

The Influence of Holistic Scoring of Students' Assignments on Their Motivation and Second Language Acquisition

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Abstract

'The process of writing is a process of thinking and discovering things. Writing is the result of employing strategies to manage the composing process, which is one gradually developing a text. (Pedagogical writing course reader, pg. 302)' We as teachers should pay attention to all of the aspects of language acquiring and we should try to use many methods and strategies in order to help the learners as much as possible to acquire the language and to be always high motivated to do it. Evaluation is the most difficult and complicated part which the teachers should involve successfully in their teaching. Keeping in mind this importance I decided to make this research proposal in order to search for the most appropriate methods of evaluation and also to support my believes that holistic scoring is a very motivating and helpful method which helps students to acquire the language easily and more effectively. 'Holistic scoring is a method by which trained readers evaluate a piece of writing for its overall quality. It requires readers to evaluate the work as a whole, while considering four elements: focus, organization, support, and conventions. The holistic scoring method is based on the theory that a whole piece of writing is greater than the sum of its parts. With this method, essays are read for the total impression they create, rather than for individual aspects. 1The aim of this research is to confirm that this is one of the best ways of scoring which has positive and encouraging effects on learners' language progress; and it would help me to know better the advantages and disadvantages of its use which will help me to know precisely when and how to use it in my teaching.

1. Introduction

Second language learning and teaching is a process that needs special attention and planning. Developing all the aspects of the language as speaking, reading, listening and writing is the most difficult and important part of acquiring the second language successfully. All the aspects are very important and all of them have a significant role in the process of learning. As I have mentioned before and according to the author of the Pedagogical Grammar course reader 'the process of writing is a process of thinking and discovering things. Writing is the result of employing strategies to manage the composing process, which is one gradually developing a text. It involves the number of activities: setting goals, generating ideas, organizing information, selecting appropriate language, making a draft, reading and reviewing it, then revising and editing. It is a complex process which is neither easy nor spontaneous for many second language learners. (Pedagogical writing course reader, pg. 302)'

In order to teach writing as effective as possible, we as teachers must pay a great attention to using the best methods and strategies to succeed. Evaluation is a very important part of the language teaching and learning. The measurement of how much and on what way the students develop their skills is one of the most important factor **which influence the second** language learning. According to the author of the course reader, the primary objectives of evaluation should be 'long-term improvement and cognitive change' of the students. Also, the author emphasizes the dilemma about what to evaluate in the written work, should that be the accuracy or fluency of the expressed thoughts. (Pedagogical writing course reader, pg. 302)'

¹ (http://www.ets.org/portal/site/ets/menuitem.c988ba0e5dd572bada20bc47c3921509/?vgnnextoid=ef5caf5e44df4010VgnVCM100_00022f95_190RCRD&vgnnextchannel=2b167f95494f4010VgnVCM10000022f95190RCRD)

The holistic scoring is a very motivational and helpful method of evaluation, because it is a kind of slight criticism of the writing assignment, concentrating the critics on the overall text quality and not stuck at each mistake individually.

"Since, in holistic scoring, the entire written text is evaluated as a whole, it is important to establish the specific criteria upon which the evaluation is to be based prior to undertaking the evaluation. This does not mean establishing a catalogue of precise individual errors that might appear, but rather deciding what impact the errors that are present have on the overall tone, structure, and comprehensibility of the writing sample" (Terry 1989: 49).

'Holistic scoring is a method by which trained readers evaluate a piece of writing for its overall quality. It requires readers to evaluate the work as a whole, while considering four elements: focus, organization, support, and conventions. This method is sometimes called focused holistic scoring. In this type of scoring, readers are trained not to become overly concerned with any one aspect of writing but to look at a response as a whole. The focus of it refers to how clearly the paper presents and maintains a main idea, theme, or unifying point. Papers representing the higher end of the point scale demonstrate a consistent awareness of the topic and do not contain extraneous information. Organization refers to the structure or plan of development (beginning, middle, and end) and whether the points logically relate to one another. Organization refers to (1) the use of transitional devices to signal the relationship of the supporting ideas to the main idea, theme, or unifying point and (2) the evidence of a connection between sentences. Papers representing the higher end of the point scale use transitions to signal the plan or text structure and end with summary or concluding statements. Support refers to the quality of the details used to explain, clarify, or define. The quality of support depends on word choice, specificity, depth, credibility, and thoroughness. Papers representing the higher end of the point scale provide fully developed examples and illustrations in which the relationship between the supporting ideas and the topic is clear. Conventions refer to punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and variation in sentence used in the paper. These conventions are basic writing skills included in Florida's Minimum Student Performance Standards and the Uniform Student Performance Standards for Language Arts. Papers representing the higher end of the scale follow, with few exceptions, the conventions of punctuation, capitalization, and spelling and use a variety of sentence structures to present ideas.'

(<http://www.flboe.org/asp/fw/fwaphols.asp>)

The main aim of this research proposal is to show the positive effects of the holistic scoring to the students' language acquisition and to their motivation. Also, the results of the investigation will encourage the teachers and facilitate the whole teaching learning process.

