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Manal Omar Mousa

Kirkuk Education Directorate

Ala'a Muhammed Hussien

College of Education for Human Sciences, Tikrit University

* Corresponding author: E-mail :

Krkwkymhnd7@gmail.com

07707532632

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The effect of using the Raft strategy in teaching writing skills to middle school students

A B S T R A C T

This practice represents an interactive co-evaluation activity among students, involving such elements as motivation, cooperation and collaborative work. It promotes meaningful learning experiences in a competitive environment. The goal of this activity is to examine topics which are explored during the semester through games that are created by students, as well as to promote holistic development and diversity through the investigation of a wide range of global cultures. Further, the activity seeks to enhance the internationalization of the pedagogic model that guides our collective educational philosophy. An empirical method of research is adopted in the current study which is based on observing students during an activity. Since the activity enhances students' creativity for a better contextualization of the country to be presented. It replaces the traditional way of testing (the written tests) and gives the students the opportunity to see the level of the acquired learning in an interactive and fun context

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اثر استخدام استراتيجية رافت في تعليم مهارات الكتابة لطلاب المرحلة الاعدادية

الاء محمد حسين / مديرية تربية كركوك

منال عمر موسى / كلية التربية للعلوم الانسانية , جامعة تكريت

الخلاصة:

الغرض من هذه الدراسة هو تحديد استخدام استراتيجية رافت في تعليم مهارات الكتابة لطلبة المرحلة الاعدادية وبيان اثر استخدام الاستراتيجية في تعليم معايير الكتابة الخمسة الخط اليدوي , ادوات التقطيع , الاملاء , القواعد , والمفردات لطلبة المرحلة الاعدادية دارسي اللغة الانكليزية كلغة اجنبية . ولتحقيق اهداف الدراسة وضعت عدة فرضيات وهي : لا يوجد فرق ذو دلالة إحصائية بين متوسط درجات

المجموعة الضابطة الذين تم تدريسهم بالطريقة التقليدية والمجموعة التجريبية التي درست باستخدام استراتيجية رافت في تحصيل المهارات الكتابية و لا يوجد فرق ذو دلالة إحصائية بين متوسط درجات استراتيجية رافت على طلاب المدارس الإعدادية للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في خمسة نماذج لمهارات الكتابة: (الخط اليدوي , ادوات التنقيط , الاملاء , القواعد , المفردات) . و لتحقيق اهداف الدراسة والتأكد من الفرضيات تم العمل باختبار بعدي وقبلي على 60 طالبة في ثانوية دجلة للبنات للعام الدراسي 2022-2023. النتائج المستخلصة كانت : يوجد فرق ذو دلالة إحصائية بين متوسط درجات المجموعة الضابطة الذين تم تدريسهم بالطريقة التقليدية والمجموعة التجريبية التي درست باستخدام استراتيجية رافت في تحصيل المهارات الكتابية ، ولصالح استراتيجية رافت وهناك فرق كبير بين متوسط درجات استراتيجية رافت لطلاب المدارس الإعدادية للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في خمسة نماذج لمهارات الكتابة ، وتحقق الطلاب في نموذج تقييم الخط اليدوي أعلى متوسط درجات. وأخيرا وفي ضوء النتائج التي تم التوصل اليها ، تم تقديم عدد من الاستنتاجات والتوصيات والمقترحات للدراسات المستقبلية .

كلمات مفتاحية : استراتيجية رافت , المهارات الكتابية , دارجي اللغة الانكليزية كلغة اجنبية, تجريبية, الطريقة التقليدية, المجموعة الرابطة.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

One of the most often used languages for worldwide communication is English. From elementary school to the university, English has been included into the Iraqi curriculum as a required foreign language. The process of teaching focuses on the four major language areas (vocabulary, structure, functions, and phonology) as well as the four main language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) (Depdiknas, 2006.)

