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Approaches to the teaching of writing skills

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Abstract

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1. Introduction

Writing has a unique position in language teaching since its acquisition involves a practice and knowledge of other three language skills, such as listening, reading and speaking. Moreover, it requires mastering of other skills, such as metacognitive skills. Learners need to set an objective for their writing, plan it carefully, think over its layout and logical structure, revise itIn the process of writing they have to use cognitive skills; they have to analyze their sources and then synthesize them in a compact piece of writing. Therefore, knowing how to write in L2 is a valuable asset in foreign language communication.

As Walsh (2010) puts it:

Writing is important because it's used extensively in higher education and in the workplace. If students don't know how to express themselves in writing, they won't be able to communicate well with professors, employers, peers, or just about anyone else. Much of professional communication is done in writing: proposals, memos, reports, applications, preliminary interviews, e-mails, and more are part of the daily life of a college student or successful graduate.

Thus, this article focuses on the development of students' writing through using two most common approaches to writing, i.e. the *product approach* and the *process approach*. Since 1980's process approach has been used

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more than product (see Applebee, 1981; Leki, 1989; or Rogers, 2012) since it emphasizes the composing process rather than the form.

The product approach to writing usually involves the presentation of a model text, which is discussed and analyzed. According to this model text learners construct a similar or a parallel text. This might seem a mechanical task; however, learners can discover the structure of the given discourse, its linguistic features and how its ideas are organized. The process approach to writing in contrast focuses on the development of language use: brainstorming, group discussion, re-writing. A comparison of both approaches is given below:

Process approach

- text as a resource for comparison;
- ideas as starting point, necessitating more than one draft;
- focus on purpose, theme, text type ...;
- the reader (audience) is emphasized;
- collaborative with other peers;
- emphasis on creativity.

Product approach

- imitate a model text;
- organization of ideas more important than ideas themselves;
- one draft;
- features highlighted including controlled practice of those features;
- individual;
- emphasis on end product.

(Steele, 2004)

In order to discover which of the approaches, i.e. product or process is more suitable for student's development of writing skills at FIM, the author of this study conducted a small-scale experiment.

2. Experimental study and its findings

At the end of winter semester of 2012/2013, 14 distant students Management of Tourism in their third year of study at FIM were asked to write an abstract of their final Bachelor paper. The research tools used were as follows:

- diagnostic test (*DIALANG*);
- assessment of students' written work;
- t-test;
- statistical methods of processing the results of the research; and
- observations.

The *DIALANG* test performed among the students showed that they possessed sufficient level of English. The test proved that most of the students (11 out of 14) had sufficient B2 level of English according to CEFR. In addition, on the one hand, 2 students had C1 level of English, on the other hand, 1 student achieved only B1 level of English (Fig. 1).

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