TEACHING WRITING TO CHILDREN: PRODUCT AND PROCESS APPROACH, A DUAL METHOD

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Abstract

Children entering primary school level have problems in Spanish writing and even more in English writing because they do not know the language form and the process of writing. That lack of knowledge affects children's learning writing skill. Academic literature suggests that children must develop specific components to start writing: linguistic knowledge, critical thinking, and the process of writing to be successful in writing their thoughts. However, English at schools is not perceived as important as it should be because English classes are thought by other teachers from different subjects, who often lack teaching capacity to apply many approaches to develop English writing skill.

The main aim of this paper was to introduce a teaching dual method (the Product and Process approaches) to probe the influence to enhance writing skill in children at Ana Páez Educative Unit. Action research was implemented during the academic term October 2018- March 2019 with 37 participants. Teachers’ observation through an anecdotal note was used to observe students’ written compositions focusing on six components: content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, spelling and punctuation. The proposed method consisted of teaching children vocabulary, grammar, punctuation and organization through a model text. First, the teacher made children read and highlighted vocabulary and grammar structures to get familiarized with the linguistic knowledge. Then, the teacher made children practice using controlled writing activity. Later, the teacher used pictures or flashcards according to the topic to help children generate ideas and wrote into a brainstorm. Then, the teacher asked children to use those ideas to write similar sentences to the modeling text. After that, the teacher asked students to organize the information by analyzing the model and writing the first draft. During the first draft, the teacher had to provide feedback to help children be aware of their own errors. Finally, the teacher made a class presentation to publish children’s writings. The research developed three phases: the diagnosis phase, the implementation phase, and the evaluation phase. The study revealed that children’s written compositions improved after applying the product and process approach to teach writing skill. The product approach helped children to acquire the language by modeling text, controlled writing and guided writing activities. This approach contributed to learning linguistic knowledge: grammar, spelling, vocabulary, and punctuation. Then, the process approach stages allowed children to analyze the sequence of ideas using the modeling text. It made children be aware of the importance to write sequence information. Feedback also helped children improve their writing skill. As a conclusion, we considered that a balanced integration of product approach and process approach allowed children to enhance writing skills. Therefore, we suggest that English teachers can apply this dual method to give children the opportunity to acquire the language and develop their writing skill.

Keywords: Product approach, writing process approach, linguistic knowledge, writing skill.

1 INTRODUCTION

English writing in children is considered as a challenging skill to develop because they need to have background knowledge of L2 language to produce either writing messages or oral information. So, children need to learn about vocabulary and how language is formed to use language adequately. That is why Hasan and Akhand (2010); Tangpermpoon (2008) suggest applying the product and process approach to teaching writing with weak students to help them acquire the language and be ready to use it. Kellog (2008); Harizaj (2011) states that writing is an activity that implies not just language and memory but also thinking ability, so we as researchers decided to apply the integration of the product and process approach to develop both language and the ability to think and be creative when writing. We consider that effective writing skill is vital to teaching in schools because it will help children to develop and expand better opportunities to work through their life.

Hammer (2001) states writing is a useful alternative to make children practice language and consolidate what they are learning. Additionally, some authors mention that writing as visual
intelligence helps people to learn quickly because they can see and remember information. Nevertheless, Writing in schools is the least important skill because teachers perceive writing as writing isolated sentences or complete exercises or just to develop grammar rules but not how to organize ideas and write what children’s think in paragraphs.

In this context, children from Ecuador at Ana Paez Educative Unit have a lot of problems in writing in their mother tongue and even more in English because they are not exposed to writing. They cannot write spontaneously and coherence. They write like the way they speak without taking into account some forms of writing. They cannot organize their ideas and write words in Spanish and English. It is because there is a lack of attention to improving English writing skill at Ana Páez Educative Unit. Thus teachers are not trained to develop writing skill using different approaches. Therefore, teachers provide little time to develop writing skill. They prefer developing speaking to writing, and when they decide to do writing, they just make students to complete vocabulary exercises and sentences. Even though teachers emphasize practicing some vocabulary, children are not familiarized with correct spelling and use either in speaking or writing because they do not practice writing in context so that children cannot use them effectively in writing.

Many authors believe that writing is not well thought in schools because it is understood that learning how to write is just to know about the language. This skill requires many sub-skills which contribute to having a good writing skill. Kellog (2008); Harizaj (2011) states that writing is an activity that implies not just language and memory but also thinking ability. Belly and Burnbay (cited in Ghufron (2008) state that writing implies a number of factors to write well such as content, spelling, grammar, punctuation cohesion and coherence. So writing is not simply to write sentences, it is how to organize our thinking into writing.

