The Use of Six Word-Sentences in Developing College Students' Reading and Writing Skills

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استخدام جمل بست كلمات في تطوير مهارات القراءة و الكتابة لطالبات الكلية

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الملخص

مهارات القراءة هي عتبة اكتساب المعرفة في جميع مناحي الحياة. لكن باستخدام مهارات القراءة لتحسين الكتابة هي أحد الأهداف التي يجب على المدرسين الجامعيين اتباعها . الهدف من هذا البحث هو التحقيق التجريبي في استخدام جملة من ست كلمات بعد كل محاضرة وذلك لتعزيز القراءة والكتابة. من أجل هذا الهدف ، ا فترض أنه لا يوجد فرق ذو دلالة إحصائية بين متوسط الدرجة الطلاب الذين يتعلمون قراءة وكتابة جملة من ستة كلمات وأولئك الذين يتم تدريسهم القراءة بالطريقة التقليدية في التدريس والكتابة. تظهر النتائج أن تحسين إنجاز طلاب الكلية لصالح جملة من ست كلمات من أن المجموعة الضابطة. أخيرًا ، هناك عدد من التوصيات المفيدة بخصوص اللغة الإنجليزية لغة أجنبية الطلاب والمدرسين الجامعيين.

"Six-Word Memoirs is an easy, inspirational entry point for all students."Meg Krause, Riverdale Country School

Abstract

Reading skills are the threshold to gaining knowledge in all walks of life. But using reading skills to enhance writing is one of the aims that university instructors should take into consideration. The aim of this research is to investigate empirically the use of a six -word sentence after each lecture so as to enhance reading as well as writing. For this aim, it is hypothesized that there is no statistically significant difference between the mean score of the students who are taught reading and writing a six –word sentence and those who are taught reading using the traditional method of teaching and writing. The results show that the achievement of the college students has been improved in favour of a six-word sentence than that of the control group. Finally, a number of useful recommendations concerning EFL students, university instructors have been presented.

Key words: College students, six –word sentences, reading and writing

Section One. Introduction

1.1 Problem of the Study

The reading skill is one of the four important language skills, which are listening, speaking, and writing. Richards (2015: 443) states that in spite of its importance, "many students still read in English with difficulty –and may also experience difficulty in reading in their mother tongue –due to the inadequate instruction in state schools." Furthermore, they cannot state the main idea in a single sentence. Reading is the sacred avenue to all types of knowledge. This paper takes as its central example the use of six-word sentence to help EFL learners summarise the main idea of any reading pieces into six- meaningful word sentences to help them engage in the creative act of writing. Weigle 2014: 226 (cited in Celce-Murcia et.al.) concentrates on the connection between reading and writing, and she thinks that connection goes back to recent years, as the teacher teaches reading without concentrating on the other skill. Nowadays, the concentration on both skills is the ultimate goal of teaching these two skills. Weigle (p.227) further adds that "many students have difficulty with sentence simplification and phrasing without changing the author's original intent." Hence, the researcher, from her experience of more than twenty-five years of teaching reading besides other subjects, comes up with the idea of merging reading and writing together, but with six- word sentences. The researcher thinks that the six- word sentences are very important as it helps students express themselves in six condensed words. It is universally acknowledged that all the people, regardless of their knowledge of language, may stare for minutes or hours at their blank sheet of paper as writing forms a great challenge to all. The researcher experienced that fear and abhorrence of writing that every student passes through.

1.2 Aim of the Study

This study aims to investigate empirically the use of six -word sentences by EFL first–year students after each lecture so as to enhance reading as well as writing.

1.3 The Value of the study

The findings of the study are expected to be of value because of its attempt to investigate the use of six-word sentences in summarising the main idea. Besides, this research is valuable to those who profess an interest in reading and writing. Furthermore, the results can create an awareness of both the university instructors as well as students of the two skills, i.e., reading and writing.

1.4 Limits of the Study

The present study is limited to the first- year EFL students in the College of Education for Women at the University of Baghdad, Iraq during the academic year 2018-2019.

Section Two: Review of Literature

There is a growing body of literature on reading and writing skills, which forms an integral part of pedagogy. Much of it concentrates on teaching reading and writing skills separately (Weir et al.,2009). Reading and writing are essential skills for today's EFL learners' lives. Merging reading and writing together after the students read the passages helps a lot in practicing their writing about the passage and the main idea in particular. "Many … learners … feel they have to know all the words in a text in order to understand it, rely heavily on the dictionary, are unable to transfer positive L1 reading strategies or positive feelings about translation, and attribute their difficulties to a lack of English proficiency" (Auerbach and Paxton(1997:238-9). The students read to gain information, and then they write whatever they understand from reading afterwards. Weigle (2014: 228, cited in Celce- Murcia, et. al.,) states that there are three main considerations in designing a writing curriculum: "the written product, the writing process, and tailoring writing to a specific audience and purpose." These three considerations help the learner enjoy writing when they know their specific product of writing is going to be read by a specific audience.

