, as cited in Cullen, 1998). The initial ideas can be viewed as a starting point to more useful ideas. ESL teachers can use brainstorming activities to encourage students to share their ideas with one another on a particular topic or question.

The Writing Process

Writing is a recursive process and not merely a set of stages to follow when composing a text. Successful writers are flexible in how they approach a writing assignment. Brown (2001, p. 336) states that writing is a thinking process, a writer produces a final written product based on their thinking after the writer goes through the thinking process. According to Tomkins (2004) the writing process has five stages

Prewriting: Prewriting is a phase of writing planning that is seen to be crucial to the writing process because it enables writers to arrange their thoughts before beginning to write. At this point, teachers allow students to select a topic, share ideas, and develop them using a variety of techniques, including associative writing, free writing, and graphic editing (Kapka & Oberman, 2001).

Drafting: Students are expected to write in this stage on paper using the arrangements they made in the previous step. Spelling and grammar norms are disregarded at this point. The main goal of the students is to produce the material (Marchisan & Alber, 2001).

Revising: This step involves the students reviewing their written copy, distributing it to a writing group they formed in class, and revising the text in response to suggestions from their peers. At this point, the students may add new ideas to the text or strike out any passages they deem superfluous. For pupils, the revision stage can be challenging (Kapka & Oberman, 2001).

Editing: The material has been the main emphasis up to this point. Spelling and punctuation rules—also referred to as the technical part of writing—are examined at this point. The students edit the document one more time before distributing it to others and make any necessary readability improvements. One might create an editing checklist that lists the spelling mistakes. This list could prove beneficial for the students' future education. The third and fourth stages may be taught to pupils using various assessment tools. While it is feasible to create assessment items in collaboration with students, pre-existing materials may also be utilized.

Publishing: The writing process ends with this step. Students share the content they have written in this stage with the readers they selected throughout the prewriting process. Here, it's crucial that the teacher gives the students' writing purpose. It's said that exchanging The written content serves as a useful tool for pupils to understand writing as an efficient a means of communication and inspire people to write (Lehr, 1995).

Overview of brainstorming

The present study draws back to studies by Slavin (1995) and Hamzah and Lu (2010), who found that students were more confident and motivated to express their ideas when brainstorming in small groups. Accordingly, the findings support Cullen's (1998) belief that brainstorming activities encourage students to become better learners, especially when low proficiency students can learn from the better ones.

