"Transfer of Knowledge from English Writing Classes to Writing in the Discipline"

Abstract

 The present study investigates the rates of correlation between the module of written expression and three other ones namely: Linguistics, Literature, and Culture. The study is based on an analysis of the students' exam marks obtained in the aforementioned modules at the University of Constantine 1, Department of English Letters and Languages. It seeks to determine whether students transfer the writing rules from one discipline to another, and how far these writing conventions are reflected in their compositions. The remote objective of such a study will be the adaptation of the appropriate approach leading to a successful transfer of the writing rules across the disciplines.

Key words: Transfer, writing conventions, disciplines.

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ملخص

تسعى الدراسة الحالية إلى الكشف عن دلالة الارتباط بين وحدة من التعبير الكتابي وثلاث وحدات أخرى وهي: اللغويات والأدب والثقافة. وتعتمد الدراسة على تحليل علامات امتحان الطلاب التي تم الحصول عليها في الوحدات الأربع المذكورة أعلاه في جامعة قسنطينة 1، قسم اللغة الإنجليزية واللغات، وتسعى إلى تحديد ما إذا كان الطلاب ينقلون قواعد الكتابة من وحدة الى أخرى، وإلى أي مدى تنعكس هذه التفاقيات الكتابية في مؤلفاتهم. ان الهدف المرجو من هذه الدراسة هو تطويع النهج المناسب الذي من شأنه أن يؤدي إلى الانتقال الناجح لقواعد الكتابة في كل التخصصات.

الكلمات الدالة : نقل- الاتفاقيات- الكتابة التخصصات.

Introduction

In the process of learning how to write effectively in English and how to transfer their knowledge in other disciplines, students encounter great difficulties when they are asked to write; that is why, writing is seen as an important discipline and skill to be dealt with both in isolation and in relation to other subjects.

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The present article is mainly concerned with writing across the curriculum; it seeks to demonstrate whether an effective transfer of the writing rules across the disciplines does exist or not. Thus, the article will start by giving a brief explicit definition of writing across the curriculum, and then examines the students' performance in the other subjects (modules) and sheds some light on the important features that students should transfer in their compositions. Finally, the study ends by analyzing students' exam papers in some modules to detect if a transfer of the writing rules across the disciplines exists, or not.

1. 1.Definition of Writing across the Curriculum

The term writing across the curriculum has come to have a positive impact on writing. In its broad sense, WAC means that students must be able to write in different specific contexts as Anson and Dannels (2009) state in a website article "writing belongs to all courses in every discipline". They claimed that students acquire proficiency in writing through instruction and practise in a variety of courses and fields.

For McLeod and Miraglia (2001), writing across the curriculum is seen as something positive for students as well as faculties. They explained that the WAC programs are defined as a means to help students become critical thinkers, problems solvers, and they develop as well the students' communication skills. WAC aims at transforming pedagogy at the college level, and at moving away from the traditional lecture mode of teaching concerned with the delivery of information to another model of active students' engagement with the material and with the genres of the discipline through writing. This happens not only in the English class, but in all classes across the universities.

In another article, Wells (2010) defined the notion of writing across the curriculum as a pedagogical movement that began in 1980 and which seen as a valuable method of learning since it first acknowledges the differences in writing conventions across the disciplines, and second it believes that students learn best to write in their areas by practising specific writing conventions according to specific disciplines. For Wells (2010) writing across the curriculum courses tends to apply one or both of the following approaches:

- **Writing to Learn (WTL):**
  This approach sees writing as a method of learning. Students retain and comprehend information better when they write reactions to information received in the classroom. By writing, students learn to create and develop new ideas and then apply what they learn to their own lives and interests. As they are asked to write more frequently, they become more familiar and comfortable with writing and besides they develop their writing skills. WID assignments are known to be informal and short and

may be applied in or out the classroom as: writing journals, summaries, response papers, problem analysis....etc.