A background about the origin of six –word sentences should be given, before embarking on the experiment. The six –word story was originated by the well- known American author Ernest Hemingway, who was asked to write a six-word story and it was:

"For sale: baby shoes, never worn."

This six-word story was written out of a bet that he cleverly succeeded in winning.

The rationale for integrating the skills is stated by National Academies Press (2012:15) by using approaches that focus on the relationship between reading and writing. Both reading and writing skills share similar insights and cognitive processes that lead to insight in one another.

In a study conducted by Abu Rass (2001), who designed an integrated reading and writing course for first –year Arab EFL students at Beit Berl College. The objective of the course is to help the students write more freely while introducing them to literature that represents simple stories from different countries, like Korea, Japan, and Europe. They were asked to recall events and predict others, in addition to answering questions about the characters.

As for writing requirements, reading logs and worksheets were distributed to students to compose their extensive answers on paper. Error analysis was done by typing the mistakes on transparencies or blackboards. The students were asked to write multiple drafts, the final one was evaluated as "good +", "good ", and "fairly good", and no marks were given, but the grades were assigned to the 10 written essays, the students' portfolios, and 30 percent was assigned to the journals and filling in the worksheets.

It can be seen the afore-mentioned study did not use six -word sentences, but an ordinary way of writing a composition out of their reading. So, the present study bridge the gap knowledge.in

Section Three: Methodology

3.1 The Design of the Study

To fulfil the aim of the study, the researcher has chosen the "Nonrandomized Control-Group Pre-Post-test Design" in which the two groups were taught the three phases of reading. Both were undergone the pre-test, but the experimental group and the control group were exposed to the post test after it was taught and introduced to the technique of six-word sentence, whereas the control group was not exposed to the afore-mentioned technique.

3.2 Population of the study

The total population of the present research is 188 EFL first -year college students the Department of English. The initial size of each of the three classes is 56, 65, and 67 (See Table 1). Since the aim of the study is to investigate empirically the use of a six -word sentences after each lecture so as to enhance reading as well as writing, four sections were intentionally and randomly chosen.

Table 1 The Study sample

Groups	The Number of the Whole Students	The number of the Involved Students
Experimental A&B	65	40
Control C&D	**67**	40
Pilot Study E&F	56	56

Total	188	136

3.3 A Sample of the Study

Two sections of the first- year undergraduate students at the University of Baghdad are randomly chosen to enrol in both the experimental and control groups. The administration of the Department of English has purposefully combined them. As every two sections are merged together, they are intentionally put by the administration of the Department of English. The final size of the sample is 80 after excluding 25 from sections A&B and 27 from sections for various reasons like failing to attend the classroom, moving into another department, or postponing the academic year.

3.4 Validity of the Test

Mousavi (2012: 869) defines a valid test as "… the extent that it measures what it measures what it is supposed to measure or can be used for the purposes for which it is intended." Validity is ensured by giving the test to some jury members.*

3.5 The Material

In order to break this ice, the researcher used the six- word sentences as a way of giving a summary of what they read. In two successive lectures, she showed the experimental group the way of writing six words. Besides, on her computer, she showed them several sentences that the researcher did or took from the net two days before the experiment. The sentences are in Appendix1.Then, she told them that the internet has many six-word sentences though some of them are quotes. She showed them the difference between six-word sentences and a quotation. She told them that these six words should be full of meaning.

In order to achieve the aim of the research, the researcher selects two groups, the first of which is the control group, and the second is the experimental one. The first group is taught reading in the traditional way, whereas the experimental group is taught reading by following Williams's three phases of teaching reading comprehension. Williams (1987) gives three phases – which he calls the pre-reading phase, the reading phase, and the post-reading phase - for teaching reading comprehension.

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3.6 Pre-reading Phase

Richards (2015: 459) thinks that pre-reading activities supply the learners with background knowledge and activate schemata as they give a purpose for reading. Grandall 1995 (Cited in Richards 2015: 459) suggests activities like discussion questions, prewriting activities, brainstorming, semantic mapping and free writing. In pre- reading, teachers can help to do some reading –related preparation, such as listing and explaining words, phrases and sentence patterns in the reading patterns (Yu-hui et.al 2010: 62) .

