Arab World English Journal

INTERNATIONAL PEER REVIEWED JOURNAL ISSN: 2229-9327

مجلة اللغة الانكليزية في العالم العربي

AWEJ Volume 10. Number 1. March 2019

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INTERNATIONAL PEER REVIEWED JOURNAL ISSN: 2229-9327
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Arab World English Journal (AWEJ) Volume 10. Number.1. March 2019

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Acknowledgment
I would like to thank all those who contributed to this volume as reviewers of papers. Without their help and dedication, this volume would not have come to the surface. Among those who contributed were the following:

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INTERNATIONAL PEER REVIEWED JOURNAL ISSN: 2229-9327
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Arab World English Journal (AWEJ) Volume 10. Number 1. March 2019 Pp.1-2

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Arab World English Journal (AWEJ) Volume 10. Number 1. March 2019 Pp. 56-63
DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol10no1.5

Incorporating Professional Initiatives in EFL Classrooms: A Way to Treat Pedagogical Solitude

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Abstract
In this climate of the expansion of globalization, in today's classrooms, encouraging student investment in writing is paramount. Due to the complicatedness of this skill, many teachers find it difficult to make their learners aware of the divergent phases of writing so they produce better compositions. Thus, the professionalism of teachers is inevitably essential in shaping the learners' writing ability (assisting students as they develop a piece of writing, and boosting their engagement with writing), and learners can achieve successful learning outcomes if they grasp how best to improve their work. To make language learning more effective, there is a need for pursuing professional growth and providing conditions where teachers cooperate to attain higher levels of learning among their students. Indeed, professional development for a teacher is about acquiring new skills, creating a potent learning atmosphere, surmounting the barriers, rectifying the failures and moving forward. It provides ongoing opportunities for educators to continue to identify teaching/learning problems, develop solutions, raise their performance, address students' needs and up their achievements. The present paper sets out to take a closer look at how teachers work with writing among the first year English as foreign language (EFL) students. It tends to offer an instruction based on a set of professional development methods that provide practitioners with several avenues to implement them in classroom practice. To this end, findings of the research indicate that the proposed strategies can lead to a virtuous bond between the teaching/learning process of written expression that may generate beneficial knowledge, valuable teaching, and constructive learning results.

***Keywords*:** EFL students, professional development, writing, written expression

Cite as: ZAGHAR, E. W. (2019). Incorporating Professional Initiatives in EFL Classrooms: A Way to Treat Pedagogical Solitude. *Arab World English Journal, 10* (1) 56-63.
DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol10no1.5

Introduction

Within information technology age, and in an ever-changing world of education, English under the flux of innovations is the nowadays tool for international organizations. In this way, it is the window to new opportunities, connections, and growth. It is a commodity that assists students in improving their literacy skills, expanding their own cultural awareness, and increasing the possibility of a better grasp and appreciation of alien cultures. According to many studies, English has become the dominant foreign language used around the globe and has been appropriated by its speakers in diverse ways. Consequently, both the needs of learners and the aims and objectives of English Language Teaching (ELT) have changed.

Being a recursive and dynamic process, where learners plan, organize, check, edit, and produce, writing is seen as a challenging aspect. It is one of the basic macro skills which has given a significant contribution to alien culture learning and also considered as a thinking process that demands intellectual effort to promote the progress of language proficiency. Writing entails more than adhering to writing conventions, it encompasses creative aspiration, problem-solving, reflection, and revision. Being a demanding process, in Sasaki's (2000) view, it consists of eight writing strategies namely: planning, retrieving, generating ideas, verbalizing, translating, rereading, evaluating, and others. (as displayed in table 1).

