

Enhancing student's writing through pre-writing activities

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Abstract

Writing is a complicated capability that provides communication between the people by means of graphic signs. Like speaking, it is a productive skill; we record our messages to convey them to the recipient.

Many writing initiatives have been discussed as ways to improve student writing. However, in order for teachers to successfully teach writing, they must be exposed to a variety of classroom-tested approaches (Williams J, 2012, p.89). Besides, teaching how to write effectively is one of the most important life-long skills educators impart to their students. When teaching writing, educators must be sure to select resources and support materials that not only aid them in teaching how to write, but that will also be the most effective in helping their students learn to write.

According to the ideas of Dan Kirby and Tom Liner (Inside Out: Strategies for Teaching Writing, p.32) succeeding as a writing teacher requires a pragmatic awareness of educational politics and the conflicts and questions within our discipline and a solid grasp of public notions about how writing classes should look, what skills are most important for students, and why writing might be useful or important. Public opinion often disagrees with instructional practices that are informed by research and by teachers' experiences with students. They also mentioned that teaching writing is challenging; it may be one of the toughest jobs a teacher faces. If we are teaching in a middle school or a high school classroom, we know the depth of the challenges that large classes, students whose first language isn't English, or russian and excessive absences—as well as the challenges we discussed previously—present for teaching and learning anything. Too many teachers work in schools clogged with test-prep demands and follow-the-script teaching expectations. It's not much of a surprise, then, if some teachers try to avoid writing instruction entirely while others adopt the latest "Teach Writing Quickly!" off-the-shelf product to make their lives a little easier. Effective teaching of writing takes time: time for practice, time to share writing, time to complete pieces of writing, and time to respond to and evaluate all of that writing. Many teachers are afraid of teaching writing precisely because it takes lots of time, in class and out. To teach writing well, we don't look some place "out there" for rules, formulas, and mimicry. We begin, instead, by teaching students to attend to their inner language, to their individual sensations, perceptions, emotions, incipient understandings, observations, and perspectives. Writing, like all other acts of creation, develops from the inside out.

Last but not least, it should also be noted that teaching and learning to write can seem complicated for both teachers and students, but with the huge contribution of writing techniques and activities the writing classes are more likely to be intriguing and motivating.

Key words: literature writing, teaching writing, classroom-tested, For and against, opinions, summarize, writing skills, madlibs, synonyms/antonyms page, follow-the-script teaching, practice, mimicry, language, to their individual sensations, perceptions, emotions, incipient understandings, observations, classroom.

I. Introduction

Stimulating writing

As it has already been aforementioned unlike other skills writing seems a bit challenging to acquire. However, there are some important techniques suggested by scholars in order to encourage students to obtain this capability more easily. In the new book, “How to Not Write Bad,” journalism professor Bitchener (2008, p.102-118) supports the opinion that “almost without exception, good writers read widely and frequently.” By this statement, it is obvious that reading is one of the vital ways of enhancing writing as it broadens readers’ viewpoints and provides with new ideas in a bid to write. He further assures his audience that reading is the “best and most painless way to absorb the rules of the language. Recently, some former students have been asked about how they viewed the connection between reading and good writing. Here’s what one had to say: “I enjoyed that exercise. I feel that it’s a good way for students to learn what their peers are reading and interested in, and it’s a way for students to learn about other authors that maybe they’d never heard of but might enjoy reading “See? Good readers are good writers.

Research also shows that feedback is more useful between drafts, not when it is done at the end of the task after the students hand in their composition to be marked. Corrections written on compositions returned to the student after the process has finished seem to do little to improve student’s writing. Although there are many ways of approaching process writing, it can be divided into three stages (Storch,2010, p. 29-46):

Pre-writing

The teacher needs to stimulate students' creativity, to get them thinking how to approach a writing topic. In this stage, the most important thing is the flow of ideas, and it is not always necessary that students actually produce much written work. If they do, then the teacher can contribute with advice on how to improve their initial ideas.

Focusing

During this stage, students write without much attention to the accuracy of their work or the organization. The most important feature is meaning. Here, the teacher (or other students) should concentrate on the content of the writing. Is it coherent? Is there anything missing? Anything extra?

Evaluating, structuring and editing

Now the writing is adapted to a readership. Students should focus more on form and on producing a finished piece of work. The teacher can help with error correction and give organizational advice.

Here are some ideas given via Storch N, and Aldosari (2010, p. 355-376) for classroom activities related to the stages above:

Pre-writing

Brainstorming: Getting started can be difficult, so students divided into groups quickly produce words and ideas about the writing.