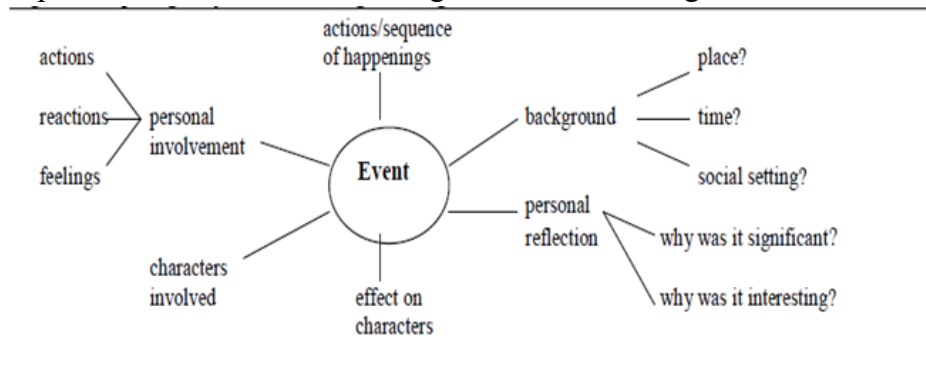
Definition of brainstorming

Brainstorming, originally called 'Think Up,' is one of the famous techniques that has been created by Osborn, A. exactly in 1938 and became popularized in his book Applied Imagination. The participants in the process of brainstorming present and reveal new ideas as potential solutions for a specific problem. Brainstorming helps the stimulation of the human mind towards creative problem-solving. This creative thinking technique usually starts with a gathering of a group of people. As an informal method of problem-solving, brainstorming stimulates creative thinking. The proposals that are generated can provoke interesting and unusual ideas that later could become a creative solution to a problem. Brainstorming is usually an activity which encourages students to focus on the free flow of ideas. The main purpose of brainstorming is to generate as many ideas as possible within the specified time that is decided by the teacher in the classroom. The ideas generated are not evaluated until the task is completed and no criticism is allowed and wide range of ideas is produced. Although not all the ideas generated are useable. "Forget quality. Aim now to get a quantity of answers. When you're through, your sheet of paper may be so full of ridiculous nonsense that you'll be disgusted. Never mind. You're loosening up your unfettered imagination – making your mind

deliver" Osborn (1948). That's why students should be encouraged to use brainstorming because they are writing for themselves, and if they won't risk saying something foolish, they are not likely to say anything wise. "Brainstorming can be wasteful, leading in too many directions. But it is more likely to extend a subject in unforeseen

ways and to make unexpected connections." Kane, T.S. (2000, p.25)

The following figure that has been created by White and Arndt (1991, p.63) explains better how brainstorming facilitates a writing task:



Adopted from White & Arndt (1991, p. 63)

Types of Brainstorming:

1. Listing: it is a way of generating ideas and organizing thoughts about certain topic via listing them. The writer can just use words or phrases to represent any ideas that come to his mind without looking for full sentences without caring to spelling mistakes or redundancy or bad thoughts.

2. Mind mapping: it is presenting thoughts in visual manner via using colours, words or images. It is unstructured way that allows ideas and thoughts to flow freely. Learners can start by writing their topic in the center of a white paper, then start jotting any ideas that pop on their minds randomly without any consideration to organization.. Then the writer can start joining ideas using arrows or colours. In fact, less emphasis is put on the relationship between ideas as it is explained in the figure below:

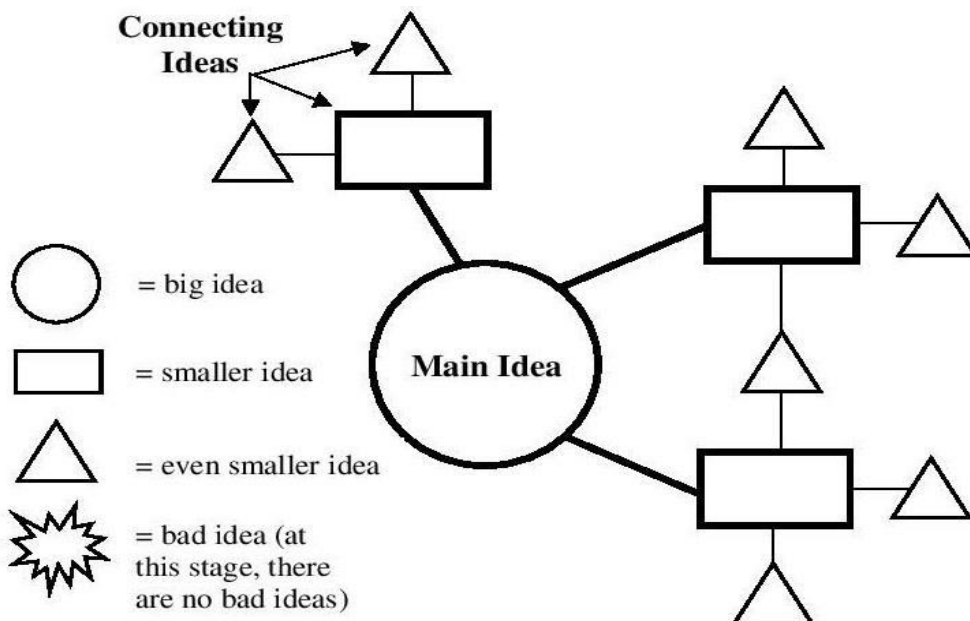


Figure.2: Brainstorming via mind mapping

Note : Reprinted from NC State Writing and Speaking Services

As has been shown in figure 2. above writers who use brainstorming as a way to generate ideas can keep them until the revision stage, because error, repetition and bad ideas are all accepted at this stage. For this aim, it is important that writers and mainly students should be aware of using such helpful techniques so that they can preserve any ideas that comes to their minds while thinking to answer certain topic.

