



Pedagogical Approaches in Enhancing Academic Writing Skills of ESL Learners

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Abstract

Higher education students need to develop strong academic writing skills to be successful. Therefore, improving one's command of the English language, and specifically one's command of academic writing at the undergraduate level, is essential for their educational excellence. The most significant difficulty, on the other hand, is related with the untrained instructors and inefficient pedagogical practices as a major cause of poor academic writing skills. As a result, this study was undertaken using a qualitative technique to investigate teachers' perceptions about the instructional techniques and tactics they employ in order to cultivate academic writing skills among students. The population of this study consisted of all the teachers working in the public universities in the province of Sindh. By using convenient sampling technique, 25 teachers were recruited to collect the data from conducting interviews. The findings indicated various helpful instructional approaches teachers utilize to develop academic writing skills in university students, which include Communication practice, Proper feedback, and Comprehension reading exercises. Based on these data, it is vital for concerned authorities to organize workshops or training programs to enhance teachers' capabilities to employ various kinds of pedagogical techniques to promote academic writing skills among undergraduate students.

Keywords: Academic writing skills; undergraduate level; qualitative study; Comprehension reading exercises; Communication practice; ESL learners

1. Introduction

The English language is favored above all other languages due to the fact that it is used to communicate with people from a wide variety of different cultural, social, ethnic, economic, political, and academic settings. This makes the English language significantly more diverse than any other language (Bice & Kroll, 2019). Apart from its function as a means of communication, the English language is widely acknowledged throughout the world as a source of knowledge that is of a scientific and technological nature. Such a substantial contribution which, on the one hand, increases its relevance and, on the other hand, increases its urgency to be learned (Lee, 2018; Abdelrady & Akram, 2022). In addition, English is not only Pakistan's official language but also a requirement for many white-collar jobs in the country. This is due to the fact that proficiency in English is used as a qualification requirement for the majority of recruitment agencies (Akram et al., 2020; Paulsruet et al., 2021). In a same vein, the language of instruction in higher education is English, which not only supports students in evaluating materials found locally and globally, but also foster the personal and professional development of students (Rahman & Singh, 2020). On the other hand, the most significant issues associated with the level of English language proficiency are related to unskilled teachers and inadequate resources (Akram, 2020), students' academic and social life differences (Haidar & Fang, 2019) Anxiety of speaking a foreign language (Akram et al., 2019), backgrounds with a low socioeconomic status (Haidar, 2019), and a shortage of opportunities for professional advancement of teachers (Akram & Yang, 2021). In this regard, strengthening students' English language skills, specifically in the area of academic writing at the higher education level, is considered a precondition for progressing and growing scholarly and professional research areas within and outside the educational institutions. On the other hand, it has been discovered that traditional English language programs are unable to meet the standards of higher education institutions in terms of academic writing (Sadia et al., 2021). This is something that is required of students who wish to pursue degrees in higher education. This is because the majority of undergraduate students in Pakistan do not display any capacity to write, particularly academic writing skills which are essential to encourage scientific and professional research activities. Thus, a critical progressive approach to learning academic English can improve novice writers' ability to engage in critical discourse and to think critically about the norms of the area. Students in higher education are expected to write critically; hence, their academic writing abilities should be developed with the assistance of relating writing to a particular subject, in order for them to be able to think critically about what they write (Bloor & Bloor, 2013). Regarding, components, students' overall academic success has a considerable correlation with their command of all four primary facets of language—namely, reading, writing, grammar, and vocabulary—regardless of whether or not they are proficient in the components of writing (Ganet et al., 2021).

