

Influence of Trained Teacher's Pedagogy on Students' Writing Skill

Nargis Zaidi¹ Uzma Quraishi² Asma Shahid Kazi³

¹ *PhD Education (Candidate), Institute of Education, Lahore College for Women University, Lahore*

² *Director, Institute of Education, Lahore College for Women University, Lahore*

³ *Asst. Prof. Institute of Education, Lahore College for Women University, Lahore*

Email: nargis_hasnain@hotmail.com

The purpose of this study was to analyze the effect of the teaching principles of a trained teacher on enhancing the subjective understanding of students' English essay writing ability through an eclectic approach. The aim is to ascertain how far this universal approach can help develop the English writing skill of the students at the tertiary level. This paper employs the pretest/posttest (control and experimental) research design. The sample includes 66 students of final year B.A. / B.Sc. (2 years) and 2 teachers in a public-sector college of Lahore, Pakistan. These students are placed in two groups; the experimental group is taught by the trained teacher and the control group by the untrained teacher. Both groups were handed self-assessment questionnaires at the start and end of the study. After completing the nine-month course of teaching essay writing, independent / paired sample T-test and Hedges' g were used to analyze the questionnaire scores to compare for differences and similarities in the pre and posttest scenarios. Trained teachers' methodology was assessed and it was discovered that the eclectic approach employed by her left a positive effect on students' overall self-perception of their English essay writing skill.

Keywords: *eclectic approach, product approach, process approach, English as a second language*

Introduction

Owing to the secondary nature of the English language in several developing countries, acquiring English essay writing skill is a challenging task. The task of essay writing tests candidates' ability to communicate effectively. Akinwamide (2012) asserted the standards and objectives of effective English writing were not catered to by the regular English textbooks due to the teachers' over-reliance on the product approach. Similarly, Steele (2004) states that such a rigid teaching strategy leads to a lack of creativity and increased dependency on theory rather than practice among the students. Writing can be taught and students can learn to write more effectively. This skill is imperative in English teaching and

learning. More specifically, in the context of Pakistan, more attention needs to be given to writing classes to meet the demands of an unseen essay exam (Paper B). The element of uncertainty about the essay topics in the coming exams needs to be tackled by equipping the students with the required written competency. In the conventional lecture-oriented classroom, the learning needs of the students are neglected as the process is largely devoid of an incremental approach which guides the students through different stages of essay writing. Moreover, the culture of rote learning reigns supreme and very little emphasis is laid on originality of work.

Throughout the academic session, teachers and students are preoccupied with

worries of syllabus and course completion which derails them from achieving a sustainable improvement in their English essay writing skill. Yet, they are expected to plunge directly into the university exams, completely based upon their writing skill. These degree exams are entirely descriptive in nature, much in contrast with the preceding level of education (intermediate), which tests the students objectively (Multiple Choice Questions and short two-line answers). It is an ironical situation that the student of the government sector colleges cannot even meet the objectives of the National Curriculum of English Language (2006) at Intermediate (objective exam) with their level of competence, let alone meeting written requirements of the Degree Examination (subjective exam). In the National curriculum of English Language (2006) the objectives of writing skill include inculcating competency for writing among students; developing fluency; focusing on accuracy in academic transactional and creative writing; and, showing insight into the writing process.

The public sector students have had some sort of exposure to the English language during their primary and secondary education and often deem their teachers' methodology as traditional and boring. Vanderpyl (2012) states that students resented the monotonous lecture-style lessons owing to their one-dimensional and teacher-dominated orientation with minimal student participation. This led the students to lose interest in the primitive method of rote learning. Their writing revolved around topics selected by the teachers themselves or was based or borrowed by substandard essay

writing materials they had purchased from the market. It was witnessed in the Pakistani public sector that the writing process lacked the originality of work and a sense of ownership and connection to the written word. Moreover, another contributory factor was the unfamiliarity of students with writing in their first language. Hence, writing full-length essays in a second language prove to be a herculean task for them. In the Government colleges, it had been observed that the written output is below average at the tertiary level which becomes abundantly evident when one reads their examination papers. Prior to the exams, the students relied heavily upon the substandard notes they had bought off the market and went about cramming them without any sense of relevance which is why university results in English are the lowest. This adversely affects not only the academic future of students' but also the chances of promotions for the teacher.

