

Developing writing skills among students with learning disabilities in English language

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Abstract

This study explored the effect of active learning on developing writing skills among students with learning disabilities in English language in Irbid, Jordan. The sample of the study included (40) male and female students, who were selected purposefully, and distributed randomly into two groups. The first was one the experimental group that was taught using the active learning method, and the other was the control group that was taught according to the traditional method. The study used the writing test after checking its validity by presenting it to a group of arbitrators, and its reliability by the method of testing and re-testing using the Pearson coefficient, which was (0.90). The results of the study showed that there were clear differences between the scores of the two study groups on the post-writing test. In light of the findings of the study, the researcher recommended training educational supervisors and teachers on practical applications of using the active learning method and evaluating it in the classroom through seminars and workshops in this field.

Keywords: Writing Skills, Active Learning, Students with Learning Disabilities.

Introduction

Active learning is related to learners' inclinations and desires, in which creative, collaborative, exploratory strategies are used to make them progress through the different stages of education and enable them to make their own decisions after being trained in it with positive teachers. The positive teacher is the active teacher who is not satisfied with the information he obtained during university education only but is also keen on continuous education for life. The active teacher is keen to achieve interaction and to ensure the formation of integrated personalities of learners. He is also able to partner with families to develop the educational presentation service for children to contribute to highlighting the talented and distinguished learners (Badir, 2012).

Writing is a means of communication that enables the individual to express his thoughts and feelings, write them down, and transmit them to others. Through writing, the individual can see the ideas of others, and learn about the development that he has been made in the lives of individuals and societies. Writing is characterized as an intellectual mental process that the individual performs after going through multiple stages and is the important channel of communication in the history of humanity. It helps the individual to show creative ideas in the form of written arts and others. This is what gives it the characteristic of permanence and continuity that distinguishes it from oral speech. Teaching writing has become a main goal and objective that language education seeks, and this is what language teaching curricula want mainly to achieve (Ashour and Al-Hawamdeh, 2010).

Writing is one of the tools of expression and translation of ideas that work in the human mind, and an important means of performance between individuals, groups, nations, and societies. Writing is subject to foundations and principles that the teacher must observe. These foundations are represented in the teacher's ability and belief in teaching writing, and that he is familiar with the psychological and mental aspects of his students. He also should have skills and abilities and possesses sufficient linguistic and cultural wealth. He should be able to exploit the students' inclinations to write, progressing with the student from easy to difficult, and training in writing in the reading class to make the two processes go hand in hand (Al-Dulaimi and Al-Waeli, 2005).

The problem of the study

The ability to write is an important aspect of a student's success in the basic stage. A student who cannot read or write cannot perform what is required of him. Because English language is very important, especially writing in basic schools, it becomes vital for students in the basic stages. Therefore, the school seeks to develop students' experiences, upgrade their concepts and social information, refine their tastes, stimulate their passion for writing, and form their balanced personalities (Bader, 2007).

The mastery of writing skills is a major factor in the success of students, and this depends on the ability of the teacher to teach these students using various methods and strategies, including active learning. Through the researcher's work and his experience, he noticed that there is a weakness among students with learning disabilities in the writing skills in English language. Therefore, this study aimed at investigating the effect of active learning as a means of addressing the phenomenon of poor writing. The study also attempted to investigate the impact of active learning on developing the writing skills of students with LDs in English language.

Questions of the study

The study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What is the effect of the active learning method on developing writing skills among students with learning disabilities in English language?
2. Are there any statistically significant differences in the development of writing skills between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups due to the gender variable?

Significance of the study

It is hoped that this study will benefit teachers and educational supervisors in the procedures for developing writing skills based on active learning in teaching English language. The results of this study might help in focusing on modern trends for ways to integrate active learning strategies into new educational learning topics. This study might open the way for other similar studies to build teaching programs based on active learning.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. The study is limited to the sample of students with learning disabilities in English language in Irbid Governorate

for the academic year 2019/2020. The study is also limited to investigating the effect of active learning on writing skills.

Literature Review

Active learning

Abdul Wahed and Al-Khatib (2001) indicated that active learning is linked to the concepts of cognitive theory and constructivist theory. Students learn through their active participation in the teaching-learning process, as they think, analyze, speak and write what they have learned, and link it to their daily lives through realistic practices. Sharon and Martha (2001) stated that active learning is a process of dynamic inclusion of learners in educational situations, which requires them to move and actively participate in all activities under the guidance and supervision of the teacher.

Active learning encourages students to read critically, diversify in educational activities appropriate for students to achieve the desired educational goals, and support learners' self-confidence towards various fields of knowledge. It also encourages students to ask different questions, work on solving problems, and contribute to measuring students' ability to build and organize new ideas (Zhang & Li, 2021).