Huete & Peréz (2003) states that children learn English having fun, so it is necessary to apply adequate methods, appropriate activities and tasks according to children’s needs so that they can learn new concepts (p. 16). Indeed, children at a very early age learn concepts quickly by imitating and adapting information. It contributes to acquiring language naturally as they learn the native language. Hasan & Akhand (2010) states that it is necessary to give input to students at the early age so they can be sure to understand how language is formed and to learn how to produce and use it in order to write later their own texts. Therefore, the EFL curriculum establishes that students need to have two levels of learning. The first one is initial literacy, which begins with reading or modelling. (Hammer, 2001) states that reading or modelling help students to acquire the language in terms of grammar, spelling, vocabulary, and punctuation. However, Oczkus (2007) contends, “Modelling writing alone is not sufficient to produce effective writers; it also needs to generate ideas and organize them” (p.27).

In this context, Lee & Troia (2014-2018); Ciccheria, M. (2016) state that children must learn specific skills to start writing. They are: reading through modeling to learn vocabulary, sentence construction, grammar in context, spelling, punctuation, genre and content knowledge to know the purpose of the writing and the style of each genre and planning, editing and revising to write their ideas. It means that those skills are integrated into the product and the process approach. That is why it is advisable for teachers to understand and use the product approach, the process approach or a balanced approach to enhance writing skill in children because they will give children a vision of what to do in the writing activity. Something interesting that teachers must know is that imitation, adapting and creating are principles of how children learn a language according to Pie (2008).

Taking into account all this reference about how children learn, we have done a critical analysis of the approaches to be used to develop writing skill in children. At first, we thought that the dual method (process and product approach) will contribute to developing children writing skill, but it did not work because children do not have knowledge of vocabulary, grammar to start developing ideas about the topic or even write sentences because of the lack of linguistic competences they have. They have a low level of English which was an obstacle to applying the dual method thought at first. Then, we re-organized the methods and we integrated the product and process approach to see the results. See the following diagram.
Diagram 1. Integrated Product approach and Process approach.

1 Modeling: Give children a model about the genre teachers want them to learn so that they can read and highlighted vocabulary, structures, spelling and punctuation to familiarize. Make children also be aware what kind of information they need to write according to the genre. It can be a story, letter, or summary.

2 Controlled writing: At this stage, children must practice the highlighted information done previously with activities that required completion to write examples as in the reading text. Teach just what children are going to use in their writings.

3 Planning: Use pictures according to the topic to help students generate ideas so they can know what to write. It is useful that you can write then using a brainstorm, then discuss with children the order of the ideas, and organize them to have the important information to be ready to write.

4 Guided writing: Make children to imitate the model but writing sentences using the ideas provided previously with grammar, vocabulary thought in the controlling writing.

5 Drafting: Make children write their sentences into a paragraph taking into account the model provided, but with their own ideas. Here, it is vital that teachers provide feedback so children can correct learned from mistakes and be aware of specific problems.

6 Revising: Provide children teacher´s feedback so that they can rewrite again to polish the final text.

7 Publishing: Use a bulletin board to publish children´s writings.

This diagram summarizes the positive aspects of each approach and makes us reflect how to use the steps of the product and process integrated to enhancing writing skill in children. Consequently, the aim of this study was to probe the influence of using the Product and the Process approach as a dual-method to enhance writing skill in children from the fifth level of Basic General Education at Ana Páez Educativa Unit. This research aimed to answer the following theory: whether or not the integration of the product approach and the process approach contributes to enhancing the main elements of writing: content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation.

2 METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out to introduce a teaching dual method (the Product and the Process approaches) to probe the influence in writing skill in children at Ana Páez Educativa Unit. We used action research to solve the problem. It lasted for two months, one hour each week. There were 37 participants between 10 to 11 years old, 9 males and 2 females. The majority of the children had a low level of English and it made us take a long time to see better results. It was applied a teachers’
observation as a data collection method to see the problems, the progress, and the results, which were registered in an anecdotal note (See annex 1); the principal components observed were: content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation.

The research process was developed in 8 writing sessions. The first two sessions were used to identify difficulties children had in their paragraphs using a pretest. Then, it was implemented the approaches— as a dual method in the next four sessions and the final two sessions helped at investigating whether or not this integration helps students to improve their writing paragraphs, mainly in the six components: content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, spelling and punctuation using a postest. We used a rubric to check a student’s writing and check the results.

