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AND THEY WROTE HAPPILY EVER AFTER: FAIRY TALES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE WRITING CLASSES

Recep Şahin ARSLAN* - Saye ZİBANDE**

Abstract
The article reports on a descriptive study with a group of English Language and Literature freshman students in a Turkish university. The study examined the effects of composing fairy tales on learners' attitude towards writing classes. An attitudinal questionnaire displayed that some students did not like writing in English earlier but integrating fairy tales to writing courses brought about a substantial difference in their opinions and practice of writing. It can therefore be proposed that English language teachers modify their traditional frame to a novel one incorporating fairy tales in teaching writing to have their students benefit from the writing practice more.

Key Words: *English as a Foreign Language, Teaching Writing Skill, Composing Fairy Tales*

VE SONSUZA DEĞİN HEP MUTLULUKLA YAZDILAR: İNGİLİZCE YAZMA DERSLERİNDE MASAL KULLANIMI

Özet
Bu makale bir Türk üniversitesinde bir grup İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı bölümü 1. sınıf öğrencisi ile yapılan betimsel bir çalışmayı ele almaktadır. Çalışmada masal yazımının bu öğrencilerin İngilizce yazmaya olan tutumlarını nasıl etkilediği incelenmiştir. Öğrencilere verilen bir sormaca sonucu bazı öğrencilerin yazma becerisini ve derslerini sevmedikleri belirlenmiş, niçin sevmedikleri ortaya çıkarılmış ve de masal yazmanın yazma becerilerine nasıl katkı yaptığı ortaya konulmuştur. Çalışma öğrencilerin yazma derslerinde masal yazımına karşın olumlu bir tavır geliştirdiklerini ortaya koymuştur. Bu çalışma ile İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğreten öğretmenlerin yazma öğretiminde geleneksel yöntemlerden ziyade onların yazmadan daha çok zevk alıp yaralanabilecekleri masal yazımı gibi uygulamaları benimsemeleri önerilebilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Yabancı Dil Olarak İngilizce, Masal Yazma, Yazma Becerisinin Öğretimi*

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing skill may be labelled as intricate by an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) student. It is not far from fact when Nunan (1999: 271) says to compose "a coherent, fluent, extended piece of writing" in one's second language is a challenging job. Moreover, the writing skill has been developed both in "breadth and depth" (Silva and Brice, 2004: 1). One of the major goals for writing teachers should therefore be making students believe in the efficiency of written communication with focus on content rather than on form (Harmer, 2001). However, EFL teachers may insist on having their students compose routine expository paragraphs and essays. While the importance of such practices cannot be ignored, 'repetitive assignments' might result in 'boring' classes. As a result of these repetitive practices, students might have a false self-confidence about their writing ability as if there is no need for writing or learning to write anymore. In direct contradiction, there is also a different type of students who feel a kind of writing apprehension as they do not believe in their writing ability. Such students tend to display high degrees of anxiety which affect their attitudes and writing abilities (Faigley, Daly and Witte 1981).

In such a dilemma literature may provide a positive assistance for writing classes in terms of grammar, vocabulary, and as a whole language (McKay, 2000). Moreover, as Chen (2006) puts

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forth literature offers very different "but natural language communications to students" (p. 212), thus, students become motivated to negotiate and write. Fairy tales (FT) particularly might be an alternative to give variety and boast learners' writing attitude. In order to compose a fairy tale, a novel approach is required. Badger and White (2000: 157) believe that one of the effective ways to teach writing is to "incorporate the insights of product, process, and genre approaches". They propose that the genre model displays the language which is applied in specific situations, and for a good product, a process approach is required. Therefore, they introduce the process genre approach. Such an approach may aid students in learning both the specific language and the different steps of composing a fairy tale.

Writing FT follows a typical structure. Everybody knows that there may be a castle or forest, monster or witch, prince or princess and so forth. In spite of all these invertible features, writing FT allows for a wider degree of creativity (Bruti, 1999). Fairy tales also help students to jog to their childhood memories (Chiarantano, 2005), reducing the affective filter. As a whole, students 1) employ their previous knowledge gained in reading tales in their native language and use it in learning English, 2) are provided with meaningful context, 3) make use of the advantage of cooperative learning, 4) reduce their anxiety, 5) transmit values of different cultures, and 6) have fun while a fairy tale is employed in EFL classrooms (Iskenderoglu-Guglielmino, 2006). With such promising features fairy tales might add variety and joy to writing courses in EFL contexts.

