

Developing Writing Abilities in L2: A Review

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Abstract: Writing is an essential component of language learning, and it provides learners with an opportunity to practice their language skills in a structured learning setting. Writing is a challenging aspect of language learning because learners need to master linguistic components of the target language and discourse community knowledge. It is a complex process that entails creating and structuring ideas and transforming them into cohesive compositions which are understandable and readable. Also, it requires a combination of skills, including critical thinking, language proficiency, and creativity to produce effective written communication. This study attempts to explore the role of developing L2 writing on language learning.

Keywords: L2 Writing, Grammar, Vocabulary, Critical Thinking, Proficiency

1. Introduction

Writing is “a complex cognitive and social activity and . . . the mental processes involved as well as the contextual knowledge bases that must be tapped are enormous” (Beaufort, 2007, p. 24 6). An ample amount of research was conducted on the development of writing skills due to its positive effects on language learning. The writing process has been defined as “the cognitive activities a writer engages in to facilitate the generation of ideas from the brain, the transfer of these ideas onto paper, and the subsequent improvement of these ideas...though composing processes are mental activities and hence seen, these cognitive operations can be inferred through the analysis of writing behaviours” (Heuring, 1985, cited in Alhaysony, 2008, p. 9). Writing is a challenging aspect of language learning because learners need to master linguistic components of the target language and discourse community knowledge. Learners’ discourse community knowledge includes subject matter knowledge, genre knowledge, procedural knowledge, and rhetorical knowledge (Beaufort, 2007). In order to express ideas through words and perform written communication effectively, writing has been regarded as an important skill in language learning (Yucedal, Abdulrahman, & Kara, 2022). Writing skills requires comprehension of cognitive, sociocultural, and linguistic competencies (Ellis, 2015). Writing helps language learners learn. It not only enables learners to foster grammatical knowledge but also word knowledge. In addition, writing is a good opportunity for learners to be involved with the language.

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2. Literature Review

Omaggio Hadley (2001) described the process of learning as a “continuum of activities that range from the more mechanical or formal aspects of ‘writing down’ on the one end to the more complex act of composing on the other” (p. 281). Simply put, writing is first understanding the functions of language and then engaging in producing communication. In other words, learners develop their skills through comprehension and apply these skills for production communication and expression. Rao (2007) argues that writing has two purposes “On the one hand, [writing] stimulates thinking, compels students to concentrate and organize their ideas, and cultivates their ability to summarize, analyze, and criticize. On the other hand, it reinforces learning in, thinking in, and reflecting on the English language” (p. 100). Writing is understanding the message through revising and thinking and then expressing ideas according to suitable figures (Chicho & Zrary, 2022).

Writing cannot be "simply a direct production of what the brain knows or can do at a particular moment" (Smith, 1989, p. 33), but it includes "an expense of effort disproportionate to the actual results" (Widdowson, 1983, p.34). Language learners need to control many variables for a writing activity. Hedge (1988) describes the writing process as "the way in which a writer puts together the piece of the text, developing ideas through sentences and paragraphs within an overall structure" (p. 89). It is apparent that writing is a complex task that requires learners to follow some processes. For instance, writing is a very complex process that entails creating and structuring ideas and transforming them into cohesive compositions which are understandable and readable. It requires a combination of skills, including critical thinking, language proficiency, and creativity to produce effective written communication. Writing is an essential component of language learning, and it provides learners with an opportunity to practice their language skills in a structured learning setting.

Learners stand for a better chance of improving their overall language proficiency by means of writing, especially in areas such as grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure, and spelling. Tickoo (2003) argues that “writing makes heavier demands on vocabulary than does speaking...because effective writing requires a far larger number of words” (p.58). It goes without saying that writing skills and vocabulary knowledge are closely interconnected. While a good vocabulary knowledge enables language learners to express their ideas more precisely, good writing skills help learners develop their vocabulary knowledge. Little knowledge of vocabulary does not allow learners to convey their messages effectively (Mart, 2012). As learners search for appropriate words to express their ideas while writing, they develop their vocabulary knowledge. Needless to say, vocabulary and grammar knowledge are essential for the desired outcomes in language proficiency development (Mart, 2021). Writing in the target language entails “linguistic knowledge and the vocabulary choices, syntactic patterns, and cohesive devices that comprise the essential building blocks of texts” (Hyland, 2003, p.3). The more learner has a good command of grammar and vocabulary knowledge, the better performances can be made. Linguistic quality can be an indicative of writing quality. Several studies investigated the link between them and found that linguistic knowledge contributes to writing quality (e.g., Yoon, 2017; Ellis & Yuan, 2004).

One of the significant benefits of writing in language learning is that it enhances learners' accuracy and fluency. Writing entails paying attention to grammar, spelling, and punctuation, which can help them identify and correct errors in their writing. This, in turn, helps learners to communicate more effectively

and confidently in the target language. Writing is a good opportunity for learners to practice functions of the target language. This practice helps them promote their effective communication. Learners are encouraged to communicate their ideas clearly and concisely. In addition, creative expression is also of importance while writing. Beaufort (2007) argues that writing is learned because it is an act of discovering and constructing views.

Another advantage of writing is that it promotes critical thinking and creativity. Writing is an activity that requires learners to organize their ideas and arguments logically, which can help them to think critically and develop their analytical skills. Additionally, writing can be an outlet for learners to express their creativity and imagination. Learners can experiment with different writing styles and techniques, which can help them to develop their own unique voice in the target language. Critical thinking is defined as “a disciplined, self-directed thinking which exemplifies the perfections of thinking appropriate to a particular mode or domain of thought” (Paul, 1990, p. 9). Critical thinking is the ability of analyzing a text through thoughtful decisions. The ability of critical thinking allows learners to think and explore several ways of understanding. Critical thinking involves gathering, evaluating and thinking carefully about information and make a right decision. Learners by means of critical thinking evaluate a text and ponder over it and then through making decisions perform writing.

Reading widely is a good way of improving L2 writing. Learners can enhance their linguistic knowledge with the help of reading. Reading will show good writing samples to learners. Examining them carefully can motivate learners to produce high quality writings. Furthermore, learners need to think and focus how to express their ideas clearly. Critical thinking and strategic thinking are useful components that will enable learners to think about the possible steps to take before writing. For instance, careful choice of words will greatly help learners write effectively. Also, by practicing learners can create good writings.

3. Conclusion

Writing is a combination of linguistic qualities with expressing ideas and thoughts clearly. Proficiency in the target language is an essential requirement for the development of writing skills. Language proficiency entails appropriate use of words and expressions about a given task. Writing is an essential component of language learning. It promotes accuracy and fluency, critical thinking and creativity, effective communication, and academic and professional success.

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