3 RESULTS

The results showed that the pedagogical implementation of the product approach and the process approach contributed to improving children’s writing paragraphs in the components: ideas, organization, grammar, spelling, punctuation and vocabulary. The improvement was more in organization and grammar because they had models to follow, so it indicated that children need both approaches to develop writing skill. Therefore, the results let us to probe that the theory product and process approach as a dual method helped children to acquire language first and then develop writing skill. The following table shows the results.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics Results of Pretest and Postest in Children’s writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing criteria</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Grammar</th>
<th>Spelling</th>
<th>Punctuation</th>
<th>Vocabulary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average score in the</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test (over 5 points)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average score in the</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test (over 5 points)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvement</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>1.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Vafeidou (2011); Sakoda (2014); Ghufron (2018) states that it is useful to start applying the product approach when the students have a low level of English and low self-esteem. It provides students to learn the language and through the models of genres starts reflecting the process approach. The model guides students in organization and teachers must apply feedback and drafting to polish writing. Even though the hours used to apply the dual method were not enough in the school, we got good results because each stage helped to fortify vocabulary, grammar, spelling, punctuation, and organization of the ideas. It is in line with what Ghufron (2008) states that writing requires many sub-skills to provide a good quality text. At the beginning of this method, the teachers play an important role to make students get familiarized with the language features by giving the model text and by explaining the related grammar and vocabulary. Once students had learned about grammar, structures, and vocabulary, they were ready to practice the language by controlling and guided writing. Even these stages are not so challenging for children, they are really helpful to practice and consolidate their knowledge of the language. This is the essence of the product approach, focusing on language form to provide children the opportunity to produce free writing followed by the process approach. It is line with what Ghufron (2018) states linguistic form is necessary to produce writing language.

The Wring process approach contributes to being aware of the organization of the ideas presented in the model. It let students be sure about what they are going to write. An important element is a feedback because it helps teachers to improve children’s writing. Of course, because of the numbers of students, it is difficult to do individual feedback. Instead, we decided to do general feedback with all the mistakes made by the children. It is quite useful because children realize their errors and correct them. Hattie and Timperley (2007) state that feedback is effective in writing because it provides learning.

Applying the product and the process approach requires time to develop writing because both contain specific stages that provide practice to produce writing. It is supported by Badger and White (2000). Furthermore, it is a process that requires enough hours to learn writing and to provide the importance to learn the language, otherwise, the learning won’t be successful.
To sum up, there is a clear connection between the product and the process approach in writing. Both contribute to developing writing and the implementation of teaching approaches depends on children’s level, motivation, and needs. Sun & Feng (2009) mention that just the product approach or process approach are not enough to develop writing skill quality. It is always necessary to integrate them according to children’s needs to have better results. Vafeidou (2011); Sakoda (2014); Ghufron (2018) states that it is useful to start applying the product approach when the students have a low level of English and low self-esteem. It provides students to learn the language and through the models of genres starts reflecting the process approach. The model guides students in organization and teachers must apply feedback and drafting to polish writing. Even though the hours used to apply the dual method were not enough in the school, we got good results because each stage helped to fortify vocabulary, grammar, spelling, punctuation, and organization of the ideas. It is in line with what Ghufron (2008) states that writing requires many sub-skills to provide a good quality text. At the beginning of this method, the teachers play an important role to make students get familiarized with the language features by giving the model text and by explaining the related grammar and vocabulary. Once students had learned about grammar, structures, and vocabulary, they were ready to practice the language by controlling and guided writing. Even these stages are not so challenging for children, they are really helpful to practice and consolidate their knowledge of the language. This is the essence of the product approach, focusing on language form to provide children the opportunity to produce free writing followed by the process approach. It is line with what Ghufron (2018) states linguistic form is necessary to produce writing language.

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4 CONCLUSIONS

The integration of the product approach and the process approach framework contributed to developing writing skill in children with a lower level of English. It allowed children to acquire the language as grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation, and then to be ready to produce organize and coherence writing even they were the smallest piece of writing. Giving student’s templates of short paragraphs according to what they were learning let children be motivated and sure to start writing because they felt they made progress. In fact, it is a long process that children must learn to do and practice in the classroom, otherwise, it will be a waste of time. Another important issue that teachers must consider is that they must be well-prepared to use the dual-method to provide children good resources to practice the language and guide them in writing. This finding supports the theory of Vafeidou (2011); Sakoda (2014). “The product approach is ideal to use first with young learners because of the small amount of language they have at their disposal. It helps them to learn structure features and then make young learners be aware and learn the process of writing through the different genres of model text.

Other researchers can use these results as a reference to do new implementations in teaching children’s how to write since there is not a lot of research on children’s writing. This research encourages other researchers to apply different combinations of approaches to see benefits in children’s writing.

REFERENCES