- **Writing in the Disciplines (WID):**

This approach claims that each discipline has its own language conventions, format, and structure. Wells pointed out that the style, the format and the organization that may be acceptable in one discipline may not be applied in another. This approach believes that students must be taught specific conventions and should practice them in various disciplines in order to participate successfully in the academic discourse. Some common WID assignments are: reports, literature review, and project proposals.

Wells (2010) claimed that WID assignments and WTL activities can be combined together as a method to help students think about new concepts, ideas, and language in their disciplines

In 2000, McLeod summarises some basic assumptions of writing across the curriculum as follows:

1. Writing and thinking are closely related.
2. Learning to write effectively involves learning particular discourse conventions.
3. Writing belongs to the entire curriculum and not just as a course offered by the English Department.
4. WAC is a faculty- driven phenomenon which involves some changes in the methods of teaching for instance: WAC assumes that students learn better in an active rather than in a passive mode. Learning is a collaborative social phenomenon, and writing improves better when it is criticized by peers and then rewritten.

1.2. Writing in Other Disciplines

Writing is a means of communication, of learning, and of thinking. Throughout their professional career, students will realize the importance of writing outside the English classes. They will learn that every discipline has its own approach to writing, and its own conventions which differ from one discipline to another. By writing in all the disciplines, students will improve their writing competence and learn the concepts, and the context of each discipline, and above all they will notice and acquire the value of writing across the disciplines. Teachers, on the other hand, must find ideas and effective ways to connect writing to the other subjects.

For Daniels, Zemelman, and Steineke (2007) who published an article entitled "Content-Area Writing", the ability to write is essential for students in every subject area, and since writing is considered as the most powerful and efficient tool that teachers use to help students to connect with content and expand their understanding of it . They claim that through writing students learn better, retain more, meet content, developed their writing skills, and deal with any test with confidence.

Teachers have to integrate writing into other disciplines, even though this integration seems difficult and time consuming. They have to do it and they need a program to do so. The four language skills overlap all together; however, in the past writing was taught separately from the other ones; in fact instructors made rarely the connection between the four. For instance, the reading-writing relationship research found that reading affects writing and vice versa. According to an article written by Brummit-Yale (2008), research has found that reading intensively helps students become effective writers; it helps students to learn text structures and language that they can transfer later to their writing. The advantage of writing is that it provides learners with prior knowledge they need; since writing is the act of transmitting knowledge into print, students must have information to share before they began to write, that is why reading plays a major role in writing. There are some techniques mentioned in Brummitt -Yale's articles (2008), which collaborate efficiently in connecting reading to writing and which reinforce development of literacy skills:

> - One of the most efficient ways to use the relationship between reading and writing is to get students involved in a specific genre. So first, teachers must identify a given genre and, then, they have to study this genre with their students from the reading and the writing perspectives which means by paying an important focus to its structure and language as well as to its reading skills including phonetics and comprehension. Once this step is achieved; students will start writing in this genre, and while they are writing, teachers should help them to apply what they have learned from reading genre specific texts to guide their compositions. By doing so repeatedly, students will not only acquire a solid and rich knowledge of the genre, but they will also strengthen their reading and writing skills.
> - Another successful way to enhance the relationship between reading and writing is to give students the choice in their reading and writing experiences. Students learn better when they are motivated, that is why teachers should give their students the opportunity to select their own books and their own topics. This is an encouraging method to improve their reading and writing skills.

1.3. Features to be transferred across the Disciplines

How do students transfer skills, knowledge and rules from one discipline to another? And how can teachers contribute to realize such a transfer? The point is whether or not students are capable of transferring what they have learned in the writing course to a wide variety of contexts outside that course.

According to Hammond and Austin (2003), there are some conditions that promote that transfer, and therefore teachers have to find out what conditions are needed for knowledge and skills learned in one context to be applied in a new situation. Most of the time, the transfer does not occur when students learned new information in a specific way or in a particular context. For instance, in a quiz, students may memorize new lexical items words but cannot use these words in their writing. They may also conjugate verbs in the L2 but they do not know how to use them appropriately.

