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Survey of Techniques for Teaching Writing in Primary and Secondary School

Dr Ting Su Hie
Centre for Language Studies
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak
94300 Kota Samarahan
Sarawak

Mahanita Mahadhir
Education Faculty
Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Shah Alam
40200 Shah Alam
Selangor Darul Ehsan

The teaching of writing to second language learners has developed from a product orientation to a process approach, and now the genre pedagogy is taking root in some contexts. This paper describes ESL learners' reports of techniques used by English teachers for teaching writing during their primary and secondary school years at a time when the KBSR and KBSM curricula were already in place. Participants consisted of 87 third year undergraduates completing a writing pedagogy course in a TESL degree programme at a Malaysian university. The results showed that there were differences in the techniques used to teach writing at primary and secondary level. The participants reported learning writing mainly through dictation, copying sentences and rearranging sentences in a story at primary school level. However, in secondary school the common techniques used for teaching writing were error identification, note expansion, writing topic sentences, and writing and revising drafts. The findings will be discussed in the context of developments in approaches to second language writing instruction.

Introduction

The trends in the teaching of writing have evolved over time. “Even as late as the 1970s, L2 writing was not viewed as a language skill to be taught to learners. Instead it was used as a support skill in language learning to, for example, practise handwriting, write answers to grammar and reading exercises, and write dictation” (Reid, 2001, p. 28). White (1987) cites dictation as “a well known example of integrating listening with writing” (p. 259) although at that time the focus of the dictation was correct spelling. It was only later that writing earned its right as a skill to be taught to language learners. Reid (2001) stated “in the 1970s many English L2 language programme writing classes were, in reality, grammar courses as students copied sentences or short pieces of discourse, making discrete changes in person or tense” (p. 28).