Problem Statement

It has been observed that the academic process in the government colleges is impeded by a grave academic issue. Majority of the students who belong to the second shift are admitted to B.A/B.Sc (2 years) classes on very low merit. According to government policy on access to higher education, the number of students to be educated has to be increased despite the low marks they have scored. Such students are requiring to be dealt with care and consideration by the teacher who must find a way to reconcile the student' acquired knowledge with their potential to write. The present study focuses on this issue.

Objectives

1. To bring out a significant comparison between self-assessment questionnaire of the students' pretest and posttest scores in both the control and experimental group.
2. To ascertain the importance of improving students' subjective outlook of English writing skill through the employment of a process and activity-oriented approach.

Research Questions

1. What are the similarities and differences between the control and experimental group students' perception of their essay writing skills in the self-assessment questionnaire at-and post-experimental stages?
2. Which eclectic strategies/activities resulted in improving students' performance in English essay writing skill?

Literature Review

The present study has explored different researches similar to its own context and strategies. In this regard, the present study advocates the usefulness of the process approach much like Matsuda and Silva (2001) who describe it as "an approach that emphasizes teaching writing, not a product but as a process; helping students discover their own ideas; allowing students to choose their own topic; providing teacher and peer feedback; encouraging revision and using students writing as the primary text of the course" (p. 67). The relevance of going through multiple stages of writing is also underscored by Smalley, Ruetten and Kozyrev (2004) who suggest that while the strategy used by different writers to the

process approach varies, all these writers follow the same general order call prewriting, drafting and revising. The concerns of the present study regarding the significance of English language usage are endorsed by Hedge (2005) who refers to it as an instrumental tool of communication in the age of globalization. English is used by people of different nations in order to communicate with one another. Communication cannot be complete without writing that is why writing has been considered a difficult area which has been held in abeyance in the literature of English language teaching for some years. An interventionist study by Hasan and Akhand (2010) - which resonates deeply with the present research by employing a blend of product and process approach to English writing skill - found positive effects of this merged approach upon students' written performance. This research is relevant for countries like Pakistan that are facing similar issues in terms of the learning and teaching of writing. Similarly, Albeshir (2012) conducted an experimental study, as being undertaken by the current research, between two groups focusing on the effectiveness of teaching the skill of writing through process approach and emphasizing that this approach is highly recommended that other traditional approaches.

Vanderpyl (2012) asserts that the process approach bears non-linear characteristics that are highly cyclical and fluid and that the final submission of the written product is preceded by multiple bouts of careful revision and feedback. With similar beliefs, the present research also aimed at implementing an intervention plan

to see whether the treatment method enhances the writing skill of the students. In the past, research on the area of English writing instruction has led to the creation of a diverse body of work. However, consensual agreements on the approaches have not been reached. This is due to the belief that the effectiveness of the eclectic teaching methodology depends on whether the teacher possesses traits like perseverance and confidence to share their work with others in order to make the learning process more effective (Vanderpyl, 2012).

Students need teachers' feedback. This fact was in accordance with the study of Black and William (1998), Tsui and Ng (2000), Lantolf (2001), Macaro (2003), Hyland and Hyland (2006), Storch and Wigglesworth (2007) and Lundstrom and Baker (2009) regarding improving writing skill through peer feedback. Citing Grami (2010), Albsher (2012) assessed the usefulness of introducing peer feedback into writing classes to develop writing skills. Additionally, this study also aims at perusing the role of teacher training in enhancing the teacher's professional development which gives them the opportunity to learn by becoming cognizant of current best teaching practices. Research conducted in this area confirms the effectiveness of teacher training for professional skill enhancement (Muijs and Reynolds, 2001).

Focus on TESL

The field of TESL training has been explored by the Researcher and has encouraged the teachers to make the best use of it in their instructional practice to better the writing skills of the students. According

to Graham (2005), philosophy of teaching should cover questions about the teaching methodology, teachers' treatment of students and the role of the teacher in the classroom. The present research highlights the inculcation of this philosophy and the doctrine of TESL that would be of unprecedented value to the teachers by unearthing the untouched angles of knowledge and skill.

