

The Challenges of Teaching Academic Writing that English Teachers Face in Azerbaijan



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ABSTRACT: There are several challenges that English teachers face when it comes to teaching learners in the area of academic writing in Azerbaijan. These challenges stem from the variability of Language knowledge and skills among students and limited access to modern texts and learning materials. In order to address such issues, the following are considered as coming up with the balanced approach of enhancing linguistic facility and minimizing limitations in terms of resource allocation for the delivery of academic writing training.

KEYWORDS: Academic writing, writing problems, English education policy

INTRODUCTION

English functions as an international language which enables people with diverse cultural, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds to interact. It is widely perceived as a significant competency within the domain of English teachers to provide writing instruction in primary school to the level of efficiency. The teaching of English puts enormous emphasis on writing skills as one of the major areas of learning. The instructional facet of writing has been incorporated from the preliminary levels of learning, particularly the stages that children undergo to learn the right formation of letters.

The assumption that students today have a poor writing foundation may potentially lead to several negative impacts on their academic success or performance; this can take different forms. It is important for children to come to school and be able to write because writing contributes not only to the academic achievement of those children but also to social/emotional development. Moreover, the analysis provides that in the contemporary world where the competition is high, writing skills are a virtue every person must embrace to excel in his or her endeavors. The worry here is that their writing skills are below par and this could have implications on their employment opportunities in the future. Therefore, it must be given priority when it comes to dealing with such issues.

The many obstacles that students must overcome in order to acquire strong writing abilities, however, have made the work of teaching writing difficult. Limited access to books and reading materials, low vocabulary, and incorrect grammar and spelling are some of the difficulties encountered by English as a Second Language (ESL) students. These challenges have caused a lot of inconveniences for the students and in turn, affected the teaching-learning process of writing abilities. Teaching writing skills can be challenging for teachers for a variety of reasons, such as low motivation, difficulty in integrating and supporting students' varying ability levels, difficulty in drafting instructions as a process of communication, and less time for effective instruction. In an effort to improve the writing skills of a particular student, the teachers should devote more time to teaching the specific subject, which usually involves the offering of help and feedback among other things.

It is important for instructors to understand the difficulties their ESL students and other English teachers have while attempting to impart writing skills to their pupils. The many difficulties encountered by both educators and their students in the process of developing strong writing skills will be the focus of this paper's literature study.

The Significance and Difficulties of English Writing

Writing is considered to be one of the fundamental abilities of the English language, alongside speaking, reading, and listening. According to Ling (2016), writing is a complex and multifaceted endeavor. It is necessary to implement writing exercises among children starting from elementary school in order to cultivate their ability to produce high-quality written work in the future. Despite the presence of several disciplines in primary schools, writing is widely recognized as a key academic discipline for students.

The acquisition of writing skills is of paramount importance as it has significant potential for enhancing the future lives of students. The implementation and incorporation of engaging activities inside educational institutions have the potential to enhance

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students' self-assurance and foster a lasting affinity for the practice of writing. The acquisition of writing abilities has significant importance for lower primary students as it enables them to effectively engage in many academic disciplines, facilitates communication, and fosters self-expression.

In addition to helping students become more proficient writers, writing activities in the classroom also promote holistic academic development by strengthening students' capacity to think critically and solve problems. It is possible to apply the steps of planning, investigating, and revising in the writing process to fields other than English, such as the sciences and mathematics. Implications for learning new words and broadening one's knowledge base are also improved. The process of learning to write may be fraught with difficulties for every given student. Every single one of our students is unique and special in their own way. For some students, these issues could be a roadblock on the way to producing an excellent piece of writing. In what follows, we will look at some of the writing challenges that kids face.

Misbah et al. (2017) suggest that students' struggles with writing may stem from a lack of vocabulary. A strong vocabulary is the bedrock of strong writing skills since it is the building block of sentences. Asep (2014) conducted a study. Students often use both spoken and written language on a daily basis as a means of expressing their thoughts, convictions, and emotions to those in their immediate vicinity. A strong vocabulary repertoire may enhance pupils' ability to effectively articulate their ideas via spoken or written communication. The use of electronic dictionaries and engagement in additional reading activities might be beneficial for children who possess a restricted vocabulary [11].

