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TEACHING WRITING TO B1 LEVEL STUDENTS THROUGH THE TASK-BASED APPROACH

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Abstract. The article takes into account teaching the writing skill to B1 level students in the task-based learning approach. The goals of the writing course, the content, and the role of the teacher are set; the lesson structure, based on J. Willis (pre-task, task cycle, language focus), is explained; an example of a lesson that requires group work with a proposal project is included. There is also a study of the resources available, the assessment and the limitations of the method.

Key words: teaching writing, B1 level, task-based writing, written competence, methodology in English language teaching.

Introduction

Although writing is a basic skill of production, it can be the most anxiety-inducing skill in lessons where it is only considered in terms of mechanical grammar and/or isolated sentence completion. B1 learners typically know basic sentence patterns and have a developing vocabulary, but have some difficulties in organizing, holding together, and selecting register when asked to produce multi-paragraph texts. B1 writers should be able to write simple, connected texts on familiar topics, describe experiences, and write personal or formal letters and messages with some accuracy (Council of Europe, 2020). This article discusses the problem that a teacher has to help a student connect isolated facts of language with written texts that are coherent and then suggests that the task-based approach is an appropriate way to do so.

The Learner and Aims of the Course

This course is aimed at students in secondary schools who are at the CEFR B1 level. After a number of years, these learners get basic syntactic structures but suffer from cognitive overload when they have to deal with choice of vocabulary, spelling, organizing paragraphs, and correctness of the grammar structure. Many people see writing as a tedious exam-like task, not a means of communicating. The goal of the course is, therefore, not only mechanical correctness, but communicative writing. Students should be able to express ideas in a logical sequence; employ cohesive devices in their writing; choose the register they are using for their text; and write and edit with others. It is crucial for the method selected below that these aims can be observed and assessed.

It is because of several reasons that these difficulties arise. In writing, learners do not receive the immediate feedback that comes from verbal communication, but have to take responsibility for the monitoring of their own writing and rely on evaluation anxiety. In addition, traditional writing tasks

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can be individual, and receive feedback solely at the end from the teacher, and there are few chances for support by peers. Therefore, there is a need for a method in B1 learners that can offer clear scaffolding, reduce the anxiety level, and give a real communicative purpose to write.

Content of the Writing Course

The course is divided into three areas of content. The first type is text organization, topic sentences, paragraphs, and other devices in the text that help to hold the material together, such as however, furthermore, and as a result. The second one is sociolinguistic competence, knowing how to control register, how to use formal and informal emails, and using the correct salutation and closing. The third is "functional language" when writing: expressing opinion, making recommendations, giving reasons, and describing past events. These areas are based on descriptors for written production and interaction for the CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2020) with descriptors for B1. The topics should come from their daily lives and should be relevant, including community improvement issues or school facilities, or travel suggestions. No language is taught separately from these topics; rather, vocabulary and grammar are chosen from what the learners need to write a task.

The Task-Based Approach in the Classroom

The approach adopted in the course is Task-Based Learning (TBL). A pedagogical task is a task in the classroom where students understand, manipulate, create, participate, etc. in the target language with the focus on meaning (Nunan, 2004, p. 4). Learners must use language in a task that leads to a non-linguistic product – e.g. a shared proposal, plan, or informational guide – not a demonstration of a grammar point. This feature is appropriate for B1 writers as the outcome is always an important one; they are required to negotiate meaning, share linguistic tools, and employ existing language.

Providing writing as a multi-stage process is a key concern of Harmer (2015) and Willis (1996). The lessons are designed in a structured way: in the pre-task phase, the context is set and a model text is analyzed; in the task cycle, a text is drafted in pairs or small groups and then collaboratively revised; in the language focus phase, typical error patterns and structural possibilities are discussed.

It is demonstrated in a sample 80-minute lesson. The subject is 'Proposal to the School Principal on Sports Facilities'. For the pre-task phase (15 minutes), students look at an authentic model proposal and identify features of the structure and polite functional phrases in it. Pairs develop their proposals in the task cycle (30 minutes) and share a document or template; they stress argumentation and paragraph organization. In planning and reporting (15 minutes), pairs trade rough copy to make sure drafts are clear and complete. In the language focus phase (20 minutes), the teacher takes notes in monitoring and leads the class to correct common errors and strengthen the linkage device. The teacher is not an interrupter during the drafting process, but observes, micro-scaffolds if asked, and provides feedback after the drafting process.

There are different types of tasks for writing that can be changed to keep learners engaged. Students can apply skills to list tasks, sort tasks, brainstorm, and categorize arguments; they can also be used to formulate a set of rules for a school club to solve a problem; and they can be used to write a proposal or a community advisory column to create something. The outcomes vary and students practise a range of text types: describing, explaining, arguing, and requesting.

In this way the roles of teacher and learners change. The teacher is an organizer, facilitator, and monitor and not a strict corrector. In the pre-task phase, the teacher makes the outcome very clear and verifies if students understand the task without presenting all the structures, so that students can use their previous knowledge. The teacher circulates, provides supportive assistance without being

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intrusive, and records examples of successful language use and typical errors. Learners actively participate in co-constructing text and are responsible for their participation in the writing process.

Constructive organization of feedback: The teacher does not red-pen each error as it is made, thereby avoiding inducing unnecessary writing anxiety, but provides feedback after drafting and review. During monitoring, notes are made highlighting good examples of text organization and sentences to be corrected without identifying individual writers. This helps to maintain communication and structure in the task and gives accurate guidance.

Lessons are planned sequentially, from easy to difficult, for a four-week period. To help build confidence, in the first week the learners do short guided writing activities in pairs. In the second week, they will work on paragraph organization and cohesive devices. During the third week, they work together to solve a problem together and create a structured proposal. They finish an extensive creative writing assignment in the fourth week. Self-assessment is conducted at the end of each week and final drafts written for the portfolio. All tasks can be carried out with printed worksheets and notebooks if internet access is limited.

Resources and Assessment

The course is supported by three fundamental books. The process-writing framework and task types are provided by Willis (1996) and Harmer (2015); a definition of a task is offered by Nunan (2004, p. 4); and the level descriptors are provided by the CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2020). Model text samples, graphic organizers, writing templates, and digital or paper notebooks are the easy-to-use classroom materials.

There are three methods for determining progress. Firstly, in terms of task achievement: did the pair achieve the text and did they achieve its communication? Second, by using a rubric that evaluates four criteria: communicative adequacy, text organization, range of language, and accuracy. Third, by learner self-assessment, in which students think about what they did well and what they would like to do better.

Limitations and Conclusion

This method has its limitations. It takes time to prepare model texts and peer-review guidelines to ensure that all students are equal participants. As a result of this design of an article, there are no direct learner data reported and the improvement of writing competence should be checked by rubric evaluation and comparing between drafts before making a definite conclusion.

To summarize, for B1 students, it is important to provide opportunities for using what they have already learned in the language in meaningful writing activities, instead of endless isolated grammar practice. Task-based writing provides a clear purpose and outcome, maintains learners' active participation, and language learning occurs after drafting when the learners have identified their own needs. This approach can help learners to gain confidence and independence as writers with careful planning and systematic feedback.

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