Developing IT Students' EFL Functional Writing and Attitude Through Task-Based Learning

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the impact of using Task-Based learning to develop second year IT students' EFL functional writing and attitude at Minia Sadat's Academy for Management Sciences.

The quasi-experimental research design which depended on one-group pretest-posttest design was used. Sixty eight IT students participated in the study in the first semester in the academic year 2021-2022.

The researcher taught a course entitled "English language 3".

It was mainly about "Essentials for Business Communication".

To achieve the purposes of the study, the researcher prepared a functional writing checklist, an EFL functional writing skills test , a functional writing rubric and a writing attitude scale. Additionally, the researcher prepared a teachers' guide. The total number of the sessions was twelve.

Findings showed a considerable statistical improvement favoring the post administrations of the English EFL functional writing test and the writing attitude scale. Moreover, there was a strong positive correlation between the two dependent variables. Recommendations and suggestions for further research were presented.

Keywords: Task Based Learning – EFL Functional Writing - Attitude towards Writing

Introduction

Communication skills are important to a well, efficient workplace. Often considered as a soft skill or an interpersonal skill, communication is the act of sharing information from one person to another person or group of people. There are many different ways to communicate, each of which plays an important role in sharing information.

There are four types of communication; verbal, nonverbal, written and visual. Written communication and oral communication are the two basic types of communication.

While verbal communication is effective, written notification is considered more formal in most cases.

In the modern world, it has become a necessity, and most businesses rely on it.

Written communication is the act of writing, typing or printing symbols like letters and numbers to convey information.

It is helpful because it provides a record of information for reference.

Kelling (2019) highlights that writing is commonly used to share information through books, pamphlets, blogs, letters, memos and more.

Emails and chats are common forms of written communication in the workplace.

Walsh (2010) states that writing is important because it is used broadly in higher education and in the workplace.

If students do not know how to express themselves in writing, they will not be able to communicate well with professors, employees, peers, or just about anyone else. Much of professional communication is done in writing: proposals, memos, reports, applications, preliminary interviews, e-mails ….etc.

In this regard, Asunmaa (2015) emphasizes that learning writing skills in a foreign language is central since writing is a way to communicate, a tool for working and a way to express one's intellect. In order to succeed in a foreign language, one needs to be able to write various types of texts such as job applications and effective essays.

Developing the writing skill is important for EFL learners in the target language.

Writing plays an indispensable role to improve students' exposure and competency for the purpose of communication and interaction. In order to be competent writers, EFL learners not only need intellectual strategies but also certain linguistic and vocabulary knowledge as well as appropriate writing conventions that will help them express themselves effectively (Ekran & Sabah, 2011).

Writing as a process starts from planning, drafting, revising and editing before getting a final piece of a well written text.

It is the area in which learners need to be offered adequate time to develop their writing skill.

Erkan and Sabah (2011) assert that language learners face many challenges in a writing task so; their writing performance is seriously hindered and in turns their academic achievement. It involves several requirements which are expected to be fulfilled by learners to produce acceptable piece of writing, learners have to give attention to content, organization, purpose, audience, vocabulary and many other aspects (Al- Samadani, 2010).

Writing is a whole brain activity, which uses right brain side (emotion) and left- brain side (logic) (Deporter & Heracki , 2000).

Writing is a composition task to formulate and organize ideas in proper language to deliver and communicate the passage to the reader and present it on a piece of paper. (Dirgeyasa, 2018).

In order to deliver the passage effectively, the writing logically should be effective as well.

Onchera and Manyasi (2013) state that functional writing skills provide an individual with the essential knowledge, skills and understanding that enables one to operate confidently effectively and independently in school, life and at work.

Individuals of whatever age who possess these skills are able to participate and progress in education, training and employment as well as develop and secure the broader range of aptitudes, attitudes and behaviors that enable them to make a positive contribution to the school, community in which they live in and places of work.

Abdallah (2014) emphasizes that functional writing relates mainly to communicative- pragmatic uses of English while writing to accomplish some realistic goals/ needs.

That is, the writing activities carried out resemble those done in real life for practical purposes. Hence, functional writing is about applying writing to real examples, situations and tasks, and accordingly, learners should produce realistic and meaningful documents.

It is also about 'quality' rather than ' quantity'; learners should be able to work on a piece until they are satisfied with it.

Salem (2018) states that functional writing skills related to business majors include skills students need in their university study such as writing formal reports, skills necessary at their workplace such as writing agenda & minute's meetings.

Therefore, the researcher of the current study assumes that students specialized in business administration in general and IT students in particular need to be equipped with an array of functional writing skills in order to cope up with the workplace requirements.

Students identify the skill of writing as more difficult than listening and reading (Berman & Cheng, 2001).

Additionally, writing is a skill that most students are least proficient in when acquiring a new language.

EFL students' vocabulary is limited, and they do not have the same background knowledge as native speakers, so it's more difficult for them to write with meaning.

Despite being able to communicate orally, writing proves to be frustrating to them because they cannot use any medium to communicate meaning expect written words.

In the same context, Elias, Akmaliah and Mahuddin (2005) report anxiety in writing is due to unnecessary focus on errors in spelling and grammar instead of content.

Unfortunately, most English as a foreign language EFL students have negative attitudes towards writing. They often view writing as a difficult task, Ismail, Elias, Albakri, Permual and Muthusamy (2010) found that most EFL students are apprehensive to writing activity and have negative attitude towards academic writing .

Usually, the students who perceive difficulty in writing, would dislike the activity (Ismail, Hussin & Darus, 2012) .

Ideally, students should have positive attitude to writing as it can help them to achieve better writing performance. Research reveals that there is a relationship between positive attitude and writing skill (Hashemian & Heidari, 2013).

