Teaching Analytical Writing Through Editorials Of Newspapers

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Abstract: Newspapers are authentic resources of language learning. The various components of language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary are readily available in the newspaper articles. This paper tries to analyze how materials from newspapers can be exploited to teach the micro and macro skills of writing analytical essays especially by using the editorials of standard and prominent newspapers like ‘The Hindu’ and ‘Times of India’. Editorials contain information regarding the current issues and the personal opinions of the authors help us a lot to understand how one can voice one’s opinions related to the issue. Writing essays is an art by itself. Analyzing the situations of any event, trying to record their views using appropriate language - words, phrases, thoughts, and opinions is something which the language learners must be capable of. For this to happen, the students are made to look at the sentence structures, vocabulary - general and academic, the organization of paragraphs, the linkers, the discourse markers to check the development of ideas, transition of thoughts, supportive statements, contradictory statements, one’s own ideas related to the topic of discussion etc. A comprehensive view about the ideas presented in the article for meaning making is also necessary. This helps the learners to firstly understand the nuances involved in writing and then apply them to their own writing. The knowledge and awareness they have about the current affairs or any issue of concern can be analyzed and presented effectively through the writing skills they have learnt from this writing workshop. The researcher conducted an experimental study to 20 learners for 3 hours. The results and outcomes are presented through data analysis and interpretation. The effectiveness and lacunae of this method will be discussed elaborately in this paper. These instructions give you guidelines for preparing papers for IUSTR JOURNALS. Use this document as a template if you are using Microsoft Word 6.0 or later. Otherwise, use this document as an instruction set. The electronic file of your paper will be formatted further at IUSTR. Define all symbols used in the abstract. Do not cite references in the abstract. Do not delete the blank line immediately above the abstract; it sets the footnote at the bottom of this column. Don’t use all caps for research paper title.

Index Terms: Current Affairs, Discourse Markers, Editorials, Effectiveness, Newspapers, Words, Phrases.

1 INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary times, students of graduation or post-graduation, appear for competitive exams like GRE, TOEFL, GMAT, CAT etc. The technical graduates may fare well in Quantitative Aptitude, logical reasoning sections. They find it difficult with the Verbal or English Language section, where vocabulary, comprehension abilities, analytical skills through writing are tested. Writing analytical essays helps the students to understand an issue from various perspectives and present it effectively. Examiners have the scope to check the lateral thinking, logical reasoning and writing abilities of learners through the essays. This paper tries to give some insights into teaching analytical writing to language learners. A classroom experiment was conducted to find out the existing competency levels in the learners and to find out whether there is improvement in the competencies after the intervention by the facilitator. Academic Writing includes writing letters, formal reports, abstracts, precisi, e-mails, essays, statements of purpose, research papers etc. The different types of essays such as descriptive, argumentative, analytical or persuasive essays often test the learners’ abilities to construct good arguments, research questions and write convincing essays. Analytical writing requires one to show the relationships between pieces of information. It is used to compare, contrast, assess or evaluate. It has a structure based on the ordering or sequencing of main ideas in relation to each other and uses evidences and real-life examples from various sources. Newspapers are authentic resources of language learning. LSRW skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing) can abundantly be taught or improved through the newspaper clippings. All kinds of articles related to political, social, economic, art, language, literature, sports can liberally be used as per the interests and needs of the learners to promote greater learning in language learners. Materials from newspapers can be exploited to teach the micro and macro skills of writing analytical essays especially by using the editorials of standard and prominent newspapers like ‘The Hindu’ and ‘Times of India’. Editorials contain information regarding the current issues. The opinions of the authors help us immensely to analyze the issues from various angles. By analyzing the structure of the Newspaper articles, students will be able to understand the nuances of writing analytical essays. While reading the article, the students need to firstly focus on the content, overall idea of the article, and then give attention to the following details. The researcher gives them the inputs as to how to look at the organization and presentation of the content in the editorials.

Stage 1: First Reading
i. Observe the headline or title, subtitle or caption and the words used in it.
ii. Skim the essay for the number of paragraphs present in the article.
iii. Observe the introduction and conclusion
iv. Start reading slowly, clearly by registering the meaning in the mind.
v. While reading, label the paragraph with one or two words/phrases (central ideas of the paragraph)
vi. While reading, underline the important lines which give the essential information.
vii. Summarize the entire article in 6 to 7 lines as per your understanding. (in your own words)

Stage 2: Second Reading
i. Analyze the structures of sentences whether it has SVO (subject, verb, Object) order; subject, verb, complement order; it starts with a phrase, clause, ‘to infinitive’, gerund or it is a simple or compound or complex or compound complex sentence.
ii. Observe the linking words or discourse markers as to how there is a transition in the thoughts either supporting or contradicting or adding information.

iii. Observe the words – both academic/technical/subject specific jargon and general words used.

iv. Observe how evidences are cited everywhere in support of the ideas expressed.

v. Check how the ideas have been developed and arranged in various paragraphs.