Planning: Students make a plan of the writing before they start. These plans can be compared and discussed in groups before writing takes place.

Generating ideas : Discovery tasks such as cubing (students write quickly about the subject in six different ways - they:

- Describe it
- Compare it

- Associate it
- Analyze it
- Apply it
- Argue for or against it.

Questioning: In groups, the idea is to generate lots of questions about the topic. This helps students focus upon audience as they consider what the reader needs to know. The answers to these questions will form the basis to the composition.

Discussion and debate: The teacher helps students with topics, helping them develop ideas in a positive and encouraging way.

Pre-writing activities and their importance

Pre-writing is a stage of the writing process that is well-known to most English teachers. Pre-writing activities, such as brainstorming, can help students to find out what they want to say before they sit down to the complex task of writing an essay. They are mostly used to make an easy transition from this reading, note-taking, and journaling into getting started on a story or poem, essay, report, or research paper assignment.

Teaching prewriting practices in the classroom will give each student or writer hints to get started on writing or overcome writer's block. And it's important to think about prewriting activities that don't use words as well. Drawing, listening to music, and working with simple models can aid students in generating ideas for a writing project (Hirvela, A., 2011, p.159-180).

Bitchener J (2009, p. 276-279) stated that pre-writing is simply "playing" with ideas without the pressure to write perfectly and correctly which saves time. These kinds of activities help students generate and refine paper-topic ideas. Most writers begin with only a vague or superficial idea of what they want to write about. Prewriting helps to develop the topic by reminding of what we already know, clarifying what we have yet to learn, and discovering which dimensions of the subject have the greatest "emotional heat" for us.

There are a wide variety of prewriting activities that can contribute us to move forward from the first-impulse writing ideas to a well-defined topic that addresses the requirements of the assignment, audience need, and appropriately assesses the scope of coverage. The most common of these are Clustering, Cubing, Dialoguing, Dramatizing, Free-writing, Listing, Matrixing, Outlining, and Topical Invention. These activities can be combined and customized to fit our personal working style and the needs of the assignment.

Freewriting is a famous prewriting technique proposed by Hayes, J. (2000, p.6-64). It is similar to brainstorming but requires more sustained writing. A writer practices freewriting by writing everything that comes to mind during a preset time period, say five or ten minutes. The requirement is that he does not stop writing at all during that period. If he can't think of anything to say, he may write, "I can't think of anything to say," or if he finds the exercise boring, he may write something like, "This is boring. Why are we doing this anyway?" Most students practicing freewriting will not get stuck in this kind of response and will go on to produce often surprising amounts of text.

In brainstorming, the writer creates a "storm" of ideas, not passing judgment on any of them or censoring any idea that comes to mind, no matter how apparently absurd it is. This is not the time to think about whether or not this idea will actually fit into a paper. The writer can brainstorm by talking with peers or a family member or a writing center consultant, with pen in hand to list the ideas that come to mind, or she can brainstorm alone, simply listing everything she thinks of with regard to the writing task. It is important to remember that at this stage in the writing process, anything goes main ideas, details, feelings, whatever comes to mind (Storch, N., 2005, p.153-173).

Diagramming may be used as a prewriting or planning activity. A tree diagram is a more orderly visual representation than clustering because it is more analytical. To diagram a

topic as a prewriting activity, write a word or phrase that represents the topic at the top of the page and then list the subtopics that occur to you in a row below it. Each subtopic may be further subdivided in as many rows as are needed.

Besides them, drawing may be a useful prewriting tool for visually oriented students Yong Mei (2010, p. 18-30). suggests storyboarding as a prewriting activity: quickly, roughly sketch six pictures of a narrative. The prewriting activity helps visual thinkers compose an overview of the topic they will then translate into words. Some particularly useful ways to use electronic environments to generate ideas is to assign role-playing. In role-playing, students are assigned characters or personae that they assume in the chat environment. Students who have finished reading *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *The Bridge to Terebithia*, *The Chocolate War*, or *The Scarlet Letter* might assume the identities of the major characters and members of the community to discuss what has happened in their community. Students may create a dialogue between the characters in different books, for example, the heroines of some conventional fairy tales and the Cinderella of Gail Carson Levine's *Ella Enchanted* or *Cimorene* of Patricia C. Wrede's *Dealing with Dragons* and its sequels. Role-playing can be used as a solitary prewriting activity as well. A student may imagine himself as a broadcaster on the evening news, reporting on a significant event or issue of the day--or of yesterday. A student writing on an historical event--the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the purchase of the Louisiana Territory, the bombing of Pearl Harbor may imagine the story that he would write to communicate the news.