Students with strong motivation perform high level of enjoyment, confidence, perceived ability and positive attitudes towards writing. (Gupta and Worldermariam ,2011)

Erkan and Saban (2011) mention that "Success with writing in a foreign

language may be related to attitudes towards writing, apprehension about writing , and self-efficacy in writing". (p.168).

The connection between students' attitude and writing has gained little attention. However, the attitudes towards writing as a whole have a significant impact on achievement; it either enhances or hinders it.

In the same context, writing in a foreign language is not welcomed by most students and that writing in a foreign language is more terrifying in the mother tongue (Gilmore, 2009).

Consequently, teachers need to engage learners in classroom activities in which writing is approached as a process and tackled through different stages. EFL learners commit a lot of errors because of their first language interference. Gomaa- Moulds (2010) claims that Arab English language learners commit and repeat mistakes due to their mother tongue interference as ; i) run on a sentence which is totally accepted in Arabic, ii) literal translation , as translating idioms and expressions from Arabic, causing misunderstanding . iii) Using punctuation marks incorrectly. iv) Writing organization that differs from writing organization in Arabic.

Among the approaches that can be used in EFL classrooms is Task-based learning.

Celik (2017) highlights that teaching English through tasks has been considered useful to employ in the language classroom because students are believed to learn the target language better when tasks are used as vehicles in language teaching. Tasks involve language and they provide a natural context for students to learn English with ease. In task-based learning the emphasis is on meaning and the learners are required to use the language for learning.

Willis (2013) defines a classroom task as a "goal oriented activity in which learners use language to achieve a real outcome".

Willis also suggests that language used in tasks is likely to reflect language

use in the outside world, in addition to being meaning-oriented; classroom tasks must also have a clear relationship with real world contexts of language use and language need.

Task-based learning (TBL), is also known as Activity-based language Learning (ABLL), Task-based language teaching (TBLT) or ATask-based Instruction (TBI).

Task-based learning was first developed by N. Prabhu in Bangladore, southern India.

Prabhu believed that students may learn more effectively when their minds are focused on the task, rather than on the language they are using (Littlewood, 2004).

In order to understand Task-based Learning, we need to define what a task is, according to Willis and Willis (2013), tasks can be real life situations or have a pedagogical purpose, a task should provide opportunities for students to exchange information with a focus on meaning, not a specific form, a task should have a clear purpose so the learners should know the outcome they are expected to produce when they finish performing the task.

The outcome may vary; it may be a solution for a problem or writing an e-mail requesting information; result in an outcome that can be shared with more people.

Task–based Learning (TBL) is a student centered approach, which aims at presenting opportunities for learners to master language skills via activities designed to engage in the natural, practical and functional use of language for meaningful purposes.

The essence of TBL is to engage students in authentic learning activities and to put them in the kinds of situations in which they need to use these skills, also TBL indicates that learning the language is a dynamic procedure which facilitates communication and social interaction among students more

effectively when they naturally exposed to meaningful tasks (Latif, 2018). Nunan (2004) has summarized seven principles which have to be followed in the fame of task-based language teaching: Scaffolding, Task dependency, Recycling, Active learning, Integration, Reproduction to creation and Reflection.

Task- based Learning which is a subcategory of the communicative language approach, is one of the most important methodologies in English Teaching. In the past decades, TBL has gained much attention from educators and researchers in various fields.

TBL basic elements are purposeful activities and tasks that emphasize meaning, learners learn language by engaging in meaningful tasks, activities and tasks can be either those that leaners might need to achieve in real life or those that have a pedagogical purpose specific to classroom.

Activities and tasks of a task-based syllabus can be sequenced according to difficulty, and the difficulty of a task depends on a range of factors including the previous experience of the learner, the complexity of the tasks, and the degree of support available. (Richards &Rodgers, 2014).

Hyland (2019: 114-115) categorizes writing tasks according to the areas of skills they are designed to improve. Hyland introduces five different skills that the student needs in order to create effective texts: content, system, process, genre, and context. The student needs knowledge of the subjects of which to write about and what to include in a text (content), knowledge of the language forms he or she needs in order to deliver a message (system), knowledge of revising and drafting (process), knowledge of communicative purposes (genre) and knowledge of reader's expectations (context).

Task-based learning is an analytical approach to language pedagogy which exposes students to holistic chunks of contextualized, functional language that they can analyze themselves. (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2013; Phuong ,

2014).

Thus, Task-based learning highlightsthe instrumental value of language.

Task-based learning views the learning process as a set of communicative tasks that are directly linked to curricular goals they serve (Brown, 2000). Although writing tasks in general have been the interest of various studies, there is still a need for a more detailed account of what types of writing tasks exist in EFL materials. (Asunmaa, 2015)

Task-based writing instruction within the larger framework of TBL makes learners involved in active mutual work on tasks that are reasonable for them and related to their real life experience. (Kawachi, 2003; Ryan &Deci ,2000) . Furthermore, teachers and students can benefit from TBL since it reduces stress for teaching big classes. In addition, students found more opportunities to clarify meaning through interaction and negotiation of meaning .(Hai-yan, 2014).

Review of Literature

A number of studies in the field of language teaching were conducted to investigate the impact of TBL in developing students' functional writing skills, performance, creativity and achievement.

For example, Bahandari (2020) conducted a study to explore English teachers' experiences in teaching writing with respect to the intent of the secondary level English curriculum prescribed by the Curriculum Development Center, Ministry of Education, Nepal.

The study was qualitative where five teacher participants were interviewed. The data were analyzed based on the taxonomy of task types by Willis and Wills (2007).