2. Research Methodology

This action research is done at International University of Struga. I am teaching three different levels: pre-intermediate, intermediate and upper-intermediate level. The students are mostly 18-19 years old, first and second year university studies. These students are the experimental groups from whom will be taken the information about how much the methods used were successful or not, what are their effects into their writing and language skills. I collect the data for this research in accordance with the advices given in the course reader and also my own methods in order to get a clear idea of what to use in my teaching, and how often and for which purposes to use holistic scoring into my teaching classes.

In order to gather information about how the holistic scoring affects the students writing and language acquisition in general I make a few experimental exercises with the students. As a first exercise in my writing class I ask my intermediate group students to write an essay on the topic 'If I were the president of the country I would...'. Then I collect their writings and evaluated them holistically. At the end of each paper I wrote my general view over the essay and gave them some useful advices how to rewrite it. The next class, I asked them to read the evaluation and to try to rewrite it. At the end of the class I develop a class discussion about how much this kind of scoring help them when they were rewriting the text.

Another activity that I made in order to make my research was that I asked my pre-intermediate group to write an essay on the topic 'A person that I admire to' for 54 minutes of the class. After that I mixed up the writings and share the students' work with their friends. I gave to each student a list of characteristics of holistic scoring and asked them to evaluate their friends' paper regarding their overall view of the paper as relevance of the sentences, incoherence, whether it is well organized and developed, whether it is detailed enough. After that the students were supposed to rewrite the paper and to send me the final draft on e-mail. I checked and evaluated their final drafts. The next class we were discussing the effects of the holistic scoring peer feedback.

3. Research Results and Discussions

The results of the holistic scoring effect were nearly the same as I was expected them to be. The results of the first activity that I did with the intermediate class, comparing the second draft of the students with the first one show that the second one was really different from the first one. My holistic scoring and the advices given there resulted to be very helpful for the students to gather and structure the information to the essay. They were more careful on the grammar and spelling mistakes, they were really careful when choosing the vocabulary in order to be well understood, they were more careful when structuring the essay, they were using more details when explaining or supporting their positions and ect. I might say that these effects and influence on the writing were noticed at the 80% of the second drafts. This was claimed by the students also, when we were doing the class discussions. They told me that they were feeling more confident and they were highly motivated when reading the holistic scoring notes. On this way they said they feel that the teacher has figure out their weaknesses and he/she found a way how they can improve it by giving the advices. According to their class discussion, they emphasized that the scoring was really helpful and highly motivational for them.

On the second activity where they were supposed to check their friends work by following some holistic scoring characteristics, the students get a clear idea of what that means by thinking what to evaluate, what kind of advice they could give to their friends and ect. This activity raised the communication in the class as well as the student-student cooperation. So, at the same time the students were improving and developing their writing, speaking and reading skills. They were developing all other aspects of the language learning by writing, which of course is the main aim of the teacher, also.

4. Reflection

As I said before the main aim of this research proposal is to show the positive effects of the holistic scoring to the students' language acquisition and to their motivation. The activities done in the research helped me to get a general idea of where and how to use the holistic scoring in my teaching. What the author of the Pedagogical Grammar course reader book mentions, and with which I totally agree, is that the second language learners make accuracy mistakes while writing. The teachers should take them positively, because according to the author, the students are making these kinds of mistakes influenced by the native language transfer, overgeneralization, and difficulty level. The students are trying hard to learn the second language, and that is why they make mistakes.

What I really like and use in my teaching is combination of the most of these ideas given in the book. I consider the holistic type of grading as a very effective and encouraging way of evaluating. I really accept the idea which says it is normally for the second language learners to make accuracy mistakes-which I don't think that should be ignored, but I think they should be taught slowly but effectively. By grading generally the whole idea, the students will be more motivated to write, but having in mind that they must pay more attention to accuracy for the next time. I also think that the type of evaluation depends on what are we teaching, depends on the level of students, and some other important factors.

I prefer and use holistic type of grading especially for the pre-intermediate and intermediate level second language learners. The students are really making a good progress in their writing, by emphasizing the communicative purpose of the ideas, added with the hidden idea of raising the attention to accuracy. Their English language level makes them to have difficulties while expressing their ideas, so that is why I used the holistic type to motivate and support them. By the time I start to put some correction of grammar nature, so they would start to think of how to express their idea more clearly.

As a conclusion I might say that I would recommend to all the teachers to use the holistic scoring writing assignments, keeping in mind the positive effects of it to the students' learning progress, explained in my research.

References

- Course reader Pedagogical Writing, pg. 238, 302,
<http://www.ets.org/portal/site/ets/menuitem.c988ba0e5dd572bada20bc47c3921509?vgnnextoid=ef5caf5e44df4010VgnVCM10000022f95190RCRD&vgnnextchannel=2b167f95494f4010VgnVCM10000022f95190RCRD>
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