Certain primary school children are encountering difficulties in the realm of grammar as well. The significance of grammar in writing is of significant importance. Grammar imparts knowledge that aids readers in comprehending the intended message. The framework plays a role in enhancing the way through which the writer conveys their message and even the kind of message that is being conveyed to the reader. Grammar as a field of study focuses on morphological consideration which is the shape or formation of words as well as syntactic consideration which is the placing of words in a sentence. In order to get correct grammatical structure, the students who have a poor knowledge of grammar become anxious while trying to build sentences. Based on an observation done with the assistance of Fareed et al. (2016), students' writing errors include the failure to observe subject-verb agreement, use of correct pronouns and tenses, proper use of articles, employment of correct prepositions, and appropriateness of essential sentence patterns. Perhaps the reasons seem evident, such as completing reading tasks and then having the culminating grammar-focused activities assist with grammatical competency advancement [11].

Today, educators face various difficulties in inspiring students towards the courses they undertake. From the research conducted by Asep (2014), it can also be noted that fear of writing and lack of interest that pupils display when it comes to writing is not a result of naughtiness. The youth generation's belief goes to the effect that they are capable of practicing any type of activity they want since their parents have given them much independence. When pupils show a level of unrest in their participation in the learning process, then signs could point to low motivation [1,2].

The problem that teachers face is to teach writing to the children in a classroom where there are many learners who have different levels of learning abilities. In several basic educational situations, students of different ability levels are enrolled within a single context of learning in the classroom. Another complexity is that the pupils themselves may be at different skill levels, and this is demanding for teachers who have to teach each student at the same time [2]. To address the needs of the heterogenic class, teachers have to employ numerous strategies on how to include and address the learners with different writing skills. Hence, by addressing teaching and learning assessment requirements, educators have some difficulties in developing learning/teaching projects and ways of selecting the appropriate teaching-learning activities for their students.

Lack of parental care therefore becomes another barrier that hinders children's chances of being intelligently and correctly graded. Lack of parental encouragement, therefore, may pose some difficulties that teachers may face when aiming to help children. Gündoğmuş (2018) notes that children and students who think that they do not experience parental affection and care may face barriers to their learning processes. This is due to the fact that parents no longer guide, motivate, or support children in achieving these goals.

In addition, one more challenge relevant to teachers is the lack of practical experience [7]. Lack of professional training means tension and pressure while teaching primary school children, especially freshmen teachers. The many tasks taken on by teachers also add a great deal to students' numerous responsibilities. Teachers in their everyday practice are also given a large workload. Instructors' specialization depends on their experience and education and is varied in terms of the time spent developing their skills. This can be because it takes an average to a long time for inexperienced teachers to get acquainted with their students. However, in question, to provide specific activities that can be engaging and to own degree challenging for students, teachers must know the level of students' competencies and specific interests they have. They also find that more efforts have to be invested in the creation of new instructional materials, the determination of acceptable lesson scaffolds, the construction of sufficient learning activities, as well as generating effective feedback or reflective analysis [7].

Anyiendah (2017) asserts that one of the major challenges associated with the situation is the lack of participation shown by the students. Despite the constant difficulty, developing one's writing skills is an interesting and rewarding pursuit. Some students

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have a tendency to tune out, especially when writing is involved. Because significant background information is needed to produce a high-quality piece of writing, many students find that writing no longer piques their interest. There are many things that students need to know about capitalization, language, vocabulary, writing, and sentence organization to write a good paper.

