

Raising Students' Motivation for Writing: Blending some TESOL Theories and Applying to the Writing Class

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Abstract

When you learn English, there are four skills: reading, listening, speaking, and writing. It is known as listening and reading skills will be the input skills, then, speaking and writing skills will be the output English skills. However, many university students might have some problems on output skills, especially writing skills because they believe that their motivation for writing is very low.

In this study, I will try to blend some TESOL^{*2} theories, that is 1) the extensive reading technique and 2) task-based strategy theory to the writing class. I realized when students have really high motivation on doing a lot of activities, then, their writing ability could improve.

1. Introduction

When your students write about something in English, you think that they are anxious about writing, especially if they are not an English speaker. Many university students in Japan might have the same anxieties that they do not write something in English. This kind of anxiety might be caused by other reasons such as your classes are very large, or teaching abilities are very low, or students' abilities are very low.

In this case study, I would like to consider these problems from blending TESOL theories and apply to my class, then I would like to raise students' motivation for writing.

2. Previous Studies

Before doing the research, I will introduce some of the TESOL theories. Casanave (2004) mentioned that 'writing is a social practice requiring deep engagement with readings and with other writers' (p19). That means, even in the writing class, reading something from the different writers is important because they will give your students many ideas and also they will give them a lot of good writing styles and useful sentences which must be some help for your students.

One of the reading technique, 'extensive reading' which is a rapid reading in short, is cited from Palmer by Day and Bamford (1998), then they introduced this as "a reader's attention should be on the meaning, not the language, of the text" (p5). Catching meanings from reading stories is also important to summarize and express the opinions in the writing. Moreover, Ellis (2003) asserted that "there is a clear psycholinguistic rationale for choosing 'task' as the basis for language pedagogy" (p320). That means, task-based strategy will be helpful for students to joining in writing as their activities. If I apply these theories to the class, I will suppose to think that my students' motivation will rise and their writing ability will improve.

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^{*2} TESOL is abbreviated from "teaching English as a second language"

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3. Methodology

In this case study, I used one of the university students' classes as data. There was time restriction that there were 12 classes in one semester, and I have 90 minutes for each class. Moreover, students' English abilities are mostly high beginner level.

I used these following methods to check some TESOL concepts from the previous studies and applying to the class: 1) checking the students' levels in the first class. I found that most students were not able to write more than two sentences in 10 minutes. Next, 2) In every class, students read short stories as a kind of extensive reading^{*3} for their model writing. Then, 3) I gave them the small tasks such as to write similar sentences using the key words, to answer questions about their topics, and to work in pairs or groups discussing or exchanging their ideas. Finally, 4) students wrote the 1st essay, and revise it. I gave them a chance to practice these four steps four times in one semester with different topics^{*4}. The purpose of the activity is to keep their concentration on writing without boring. As a part of the final in-class exam, I chose one of the topics that they did, then I examined them in the point of vocabularies, phrases, grammar, and expressing their opinions.

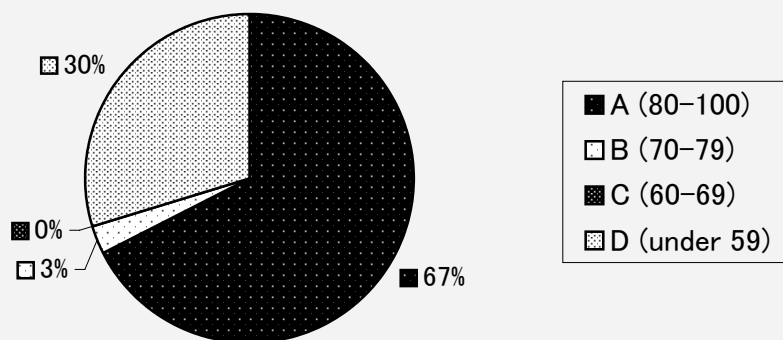
4. Result

After practicing the small tasks, students were able to gain high scores on the final exam in the writing section. Table 1 and Figure 1 show the ratio of students' writing scores.

Table 1: The ratio of students' writing scores

	number (%)
A (80-100)	25(67%)
B (70-79)	1(3%)
C (60-69)	0(0%)
D (under 59)	11(30%)
	37(100%)

Figure 1: The ratio of students' writing scores



^{*3} Originally, the extensive readings are decided by students, however, it is hard to control the class, therefore, I gave them some short stories from their textbook as a kind of extensive reading.

^{*4} Topics were from students' daily basis such as "your special places", "who are you?", "your ideal partner" and so on.

Table 1 and Figure 1 shows that 67% of students were able to get more than 80 points on the final exam (the total point is 100). I would like to mention that at the beginning of the semester, only three or four students could write more than three sentences as a writing task. After doing above activities as practicing writings, most students' could write more than 10 sentences. The ratio also shows that 30% of students made under 59 points, which means, they still have grammar misunderstanding, or they could not write essays, or they might defeated by the limitation of time.

5. Discussion

There are many writing techniques such as brain storming, making lists, drawing maps and free writing. However, in the high beginning class, I found that one of the most effective ways for writing was getting used to writing sentences using the small tasks such as reading stories as a model writing, writing short sentences, discussing the ideas with partners and in groups. When students were involved in these practices seriously, then they could complete all activities somehow. When they became getting interested in writing, their writing ability would increase. In addition, motivation for studying English is risen. I could also feel students' positive energy, and the activity was useful. In short, practice develops student English fluency. However, if students do not participate in such practices, or if they lack concentration, or if they are not just interested in activities, their motivation will decrease, then their writing ability do not improve. Therefore, I have to consider how to raise students' motivation when they use tasks as their activities.

6. Concluding Remarks

This study was a small case study, so we realized some unsolved problems. We have to collect more empirical data, then, we should also consider students who abandoned themselves, and also we have to know how to treat students after getting to the different levels such as inter-mediate and advanced levels. Moreover, at the beginner level, some students memorized all sentences as a preparation for the final exam. Such problems will remain as further studies.

<References>

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