

Utilising Task-Based Instruction to Develop Some Writing Skills and Attitudes of EFL Majors at the Faculty of Specific Education

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Abstract:

The study aimed to investigate utilizing task-based instruction to develop EFL majors' writing skills and attitudes towards writing. The study had used a quasi-experimental design with one treatment group. The treatment group consisted of 40 EFL first year students who were randomly chosen. The study utilized two instruments. The first was a writing skill test and the second was an attitudes towards writing scale. The participants were pre and post administered to the instruments of the study. The study material consisted of eighteen essays of different types. The essays were introduced through different types of writing tasks including various task-based activities. The experiment was conducted over a period of eleven consecutive weeks within the second term of the academic year 2016-2017 and accomplished within the limits of 22 sessions. The results of the study confirmed that: a) there was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the treatment group in the pre and post writing skill test favouring the post-test scores, b) there was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the treatment group in the pre and post attitudes towards writing scale favouring the post-scale scores, c) utilizing task-based instruction can develop EFL majors' writing skills and d) utilizing task-based instruction can develop EFL majors' attitudes towards writing.

Key Words: Task-Based Instruction - Writing Skills - Writing Attitudes.

ملخص الدراسة:

استهدفت الدراسة الحالية بحث استخدام التعليم القائم على المهام لتنمية مهارات الكتابة لدى طلاب الفرقة الأولى بشعبة اللغة الانجليزية وكذلك تنمية اتجاههم نحو الكتابة. ولإجراء الدراسة الحالية تبنت الباحثة نظام المجموعة التجريبية الواحدة والتي تضمنت أربعون من الطلبة والطالبات الذين تم اختيارهم بطريقة

عشوائية من طلاب الفرقة الأولى، بشعبة اللغة الإنجليزية بكلية التربية النوعية، تم التدريس لهم باستخدام مجموعة متنوعة من المهام التعليمية الكتابية التي شملت أنشطة متنوعة قائمة على المهام. و قد شملت أدوات الدراسة أ) اختبار كتابة لقياس بعض مهارات الكتابة لدى طلاب العينة و ب) مقياس اتجاهات لقياس اتجاهاتهم نحو الكتابة، وقد تم تطبيقهما قبلًا وبعدياً على عينة الدراسة. وقد تم إجراء الدراسة الحالية عبر اثنين وعشرون جلسة عملية تم إجرائها على مدار أحد عشر أسبوعاً خلال الفصل الدراسي الثاني من العام الجامعي 2016/2017. وبعد إجراء المعالجة الإحصائية توصلت الدراسة إلى مجموعة من النتائج تتمثل بشكل عام في: أ) وجود فرق دال إحصائياً بين متوسطي درجات طلاب عينة الدراسة في اختبار مهارات الكتابة المطبق قبلًا وبعدياً لصالح التطبيق البعدي، ب) وجود فرق دال إحصائياً بين متوسطي درجات طلاب عينة الدراسة في مقياس الاتجاهات نحو الكتابة المطبق قبلًا وبعدياً لصالح التطبيق البعدي، ج) استخدام التعليم القائم على المهام له تأثير إيجابي على تنمية مهارات الكتابة لدى طلاب الفرقة الأولى بشعبة اللغة الإنجليزية وكذلك تنمية اتجاهاتهم نحو الكتابة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التعليم القائم على المهام - مهارات الكتابة - الاتجاهات نحو الكتابة

Introduction:

Language teachers emphasize the importance of writing because most classroom activities and home assignments are done in a written form. Williams (1993) considered writing one way of providing variety in classroom procedures, and thinks that it also makes possible individualized work in large classes. Writing provides a student with physical evidence of his achievement and becomes a source whereby he can measure his improvement. Furthermore, writing is important in learning in general.

Writing is one basic skill in learning English as a foreign language. It is considered one of the important key activities in language teaching and learning, as people are expected to write, both in their educational stages and later in life. It helps students communicate their ideas effectively and reinforce grammar and vocabulary they are learning (Ahmed, 2012, p.2).

Writing is an important skill in today's society, and it is one of the most complex activities taught in schools and colleges. Besides, writing is at the root of every skill. It can improve students' speech and pronunciation by making them aware of patterns, sounds, spelling, and grammatical forms. Writing is also clearly linked to reading. Students cannot write well without reading and re reading what they have written. Writing is a tool for learning. We cannot delay it until students achieve a high level of proficiency (El-Naggar, et al., 2002).

Scarcella & Oxford (1992) stressed the importance of writing as it serves as a gate-keeping function in universities. Students' survival in academic settings depends mainly on their ability to write well. Professors in most cases evaluate

their students according to their written work. These students who acquire strong writing skills usually advance academically.

Developing the writing skill is especially important for English language students. El-Shafie (2006) revealed that students finish the secondary stage without acquiring the skills required for writing in English. They cannot write a complete correct paragraph if they are asked to do.

