

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



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ABSTRACT: English educators in Azerbaijan have several obstacles when it comes to instructing learners in the realm of academic writing. These issues arise from the diverse levels of language competence among students, the emphasis on rote memorization rather than analytical thinking, and the restricted availability of contemporary educational materials. To overcome these disparities, it is essential to adopt a multifaceted strategy that encompasses the improvement of linguistic proficiency, the alignment of pedagogical techniques with cultural conventions, and the mitigation of limitations in resources, all of which contribute to a more efficient provision of academic writing training.

KEYWORDS: Academic writing, writing problems, English education policy.

INTRODUCTION

English serves as a global lingua franca, facilitating communication among individuals of many cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic origins. The proficiency to impart writing instruction with efficacy in primary schools is regarded as a crucial competency within the realm of English educators. The instruction of English places significant emphasis on the development of writing skills. The instruction of writing has been implemented as early as the first stages of education, during which children acquire the fundamental skills of letter formation.

The presence of a poor foundation in writing among students might potentially result in significant detriments to their academic achievement, manifesting itself in many repercussions. The act of writing has a crucial role not only in enhancing academic achievement, but also in fostering social and emotional growth. Furthermore, in the context of a highly competitive global landscape, the ability to write proficiently is seen essential for individuals to achieve excellence. The potential impact of their deficient writing skills on their future employment prospects is a matter of concern. Hence, it is essential to address this matter with utmost efficacy. Nevertheless, the task of instructing writing has grown more arduous due to the many obstacles encountered by students in acquiring proficient writing abilities. ESL students encounter many problems, including limited vocabulary, deficient grammatical skills, inadequate spelling abilities, and limited access to books and reading resources.

The difficulties encountered by students have posed significant obstacles for educators in the instruction of writing abilities. Teachers have several problems when it comes to instructing writing skills, including the arduous task of motivating students, accommodating learners with varying proficiency levels, grappling with complex instructional materials, and managing time restrictions while effectively teaching students. In order to enhance a student's writing proficiency, it is essential for educators to allocate more emphasis towards the instruction of writing, including the provision of assistance and constructive criticism.

Hence, it is vital for educators to possess an understanding of the obstacles encountered by other English instructors in instructing writing abilities, as well as the difficulties encountered by ESL learners in acquiring writing proficiency. This study presents a comprehensive overview of the existing research pertaining to the many obstacles encountered by educators and learners in the process of teaching and acquiring writing proficiency.

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 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.

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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 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.

Writing exercises used in educational institutions facilitate the enhancement of handwriting proficiency, as well as foster comprehensive academic growth by improving problem-solving skills and critical thinking abilities. The writing process may also be extended to other disciplines, such as Mathematics and Sciences, where the skills of planning, investigation, and revision are also used. The acquisition of general information and expansion of vocabulary are also enhanced as a consequential outcome.

Every individual learner may encounter various obstacles in terms of acquiring writing skills. Each student has distinct and exceptional qualities that set them apart from one another. These problems may hinder students' progress in generating a high-quality piece of writing. The following paragraphs elucidate the difficulties encountered by students in the realm of writing.

According to Misbah et al. (2017), the pupils' difficulties in developing writing abilities might be attributed to a deficiency of vocabulary. Vocabulary is the foundational component in the construction of sentences, serving as the central pillar of proficient writing abilities. 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 serves as a vehicle for effectively communicating the writer's nuanced message to the reader. The field of grammar encompasses the study of morphology, which pertains to the shapes and structure of words, as well as syntax, which concerns the arrangement of words in sentences. Students who possess a weak understanding of grammar may experience heightened levels of anxiety while attempting to construct sentences that adhere to proper grammatical rules. In a study conducted by Fareed, Muhammad et al. (2016), it was shown that students often commit errors in subject-verb agreement, pronoun use, tense consistency, article placement, prepositional usage, and fundamental sentence structures. The enhancement of grammatical proficiency may be achieved by engaging in reading exercises and participating in activities that are specifically designed to target grammar skills [11].

In contemporary times, educators have challenges in effectively fostering student motivation. The lack of enthusiasm in studying writing among pupils is not attributed to their naughtiness, as shown by Asep's (2014) findings. The younger generation holds the belief that they possess the ability to engage in any desired actions, since they have been granted significant autonomy by their parents. When pupils exhibit a sense of reluctance towards engaging in the learning process, it might be seen as an indication of insufficient motivation [1,2].

Teachers have the issue of instructing writing in classrooms with pupils of varying proficiency levels. In several basic educational settings, pupils of varying academic abilities are often integrated inside the same classroom environment. The presence of pupils at various levels of proficiency is a challenge for instructors as they strive to address the diverse needs of each student concurrently [2]. Teachers must use several techniques to accommodate students with diverse degrees of writing ability. Consequently, educators have challenges in devising instructional plans and designing suitable learning engagements for their students.

