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Writing More and Writing Better; Rethinking Development in Writing Composition

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ABSTRACT

The study examines the relation between the quantity of writing and the quality of writing in relation with learner development in second language composition. It internalises Swain's Output Hypothesis and reviews the existing research in relevance with writing practices, feedback and Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI) in Second Language writing. The reviews of the existing literature suggest that a single long written composition can support learning but it may not fully represent the learners' learning progress and capability of testing learners' writing ability. Gen AI has made such divergence more noticeable because learners can improve their writing through external assistance such as AI tools, supporting websites, and chatbots, etc. The study argues that writing development should be examined through learners' ability to communicate effectively, apply feedback during the process and produce comprehensible texts. It also investigates the usage of AI as a part of the learning process instead of being a bypass for learners' writing practices.

Keywords: Writing skill, Generative Artificial Intelligence, Output Hypothesis, writing development, writing pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

In second language education, learners engage in writing more through assignments, tasks and activities during the learning process, but the idea of progress behind it deserves to be examined. A learner may produce longer texts and complete more assignments but still may struggle gaining control over contextual organisation, vocabulary or purpose. Longer texts may demonstrate greater fluency, but length alone cannot establish accuracy, coherence or effective communication. A learner may produce a detailed composition with limited control over language, while another may communicate ideas more precisely in fewer words.

The growing influence of Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI) has made this argument more relevant. Artificial Intelligence tools can assist learners with vocabulary selection, grammar correction, organisation of ideas and even the production of entire composition but those assistance may not always lead to learning. Research on AI in second language writing also highlights the importance of learner agency and the need for critical engagement with these tools. Thus, the distinction between improvements in written products and actual learner development has therefore become an increasing concern in language teaching.

The study examines the relationship between writing quantity, writing quality and learner development through Swain's Output Hypothesis. It considers how language production, reflection and revision contribute to writing competence while addressing the growing influence of generative AI on written performance. The research argues that meaningful progress should be understood through changes in learners' linguistic competence, communicative effectiveness and ability to produce texts independently, rather than through the quantity or apparent quality of their compositions alone.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study is guided by the following research questions,RQ1: How are writing quantity and quality related to learner development in second language learning?

RQ2: How does Generative Artificial Intelligence influence the relationship between written performance and the development of independent writing competence?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Literature on second language learning has examined how writing activities contribute to the learners' language learning progress. In Testing the Output Hypothesis: Effects of Output on Noticing and Second Language Acquisition, Izumi et al. examined whether producing language helps learners notice linguistic problems and tested on how some of the writing tasks led to immediate improvement among learners but failed to be consistent. Thus, a written product can support learning but the improvement through the product is to be examined deeply. (Izumi et al., 1999). Similarly, a study, "The Efficacy of Various Kinds of Error Feedback for Improvement in the Accuracy and Fluency of L2 Student Writing" found that teacher feedback and error correction can improve later writing. Learners who corrected grammatical and vocabulary errors showed improvement in accuracy in subsequent assignments. Thus, feedback and correction can contribute to learner improvement without reducing fluency (Chandler, 2003).

Ortega examined the relationship between sentence complexity and second language proficiency through a review of 25 studies. The research found that the relationship varied according to learning contexts and assessment methods. This suggests that sentence structure alone cannot explain the overall development of a learner's writing ability. Hanaoka investigated how learners noticed language problems when they compared their writing with model texts. The study found that learners were more likely to use and remember language features that helped them address problems they had already noticed. Thus, reflection and revision can play an important role in the learning process. Further research examined how changes in language use relate to writing quality. Bulté and Housen studied 45 adult ESL learners and found that different measures of linguistic complexity were useful for identifying changes in writing performance. Their research also suggests that the linguistic features that showed improvement over time were not necessarily the features associated with higher writing quality.

The introduction of generative AI has brought further attention to this concern. Mahapatra investigated ChatGPT as a feedback tool among undergraduate ESL learners and reported improvements in academic writing performance, including results from a delayed assessment. However, Nguyen and Barrot examined how six second language writing teachers evaluated human and AI generated compositions. Their findings showed that teachers could not consistently identify the source of the texts. This raises concerns about whether the quality of a submitted composition can reliably represent a learner's independent writing ability. More recently, Pretorius and Thewissen compared 91 compositions with their revised versions produced through teacher guided ChatGPT feedback. Their research examined changes in grammatical accuracy and vocabulary use, while also considering the limitations of AI assisted revision. Jerome S and Sathya explored a different application of AI through prompt writing activities. Their study reported improvements in learner engagement, reflection and awareness of language choices through repeated prompt refinement. These studies suggest that AI can support language learning when learners remain actively involved in the process. However, the distinction between producing an improved text and developing the ability to write independently remains an important concern.

The existing literature provides evidence of improvement through writing practice, corrective feedback and AI assistance. Yet the relationship between written production, the quality of the final composition and the development of independent writing competence requires further examination.