II. Data Collection

Even though the process of data collection tends to be complicated, it is also one of the interesting parts of this research. The researcher began collecting the data curiously as the research was devoted to stimulating writing through pre-writing activities which played an important role in students' learning process. In order to collect all necessary data the researcher used observation needs analysis, pre and post-tests and interview sheet for teachers. All stages were outlines as follows:

The researcher started the first stage with observing some of the writing teachers' classes. The first observation was held on the 14th of February at the Specialized Branch of Tashkent State University of Law. The subjects were the first-year students of the branch's Faculty. The teacher began the lesson via greeting and giving some general questions about their summer holiday and themselves. Then, students were made to revise the knowledge related to writing that they learnt last year. The teacher introduced the topic of the lesson after doing some brainstorming activities. Subsequently, the teacher introduced the topic and explained some rules concerning it. During the explanation process she tried to elicit more from students with some questions. In a bid to check their comprehension she distributed some exercises and divided them into three groups. All groups were involved in the lesson and did their best. At the end of the class the teacher gave them homework for the next class. The lesson was conducted well as the class was learner-centered and conducted well. The teacher herself was very friendly with the students and it made the learners to express their opinions more freely.

The second observation was dedicated to observing the first-year students of that faculty. It took place on the 16th of February. The subjects were the students of the group 1B and there were 16 students in the class. The teacher began the lesson with greeting, checking the attendance and the previous homework. Not all students were ready with their homework. Therefore, the teacher warned them to be well-ready for the next class. After that, she moved to the topic of that lesson. For this she gave some questions to the students and asked them to guess the topic. The theme of the lesson was "writing CV forms". In the main part she explained the rules to write CVs and gave some exercises to revise and check their comprehension. During the lesson students themselves experienced writing CVs and gave their peers to check them. The teacher concluded the class by revision about

what they learnt during that lesson and gave their home task. Overall, the class was conducted well since all students participated and the teacher tried to make students interested to the topic. The class atmosphere was satisfactory with good decoration and equipment. The teacher herself was a bit strict and controlled the class well. She was good at time management as well. The researcher observed other lessons too and the whole process lasted for a week.

In the second phase the researcher herself began her teaching experiment with the first-year students of the groups 1A. In the first class she distributed needs analysis (See Appendix 1) in order to get familiar with the learners and find the best methods to teach them. But before it she also asked the teacher to give some writing tips and tactics to teach these groups. In the needs analysis there were some general questions about them, such as:

1. What do you know about writing?
2. What/how do you usually write?
3. What are you expecting to learn in this course? and so on

The questions were handed out to all students and asked them to give their full answers. All filled questionnaires were gathered on that day and very helpful to find out about them. Subsequently, after conducting the lesson she separated 40 minutes for writing a paragraph for the group 124 about the descriptive topic named as “My dream house “ without any pre-writing activities, but prior to writing the researcher explained them the structure of writing a descriptive paragraph. Some students had difficulty in writing and made many mistakes. Even some of them did not want to write as they found that topic somehow boring. It was considered as a pre-test and in this process the researcher figured out that the lesson with no pre-writing strategies was useless and ineffective. Therefore, during the teaching process she tried to use more pre-writing strategies in the lessons.

After conducting several lessons the researcher gave the compare and contrast topic to the students. Before giving the paragraph to write she introduced some pre-writing tactics to encourage them. For this, she showed them a video related to the topic and students brainstormed some ideas about that topic. After that the researcher introduced some vocabulary and idioms regarding the theme. Importantly, as reading and writing are related to each other she gave them a reading text and made them do some exercises in it. Afterwards, the students were given 30 minutes to write about new technologies. The topic was “Does modern technology make life more convenient or is it better without it? “. It was accepted as a post-test to show the importance of pre-writing activities. All students tried to write well by using the words that were given them before writing. Both tests were assessed according to the criteria given in the Appendix. It proved that pre-writing activities were more stimulating to increase students’ writing as well as their vocabulary.

As the last stage was regarding the interview the researcher tried to gather some teachers’ opinions concerning the research work. The interview sheet (See Appendix4) was designed as a form of questionnaire which consisted of 7 questions. On the 24th and 25th of February she distributed the questionnaires to the writing teachers and asked them to be objective, critical and provide their responses in detail. All the teachers filled the questionnaire out willingly and answered all questions. The questions asked were:

How do you usually conduct the writing classes?

- What are pre –writing strategies?
- What kinds of pre-writing techniques do you use in your classes?
- What pre-writing techniques do you suggest to stimulate students’ writing? and so on

All the questionnaires were collected within two days as it was difficult to reach some teachers. Indeed, they were also very beneficial for the research in order to find more pre-writing activities and realize their importance.