Writing, the visual presentation of language, is invaluable for helping students communicate and understand how the parts of language go together. Moreover, many students actually learn and remember more through the written word (Lindsay, 2000). It is one way students can express and understand themselves. It is among the most important ways students use in participating in the many communities in their life: their school community, clubs and organizations, citizen groups, and workplaces (Heffernan; Lincoln & At will, 2001).

No one learns to write automatically. People cannot write even a single letter of alphabet without a conscious effort of mind and hand, and to get beyond the single letter, they must be shown how to form words, how to punctuate those sentences. Writing, then, is a means of communication people must consciously learn and the more they study and practice the craft of writing, the better they will use their writing time (Herffernan , Lincoln & At will, 2001).

It is globally known that English is the first international language spoken by the native and the non-native speakers. Writing is one of the fundamental skills in learning English. Brown (2001) considered writing in L2 from the perspective of teaching writing as one of the four skill areas. According to Bello (1997) learning to write in English as a second language allows learners to put their thoughts on paper, see their ideas in print, and share them with others. Writing also enhances language acquisition as learners experiment with words, sentences, and large chunks of writing to communicate their ideas effectively and to reinforce grammar and vocabulary they are learning in class.

1- Writing enables teachers to provide different learning styles and needs. Some learners, especially those who do not learn easily through oral practice, feel more secure if they are allowed to read and write in the language. For such students, writing is likely to be an aid to retention, if only because they are more at ease and relaxed.

According to Byrne (1991), writing serves a variety of pedagogical purposes:

2- Writing provides learners with some tangible evidence that they are making progress in the language, so, it satisfies a psychological need.

3- Writing provides variety in classroom activities, serving as a break from oral works (and is therefore a quieter and more relaxed time for both students and

teacher!). At the same time, it increases the amount of language contact through work that can be set out of class.

4- Writing is often needed for formal and informal testing. The ability to write is not automatically an acquired skill; it is usually learned or culturally transmitted as a set of practices. Writing skills must be practiced and learned through experience (Myles, 2002).

In spite of the great importance of writing skills, also the benefits and increasing need of developing these skills, as shown before, the writing skill has often been neglected in many ESL/EFL classrooms.

Writing is the last and perhaps the most difficult skill students learn. Not only is there a dearth of actual classes of writing, nor are inclined to invest the time, effort, and energy to do so. Moreover, there is a lack of consensus among educators about the importance of writing and about the steps needed to enhance writing or the awareness of writing as a crucial skill (Shaughnessy & Eastham, 1996).

Through working in teaching English in the English Department at the Faculty of Specific Education, the researcher observed that the students in this Department encounter many problems and have many difficulties in writing English. To make sure that there is a problem, firstly, the researcher reviewed a number of studies discussing writing difficulties & problems in ESL & EFL contexts, and also asked some specialists in TEFL field to determine the common problems & difficulties faced by the students in writing English, and those problems & difficulties are shown as follows.

Ibrahim (2012, p.1-2) stated that the greatest bulk of literature implies that writing is the most problematic area of language instruction whether in first or second language for the majority of English language learners. The reason is that writing is the skill which is most neglected. Furthermore, the sequence of activities in language teaching syllabi implies that written composition has a minimum share in most ELT programs.

Lochana and Sultana (2002) showed that writing is considered to be the most difficult area of language learning by both learners as well as teachers as it has two basic problem areas: fluency and accuracy. At the same time, Longshaw (2002) examined that the key to developing the reading and writing skills of low-levels students is providing the right level of challenge and interest. The workshop demonstrated how level - appropriate tasks, that include interesting content, develop language competency and aid low-level students to become better readers and writers.

Even if many students have mastered the basic skills, they cannot write well enough to meet the demands faced in higher education and the work place (The College Board, 2003). Findings from the National Assessment of Educational Progress found that most students have mastered the writing basics but only a few

students have been found to write clearly and meaningfully (The College Board, 2003).

Lindsay (2000) pointed out that, in terms of skills, producing a coherent, fluent, extended piece of writing is probably the most difficult thing there is to do in language regardless the language in question is a first , second or foreign language. It's something most native speakers never master. For second or foreign language learners the challenges are enormous, particularly for those who go on to a university and study in a language that is not their own.

Writing is a difficult activity for most people both in a mother tongue and in a foreign language (Helmy, 2003). Writing is essentially a solitary activity and the fact that people are required to write in their own without the possibility of interaction or the benefit of feedback, in itself makes the act of writing difficult. In writing, writers have to compensate for the absence of these features: They have to ensure, both through their choices of sentence structure and by the way their sentences are linked together and sequenced, that the text they produce can be interpreted on its own (Ali, 2008, p.2-3).

