

The Pedagogic Process of Writing in English as a Second Language (Esl) in Kenyan Secondary Schools

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Abstract

The present study is a descriptive survey of the pedagogic process of ESL writing in selected secondary school classes in Kenya. The study describes the input provided by teachers with regard to writing in the ESL classes, explores the steps in the writing process followed by the learners, uncovers teacher feedback provision practices and finally surveys learners' reactions to the writing lessons and to the feedback. The motivation for the study was the continued poor performance in the K.C.S.E English composition writing paper. The subjects of the study were Form Two students plus their teachers of English (writing) in eleven secondary schools selected using stratified random sampling. Data collection was by classroom observations, tape-recording of lessons, questionnaires, interviews and document analysis of marked essays. Data analysis and discussion of findings was guided by the tenets of Ellis' theory of instructed second language acquisition, the affective filter hypothesis and the process-genre approach to the teaching of writing. Input in the classroom was found to touch on all important areas of writing though its comprehensibility could be improved by adopting a wide variety of learner centered classroom activities and use of a variety of resources. Learners were found to follow all the steps in the writing process but need training in specific strategies especially for pre-writing and revising. The most prevalent teacher feedback provision method was indirect uncoded error feedback accompanied by teacher commentary. The feedback focuses largely on weaknesses, touches on all important areas of writing but has a bias towards LOCs. Learners revealed that their writing lessons are interesting, but can be improved by including more writing practice, a wide variety of resources and samples of written communication. The learners also revealed that teachers provide useful and fair feedback that largely focuses on LOCs. The learners would prefer feedback in all areas, top among them vocabulary usage. Using a variety of error feedback strategies plus other methods of feedback provision as well as incorporating a requirement for revision of marked essays into the feedback process could improve provision of feedback in the learners' view. The findings of this study imply the need for: improvement of classroom practices, activities and resources; a better preparation of teachers especially with regard to feedback provision, and a re-evaluation of the examination practices for composition writing.

Key words: Second language acquisition, English language, Composition and exercises, Study and teaching, Writing, Research

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