The most important skill students should learn is writing. Work on both your productive and receptive abilities if you want to communicate English effectively. Speaking and writing are considered productive skills, whereas listening and reading are considered receptive skills. The productive side of language abilities includes writing, according to Harmer (2007), It is a skill that requires students to create words on their own. One of the most essential and important skills for effective communication is listening. Writing is still the most crucial skill for English language learners to master, despite being the most challenging of the four categories of language abilities (Saravanan, 2015.)

The English textbooks used in Iraqi schools are designed to educate learners in efficient English communication. Writing is therefore regarded as a crucial skill for students to develop in order to achieve acceptable academic progress, and students' success in this area reflects their real mastery of the target language (EI- Bettar, 1984.)

Students still struggle greatly with the mechanics of writing; they frequently have questions about whether to use punctuation correctly, such as commas, full

stops, colons, etc. They also struggle with spelling correctly. Even some students struggle with capitalization (Radjab, 2013 and Ur, 2000.)

It can be assumed that the students still fall more between the levels of acceptable and poor in their writing abilities to produce a paragraph. It is brought on by a number of reasons. The students' inability to adequately communicate their ideas is the first problem. They still struggle to come up with a good topic sentence for their paragraph. Second, students still have a restricted vocabulary, which makes it challenging for them to select terms that are appropriate for the writing's subject matter. Third, the students do not understand the standards for creating an effective paragraph. Finally, according to Lea and Street (1997), the writing techniques used in the classroom do not actually assist students in developing good paragraphs.

For language learners of all levels, writing is one of the difficult language skills to master. The teacher should be able to select the best writing strategy in this case. At the very least, the teacher, the pupils, the conditions of the lesson, as well as the larger socio-cultural environment, should influence each approach used (Larsen Freeman, 2000)

According to El Sourani (2017), RAFT is a four-part instructional technique that considers the role of the writer (R), the audience(A), the written product's format(F), and the topic of the writing assignment (T). According to Simon (2012), RAFT can assist students in realizing their roles as creative writers when completing creative writing projects. It helps individuals learn how to effectively articulate themselves and offer their points of view in order to increase the awareness of their writing's intended audience. Students that use RAFT's writing method become more conscious of the audience, various formats, as well as the ideas and subjects they will be discussing.

1.2 Aims of the Study

This study aims at:

1-Finding out the effectiveness of using RAFT strategy in teaching writing skills for EFL preparatory school students'.

2-Finding out the effectiveness of using RAFT strategy on EFL school students at five rubrics of writing skills: Style, Punctuation, Spelling, Grammar, Vocabulary.

1.2 Hypotheses of the Study

1-There is no statistically significant difference between mean scores of control group who taught by conventional method and experimental group who taught by using RAFT strategy in writing skills achievement.

2-There is no statistically significant difference between mean scores of RAFT strategy on EFL preparatory school students at five rubrics of writing skills: Style, Punctuation, Spelling, Grammar, Vocabulary.

1.4 Value of the Study

This study could be valuable to EFL preparatory school students ,as well as, teachers ,Curriculum designers of English syllabus, as follows:

1-The study sheds light on the benefits of using RAFT Strategy in the language classroom through the use of modern experiences.

2-It motivates preparatory school students to learn more about the variety of topics and improve their mastery of a wide range of texts.

3-This study serves as a guideline to EFL teachers and encourages them to use RAFT strategy to motivate their students to write professionally and independently.

4-Preparatory students can explore and analyze new concepts, interpret their meaning and increase their ability to reach for the meaning of writing vocabulary correctly.

5-Experiment the role of using RAFT strategy in the educational process for the purpose of improving EFL students' writing ability.

6-Curriculum designer who ought to include some knowledge on how to use Concept RAFT at different levels of textbooks to be implemented by the teachers.

1.5 Limits of the Study

This study is limited to the fourth year scientific preparatory school student's in "Dijlah Preparatory School for Girls " in the city of Kirkuk who are studying **English for Iraq 4th preparatory student's Book Chapter 5, 6, 7** during the academic year 2022_2023.

