

The Significance of Text-based Approach in Teaching Writing to ESL/EFL Learners: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

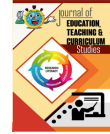
This paper presents a systematic review of the Text-based approach in teaching writing skills to ESL/EFL Learners. Using the Systemic Functional Linguistics theory and concepts drawn from the Social Cultural Theory, specifically Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and Language Acquisition Support System (LASS), the study analyses how the theory and concepts shaped the application of the approach in diverse international, regional and local language education settings. This systematic review presents a clear analysis of the approach, citing previous studies. It highlights the results from previous studies on the effectiveness of the approach, showing how it contributed to the development of writing skills. The reviewed literature revealed that text-based instruction is effective in developing ESL/EFL students' writing skills if it is enhanced with peer review and student self-assessment. This study would add to the pedagogical and theoretical understanding of the use of text-based instruction and promote additional studies in under-resourced ESL/ EFL settings.

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Introduction

This paper aims to explore the effectiveness of the text-based approach in under-resourced ESL/EFL contexts. Languages represent a major source of meaning-making and communication. They are organised systems, which humans use to communicate efficiently (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, 2022; Barasa & Mudogo, 2019). The teaching methods of language focus more on communicative competence with the help of working with authentic texts. In this context, the text-based approach presupposes a key position as it connects written and spoken texts to their social and cultural background and explicitly learns the structures of texts (Richards & Rodgers, 2022). Although it may not be given much importance in some linguistic contexts, writing is essential in academic performance and professional communication (Al-Busaidi, 2021; Bhowmik, 2021). Research shows that writing competence allows learners to write grammatically correct texts, which improves their academic achievements and career differentiation (Niyibizi et al., 2024).



Despite its importance in academic settings, writing has been underemphasised in English language teaching, especially in Africa and Rwanda, while it is part of the bigger picture in ESL/EFL teaching (Niyibizi et al., 2024; Ndimurugero et al., 2024). Rwandan researchers suggest changing the learning approach to emphasise the development of academic writing skills (Niyomugabo, Sibomana, & Niyibizi, 2018; Twagilimana & Naidoo, 2020). Text-based instruction has proven its efficiency in a variety of international settings (Ho & Henry, 2014; Gomez Burgos, 2017), but its use in Africa and especially in Rwanda has not been thoroughly studied. This paper sets out to explain the principles and practice of the text-based approach and evaluate its effectiveness in the ESL/EFL context, such as in Rwanda. The research puts two main research questions: (1) What is the effectiveness of a text-based approach in teaching writing skills? and (2) How does the use of a text-based approach influence the development of writing skills in ESL/EFL students? This study will lead to studying the effective methodologies of teaching writing by analysing the existing literature through the prism of Systemic Functional Linguistics by Halliday (1985) and the Teaching-Learning Cycle by Rothery and Stenglin (1994).

Theoretical foundations

Text-based instruction is grounded in Halliday's (1993) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Michael Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) has been influential in the field of ESL/EFL language teaching, especially genre pedagogy (Halliday, 1993). SFL implies that students employ ideational, interpersonal and textual functions in order to learn a text (Ho & Henry, 2014). Students deconstruct the meaning of a text, jointly construct a text, and finally apply the skills from the first two stages to construct the text individually (Gomez Burgos, 2017; Liu & Chen, 2022). Rose and Martin (2012) refer to the process as "Teaching-Learning Cycle". The model made a valuable contribution to the promotion of genre pedagogy founded on a functional model of language to integrate literacy teaching in primary and secondary schools' curriculum in Australia, Canada and South Africa, focusing on first language literacy (Richards, 2006; Dirgeyasa, 2016; Mohlabi-Tlaka, 2016).

Systemic Functional Linguistics suggests that it would be more efficient to teach learners writing skills focusing on particular social communication contexts rather than just concentrating on general English (Acurso & Gebhard, 2021). Therefore, SFL is reliable in the present study as it puts forward the role of context in language learning in the teaching and learning of different types of texts. It is complemented by two concepts drawn from Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory of cognitive development (SCT), namely Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and Language Acquisition Support System (LASS), which imply that through proper peer support and scaffolding, learners develop more skills. This study sees peer support as a crucial practice in teaching writing. Therefore, theories in language teaching should consider that students learn better when they are supported by peers and teachers as more knowledgeable others.