Active learning contains a diversity, plurality, exclusivity, and participation, so there are many teaching methods and techniques in active learning (Thambu et al., 2021). First, the discussion method, which is one of the common ways used in active learning. The discussion technique urges teachers to continue learning, apply the learned knowledge in new situations, and develop the learners' thinking skills. This method needs a good knowledge of the subject matter by the teacher. The teacher should be able to use the appropriate methods of asking questions and managing discussions. He also should be able to create a discussion environment (mental and moral) that encourages learners to put forward their ideas and questions with fluency and courage.

Second, Micro-teaching, which is a learning situation that takes place in a short time (about 10 minutes on average) and involves a small number of students (usually between 5-10 students) during which the teacher introduces a specific concept, or trains students in a specific skill. Micro-education has

been used to allow the teacher to get feedback on this teaching situation and has been used in many areas, including pre-service teacher training, in-service training, micro-psychological counseling, supervisor training, pleading training, and college teacher training.

Third, brainstorming, which is one of the group discussion methods that encourage members of a group of (5-12) people, under the supervision of a teacher, to generate the largest possible number of diverse innovative ideas, spontaneously, in an open, non-critical atmosphere that does not limit the release of these ideas that could be solutions to a predetermined problem.

Writing skills

Writing is the means of communication through which an individual can express his thoughts and feelings, write them down and transmit them to others. Writing also enables individuals to recognize the ideas of others and stand up to the development that he has made in the lives of individuals and societies. It is characterized as a mental and intellectual process that the individual performs after going through many stages (Tortorelli et al., 2021).

Writing is a basic linguistic activity used in daily life. When an individual writes, he communicates his thoughts, news, and experiences to others, or expresses his feelings and emotions towards others. It is a container of thought, a heritage preserver, and a tool for expression and thinking. Writing is not only a mechanism through which knowledge and news are communicated or transmitted, but it is a technique by which knowledge is transformed, generated, reconstructed, and organized in a new form of different forms of organization. Writing is an internal process that helps writers examine their ideas. It is a dynamic process, with continuous movement between the product and the process, and embodiment and subjection are important to this process (Shehata, 2000).

The goals of teaching writing are closely related to the goals of teaching English language itself, as writing is the outcome of all the other language skills from listening to speaking to reading and writing. The goals of teaching writing, in general, come from the great importance of it, as writing has given the human community a great opportunity for communication between its members in different fields of life. Through writing, the heritage of different civilizations has been preserved over time and generations. The individual can express

his thoughts and feelings in written linguistic forms, thus enhancing his self-confidence by convincing others, in addition to gaining the ability to describe the events that take place around in various life situations (Amer, 2000).

Previous studies

Mori (2020) explored undergraduate students' preferred method of learning in an English classroom at a Japanese university. The study used an explanatory design by conducting a questionnaire survey with 21 participants. Students chose active as a style as their best method. They expressed their dissatisfaction with the traditional lecture style, and they preferred a more interactive method of learning.

Yacob and Yunus (2019) conducted a literature review to explore the use of collaborative online writing activity on ESL learners' critical thinking and active learning. The results showed the importance of using collaborative online writing activities to teaching and learning writing for ESL learners. The review was a reference for future researches to ensure many ESL writing activities to be more enjoyable, engaging, and meaningful.

Ismail and Winarni (2019) explored the impact of active learning on the ability of students to develop their scriptwriting skills at the University of Surakarta. The study used interviews, questionnaires, and observations to collect data. The results showed that students' skills in writing improve with the use of active learning techniques and methods.

St and Winarni (2019) explored the development of an Indonesian textbook model based on text and character and the impact of active learning on students' writings. The study used the qualitative descriptive approach. The study collected data using observations, interviews, and observations. The findings showed that the used textbooks need reconsideration. The textbooks should include more active learning activities and techniques.

Sawyer et al (2017) compared active-learning techniques of cooperative learning and writing to learn. The study included 165 undergraduate students in developmental psychology courses. The study found that multimedia cooperative learning increased learners' motivations. The results also showed that active learning techniques improved the academic level of students.

Methods

Sampling

The number of the study sample included 40 male and female students. Table (1) shows the distribution of study members by gender and the total number.

Table 1. Distribution of the study sample according to gender and group

gender	Control group	Experimental group	Total
Male	10	10	20
Female	10	10	20
Total	20	20	40

Instrument of the study

The researcher prepared a writing test, consisting of 40 items, as an instrument of the study. The test aimed at measuring the performance of students with learning disabilities in English language, based on the lessons provided to them.

The validity of the writing test was verified by presenting the objectives and test items in their initial form to a group of specialized and experienced judges. The purpose was for reviewing and reformulating the test items, expressing their opinions in the linguistic form of its vocabulary, and expressing their observations in the test items in terms of clarity of its objectives, and the extent of its comprehensiveness. The judges checked the scientific accuracy of the paragraphs of the test, and their representation of the content and objectives to be measured or any other suggestions. After collecting the judges' notes, some test paragraphs were modified, and some of them were reformulated to become more accurate.