Model of Eclectic Approach

Eclectic Approach. This activity-based approach called forth certain instruction by the teachers for the given language teaching approaches. The teacher would use her experience to choose the best possible technique which was most suitable for the aim of the lesson, the potential of the students, and the social and academic order to which they belonged. In this study, the eclectic approach has been adopted by the teachers based on a progressive model (Lavelle and Guarino, 2003) to better the students' writing skills in colleges. According to this approach, the primary importance is given to the sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic needs of the students in order to meet their expectations by altering the teaching approach. In an eclectic approach, a single method is drawn out of the varied and diverse methods of teaching so that the method adopted is the most effective in bringing out positive outcomes. Modern viewpoint lays stress on the balance between product and process approach. This can be achieved by following the eclectic approach where the process of writing does not reduce the importance of the final product. This process requires different stages which include prewriting, drafting,

revising and editing which (Macaro, 2001) asserts should be seen as “a means to an end and not an end in itself”. Various activities have been developed based on an eclectic approach which has been discussed at length by Hedge (2005) and Brown (2015) in their phases of writing and writing spinner respectively.

Research Methodology

Research Design. The research followed a quasi-experimental methodology by employing pre and post-test design. The researcher divided students at the tertiary level into control and experimental groups. The experimental group was taught and engaged by the trained teacher through a specially designed activity-based approach. Such an exercise broadly included the development of cognitive skills as a prerequisite to planning and teaching the art of writing in English Language and improving the written ability of the students through an eclectic approach. On the other hand, the control group was taught by a teacher who was not endowed with any form of formal training and taught through a lecture-oriented traditional method which was not guided by an activity-based approach. This traditional method made for minimal student-teacher interaction and resulted in an absence of profundity of thought and innovation. In learning the art of essay writing specifically, the predominant focus of the students remained on hurriedly jotting down any keywords used by the teacher during the lecture that later made for a half-baked essay outline, eventually resulting in poorly crafted full-length essays.

Hypotheses

Following null hypotheses will be tested at 0.05 level of significance:

HO1: There will be no significant difference between the pretest self-perception of the students in the control and experimental groups.

HO2: There will be no significant difference between the posttest self-perception of the students in the control and experimental groups.

Sample. The sample comprised of 66 students and 2 teachers (one trained and the other untrained) of a Government-run College in Lahore, Pakistan, in a quasi-experimental design.

Instruments

English as a Second Language Program (ESLP) 82 Self-assessment Questionnaire. This study used a modified version of “ESLP 82 Questionnaire: Self-Assessment of English Writing Skills and use of Writing Strategies” (Marquette University, 2008), to get a comparison of the pretest and posttest self-assessment scores of the participants in the two groups. A five-point Likert scale was used to rate the questions with point 5 as ‘strongly agree’, 4 as ‘agree’, 3 as ‘neutral’, 2 as ‘disagree’ and 1 as ‘strongly disagree’.

Pretest and Posttest. The current or existing level of students’ self-perception of their English essay writing skill was ascertained by using the pretest tool. Similarly, the posttest tool was employed to assess the ability of students’ English essay writing skill after being taught a 9-month course on English writing skill.

Observation. As a participant-observer, the researcher made use of the tool

of Observation. Classroom instructions/activities were judged through carefully planned observations covering a host of essential classroom measures, as propagated by Richards and Farrell (2011). These include, but are not limited to, “lesson structure, classroom management strategies, types of teaching activities, teaching strategies, teachers’ use of materials, teachers’ and students’ use of language, students’ interaction, and feedback from both teachers and students”

Analysis of Data

Quantitative techniques were used for data analysis and data collected via the questionnaires was statistically analyzed to obtain different types of descriptive statistics through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 23. Based on the self-assessment questionnaire scores, the mean scores, standard deviations and gain scores were computed for both groups in the pretest and posttest scenario. Independent sample t-test was applied on data gathered from different groups while Paired sample t-test was used for the same groups at 0.05 level of significance ($p < 0.05$) to compare Table 1

the mean questionnaire scores. Additionally, the effect size was computed to measure the extent of the effect of treatment. The effect size is categorized as small when the effect size is of 0.2; medium when the effect size is of 0.5; and large when the effect size is of 0.8 (Cohen, 1998). In this paper, the effect size (Higgings et al., 2005) was calculated using the Hedges’ g method with 95% confidence interval.