Text-based approach

Learning through a model text analysis

Text-based approach is a linguistic strategy that is based on teaching different types of texts by analysing model text structures, purpose, content and language (Matthiessen & Teruya, 2023). Writers organise their texts with a structure or pattern that will help the readers figure out and understand how the contents are organised and tied to each other within one text. According to Khan (2023), text analysis



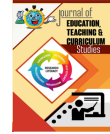
should not only look at what is explicitly stated in the text, but also at the implicit messages. Richards (2006) contends that through a text-based approach, students analyse the features and structure of the text-types, collaboratively create texts with the guidance of their teacher, and become capable of producing their own texts independently. Social context and peer support are the foundation of the text-based approach to writing as the students work collaboratively and get support from their peers and teachers. Henceforth, learning makes sense when it is conducted in a socially meaningful context and when it involves social partners or peers.

It has been demonstrated that through the reading of whole texts, learners would comprehend the functioning of language and build the entire truth in a much more effective manner (Ho & Henry, 2014; Ramadhan & Indriyani, 2023). The scholars highlight the social and functional aspects of language of the text-based approach as proposed by Bruner (1985), because the approach focuses on both text features and the social contexts in which they are produced and used. In addition, Ho and Henry (2014) found that the text-based approach is important because it helps students become proficient writers. By focusing on how other texts are structured and the language choices other writers make to achieve their purposes in particular contexts, it can be seen as one possible way to raise writing literacy among ESL/EFL learners (Ho & Henry, 2014). The role of the teacher is to guide students in reading the text, identifying its structure, and jointly constructing their own draft of the type of text under study. The process is referred to as the Teaching/Learning Cycle (TLC) (Rose & Martin, 2012; Gomez Burgos, 2017; Ho & Henry, 2014).

Moreover, Kuyyogsuy (2019), Mahdiyyah, Herawati & Vonti (2020) found that peer review and peer feedback are necessary tools to help students engage with written texts. They play a crucial role in writing to help students understand the content and structure of other writers' texts and therefore correct their own mistakes. Poveda de Brusa and Harutyunyan (2019) conducted a study in Ecuador and wrote that the statistical analysis of data collected revealed that peer review significantly influences the academic writing performance of students. It is worth noting that if text-based instruction is associated with peer review, after which students provide feedback to their peers, the approach may yield more results in teaching writing skills. Another strategy to enhance text-based instruction is to let students evaluate their own written work. Wijaya's (2023) study, conducted in Indonesia, revealed that student self-assessment is vital in helping EFL writers to learn and produce impeccable writing. The use of peer review and student self-assessment was henceforth viewed as a critical strategy to support student writing through the text-based approach.

Assessing the Text-based approach's contribution

The text-based approach has been applied in various ESL/EFL contexts with positive results. A number of researchers have used the text-based approach in the teaching of writing (Mohlabi-Tlaka, 2016; Wang, 2007; Huang & Morgan, 2003; Ho & Henry, 2014; Latipah & Gunawan, 2020). Mohlabi-Tlaka (2016) examined the implementation of the text-based approach to English education in South African public schools. The results revealed that the text-based approach was implemented by means of achieving literacy requirements. Similarly, Ho and Henry's (2014) study showed that the text-based instruction was used in developing writing skills in a secondary classroom in Brunei Darussalam. The researchers tested only students' performance in the three dimensions and reported that there was a significant difference in improvement between the pre-test and post-test scores after the intervention. Liu et al. (2023) reviewed a total of 38 studies on genre-based approaches and ESL/EFL writing that



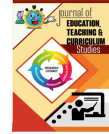
had been conducted over 20 years. Four broad themes were identified in the review: research articles, thesis or dissertation writing, argumentative writing, and other types of professional writing. The study concluded that genre-based approaches, grounded in SFL, significantly improved ESL/EFL learners' writing skills.

In regard to the previous studies, this review found gaps in the way students made profit from textual analysis to produce their own texts, because analysing and producing texts might not be enough in teaching and learning writing. Further activities should be carried out to ensure that students examine, critique and make sense of produced texts for further improvement. This technique is referred to as peer review (Kuyyogsuy, 2019; Mahdiyyah, Herawati, & Vonti, 2020). Peer review accompanied by peer feedback might be a good way to enhance text-based instruction. Another strategy to reinforce the teaching of texts is student self-assessment (Wijaya, 2023). Therefore, the two strategies should be given high consideration while teaching writing skills.