The reliability coefficient of the writing test used in this study was calculated by applying the test on an exploratory sample of (30) male and female students of the fourth grade from outside the study sample. The test-retest method was used, where the test was applied twice with an interval of two weeks. The reliability coefficient using the Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated, which was (0.90). This value is acceptable and justifies the use of the test for the current study.

Results and Discussion

The two questions of the study were answered by calculating the mean scores and standard deviations of the performance of the study members on the pre and post-writing tests according to the teaching method (active learning method, the regular method). Table (2) shows the results.

Table 2. The mean scores and standard deviations of the study sample's performance on the pre-test and post-writing test according to the variables of teaching method and gender

Teaching method	Gender	No.	Pre-test		Post-test	
			Mean score	Standard deviation	Mean score	Standard deviation
Traditional	Male	10	31.73	8.58	39.38	6.42
	Female	10	30.95	6.52	35.68	8.44
	Total	20	31.39	7.65	38.36	7.55
Active learning	Male	10	37.19	5.24	45.60	0.99
	Female	10	31.00	4.40	41.34	5.44
	Total	20	34.71	5.59	43.89	3.76

Table (2) shows that the mean score of the performance of the study sample on the post-writing test who studied using the active learning method was (43.89), which is higher than the mean score of the control group, which was (37.36). The mean score of the performance of the male students was (42.56), which is higher than the mean score of the female students, which was (37.90).

To find out whether the differences between the mean scores of both groups were statistically significant, the accompanying two-way analysis of variance (ANCOVA) was conducted for the effect of teaching method and gender. Table (3) shows the results of the analysis.

Table 3. The results of the (ANCOVA) analysis for the performance of the study sample on the post-writing test according to the variables of teaching method and gender

Source of variance	Sum of square	Freedom value	Mean square	F-value	Sig.
Pre-test	109.821	1	109.821	2.61	0.111

Source of variance	Sum of square	Freedom value	Mean square	F-value	Sig.
Teaching method	570.514	1	570.514	12.458	0.000 *
gender	242.518	1	242.518	4.734	0.019*
Error	2801.74	66	41.466		
Total	3998.468	69			

*Statistically significant at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$)

Table (3) shows that the F value for the teaching method was (12.458), which indicates that there are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the performance of the two study groups (experimental and control) on the post-writing test. This means that the active learning method had a significant impact on learning English language among the sample of the study.

Table (3) also shows that the F value concerning the gender variable was (4.734) and at a level of significance (0.019), which indicates that there are no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the performance of the two study groups (experimental and control) on the post-writing test due to gender variable. The use of the active learning approach is not affected by the gender of the student. this could be explained by that both genders received the same training and treatment.

The modified mean scores have been extracted to find out to which group the differences are in favor. Table (4) shows the results.

Table 4. The modified mean scores and standard for the performance of the study sample on the post-writing test according to the teaching method variable

Method	Gender	No.	Mean score	Standard deviation
Traditional Method	Male	10	39.61	1.46
	Female	10	35.06	1.70
	Total	20	37.37	1.12
Traditional	Male	10	43.86	1.49
	Female	10	41.71	1.76
	Total	20	43.22	1.11

Table (4) shows that the adjusted means score of the experimental group, which studied using the active learning method, was (43.22), while the mean score of the control group that studied using the traditional method was (37.37). This indicates that the difference was in favor of the experimental group, which was studied using the active learning method. This also confirms the effect of this method in developing writing skills compared to the traditional method. It is also noted from Table (4) that the adjusted mean score for male students was (42.23), while the adjusted mean score for female students was (42.23), and this indicates that the difference was in favor of males.

The progress of the experimental group over the control group in writing skills may be attributed to the students' gradual development in writing through stages, each of which includes various steps and processes, giving them the freedom to choose the topic they wish to write on, and the student's reincarnation of the true writer's personality while writing. Students had the chance to plan, write, review, correct and publish their topics. The diversity of activities and exercises accompanying each of the operations brought pleasure and joy to the writing process.

This may also be attributed to the freedom of the active learning brought to students to express their ideas, write them down and work on arranging and revising them, without worrying about linguistic errors that may limit the focus on ideas, organization, and codification, interestingly and excitingly.

Recommendations

The study recommends the necessity for researchers interested in developing methods of teaching imagination skills to work on organizing training programs for teachers, based on active learning, and to prepare a guide for teachers that can be referenced when using these programs to learn and teach writing skills in the basic stage. It is also recommended to train educational supervisors and teachers on practical applications for using the active learning method and evaluating it in the classroom, through the adoption of training programs, and the holding of specialized technical seminars and workshops in this field. English language teachers should use the active learning method in the classroom in the various units of the English language subject in the basic stage.

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