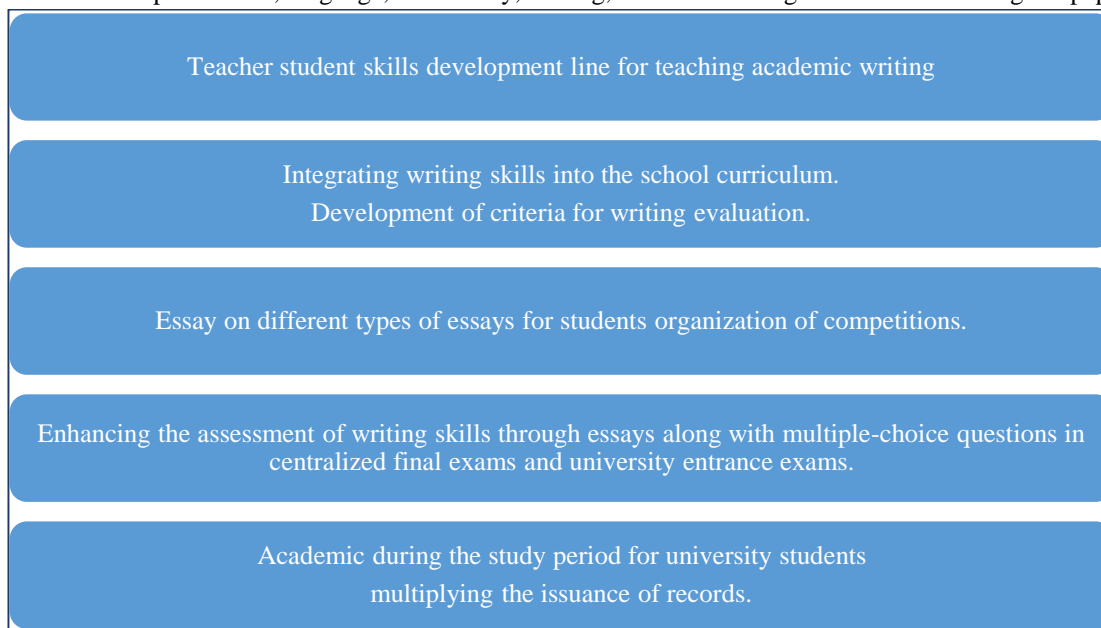


Fig 1. Stages of incorporating writing into the teaching assessment process

Source : [6]

The Ministry of Education in Azerbaijan has conducted significant changes in several areas, including curriculum development, teacher education, school administration, and infrastructure [12]. In recent years, the State Exam Centre (SEC), formerly known as the Students Admission Commission (SSAC), has made significant advancements in its operations. The SEC is responsible for coordinating and administering university admission tests, as well as other state examinations that are not within the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education [5]. Over the last twelve years, there have been various modifications implemented in the administration, management, and regulation of examinations on a national scale. Additionally, in 2011, open-ended questions were introduced to the examination papers in subjects like mathematics and history, as part of the centralized examination system, and the applicability of this approach has led to better assessment of students in the general environment during university entrance examinations [5]. According to the current numeral statistics, it has been identified that more than 90,000 students are annually able to achieve their final secondary education in the country of Azerbaijan. Moreover, the centralized examination system results in the enrollment of about 30,000 students from this population to higher education institutions as stated by State Students Admission Commission.

Teaching academic writing in Azerbaijan involves several challenges or tasks that are unique to English teachers and based on language and resource factors. The greatest challenge that has to be faced is the problem of explaining the students' language acquisition and achievement process with reference to the range of language skills demonstrated across classrooms. Good spoken English may be a strong point of Azerbaijani students; however, it seems that they encounter great difficulty when it comes to rechanneled academic language which is more formal and complex. To overcome the linguistic barrier, educators are obliged to work intensively to build up proper strategies in the English language and make students acquire the proper and successful level of language appropriate to the academic context.

In many schools of Azerbaijan, a teacher grades his student on the basis of multiple-choice tests or questions; therefore, different parts of the student yield to the high development of the skills of one part, while the other part gains less from this process. Both the tasks previously prepared and marked during the preparation for the entrance exams and the tasks prepared for the development of reading and writing skills underlie thinking and other skills in students. Sustaining these behavioral skills for positive academic writing needs the application of careful balance and the knowledge of how to change mentoring processes might be made to elicit these end results.