### 2 TEMPLATE OF OBSERVATIONS

#### 2.1 Here is a template created by the researcher to help learners record their observations systematically.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Idea of each paragraph in one or two lines</th>
<th>Sentence Structures (SVO/phrases + complements/Compound/complex)</th>
<th>Words/Phrases used along with parts of speech</th>
<th>Discourse Markers/Linkers (what they signify)</th>
<th>Author’s central ideas (10 points)</th>
<th>Your own views</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</table>

#### 2.2 The Writing Task

Now the student is ready to write his/her own essay. Here are a few more suggestions, prompts for them to go ahead with the writing of the essay.

i. Brainstorm using ‘Wh technique’ (What, when, where, whom, who, how, why questions) and jot down the ideas as they occur based on the topic/question given.

ii. Sequence the ideas by numbering them.

iii. Start the introduction. Use thought provoking statements or questions or proverbs to trigger the interest in the readers.

iv. Think and list down the idioms, phrases or words – both academic and general that you would want to use in the essay.

v. Start writing the paragraphs. Use Topic sentences (Main idea you intend to develop), elaborate the ideas using real life examples, persuasion, statistical data, facts, figures. Use Linkers to connect sentences. Write the concluding sentence to summarize what you said so far.

vi. Link the current paragraph to the next paragraph using linkers or discourse markers.

After writing the essay, the learners need to improve their writing by using innovative sentence structures, run-on sentences, giving attention to grammatical aspects such as subject-verb agreement, tenses, articles, prepositions. The words should be according to the context and at the right places. The writing can then be edited, chiseled, refined several times for the final output.

The research was conducted for 20 B. Tech learners for a period of 2 hrs. The methodology, findings and conclusions are presented in the paper.

### 2.3 Methodology

#### Phase – I

Essay writing session on the topic, ‘As people rely more and more on technology to solve problems, the ability of humans to think for themselves will surely deteriorate’ (With basic instructions of how an essay has to be written with introduction, discussion, conclusion) – 30 minutes.

#### Phase – II

i. First reading of the editorial, titled, ‘Treating Education as a public good’ The Hindu on November 16, Saturday, 2019 for the overall comprehension of the content – 20 minutes.

ii. Writing the summary of the article in 6 to 7 lines – 10 minutes

iii. Reading the article for the second time closely and deeply taking into account the template designed and filling the details accordingly – 20 minutes

#### Phase – III

i. Writing an essay again on the topic, ‘As people rely more and more on technology to solve problems, the ability of humans to think for themselves will surely deteriorate’ with the inputs received in Phase-II - 30 minutes.

### 2.4 Observations

#### Student 1: First essay seems was good thoughts wise but was with lot of grammatical errors. The content in the second draft was less but less grammatical errors were there.

#### Student 2: First essay was good with respect to the content, grammar, ideas, thoughts and examples. The second essay had more clarity, clear demarcation between paragraphs, and transition from one thought to the other, more quotations used, relevant examples and an effective conclusion.

#### Student 3: The first essay was good thoughts wise but not the second essay.

#### Student 4: Thought pattern and development of thoughts was fine in the second draft, but grammatical accuracy has to be maintained drastically.

#### Student 5: Thought development and language use seem to have improved in the second essay.

### 2.5 Findings

i. Effective introduction was not there mostly in the first drafts. It was very general.

ii. Learners have a tendency to use incomplete sentences.

iii. Inappropriate use of article, ‘the’ was observed in some of the scripts.

iv. Conclusion was sometimes seen in the first paragraph itself.

v. Repetition of ideas and introducing the topic again in the second paragraph was seen.

vi. Inappropriate combination of words E.g: It is a surviving aspect’, ‘educational grounds’ instead of ‘educational needs’, using the word, ‘attachment’ for
‘addiction’ etc.

vii. Lack of substantial and sufficient number of examples was seen in some of the essays.

viii. No serious thought development was seen in the essays.

ix. Grammatical accuracy related to the use of prepositions, missing of verbs in between the sentences, unnecessary use of present continuous tense, using informal expressions, using the wrong tense, spelling errors and the like were seen.

3. CONCLUSION

Around 50% of the learners showed improvement in their writing the essay the second time. Overall, the set of learners selected are not yet ready for writing good analytical essays in the competitive exams. Their language abilities, thinking capacities have to be drastically improved. Proficiency in language, adequate knowledge of sentence structures with basic vocabulary are a must for good analytical writing. The content has to be improved for which wide range of reading habits and substantial information are needed. The topic given is actually suitable for the existing learning level of the learners. Lack of practice in writing in schools, colleges may be one of the reasons for poor writing abilities in learners.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. More exposure to reading and writing are recommended to the learners. Special emphasis on writing skills is a must to the learners of the present day.

2. Scheduling some classes for reading with recommended books at least twice in a week for 1 hr each may trigger the interest in the learners to acquire language and use the same in writing activities.

REFERENCES