The findings showed that the teacher participants were theoretically aware of TBLT, especially in teaching writing, and the intent of the prescribed

curriculum; however, they were not able to fully bring their knowledge and skills into practice to meet the objective of the curriculum.

Thus, Bahandari 's study purposed a way forward to strengthen teachers' ability to bring TBLT theory into practice through training, workshops, research, and higher studies.

Amer (2019) conducted a study to investigate the effect of TBLT on EFL writing skills of 2nd year secondary school students.

Participants of the study consisted of 62 students at Menofya governorate. They were divided into two groups (No=32) for the experimental group and (N=30) for the control one. The experimental group was treated by using TBLT while the control group was treated using traditional teaching. Instruments included an EFL writing test and a rubric for assessing students' writing skills.

T-test results revealed that the experimental group students outperformed the control group on the EFL writing skills as a result of TBLT. Findings also indicated that students of the experimental group in the post-test of EFL writing skills outperformed those in the pre-test.

Sundari, Febriyanti and Sargih (2018) investigated the effectiveness of task-based materials in improving writing class for university.

A mixed method approach was carried out by using quasi-experimental research and content analysis of sentence complexity.

The respondents were 210 students from writing classes as experiment and control with writing test as instrument.

The results of data analysis showed that the score did not significantly differ on the aspect of writing mechanics, a developed task-based material has been proved to improve students' writing skill in the aspect of format, content, organization and grammar.

Moreover, the levels of complexity and accuracy from the students whose

materials use task-based design were higher than those who did not use it.

Then, it could be drawn a conclusion that the use of developed task-based materials brought significant effects towards writing performance .

Furthermore, Oktavianti (2015) found out that TBLT managed to improve students' writing performance in Descriptive texts.

Pourdana and Behbahani (2012) also conducted a study to examine the impact of three types of language assessment tasks; Topic Writing, Picture Description, and Text Reconstruction - on aspects of accuracy, fluency and complexity in Iranian EFL learners' writing performance.

Findings from Analysis of Variances (ANOVA) demonstrated a high degree of accuracy and complexity in EFL learners' performance on Topic Writing task, comparing to aspect of fluency which was demonstrated to be the highest in EFL learners' performance on Picture Description task .

Abdalla   and Mansour (2015) conducted a study to investigate the effectiveness of employing a virtual-task-based situated language learning (TBSLL) environment mediated by second life (SL) in developing EFL student teachers' pragmatic writing skills and their technological self-efficacy. A control – experimental research design was employed to compare between participants' performance in two groups: a control group (n=10) exposed to a traditional lecture based writing course; and an experimental (SL) group selected previously (n=10) exposed to the virtual SL situated language learning (online sessions). Tools included (a) pragmatic writing skills post-test (b) Academic Self-efficacy scale; and (c) e-portfolio for formative assessment. Results indicated the effectiveness of the virtual task-based situated language environment in developing participants' pragmatic writing skills in English and that SL participants' technological self-efficacy was significantly higher than the control group participants .

Marashi and Dadari (2012) investigated the impact of task-based writing on

EFL learners' writing performance and creativity on a sample of 56 female intermediate Iranian EFL.

They were randomly assigned to one control and one experimental group with 28 participants in each.

Both groups underwent the same amount of teaching and the same writing topics during 18 sessions of treatment.

The only difference was that the experimental group was engaged in doing task-based writing activities while the control group was not asked to do any kind of tasks.

Results revealed that learners benefited significantly from task-based writing in terms of both their writing and creativity.

The researcher surveyed some recent studies that had dealt with EFL functional writing skills. For example, El-Qersh (2019) investigated the effectiveness of service learning strategy in developing the EFL functional writing skills for the secondary stage students.

The study adopted a quasi-experimental approach employing one group design.

The participants were twenty-three students in second secondary at Mostafa Kamel Governmental Language School, Omrania zone, Giza Governorate.

Data collection instruments included a preposttest of EFL functional writing skills (book review, report and letter).

The experiment lasted for 10 weeks in the second term of the academic year 2017-2018. The results showed a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the pre- posttests in overall EFL functional writing skills in favor of the posttest results.

Hence, the effectiveness of service learning was proved in developing the EFL functional writing skills of the second secondary students.

Salem (2018) investigated the impact of using flipped classroom approach on

improving functional writing skills of business majors.

The Quasi-experimental research design was used to investigate progress achieved by the sample of the study which included (51) business majors; (26) business students for the experimental group and (25) for the control group. The findings revealed large gains in functional writing skills, in favor of experimental group compared with the control group .

Abdallah (2014) conducted a study to investigate the Egyptiation EFL student teachers ' currently –needed functional wriring skills.

The reseaqrcher employed a mixed –method research design that included both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods/techniques.

The study reached a preliminary list of functional writing skills (54 items under 9 main categories) as well as a final list and taxomonmy of those items re-orded descendingly based on statistical means.

Additionally, the study proposed a set of methods / techniques to be used for teaching functional writing at Egyptian public schools .

Salem (2013) performed a study aiming at investigating the effect of using a program based on the writing workshop approach on developing functional writing skills of pre-service teachers of English in Hurgada faculty of Education.

Findings of the study indicated that the writing workshop program had significant effect on improving the participants' functional writing.

Concerning the impact of using TBL on students' attitudes; a study was conducted by Nhem (2020) who examined students' perceptions regarding the impact of TBLT on their writing behaviors and motivation in learning before and after the intervention, as well as the constraints that they encountered during the implementation of TBLT.

The results indicated positive but varying views regarding this intervention .

Dhadhodara and Joshi (2017) conducted a study with one main objective that was to measure writing attitude of higher education students with reference to their gender, social class, category, and areas of residence, discipline of the study, parental educational status and known languages.