Researchers have found out a number of factors that influence the learners' ability to understand and apply the new language:

> - The nature of the initial learning experience.
> - The contexts for both the initial learning and the new situation to which it may apply.
> - The ability of learners to see similarities and differences across situations.
> - Learners' meta-cognitive abilities to reflect on and monitor their own learning.

Methodology

2.1. Data Collection

The data collection was done in the Department of English Letters and Language, and is concerned with 2nd year students' exam papers (Group 14); this sample was seen to fit the goal of our investigation which aims to indicate if there is a transfer of the writing conventions across the curriculum disciplines

The work consisted in gathering the students' exam marks obtained in the following modules: Written Expression, Linguistics, Literature, and Culture. The total number of marks analyzed is 15 for each subject (module) i.e. a total number of 60 marks. The marks were grouped in a table .The choice of this type of analysis was, in fact, to check whether the rules taught in the written expression module are transferred in the other subjects, or not.

Thus, we will analyze 15 students' exam papers one by one among a sample of 40. Our examination was supported by a checklist that mentions all the necessary aspects of the research purpose. Therefore, the table below illustrates each module with the mark obtained by each student in every subject. Last but not least, this table contains the students' marks concerning their writing proficiency and how they enrich their writing with the essential writing conventions such as articles (definite and indefinite), cohesive devices, capitalization and the "S" for the three pronouns respectively "she", "he", and "it". To measure the students' writings performance, a correlation test has been calculated between: W.E and Linguistics; W.E and Literature; and W.E and Culture.

1.2 Correlation between W.E and Linguistics

Scores	X	Y	XY	X²	Y²
S1	10,75	7	75,25	115,5625	49
S2	3	8	24	9	64
S3	5,5	5	27,5	30,25	25
S4	9,5	5	47,5	90,25	25
S5	16,25	17	276,25	264,0625	289
S6	8	3	24	64	9
S7	7,5	8	60	56,25	64
S8	7,5	8	60	56,25	64
S9	3,5	5	17,5	12,25	25
S10	7,5	8	60	56,25	64
S11	7,5	8,5	63,75	56,25	72,25
S12	4,5	5	22,5	20,25	25
S13	10,25	5	51,25	105,0625	25
S14	4,5	5	22,5	20,25	25
S15	6,5	8	52	42,25	64
N= 15	Σ =112,25	Σ =105,5	Σ =884	998,1875	Σ =889,25

Table 1: Correlation between W.E and Linguistics

$$R= N \Sigma XY - \Sigma X * \Sigma Y / Sqrt ([N\Sigma X^2 - (\Sigma X)^2][N\Sigma Y^2 - (\Sigma Y)^2])]$$

$$R= \frac{(15*884)-(112.25*105.5)}{\sqrt{(15*998)-(112.25)^2}*(15*889.25)-(105.5)^2}}$$

$$R= \frac{13260-11842.375}{\sqrt{(14970-12600.06)*(13338.75-11130.25)}}$$

$$R= \frac{1417.625}{\sqrt{2369.94*2208.5}}$$
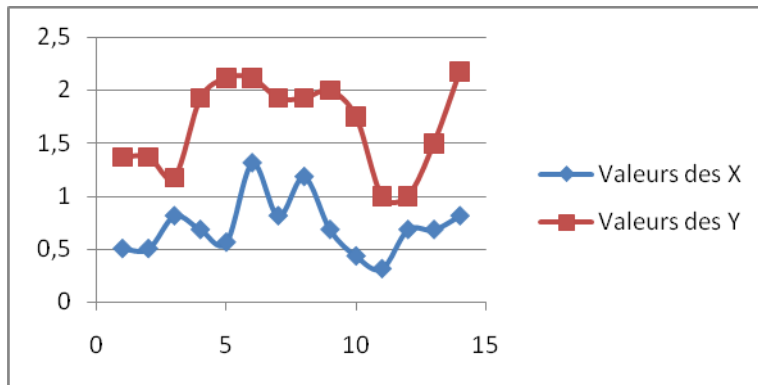
$$R = \frac{1417.625}{\sqrt{5234012.49}}$$