Text-based approach used in local contexts

Although the research in the Rwandan context is scarce, the principles of the text-based approach are also consistent with the necessity of providing writing instruction explicitly. Niyibizi et al. (2024) emphasised the insufficient focus on writing as a component of English language teaching in Rwanda and suggested reforming teaching practices in order to focus on the development of academic writing skills. To close this gap, a text-based strategy may be considered, which will offer the structure and contextually appropriate writing training. The development of literacy skills, especially written proficiency among the graduates, seems to be a hot issue in the teaching and learning of English, though no significant investigations have been made in this area. According to Karamage, Anguru and Munyegwa (2023), one crucial goal to achieve high-quality education in Rwanda is giving priority to promoting literacy in the English language. Rwandan researchers have suggested that a new language teaching scheme should be established (Niyomugabo, Sibomana & Niyibizi, 2018). However, university students and lecturers are not well informed about the models and approaches for teaching writing. Whereas numerous studies have shown that there are gaps among the methods used to teach English in Rwandan universities (Niyomugabo, Sibomana & Niyibizi, 2018; Twagilimana & Naidoo, 2020), there is a dearth of studies that investigated the teaching of writing through a text-based approach. The features in the text-based teaching are still the kind of knowledge that needs to be propagated in Rwandan schools.

Most instructors refer to traditional teaching methods such as lecturing and modelling rather than letting students engage in text deconstruction and joint construction. It becomes worse when students are not given appropriate feedback and supported through scaffolding. However, using a model text would be a strategy to demystify the challenge by offering students the right way to follow in order to produce different types of texts, because the strategy allows them to support each other by notifying what they need to include in their writings (Yang, 2018). Checking the structure, style and content of exemplary text types enhances their ability to write cohesive, coherent and meaningful texts. Hyland (2022) argues that texts are widely used in today's writing classes where students show a low level of language proficiency, and the strategy has helped to increase the confidence of novice writers. This study argues that a text-based approach would support the teaching of writing skills in the Rwandan context if the proposed stages were followed. In addition, students should be given time to review their



produced text and provide feedback to their peers and then apply the given feedback while improving their final texts.

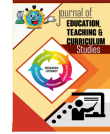
Methodology

In order to gain sufficient insight to answer the research questions, this study undertakes a thorough analysis of the previous literature on the effectiveness of the text-based approach in teaching writing skills and how the use of the text-based approach affects the development of students' writing skills in the ESL/EFL context. A review and synthesis of how the approach was applied in different contexts helped to identify its effectiveness and areas that need to be reinforced further. Only articles that were directly pertinent to the subject of this investigation have been searched, and they include peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly papers, research reports and academic dissertations retrieved in reputable databases. The analysis mainly focused on the publications in the past ten years to maintain relevancy and contemporaneity, unless some theoretical literature was needed to maintain the originality of the founding views in the theories. Moreover, the selected studies were compared and contrasted based on the methodological rigour and thematic relevance.

Findings and Discussion

The text-based approach to teaching writing combines the principles of the SFL and SCT as it deals with the analysis and production of texts in their social contexts. Truong (2017) argues that SFL gave rise to a text-based approach, or genre-based approach. According to SFL, language is applied and perceived in a context (Atmazaki, Ramadhan, & Indriyani, 2023; Truong, 2017). Text-based approach is also known as text-based instruction, or genre-based approach (Ho & Henry, 2014; Dirgeyasa, 2016; Liu & Chen, 2022). This approach is preoccupied with reviewing the model text, performing writing tasks and assessing the produced texts. It is aimed at learning the language by exposure and studying the various forms or genres of texts (Liu & Chen, 2022; Dirgeyasa, 2016). It applies to the demonstration of text structure and content, which allows the students to make their own versions of written texts. Different studies found that through working with whole texts, learners can better learn how meaning is constructed to create the entire truth (Ho & Henry, 2014; Atmazaki, Ramadhan & Indriyani, 2023).

For example, Ho and Henry (2014) found that a text-based approach is useful for teaching writing because it helps students to become proficient writers when they analyse and understand the contents and structures of different genres. Text-based approach has been very dominant in teaching literacy in all the teaching models (Mumba & Mkandawire, 2019; Mohlabi-Tlaka, 2016; Peloghitis & Ferreira, 2018; Meidianti, Sukyadi & Damayanti, 2024). Strategies used in text-based teaching helped students achieve writing competencies. They include text analysis and collaborative writing. However, this study argues that the previous methods lacked students' involvement in the produced texts. Choy and Lee (2022) claim that text review can assist students in being involved in the text and training writing skills. The students have to manipulate the genre text in small groups through the deconstruction of meaning. Ho and Henry (2014) point out that the role of the teacher is to direct students in understanding the function, communicative purpose, and the structure of the text through encoding experiences (ideational), interacting with each other as writers (interpersonal), and making coherent organisation of meanings (textual), but Kuyyogsuy (2019), Mahdiyyah, Herawati, and Vonti (2020) found that peer review and peer feedback should also be used as tools to help students engage with written texts, a strategy that is given high consideration in this study. Nevertheless, the findings from the previous studies helped to answer the questions in this study.



