

**The Effect of a Needs– Based Program in the Light of
the National Standards of English on Developing
Elementary School EFL Fifth Graders' Writing
Mechanics and Grammar Skills**

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Abstract

The present study examined the effects of a needs– based program in the light of the national standards of English on developing elementary school EFL fifth graders' writing mechanics and grammatical skills. The design adopted was one –group pretest–posttest quasi–experimental. Sample of the study included thirty – two fifth graders at Sameh Othman primary school. A writing diagnostic test was used to assess pupils' writing needs .Results of the test revealed that the study sample had serious writing problems in using grammar and mechanics of writing. So, pupils were given direct instruction through the study program in these specific skills. Results of the study showed a great enhancement in the following writing skills :(1) mechanics of writing;(2) grammar skills.

Key words: writing skills, the National Standards of English, grammar skills, mechanics of writing, direct instruction in writing.

**تأثير استخدام برنامج قائم على احتياجات التلاميذ في ضوء المعايير
القومية للغة الإنجليزية على تنمية مهارات آليات الكتابة وقواعد
اللغة لدى تلاميذ الصف الخامس الابتدائي**

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مستخلص

تناولت الدراسة الحالية تأثير استخدام برنامج قائم علي احتياجات التلاميذ في ضوء المعايير القومية للغة الإنجليزية علي تنمية مهارات قواعد اللغة و آليات الكتابة لدي تلاميذ الصف الخامس الابتدائي. استخدمت الدراسة التصميم شبه التجريبي المكون من مجموعة واحده. اشتملت عينة الدراسة على اثنين وثلاثين تلميذاً بالصف الخامس في مدرسة سامح عثمان الابتدائية. تم استخدام اختبار تشخيصي للكتابة لتقييم احتياجات الكتابة لدى التلاميذ، وكشفت نتائج الاختبار أن عينة الدراسة تعاني من مشكلات في استخدام مهارات قواعد اللغة، وآليات الكتابة. استخدم الباحث استراتيجيات التدريس المباشر خلال برنامج الدراسة لتنمية تلك المهارات المحددة. أظهرت نتائج الدراسة وجود فروق دالة إحصائية لصالح التطبيق البعدي لاختبار الكتابة في مهارات الكتابة التالية: (1) آليات الكتابة؛ (2) المهارات النحوية.

الكلمات الافتتاحية: مهارات الكتابة، المعايير القومية للغة الإنجليزية، قواعد اللغة، آليات الكتابة. طريقة التدريس المباشر

Introduction

Writing is an essential communicative language skill .It is a basic means to express one's needs, feelings, thoughts , experiences and needs. In order to write ,learners have to make balance between multiple issues such as content, organization, purpose, audience, grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling, (Jahin and Idrees, 2012).

Mastery of the writing system ,requires the ability to master grammar, punctuation , spelling.... etc. These sub-skills are very important in any written language and any error in these aspects affect the written production and lead to misunderstanding (Baroudy ,2008).

Based on the facts above ,the current study aimed to identify the writing needs and problems of fifth graders in using grammar and mechanics of writing and design a program based on their needs ,in order to develop their writing mechanics and grammatical skills.

Context of the problem

The researcher is a teacher of English language at Sameh Othman primary school for more than four years. During this period ,he noticed that, many pupils had difficulties in writing skills. To document this problem, the researcher conducted a pilot study using a writing test(see appendix D) . The writing diagnostic test was administered to eighty pupils of the fifth grade at Sameh Othman primary school to identify the most common errors that pupils make in their writing. Results of the test showed that about 72% percent of the sample got below

average scores (less than 50%) in the test and about (65 %) of their errors were in the area of grammar and about (50%) of their errors were related to mechanics of writing. Based on results obtained by the writing diagnostic test , the current study attempted to develop some of writing skills of the fifth graders by using a proposed program based on their needs.

Statement of the Problem The problem of this study can be identified in the weakness of writing abilities among fifth grade pupils , particularly in their grammatical skills and mechanics of writing .

Questions of the Study

The current study attempted to find answers to the following questions:

- What was the effect of a proposed program based on the needs of the fifth graders in writing on developing their mechanics of writing?
- What was the effect of a proposed program based on the needs of the fifth graders in writing on developing their grammatical skills?

Objectives of the Study

- Identifying the writing needs of the fifth graders.
- Identifying the effect of a proposed program based on the needs of the fifth graders in writing on developing their grammatical skills and mechanics of writing .