Wyse & Jones (2001) added another difficulty involved in teaching writing, which is writing has been neglected area of English language teaching for some years. One only has to look at the large numbers of books available to English language teaching profession on reading, and the scarcity of books on writing to see the imbalance.

Byrne (1991) classified students' difficulties in writing into three kinds: psychological, linguistic and cognitive- although these, inevitably overlap to some extent.

1. Psychological problems:

Writing is essentially a solitary activity and the fact that people are required to write alone, without the possibility of interaction or the benefit of feedback, in itself makes the act of writing difficult.

2. Linguistic problems:

In writing, writers have to compensate for the absence of these features: through their choices of sentences, structures and linking their sentences together sequenced, so that the text they produce can be interpreted on its own.

3. Cognitive problems:

Writing is learned through a process of instruction they have to master the written forms of the language and to learn certain structures which are less used in speech, or perhaps not used at all, but which are important for effective communication in writing. They also have to learn how to organize their ideas to be understood by a reader who is not present and perhaps by a reader who is not known to them.

Writing for a long time follows the product approach, which focuses on writing tasks in which the learner imitates, copies, and transforms teacher supplied

models (Nunan, 1999). This traditional, product-driven, rules-based, correctness-obsessed writing instruction is deficient in two important aspects. First, the teacher views the student's writing as a product, which assumes that the student knows how to write and uses what he produces as a test of that ability. Second, the teacher focuses on form, i.e., syntax, grammar and mechanics rather than on content (Hobelman & Wiriyachitra, 1999). Grammar is important but as a tool, a means, and not as an end in itself. Such research evidence suggests that focusing on language errors in writing improves neither grammatical accuracy nor writing fluency. Moreover, through attention to meaning, not just form, writing improves. (Ahmed, 2008, p.3).

Simultaneously, the learner's attitudes and motivation affect the student's writing and the acquisition of the second language whether the attitudes are positive or negative and the motivation is intrinsic or instrumental (Yau, 1991). Therefore, language acquisition is a product of the complex interaction of the linguistic environment, the social environment and the learner's internal mechanism.

For many students, composition writing is an arduous task. Maintaining interest after the initial draft can be difficult, especially during revision when syntax mechanics, and spelling become the focus. Specialists hear teachers complain about a particular student's "bad" attitude that interferes with his or her success in completing an assignment (Ibrahim, 2012, p.9).

Attitudes include affective, behavioral, and cognitive components; attitudes may be accompanied by positive or negative emotions, and writers may act and think in particular ways as a result of our attitudes. Therefore, emotions and attitudes are distinct affective states, even though an attitude may lead to an emotional response and then to a feeling or bodily response, as in a student's negative attitude toward writing resulting in anger and perspiration (Musgrove, 1999).

As writers work to shape a positive attitude toward writing, we may find that private writing (that is, writing we do just for ourselves) can also help us to become more confident with our public writing (the writing we do for others). Nordquist (2009) asserted that at this point what matters isn't whether we think we are good writers or bad ones, but the extent to which we are willing to work to become better.

Learning a language is closely related to the attitudes towards the languages (Starks & Paltridge, 1996). Karahan (2007) believed that "positive language attitudes let learner have positive orientation towards learning English". As such, attitudes may play a very crucial role in language learning as they would appear to influence students' success or failure in their learning (p.84). Such negative attitudes may lead learners to withdraw, be reluctant to write, avoid the

writing sessions or even have a psychological barrier between them and practicing writing causing what is called writing apprehension or writing anxiety.

Students' attitudes, values, beliefs, and motivation play a significant role in their literacy learning (Bottomley and Henk, 1998). When students see themselves as incompetent writers, a lower level of engagement will occur in their writing. Some self-efficacy researchers have suggested that teachers should pay as much attention to students' perceptions of competence as to actual competence, for the perceptions may more accurately predict students' motivation and future academic choices.

Reeves (1997) ascertained that writing anxiety and negative attitudes towards writing are reflected on students behaviors as follows:

- They report low success in prior experiences with school-related writing.
- They have received negative teacher responses to prior writing attempts.
- They are more apprehensive when writing personal narratives in which they express personal feelings, beliefs and experiences.
- They lack role models for writing.
- They score lower in verbal ability, reading comprehension, and standardized tests writing ability used for college placement.
- Their self-concept is often low and they lack self-confidence.
- They tend to choose courses and majors that entail little or no writing.
- They tend to select careers which require few or no writing tasks.

Therefore, the need arises for using and applying techniques and strategies that would encourage the students to master the writing skill. Reviewing literature and studies investigating strategies that can be useful in developing the writing skill, the researcher found that the "Task-Based Learning and Teaching" approach is one of the most appropriate strategies that can be useful in enhancing & developing the writing skill for adults. Accordingly, the present study sought to use and apply an approach that may contribute to the acquisition and developing of writing skills, this approach is called "Task-Based Instruction".