1.6 Plan of the Study

The steps below are going to be followed:

- 1-Specifying the steps and the main principles, techniques and characteristics of the RAFT Strategy.
- 2- Selecting a sample of 4th preparatory school students from Dijlah preparatory school for (girls) in the city of Kirkuk.
- 3- Dividing the selected sample into two groups, experimental and control. The two groups have been equalized in their age, parent's academic level and their achievement in the pretest.
- 4-Teaching the experimental group students English writing by using the RAFT Strategy, whereas teaching the control group English writing by using the conventional method for a period of ten weeks.
- 5-Constructing an achievement posttest and estimating its validity, reliability, discrimination power, and difficulty level of its items.
- 6-Subjecting the two groups of students to the constructed achievement posttest.
- 7-Collecting the required data and analyzing it statistically.
- 8-Discussing the obtained results and giving some conclusions, recommendations, and suggestions for further work.

1.7 Definitions of the Basic Terms

1.7.1 Effectiveness

Effectiveness: "A measure of how well the outputs of a program or service achieve the stated objectives (desired outcomes) of that program or service" (stringfield,1994).

Effectiveness: "is a measure of the match between stated goals and their achievement. It is always possible to achieve 'easy 'low-standard goals (fraser,1994).

1.7.2 RAFT Strategy

With the help of the RAFT system, teachers may make sure that students are aware of their writing assignment, audience, structure, and necessary information. The following crucial elements are found in any writing assignment: Role of the writer, audience, format, and topic (Santa, 1988).

RAFT is one of the instructional strategies used to teach writing to pupils because it enables students to use their own creativity to describe what they are writing using well-structured processes. In addition to engaging pupils in the investigation of a particular topic or concept, it allows students to employ their imagination and creative talents to provide original ideas that give the topic a distinct perspective (Dani, Litchfield, & Hallman-Thrasher, 2018).

1.7.3 Writing Skills

Writing serves as a visual representation of language; in addition to punctuation and numbers, sets of symbols are used in writing to represent speech sounds (Daniels and William, 1996).

It is “a dynamic, cognitive process requiring sustained mental effort over a substantial period of time” (Nunan, 1999).

Not everyone is an artist, but good writing is an art. Students can learn how to write well, but they also need to have a plan before they start (Birjandi et al, 2004)

2.0 Theoretical Background

2.1 The Concept of Writing

As writing is an essential tool for daily life, it is important to include it in foreign language instruction. The capability to write well is crucial because it allows teachers to reinforce learning and introduce students to new words in written form (Aziz, 2011). Writing is one of the most important abilities in societies of the twenty-first century. Writing serves a variety of purposes, including aiding interpersonal contact, mediating one's self-expression in a variety of circumstances, assisting in the development of ideas, and collecting, saving, and transmitting information (Graham & Harris, 2005). Communication by writing is essential in the modern world and becoming more critical as the information age progresses. The electronic and wireless communication

explosion has brought writing skills into play as never before (Graham & Perin, 2007).

A major linguistic skill and way of exchanging ideas is writing. Therefore, lessons in writing short dialogues, letters, and paragraphs should be given to students to become better at writing. Writing is important to the classroom teaching process in addition to serving as a means of communication. Under the teacher's control, students must be educated in the several stages of the writing process, including copying, dictation, controlled, guided, and free writing (ELT, Methodology (1). 2007)

There are many stages in writing they are:

-Prewriting

-Drafting

-Revising

-Editing

-Publishing

2.2 RAFT Strategy

The RAFT writing technique is regarded as a useful writing technique. Role, Audience, Format, and Topic, or RAFT, are the essential components of every effective writing project (Buehl, 2014). With the use of the RAFT technique, students can better comprehend their function as writers, as well as their target audience, various forms, and anticipated material. This writing technique according to the authors (Sejnost & Thiese, 2007) "encourages the students to raise their capacity for critical thought and reflection while they synthesize what they have learnt". The RAFT technique also strengthens students' understanding of what it means to be a writer by educating them on how the topic and format might affect their audience. As a result, using an approach that is focused and particular can help students enjoy writing (Sejnost & Thiese, 2007).