Results

The results were calculated by jointly comparing both groups first in the pretest scenario and then on the posttest scenario. Moreover, the gain scores of the two groups were analyzed by applying the independent sample t-test, paired sample t-test and Hedges’ g.

Analysis of Self-Assessment Questionnaire

The pretest and posttest scores of the self-assessment questionnaire were analyzed to ascertain how the students perceived their English essay writing skill. All 16 questions of the self-assessment questionnaire were analyzed using the aforementioned set of statistical tests.

Impact of Intervention on self-assessment questionnaire responses

Comparison of Experimental and Control Groups

Group	Self-assessment questionnaire scores		
	Pretest	Posttest	Gain score
Experimental			
N	33		
M	2.29	3.81	1.52
SD	1.03	1.14	0.828
Control			
N	33		
M	2.30	2.33	0.03
SD	1.06	1.20	.589

Me –Mc	-0.01	1.48	1.49
T	0.294	20.52	33.83
P	.769	<.000	<.000
ES			2.03
95% CI			(1.41,1.58)

Note. ES = Effect Size; Me-Mc = Mean of Experimental – Mean of Control; CI= Confidence Interval.

*Effect size was computed by using Hedges' g method.

In the pretest scenario, the results obtained and analyzed from the questionnaire data on the self-perception of writing skills of students from both groups (Table 1), were not found to be significantly different ($p=.769$). Hence, the hypothesis H01 “There will be no significant difference between the pretest self-perception of the students in the control and experimental groups” was not rejected. Again, in the posttest scenario, the scores obtained and analyzed for the self-perception of writing skills of students from both groups were found to be significantly different for the experimental group ($p<.000$). Hence, the hypothesis HO2 “There will be no significant difference between the posttest self-perception of the students in the control and experimental groups” was rejected.

Moreover, when compared to the control group (gain a score of 0.03), the significantly higher (1.52) gain scores on the self-assessment questionnaire also reflected the improvement of self-perception among the participants of the experimental group. Another indicator that reinforced these finding was the effect size on pain scores. This measure was 2.03 (1.41, 1.58) with a 95% confidence interval which signifies the magnitude of the effect of the difference in students' self-perception brought about by the intervention. These findings are relevant to the first research question as they highlight that while the self-perception of

students of both control and experimental groups remained at the same level before the experiment took place, the experimental group participants assessed themselves differently after indulging in a 9-month long activity-based essay writing course administered by the professionally trained teacher. On the other hand, the control group's self-perception did not show a marked improvement after the conventionally taught lecture-based English essay writing course.

Discussion

Research Question 1

ESLP 82 questionnaire was answered for self-assessment through scores obtained by the students in the pre and post-experiment situations. The result of this questionnaire at the pretest stage of both the groups pointed toward their dismal performance levels in English writing as shown by the p-value (.769). During the informal feedback session with the students, a large difference was found when they shared their views about their English writing skills. Most of them had the false perception that their writing skill was sufficient to pass the examination due to their usual exam preparation which entailed cramming sessions and rote learning from substandard notes available in the market. The writing experience of their first language (Urdu language) has greatly impacted their second language writing skill.

They conducted their thought-process in the first language and then translated those ideas into English, making grammatical mistakes in the process. This resulted in the deterioration of their analytical skills which decreased their chances of becoming skilled writers. (Kazi, 2001). Liyanage (2004) asserts that in countries with colonial rule, in this case, Pakistan, where the first language is not English, the teaching of English is guided by the product approach and is highly teacher-oriented. Students are given some readymade model essays and are encouraged to cram and reproduce the content in their examinations.

Even this process of reproducing crammed up ideas mindlessly is highly error-prone as the students lack the basic conceptual knowledge of English writing skill and are, therefore, rendered incapacitated to innovate and create original pieces of writing. The participants of the experimental group in the posttest stage demonstrated diverse writing techniques, in comparison to their counterparts. They were beginning to internalize the new teaching method. Their concept had greatly improved as shown in the different posttest and gain score p values ($<.000$). Moreover, during the debriefing stage, the students responded eagerly and positively.

