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Proposed Essay Writing Component for EFL Students at Tertiary Level

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Abstract: This paper aims at taking university-level EFL students with an intermediate ability in English as a foreign language from paragraph writing to essay writing. The main idea in this paper is to propose the essay writing skills of EFL students. It proposes writing component that provides a complete picture of developing an essay writing process for EFL students at tertiary level. It also, reveals the objectives of essay writing, the contents, the theoretical aspects, practical aspects, the academic writing layout, and finally, the suggested writing textbooks.

Keywords: Paragraph; Short essay; Essay; Academic writing; Writing skills.

1. Introduction

EFL learners who enroll in a university majoring English language want to develop writing skills that will lead them to a better writing performance. *Academic writing* that is used by university students, faculty, and researchers to convey a body of information about a particular subject. Generally, academic writing is expected to be precise, semi-formal, impersonal, and objective.

The final product of the writing process should make an impact. This idea can be clearly supported by [Gerald and Cathy \(2010\)](#) they indicate that "To make an impact as a writer, you need to do more than make statements that are logical, well supported, and consistent. You must also find a way of entering a conversation with others' views--with something 'they say.' . . . It follows, then, . . . that your own argument--the thesis or 'I say' moment of your text--should always be a response to the arguments of others."

Research strongly suggests that the most beneficial way of helping students improve their command of grammar in writing is to use students' writing as the basis for discussing grammatical concepts. Researchers agree that it is more effective to teach punctuation, sentence variety, and usage in the context of writing than to approach the topic by teaching isolated skills ([Calkins, 1980](#); [DiStefano and Killion, 1984](#); [Harris, 1962](#)).

The academic writing is not the designed format in which one can look at as episodes built by words and sentences. It's something beyond this simple untied building. [Rowena and Sarah \(2006\)](#) go furtherer than that. They indicate that "Academic writing is not the printed display of one's fully formed thoughts. It starts with flawed, incomplete, vague hunches, ideas and concepts. But, if you exploit its inherent 'revisability' it allows you to come full circle, to revisit ideas long after you first thought of them, to explore the same things in different ways, to experiment, to revise, to repeat and reconceptualize--all of these are arguably central to the essence of scholarship which you exercise every day in other academic tasks. . ."

[Hillocks \(1986\)](#) states that "sentence combining practice provides writers with systematic knowledge of syntactic possibilities, the access to which allows them to sort through alternatives in their heads as well as on paper

and to choose those which are most apt" (150). Research also shows that sentence combining is more effective than freewriting in enhancing the quality of student writing (Hillocks, 1986).

Hillocks and Smith (1991) show that systematic practice in sentence combining can increase students' knowledge of syntactic structures as well as improve the quality of their sentences, particularly when stylistic effects are discussed as well. Sentence-combining exercises can be written or oral, structured or unstructured.

2. Statement of the Problem

Many EFL learners experience problems when writing in English, so they suffer to express their intended ideas in real contexts. This phenomenon can be considered as an indication of severe teaching/learning difficulties that reflect bad written performance of English language. At the same time, it has to do with the process of curriculum design and content of writing component that is introduced to the EFL learners at the tertiary level. The researcher thinks that such problem could be solved by proposing an essay writing component for EFL Students at Tertiary Level.

As a result, this paper is designed to take university-level EFL students with an intermediate ability in English as a foreign language from paragraph writing to essay writing. The main idea in this paper is to develop the academic writing skills of EFL students. The proposed writing component is expected to provide a complete picture of developing an essay writing process. This component is basically built upon three main areas. The first area will cover the description of the content. The second area reveals the objectives that can be achieved by the learners upon the completion of the whole Component. Finally, the third area reflects theoretical aspects that EFL students should be able to practice.

There are three steps should be followed when thinking of describing the proposed writing component. First of all, there should be a review of sentence structure, followed by guidelines on how to compose an academic paragraph. The main aims of the step are to familiarize EFL students with the basic components of a paragraph, paragraph organization, planning to write and writing a paragraph on a given topic. It covers the rhetorical modes of example, process and narration, while dealing with the language forms associated with each particular mode of writing.

Secondly, we have to build on what EFL students have learned step one to function as a link between step one and step three. It initially provides EFL students with a thorough review of sentence structure and mechanics to consolidate knowledge before moving on to more extended writing. EFL students then become familiar with the basic components of a short essay, essay organization, planning to write and writing an essay on a given topic. The main goal of this step is to guide EFL students to produce a short essay on the rhetorical modes of description, opinion and compare and contrast, while dealing with the language forms associated with each particular mode of writing.