Table 1. *Key Writing Strategies and Sub Strategies*

Writing Strategies	**Sub Strategies**	**Definition**
Planning	Global planning	Detailed planning of overall organization
	Thematic planning	Less detailed planning of overall organization
	Local planning	Planning to write next
	Organizing	Organizing the generated ideas
	Conclusion planning	Planning the conclusion
Retrieving	Plan retrieving	Retrieving the already constructed plan
	Information retrieving	Retrieving appropriate information from long-term memory
Generating ideas	Naturally generated	Generating an idea without any stimulus
	Description generated	Generating an idea related to the previous description
Verbalizing	Verbalizing a proposition	Verbalizing the content the writer intends to write
	Rhetorical refining	Refining the rhetorical aspects of an expression
	Mechanical refining	Refining the mechanical or (L1/L2) grammatical aspects of an expression
	Sense of readers	Adjusting expressions to the readers
Translating	Translating	Translating the generated idea into L2
Rereading	Rereading	Rereading the already produced sentence
Evaluating	L2 proficiency evaluation	Evaluating one's own L2 proficiency
	Local text evaluation	Evaluating part of generated text
	General text evaluation	Evaluating the generated text in general
Others	Resting	Resting
	Questioning	Asking the researcher a question
	Impossible to categorize	Impossible to categorize

Source: (Sasaki, 2000, pp. 289-291)

In highlighting the importance of writing professionally, Bolton and Delderfield (2018) declare that this type of writing is: "the key that can unlock the reflective imagination" (p. xvi). Writers should vary and employ different strategies; the main purpose of writing is to aid students to learn and produce quality-efficient discourse. In order to create an inviting climate for students as well as teachers, Fu and Townsend (1998) expounds:

> To help diverse students become competent and confident writers we must help them become bilingual and bicultural learners. The process may be slow and often frustrating for both students and instructors. And, at best, this process will not be one of accommodation or assimilation, simply replacing or adding on another language, another set of values. Rather, it should involve both students and teachers in the process of mutual transformation, so that each becomes an entirely new type of language user (p. 132).

In an attempt to build up a meaningful and successful educational context, there are two elements to consider: the learners and the teachers. The former should be encouraged to become autonomous and have the willingness to take greater responsibility for their own learning, the latter being major catalysts for change should possess an active teaching practice via an unending round of professional development strategies to keep the currency of their knowledge updated.

Accentuating learner's autonomy is pivotal. Teachers should encourage learners to learn autonomously, collaboratively, and ceaselessly. Vanijdee (2003) in explaining the meaning of autonomy writes that it is "a capacity -a construct of attitudes and abilities- which allows learners to take more responsibility for their own learning" (p.76). Therefore, students should see their learning process as a personal discovery. Learning to write helps students improve aptitudes for the negotiation of differences, develop their own worldviews, and respond to unfamiliar or changing settings. Further, thanks to the availability of technological means these students have plenty of possibilities to ameliorate their learning such as exposure to knowledge about various topics and issues arising from real-world scenarios.

The role of teachers has grown immensely. In the current times, they go through a vast array of practices from being the major source of knowledge, leaders, managers and educators to supporters and facilitators; they are expected to be tech-savvy, computer literate and at the cutting edge of education. Their task is to cope with the 21st –century learners; they should have a repertoire and reservoir of instructional techniques, effective teaching methodologies, and robust directional capabilities in such a way that they can foster their students' interest and creativity, and elevate their motivation. Accordingly, instructors need to take on new roles in order to face numerous changes emerging from their internal and external environment to confront the modifications in curriculum and learners' needs that are met in present-time ELT.

Theoretical Foundation: Professional Development

Becoming an instructor is unique and there is no single path or direct map to follow. This journey involves being open to new experiences and capable of reflecting on one's own skills and abilities. In the fast changing globe of the early 21st century, teachers are urged to ensure best learning outcomes for their students, help them become independent, and provide them with

motivation and interest for lifelong learning. So to handle ongoing changes and strengthen the quality of education, teachers should be equipped with the needed strategies to make real transformations in their day-to-day surroundings.