A guided writing technique is the RAFT strategy. It challenges students to think more deeply about the subject they are writing about and the audience for their work. The goal of using RAFT is to provide students new ways to

approach their writing (Pratiwi,2016). The RAFT technique is applied to teach student-oriented writing and enhance writers' productivity.

Since the student plays a key role in this technique, it is necessary for them to actively participate in the educational process (Al-Dulaimi & Hussain, 2020).

According to(Abdelqader ,2017) RAFT strategy is a system for teaching students the essential components of arranging their writing.

According to Meredith& Steele(2010) there are four components for RAFT Strategy which are listed below:

1-Role

Every piece of writing reflects opinions or points of view; there is no writing that is free from prejudice. This is an important concept for pupils to grasp. Students are influenced by this concept to become mature and to understand the value of perspective in writing since they need to be aware of the various writing roles they can play .

2-Audience

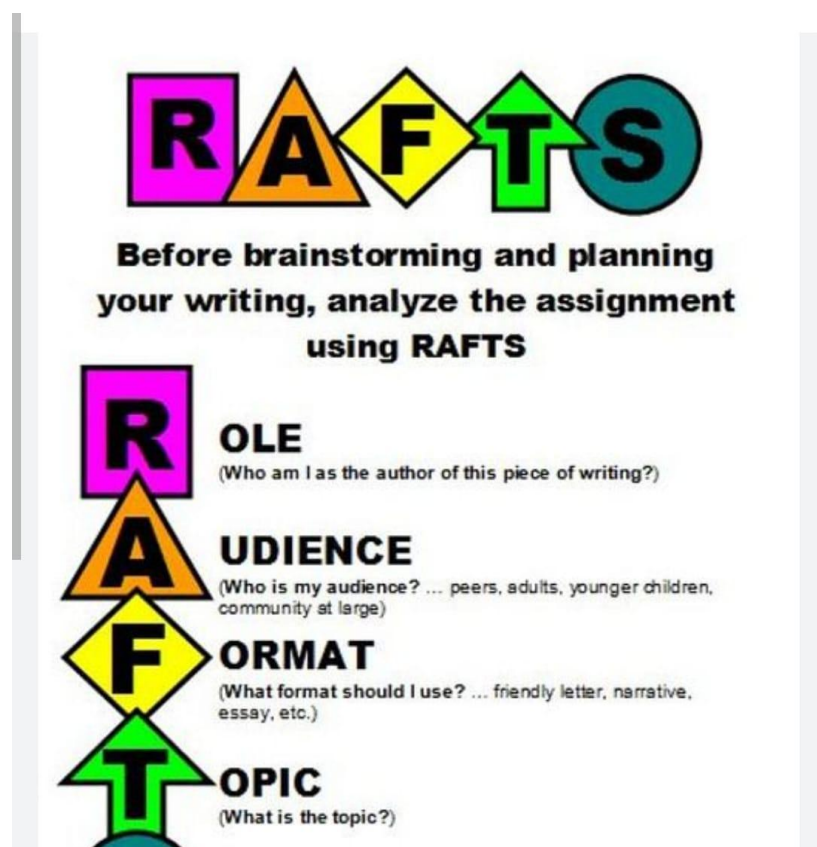
It can be both one of the most enjoyable and difficult aspects of writing. By writing on comparable subjects but for different audiences, students can gain important knowledge about writing as a form of communication. In contrast, students can be given a topic and a specific audience to target, and then their work might be compared to see how each student addressed that audience. Another option is to discuss a subject and inquire as to whether writing differs depending on the audience and format. What arguments might students make if they were blogging, tweeting, messaging a friend, or writing a formal letter to the president.

3-Format

Students are adding more tools to their communications toolkit as they learn about and gain experience with different writing genres. Students frequently want to study different writing styles and look for alternatives to the traditional narrative form. If pupils are only allowed to write basic essays, there are less options for creative writing and avenues for expression.