"Task-based instruction" is a type of integrated skills approach, as contrasted to the purely segregated approach, that exposes English language learners to authentic language and challenges them to interact naturally in the language (Oxford, 2001). Task-based instruction is frequently promoted as an effective teaching approach, superior to traditional method, which is often justified by the claim that linguistic regularities are acquired through noticing through communicative activities (Swan, 2005).

The task-based instruction has the following characteristics: It depends on a real life tasks, Its pedagogy is driven by learner centeredness and it is concerned with authentic communicative tasks in the target language.

Tasks are defined as activities which stand alone as a fundamental unit that requires producing, comprehending and manipulating in authentic language while

attention is paid to meaning rather than to the form (Nunan, 2004), Many take a psycholinguistic approach viewing task as a construct that determines the type of language use and information processing in which learners will engage in (Eillis, 2000).

Hurley (2003) showed the importance of the task in the field of EFL proficiency, as he clarified the issues of language proficiency for educators. He suggested that the school-related tasks require school-related high proficiency as Vermont Department of Education (2005) defined the writing proficiency as the ability to meet all practical writing needs such as note taking on familiar topics, uncomplicated letters, simple summaries and compositions related to work, and to write in such way that the text is generally comprehensible to natives not used to dealing with non-natives.

Guoxing (2004) stated that task-based instruction gives the learners the confidence in trying out whatever language they know, experience of interaction, chances for negotiating and chances to try out communication strategies. Also the language of task-based instruction makes the students interact meaningfully, think about topics that interest them, share opinions on these topics and develop their awareness of target culture by giving them the opportunity to critically analyze their beliefs and behaviors (Finch, 1999).

The task-based instruction also has an effect on enhancing EFL proficiency. Nunan, (2004) mentioned that the concept task has become an important element in syllabus design. It has an EFL setting, as it has an emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language, and it helps the learner to focus not only on language but also on the learning process. In the EFL classroom, the task-based instruction calls for the activation of strategies for invention and discovery (Massia, 2001).

Empirically, Daroon (2002) used the task-based instruction in his EFL classroom through these steps. Firstly, he makes an introduction and discussion of the topics or the task, then he makes them the task in small groups and then perform it. He then notices how EFL learners involve in learning and use the language in a specific situation. He demonstrates how students have to strive for explanation which implies that the situation set for the task-based interaction activities can promote recall and restructuring of their language acquisition. He also, examined a variety of the conversational strategies like "confirmation check, comprehension check, clarification request, repetition and recast" and then recorded the number of students turn-taking. As a result he concluded that the task-based approach according to the course design has much potential benefits and that EFL learners have a positive attitude toward the task-based instruction. The number of turn-taking shows the number supporting the students in the language learning tasks which implies high involvement in interaction.

Khatter (2008, p.5) mentioned that "The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach implies that language is communication. The following are the set of principles that underlie this approach:

Learners learn a language by being involved in communicative tasks. Authentic and meaningful communication should be the goal of classroom activities. Fluency and accuracy are both important dimensions of communication. Communication involves the integration of different language skills. Learning is a gradual process that involves trial and error. The goal of language learning is communicative competence".

Task-Based Instruction (TBI) can claim to be an application of these principles and hence continue as a mainstream approach today, (Richards, 2002). Similarly, "The task-based approach falls under the umbrella of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)" (McLaughlin, 2001).

A clear sign of the efficacy of TBI is that it has become the one of choice in the best government programs. Since the 1980s, nearly all government institutions have used TBI in their FL programs, (Leaver & Willis, 2004, p. 47).

In the model of TBL described by Willis (1996), the PPP lesson is reversed. The students start with the task. When they have completed it, the teacher draws attention to the language used, making corrections and adjustments to the students' performance. In this framework for TBL, Willis presented a three-stage process:

- (1) "Pre-task" - Introduction to the topic and task.
- (2) "Task cycle" - Task, planning and report.
- (3) "Language focus" - Analysis and practice.

Swan (2005) assured the superiority of TBI over the traditional methods due to the fact that it promotes communication while form can be acquired during task performance.

It is often referred to the relevance of TBI to all levels of language proficiency besides its significance in enhancing interaction in an EFL classroom. In TBI, pair work and group work are basic and often used to increase opportunities for interaction. Willis (1996) & Willis (2007) emphasized that any topic or theme can give rise to different types of task as follows:

Listing (brain storming & fact finding); Ordering & Sorting (classifying, categorizing, sequencing, ranking); Comparing (finding similarities, finding differences, matching); Problem Solving (decision making, analyzing real situations, analyzing hypothetical situations, reasoning); Sharing personal experiences (narrating, describing, exploring and explaining- attitudes, opinions and reactions).

Pica (2005, p.369-383) concluded that tasks are effective in combining form, function and meaning and that is considered to be vital for EFL/ESL students. TBI is one of the teaching models, which have influenced current teaching

practice where the emphasis is on the task rather than the language, (Harmer, 1998, p.31).