The students who endorsed this new method of eclectic teaching desired to sustain this change. The outcome from the questionnaire revealed that the students were impressed by this new method and revealed that the trained teachers were more effective in teaching writing skill through an eclectic approach. In contrast, the posttest perception of the controlled group

participants was marred by the monotony of the conventional lecture-based teaching methodology. These results also correlate with Albeshar's (2012) research findings which pertain to students of the control group performing poorly ($p=>.005$) in comparison to those of the experimental group ($p=<.005$).

The evidence of change for both groups was reflected in the gain scores of the questionnaire. The varying conceptual depth between the two groups is reflected by the measure of Hedge's g of 2.03. It also shows the difference between the high conceptual developments in the experimental group participants through the eclectic approach as compared to that of the controlled group. Hence, the effect size also endorsed the supremacy of the eclectic approach in providing depth to the conceptual thinking of the students.

Moreover, in addition to administering the self-assessment questionnaire, the trained and untrained teacher also rated their students' essay writing skill by employing an essay writing rubric. Each students' essay was marked by her relevant teacher based on the "quality of outline, thesis statement, supporting arguments, organization and cohesion, mechanics, vocabulary, expression and grammar".

The findings reflected by the marks obtained by students of both groups were in sync with those of the self-perception questionnaire as the experimental group outperformed the control group on almost all categories of the essay scoring rubric in the post-test scenario.

Research Question 2

Which eclectic strategies/activities resulted in improving student's performance in English essay writing skill?

The trained teacher aimed at transforming her English writing class into an innovative and interactive session. To meet this end, the teacher worked with dedication to gradually improve the writing skills of the student. The students received information about the procedure to be followed by the teacher in the prewriting stage and put forth their original ideas prior to moving to the final stages. The help provided by the teacher at the prewriting stage enabled the students to assess their problems to create rhetorical writing and find a solution by activating the process of concept building. This helped the students a great deal to recall experiences, create their own ideas and do away with banal and overused ideas (Akinwamide, 2012).

Following the steps of essay writing, the teacher and the student both shared and generated critical thought which brought originality and academic depth to their written work. Ideas were jotted down on the board at random as they struck the mind of the teacher and the students. These ideas were later given sequence and order and the students were asked to connect them logically so that one idea flowed into the other.

Drafting stage, which Bruton (2005) describes as a core activity in the process of writing, provided students proper reason for formative assessment. Various drafts were revised and the task was done through pair work and facilitated by the teacher. The trained teacher guided the students during

the drafting and composing stages by providing them with the list of different tools and devices for the structuring and joining of the sentences. Conti (2001) also employed various learning materials in order to effectively 'scaffold' the writing process. In the end, the concerned student made considerable improvement in reducing the errors through effective self-correction. Conti's students handled the teacher's feedback quite effectively and credited the substantial role played by the teacher in bringing about this positive change in their writing skill.

This added effort by the teachers made their students eager to review their own work to improve it further. All this exercise by the teachers helped the students gain confidence and appropriately deal with unseen topics in the university examination. The students were able to give arguments and expressions to make their written content more significant. According to Trupe (2001), this resulted in a much-improved performance and reflected positively on the constructivist and eclectic approaches.

Conclusion

It has been concluded from the findings of this research that the writing skills of the students have considerably improved by the introduction of the process-oriented eclectic approach. It was found that by making the experience of learning English writing skill activity-based, the trained teacher equipped the students with a valuable skill set that would be of immense help to them in the future. However, the success of the new method depends largely upon how well the teacher prepares her

work and with what earnestness the students interact with the teacher's methodology. It has been commonly observed that English has become a status symbol and the students are aware of it. They fully understand the significance of English and involve themselves with a passion for learning and improving their English writing skill. The developing countries too are aware of the importance of English and are putting in an all-out effort to promote the teaching of English at all levels in schools and colleges. Opportunities for scholarships and training are being readily provided to the teachers by their respective institutions and governments to enhance their English teaching and writing skills by improving their professional qualification. In the government sector of Pakistan, as well, this trend is gaining ground.

The Higher Education Commission has been instrumental in providing scholarship to teachers and professors to improve their academic mark and to give them exposure to new modern methods of education. Some motivated teachers and individuals are aware of the significance of English and what the future has in store for them. They have gone ahead and taken up self-finance courses to improve their professional qualification and to become more useful teachers to play a positive role in furthering the success of their students.

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