R= 0.6

Figure 1: Correlation between W.E and Linguistics

2.3. Correlation between W.E and Literature

Scores	X	Y	XY	X²	Y²
S1	10,75	2,5	26,875	115,5625	6,25
S2	3	1	3	9	1
S3	5,5	2	11	30,25	4
S4	9,5	3,5	33,25	90,25	12,25
S5	16,25	13	211,25	264,0625	169
S6	8	4,5	36	64	20,25
S7	7,5	3	22,5	56,25	9
S8	7,5	5	37,5	56,25	25
S9	3,5	3	10,5	12,25	9
S10	7,5	6	45	56,25	36
S11	7,5	0,5	3,75	56,25	0,25
S12	4,5	10	45	20,25	100
S13	10,25	10	102,5	105,0625	100
S14	4,5	5,5	24,75	20,25	30,25
S15	6,5	5	32,5	42,25	25
Σ= 15	112,25	74,5	645,375	998,1875	547,25

Table 2: Correlation between W.E and Literature

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$$R= N \Sigma XY- \Sigma X* \Sigma Y/ Sqrt ([N\Sigma X^2 - (\Sigma X)^2][N\Sigma Y^2 - (\Sigma Y)^2])]$$

$$r= \frac{15(645.375) - (112.25 \cdot 74.5)}{\sqrt{15(998.1875) - (112.25)^2] \cdot (15(547.25) - (74.5)^2}}$$

$$r= \frac{1318}{\sqrt{2372.75 \cdot 2658.5}}$$

r= 0.5
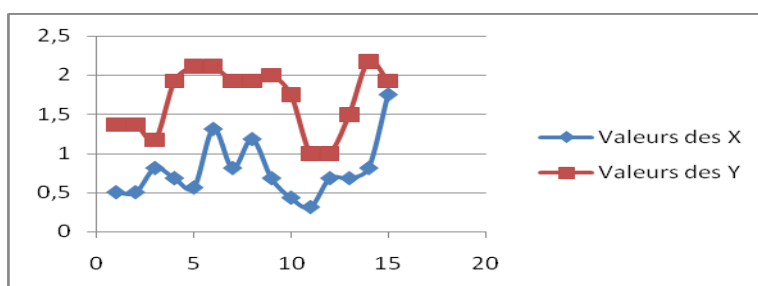
Figure 2: Correlation between W.E and Literature

2.4. Correlation between W.E and Culture

Scores	X	Y	XY	X²	Y²
S1	10,75	11	118,25	115,5625	121
S2	3	7	21	9	49
S3	5,5	9	49,5	30,25	81
S4	9,5	3	28,5	90,25	9
S5	16,25	16	260	264,0625	256
S6	8	7	56	64	49
S7	7,5	12,5	93,75	56,25	156,25
S8	7,5	14,5	108,75	56,25	210,25
S9	3,5	12	42	12,25	144
S10	7,5	10,5	78,75	56,25	110,25
S11	7,5	5	37,5	56,25	25
S12	4,5	4,5	20,25	20,25	20,25
S13	10,25	8,5	87,125	105,0625	72,25
S14	4,5	14	63	20,25	196
S15	6,5	5	32,5	42,25	25
Σ= 15	112,25	139,5	1096,875	998,1875	1524,25

Table 3: Correlation between W.E and Culture

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$$R= N \Sigma XY- \Sigma X * \Sigma Y/ Sqrt ([N\Sigma X^2 - (\Sigma X)^2][N\Sigma Y^2 - (\Sigma Y)^2])]$$

$$r= \frac{15(1096.8757)-(112.25*139.5)}{\sqrt{15(998.1875)-(112.25)^2}*(15(1524.25)-(139.5)^2}}$$

$$r= \frac{794.25}{\sqrt{2372.75*3403.5}}$$
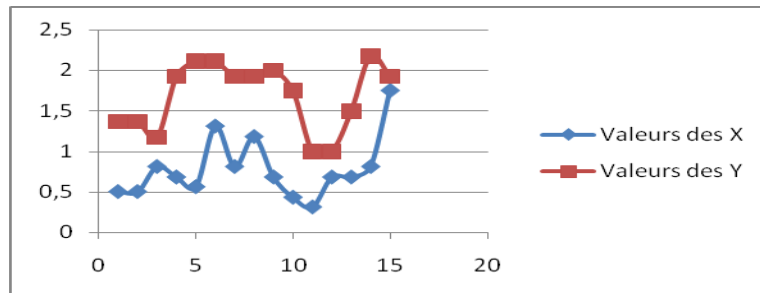
r= **0.2**