All the post graduate level students of Gujarat Vidyapith were the population of the study. Three hundred forty six students were selected by random cluster method.

Four point Likert type Dhadhodara & Joshi (2017) writing attitude scale was used.

The findings revealed that only 15.89 % students had positive attitude towards writing.

There was no significant difference in writing attitude in the context of students' gender, social class category, discipline of the study, parental educational status and languages known.

There was significant difference in writing attitude in the context of students' area of residence .

Some studies sought to investigate the correlation between writing attitude and writing performance in English such as the studies conducted by Alluhaybi (2015) who conducted a study that aimed to 1) explore the writing attitudes, apprehension, and self-efficacy beliefs of Saudi learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) and 2) understandthe relationship between these components and writing competence in English.

The subjects were 145 Saudi female undergraduates of English in three higher education institutions.

The instruments used in the study comprised two questionnaires and two essays. Relevant statistical tests were performed.

The findings revealed that participants possessed positive attitudes towards writing in English, were moderately apprehensive regarding writing in

English, and moderately rated their perceived ability (self-efficacy beliefs) to write in English.

The results also showed that none of the three psychological variables correlated with or predicted the writing competence of the subjects.

Hashemian and Heidari (2013) investigated the relationship between motivation / attitude and L2 writing. Participants were randomly selected from a total population of Thirty M.A students of TEFL.

Data were collected through using Gardner's Attitude / Motivation Test Battery and a writing proficiency test to assess the participants' English writing proficiency level. Although running Pearson-product correlation indicated no relationship between participants' with integrative type of motivation and the writing skill. There was also no relationship between negative attitude and success in L2 writing, but there was a relationship between positive attitude and the writing skill .

Erkan and Saban (2011) conducted a study to identify whether writing performance in students of English as a foreign language (EFL) is related to writing apprehension, self-efficacy in writing, and/or attitudes towards writing. The subjects were tertiary-level EFL188 students at Çukurova University School for Foreign Languages (YADIM) in Turkey.

Three instruments were used to collect data: a writing apprehension test (WAT), a selfefficacy in writing scale (SWS), and a questionnaire on attitudes towards writing (WAQ).

Results revealed that writing apprehension and writing performance are negatively correlated, writing apprehension and writing self-efficacy are negatively correlated, and writing apprehension and attitude towards writing are positively correlated.

Writing apprehension and writing attitude are supposed to be negatively correlated but although WAQ was devised to test attitude, it has subscales that

measure apprehension, too.

That is why the result regarding the relationship between writing apprehension and attitude towards writing is surprising.

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Writing apprehension and writing attitude are supposed to be negatively correlated but although WAQ was devised to test attitude, it has subscales that measure apprehension, too.

That is why the result regarding the relationship between writing apprehension and attitude towards writing is surprising.

Commentary

The above mentioned review of literature on the area related to TBL, functional writing and attitude towards writing gave the researcher enough knowledge and confidence to state the hypotheses of this study.

It also revealed that few studies were conducted on the effect of TBL and writing especially in the Egyptian contexts and for those students whose major is not English.

Therefore, the current study sought to fill in this gap. The current study tried to develop the participants' English functional writing to enable them to write effective business messages.

The current study was similar to those reviewed in the literature as it focused on the same variables but it tried to investigate them in different context.

It attempted to investigate the impact of using TBL to enhance second year IT students' EFL functional writing and attitudes towards writing and tried to find out the correlation between the two dependent variables.

It was also noticed that few studies were conducted to investigate the effect of TBL on developing students' writing attitude.

In addition to, few studies were conducted to investigate the correlation between students' EFL functional writing and their attitude towards writing.

The current study offered a teachers' guide to manifest to EFL instructors how they could skillfully use TBL to develop learners' EFL functional writing and attitude towards writing.

Context of the problem

In order to document the problem of the study, the researcher conducted a pilot study which aimed at identifying the ability of IT students to use their functional writing skills effectively.

A random sample of second year IT students (n=20) from Sadat Academy for management sciences were selected for that purpose. The pilot study revealed

that only 45% of the students succeeded in the test.

In addition the researcher conducted a semi- structured interview with the same pilot sample to identify how far they used to write in English the researcher found that most students had no strong tendency to study English and good writing in English was their biggest worry.

They stated that they used to do written class assignments without knowing whether or not their responses to the written tasks went well. The judgment was only on the final product of the writing assignments and no feedback was given to them. Consequently, students got bored and were not interested in writing.

Statement of the Problem

Based on the results of the pilot study and the semi- structured interviews. It became clear that Sadat's Academy IT students' levels in functional writing and attitude towards writing were low and they needed stimulating methods to arouse their interest to write effective business messages.

Therefore, the researcher investigated the impact of using Task- based learning to develop Sadat's Academy IT students' English functional writing and attitude towards writing.

Aim of the study
The researcher aimed at developing second year IT students' functional writing and attitude through using Task-based learning.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested:

1. There would be a statistically significant difference ($\alpha \leq .05$) between the study group's mean scores of the pre-post testing (favoring the post testing) of the functional writing test.

2. There would be a statistically significant difference ($\alpha \leq .05$) between the study group's mean values of the pre-post administrations (favoring the post administration) of the writing attitude scale.

3. There would be a positive correlation between the study groups' scores in the Functional writing test and theirs in the writing attitude scale.

Significance

The importance of the current study emerged from the following points:

1. The present study tried to fill in a gap in the review of literature about studies that dealt with TBL to enhance Sadat's Academy IT students' English functional writing and attitude towards Writing

2. It offered a teacher's guide for presenting the sessions using Task- based learning.

3. The study encouraged students to learn by doing things actively instead of being too dependent upon their instructors.