The Aims of teaching English are often defined in terms of the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. These skills are not practiced in isolation but in closely interwoven series of tasks which mutually reinforce and build on each other. If some language courses are designed to be practiced and developed in isolation, they would consequently leave a considerable gap in the curriculum.

Context of the Problem:

Previous research on writing in the Egyptian context reveals the persistence of actual problems in teaching and learning writing for both teachers and students.

Abdu (1993) confirmed the persistence of actual problems in teaching and learning writing for both teachers and students. Teachers frequently complain of the big work load of students' poor writings which they have to correct. As far as students are concerned, they mostly prefer to be assigned other types of written work, i.e., comprehension, grammar, and vocabulary exercises, and view composition writing as some sort of punishment. They hardly have any organized and disciplined instruction in writing. Writing is included as part of the prescribed textbook content, usually as a summary of a given text, giving a very limited chance for students to exploit their own linguistic resources and ideas. This denies students the chance to experience real writing. To make matters worse, teachers mark composition by underlining the most obvious and easily identifiable mistakes in grammar and spelling, and lack of coherence. Usually no attempts are made to find out the reasons for wrong performance. These techniques are confusing and give students very limited notion of writing.

Helmy (2003) revealed that teachers of English assign a topic, give a time limit, and specify the number of sentences or lines to be written. Teachers expect students to write a finished product, turn it in for grading, and have it returned with the teacher who has the role of examiner or grade-giver. Students complete their writing in one copy with no opportunity or expectation for revision. Teachers rarely gave students feedback.

Previous researchers proved that EFL students face some writing problems. These problems might hinder their ability to express themselves freely, as they are not interested in the topic that the teacher asks them to write about (Aly, 2001). They cannot link sentences into coherent paragraphs, nor they can express their thought in lucid and organized way.

Abdel-Motaal (2001) and El-Shafie (2006) stated that writing is the most difficult skill of all the language skills taught to EFL students and some sort of punishment for students. Students cannot develop their ideas when asked to write simple or compound sentences, and certain types of grammar mistakes dominate their writings (e.g. sentence structure, conjunctions, tenses, adverbs, adjectives,

voice, prepositions, word-order, spelling, paragraph development, vocabulary choice and punctuation). In addition, their sentences are almost Arabic structures literally translated. Their writing is unsatisfactory and poor and they are unable to express themselves in writing appropriately and correctly.

Ahmed (2008) stated that feedback or the way teachers respond to students' writing in English language can be an important reason for the problems of lack of EFL writing skills and negative attitudes towards writing in the English language. The correction of writing has been the most difficult, stressful and neglected aspect of writing instruction and the sole responsibility of the teacher.

After reviewing the related studies concerning writing skills, the researcher concluded that students' writing problems may be due to some reasons: Instructors depend on the traditional method in TEFL, students have some language problems, instructors use one method of teaching and they do not meet the individual differences among students, students are low motivated because the textbook and the methods of teaching neglect students' abilities, talents, needs and interests and students are not provided with the opportunities to participate in the learning process because the courses are teacher-centred.

Moreover, based on the researcher's previous experience in teaching English in the English Department at the Faculty of Specific Education, Zagazig University, she noticed the following: The English Department students' written expressions in English lack coherence and cohesion. They cannot organize their writing logically and cannot use transitions correctly. Most of them make spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors. The time devoted to teaching writing inside classrooms is not enough to develop the necessary writing skills. These students find writing as a mystery; it is like a secret that is never revealed to them. Therefore, they would rather give up than risk failure.

Thus, it has been noticed that students in the English Department at the Faculty of Specific Education have some difficulties in writing. In order for the researcher to make sure that the problem really exists, to identify the difficulties EFL majors at the Faculty of Specific Education face in writing and to determine the extent to which these students lack those skills, the researcher conducted a pilot study in (February 2015) comprising the following procedures:

1- A writing skill questionnaire (see Appendix B) which includes some writing sub-skills and was administered to some specialists of EFL to determine the most important writing sub-skills appropriate for and required by EFL majors.

2- Based on the writing skill questionnaire results, the researcher prepared a writing skill test (see Appendix C) to investigate students' writing skills, that is, to determine the extent to which students lack those skills and to identify whether they master these writing skills or not. The test was administered to a sample of (100) of the first and the second year students at the English Department (50 first

year students & 50 second year students). The test examined the following writing skills:

- Grammatical Skills (Having correct grammatical sentences).
- Stylistic Skills (Manipulating the language correctly and effectively).
- Mechanical Skills (Using writing conventions correctly).
- Judgement & Organization Skills (Arranging sentences, selecting and organizing relevant information, and keeping the audience in mind).