Figure 3: Correlation between W.E and Culture

2.5. Results and Discussion

The study revealed that there are different correlations between the variables, yet all of them are moderate positive ones. The value "r" summarizes the results as follows:

a)   - W.E and Linguistics *r = 0.6*

b)   - W.E and Literature *r= 0.5*

c)   - W.E and Culture *r= 0.2*

One can deduce that while correcting their students' papers some teachers took into consideration only the content while others the form; they should have focused on both since they are significantly important in writing. Students from their first year learn the writing conventions explicitly in the module of written expression and they are supposed to apply and to transfer these conventions across other subjects; i.e., from one module to another. We have noticed that students do not always transfer these conventions:

Conventions uses	Number of students
The use of "S" (3rd singular pronoun)	The majority of students do not put the "S"
capitalization	Many students do not respect the rules of capitalization
The use of cohesive devices	Only six devices are reflected into the students' papers

Table 4: The Use of the Writing Conventions in the Students' Compositions

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Through the analysis of the students' papers, we noticed that the transfer is almost inexistent. It might easily be argued that students encounter more difficulties with the rule concerned with putting the "S" in the third singular pronoun. The question which comes up to our mind is: why do the students meet difficulties with this feature? The most obvious answer is that this rule neither exists in Arabic nor in French, and while writing students tend to refer to these languages; that is why they frequently forget to apply this rule to the foreign language.

Another typical difficulty that the students meet is the one relative to the wrong application of capitalization which is highly important in the writing skill. Although learners know that they must capitalize at the beginning of each new sentence, yet they do not apply this rule. The immediate solution to this problem is that students should be informed repeatedly that the rules they are learning during the writing class must be used across other modules.

The third difficulty is the one related to the use of cohesive devices in writing. After analyzing the students' papers, we have noticed that the most frequent ones are: *and, because, but, which, that, so*, as the following table reveals:

Cohesive Devices	Number of times used
And	78
Because	60
But	35
Which	18
That	15
So	7

Table 5: The Use of Cohesive Devices in the Students' Papers

 The challenge involved in using cohesive devices is that students should show willingness to learn and use new cohesive devices whenever they come across them; this can be as an efficient strategy for enriching students' register. From the table, we can notice that many types of conjunctions such as: additive, causal, adversative, temporal and lexical should be in the academic writing; the use of cohesive devices is fundamental in writing as it shows the difference between the weak and good writing. To provide a detailed portrait about the use of cohesive ties, the researcher made the following table moving from the most frequent devices to the least ones:

Most Frequent	Least Frequent
Additive: and, in addition, besides.	Demonstrative,
Lexical: synonym, repetition	Adversative devices: however, but, on the other hand
Temporal: first, second, lastly, in conclusion.	Causal devices: as a result, so, thus.
Definite articles	/

Table 6: Most and Least Frequent Cohesive Devices used in Writing

The use of articles is the only application where students obtained nearly the whole mark in the three modules selected for the present study: Literature, Culture and

Linguistics. It seems an easy exercise for students to implement their assignments with articles, most of the time correctly. This was the only successful transfer among the other ones.

Conclusion

In the present article, a correlation has been selected to determine the students' transfer of the writing rules across different disciplines. The study also seeks to know if teachers and students are aware how deep writing is close and connected to other subjects; what is learnt during the written expression class should be applied efficiently across all the disciplines.

Therefore, the tables can clarify the amount or the number of personal teachers' opinions about the students' level in writing, and more exactly the transfer of the writing rules across the disciplines.

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