In addition, students who are enrolled in advanced levels of education are required to produce academic writing such as articles, reports, and synopses, and finally a comprehensive research thesis. This is a prerequisite that has to be satisfied in order to be accepted into and graduate from bachelor's degree programs as well as other degree programs

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at a higher level in nearly any area of research. Besides, Academic writing tasks at higher education level need critical literacy to synthesize data and prove a theory. But the majority of the students are struggling because their teachers have high expectations for them and believe that academic writing skills were supposed to be taught to them by their language instructors in previous sessions and mastered by those instructors. As a result, the majority of our students are in a state of confusion (Khan et al., 2016). On the other hand, Mumtaz (2021) underlined the necessity for University of Education, Lahore students to increase their vocabulary through enough practice in order to convey themselves more effectively to the readers. According to Haq and Shahzad (2021), one of the primary factors contributing to the difficulty of academic writing is a lack of communication between supervisors and students. While Fareed et al. (2016) identified untrained instructors and inefficient pedagogical practices as a major cause of poor academic writing skills.

This sad state leads the ESL learners to mental pandemonium. In light of this, the purpose of the study was to investigate the instructional techniques and tactics that teachers employ in order to cultivate academic writing skills in their pupils. In this regard, the current study led by the following objectives:

- To investigate teachers' perceptions about the instructional techniques and tactics they employ in order to cultivate academic writing skills among students.
- To offer suggestions for potential remedies to the problems with academic writing that undergraduate students experience.

1.1. Significance of the Study

Given the importance of academic writing skills in higher education, the current study would enrich information regarding how teachers play their role and employ certain instructional techniques and tactics in order to cultivate academic writing skills among students. In addition, learning how to write is a vital skill to acquire command over speaking, reading, and listening skills of English language. In this regard, this research would help students improve their writing abilities by bridging the gap between the writing skills they acquire in school and the writing skills necessary at the university level.

2. Methodology

In order to explore teachers' perceptions regarding how they play their role and employ certain instructional techniques and tactics in order to cultivate academic writing skills among students, the researcher followed a qualitative approach and collected the data through interviews from the teachers. The mode of interviews was semi-structured in nature, (i.e., a blend of open-ended and closed-ended questions) which were guided by the probing questions, which allow researcher to gain in-depth information (Tenny et al., 2017). Thereby, considered as the most appropriated approach to explore educational practices employed by teachers to cultivate academic writing skills among students in detail. The interview questions were designed by following the questions developed by Sadiq and Khanam (2022) and prior literature to investigate which educational practices teachers employ to cultivate academic writing skills among students.

2.1. Population and Sampling

The population of this study consisted of all the teachers working in the public universities in the province of Sindh. By using convenient sampling technique, 25 teachers were recruited to collect the data from them. Subsequently, all of the interviews were conducted by the researcher via direct face-to-face communication, which lasted for 20–35 min, after getting permission from the participants. In addition, to keep the identities of the participants confidential, their names were changed to pseudo names.

2.2. Trustworthiness of the Instrument

In qualitative research, the term "trustworthiness" refers to the degree to which the research questions are understood in a timely and sufficient manner. In order for an instrument to be useful, it needed to possess both validity and dependability. In the research conducted by Creswell (2014), it was found that a valid instrument was one that accurately measured the user's purpose. According to Patton (2015), inter-coder dependability is an essential element of open-ended questions in study. In this regard, three peers and two specialists in their respective fields were selected to evaluate the coding method used in the study as well as the findings drawn from it. The level of consensus among independent researchers and subject matter experts was greater than 80%, which indicates a level of reliability that is adequate because it is lower than the cutoff figure established by Creswell and Creswell (2017). Following this, two interviews were carried out as a core component of the pilot scheme; however, those interviews were not incorporated into the final interviews. Following the completion of an investigation into the dependability of the qualitative interview technique, participants in the qualitative data collection were handed a consent letter in addition to the interview protocol.

3. Data Analysis

Each of the interviews using a semi-structured format was recorded and then transcribed. The researcher listened to each recorded interview and analyzed it to determine how well it fell into the categories of teacher interviews. The researcher used data triangulation to produce a rich, thorough picture of teachers' perceptions of the instructional approaches and tactics they use to promote academic writing skills in university students. The qualitative analysis included the creation, processing, and categorization of transcriptions as part of the methodology. It required locating the data, defining it more precisely, categorizing it, and extending it (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). We looked at themes from interviews as well as themes from literature. After the coding was complete, a detailed description was provided for each theme. The key issues and maybe a variety of discoveries were disclosed when the primary themes were clarified, grouped, and merged. At long last, a story provided an explanation for developing ideas (Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

4. Results

The participants' comments, guided by the study's research objectives, indicated various helpful instructional approaches and tactics they utilize to develop academic writing skills in university students, which are outlined below.

