SSH CHES

Verband der Sprachenzentren
an Schweizer Hochschulen

Association des Centres de langues
des Hautes écoles suisses

Lecturers' attitudes and beliefs regarding writing to learn

an additional language and learning how to write

A study by the research task group of the CHES/SSH

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Summary

Background

Lecturers' and students' attitudes and beliefs shape teaching and learning. This is also true about writing in order to learn an additional language (WL[a]) and learning how to write (LW) in an additional language. For both WL[a] and LW, we can distinguish four phases: (1) lecturers prepare students for writing; (2) students are in the process of writing; (3) lecturers respond to students' written texts; and (4) students follow up after lecturers' first response to students' texts.

Question

We asked: How important do lecturers in both groups (WL[a] and LW) believe various aspects of the four phases of writing are, namely: preparation, the writing process, response, and follow-up.

Participants and methods

Seventy-six lecturers from institutions affiliated to CHES/SSH responded to an online, mainly quantitative survey.

Results

This initial report focusses on (1) genre, (2) the four phases and (3) open questions. Overall, we found that lecturers in both the WL[a] and LW groups agreed more on what is least effective. They disagreed more on what is most effective.

1. Genre

The two groups did not agree about how important it is that lecturers focus on genre in general. In addition, lecturers in the WL[a] group believe that informal genres are most important. In contrast, lecturers in the LW group believe academic texts are much more important than other genres.

2. The four phases

Differences: Lecturers in the WL[a] group believe that what is most important is that students manage general vocabulary during the writing phase, while lectures in the LW group believe that what is most important is that lecturers discuss the structure and language of different genres with students during the preparation phase.
Similarities: Lecturers in both groups agreed that it is least effective when, in the response phase, lecturers only give an overall grade and do not break down their feedback into various aspects of students' texts. Both groups also agreed that technology is of little value – for example when students use software in the writing phase and when lecturers use screen capture in the feedback phase.

3. Open questions

In their responses to the open questions, lecturers emphasised the importance of all writing development, but also pointed out some obstacles to developing writing. In addition, they described *how* they believe writing adds to learning an additional language and explained *why* they think revision and resubmission are valuable or not.

Applications

Lecturers can use these findings to reflect on their teaching practice. Language centres can explore the implications of these findings for writing development in WL[a] and LW, for example in training for lecturers.