Major Merits of Professional Development

Continuing ongoing education opportunities can help teachers:

- keep abreast of the most recent developments and innovations in teaching in general and the world of ELT in particular
- select more appropriate teaching resources
- develop materials required to match the future needs of the learners
- become reflective practitioners
- create a safe, supportive learning atmosphere
- teach their learners how their own culture aids them to understand other alien cultures
- offer multiple opportunities to their students to better their linguistic output
- elevate their learners' intercultural awareness to interact effectively in diverse multicultural encounters
- teach their students how to actively engage in a variety of language learning opportunities with manifold audiences
- take appropriate decisions and actions to correct students' misbehaviours that do not meet classroom expectations
- modify and readdress the teaching and learning experiences and stay well-informed of the current practices in language education

The Suggested Types of Professional Development Procedures to be Implemented

Two kinds of methods were conducted Teaching portfolios and Analysing critical incidents:

- Teaching Portfolios:

A teaching portfolio-also termed a dossier or profile, is regarded as an effective way for teachers to reflect on, select, organize, portray, and document their teaching philosophy, objectives and accomplishments. Evans (1995) typifies the nature of a portfolio:

> A professional portfolio is an evolving collection of carefully selected or composed professional thoughts, goals, and experiences that are threaded with reflection and self-assessment. It represents who you are, what you do, why you do it, where you have been, where you are, where you want to go, and how you plan on getting there (p. 11).

The eminence of reflective practice in educational circles is widely recognized as a means of extending, evidencing and supporting professional growth, and this may offer prospects for more innovative teaching resolutions. Numerous educators make the point that the portfolio serves some purposes (either formative i.e. developmental or summative i.e. evaluative), which can be to:

• facilitate quality teaching
• help set goals for further development or improvement
• demonstrate individual capabilities and achievements
• aid in refreshing skills and updating one's depth of knowledge
• support reflection and self-evaluation

• encourage collaboration with colleagues

Therefore, it appears that by using a portfolio, written expression teachers will maintain individual actions and find out a kind of a framework of reference for continuous learning and deep reflection.

- Analyzing Critical Incidents:

The concept of 'critical incidents' is variously interpreted by researchers and practitioners; in the educational context, the useful technique used for self-reflection is critical incident analysis, it is seen as an empowering and supportive process that deals with problems or challenges that educators encounter in day-to-day practice. Critical incidents are instruments for boosting one's awareness and comprehension of human behaviors, attitudes, expectations, and interactions. For Flanagan (1954): "The critical incident technique consists of a set of procedures for collecting direct observations of human behavior in such a way as to facilitate their potential usefulness in solving practical problems and developing broad psychological principles" (p. 327).

This technique helps teachers know how they operate, question their own practice, and then explain and provide a solution. Many scholars take the view that examining and uncovering critical incidents can have a number of merits, it can:

• promote self-directed professional growth
• create a heightened sense of self-awareness
• allow for building collegiality, sharing expertise, and identifying a possible resolution
• aid teachers to fine-tune their instructional repertoire
• serve as a valuable resource for both novice teachers and expert ones
• give teachers support to pose critical questions about many aspects of teaching
• assist in raising the instructors' deeper level of reflective thinking

Valuing the importance of analyzing critical incidents as a profitable professional way, written expression teachers are recommended to use it in order to capture plenty of different events that take place on the terrain, and to record the learners' attitudes and misconducts. As a result, the instructors can gain useful insights into how:

• to improve their methodologies and practices
• to correct the misbehaviors and help their students develop positive attitudes towards their learning experience
• to produce possible transformations and readjustments

The Study in Context

This research took place at the University of Oran 2 in Algeria. It was undertaken with first year students majoring in EFL. This population was made up of 127 learners (male and female). Two teachers covering the module of Written Expression took part in this study.

Results and Discussion

Students were given assignments, homework and subjected to many tests throughout one academic year; the objectives were to provide each participant with an opportunity to learn from

writing mistakes made on each previous task, edit those errors on the next work and consequently improve the student's writing skills. The majority of learners do not possess the skills necessary to effectively communicate in a written format that will help them become successful writers in the real world of work. The data revealed that 62.20% of the students showed a significant progress in their writing skills throughout the year. What is more, the results indicated that the inclusion of the cited strategies led to a change in the instructor's pedagogical beliefs and practices, respectively.

This research aims to address the following question:

- How is it possible to enhance the writing skills among first year EFL learners?

For a better investigation of this teaching, a case study approach is utilised in this research to gain an insightful account of the situation before suggesting any changes. It gives opportunity for more scientific aspects that make probably the yielded data to be realistic. Be it descriptive or explanatory or exploratory, the case study provides the investigator with an instrument to conduct comprehensive, intensive, qualitative as well as quantitative research. Creswell (2007) depicts:

> Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bound system (a case) or multiple bound systems (cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (observation, interview, audiovisual method, documents etc.) and reports a case description or case-based themes (p. 73).

