

Investigating the Relationship of Reading and Writing Abilities in the English Language Program at King Faisal University

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Abstract

Many studies in first language research have found high correlation between good writers and good readers and have viewed reading and writing as mutually reinforcing interactive processes. On the other hand, only a few studies have investigated the connection between reading and writing in second language contexts. These studies have concluded that second language input plays a significant role in developing literacy skills in the second language, i.e., reading input affects the development of writing and reading abilities and/or writing input affects the development of reading and writing abilities. This study has investigated the relationship between reading and writing abilities in an advanced second language learning situation at King Faisal University and found that reading and writing form important relations with each other. They are mutually interactive skills and share many cognitive processes and ways of learning. The study concludes with the important implication that reading and writing are to be taught together in advanced academic preparation.

Introduction

Research of first language acquisition (Belanger, 1987; Flood and Lapp, 1987; Kucer, 1987; Stotsky, 1983) have shown strong relationships between reading and writing abilities, i.e., good readers tend to be good writers and good writer tend to be good readers. Such studies have also identified common cognitive processes and/or structural components underlying reading and writing abilities so much so that instruction and improvement in one skill can enhance capabilities in the other. In contrast to the substantial body of surveys on the relationship between reading and writing abilities in

a first language context little has been done to investigate this connection for second language learners.

According to Carson, Carrel, Silberstein, Kroll, and Kuehn (1990), the situation for second language learners is much more complex than it is for first language learners. However, it is difficult to imagine that input in second language would not play a significant role in developing literacy skills in the second language, i.e., reading input presumably affects the development of writing and reading abilities and/or writing input affects the development of reading and writing abilities.

Carson et al., (1990) examined whether or not reading and writing relationship are closely related in first and second language contexts. Their results suggest that the interaction between reading and writing is complex, with certain aspects of each skill being somewhat independent of the other. Carson (cited in Grabe, 1991) examined the many arguments for assuming that reading influences writing, that writing influences reading, and that they interactively influence each other. She stresses that reading and writing are likely to influence each other reciprocally but not as inverses of the same process. Rather, a bidirectional model (Shanahan and Lomax, 1986) states that reading and writing relationship changes at different stages of language development and aspects of this relationship will be independent of each other.

Krashan (1987) claims that second language learners' writing competence derives from large amounts of self motivated reading for interest and/or pleasure. Kimberling, Wingate, Rosser, DiChara and Krashan (cited in Krashan, 1984) examined this issue directly. They found very clear differences between good writers and poor writers – good writers reported more pleasure reading at all ages, and especially during high school years. However, not one poor writer reported “a lot” of pleasure reading during high school.

McNeil (cited in Krashan, 1984) evaluated the results of a pleasure reading program. His findings showed that the “readers” exhibited significantly greater writing fluency and wrote with greater complexity than did the ‘non-readers’. The readers also gained in self-esteem as compared

to the “non-readers”, were less anxious about school, improved in attitudes towards reading and writing, and were superior in reading comprehension.

Krashan (1984) stresses that increasing reading has generally been found to be more effective in producing gains in writing than increasing writing frequency. Smith (1982) describes reading as a process that involves both the extraction and supplying of information. He suggests that the latter may be even more important than the former. “The basic skill of reading lies more in the non-visual information we supply from inside our heads rather than in the visual information that bombards us from print” (Smith, 1982: 105).

Thus, when we read we extract information according to the purpose of our reading, our interests, motivations, etc; we supply information in order to make sense of what we read, using our knowledge of the world and our previous experience as readers. Our previous experience as readers enables us to identify and understand cohesion, coherence, rhetorical organization, and conventions of written language; our knowledge of the world enables us to understand concepts and point of view and to integrate them in our experience (Lopes, 1991).

When we write, we also make use of our knowledge of the world and of our experience as readers. This why, as Lopes (1991) notes, projects designed to improve students’ writing focus primarily on developing reading skills. Lopez, thus, concludes that if we aim at better writing, the first step should be the improvement of students’ reading strategies, making them always aware of the importance of calling upon their knowledge of the world and their experiences as readers. The second step should be to help them develop a different attitude towards writing by helping them concentrate on expression their thoughts rather than avoiding mistakes.