The present study therefore investigates how writing a fairy tale might be appropriate to modify students' attitude towards writing classes. Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions:

a) In general, what is the students' perception towards the writing classes?

b) How does writing a fairy tale affect the students' receptivity towards the writing classes?

2. THE STUDY

2.1. Subjects

The subjects were 48 freshman students in the Department of English Language and Literature at a Turkish university. The subjects had been taught written rhetoric and mechanics during the first semester of the year. In the study the students were assigned with writing a fairy tale to EFL young learners. Having composed fairy tales as part of writing courses, each student completed a questionnaire.

2.2. Procedures

The fairy tale writing project was introduced to the subjects at the 9th week of the 2nd semester which is 18 weeks on the whole. The students were divided into 8 groups of 6. Each member had a different responsibility: No.1) Coordinator, No.2) Character and Setting maps, No.3) Conflict and Resolution maps, No.4) Design of the pages, No.5) Pictures, No.6) Activities for the end of the book. However, decision making on these areas was shared among the teacher and the students, and then the text and pictures were transmitted to the computer by each responsible individual. Writing fairy tales took place in a number of stages:

Writing Sessions

This activity was accomplished within 4 weeks. The teacher (the second researcher) and the students came together twice a week.

First Session

The students recalled their memories of reading FT during their childhood. Then, there was a rich discussion about the features of one tale which all of the students were familiar with. The students did this without having any rhetorical knowledge about writing FT.

Second Session

Different maps for composing FT were introduced in order to broaden the students' knowledge about FT. These maps are called 'Character', 'Setting', 'Conflict', and 'Resolution' as can be seen in the following table.

In fact, these maps functioned as "a launching point for students' own fairy tales" (Fink, 2007: para 1). In order to make students more familiarized with these maps, the selected tale in the first session was analysed according to these maps. In the 'character' map, students learnt about the 'good' and 'evil' characters and what the reaction of other characters was to these characters. The 'setting' and the 'conflict' maps respectively clarified the 'place and time' of the story and 'opposition of the characters'. The question of

Table 1. Maps for composing fairy tales

Character Map	*Setting Map*
• Character name • What does the character look like • How does the character act and how other characters react to this character	• *Where does the story take place? (city, castle, ship, cemetery)* • *When does the story take place? (afternoon, fall, morning, date)* • *Write a detailed description of the setting. Weather, noise, or colours*
Conflict Map	*Resolution Map*
• *What is the problem? Another person, thing, thoughts and feelings of the character* • *Why does this problem occur?*	• *How is the conflict resolved?* • *What happens after the conflict is resolved?* • *How do this conflict and its resolution affect the character?*

Reference: Iskenderoglu-Guglielmino, 2006

'what are some ways the conflict should be resolved?' was transferred to the 'Resolution map'.

Third Session

Firstly students, sitting in circles, were taught about the genre specifications and grammatical aspects of FT. Then, they discussed the maps with their group members to check whether they had learnt the information correctly. If there were discrepancies about their knowledge, they addressed their questions to the teacher who was moving around the groups in the classroom. The students also worked on the computer to search for more information on the net about writing FT. They found it interesting to read the tales in English which once they had read in their first language. They also applied the maps to the tales which they read on the net.

Following Sessions

In the following sessions, the group work continued, and students worked on their own maps. This time, students learnt that they should consider a moral for their story. They learnt to design the characters and conflict in a way that the readers (children) would learn a moral point by reading the story. For example, in one of the stories, the moral point was not to break the promises or in the other story, it was the importance of being truthful.

Writing Conferences

The teacher preferred the students to share their maps and proceedings with other groups; however, the best story was assigned with a prize, so the secrecy was high. As the groups could not think and talk aloud, the teacher had writing conferences with each group through which, students and the teacher mutually asked their questions. The students asked about the details of their maps, the appropriateness of their pictures and design of the pages, and some questions related to the mechanics of writing skill such as the use of punctuation marks. As a whole, the teacher was not dominating the class but acting as a facilitator during the sessions.