3-The researcher prepared a writing attitudinal scale (see Appendix D) in order to identify the students' attitudes towards writing in English. That scale was administered to a sample of (100) of the first and the second year students at the English Department (50 first year students & 50 second year students). The scale items were presented in English and Arabic.

The results of the pilot study showed that: 1-The most important writing skills appropriate for and required by EFL students are: Grammatical Skills (Having correct grammatical sentences), stylistic Skills (Manipulating the language correctly and effectively), mechanical Skills (Using writing conventions correctly) and organization Skills (Arranging sentences, selecting and organizing relevant information, and keeping the audience in mind). 2- These students had problems in writing regarding: Using informal expressions and formulas, problems with format and layout, expressing personal views, missing the use of illustrations, misplacing of verbs, missing the needed details for clarity, spelling errors, punctuation errors and singular and plural confusion. 3- Most of the students had negative attitudes towards writing.

Statement of the Problem:

Based on the above discussion including previous studies on writing skills, the researcher's experience and observations as well as the pilot study results, it was concluded that those students had some problems in writing skills and they lacked the mastery of the necessary writing skills. They also had negative attitudes towards writing.

In order to help students overcome such problems, the researcher suggested utilizing task-based instruction to develop EFL majors' writing skills and attitudes towards writing. Accordingly, the problem of the study was stated as follows: "EFL majors' writing skills and their attitudes towards writing could be developed by utilizing Task-based instruction."

Questions of the Study:

Consequently, the problem of the study was stated in the following main question: "How can EFL majors' writing skills and their attitudes towards writing be developed by utilizing Task-based instruction?"

This main question was sub-divided into the following sub-questions:

- 1-What are the writing skills required for EFL majors?
- 2-To what extent do the target students master these writing skills?

- 3-What are the students' present attitudes towards writing?
- 4- What are the learning tasks that can achieve the optimal writing skills?
- 5- To what extent can the Task-based instruction help to develop some writing skills of EFL majors?
- 6- To what extent can the Task-based instruction help to develop EFL majors' attitudes towards writing?

Purpose of the Study:

The Purpose of the study was to develop the EFL majors' writing skills and attitudes towards writing by utilizing task-based instruction. The study specifically aimed at:

- 1- Identifying the necessary and most appropriate writing skills for EFL majors and developing these skills.
- 2- Determining and developing those students' attitudes towards writing.
- 3- Helping students practice different task-based activities.
- 4- Constructing task-based activities to develop EFL majors' writing skills and attitudes towards writing.
- 5- Measuring and determining to what extent the suggested task-based activities could help to develop the EFL majors' writing skills and attitudes towards writing.
- 6- Investigating the extent to which utilizing task-based instruction could develop EFL majors' writing skills and attitudes towards writing.

Significance of the Study:

The study might be significant to:

1- EFL majors:

- It might help them develop their writing skills which hopefully would affect their success in studying and future career as English teachers.
- It might help develop their attitudes towards writing from negative to positive.
- It might encourage them to overcome their passivity and practice learning English in a non-threatening environment.
- It might help them to practice their roles as in real life situations.
- It might help them to become more creative and confident.
- Task-based instruction might be a helpful and successful device which could overcome the difficulties that usually face those students while writing.
- Task-based instruction might be helpful in developing those students' writing skills and maximizing their roles as positive participants.
- Students would benefit from their peers, teacher and the activities they would study, so their writing skills might be developed.

2- EFL instructors:

- It might provide them with a list of some writing skills, necessary for EFL majors, to be considered in their instructional strategies to maximize the learning experience.
- It might provide them with practical procedures to develop their methods in teaching writing skills.
- It might provide them with some suitable writing activities for task-based instruction as extracurricular activities that could help in developing the desired writing skills for EFL majors.
- The task-based instruction would provide the EFL instructors with practical classroom techniques to develop the EFL majors' writing skills.
- It might improve their ability to utilize the task-based instruction effectively and accurately.
- It might enable EFL instructors to know something about how their students think and learn and how they could help them learn more.

3- Course designers:

- It might provide them with considerations to be taken in developing and designing writing materials that activate students' strategies and involvement in a writing classroom.
- It might help them take into consideration task-based instruction (TBI) principles while designing tasks to be included in the prescribed textbooks.
- It might exceed the ability to utilize task-based instruction in designing different language courses.

4- The other researchers:

- It might exceed the ability to utilize the task-based instruction in various situations, faculties and stages.

Delimitations of the Study:

1- The study was carried out at the Faculty of Specific Education, Zagazig University where the researcher works. That gave an opportunity for carrying out the experiment.

2- The experiment was conducted to a sample of EFL majors drawn randomly from the first year students in the English Department at the Faculty of Specific Education, Zagazig University since it was their first contact with English.

3- The promotion and development of writing skills which are suitable for and required by the students in this particular age and in which students were inefficient. Those skills were determined through the writing skill questionnaire and the writing skill test submitted to the EFL specialists as well as surveying the relevant literature.