On the other hand, researchers such as Edelsky, 1982; Hudelson, 1984; Harste, Woodward, and Burke, 1984; Spack, 1985; Hansen, 1987 (cited in Zamel, 1992) believe that writing is what makes it possible for us to read rather than the other way around.

The contribution of writing to the development of reading has been demonstrated as Zamel (1992) reports, in elementary school classrooms in

which writing becomes as opportunity to explore meaning. In such classrooms, children with limited literacy and English language proficiency, even before they are able to read or, for some of the, express themselves orally in English, write stories which become their first reading texts. This initiation into literacy provides these children with the opportunities to develop and extend their understanding about text. It helps them test out their growing understanding of storiness, or wordness, of how one keeps ideas apart in writing, and of how one uses writing to mean. Writing, as Zamel (1992) continues to describe, “because it requires these beginning readers/writers to make decisions about purpose, sequences, and language, because it helps them to understand how and why texts are written, gives these learners insights in the goals, constraints, and concern of authors, insights which they apply to their reading. Writing, because it helps learners understand that everything they read is writing, therefore needs to be recognized as the foundation of reading” (p.469).

Like children in these writing to read classrooms, adults who are in the process of acquiring a second language can benefit from creating their own texts; these written texts, because they can provide a means through which learners record their own experiences and consider their own realities, have greater resonance for them than those they are usually assigned to read and thus have the potential for becoming the basis for literacy development (Zamel, 1992).

At college level, ESL composition writing has been shown to affect the reading of literature when the assigned writing is fully integrated with and provides strategies for reflecting about literary texts (Spack, 1988). At more advanced levels, writing has been shown to contribute more to reading. Zamel (1992:470) cites the following excerpt by a graduate student who was reflecting on his own developing as a reader.

Until sometime after I began majoring in English, I was a poor reader. I treated each word on the page as a separate entity. Reading this way always caused me to become easily distracted. (I'd restart continually I'd read “Call me Ishmael” over and over), lose my concentration, etc. Once it had become clear to me by way of learning about the writing process, I applied a sort of free-writing approach to my

reading. I forced my eyes to speed up, to move forward as a pen is commanded to during free-writing. I took in chunks of sentences at a time in the same way that phrases rolled off my pen when I was writing without having time to think about them. And slowly without fully realizing it at the time, I began predicting where the author was going so that I didn't need to attend to every word in order to get the meaning.

Objectives

At King Faisal University, the department of Foreign Languages trains English language teachers to serve in the Saudi school system. Since its inauguration in 1982, the course program of the department has sought to offer a broad base of language skill courses in addition to courses in linguistics, literature and methodology. In this program, language skill courses constitute 46% of the total number of courses offered. 55% of these skill courses are reading and writing courses, 27.7% reading and 27.7% writing. The reading and writing courses are distributed evenly over a period of six semesters of course work in the department. The reading courses proceed in a progression to prepare students from developing basic reading skills and vocabulary in the first year to reading university level materials with special attention to varieties of written English and the purpose each variety serves-information. Observation, thought, persuasion, personal expression, and art-in the third year. The writing courses proceed in a progression that prepares students to proceed from practicing writing skills beginning at the level of simple sentences, moving to compound and complex sentences and concluding with the production of a well formed, coherent paragraph in the first year to writing university level compositions and carrying out similar tasks such as letters and essay answers on exams in the third year.

In light of the preceding literature on the relationship between reading and writing abilities, this study will attempt at investigating such relationship in a foreign language learning context in the English Language program offered by the department of foreign languages at King Faisal University.

Methodology

Data for this study is collected from actual examinations of reading and writing courses given to male and female students of the department of Foreign Languages at King Faisal University in Al-Hasa, Saudi Arabia. The evaluation will, therefore, include actual life situation in the department and the results and the discussion have direct bearing on the actual execution of the program and the performance of its participants. The subjects for the study are 65 students, 28 male and 37 female. They comprise all those who took the examination in the second semester, June 2000.