Transferring Written Drafts to the Computer

For the tale pictures, the 'image' sections of the search engines and to design colourful and interesting pages, the Microsoft Office Publisher Program® were very helpful. None of the students had employed this program beforehand. However, all of the students were very successful, and this was interesting for them because they had thought it was a complicated program.

Activities for the End of the Story

Students were asked to prepare activities for the end of the story. These activities should refer to the reader's age and knowledge and should assess the learned knowledge in the book. For example, in one of the stories, the fruits were the characters of the story, and the main colours were also taught. Thus, the activity was the picture of a strawberry which should be painted. The sentence written under the picture was: "This is a RED …….. ." Thus, the child should fill in the blank with the name of the fruit and colour the fruit in red. Moreover, there were puzzles, word search, and matching games.

The activity section of the fairy tale was both interesting and challenging for the students. The

students reflected their thought as follows:

> We enjoyed while preparing them. (Student 1)
>
> It was difficult to use simple vocabulary and language. (Student 6)
>
> We prepared interesting activities to get the interest of children. (Student 10)
>
> It was challenging but great. (Student 12)

Conventional Rubric

The students were not submitted a written form of rubric. However, the teacher and the students reviewed what had been done up to that session and according to what was taught a rubric was designed. In other words, there was a consensus among the teacher and students that 'maps', 'mechanics', 'design of the pages', 'activities at the end of the story', 'language', and 'the taught moral' would be the criteria to determine the grade and the winner. This spoken rubric helped the students to review the whole procedure of the tale which a written form of rubric would not offer such a possibility.

Following the fairy tale sessions, an attitudinal questionnaire with close and open-ended questions was designed by the researchers to learn about students' opinions about the process. Different questions with 5 likert-scale choices were responded by the students to find out their rationale behind their both positive and negative attitudes towards writing classes and also writing fairy tales. At the end, open-ended questions made the students feel free to write the effects of writing fairy tales on their attitudes towards writing classes.

The descriptive analysis of close-ended questions was calculated by SPSS 16.0 programme and the analysis of the open-ended questions was realized according to the content analysis. The questionnaires were coded by numbers, so the participants would remain anonymous and the numbers would represent the students.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

With regard to students' receptivity to writing classes, the factor desire to be a 'successful learner' plays the most effective one. The least important factor is 'class hours'. The interesting result here is that students mostly complain about the class hours and the burden of the assignments in writing classes. For example, the class hours of half of the students who were the respondents of the questionnaire for this study were eight in the morning (08.00 a.m.) and three in the afternoon (03.00 p.m.). The students were always complaining about this. However, Table 2 below depicts the fact that 'class hours' does not have an important effect on students because the mean for both groups (X=3.14, X=2.82) notify that they were 'unsure' about the 'class hours' affecting their attitudes.

Table 2. Factors which make students like/not like English writing classes

Students who like writing classes		Students who do not like writing classes	
Factors	Mean	Factors	*Mean*
1 Successful Learner	*4.49*	*1 Class Activities*	*3.75*
2 English Language	*4.14*	*2 Fellow Learners*	*3.50*
3 Instructor	*4.11*	*3 Written Communication*	*3.42*
4 Class Activities	*3.94*	*4 Assignments*	*3.17*
5 Written Communication	*3.89*	*5 Syllabus*	*2.83*
6 Teaching Method	*3.79*	*6 Class Hours*	*2.82*
7 Assignments	*3.57*	*7 English Language*	*2.80*
8 Syllabus	*3.51*	*8 Teaching Method*	*2.67*
9 Textbook	*3.40*	*9 Successful Learner*	*2.58*
10 Fellow Learners	*3.29*	*10 Instructor*	*2.45*
11 Class Hours	*3.14*	*11 Textbook*	*2.42*

Those students who do not like writing classes do not consider being a 'successful learner'(X=2.58) and 'English language' (X=2.80) as important factors. Thus, these students are not open to both being successful and the medium and target of their education, that is, English. This is a relaxing point for teachers because these factors are related directly to the learner. Moreover, students complained about the load of the assignments. However, Table 1 displays that those students who like writing classes show 'assignments' as a factor (X=3.57) which is helpful for them, and the other group of students are unsure about this factor (X=3.17).