4.1. Communication Practice

The method of 'communication practice' between students and teachers was the one that was mentioned most frequently. It is the best practice, according to the teachers, to provide opportunities to students in real time to think critically about a potential topic. These opportunities allow students to develop multiple sentences and may be able to gain quick feedback from teachers and peers. Schillings et al. (2018) also indicates that students become capable of critical thinking with the help of utilizing this method, which, on the one hand, allows them to write competently, and on the other hand, allows them to think critically. teachers need to demonstrate flexibility and understanding of the issues of their students. PO, a member of the teaching staff, has reported that:

"I usually keep my ESL students engaged in a communication practice by offering them a random topic to talk about in the classroom. This is because I know how important it is for them to have strong academic writing skills. Students show an interest in participating in the discussion, and as a result, I provide the chance for all students to share their points of view in order to ensure that each gets a sufficient say."

4.2. Proper Feedback

It is critical for the instructor to provide appropriate feedback on the writing assignments students have completed in order for the students to identify and correct their errors. Therefore, this method was recognized as another way that teachers use to help their ESL students enhance their academic writing skills. According to Hosseiny (2014), giving comments on grammar to ESL students in their writing projects helps these students receive self-correction on the one hand and enhances their writing skills on the other. According to the information provided by SU, a member of the faculty:

"I assign writing assignments on a variety of topics to ESL students, and I provide them with constructive criticism to help them improve their writing abilities. This allows the students to gain a better understanding of their own writing abilities."

4.3. Comprehension Reading Exercises

Reading helps learner gain more vocabulary and better writing style by developing understanding regarding a comprehension. Ghorbani et al. (2013) found that the instruction of reading comprehension strategies is more helpful for learners with poor comprehension skills. Therefore, this method was recognized as another way that teachers use to help their ESL students enhance their academic writing skills. Habibi et al. (2015) also indicates that students become capable of critical thinking with the help of reading a range of informative or interesting comprehensions, as well as it also allows them to write competently. In this regard, a faculty member YT, identified:

"I usually keep students engaged in comprehension reading activities by offering them a random document to read in the classroom or outside the classroom. This is because I know how important it is for them to have strong academic writing skills. Afterwards, I provide the chance to all students to share their points of view via speaking or writing regarding the given comprehension in order to ensure that each gets a sufficient say. Speaking about the comprehension allow students improve their speaking skills at one hand while also the writing skills on the other."

5. Recommendations and Conclusion

The findings indicated various helpful instructional approaches teachers utilize to develop academic writing skills in university students, which include Communication practice, Proper feedback, and Comprehension reading exercises. However, faculty members try to play a supportive role in strengthening academic writing skills of students. Yet, institutional support is needed to help the faculty members to accomplish their motives. In this regard, in light of the

findings of the current study, a few of the following suggestions may be considered to improve the academic writing skills of undergraduate students in Pakistan:

- Students should be given reading assignments that are extensive and should be encouraged to help them become familiar with particular genre-based vocabulary as well as the conceptual understanding meaning of phrases and words pertinent to their respective fields of study.
- Universities should organize workshops or training programs to enhance teachers' capabilities to employ various kinds of pedagogical techniques to promote academic writing skills among undergraduate students.
- Students should be encouraged to write on material regardless of the subject matter of each written assignment they are given, regardless of the discipline.
- The reading and writing instruction of English at the higher education level ought to be brought up to date with the most recent methods and theories that are used internationally.
- In addition to this, it is important to place emphasis on the student's motivation and attitude toward the development of content and task-oriented academic writing.

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