The process of data collection was successfully finished. All the information gathered in this process was then analyzed in the results and discussion part thoroughly. Each fact was carefully learnt.

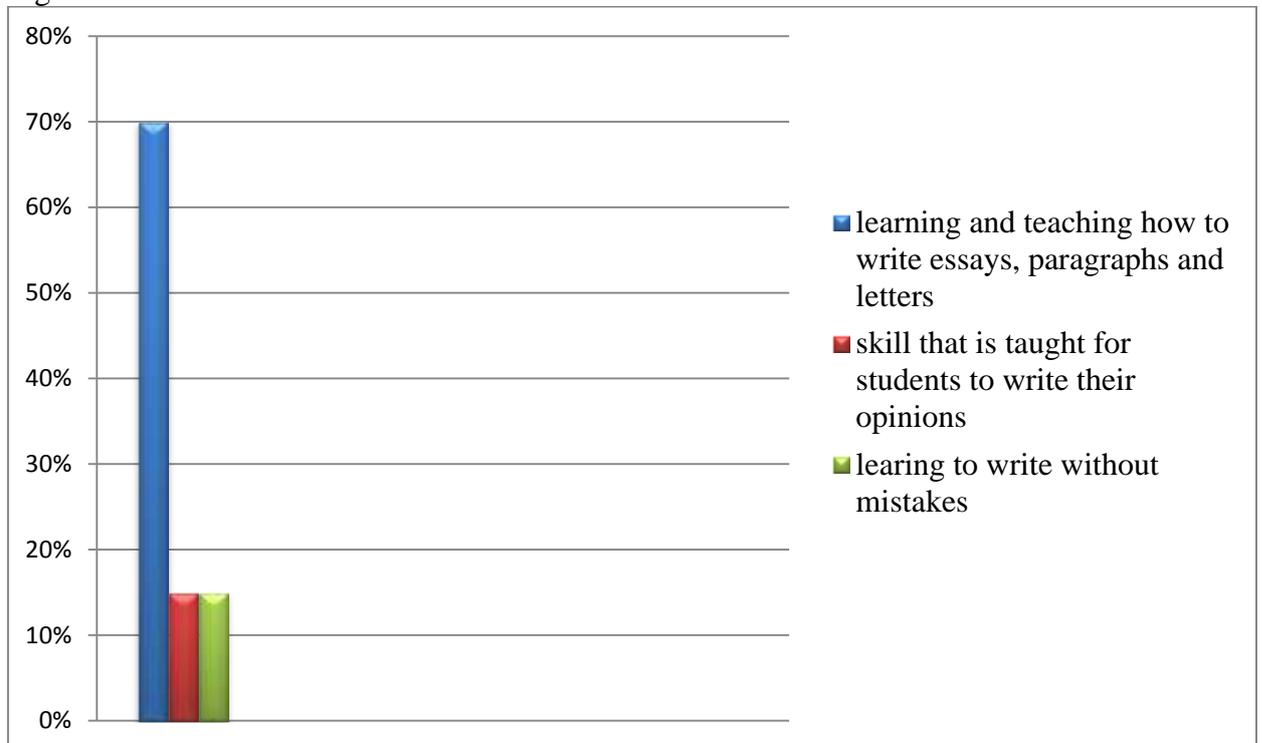
III. Results and Discussion

The two-month study was crucial in measuring the suggested goal in practice. In order to accomplish this task the research focused mostly on analyzing and comparing the data gathered during this period, and presented the final outcomes.

Initially, she decided to give the results of students' questionnaires. That was taken as a needs analysis during the experiment. With the help of this information the research was able to be well-aware of students' all needs, learning styles and other desires in further learning. The questionnaire was given to the group 124 and it consisted of 6 questions. Each question was analyzed thoroughly and the results were described in the following figures:

Q1. What is writing in general?