Theoretical Framework

Swain's Output Hypothesis provides the theoretical foundation for the present study. Swain explains that language production is not only a way for learners to demonstrate what they know but also an opportunity to develop their language skills. The theory identifies three important functions of output: noticing gaps in language knowledge, testing language choices and reflecting on language use (371).

Noticing: A learner recognises a gap in their language knowledge while trying to express an idea.

Hypothesis testing: A learner tests / tries a grammatical structure or expression

Metalinguistic reflection: A learner thinks about language choices and ways to improve them.

In writing tasks, learners may recognise grammatical problems, reconsider their vocabulary choices or improve their expressions through feedback and revision. However, the amount of writing produced does not guarantee that these processes take place. The rapid growth of Gen AI makes such differences more important. AI tools can correct errors and improve sentences, but these changes do not necessarily indicate that learners have understood or learnt from them. The learner's involvement in reviewing suggestions, questioning corrections and applying new knowledge becomes important. Swain's theory therefore helps examine how written production contributes to learning and why improvements in a final composition may differ from the development of independent writing competence.

Findings

The findings of the research are as follows,

Increased in a long composition text or the writing quantity does not necessarily indicate improved writing quality.

Feedback and reflection contribute to learners' writing development thus catalysing the learning process.

AI assisted writing need not to always reflect independent writing competence, it may affect learners linguistic competence if failed to put it into practice without creating awareness of its usage

Active learner involvement through interactive activities and materials with AI incorporation influences the learning value

of AI assistance.
Writing development needs to be assessed beyond a single written composition. Multiple writing practices and activities must be held to support for deep evaluation.
Learners' consciousness raising on the usage of artificial intelligence not as a bypass on writing practices but as an learning aid for improvement in writing

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study suggest that writing development cannot be understood only through the quantity of text learners produce during the learning process. It raises a question of what can be considered as the evidence of writing development, and how progress is recognised in second language classrooms. A learner may write longer compositions or complete several assignments with fewer errors but may not show the actual improvement in language use. Swain's Output Hypothesis helps explain this difference through the learner's involvement in identifying language problems, testing alternatives and reflecting on language choices. Writing quantity can indicate fluency of a learner but it may not show the ability to organise ideas, select appropriate vocabulary and communicate clearly. The purpose of the writing task also matters because a descriptive essay may require details, while an argumentative paragraph may be more effective with fewer words and clearer reasoning. Therefore, the value of written products must be understood in relation to what learners are expected to communicate. These processes as a whole offer opportunities for learning, but their results need to be examined through subsequent writing performance.
Generative AI makes the assessment of writing practices more challenging, A learner may use AI to correct grammatical errors, turn their writing more comprehensible, develop arguments or bypass cognition but fails to address learners' own growth. At the same time, a learner who examines AI suggestions and makes conscious changes and corrections may develop their linguistic knowledge. Therefore, the concern is not about the usage of AI but how much the learner gains from it, applies it, and uses it in later writing tasks. Thus, the study suggests repeated writing tasks that focus more than quantity. It should produce different drafts, beginning from the original draft and then compare those original drafts with assisted revised drafts, AI assisted revisions and later to the independent writing as an evidence of development. The writing tasks should also vary in purpose and context, as improvement in one type of composition may not reflect the learners' ability to write another. The use of AI can be included in such tasks through prompt writing, feedback and revisions where learners make decisions and planning before writing. This would track the learners' progress while keeping AI not as a bypass but as an aid of the learning process.

Pedagogical Implications

The study suggests that writing activities should focus more on developing learners' ability to communicate across different tasks instead of producing longer compositions, suggesting a revised testing would benefit the process more. Lesson plans on writing can include activities that involve narration, description, explanation and argumentations. This could create an environment for the learners to practice different language functions and apply previous learning in new contexts. Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI), can also be a part of these activities through feedback, prompt refinement and language exploration. As the research article, "Prompting Metacognition: Using Prompt Writing as a Language Task and Metacognitive Tool in ELT" from ELTAI has experimented on prompt writing as a language learning activity, which has improved learners engagement and responses. AI incorporated activities such as prompt writing, error correction games, vocabulary detectives, comparative writing (human vs ai text comparison) can be integrated into the writing models in order to prevent learners from using the upcoming technologies to their progressive benefits. Thus, this approach allows AI to support the writing process while maintaining learner involvement.

CONCLUSION

The study argues that writing development should not be understood through the length of a single composition alone. Learners need opportunities to produce clear, accurate and purposeful texts through different writing tasks. Generative AI can contribute to this process when learners examine its suggestions, reflect on their language choices and apply their learning in the process. The study also highlights the importance of providing different writing activities that would allow learners to develop their skills through practice, feedback and reflection. Thus, the focus of the second language composition is beyond the length or quality of a single written text. It should consider how learners develop their writing competence through different tasks and learning situations.

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