4. It helped students to strengthen their linguistic skills by positively affecting their learning attitude and by helping them build learning strategies and promote their self-confidence.

5. It offered an English functional writing test with a table of specifications focusing on the most needed writing skills that are essential at work place communication.

 6. It offered a writing attitude scale.

Delimitations

The following functional writing skills were developed (Writing formal letters- writing e-mails-writing memos- writing a typical request- writing instructions- writing direct claims and complaints)

The researcher would focus on the 3-X-3 writing process as it was necessary

to be adopted when writing effective business message. This process included the following skills and sub-skills :

- Pre-writing: (Analyzing-Anticipating-Adapting).
- Drafting/ Writing: (Researching-Organizing-Drafting)
- Revising: (Editing-Proofreading-Evaluating)

1. Sixty eight EFL students in the second year enrolled at Sadat Academy for Administrative Sciences specialized in Information Technology participated in the study as one study group. They had to be equipped with an array of functional writing skills and to use them later in the upcoming years.

2. The study was conducted in the first term of the academic year 2021-2022 and lasted for twelve weeks two hours each.

Definition of Terms
Task-based learning

According to Zakime (2018) Task-based learning (TBL), is an approach in which learning revolves around the completion of meaningful tasks. In the TBL approach, the main focus is the authentic use of language for genuine communication.

Ahmadian and Long (2021) defines TBL as an innovative approach to language teaching which emphasizes the importance of engaging learners' natural abilities for acquiring language incidentally.

The researcher operationally definesTask-based learning as an analytical approach that used tasks as the basic unit of analysis at the levels of goals, educational activities and assessment.

Functional Writing

Shorofat (2007) defined functional writing as opposed to academic and creative writing, as that kind of writing which aims at conveying a specific , direct and clear message to a specific audience.

It includes several areas such as writing instructions, formal letters , notes , invitations, advertisements, and reports.

Functional writing is operationally defined in this study as the ability of second year IT section enrolled at Sadat Academy for Management Sciences to write effective English business messages such as formal letters, e-mails, memos , typtical requests, instructions, direct claims and complaints.

Attitude

In general, attitude is an individual's reaction or evaluation of a certain situation or object depending on his / her opinions and beliefs (Abidin, et.al, 2012).

For Al Norsi (2013), attitude is viewed as a psychological process in which learners favor or disfavor a certain situation.

Attitude towards writing

Attitude towards writing is operationally defined in the current as the responses of second year IT students' responses towards using TBLT which is considered an indicator of their acceptance or rejection of the material, and is expressed by the degree that that the students get for their responses to the items of the writing attitude scale.

Method
Research Design

The pre-experimental design where one group (n=68) pre-post test was used.

Participants

Sixty eight students in the second year at Sadat Academy for Management Sciences specialized in Information Technology (Basically Management Information Systems) participated in the study in the first semester of the academic year 2021-2022 acted as one study group.

Duration

The Experimentation lasted for one term. It was the first term of the academic year 2021-2022. The experiment started at 20-10-2021 and ended at 12-1-2022.

The total number of the sessions was twelve; two hours per-each.

Instruments and Materials

- The functional writing skills checklist.
- A functional writing skills test (pre –post)
- A functional writing rubric
- An attitude scale
- A teacher's guide

The Functional writing skills Checklist   (Appendix A)
The Objective of the Checklist

  The main objective was to determine the mostly needed functional   writing skills for second year IT students.

The Content of the Functional Writing Checklist

The checklist in its preliminary form consisted of sixteen functional writing skills.

It was administered on nine TEFL staff member to decide upon the mostly needed functional writing skills for six graders.

The skills which took 85% and more were selected. Thus, the functional writing skills that received the agreement from the jury members were six.

The Functional Writing Test: (Appendix B)
Test Objective

The functional writing test aims primarily to assess the writing performance IT students at Sadat's Academy for Management sciences when writing business messages.

A table of specifications was designed by the researcher to guarantee that the test covered the objectives. The total score of the test was 80 marks.

Test Construction

The test consists of five main questions with a they are as follow:

- Question one: Completion items.
- Question two: Spot the error and correct it.
- Question three: Give reasons
- Question four: Revise a number of sentences
- Question five: Two writing questions .

Duration

The allotted time for the test was two hours.

Test Validity

Content Validity

To establish the content validity of the test, the test with its table of specifications was distributed to nine TEFL staff members.

The members were asked to evaluate it in terms of; linguistic stating of items, academic verifications of the content, whether the items measure how far the objectives have been achieved, and coverage of the number of the items for the skills depicted in the test and applicability of the test.

The nine jury members' suggestions were taken into consideration. They

confirmed its suitability and applicability.

Test Reliability

Test- Retest

In order to establish the reliability of the functional writing test, it was administered to a randomly chosen sample of 30 second year IT students. The reliability of the test was determined by using test-retest method with two weeks intervals.

The researcher and another colleague marked the test. The average score of each student was calculated.

The whole test had a reliability coefficient of (0.72) and that value had a statistical significance which showed that the test had a good reliability level.

The Functional Writing Rubric :   (Appendix C)

The researcher prepared a rubric for evaluating IT students' functional writing , in the light of the following criteria:

(1) Clarity of the purpose   (2) Content   (3) Mechanics

(4) Coherence   (5) Cohesion

The Writing Attitude Scale: (Appendix D)

Objective

The writing attitude scale was designed to measure students' attitude towards writing.

Construction

The scale consisted of thirty statements divided under three main domains; importance of writing, motivation and enjoyment.

Duration

One hour was devoted to respond to the scale.