4-Topic

The hardest part of content area writing is frequently choosing a writing theme. Teachers typically ask pupils to respond to a few key, specific questions. It is helpful to think about the types of questions students should answer when choosing themes; they must think about the conceptual approaches that can be taken to that crucial point. This can be discovered using various topic suggestions. Giving writers the chance to reflect on specific writing prompts is another useful strategy for getting students to write about important topics for class.



RAFT Elements

3.0 Methodology and Procedures

The experimental design is "the blueprint of the procedures that enable the researcher to check hypotheses by reaching valid conclusions about the partnership between independent and dependent variables" (Best and Kahn,2006).The experimental design is a "traditional approach to conducting quantitative research or test an idea (or practice or procedure) to determine whether it influences an outcome or dependent variable" (Creswell,2012).

The experimental design of the current study is entitled “The posttest- Only Equivalent- Group Design” (Best and Kahn, 2006), as shown in the following table.

The Experimental Design of this Study

Groups	Independent Variable	Posttest
Experimental (RAFT)	Using RAFT Strategy	Posttest
Control	Conventional Method	Posttest

3.1 The Population

Richards (2017) defines the population as the people whose data will be collected. According to Lehman and Mehrens (1971), the term "population" can refer to both the group as a whole and the population's size, or the total number of people. The population of the current study includes all of the fourth year-scientific preparatory school students who are distributed among schools in the city of Kirkuk during the academic year 2022-2023. Dijlah Preparatory School for Girls is randomly selected to be involved in the experiment of the study.

The total number of the fourth year-scientific students of the selected school is Sixty. The students are grouped into three sections: (A), (B), and (C). Sections (A) and (B) have been randomly selected as the experimental and control groups whose total number is (60). Section (A) consist of (30), and section (B) consist of (30) students. Some of those students are employed for the pilot study, (5) students are excluded from section (A), and (5) students are excluded from section (B). Thus, (25) students have been selected from section (A) as an experimental group, and (25) from section (B) as a control group. Therefore the total number of the involved sample is (50) who represent 90% percent of its original population, as shown in the following table .

The Population and Sample of the Study

Groups	No. of Population	No. of Pilot Students	No. of Sample Students
Experimental (RAFT)	30	5	25
Control	30	5	25

Total	60	10	50
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3.2 Test Construction

Researchers utilize post-tests as a way to verify whether there are statistically significant changes between control and experimental groups, therefore they designed a test based on the subject chosen at the beginning of their study.

3.3 Face Validity

When a test captures the elements that the test-taker intended to measure, it is valid (Bynom, 2001). According to Standards, the most crucial factor in test evaluation is validity (1985:9). Face validity and content validity are two significant subtypes of validity. By defining the test's intended contents and behavioral aims, the content validity of the created test has been ensured. Face validity is "the way the test looks to the examinees, test administrator, educators and the like" (Harris, 1967).

3.4 Content Validity

Bollen (1989) defined content validity as a qualitative type of validity where the conceptual domain is formed and examined to see if the measurement accurately represents the domain.

3.5 Reliability of the Achievement Tests

Reliability is an important characteristic of a good test. A test is said to be reliable if its degree of accuracy stays stable and consistent each time it is conducted under the same conditions for the same sample of students (Veram and Beard, 1981). One of the necessary characteristics of a good test is reliability. Alderson (1995) states that "reliability is the extent to which test scores are consistent". Reliability is explained by Ravitch (2007). "In testing, a measure of consistency. For example, if a person took different forms of the same test on two different days, the scores on both tests should be similar.

The Alpha-Cronbach formula is used to measure the reliability of the post-test. The coefficient is found to be (0.86) which is considered acceptable.

3.6 Pilot Study

A pilot study is a preliminary study carried out with a sample from the experiment sample to familiarize the researcher with any potential obstacles that may arise throughout the application of the test (Good, 1973). The aim of the pilot study is for the researcher to learn how the instrument works and to estimate how long it will take to answer all of the test questions or items. It also tries to measure the test items' discrimination power and difficulty level, as well as the clarity of the test instructions.

