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Comparing Between Expert And Novice Raters In Assessing Students’ Written Work Using Verbal Protocol Analysis

COMPARING BETWEEN EXPERT AND NOVICE RATERS IN ASSESSING STUDENTS’ WRITTEN WORK USING VERBAL PROTOCOL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to gain insights into the cognitive difference between expert and novice raters in assessing and giving feedback to students' writing and translate this insights into a mental model that may be used in training to help the novice raters acquire the skill of an expert rater in assessing students' writing effectively. The qualitative paradigm for this study has provided a suitable framework as it enables the researcher to describe the mental processes of the subjects from the qualitative data collected through verbal protocol, field notes, observations and interviews. The transcripts of verbal protocol Analysis (VPA) and interviews were analyzed, using a coding scheme, to identify the knowledge states and conceptual operators used by the expert and novice raters, which were also their personal justification on the decision and action taken while doing the process of “thinking aloud”. The findings revealed that novice and expert raters have shown variability and discrepancy in assessing and giving feedback to students’ written work. The depth of processing and decision-making differences between the two groups of raters may have accounted for these discrepancies.

Introduction

Writing is a productive skill that is highly prioritized in English as Second Language (ESL) classrooms. Teachers are expected not only
to teach the skill well but at the same time are demanded to possess essential competence in assessing it. Teacher's written feedback is an essential aspect in any English language writing course. In studies that have examined it, feedback is also associated clearly with writing improvement, especially for older students, and those students much appreciate it (Ferris, 1997). According to Graves (1983), teacher feedback and the opportunity to revise written work based on this feedback are keys to students' development as writers. The way a teacher provides feedback will have direct impact on whether students become successful or unsuccessful writers. Apart from that, novice writers need guidance to evaluate, modify, or restructure their ideas and to add and delete content to improve their writing (Condon, 2009; Keppner, 1991; Olson & Raffeld, 1987).

**Related Literature**

Learners of writing need to know when they are performing well and when they are not (Zellermayer, 1989). The more information learners have about their writing, the better they understand how to perform in a better way (Cardelle & Corne, 1981). Learners of writing need feedback, not only to monitor their own progress, but also to take other's view and adapt a message to it (Flower, 1979). Research
findings from second language classrooms indicate that writing teachers are mainly concerned with responding to surface level features and mechanical errors. Such feedback is likely to be ineffective, confusing, inconsistent and contradictory (Zamel, 1985; Robb, Ross & Shortreed, 1986; Cohen, 1987).

There are also a number of approaches and formats that a teacher can adopt while responding to students' writing. The most common choices include descriptive written commentary, comments for revising major content and organization of the essay, and prose-editing responses on major editorial weaknesses (Grabe & Kaplan, 1998). Caulk (1994) in his study suggests that comments can be divided into six categories which consist of comments on form, reorganization, more information, write less, clarity and style. In general, the teachers' feedback includes all kinds of comments, corrections, codes, suggestions, questions, marks, interviews, discussion, or any other means by which learners receive information about their writing. As much as it was important for the students to do well in the writing tasks, it is also equally important for ESL teachers to assess their students' writing and provide immediate feedback to ensure that the students progress in their learning process.
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