Question 1: What is the effectiveness of a text-based approach in teaching writing skills?

Studies have revealed that the text method has proved helpful in the creation of literacy and writing skills during the past decades. This method has aided in the development of vocabulary and boosted the confidence of the beginners (Hyland, 2022). It enables them to help one another by informing them of what they should incorporate in their writings (Yang, 2018). This teaching method is consistent with language teaching/learning theories, including the Systemic Functional Linguistics proposed by Halliday (1993). In fact, students learn the way language works and the way in which meaning is generated by reading entire texts and so become fluent writers (Ho & Henry, 2014; Atmazaki, Ramadhan, & Indriyani, 2023). The strategy is one of the possible ways of increasing the writing literacy of ESL/EFL students, as revealed by Mohlabi-Tlaka's (2016) research conducted in the South African context.

This review has seen that the text-based approach is effective in enhancing the writing skills of ESL/EFL learners in a wide range of contexts. Research conducted in Canada (Huang and Morgan, 2003) and Iran (Wang, 2007) indicated that students who studied model texts and were taught writing on scaffold writing generated greater coherent, grammatically correct, and context-appropriate texts. Recent research supports these results. Atmazaki, Ramadhan, and Indriyani (2023) also found that there was better writing competence with authentic texts because linguistic accuracy and communicative effectiveness were improved.

Question 2: How does the use of a text-based approach affect the development of students' writing skills in an ESL/EFL context?

Experts stipulate that a text-based approach to teaching writing follows its typical process or steps. Rothery and Stenglin (1994) suggest a Teaching-Learning Cycle model consisting of deconstruction, joint construction, and individual construction. First, in the deconstruction stage, a certain type of text is given to students by the teacher. The teachers and students then analyse it in order to identify its structure, purpose, and content. Second, in the joint construction stage, the students do exercises by manipulating and analysing the text in terms of content and language usage. Finally, the students individually produce the genre type in question (Dirgeyasa, 2016). Teaching language through exposure to and analysis of different text types helps students produce their own forms of written texts. This is supported by Ramadhan and Indriyani's (2023) arguments that emphasise that engaging with texts helps language learners construct meanings. Indeed, students engage deeply with the text and practice writing skills.

It is clear that without model texts, students' understanding of the content and structure of the text would be difficult. It would be significant to include peer review and peer feedback based on Kuyyogsuy (2019), Mahdiyyah, Herawati, and Vonti's (2020) studies, since the students will be required to assess production by peers and subsequently apply peer learning to their texts. Through the Teaching-Learning Cycle (TLC), where the deconstruction, joint construction, and individual production are engaged, the learners know the content and structure of every type of text and become capable of producing their own writings (Rose & Martin, 2012; Gomez Burgos, 2017). Students are able to internalise the genre conventions and develop texts on their own. The learning process is also improved by peer cooperation, peer feedback, and student self-assessment. Poveda de Brusa and Harutyunyan (2019) and Wijaya (2023) stress that peer review and self-assessment help students to



develop their knowledge of structural and grammatical conventions and, as a result, they refine their writing skills.

Following the SCT, this collaborative method allows learners to work in their own zone of proximal development, and they slowly gain independence in the production of text. Text-based instruction may be used in the Rwandan context to resolve long-standing issues of writing proficiency. Niyibizi et al. (2024) noted that the limited exposure of students to model texts and the absence of organised instructions to support their writing are the obstacles to their writing development. The introduction of TLC using scaffolding, model text analysis, peer feedback, and self-assessment may give students a chance to internalise the academic genres and improve their confidence and competence in writing. These results are in line with the rest of the literature, and they show that text-based methods can help in different educational settings, even in the non-native English population.

Conclusion

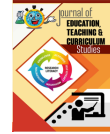
The text-based strategy is a powerful, evidence-based teaching technique for teaching ESL/EFL writing. The text-based approach has been utilised by scholars in various levels of school settings, such as secondary and tertiary levels. Theoretical application of SFL was a strong partnership between the pupils and instructors as a result of an interaction between deconstruction, shared work, and scaffolding. Issues like scarcity of resources, knowledge and skills of teachers, as well as understanding the text-based method, should be addressed to get the most out of it as a tool for developing writing. In a word, it has been understood that a text-based approach is an essential pedagogical instrument which implements theories in practice, enhancing excellence in writing among the students. The methodology provides students with a whole language learning experience, and it also improves their ability to write various kinds of texts. Nonetheless, there is a reason to point to the need for additional strategies to enhance this approach. Consequently, this paper suggests that peer review, peer feedback, and student self-assessment should be considered in adopting the text-based approach, and so long-term effects are to be elucidated in the teaching of writing using such an improved approach.

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