Figure 1.1

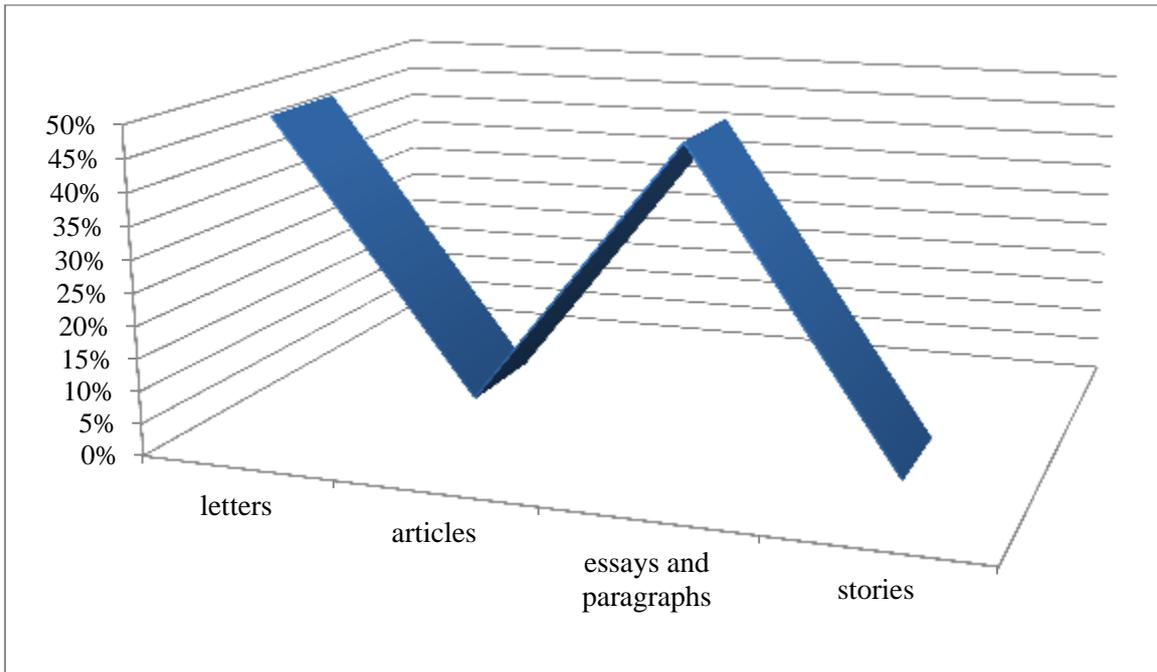


As it is evident from this figure there are most frequent answers given in the needs analysis. Most students in this group answered that writing is learning and teaching how to write essays, paragraphs and letters (70 %), whereas the second and third options maintained the same level at 15 %.

Q2. Have you ever written something?

Figure 1.2

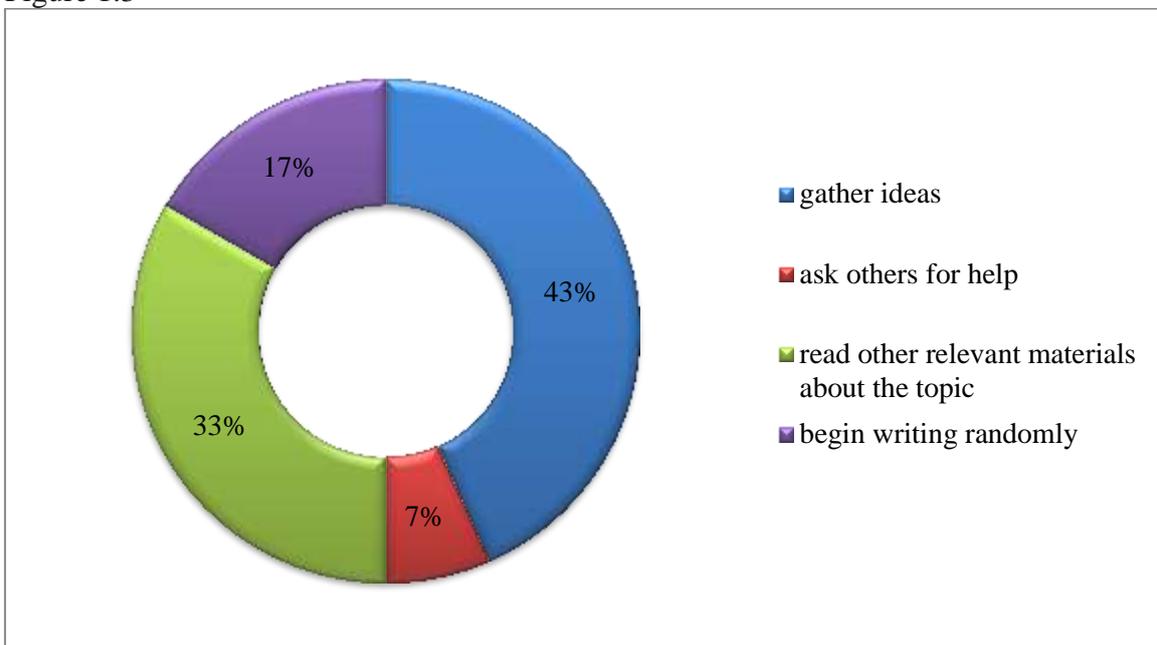
As the second question requires "Yes/No " answers almost all the students in both groups answered "Yes ", and ultimate results were shown in the diagram below



It is obvious that a half of the learners experienced writing letters, essays and paragraphs. Writing articles and stories accounted for only 10 % and 5 % correspondingly.