This study, then, comprises a vast array of tools of thorough check involving questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observation procedures. A questionnaire was given to first year EFL students (male and female). This instrument aims to gather complete and valid data; it is made for the purpose of understanding, analyzing and interpreting the views, attitudes, and experiences of a given group of people from a target population. The researcher has utilised the questionnaire as an effective mechanism for efficient collection of specific data from a large group of students in addition to other useful information obtained from teachers. Confidentiality being highly respected, the questionnaire allows for a reliable method of analysis as all respondents are asked the same standardised questions.

Described as a discussion that has a structure and a purpose, interviewing is a way to assemble information as well as to gain knowledge from individuals; it is a thoughtful questioning and listening method with the aim of having an in-depth description of a particular subject. An interview is conducted with written expression teachers to investigate issues deeply and to capture the instructor's attitudes and personal opinions. It was first recorded and later transcribed for analysis. It provided an insightful idea about possible suggestions for enhancing the situation of teaching/learning writing.

In order to gain an understanding of some aspects of teaching, learning, or classroom interaction, classroom observation is used. The main purpose behind this self-report method is to allow a room for getting feedback about one's strengths and weaknesses, and it is a way of developing self-awareness on one's own teaching and obtaining suggestions for further

improvements. Additionally, this useful process can help determine professional learning, support collegiality among peers, and provide opportunities to discuss challenges and concerns. As a powerful research strategy, it helps to record the teacher's practices and the students' actions and offers detailed and precise evidence about several aspects of the class than other data sources. It has also allowed having comprehensive knowledge and a close examination of the subject under study, and to view the target group (first year students) in its natural circumstances.

As an elemental answer to the problematic, some major themes emerged from the examination of obtained findings:

1- A Noticeable Increase in Good Academic Writing and a Reduction in Classroom-related Stress:

The findings indicated the emergence of greater interest towards the task of writing and a considerable enthusiasm among the classmates. Responding to a question, one of the participants opines:

> "The great amount of exercises and homework we were given has really motivated us, and we were taking pleasure in doing it"

Moreover, through the implementation of the professional approach, the researcher has observed that the students taking part in this study were able to shape their ideas and to challenge new thoughts. They became more familiar with the process of writing and obeyed its steps which has led them to produce coherent and meaningful paragraphs and essays. The proposed strategies have demonstrated that the researcher has established some key elements that permit to lessen anxiety and stress through offering a conducive and relaxing atmosphere and to discover and record the learners' weak areas, attitudes and misbehaviours. Thus, the teacher can gain a thorough analysis and can later refine his/her teaching methodology.
As an illustrative response of the teachers' interview, the following can be cited:

> "I was carefully monitoring and following up what occurred through the learning experience"

2- Gain of Basic Instructions To Be Respected when Producing a Piece of Writing:

The results pictured that the students have utilized more complex expressions and appropriate content. That is, this experience fostered their writing abilities. It was remarked that incorporating the professional approach has contributed to the refinement of learners' writing capacities through a selection of more complex expressions, the use of the convenient substance and the acquisition of useful vocabulary.

3- A Constructive Awareness about Examining and Developing One's Own Practices through:

- Discovering the students' strengths and downsides
- Posing significant queries then exploring them
- Trying to find out specific areas of teaching practices that need to be improved

Therefore, these techniques have demonstrated that they enable the teachers to gain key reflections on their own instruction and on their learners' interactions and conducts throughout time.

Concluding Reflections

As concluding thoughts, promoting the quality of instruction has always been the subject of salient discussion in teacher education; thus, aiding teachers to reshape their classroom practice is key to their success. Ameliorating teachers' professional growth is seen as a prerequisite for addressing a continuous stream of changes in their environments. Further, ongoing professional advancement does not only allow teachers to learn new approaches, but also enables them to grapple with divergent issues and refine the pedagogies required to support students to increase the knowledge, skills, and competencies they need to thrive in the 21st century. Our findings make a case for future scholarship exploring the extent to which teachers readjust and revise their specific existing practices.

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