Parental apathy is an additional obstacle. The absence of parental support may provide significant challenges for instructors in their efforts to assist kids. According to Gündoğmuş (2018), students who perceive a deficiency in parental warmth and compassion may have hindrances in their academic progress. The lack of parental direction, motivation, and support contributes to this outcome.

Furthermore, an additional obstacle encountered by educators is the absence of professional experience [7]. A dearth of professional experience may result in stress and anxiety while instructing primary school kids, particularly for newbie educators. The many responsibilities assumed by teachers also provide a significant burden. The amount of instructors' expertise is contingent upon their prior experience and training. Novice instructors may need a significant amount of time to effectively acclimate themselves to their pupils. In order to effectively design suitable activities, educators must possess a comprehensive understanding of their students' competency levels and individual interests. In addition, a greater amount of effort is required for educators to develop novel instructional resources, formulate acceptable lesson frameworks, design adequate learning activities, and provide comprehensive feedback or reflective analysis [7].

According to Anyiendah (2017), a significant difficulty that arises is the lack of engagement shown by pupils. The development of writing abilities is consistently demanding, but it remains an engaging endeavor. Particularly in the context of writing, some pupils tend to disengage. A common issue experienced by students is a diminished level of interest in writing, mostly due to the extensive knowledge required to create a high-quality piece of work. To produce a high-quality written composition, students must possess a comprehensive understanding of punctuation, grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and sentence structure.

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Teacher student skills development line for teaching academic writing.
Integrating writing skills into the school curriculum.
Development of criteria for writing evaluation.
Essay on different types of essays for students' organization of competitions.
Enhancing the assessment of writing skills through essays along with multiple-choice questions in centralized final exams and university entrance exams.
Academic during the study period for university students multiplying the issuance of records.

Fig 1. Stages of incorporating writing into 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. The use of this approach has resulted in a more equitable evaluation of students' academic achievement during university entrance examinations. Based on current statistical data, it has been observed that over 90,000 students successfully complete their secondary education on an annual basis in Azerbaijan. Furthermore, out of this cohort, approximately 30,000 students are granted admission to higher education institutions via the centralized examination system, as reported by the State Students Admission Commission.

The instruction of academic writing in Azerbaijan presents a unique combination of obstacles for English educators, influenced by language and resource-based elements. One significant obstacle that must be overcome is the task of effectively addressing the diverse range of language skill levels shown by students. The proficiency of Azerbaijani students in spoken English may be notable; nonetheless, they have a considerable challenge when it comes to adapting to the formal and intricate language necessary for academic writing. Educators are required to develop effective approaches in order to overcome the linguistic barrier, therefore cultivating a proficient grasp of the English language that is in line with the demands of academic discourse.

In Azerbaijan, teachers often test their students on multiple-choice questions, which leads to the high development of the skills of one part of the student, while the other part results in less benefits from this process. During the preparation for the entrance exams, the tasks already marked and prepared for the development of reading and writing skills lay the groundwork for the development of thinking and other skills in students.

Achieving the harmonious cultivation of the necessary skills for academic writing requires a nuanced balance and an understanding of how to modify teaching strategies to foster more independent thinking and self-expression.

Additionally, the presence of restricted access to current instructional materials adds an additional level of intricacy. English educators often encounter the challenge of limited resources available to facilitate the teaching of academic writing effectively. The presence of limited resources poses a challenge in establishing a learning environment that is favorable for students, perhaps hindering their capacity to effectively interact with a range of writing styles and current academic discussions.

To effectively tackle these difficulties, it is essential to use a comprehensive and multidimensional strategy. English educators in Azerbaijan may be required to use focused language development methodologies, including activities that explicitly promote the proficiency of academic writing abilities [8].

The enhancement of resource accessibility has similar importance. This may include engaging in partnerships with educational institutions, legislators, or using technological advancements to address physical limitations. By directly confronting these obstacles, educators of English in Azerbaijan have the potential to augment the efficacy of their teaching in academic writing, equipping students with the required tools and competencies for success in scholarly discourse and beyond.

Hence, educators possess an understanding that the diverse characteristics of students might potentially impact their acquisition of English academic reading and writing skills. It is important to recognize that pupils in a certain class may possess diverse language abilities and vocabulary knowledge. The level of familiarity with academic language, whether limited or vast, significantly impacts learners at this stage. The proficiency in academic writing in one's native language might influence their acquisition of academic writing skills 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

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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. 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. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is a globally recognized standard that provides a comprehensive framework for the assessment and description of language proficiency. This Standard includes a six-point framework for language assessment, denoting different levels of competence from A1 to C2, with A1 indicating beginners and C2 indicating 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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