4- The designed tasks and activities were practiced through the practical sections of the "Essay and linguistic exercises" course submitted to first year students because it is the most suitable course for practicing and developing

writing skills via planning and implementing activities using task-based instruction.

Definition of the Terms:

1. Task:

"It is a group of activities which stand alone as a fundamental unit that requires producing, comprehending and manipulating in authentic language while attention is being paid to meaning rather than to form" (Nunan, 2004).

In the present study, task refers to the activity carried out by students in which meaning is primary and where there is a communicative problem to be solved and there is also some sort of relation to real world activities Task completion has some priority here and the task assessment is in terms of the outcome.

2. Task-based instruction (TBI):

"It is a type of integrated skills approach, as contrasted to purely segregated approach that exposes English language learners to authentic language and challenges them to interact naturally in the language" (Oxford, 2001).

In the present study, task-based instruction refers to an effective teaching method superior to the traditional one. This is justified by the claim that the linguistic regularities are acquired by noticing the communicative activities.

3. Writing skill:

"It is the ability to present ideas and views in a graphic form" (Okonkwo et al., 2012).

In the present study, writing skill refers to the language process through which the writers explore ideas and thoughts and also make them concrete and visible.

4. Attitudes towards writing:

"They mean: students' negative or positive feelings about writing in English language, the EFL teaching methods, his/ her self- confidence in his/ her ability to write and his/ her awareness of the communicative benefits of writing in English language" (Abdel-Maksoud, 2007).

In the present study, attitudes towards writing refer to all of the students' negative and positive responses toward writing English language that would influence their writing performance and level and also are affected by their unfavourable or favourable experiences concerning foreign language instruction. Writing attitudes are simply the students' responses and reactions to the different writing tasks due to the types of feedback received

Hypotheses of the Study:

Based upon the previous literature and related studies, the hypotheses of the current study could be phrased as follows:

(1) There would be a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the treatment group in the pre and post writing skill test favouring the post-test scores,

(2) There would be a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the treatment group in the pre and post attitudes towards writing scale favouring the post-scale scores,

(3) Utilizing task-based instruction can develop EFL majors' writing skills, and finally

(4) Utilizing task-based instruction can develop EFL majors' attitudes towards writing.

Method:

Design:

The current study utilised a quasi-experimental design. A group of forty students were randomly selected and assigned into one treatment group.

Participants of the Study:

A group of forty students were randomly selected and assigned into one treatment group. All the forty participants of the study were freshmen students enrolled at the Faculty of Specific Education, Zagazig University. They were all EFL majors. The forty participants did attend both the pre-post- testing sessions and the treatment sessions.

They were relatively at the same age, ranging from 18 to 19 years old, with the same cultural background. Moreover, the proficiency of the students was measured by the pre- writing skills test and the pre- attitudes towards writing scale revealing that all the students were nearly at the same level.

Instruments of the study:

1. *The pre-post writing skills test:* It was developed by the researcher and aimed at evaluating the participants' level concerning the predetermined writing skills. It was used as a pre-test to evaluate the participants' level concerning the predetermined writing skills before the treatment. As a post-test, it was used to identify whether the writing skills were developed as a result of teaching using the TBI and to determine how far the students could master these skills. The test consisted of four main parts according to the four main predetermined writing skills; grammatical skills, stylistic skills, mechanical skills and judgment or organization skills. Each main part was divided into two sections or parts. Each section consisted of various questions matching the elementary writing level of the freshmen participants and measuring the sub-skills of writing predetermined under each main writing skill. The questions contained some directions to be followed by the students. In order to ensure the validity of the test, it was administered to a jury of TEFL specialists. The test was approved by the jury and set to be used to evaluate the participants' writing skills. In order to determine the reliability of the test, it was computed by using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient. The reliability coefficient was found to be high enough (0. 925) to be used to evaluate the participants' writing skills.

2. *The attitudes towards writing scale*: It was developed by the researcher and aimed at evaluating the participants' attitudes towards writing before and after the treatment to check any possible difference. The attitudes towards writing scale is a closed- form scale. It utilized a three point Likert scale that are 'Mostly', 'Sometimes' and 'Rarely' with three, two and one as the score of each of the previous points respectively. The scale consisted of 33 positively-phrased statements. The items of the scale were translated in Arabic in order to make it easier for the students to answer. In order to ensure the validity of the scale, it was administered to a jury of TEFL specialists. It was approved by the jury and set to be used to evaluate the participants' attitudes towards writing. All the jury members suggested that the scale items were appropriate and there were no modifications. In order to determine the reliability of the scale, Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient was used. The reliability coefficient was found to be high enough (0. 837) to be used to evaluate the participants' attitudes towards writing.