Finally, the third step serves as a transitional stage between step two and more extensive writing assignments in subsequent components. Stress is laid on how paragraphs are combined together to form a coherent essay. The writing activities provided in this step are designed to promote the development of EFL students' critical thinking skills, the exploration of their own ideas about different themes, and meaningful essays as the final product. EFL students are lead through the process of gathering ideas, organizing an outline, drafting, revising and editing an essay on the rhetorical modes of cause and effect, argumentation and classification. The Component also deals with the language forms associated with each rhetorical mode of writing.

3. Component Objectives

To have a very clear set of objectives, there must be two important structures to modify their objectives. These structures can be said as deep structure that covers essay coherence, critical thinking skills, the rhetorical modes of cause and effect, argumentation and classification, and the language forms associated with each rhetorical mode of writing. On the hand, we have to think of the surface structures that build the essay format and skeleton." [Marilyn S.] [Shaughnessy \(1977\)](#), in [Alister and Cumming \(2006\)](#) in summarizing her longitudinal study of 53 college students' writing development, identified four general purposes of writing in university courses: to make knowledge conscious, to help remember facts, to analyze concepts, and to construct new knowledge. . . . Specifically, [students] used writing to translate concepts into their own language, move from gathering facts to analyses of them, and adjust themselves to the task demands of specific courses and fields."

Given [Noguchi \(1991\)](#) analysis that grammar choices affect writing style, sentence combining is an effective method for helping students develop fluency and variety in their own writing style. Students can explore sentence variety, length, parallelism, and other syntactic devices by comparing their sentences with sentences from other writers.

Upon the completion of the first step of the component contents, EFL students should be able to:

- Demonstrate paragraph writing skills, such as idea generation, organization, topic sentence, supporting details, and concluding sentence.
- Produce meaningful, logical and grammatically correct sentences.
- Stick to the rules of punctuation in English language writing.
- Express their ideas in coherent sentences.
- Maintain unity within a paragraph.
- Plan and write a paragraph of half a page within 45 minutes, in various rhetorical modes.
- Edit paragraphs for mistakes.

Upon the completion of the second step of the component contents, EFL students should be able to:

- Compare and contrast the components of a paragraph and a short essay.
- Integrate the steps of writing a single paragraph to writing a three-paragraph essay of 1 full page, with an Introduction, Body and Conclusion.
- Implement the steps of writing an essay by brainstorming ideas, writing an outline, writing the essay, and editing the essay, all within 1 hour.
- Write a well-focused thesis statement in the Introduction.
- Develop each paragraph with a topic sentence, supporting details and a concluding sentence.
- Compose a concluding paragraph that rewords the thesis statement mentioned in the Introduction, summarizes the main ideas in the Body paragraphs and offers some kind of advice.
- Use suitable cohesive ties at both the inter- and intra-sentence levels to produce coherent paragraphs.
- Maintain unity within a paragraph.
- Produce meaningful, logical and grammatically correct sentences.
- Adhere to the rules of punctuation in English language writing.

And finally, upon the completion of the three step of the component contents, EFL students should be able to:

- Write essays according to the prescribed format of the Component:
 - the Introductory paragraph, including the Hook, Background Information and Thesis Statement;
 - the Body paragraphs, containing the Topic Sentence, Supporting Details and a Concluding sentence;
 - the Concluding paragraph, comprising a Restatement of the Thesis Statement, a Summary of the Body paragraphs and a Concluding sentence offering Advice.
- Demonstrate proficiency in the process of writing through planning, drafting, revising, and editing, all within 1 hour and 15 minutes.
- Build up cohesion, coherence, unity, continuity and style, so that ideas in a written essay are logically arranged.
- Integrate grammar in writing to write a variety of complex structures.

Abide by the rules of punctuation in English language writing.

4. Theoretical Aspects

The theoretical aspects that suggested to be covered in step one contents are: (1) the paragraph, (2) example essays, (3) process Essays, and (4) narration essays. For these aspects it is to say that "The sentences in academic writing are often longer and more intricate than the sentences in popular magazines. Academics strive to go beyond what is quick, obvious, and general. They ask questions based on studying a subject from multiple points of view, to make surprising connections that would not occur to someone who has not studied the subject carefully. (Stuart and April, 2012).

When the students move to step two of the writing component contents they are supposed to be introduced to the following theoretical aspects: (1) paragraph to short essay, (2) descriptive essays, (3) opinion essays, and (4) compare and contrast essays. Finally, the EFL students are coming to step three of the writing component contents where are familiarized with (1) the five-paragraph essay, (2) classification, (3) argumentation, and finally, cause and effect. All these three areas of theoretical aspects should come to reality when the students practice them.