Validity

1. The content validity of the scale

The content validity of the scale was decided through submitting the writing attitude scale to a nine TEFL experts to establish its validity with regard to: The belongingness of the sub-domains to the main domain, the importance of the sub-domains to be measured, linguistic stating of the statements included , the suitability of the statements for the participants, applicability and relatedness of the statements to the objectives of the study and if there any suggestions, addition or omission .

The jury members confirmed the suitability of the scale as it would help to assess students' attitude towards writing. They stated that the items were inclusive, easy to respond, varied and focused.

2. Internal Consistency of the Scale

Internal Consistency between each statement compared to the scale as a whole shown below in table (1).

Table (1)
Internal Consistency of the Writing Attitude Scale

No.	R	No.	R	No.	R
1	$.455^{**}$	11	$.250^{*}$	21	$.326^{**}$
2	$.473^{**}$	12	$.520^{**}$	22	$.304^{**}$
3	$.566^{**}$	13	$.442^{**}$	23	$.306^{*}$
4	$.516^{**}$	14	$.310^{**}$	24	$.316^{**}$
5	$.616^{**}$	15	$.330^{**}$	25	$.355^{**}$
6	$.268^{*}$	16	$.291^{**}$	26	$.540^{**}$
7	$.285^{*}$	17	$.389^{**}$	27	$.323^{**}$
8	$.424^{**}$	18	$.389^{**}$	28	$.359^{**}$
9	$.331^{**}$	19	$.329^{**}$	29	$.430^{**}$
10	$.427^{**}$	20	$.385^{**}$	30	$.376^{**}$

Table (1) shows that there are significant correlations between each item and its domain.

Table (2) Internal Consistency of the Writing Attitude Scale Correlation between each Domain and the Total Scale

No.	The Domains of Writing Attitude scale	Correlation
1	Importance of Writing	.901**
2	Motivation	.588**
3	Enjoyment	.582**

*Significant at 0.05 level and beyond

From table (2) , it can be inferred that the correlation of the first domain (Importance of writing) and the total score of the scale is (.901), the correlation of the second domain (Motivation) and the total score of the scale is (.588) and the correlation of the third domain (enjoyment) is (.582). This proves that the scale has internal consistency between its subdomains.

It can be concluded from table (1) and (2) that the scale has good internal consistency.

Reliability

To establish the reliability of the test, the researcher used Alpha- Cronbach formula. As shown in table (3), the reliability coefficient was (.719) . It can be concluded that the scale has an acceptable reliability level.

Table (3) The Cronbach Alpha's Reliability Coefficient of the Writing Attitude Scale

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.719	30

The Teachers' Guide: (Appendix E)

Four units were introduced to students for the purpose of developing their writing in the workplace using Task-based learning. The Teachers' Guide was entitled "English for Business Communication".

It was adapted from "Essentials of Business Communication ", by Guffey, Mary E. and Loewy, Dana Cengage Learning 2016. The general objectives were as follow:

Unit One: Communicating in the Digital Age- Workplace:

1.1 Master the Tools for Success in the Twenty-First Century Workplace

1.2 Develop listening Skills

1.3 Learn nonverbal Communication Skills

1.4 Recognize how Culture Affects Communication

1.5 Build Intercultural Workplace skills

Unit Two: Planning Business Messages

2.1 Understand the Communication Process

2.2 Use the 3-X-3 Writing Process as a Guide

2.3 Analyze and Anticipating the Audience

2.4 Use Expert Writing Techniques to Adapt to Your Audience

2.5 Develop Additional Expert Writing Techniques

Unit Three: Organizing and Drafting Business Messages

3.1 Draft workplace Messages

3.2 Organize Information to Show Relationships

3.3 Compose the First Draft with Effective Sentences

3.4 Develop business Writing Techniques

3.5 Draft Well Organized Effective Paragraphs

Unit Four: Revising Business Messages

4.1 Take Time to Revise: Applying Phase 3 of the writing Process

4.2 Make Your Message Clear

4.3 Enhance Readability through Document Design

4.4 Proofread to Catch Errors

4.5 Evaluate the Effectiveness of Your Message

Role of the Instructor

1. The instructor as a selector and a sequencer of tasks has an active role in choosing, adapting and designing tasks and then building these tasks keeping with learners' needs, expectations, interests and language skill levels.

2. The instructor prepares learners' for tasks. Making some training activities may include topic introduction, specifying task instructions, assisting students in learning or recalling key words and phrases to make the task accomplishment easy, and offering partial display of task process.

3. The instructor as consciousness-raising deploys an integration of form-focusing techniques, covers attention focusing on pre-task activities, examines the given text and guides exposure to similar tasks.

4. The instructor's role is reflected in being as an establisher of study setting.

5. The instructor has to offer sufficient feedback about the implemented the functional writing tasks and assignments. The instructor has to check students' ability to prewrite, draft, and revise a   business messages.

Role of the Participants

1. Learners as group participants perform a number of tasks individually, in pairs or in small groups according to the assigned tasks.

2. Learners as task monitors can employ tasks as a tool for facilitating the learning process in task-based learning. Classroom activities should be organized so that learners can have the opportunity to observe how language is utilized in communication.

3. Learners as risk-takers and innovators are pushed by tasks to generate

and expound messages for which they do not have full linguistic resources and prior experience.

4. while studying the 3-X-3 writing process, learners were given tasks where they learned how to self-correct and peer-correct their writing products. In each lesson there was a writing assignment which they had to work on and deliver it to the instructor in the upcoming session.