Q3. What do you usually carry out before writing something, such as essays, paragraphs, etc...?

Figure 1.3



When estimating all results in this question the researcher found out that in a bid to write something the majority of the students firstly gather some ideas and read other relevant materials about the topic (43 % and 33 % respectively), while only 7 % of them ask others for help. Roughly a fifth (20 %) is in favor of beginning to write randomly.

The results of the subsequent questions are depicted in the following table:

4. In your opinion what should teacher do in order to stimulate learners to writing?	Teacher should use different kinds of activities- 65 % He/she should have some competitions among students- 20 %
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	He/she should give awards to the ones who write well-15 %
5. How do you want to be taught in writing class?	By more interactive activities and presentations- 60% By different methods- 25% By more writing tasks and exercises-15%
6. What are you expecting to learn in this course?	Writing essays without mistakes-40 % Writing articles and letters-38% Acquiring writing skills well-22 %

Last, but not least by giving the whole analysis of the results of the questionnaire the researcher aimed at showing the students' attitudes towards writing in general and their opinions which were helpful during the experiment.

Discussion of the results of the pre-test

After being familiar with all students' needs the researcher started conducting some classes with them during a two-month period. However, prior to this she took pre-test from the group 1B in order to figure out their current levels and writing awareness.

During the pre-test the researcher gave them the topic named «My dream house “. Indeed, with the purpose of proving the importance of pre-writing activities the researcher conducted the initial class without them. She just introduced the topic, explained the structure of writing a paragraph, and gave them 40 minutes to write regarding the given theme. Undoubtedly, all the students were not inclined to write the paragraph and began writing randomly. As a result, they showed unsatisfactory scores which were presented in the following table. Their works were assessed according to the criteria given in the appendix:

Table 2.1

Name	Score (20)
AbduqahhorovSamandar	13
AbduvohidovaXadicha	13
Ahmadov Muhammad	14
BoltaboyevBunyod	13
ZiyobekovElmurod	15
ZiyoyiddinovOzodbek	11
KamaliddinovIzzat	14
NuraliyevDamirbek	16
NuriddinovOzodbek	10
PulatovAbdumalik	11
RustamovJaloliddin	9
SaparovJavlonbek	7

Then she added all the scores and divided them into the number of the subjects to identify the mean:

$$\frac{13 + 13 + 14 + 13 + 15 + 11 + 14 + 16 + 10 + 11 + 9 + 7}{12} = 12.1$$

Table 2.2 Frequency distribution of the pre-test

Score Value	Frequency
7	1
8	0
9	1
10	1
11	2
12	0
13	3
14	2
15	1
16	1

Figure 2.1 Frequency of distribution of the pre-test

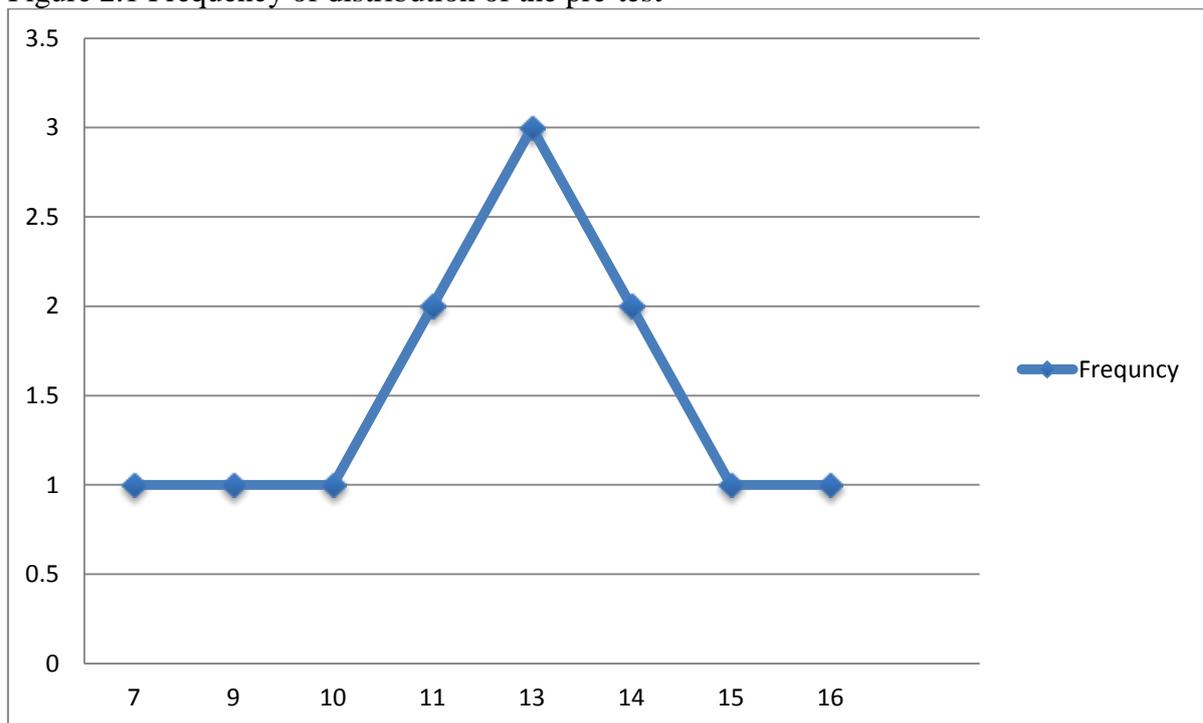


Table 2.4 Standard deviation of the pre-test

This result was gained by subtracting the mean from each score in the set, and then squaring each of these values before adding them up. After all, the researcher divided the total via the number of scores, and the square root of that total was the standard deviation.

Name	Score	Mean	Difference	Difference squared
Samandar	13	--12	1	1
Xadicha	13	--12	1	1
Muhammad	14	--12	2	4

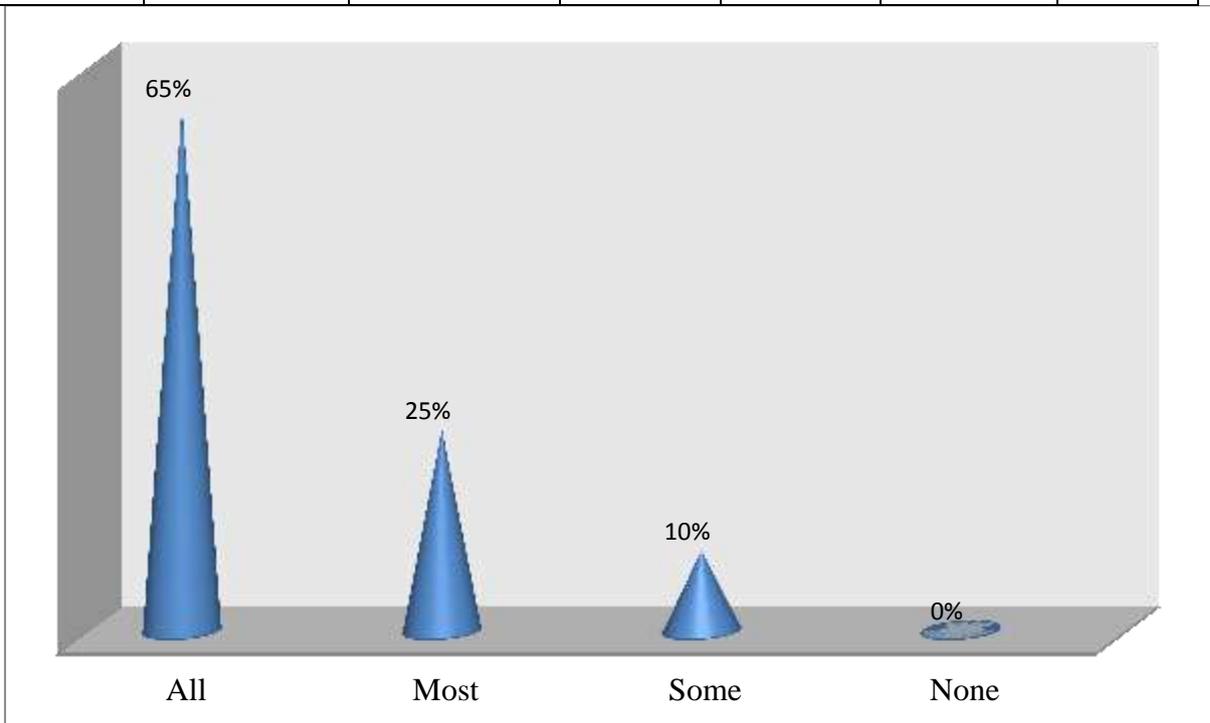
Bunyod	13	--12	1	1
Elmurod	15	--12	3	3
Ozodbek	11	--12	--1	1
Izzat	14	--12	2	4
Ziyodulla	16	--12	4	16
Damirbek	10	--12	--2	4
Otabek	11	--12	--1	1
Abdumalik	9	--12	--3	9
Boburjon	7	--12	--5	25

$$SD = \sqrt{\frac{1 + 1 + 4 + 1 + 3 + 1 + 4 + 16 + 4 + 1 + 9 + 25}{12}} = \sqrt{11.91} = 2.4$$

Overall, the result of the research can be seen in Table 5, which describes the analysis of the outcomes of the pre-test.