The reading courses examined in the study are English Texts I, English Texts II. The writing courses examined are Composition I, Composition II and Essay.

The reading courses are offered in the third year (third level) and the writing courses are offered in the second and third years (second and third levels). The five courses have been selected from among ten reading and writing courses for their terminal and advanced nature in the skill courses component of the program and thus reflect the performance of subjects at an advanced stage in the program.

It is important to remember that in the department of foreign languages female students are separated from male and are instructed in both skill and content courses in the department by both male and female teachers. Male students on the other hand, are instructed by male teachers only.

Research hypotheses and tools:

The general assumption of this study is that the development of reading ability of students in the department of foreign languages at King Faisal University has a direct bearing on the development of their writing ability and vice a versa. This basic assumption has been reduced to the following four main hypotheses:

1. There is high correlation between total scores of reading courses and total scores of writing course.
2. There is high correlation between total scores of reading Courses and total scores of reading and writing courses combined.

3. There is high correlation between total scores of writing Courses and total scores of reading and writing courses combined.
4. There is high correlation between scores of individual Reading and writing courses.

To test these hypotheses and calculate the results Pearson Correlation Coefficient is used.

Results and Discussion:

The first hypotheses suggests a high correlation between total scores of reading courses and total scores of writing courses. Table (1) below shows significant correlation ($r=.73$) of scores obtained by male students ($n=28$) in reading courses combined and writing courses combined at the (0.05) level.

Table (1) : Results of males correlations between reading courses and writing courses

Correlation			
	TOREAD	TOWRITE	TOSKILL
TOREAD Pearson Correlation	1.000	.729*	.885*
Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
N	28	28	28
TOWRITE Pearson Correlation	.729*	1.000	.953*
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
N	28	28	28
TOSKILL Pearson Correlation	.885*	.953*	1.000
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
N	28	28	28

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Scores obtained by female students ($N=37$) as displayed in table (2) show significant correlation ($r=.89$) between combined scores of reading courses and those for writing courses at the (0.05 level).

Table (2): Results of female correlations between reading courses and writing courses

Correlation.

		TOREAD	TOWRITE	TOSKILL
TOREAD	Pearson Correlation	1.000	.889*	.969*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
	N	37	37	37
TOWRITE	Pearson Correlation	.889*	1.000	.970*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
	N	37	37	37
TOSKILL	Pearson Correlation	.969*	.970*	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
	N	37	37	37

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

These results indicate clearly the existence of strong relationship between students abilities in reading and their abilities in writing. This findings is in accordance with earlier findings of previous studies mentioned above which argued that input in reading affects the development of writing abilities and input in writing affects the development of reading abilities.

It is also evident from tables (1) and (2) that the relationship between reading and writing abilities is much stronger in the case of female students ($r=.89$) that in the case of males ($r=.73$). Evidence for this higher relationship in the case of female students can be found in table (3) where mean score for reading courses combined for females is ($x=70.2$) and that for writing courses in ($x=70.6$).

Table (3): Females mean scores of reading courses and writing courses

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
TOREAD	70.1892	10.5431	37
TOWRITE	70.5946	9.9818	37
TOSKILL	70.5676	10.0652	37

The lower correlation of reading and writing abilities in the case of male students can also be traced in table (4) which shows mean score for reading courses for males ($x=67.3$) and for writing courses ($x=72.6$).

Table (4): Males mean scores of reading courses and writing courses.

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
TOREAD	67.3214	9.4909	28
TOWRITE	72.6071	8.1256	28
TOSKILL	70.4643	8.0438	28

The higher performance of female students in reading and writing as detected by the previous data can be attributed the over all superiority of female students in the department of Foreign Languages over males, which is also particularly so far the present group of female students (N=37) as compared to males (Al-Braik, Al-Saadat, Al-Shabab, forthcoming).