Examples of implemented Tasks

- Listening Tasks
- Reading Tasks
- Writing Tasks
- Information Gap Tasks
- Classifications Tasks
- Pair/ work tasks
- Closed /Open tasks
- Comparing Tasks
- Opinion gap /reasoning gap tasks

Evaluation Techniques:

- Short answer questions
- Completion tasks
- Writing tasks
- Self-report
- Portfolios

Pre- testing

The researcher noticed at the beginning of teaching the course that participants were reluctant to participate and their level in English was low and this could be obviously seen in their performance in the pretesting of both

the functional writing test and the writing attitude scale (See Table 4 and 5).

Experimentation

Phases of Task Based Language Teaching (TBL):

According to Mustafa and Mufit (2017), in order to implement a Task Based model in EFL classrooms, there are three stages (pre-task, task cycle and post task), These stages help EFL instructor to plan the teaching process more effectively and give him or her a chance to control the progress of the course.

Pre-task

In this phase, the instructor tries to remind students with the prior knowledge and skills related to the task. "The purpose of the pre-task phase is to prepare students to perform the task in a way that will promote acquisition". (Ellis, 2003: 244).

Willis and Willis (2013: 160) highlight that "learners who are given five to ten minutes just before the task to plan what to say tend to produce task interactions that are not only longer but linguistically richer, with a high degree of fluency and clause complexity".

Task Cycle

The task stage is the stage in which students try to accomplish the task given to them in an interactional context. This stage aims at developing an environment in which students try to improve their communication skills. At the task stage, students try to perform the task given by their instructor either in small group or in pairs. The instructor does not interfere with the students and only monitor them as they are expected to be in a stress-free classroom environment .

Post Task

Willis & Willis (2013, 178) call the post task stage as language focus. They

analyze the post task phase under two different titles as language focus and language practice. On language focus stage, students try to understand the usage of the language and the rules of the target language.

At this stage, students have the knowledge about some special usage and the exact use of language functions. On language practice stage, a wide variety of different exercises can be studied to strengthen the understanding of the learners.

Post Testing

At the end of the experimentation, students were post tested using the functional writing test and the writing attitude scale. Data were treated statistically and the findings are within the following section.

Findings

Testing Hypothesis one

Hypothesis one predicted that There would be a statistically significant difference ($\alpha \leq .05$) between the study group's mean scores of the pre-post testing of (favoring the post testing) of the functional writing test.

xcxStatistical analysis shown in table (5) indicated that this hypothesis was accepted as participants' post testing exceeded their pre testing and the 't' was (72.715) and this value was significant at 0.001.

Table (4)
Means, Standard Deviation, t-value and Cohen's d and the Difference between Mean scores obtained by the Study Groups' Pre-Post Testing on The Functional Writing Test

Variable		Mean	No.	Std. Deviation	t- value	D.F	Cohen's d	Sig.
Functional Writing	Pre	5.22	68	2.497	b.		12.69003	<.001
	Post	69.38	68	6.700	.; **72.715	67		

**Significant at (0.01) level

Testing Hypothesis two

Hypothesis 2 predicted that there would be a statistically significant difference (α ≤ .05) between the study group's mean values of the pre-post administrations (favoring the post administration) of the writing attitude scale.

Statistical analysis shown in table (5) indicated that this hypothesis was accepted as participants' post testing exceeded their pre testing and the 't' was (66.152) and this value was significant at 0.001.

Table (5)
Means, Standard Deviation, t-value and Cohen's d and the Difference between Mean scores obtained by the Study Groups' Pre-Post Testing on The Writing Attitude Scale

Variable		Mean	No.	Std. Deviation	t- value	D.F	Cohen's d	Sig.
Importance of writing	Pre	21.65	68	3.203	**46.063	67	6.637374	<.001
	Post	42.03	68	2.932				
Motivation	Pre	17.62	68	2.246	**51.032	67	8.164566	<.001
	Post	41.97	68	3.570				
Enjoyment	Pre	18.72	68	3.831	**43.573	67	6.93458	<.001
	Post	40.74	68	3.831				
Writing Attitude Scale as Whole	Pre	57.99	68	5.739	**66.152	67	10.139292	<.001
	Post	124.74	68	7.331				

**Significant at (0.01) level

Testing Hypothesis three

Hypothesis three predicted that there would be a positive correlation between the study groups' scores in the functional writing test and theirs in the writing

attitude scale. Statistical analysis in Table (6) showed that this hypothesis was accepted as Person's Correlation was (.832) and this value indicated that there was a strong correlation between students' Functional writing and attitude towards writing.

Table (6)
Pearson Correlation between the Study groups ' scores in functional writing test and theirs in Writing Attitude

	Variable	Functional Writing
Writing Attitude	Person Correlation	$.832^{**}$
	Sig.	<.001
	N	68

Significant at (0.01) level

Acknowledgment

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author acknowledged no possible conflicts of interest in connection with this article's research, writing, and/or publishing.

Discussion

This study was conducted to investigate the effect of using Task Based Learning (TBL) to enhance Sadat's Academy second year IT Students' English functional and attitude towards Writing. Students who were enrolled at Sadat Academy for Management Sciences (Specialized in Information Technology) participated in the study.

The numbers who were pre-post tested in functional writing and attitude towards writing was sixty eight after excluding the dropouts.

It is noteworthy that most of the participants' level in English was quite low due to the fact that they were not specialized in studying English besides they had little information about the course content.

This was reflected in their performance in the pre-testing.

At the beginning of the experiment they were reluctant to participate.

But soon after announcing the main objective of the experiment and the importance of using Task-based learning inside the EFL classroom they were motivated and excited to participate.

In the current study the researcher sought to develop participants' functional writing using the TBL with its three phases (Pre-task, Task cycle and Post task).

Students' functional writing was measured through a functional writing test that aimed to measure participants' mastery of the writing techniques and related to the rules of writing effective business messages at workplace communication. Throughout the course students were trained to use the 3-X-3 writing process in writing business messages.