Therefore, the posttest has been tried out on ten students who are discluded from the study's original sample,(5) from group A, and (5) from group B, as specified in the population of Dijilah preparatory school. The time required to answer all of the test questions ranges between 45-55 minutes, and the test instructions are clear.

3.7 Item Analysis

According to Cervantes (1989),Examining test items for difficulty and discriminating power is the process of item analysis. Item analysis is a tool that helps the test writer locate test content and assess the difficulty or ease of an item.

The test items are required to be analyzed in order to determine two important features: difficulty level, and discrimination power, as follows:

3.7.1 Difficulty Level

The difficulty level is specified as the ratio of the students who replied correctly to each item (Rosas, 2000). Item difficulty refers to the extent to which an item appears to be complicated or facilitated for a given number of tests. It just reflects the percentage of learners who respond correctly to the object. The most suitable test item will have item difficulty varying between 0.15 and 0.85 (Brown, 2010). The difficulty level of the present test items varies from (0.31) to (0.55).

3.7.2 Discrimination Power

Discrimination power means " calculating the degree to which a particular item's results correspond with the results of the entire test' (Alderson, 1995). This means that an object is deemed to have weak power of discrimination if it is correctly scored by high-skilled students as well as low-skilled students. Item discrimination refers to the degree to which an object makes a difference between good and poor testers. An object has good power of discrimination if it collects the right answers from the good students and the wrong answers from the bad students. It is worth noting that the high power of discrimination will be close to 1.0, and no power of discrimination will be nil at all (Brown, 2010). The test item discrimination power was found to have a range of (0.38) - (0.56).

4.0 Analysis of Data and Discussion of Result

4.1 Comparison of Mean Scores between Two Groups

The comparison of means shows that the mean scores of the three groups. Thus, the first hypothesis, which states that " There is no statistically significant difference between mean scores of control group who taught by conventional method and experimental group who taught by using RAFT strategy in writing skills achievement ", According to these results, since the mean score of control group is (44.2000), whereas RAFT strategy is (76.7200), whereas the calculated F-value (52.174) is higher than the tabulated F-value (3.13) at the (0.05) level of significance and $DF = (2, 72)$. This indicates that there is a significant difference between the achievement of the two groups in the post-test and in favour of RAFT strategy. So , this hypothesis is rejected.

Comparisons of Means According to (Scheffe^a)

Groups	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
Control	25	44.2000	
Experimental (RAFT)	25		76.7200
Sig.		1.000	1.000

4.2 Comparison Between RAFT strategy Mean Scores Of Iraqi EFL preparatory school students at five rubrics of writing skills

According to the table (4.2), the comparisons of means showed that the mean scores of Vocabulary is (12.3600), Spelling is (12.7200), Grammar is

(15.4400), Punctuation is (16.9600), and Style is (19.2800), with harmonic mean sample size = 25. These results indicate that students' achievement in the Style rubric has the highest mean score. The hypothesis, which states that there is no statistically significant difference between mean scores of RAFT strategy on EFL preparatory school students at five rubrics of writing skills, is rejected.

Comparisons of Means (Scheffe^a)

Groups	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05			
		1	2	3	4
Style	25	12.3600			
Punctuation	25	12.7200	12.7200		
Spelling	25		15.4400	15.4400	
Grammar	25			16.9600	16.9600
Vocabulary	25				19.2800
Sig.		0.998	0.111	0.664	0.239

4.3 Discussion of the Obtained Results

The obtained results of the current study show that the achievement of the experimental group who has been taught by using RAFT strategy is better than that of the control group who has been taught by using the conventional method. This means that RAFT strategy proves to be effective in teaching writing to the EFL fourth year-scientific preparatory school students.