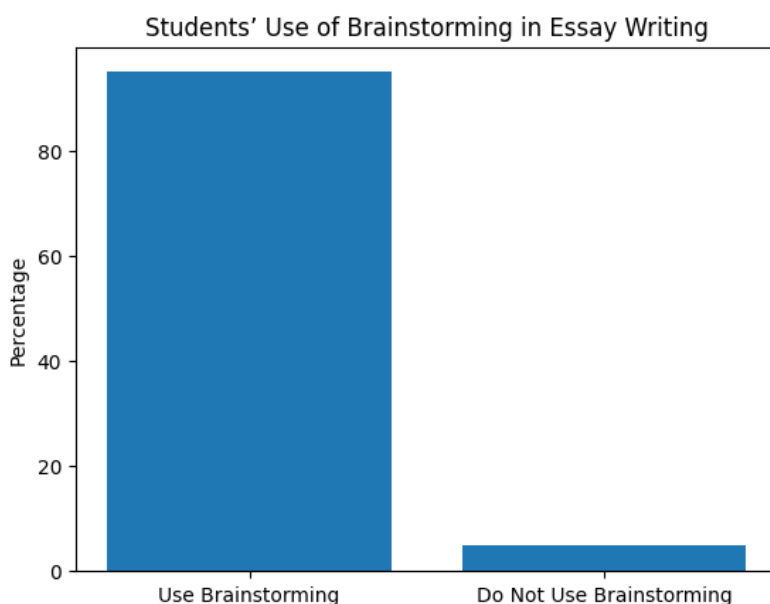
Data analysis and Interpretation

The students' questionnaire has been distributed to 25 students from a population of 50 third year students studying written expression for the year 2022/2023.

The analysis of data gathered via a questionnaire showed that the majority of the students(95%) use Brain storming technique while writing their essays and they consider it as an important helpful tool in generating ideas in the pre-writing stage. the table bellow clarifies more the results:

Figure1

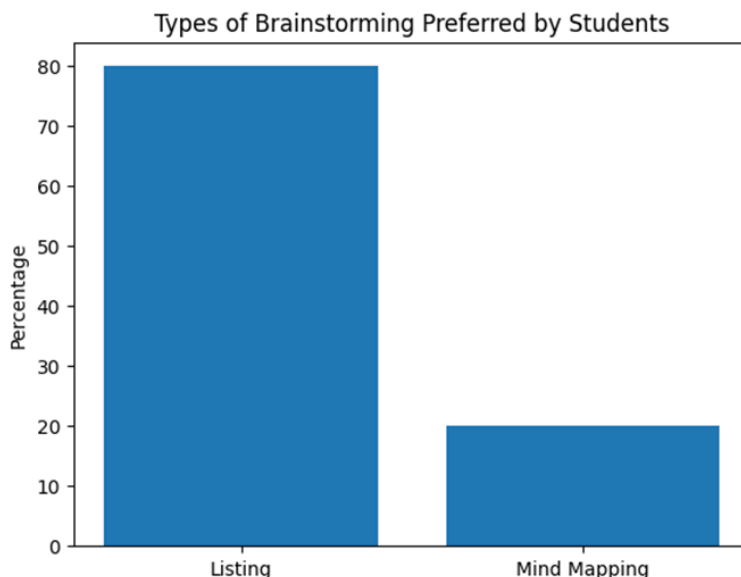
Percentage of third-year EFL students who use brainstorming during the pre-writing stage.