Hypotheses of the study

- There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the study sample in the pre and post

administration of the writing test, regarding the mechanics of writing, favoring the post administration.

- There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the study sample in the pre and post administration of the writing test , regarding the grammatical skills, favoring the post administration.

Significance of the study

The current study provided syllabus designers and curriculum planners with an accurate picture of the writing needs of the fifth graders in order to design programs based on their needs .It may also help EFL teachers know their pupils' difficulties in writing. Moreover, it will aid in the adoption of appropriate teaching strategies to help EFL students write better. The current study might help fifth graders develop their writing skills and make them to be aware of their learning needs and difficulties regarding EFL writing skills .

Study delimitations

1. Sixty fifth graders at Sameh Othman primary school participated in the study.

2–A proposed program based on the needs of the fifth graders in writing.

3–The following writing skills:(1) mechanics of writing which include: a)Following principles of good writing.(b)Writing correct spelling of words.(c)Using punctuation marks correctly.(d)using capitalization correctly.

(2) Grammar skills which include:

- Using articles correctly.
- Using pronouns .
- Using possessive adjectives correctly.
- Using word order correctly .
- Writing a simple sentence to describe objects correctly.
- Using Subject–verb agreement correctly .
- Using present simple in writing sentences correctly .
- Using past simple in writing sentence correctly.
- Writing (yes/No) questions. Answering (Yes/No) questions.

Definition of terms

Pupils' Needs :

Vifansi (2002) defined needs as a lack of something required for a certain purpose . Pedagogically , he used the term to refer to the knowledge and skills required for learners to perform specified activities .

khamkaew (2009) stated that there are two types of language needs:

1. Target needs are described in three terms ; necessities, lacks and wants . Necessities refer to what learners have to know in order to perform effectively in a target learning situation . Lacks are the gap between what students are expected to know and what they already know . Thus; it is important to determine what students already know and what they have to know in order to identify their lacks . wants are students perceptions about their needs; in other words, what learners feel they want to learn .

2. **Learning needs:** they refer to what the learner needs in order to learn . Learning needs include all the factors connected to the learning process (e.g., motivation , attitudes ,learning styles, learning strategies , content , and social background).

In the present study, the term “needs” refers to the skills required for the fifth graders in writing to perform better in writing.. Identification of these skills included what khamkaew (2009) called necessities (i.e., what students have to know or possess in order to perform well in writing situations) and lacks (i.e., the gap between what students have to know and what they already know).

(Operational definition)

Theoretical Background and Review of Literature

Grammar skills

Grammar and spelling are important elements in communicating clear and correct meaning. Grammar gives students the structure to create meaningful sentences. It helps students facilitate writing and reading process, without grammar it wouldn't be nearly possible for the writer to articulate his/her thoughts and make them intelligible for the reader. Grammar can give utterance to any thought that crosses the mind. It also helps learners express what they feel and needs(Abbot 2007: 6).

Correct grammar and mechanics are important elements of writing instruction and writing quality. For example, in a study by Cutler and Graham (Graham, McKeown, Kihara & Harris,2012) , over 75% of surveyed teachers indicated that they taught grammar skills at least several times a week at the expense of teaching essay writing, planning,

and revising. Additional evidence for the perceived importance of grammar skills in the classroom can also be found in writing textbooks, which dedicate large sections to grammar instruction (Morris& Perney 1995).

Mechanics of writing

Norman et al. (2005:45) define it as "the sub-skill that includes punctuation, spelling, abbreviations, acronyms ...etc.". Betham (2011, 37) points out that "Punctuation is more important than spelling". Punctuation marks give meaning to words as pauses and change in tone of speech do.

Similarly, Sun (2003) stated that mechanics of writing specifies the established conventions for words that one uses in documentation. These conventions include capitalization, contractions, numbers, numerals, pronouns, technical abbreviations, acronyms, units of measurement and punctuation marks.

Direct Instruction

Direct instruction ((sometimes referred to as explicit instruction) is a structured and organized teaching method often used to teach complex language skills . Direct Instruction is an effective method in improving student writing effectively .It has been strongly suggested by many researchers that this is the most beneficial way of helping students to improve their command of grammar in writing. (Graham, et al. (2012).

Nazari (2013) investigated the effects of both direct and indirect instruction on learners' ability to learn grammar. A sample of 60 female Iranian learners were used for teaching the present perfect by various methods of instruction. Through direct instruction, they got exposed to direct explanation of the

rule on the part of the teacher, This study lasted for 10 sessions. A grammar test was administered to check the learners' achievement. Results revealed that Direct instruction had a better effect on enhancing the L2 learners' grammatical knowledge .

