WRITING PEDAGOGIES AT UNIVERSITY AND THEIR IMPACT ON FIRST YEAR EFL STUDENTS’ PROFICIENCY AND WRITING ABILITY

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ABSTRACT

The majority of new Baccalaureate holders enrolled in the Department of English at Tlemcen University present serious deficiencies in FL2 writing at both linguistic and discourse levels, their level of writing competency lower than expected despite a long formal exposure to English learning prior to university entrance, seven years or even more. In order to have a better understanding of the way these learners proceed as they embark in a writing task, the major aim of the present research is to investigate these learners’ writing proficiency, pointing out the difficulties encountered in FL2 writing through an exploration of the writing pedagogies employed at first-year university level. For this purpose, an investigative study is undertaken through classroom-action research, making use of triangulation tools: teacher classroom observation, learners’ task production (pre and post-intervention phase tests), and questionnaires (pre and post-intervention phase questionnaires) addressed to first-year EFL university learners. The study involves a group of thirty Algerian EFL first-year LMD students at the University of Tlemcen. The results brought by this action-research show that besides pre-education which fails to prepare learners to cope with university requirements, in the present teaching setting the prevailing methodology is still language-based and accuracy-oriented. While the main concern is the final product, the process is totally inexistent. Giving priority to language mastery and grammatical accuracy over the development of the writing process proves totally inefficient. First-year learners display an obvious inability to make a balance between accuracy and fluency and appear to be primarily concerned with sentence-level production, such inability in writing in the target language being in no case solved by mere acquisition of linguistic competence. The study also shows the positive impact of explicit teaching of the specific composing resources and the use of the writing process on learners’ performance. The conclusion that can be drawn from this research is that a pedagogic change in terms of a different approach and techniques in addition to a reasoned eclecticism for achieving effective writing is needed. This study then attempts to suggest ways that can contribute to the enhancement of entrant students’ writing proficiency level, hoping to help eradicate or at least lessen some of the existing problems and bring about positive change at university level.
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