Procedures:

The study was performed over a period of eleven consecutive weeks within the second term of the academic year 2016-2017. More precisely, the study was conducted within the limit of 22 sessions. The study was initiated by a welcome session in which the participants were given an overall view about what they were going to study, the importance of improving their writing, the different types of essays, the specific writing skills they were going to learn and the significance of such skills to their academic and professional improvement. Then the researcher proceeded to the pre-testing session that lasted for one hundred and eighty minutes (two hours and half for the writing skills pre-test & half an hour for the pre-attitudes towards writing scale). The pre-testing session was followed by the treatment sessions. The participants received eighteen training sessions following the order of two 3 hours sessions a week. Coming to an end, the training sessions were followed by the post-testing session that lasted for one hundred and eighty minutes (two hours and half for the writing skills pre-test & half an hour for the pre-attitudes towards writing scale). The post-testing session was followed by the final goodbye session in which the researcher thanked the participants for their time and effort and shared them happy moments celebrating the end of the treatment sessions. Data obtained from the pre and post administrations of both the writing skills test and attitudes towards writing scale to the treatment group were treated statistically in the light of the study hypotheses. The study has utilized both *t*-test and Cohen's formula of the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS Version. 18).

Results of the study:

Hypothesis (1)

To validate the first hypothesis of the study which states that "There would be a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the treatment group

in the pre and post writing skill test favouring the post-test scores", one sample *t*-test was used to compare the results and find out whether or not there was any significant difference.

Table 1. *t*-values for comparing the mean scores of the treatment group in the pre and post administrations of the writing test.

Group	Number	Mean	S D	T-value	Significance
Treatment (pre)	40	12.78	1.90	169.30	.000
Treatment (post)	40	322.78	12.53		

Table 1. illustrates that there was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the pre and post administrations of the writing test favouring the post-test' scores. The mean scores raised from (12.78) in the pre-administration to (322.78) in the post- administration of the writing test and *t*-value were (169.30). Thus the first hypothesis was accepted.

Hypothesis (2)

To validate the second hypothesis of the study which states that " There would be a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the treatment group in the pre and post attitudes towards writing scale favouring the post-scale scores", one sample *t*-test was used to compare the results and find out whether or not there was any significant difference.

Table 2. *t*-values for comparing the mean scores of the treatment group in the pre and post administrations of the attitudes towards writing scale.

Group	Number	Mean	S D	T-value	Significance
Treatment (pre)	40	8.85	1.78	267.04	.000
Treatment (post)	40	122.75	2.06		

Table 2. clarifies that there was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the treatment group in the pre and post administrations of the attitudes towards writing scale favouring the post-scale's scores. The mean scores raised from (8.85) in the pre- administration to (122.75) in the post- administration of the attitudes towards writing scale and *t*- value were (267.04). Thus the second hypothesis was accepted.

Hypothesis (3)

To validate the third hypothesis of the study which states that "Utilising task-based instruction can develop EFL majors' writing skills", Cohen's formula was used. The results are as follows:

$$\text{Cohen's formula} = \eta^2 = \frac{t^2}{t^2 + df}$$

$$d = ES = 2 \sqrt{\frac{\eta^2}{1 - \eta^2}}$$

Where $\eta^2 = \text{Etasquare}$

t = *t* test value

df = degree of freedom

D = *Es* = effect size

$$\eta^2 = 0.97 \text{ and } d = Es = 11.2$$

Hypothesis (4)

To validate the fourth hypothesis of the study which states that "Utilising task-based instruction can develop EFL majors' attitudes towards writing ", Cohen's formula was used. The results are as follows:

$$\text{Cohen's formula} = \eta^2 = \frac{t^2}{t^2 + df}$$

$$d = ES = 2 \sqrt{\frac{\eta^2}{1 - \eta^2}}$$

Where $\eta^2 = \text{Etasquare}$

t= t test value

df = degree of freedom

D= Es = effect size

$$\eta^2 = 0.99 \text{ and } d = Es = 19.9$$

Discussion:

The results of the study could be clearly explained and discussed in the light of task-based instruction (TBI) capacity for:

1. Developing students' sense of achievement by their actual involvement within the different types of tasks,
2. Developing their sense of satisfaction about their academic performance and achievement level,
3. Developing a host of social skills through the participants' continuous and active cooperation in order to fulfil their tasks effectively,
4. Creating an intimate and informal learning environment which breaks the ice and increases students' familiarity with the target language (EFL),
5. Helping students to overcome their feelings of shyness, hesitations, reluctance, language anxiety, and fear of failure,
6. Improving students' trust and ease when using EFL to express themselves in writing,
7. Improving students' attitudes towards writing in a more natural, spontaneous, and indirect way,
8. Improving students' sense of responsibility by stressing the fact that their performance level is due to their invested effort, and the harder they try, the better and more competent they would be, and
9. Boosting the participants' motivation, enthusiasm and interest.

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