The relationship of scores of reading courses and total scores of reading and writing courses combined (second hypothesis) is displayed in tables (1) and (2) above. These tables show a significantly high correlation at the (0.05) level between these scores for both male and female students, ($r=.88$) and ($r=.97$) respectively. Again much stronger relationship between these scores can be found in the case of female students as compared to males which again, may be attributed to their higher performance in the department. This same pattern of relationship is repeated in the case of the relation of writing courses and reading and writing courses combined. For this relationship, a significantly high correlation at the (0.05) level is shown in tables (1) and (2) above, ($r=.95$) for males and ($r=.97$) for females.

As can be seen in tables (1) and (2) these latter relationships (second and third hypotheses) are more streamlined in the case of female students than males. This can be traced in tables (3) and (4) where male students show more fluctuation in their mean scores of reading course ($x=67.3$), writing courses ($x=72.6$), and reading and writing courses combined ($x=70.5$) than females, ($x=7.2$), ($x=7.6$) and ($x=7.6$) respectively.

Obviously these findings support the remark of Carson (1990) about the significant role that second language input can play in the development of literacy skills in the second language and his presumption that reading input affects the development of writing and reading abilities and/or writing input affects the development of reading and writing abilities.

The relationship between individual reading and writing courses (fourth hypothesis) is detected in tables (5) and (6). These tables show, for both male and female students, the existence of significant relationship between reading and writing courses on individual bases at the (0.05) level. Two reading courses: English Text I and English Text II, and three writing courses: Composition I, Composition II, and Essay have been used in this study. The correlation coefficients for the first reading course (English Text I) with the three writing course for males are ($r=.76$), ($r=.76$) and ($r=.70$) respectively. For females these correlations are ($r=.80$), ($r=.84$), and ($r=.65$) respectively. The correlation coefficients for the second reading course (English Text II) and the three writing courses for males and ($r=.61$), ($r=.79$), and ($r=.79$) respectively. For females these correlations are ($r=.76$), ($r=.82$) and ($r=.70$) respectively.

Table (5): Results of males correlations: individual reading and writing courses **Correlations**

		ESSAY	COMPONE	COMPTWO	TEXTONE	TEXTTWO
ESSAY	Pearson orrelation	1.000	.735*	.798*	.705*	.794*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	28	28	28	28	28
COMPONE	Pearson Correlation	.735*	1.000	.647*	.758*	.608*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.000	.001
	N	28	28	28	28	28
COMPTWO	Pearson Correlation	.798*	.647*	1.000	.765*	.794*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	28	28	28	28	28
TEXTONE	Pearson Correlation	.705*	.758*	.765*	1.000	.506*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.	.006
	N	28	28	28	28	28
TEXTTWO	Pearson Correlation	.794*	.608*	.794*	.506*	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.001	.000	.006	.
	N	28	28	28	28	28

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table (6): Results of Females correlations between individual reading and writing courses

Correlations

		ESSAY	COMPONE	COMPTWO	TEXTONE	TEXTTWO
ESSAY	Pearson Correlation	1.000	.654*	.595*	.689*	.652*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	37	37	37	37	37
COMPTWO	Pearson Correlation	.654*	1.000	.843*	.825*	.836*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.000	.001
	N	37	37	37	37	37
COMPONE	Pearson Correlation	.595*	.843*	1.000	.762*	.799*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.000	.000
	N	37	37	37	37	37
TEXTTWO	Pearson Correlation	.689*	.825*	.762*	1.000	.857*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.	.000
	N	37	37	37	37	37
TEXTONE	Pearson Correlation	.652*	.836*	.799*	.857*	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.001	.000	.000	.
	N	37	37	37	37	37

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The correlation coefficients in tables (5 and (6) which range between (r=.61) and (r=.84) as evidently high enough to strongly support the relationship between individual reading and writing courses. The two seemingly lower correlations in the two tables (r=.61) between English Text II and Composition I for males and (r=.65) between English Text I and Essay for females though high enough to prove the relation and exist in the two sets of individual courses, is due, perhaps, to the variance in students performance and achievement in these courses. This is particularly so in the case of males (Table 7) where the mean score for the reading courses is (x=.64.1) and that for the writing course is (x=73.8). For females the mean scores for the two concerned reading and writing courses are (x=69.9) and (x=69.3) respectively (Table 8).