El-Shami(2011)investigated the effect of using explicit teaching on developing the mechanics of writing of eighth graders in Gaza private schools . The Sample were (37) male students of eighth graders. They were divided into two groups, an experimental and a control group.. the researcher used the explicit teaching to teach the experimental group, whereas the conventional method was used with the control group. Results of the study revealed that there were statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group and those by the control one in favor of the experimental group.

Hussain (2010) explored the effect of a direct method on the academic achievement in English of high (excellent students) and low achievers (poor students) at a secondary school level. The pre-test and the post-test were used to measure the achievement. The participants were initially classified into two groups: experimental and control groups. While the former group was taught by using the direct method, the latter was taught by the traditional method for six-week periods. The pre-test and the post-test were administered, and their scores were compared afterwards. Interestingly, the obtained results revealed that the direct teaching method was more effective than the traditional one. It was also found that

the low achievers in the direct teaching method group showed significant superiority over those learning English through the traditional method. For the high achievers, whether or not they were taught by the direct or traditional method, they retained learned materials at the same rate. But the low achievers who were taught by the direct method retained more materials than the low achievers taught by the traditional method of teaching.

Rizwan and Akhtar (2016) investigated the effects of two grammar instructions which are explicit and implicit to teach grammar specifically on the articles. The sample were 40 10th grade male students selected randomly. They were asked to answer 10 multiple choice questions. A pre-test was administered in order to assess their proficiency level of articles usage. Students were divided into two groups, Group A undergone explicit instruction whilst Group B received implicit instruction for two weeks. In the post-test, Group A scored higher than Group B. Thus, the study suggests that explicit instructions is beneficial to develop grammatical accuracy.

The research design:

The one group pretest-posttest quasi-experimental design was used in the current study.

2. Sample of the study

Thirty –two fifth graders at Sameh Othman primary school.

3. Instruments of the study

The writing diagnostic test

The aim of the writing diagnostic test was to specify the needs and problems of the fifth graders. To verify the validity of

the test, it was submitted to a group of EFL specialized jury members. In order to establish the reliability of the test, it was piloted on a randomly selected sample of 25 fifth graders at Sameh Osman primary school. Results of the pilot test were analyzed using the SPSS program in order to examine reliability of the test for pilot study sample row scores, see appendix (4). Reliability of the test (0.8), is an acceptable level.

The pre–post writing test:

As a pretest, it was used to obtain baseline data about the treatment group's writing performance prior to the administration of the training program. As a posttest, it was used to investigate the effect of the training program on developing the writing skills of the treatment group. To ensure the validity of the test, it was judged by a group of EFL specialists .The reliability of the test was established by piloting it on a randomly selected sample of 20 fifth graders at Sameh Osman primary school. Reliability of the test (0.7), is an acceptable level.

The writing scoring Rubric:

The rubric was mainly used to assess pupils' ability to use the paragraph writing skills included in the training program. So, it focused on the following writing sub–skills: Mechanics of writing .and grammatical skills.

The training program:

The training program aimed to solve fifth graders' writing problems and developing their writing skills in the following areas.

A] Mechanics of writing

Mechanics of writing include :

- 1) Following principles of good writing.
- (2) Writing correct spelling of words.
- (3) Using punctuation marks correctly.
- (4) using capitalization correctly.

B] Grammar skills

Grammar skills include:

- Using articles correctly.
- Using pronouns .
- Using possessive adjectives correctly.
- Using word order correctly .
- Writing a simple sentence to describe objects correctly.
- Using Subject–verb agreement correctly .
- Using present simple in writing sentences correctly .
- Using past simple in writing sentence correctly.
- Writing (yes/No) questions. Answering (Yes/No) questions.