Q2. Are all of your students interested in writing lessons?

Central Tendency			Dispersion			
Mean	Mode	Median	Low	High	Range	SD
12	13	12	7	16	10	2



In fact, the majority of the educators said that all their students are interested in their classes, while 25 % of them were of the opinion that most of their learners have willingness towards writing lessons. Only one in ten (10 %) deemed that some of their students are into their writing classes since they consider writing to be boring and difficult to learn.

IV. Conclusion

Indeed, a two-month research was dedicated to examine different pre-writing strategies and prove their effectiveness to enhance students' writing skills. For this purpose as a researcher I conducted a current study with the 1st year students of the SBTSUL, and my classroom research suggests that using pre-writing activities in writing classes is very beneficial and effective in order to increase students' awareness and interest towards the topic and lesson. Pre-writing strategies provide the learners with better comprehension via making them plan their whole writing beforehand. Besides, with the help of these activities they are more likely to manage their time by writing in a faster pace. While implementing my research work I figured out their importance and benefits to students. For instance, as it was outlined in the results and discussion part the group conducted with pre-writing tactics gained higher scores and used less time as compared to the group which did not practice them, and in their writing this group tried to use more academic words related to that topic and proper grammar structures (as they were explained how to write a paragraph too).

Apart from that, using pre-writing approaches is grossly helpful for the teacher as well because teacher is not confronted with many difficulties when conducting her/his writing lessons. He/ she can explain the topic more easily and thoroughly. During my research I tried to utilize some before-writing strategies, such as brainstorming, showing videos, some reading activities and practicing the vocabulary pertaining to that topic, and I found out that students were more eager to write the paragraph with these activities.

Within the process I encountered some challenges, especially with the group 1B because I did not introduce them any writing activities and warm-ups as well as explanations before they began writing their paragraphs. As a result, they showed unsatisfactory scores, and they did not have willingness towards my lessons. Furthermore, I had some difficulties to gather materials for the work since many scholars gave different perceptions about using pre-writing activities. However, in the end I tried to collect more appropriate and essential points for the research work. In their works all scholars mentioned regarding the advantages of using pre-writing techniques. As an illustration Kyle Cushman stated that these kinds of activities help students generate and refine paper-topic ideas. Most writers begin with only a vague or superficial idea of what they want to write about. Prewriting helps to develop the topic by reminding of what we already know and clarifying what we have yet to learn. I fully agreed with these statements after doing the experiment with the learners, and I also realized that pre-writing does not only improve writing, but it also helps to develop other skills. For example, while doing these activities students are able to practice reading, speaking and listening. By discussing the certain topic before writing they are more prone to learn how to express their opinions or perceptions which leads to the growth of their critical thinking too. Moreover, in order to carry out some pre-writing activities students are obliged to work with their peers or within the groups and it enormously help them to increase their collaborative and team-building abilities. With these reasons I can surely say that the benefits of these strategies are plentiful for both learners and teachers.

For implementing this work I tried to adopt the materials according to students' needs and desires. During the study some research tools were applied. Among them, questionnaires, lesson plans, teachers' interviews and writing tests greatly assisted to carry out the research successfully.

Based on my experience of practical experiment at university, I would suggest that there are common aspects which might make this research transferable to other educational establishments which share a similar university environment. For instance, the majority of SB TSUL English and Russian language teachers currently use pre-writing tactics. The classroom setting and the type of writing activities students learn, and how they learn it, are similar from one course and university to another. Hence, the use of meaningful

activities and warm-ups by teachers could gain the interest of the majority of the learners at university. According to these features, the results of my research suggest that pre-writing techniques can be used successfully throughout the SB TSUL.

In sum, collecting information, then using them in the classes helped me to learn deeply about pre-writing strategies. While conducting the writing course, I practiced my teaching skills as a future English teacher, and it has tremendously influenced on my current study. Also, the whole process of the research work has contributed to my professional advancement via providing me and my colleagues with a variety of teaching strategies and methods. It has enriched greatly my writing skills as well. Therefore, in the future I am going to use these methods in my classes to increase my students' writing awareness.

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