In terms of the obtained results, the improvement of the EFL fourth year-scientific preparatory school students' achievement in writing skill by using RAFT strategy could be attributed to the following factors:

1- RAFT strategy helped students write better, and it was helpful in teaching them how to compose a paragraph.

2- RAFT strategy gave the students the opportunity to play many roles as thinkers, (R) Role of the writer, (A) Audience, writer and poet etc ... (F) Format of the topic, writing a composition, Paragraph and letters. (T) Topic. These responsibilities made it easier for them to learn and use English writing abilities in a variety of contexts and encourages them to write in a creative way, to consider a subject from various angles, and to identify the audience in a variety of formats. The students were better able to write about the issue's components, comprehend the subject they were writing about, and then organize their expression of it. In order for readers to grasp what the writer wrote, it can

enable pupils to understand their function as writers and how to communicate their thoughts clearly.

3-The aspect that improved the most was(Form) in the experimental group that use RAFT strategy .

4- By using RAFT strategy students were able to reason through and articulate their ideas. Students that are excellent at developing and arranging their thoughts will therefore also be excellent at creative writing.

5-Through RAFT strategy the students were not only improved by their own mistakes, but also learning from their friends' mistakes.

6-Because the students enjoyed using RAFT strategy, they felt confident to write.

Thus, the objectives of the study have been achieved as required.

Results of the present study agree with those of El-Sourani (2017), Ibrahim Mohamed (2020) , and Ibrahim Abd- Alwahab (2022).

5.1 Conclusions

In the light of the obtained results, the following points are concluded:

1- RAFT strategy is more productive than the conventional method in teaching writing to EFL Preparatory school students.

2- RAFT strategy promoted a learning environment that provided opportunities for exploring and investigating ways for understanding their roles as writers

3- RAFT strategy gave the students the opportunity to play many roles as thinkers, (R) Role of the writer, (A) Audience, writer and poet etc ... (F) Format of the topic, writing a composition, Paragraph and letters. (T) Topic. These roles helped them to acquire and employ English writing skills in different situations more easily.

3- RAFT strategy considered the individual differences among learners with its various activities and techniques that were suitable for students with different levels of proficiency.

4- RAFT strategy plays an equal role for improving EFL students' performance at production level of writing.

8- RAFT strategy encourages cooperative learning and team work among the students.

9- RAFT strategy can be from those methods for assisting students in expressing their thoughts and ideas.

10- Teachers of EFL can employ various appropriate classroom techniques while teaching writing to their students.

11- RAFT strategy presents a better learning environment for students, as well as they are a conceptual methods that employ a variety of styles, and ideas to facilitate efficient learning.

12- Students show a positive response towards the strategy since they are easy and simple to use, and creates a joyful environment.

5.2 Recommendation

In term of the obtained results and drawn conclusions, the following recommendations are put forward:

1- Preparatory school's teachers must keep up with the new trends for teaching EFL and should be aware of the effective methods and techniques for teaching English in general and writing in particular.

2- EFL syllabus-designers are recommended to construct pre-service educational materials that inform student-teachers about the benefits of RAFT Strategy in improving students' performance in English, particularly in writing.

3- Specialists are recommended to provide in-service training courses to EFL teachers in order to train them in employing the strategy for teaching English for their students.

4- Since there is no ideal method for teaching English, teachers should be allowed to choose techniques, methods, and activities that are appropriate for their students' levels and skills.

5- Teachers are recommended to organize and make a blend of methods they think are appropriate. Each method has its value and uniqueness, on one side and its difficulties and disadvantages, on the other side.

5.3 Suggestions for Further Studies

For further work, the following studies are suggested to investigate:

- 1- The use of RAFT strategy to improve students' Narrative writing achievement for EFL Preparatory Students school.
- 2- The effect of RAFT strategy on developing EFL creative writing skills for EFL Preparatory Students school.
- 3- Implementing RAFT strategy to enhance students' skill in writing formal letter for EFL Preparatory Students school.
- 4- The effect of RAFT strategy through picture series in writing Narrative Text for EFL Preparatory Students school.

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