As shown in Table 3 below, students who like writing classes display the highest level (X=3.77) for being surprised by the fairy tale assignment which shows this as an original activity for the writing class. Thus, it can be put forth that the activity was a good surprise for the students. Here are the students' statements:

At first I was surprised and got very much astonished. I did not know what to do but as time passed, our lecturer taught us how to write a fairy tale. It had positive effects on me as I worked on an unfamiliar project. (Student(S) 6)

I saw the enjoyable side of the writing. I developed my writing skill. (S 17)

On the hand, introducing new activities can act either as a motivating or demotivating factor; however, those students who had positive feelings about writing also agree that maps used for composing the fairy tale were helpful (X=3.69).

Table 3. Introducing fairy tales to those students who like/do not like writing

Students who like writing classes		Students who do not like writing classes	
Items	Mean	Items	Mean
1 Astonishing News	3.77	1 By Myself	3.17
2 Helpful Maps	3.69	2 Group Work	3.08
3 By Myself	3.09	3 Pair Work	2.83
4 Pair Work	2.94	4 Astonishing News	2.83
5 Group Work	2.91	5 Helpful Maps	2.50

The results of Table 3 depict the fact that those students who do not like writing skill, in fact, are unsure about the activity of writing fairy tales. They could not decide whether they were surprised or not when they were given the fairy tale assignment. Moreover, they could not even decide about whether they preferred to accomplish the activity by themselves, as a pair work, or a group work. All these can display the fact that these students were not sure about their position in class as a writing student.

As stated before, those students who like writing classes were astonished by hearing news about writing a fairy tale as a new assignment. Here also in Table 4, it can be observed that 'different assignment' includes the highest value (X=4.29). Next comes 'being creative' (X=4.21).

Table 4. Factors for those students who like both writing and fairy tale

Items	Mean
1 Different Assignment	4.29
2 Being Creative	4.21
3 Communicating with Children	3.93
4 I like My Instructor	3.86
5 Computer's Visual Program	3.71
6 Real-life Task	3.21
7 Passing the Course	3.14
8 Working with My Friends	3.14
9 Class Having Positive Atmosphere	2.71
10 Children's Future Author	2.43

This can be a good point here as writing fairy tales helps students to practice a different kind of written work which is apart from producing different kinds of expository paragraphs. Students, in fact, may be creative in writing; however, they do not discover this ability while composing routine paragraphs and essays. Here are some of the students' comments:

> Fairy tale helps us to write about different things rather than common subjects. (S3)
>
> It was the first time I took part in such a project, and it was enjoyable. It helped me to be in a different world. (S4)
>
> You create a new life in your life. It is an imaginary, colourful, pure and lovely life. (S18)
>
> It paved the way of improving my creativity in writing and developing my power of thinking. (S19)
>
> I learnt to force my imagination. I became aware of my creativeness. I look back on my childhood. (S31)

The last statement resembles to Chiarantano's (2005) remark which puts forth the fairy tale reducing the affective filter. It shows students like to go back to their childhood time through fairy tales.

The factor which plays the lowest role is 'future children's author' (X = 2.43). However, these students agree (X=3.93) that they were happy because of 'communicating with children'. Thus, it can be proposed that probably this cannot be an introduction for a new kind of job suggestion for students; however, students were happy to write to a different reader, that is, children. Both finding out to be creative and writing to a different audience enhance the students' motivation. The following statements depict this:

> Maybe some of us will become a writer in the future after this experience.(S7)
>
> I found my creativity aspects. We studied very much and created a new thing for children. It was a very good feeling for us. After we completed our fairy tale, I understood that we could do everything about writing. (S8)
>
> At first, I found it so hard and waste of time because I thought that it is not a writing style which will contribute to our writing. However, my mind changed after the work finished. It was so enjoyable to produce something which could be used in real life. (S16)

Table 5. Factors for those students who do not like writing fairy tales

Items	*Mean*
1 Not liking Group Work	*4.57*
2 Spending too Much Time in front of the Computer	*4.00*
3 Not to Deal with Children	*3.29*
4 Preferring Essays	*3.00*
5 Not Being Creative	*2.43*

In Table 5, one more time it can be observed that these students 'do not like group work' (X=4.57). This group also claimed that while writing a fairy tale, they spent 'too much time in front of the computer' (X=4.00). Here are the students' statements:

> There were sometimes quarrels among group members. (S3)
>
> The only negative thing was working in front of computer. (S5)
>
> Some of our friends were irresponsible. (S13)
>
> Lots of argument took place in the group. (S32)

Thus, it can be proposed that the most important thing which made this group not like the assignment of fairy tale is 'working within group work'. If they had had the possibility of working by themselves, they could have joined the group who liked writing fairy tales. As a whole, the students pointed to only two negative aspects: 1) participating in a group work and 2) spending a lot of time in front of the computer. However,

there are also students who took advantage out of these. For example,

> It made me enthusiastic about writing. It was enjoyable. Group work was very helpful. (S6)
> I spent much more time with my friends. (S7)
> Designing the pictures and working with computer were very enjoyable. (S9)
> It helped me to use Microsoft Word easily. (S10)

Table 6. Factors for those students who later got interested in writing fairy tales

Items	Mean
1 Design of the Pages	4.78
2 Colourful Pictures	4.22
3 Thinking about Plot	4.11
4 Teacher's Instructions	3.56
5 Friend's Assistance	3.33
6 Being Creative	3.33
7 Competitiveness	3.22
8 Work by the Computer	3.11
9 Deadline for Submission	3.00
10 Fairy Tale Maps	2.89

A group of students also gradually developed positive feelings toward application of fairy tales in writing classes. This group displayed the factor of 'design of the pages' (X=4.78) and 'finding colourful pictures' (X=4.22) as the most important factors which made them got interested in FT. The other point is that none of the factors are claimed as being not effective in making the students interested in FT, so all of these factors are more or less important in making students enjoy writing FT. These are reflected in students' comments as follows:

> It made me more creative about writing. I managed to show my ability in terms of writing. It contributed so many skills to my writing. (S11)
> Writing a FT developed my writing skill. I learnt to design a page consisting of pictures, and also it was a great contribution to my imagery development. (S21)
> I learnt how to develop thinking by writing a story. (S24)
> Surfing the net to find suitable pictures was funny. (S25)

Table 7. Factors for those students who only like writing fairy tales

Items	*Mean*
1 Writing Different Assignment	*4.00*
2 Being Creative	*4.00*
3 Communicating with Children	*3.50*
4 Working with Computer's Visual Program	*3.00*
5 Passing the Course	*3.00*
6 Having Positive feelings towards My Instructor	*3.00*
7 Positive Class Atmosphere	*2.50*
8 Real-life Task	*2.50*
9 Working with My Friends	*2.00*
10 Becoming Children's Future Author	*1.50*

It was also possible to see a group of students who did not want to write in English except fairy tales. Two factors which make students like FT are 'being creative' and 'different assignment' (X=4.00). This means students are searching for any different kind of assignment which provokes their creativity, except for the traditional ones. Here are some of the example statements:

> It helped me to write about imaginative things. I developed my skills such as

creativity to a big extent: I gained self-confidence. (S23)

It was interesting to try something which you had never experienced before. (S30)

It made me create something different than daily works in my life. (S33)

I think it enhances our creativity. It was like a game. Although I don't like writing, I enjoyed writing during the FT project. (S34)

It was very enjoyable. My imagination improved. I wrote better than the time I wrote other assignments. (S36)

Such remarks show that students are not resistant to writing when presented with interesting and worthwhile writing tasks.

4. CONCLUSION

The results of the study show that there were students having a negative perception towards writing. Thus the course instructor attempted to get the interest of this group of students via application of fairy tales in writing classes. This study tried to display how effective writing fairy tales could be on the way to bring variety and quality to writing instruction. The statistical and qualitative data presented here depict that the employment of FT in writing class has advantages. As a whole, writing FT assists students to broaden their creativity, imagination, and self-confidence since the students find working on a new activity very interesting and enjoyable. This modification brings motivation and appreciation to the class. In the light of the above findings, it could be recommended that EFL teachers break the traditional rules of writing activities and try the novel ones. Instead of only assigning the same kinds of expository paragraphs and essays, EFL teachers can bring originality to the activities and assignments, too. While this study applied fairy tales in writing classes, this employment might be pertinent to other EFL skills as well. It might be endeavoured to apply fairy tales in teaching such other language skills as speaking, listening and writing since this study displayed that fairy tale is an applicable technique to make students appreciate their writing classes and write happily for ever.

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