5. Practical Aspects

The 'actual writing'-bit can be the most overwhelming and stressful part of the essay process, and is where most students get stuck. Here are some suggestions to common writing development. For developing the suggested essay writing component, EFL students need to organize themselves and keep anything in its right place. They should be aware of writing daily in English that they start to create a new habit. So, it could be said that writing in English will become natural and something they look forward to. They will not see a significant improvement if they are not dedicated to becoming a better writer in English. It is confirmed that they cannot create remarkable stories and papers if they never try.

EFL students should be trained not to get stuck on figuring out what to write about. They can write about anything, about what they do, things they hear or see, news, or make up a story. After that they are expected to write a draft, which means a preliminary version of piece of writing. Sometimes, their writing becomes better after they take a break and work on a second or third draft. When they revise (or rewrite) their work they are often able to get their message across more clearly. They make think of things that they did not think to write in the first draft and they can add it in a later draft.

On the other hand, EFL students can use online resources to correct their grammar. These online sources such as Grammarly, GrammarCheck, or GrammarBook.com to help them answer a grammar question when it comes up. They could also use the spell and grammar check on MS Word, their iPad or Google Doc to check their spelling and grammar in English. Because writing is a multifaceted and challenging activity for many students, teachers should focus on the grammatical concepts that are essential for the clear communication of meaning.

Research conducted since the early 1960s shows that grammar instruction that is separate from writing instruction does not improve students' writing competence (Braddock *et al.*, 1963; Hillocks, 1986). One can say that research indicates that the transfer of formal grammar instruction to writing is not applicable to larger elements of expository writing. Through detailed studies of students' writing, Shaughnessy (1977) concludes that the best grammar instruction is that which gives the greatest return for the least investment of time. Shaughnessy advocates four important grammatical concepts: the sentence, inflection, tense, and agreement. She recommends that teachers encourage students to examine grammatical errors in their own writing. She also cautions teachers not to overemphasize grammatical terminology to the detriment of students' ability to understand and apply the concepts.

Weaver (1998) proposes a similar approach to teaching grammar in the context of writing. She writes, "What all students need is guidance in understanding and applying those aspects of grammar that are most relevant to writing." Weaver proposes five grammatical concepts that enable writers to show improvement in sentence revision, style, and editing. These five concepts are (1) Teaching concepts on subject, verb, sentence, clause, phrase, and related concepts for editing. (2) Teaching style through sentence combining and sentence generating (3) Teaching sentence sense through the manipulation of syntactic elements (4) Teaching both the power of dialects and the dialects of power (5) Teaching punctuation and mechanics for convention, clarity, and style

There must be an editing for the EFL students essay writing. Often having another set of eyes look at their writing helps find mistakes that they have overlooked. Finally, EFL students should make sure that writing is a process; the more they work on their writing the better it (and they) will get.

6. Academic Writing Layout

An essay contains many different kinds of information, often located in specialized parts or sections. Even short essays carry out several different operations: introducing the argument, analyzing data, raising counterarguments, concluding. Introductions and conclusions have fixed places, but other parts don't. Counterargument, for example, may appear within a paragraph, as a free-standing section, as part of the beginning, or before the ending. Background material (historical context or biographical information, a summary of relevant theory or criticism, the definition of a key term) often appears at the beginning of the essay, between the introduction and the first analytical section, but might also appear near the beginning of the specific section to which it's relevant.

To sum up an academic writing has three main sections - the introduction, body and conclusion:

In the introduction, EFL students must grab the reader's attention and identify the thesis of the paper. They can do this by opening with: questions, a quotation from a well-known work or person, interesting facts or information, or a definition of an important term related to the work.

Body is the main part of the work and the paragraphs must be clearly written and be approved in a logical order, like chronologically or in order of importance. Each initial sentence links the previous paragraph and the whole section flows smoothly. Within each paragraph, the sentences need to flow and refer back to the topic. Cohesion is achieved by repeating important words, using synonyms for the main subject, and using transitional words like: however, such as, therefore, and for example.

Conclusion: in the conclusion, EFL students re-emphasize the thesis and summarize all the main points. The conclusion consists of one paragraph which shows the final conclusion to the reader.

Whether EFL students are writing a research paper, a thesis, or a paper for a conference, these tips should help their paper be authoritative and coherent. Their thesis will be substantiated and explanations clear. Readers of their paper will follow their reasoning and understand their conclusion. <http://grammar.yourdictionary.com>

Writing Suggested Textbooks

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