Table (7) Males mean scores of individual reading and writing courses

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
ESSAY	74.7143	9.5447	28
COMPONE	64.0714	10.4489	28
COMPTWO	69.8214	7.0399	28
TEXTSONE	70.1071	9.7157	28
TEXTSTWO	73.7857	9.1666	28

Table (8): Females mean scores of individual reading and writing courses

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
ESSAY	69.9189	15.1555	37
COMPTWO	70.0270	11.0315	37
COMPONE	70.0459	10.7650	37
TEXTSTWO	71.1892	12.1743	37
TEXTSONE	69.2703	9.7115	37

Conclusion

It is important to realize that the relationship between reading and writing is anything but simple (Grabe, 1991), that reading and writing are not simply reciprocal processes, and that many differences between reading and writing and writing processes exist. However, the findings of previous research on the relationship of reading and writing reviewed earlier supported by the results of this study indicate that reading and writing form important relations with each other. They share many cognitive skills and are viewed as mutually reinforcing interactive processes. Thus, better readers were better writers and better writers were better readers. The overriding implication of these findings is that reading and writing be taught together at

more advanced second language contexts, as is the situation in the department of foreign languages at King Faisal University. The integration of literacy skills develops strategic approaches to academic tasks.

Reading and writing should not be sequenced in linear fashion so that reading necessarily precedes writing. Just as the teaching of writing must involve the teaching of reading (as has been conceptualized above), the teaching of reading is by necessity the teaching of writing. Just as reading furnishes learners with comprehensible input for writing, writing can provide comprehensible input for reading. Just as learners need to become better readers in order to become better writers, they can become better readers by becoming better writers. This realization is crucial since most often reading and writing are segregated in ESL research and pedagogy (Spack, 1988; Zamel, 1992).

This line of research on the complex relationship of reading and writing is new for second language context. Yet, its importance for improving both reading and writing abilities in second language learners cannot be overemphasized.

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دراسة العلاقة بين مهارتي القراءة والكتابة في برنامج اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة الملك فيصل

عبدالله بن إبراهيم السعادات

قسم اللغات الأجنبية - كلية التربية

جامعة الملك فيصل - الأحساء

المملكة العربية السعودية

الملخص:

توصلت كثير من الدراسات حول اللغة الأم إلى وجود ارتباط وثيق بين إجادة الكتابة وإجادة القراءة لدى المتعلمين. واستنتجت هذه الدراسة أن هاتين مهارتي تتفاعلان مع بعضهما وتعزز أحدهما الأخرى. وعلى الجانب الآخر فإن قليل من الدراسات فقط تعرض للبحث في العلاقة بين مهارتي القراءة والكتابة في محيط تعلم اللغة الثانية. وقد خلصت هذه الدراسة إلى أن مدخلات اللغة الثانية تلعب دورا هاما في تطوير مهارتي التعلم هاتين. أي أن مدخلات القراءة تؤثر في نمو مهارتي الكتابة والقراءة وكذلك مدخلات الكتابة تؤثر في نمو مهارتي القراءة والكتابة.

وقد عمدت الدراسة الحالية إلى البحث في العلاقة بين مهارتي القراءة والكتابة في مستوى متقدم لتعليم اللغة الثانية بجامعة الملك فيصل، ووجدت أن هاتين مهارتي تتبادلان علاقة هامة، فهما تتفاعلان مع بعضهما وتتشركان في العديد من العمليات الذهنية وطرق التعلم. وتخلص الدراسة إلى نتيجة هامة مفادها أن مهارتي القراءة والكتابة ينبغي تعليمها جنبا إلى جنب في برامج التعليم الأكاديمي المتقدم.