From the results obtained in table (5), it could be noticed that the effect size was found (12.69).

This value is much satisfactory to the researcher because according to Cohen (1988), a generally accepted minimum level of statistical power is 8.0. Thus this value refers to the high effect of using TBL on students' functional writing.

The main focus was to teach students the functional writing skills needed for writing effective business messages.

They had to master the writing techniques such as analyzing and anticipating the audience, drafting workplace messages, organizing information to show relationships, composing the first draft with effective sentences, enhancing readability through document design, proofreading to catch errors and to master the techniques for evaluating the effectiveness of the message.

Using TBL managed to increase participants' confidence in writing and helped to enhance their self-learning.

Providing students with meaningful authentic tasks such as writing e-mails, memos, claims, requests, instructions…etc helped them to be more engaged and aroused their interests.

Participants felt so comfortable when conducting peer-writing assessments.

Throughout the experiment students were engaged in a number of meaningful tasks such as brainstorming, note-taking, clustering, paragraphing, and scanning for finding mistakes, Jigsaw tasks and other substitution, transformation and communicative activities.

These activities helped participants to practice using the target language in their EFL classroom.

Thus the current study confirmed the positive impact of using TBL in developing participants' functional writing.

This conclusion came in accordance with the studies conducted by Bhandari (2020; Amer (2019); Sundari, Febriyanti and Sargih (2018) ; Oktavianti

(2015); Abdallah and Mansour (2015); Abdallah (2014); Marashi and Dadari (2012) ; and Pourdana and Behbahani (2012)

The researcher also attributed the participants' improvement in the post administration of the writing attitude scale to the use of TBL that offered optimal opportunities for interaction between the instructor and the participants and the participants themselves.
TBL facilitated communication and promoted interaction between students.
It helped students to exchange their experience in writing business messages.
Having exposure to the assigned material, students were exposed to new language.
They had an opportunity to check spelling and use accurate syntactic.
Consequently, students were motivated to produce the correct text and produce relevant vocabulary.
Throughout the experiment students were exposed to a number of tasks that promoted students' scaffolding, task-dependency, active learning, integration, reproduction to reflection and creation.
Students' participation in the implemented tasks gave them the chance to perform different roles such as initiating questions and commenting on others' work for correction.
Results revealed that participants showed improvement in their attitude towards writing as a result of using TBLT.
Reviewing the values of the effect size of each subdomain included in the writing attitude scale, it could be noticed that the most subdomain that was highly enhanced was that related to "Motivation" and this conclusion came in accordance with Nhem (2020) who reported a similar result. Therefore, it could be said that TBLT managed to arouse participants' motivation to practice writing effective business messages.
The other subdomain that was enhanced was "Enjoyment".
The tasks that were implemented gave participants the chance to choose language that was relevant to the situation.
TBL provided a learning milieu for the participants that fostered their enjoyment while performing the required tasks.
The last subdomain that was enhanced was that related to "Importance of writing".
Participants showed improvements in their estimation of the writing process especially at workplace communication.
TBL led learners to focus on meaning instead of form.
This conclusion came in accordance with the study conducted by Dhadhodara and Joshi (2017) as they confirmed that students with positive attitudes performed significantly better than those with negative attitude in a writing task.

The researcher sought to calculate the correlation between participants' functional writing and their attitude towards writing.

She found out that it was (r= 0.8) and this value indicated strong positive correlation.

Therefore, the current study emphasized that there was a strong positive correlation between participants' functional writing and their attitude towards writing.

This conclusion came in accordance with Alluhaybi (2015); Hashemian & Heidari,(2013) and Ekran and Saban (2011)

Implications

It is clear from the above discussion that using TBL significantly enhanced students' functional writing and attitude towards writing.

It stimulated students' thinking through using a variety of student-centered tasks and assessment techniques. The use of TBL encouraged learners to think, analyze and reflect on their writing assignments and thus became self-dependent learners and competent writers.

Conclusion

The results of the present study indicated the effectiveness of using TBL in enhancing Sadat's Academy second year IT students' functional writing and attitude towards writing.

It also confirmed that there was a positive correlation between students' functional writing and their attitude towards writing. To conclude, TBL provided a learning milieu which really helped participants to be more engaged in the learning process.

It reinforced their learning experiences, raised their interest in learning English and helped them develop a better self-image as EFL learners.

Challenges

The study was conducted in a small number of participants and therefore, the results could not be generalized. Task-based activities challenged students to use the target language however, few students at the beginning tried to use their mother tongue language but the researcher encouraged them to use English in completing classwork activities by focusing on the key words and by time they became much better.

Recommendations

In the light of the results obtained in the present study, a number of recommendations could be drawn:

1. EFL instructors are strongly advised to incorporate TBL in teaching their writing courses.
2. Developing students' writing attitude should be one of the priorities in the teaching –learning process.
3. To create long lasting learning, providing an on-going feedback is the best way to demonstrate results.
4. Staff members who teaching language courses should more link theory to practice in their attempt to practice.
5. More attention should be given to the methods and techniques that encourage the involvement of the learning act.

Suggestions for further research

6. Investigating the impact of using E-Task based learning on developing IT students' EFL functional writing and in reducing their writing apprehension.
7. Investigating the impact of using TBL on developing ESP students' communicative competence.
8. Investigating the impact of using TBL on developing IT students' vocabulary retention.
9. Investigating the impact of using TBL on developing IT students' oral communication skills.
10. Investigating the impact of using TBL on developing IT students' self-esteem and self-confidence
11. More correlative studies are still needed between functional writing and attitude towards writing.
12. Further research studies are needed to compare between TBL and other instructional strategies on other group samples and contexts.

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