Of these, the most important for building background knowledge is the first, pre-reading phase wherein the instructor has the opportunity to use pictures, slides, movies, games and other such devices to activate and build upon the students' schemata. In this phase, students might also be asked to write about their knowledge of the subject and, after writing, discuss their knowledge with other students.

Hence, in the pre- reading phase, the researcher asked the students to read silently and then answer the activities that are mentioned in their textbook, entitled **Select Readings** by Lee and Gundersen (2011). These activities are like *connect with the topic*, *pair work* and *previewing chart*.
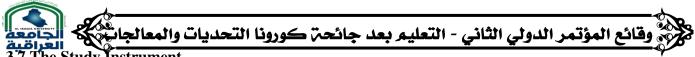
Brainstorming and discussion are included in these activities. The researcher asked the students about their favourite colour, then she asked them to give her reasons for that. This triggered new ideas, and helped build background knowledge. She tried to introduce the six-word sentences.

While Reading Phase

In the second phase, while reading, the students reason about the subject. In this way, they continue to build upon their own existing schema. Each time they read about the same subject; their knowledge of the subject becomes vast. The students were asked to read the passage and answer the questions in it. that were related to it. They continued to build upon their own existing schema.

The Post –Reading Phase

Through the activities of the post-reading phase, the students integrate this background into a new schema structure. Hence, the students are ready to write a six-word sentence about the passage that they read and understood.

3.7 The Study Instrument

To achieve the aim of the study, the following instruments are used:

1. Pre-post-tests were given to both control and experimental groups;
2. The instructional program is based on Williams's three phases of teaching reading comprehension;
3. In order to see the effect of applying the six-word story, the students are asked to answer the W/h questions about the main idea that are given to both groups.

3.8 The Administration of the Test

Before administering the test, the researcher showed the experimental group some six –word sentences and asked them to decipher the meaning of each (See Appendix 1). Each of these sentences gives the student a story that is explained with the help of the students the meaning of each sentence and the context in which it is uttered.

The test was prepared by the researcher, after administering the program, which lasted for five weeks, two hours per week. The test consists of an unseen passage taken from a different textbook from the studied one. The question sheet consists of five questions, including the question about the main idea. The procedure is that the students read the comprehension passage from their textbook entitled "Select Readings" and then, before the end of the lecture, they are requested to answer a question like that mentioned in Appendix II:

4. Section Four: Results and Discussions

4.1 Data Analysis

As Table 2 shows, the results indicate the calculated t- test value (3.47), which is higher than the tabulated one which is (2.00). Thus, it can be stated that there are statistically significant differences between the experimental group and the control one. Accordingly, it indicates that those students who were trained to write a six-word story in the experimental group are better than those in the control group who know nothing about how to write them. Therefore, the aim of the study is achieved when it empirically investigates the six-word sentences written by EFL first –year students after each lecture so as to enhance reading as well as writing.

Table 2 T-Test Value of experimental and control groups in the overall score

Group	No. Students	Mean	SD	T-Test		The level of Significance	A degree of Freedom
				Computed	Tabulated		
Control	40	21.55	4.15	3.47	2.000	0.05	8
Experimental	40	24.42	3.18				

4.2 Discussion

Due to the results of the statistical analysis of the study, it was found that the EFL students significantly improved in writing after using six-word sentences. Furthermore, they have a positive attitude towards writing six –word sentence. They show remarkable progress in both reading and writing skills compared to the control group.

5. Conclusions

According to the results obtained, the following conclusions are put forward:

1. Six –word sentences are very important in teaching the writing skill of stating the main idea.
2. The phases of pre-reading, during reading, and post-reading are very important in teaching the skills of reading.
3. The employment of six –word sentences triggers students' minds to write sentences that are short at their own time effectively.
4. A positive attitude is spread among the experimental group as they feel that they can depend on themselves when writing the main idea of the passage.
5. The findings show that EFL students are more likely to orient and engage in new teaching methods that arouse fun and enjoyment in them.
6. The researcher determines by examining their responses that EFL learners' levels of writing ability demonstrate that they are able to produce sentences that narrate a story that piques and maintains the audience's interest.

APPENDIX I

Here are some sentences which are taken from the u-tube (Lion of Judah):

1. I don't want to be alone.

2. Your position is no longer wanted.
3. There's been a terrible accident
4. I just want to be friends.
5. The cancer isn't responding to treatment.
6. Here's a rose off the casket.
7. You are not able to conceive.
8. Love is hard, life is easy. (mine)
9. God will not waste your pain.
10. You will be comforted at last. (Mine)

Appendix II

1. Write a six-word sentence about the favourite colour from the passage that you have just read.
2. Write a six-word sentence about your daily routine.
   3. Write a six-word sentence about yourself

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