Teaching methods and techniques:

The current study used the following teaching techniques :

- Mini– lessons. Modeling.
- Shared writing. Interactive writing.
- Collaborative writing. Conferencing

Results of the writing diagnostic test:

The following formula was used to calculate the frequency and percentage of students' errors.:

total of a given error

$$\text{percentage of an error} = \frac{\text{total of the whole errors}}{\text{-----}} \times 100$$

Table (1)

Table (1) shows students' grammatical and mechanics of writing problems:

Category	Number	Percentage%
1.Mechanics of writing errors:		
A. Use of full stops	163	28.20%
B. Use of question marks	120	20.76%
C. Use of commas	195	33.73%
D. Capitalization	100	17.30%
Total	578	
3.Grammatical errors:		
A. Verb tense	411	20.92%
B. word order	320	16.29%
C. prepositions	160	8.13%
D. wrong use of pronouns	185	9.41%
E. verb missing	265	13.49%
F. articles	205	10.43%
G. subject –verb agreement	195	9.52%
H-.subject missing or repeated	223	11.35%
Total	1964	

The table above shows that the writing diagnostic test sample had serious writing problems in following areas: (1) grammar problems (45%), (2) sentence structure problems

(23.6%). (3) paragraph writing problems (21.8 %), (4) vocabulary use problems (18.1%), and (5) mechanics of writing problems (13.2%). These problems will be discussed in details as follows:

Results of the pre – post Writing Test

Testing the First Hypothesis of the Study:

The first hypothesis states that, there is a statistically significant difference between mean scores of the study sample in the pre and post administration of the writing skills test regarding the” mechanics of writing” , in favor of the post administration of the test.

t -value and its significance in the pre and post administration of the mechanics of writing skills

Table (2)

Item	N.	Mean	St. dv.	t. value	(df)	significance	(d)
Pre	36	1.48	2.84	10.56	35	0.01	3.80
post	36	8.73	5.49				

As shown in table (2) the mean score of the study sample in the post administration of the writing test regarding the mechanics of writing was higher (8.73) than that obtained in the pre one (1.48).The calculated t - value was (10.56) ,which indicates a significant difference at (0.01)level ,in favor of the post administration .The effect size was (3.80) , which indicates the positive effect of the study program in developing the study’s sample correct use of mechanics of writing .Thus the first hypothesis was verified.

Testing the Second Hypothesis of the Study:

The second hypothesis states that ,there is a statistically significant difference between mean scores of the study sample in the pre and post administration of the writing skills test regarding the” grammatical skills of writing” in favor of the post administration.

t-value and its significance in the pre and post administration of the grammatical skills of writing

Table (3)

Item	N.	mean	St. dv.	t. value	(df)	significance	(d)
Pre	36	0.56	1.26	10.72	35	0.01	3.86
post	36	4.39	2.41				

Table (3) shows that the mean score of the study sample in the post administration of the test regarding the crafting skills was higher (4.39) than that obtained in the pre one (0.56). The calculated T- value was (10.72) which is higher than the tabulated value showing the presence of a significant difference at 0.01 in favor of the post administration The effect size was high (3.86) ,indicating that students writing ability to use grammatical skills improved due to the introduction of the study program . Therefore the second hypothesis of the study was verified .

Discussion of results

In the light of the previous results of the analysis of data, it can be concluded that the proposed program based on students' needs was effective in developing pupils' writing

skills in general and the identified skills in particular. It can be claimed that the pupils' development in writing could be due to the following:

–The program that concentrated on real needs, so they felt the importance of participating in its activities, and that made them motivated and interested .

–The activities introduced during the study program were not complicated. They were accessible to pupils . Thus, they always showed a feel of enhanced self–perception whenever they succeeded in performing a specific task .

Recommendations:

In the light of the results obtained in the present study, a number of recommendations are suggested :

(1) Teachers need to provide writing instruction that caters for individual student needs, e.g. , introducing small group mini – lessons, and small – group conferencing based on students' needs.

(2) Teachers have to use writing materials and techniques that scaffold students' writing, i.e. , modeling, shared writing, guided writing, interactive writing ..etc

(3)Writing should be a prominent part of the EFL course introduced at all school grades beginning from the primary stage.

(4) Students should be provided with authentic writing activities rather than decontextualized ones intended to reinforce grammar and vocabulary use.

Suggestions for further Research:

In light of the present study results, the researcher suggests the following further studies :

In light of the present study results, the researcher suggests the following further studies:

(1) The effect of a needs based program in the light of the national standards of English on developing fifth graders on e.g. , reading, speaking and listening.

(2) The effect of a needs–based program in the light of the national standards of English on developing other stages' (e.g., preparatory and secondary) writing skills.

(3) The effect of using explicit teaching on developing other language skills for underachieving students, e.g. , speaking, and listening.

Conclusion

The present study investigated the effect of a proposed program based on the needs of the fifth graders in writing in light of the national standards of English on developing their grammar and mechanics of writing . Findings from this investigation provided a positive support for the hypotheses of the study.

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