The analysis of the results also show that students are encouraged by their teachers to use this tool before they start writing as they provide from 5-10 minutes to finish it. It has been also proved that the great majority of the participants (80%) use the listing type and consider it more organized and time consuming, whereas the rest prefer the mind mapping strategy to generate ideas.

Figure2

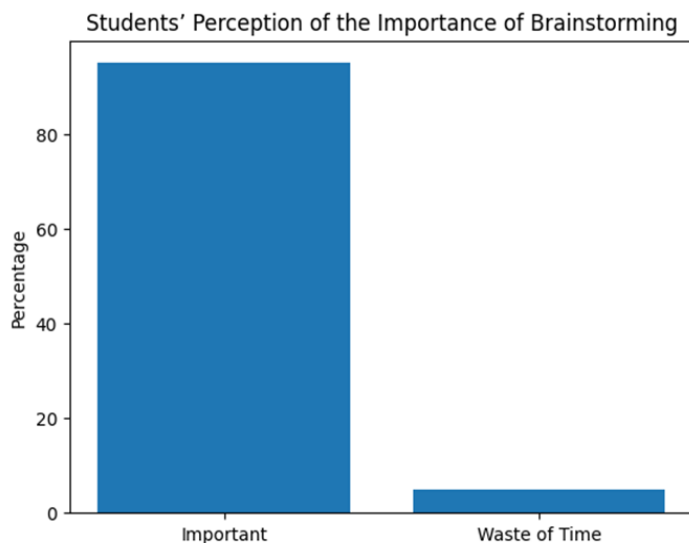
Types of brainstorming strategies preferred by third-year EFL students



Concerning its importance, few students (5%) think that it is a waste of time, whereas the great majority (95%) think that it has a great importance in letting them remember their first ideas and see it as a chance to preserve them. Furthermore, they think that even though the last ideas are more developed compared with the first ones but we cannot reach them without the use of this technique. Figure 3 on the following page (11) represents the results of students' attitudes towards its importance .

Figure3

Students' perceptions of the importance of brainstorming in essay writing.



Finally, students suggested that teachers should encourage students to use brainstorming and teach its different types so that students can choose the suitable one and use it. Students added that they feel comfortable to use it since they don't think about good and bad ideas at this stage, what is correct or not, they just think about gathering the maximum number of ideas related to a certain topic.

Implications and recommendations for instructors and learners:

Regarding the importance of writing in the learning process; as being considered by many teachers and learners as one of the signs of successful learning, both teachers and learners should give more attention to this skill. Furthermore, brainstorming is an effective teaching technique that can be used by teachers to motivate their students to generate ideas for their topics as much as they can; by raising their awareness to its benefits and encouraging them to use the type of brainstorming that they find appropriate for them.

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that teachers and educators integrate brainstorming activities regularly into writing classes, as they have been shown to enhance students' writing performance. Future researchers may explore the effectiveness of different types of brainstorming techniques, such as group brainstorming, individual brainstorming, or guided brainstorming, to determine which methods yield the best outcomes for various writing tasks. Additionally, longitudinal studies are suggested to examine the long-term impact of brainstorming on writing development. It is also advisable to investigate the effectiveness of brainstorming on different aspects of writing, such as idea generation, coherence, and creativity, and across different proficiency levels or age groups. Finally, providing training for teachers on how to effectively implement brainstorming strategies could further improve students' writing skills and engagement. To sum up, teachers can encourage learners to use brainstorming by evaluating it as being part of the writing process and obliging them to show it on test and exam sheets and adding grades, as a reward, for students who use it.

University students can benefit greatly from brainstorming in their writing by using it as a tool to generate, organize, and refine their ideas before drafting. Through brainstorming, they can explore multiple perspectives on a topic, uncover connections between ideas, and overcome writer's block. For example, creating lists, mind maps, or freewriting allows them to collect raw thoughts without worrying about correctness, which encourages creativity and originality. Brainstorming also helps them prioritize and structure their arguments logically, making the writing process more efficient and the final text more coherent.

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