However, designing for secondary learning also involves an extra layer of complexity coming from the awkward and limited access to the current instruction materials that could be availed by the students. Writing teachers from an English background are familiar with the problem of a comparatively low level of resource support to ensure the proper teaching of academic writing. This seems like a limitation in terms of resources that affects the ability to create a conducive learning environment for students, which may in turn limit their ability to engage and adapt to diverse writing styles and the topics being discussed in class today. Thus,

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it is crucial to apply an adequate and more profound approach to address these challenges. English teachers teaching in Azerbaijan could be forced to employ the identified focused method that involves activities that foster the development of academic writing skills [8].

The increase in the consolidation of resource availability has a similar significance. It may encompass areas such as forming collaborations with academic institutions or leveraging technology to overcome barriers that affect the body. Hence, by fighting these issues head-on, the educators of English in Azerbaijan may greatly enhance the effectiveness of their training in the context of academic writing and furnish students with all the necessary tools and skills needed for performing well in academic settings and not only.

As a result, educators, among others, have knowledge that the variety of learners' features may influence their foreign language, particularly, the Academic Reading and Writing skills. First, when organizing the learning process of a definite class (or a definite group in a class), one has to remember that the pupils can have different language skills and knowledge of the vocabulary. Regardless of whether this storehouse of terms is small or vast, it exerts either a positive or negative influence on learners in this particular stage. Fluency in one's first language and academic writing might affect the velocity at which one gains academic writing agility in English [8].

Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that kids may possess diverse cultural expectations and attitudes towards reading and writing, which might differ across various cultures and are often shaped by familial and societal influences. Motivation has a crucial part in the learning process of reading and writing, as well as in the use of diverse techniques to approach reading tasks. The aforementioned characteristics have a significant impact on students' attitudes towards reading and writing, and it is important for instructors to prioritize these aspects throughout their teaching in the classroom [8].

Despite the fact that Azerbaijan ranks 83rd in the world in terms of the level of knowledge of the English language, the level of development is expected to increase. According to the presented statistical data, it is known that the increasing number of people who know English in our country draws attention to the importance of reforms. Another noteworthy point is that the indicators of Azerbaijan are quite high compared to the indicators of other nations in the region. The reason for this is connected with the necessity of English language exams both for students and in the process of admission to higher education degrees [9].

Despite the low index indicator in our country, the Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan has implemented policies aimed at enhancing English language proficiency. This is evident through the establishment of an examination system that assesses English language skills not only for undergraduate and graduate degrees but also for doctoral studies and other types of examinations.

A change in both standards and content is appropriate to increase proficiency in language acquisition. Absent changes in standards and content, we believe that increasing the number of hours of study will not have any significant benefits. In order to improve the foreign language curriculum in general education institutions and to meet the needs of students, we suggest that the foreign language subject should be adapted to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, an internationally recognized standard for the assessment of language skills, which can determine the development prospects for the field. CEFR known as The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages is a world standard that offers considerable guideline for language description and assessment. This Standard offers six points for language assessment, which defines different levels of competence ranging from A1 to C2, where A1 is on a novice level to C2 signifying mastery of the language. This facilitates the selection of different levels of language proficiency for those involved in language teaching and assessment, including both educators and learners. Currently, some countries such as the member states of the European Union, China, Vietnam, Mexico, Uzbekistan, Japan and Canada have implemented changes to foreign language teaching in primary and secondary schools to align with the Common European Framework of Reference [4]

State initiatives have been implemented and are underway with the aim of enhancing the foreign language proficiency and educational attainment of Azerbaijani youth. Annually, about 100 students are selected and sent to international institutions under the auspices of this program, where they pursue education across diverse academic levels [3]

CONCLUSION

Given that Azerbaijan is among the nations that emerged after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, there are specific challenges encountered in the advancement of the English language inside its borders. This procedure poses challenges for both students and educators. Furthermore, the presence of linguistic disparities among students may be attributed to varying degrees of proficiency in formal English, which poses a significant obstacle that necessitates the implementation of focused language development initiatives. Nevertheless, the measures undertaken by the government and the policies adopted are expected to result in a favorable settlement of this issue in the foreseeable future.

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