

Evaluating the Academic Writings Skill of Students of English Literature with IMRAD Disposition

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Abstract

In our academia, the evaluation and assessment process chiefly relies on how students perform in writing. Almost all accrediting and awarding exams are conducted in writing. Hence, it is common, no matter how good a student is at a certain subject, but if he is not a sound writer, he ends up with poor grades. Moreover, in academic writing, various dispositions have been developed to help researchers write and evaluate, IMRAD being the most common. The researcher aimed to explore if students knew about it and could write under this disposition. 210 students of various public universities were approached participate by asking them to write an academic paragraph and answer a brief questionnaire. The drafts were assessed and scored on 1-5 scale and the results were analyzed on t-test of two samples assuming equal variance. The results show that most of the students hardly know about the writing disposition and few could express themselves in this disposition.

Introduction

Today, any investment in education is not an option but a necessity as this is the sole source and support of survival for any nation. Our affinity with each other due to globalization on various issues coupled with a massive inculcation of technology in every form of our day to day life structure has pushed the educationist to the limits to explore the domain of education in very unprecedented ways. At Pakistan, English language enjoys an unparalleled status as it is not just applied as a medium of instructions till post graduate level but due to the inferiority of regional languages in knowledge creation and job search and survival, it is widely emphasized and acquired.

The above examples highlight the role of English in Pakistan and especially in its academic system. Most of the major activities including teaching and testing are executed in English. Thus, every student must possess a good command over all major skills of this language to qualify for the desired accreditation. And among all the skills, due to its unparalleled role in assessment and evaluation, writing skill remains the most desired one.

As tested, like all other skills, the skill of writing cannot be acquired without the common process of imitation and practice (Aronoff & Rees- Miller, 2007). The latest research studies on writing skills have discovered many ways to make learning writing more effective and helpful (Roca de Larios, Murphy & Marin). However, it is not possible to sum up or supply universal definitions to writing skills. Secondly, the research also highlights the significant difference of challenges and problems in writing the first language and second (Silva 1993 p.669). The similar results are reflected by Lee and Krashen, 2003 in their studies too. As mentioned by Hyland 2004, Straub finds “learning writing” as the best way instead of “teaching writing”. He finds writing problems have a universal presence and recognition (Stern, 1983: 400). But these problems due to their orientation and nature have been acknowledged with varied definitions (e.g., Jing, 2005; Tajino, 1997).

In Pakistan writing skills is based on rote learning which according to Silva, Leki, and Carso (1997) is a process of knowledge telling. Their written response will decide their

overall performance and will be reflected on their transcripts and degrees. In most of the cases, almost 80% and in some 100% grade awarding is based on performance demonstrated through writing. In the given fact, a student having weak written exposure will usually end up with poor grades.

Writing Disposition

No doubt writing is a sophisticated and complex task and requires a quite challenging process to accomplish and as well as assess it (Walker et al., 2005, p175). Therefore to help in evaluating the academic drafts writing dispositions are developed (Bocanegra-Valle, 2010: 148-149). Hence, a disposition known as IMRAD which stands for Introduction, Method, Results and Discussion was designed for writers (Swales, 1990, Hall M. George 2013).

The researcher under the supervision and guidance of his research supervisor applied survey method to collect the data to determine and explore the factors behind students' writing disposition. The researcher also applied corpus analysis method by inviting students to write on various topics. Later, the scripts were analyzed on IMRAD disposition and results were drawn accordingly. Ideally the writing disposition is assumed for a detailed critical essay of a significant length. However, in order to obtain a best willing response the researcher requested students to write paragraphs.

Participants

As this research was focused on the graduate students of literature therefore, all public sector universities and the campuses where such program is offered were taken as a population. In Sindh there are so far five public universities offering graduate studies in literature, they are: Karachi University, University of Sindh, Shah Abdul Latif University Khairpur, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University Nawabshah and Benazir Bhutto University Lyari Karachi. Apart from these universities degree programs in literature are also offered in two campuses of University of Sindh which are Muhtarman Benazir Bhutto Campus Dadu and Thatta Campus. The entire strength of students studying literature as major in these five universities and the campuses was considered as the population of this study.

Participants' sample

In the interest of results, the researcher used cluster sampling technique as the initial step towards sampling. The researchers selected a considerable percentage of students from each campus; hence he took 55 students from University of Sindh and 45 students from Karachi. Similarly the researcher approached 60 students of Shah Abdul Latif University Khairpur and 50 students from Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University Nawabshah. Among these students 70% students were either from third or final year whereas, the remaining 30% freshman or sophomore.

Table No.01: Sample details of students.

University	SBBU	UoS	SALU	KU	Total
Boys	25	30	30	20	105
Girls	25	25	30	25	105
Total	50	55	60	45	210

After the data collection, following facts were collected about the sample regarding their age group, learning experience length, training in the skill, previous academic

experience and use of social media. It was observed that most of the students enrolled in this program were from the age group between 20 to 23 years. In this light of cognitive analysis pertaining to academic writing skills, this is an appropriate age when a writer has developed all cognitive and neurological factors to undertake an academic writing task.

Table No.06: Age and Gender Cross tabulation

		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
Age	Below 18	1	5	6
	18 - 20	21	37	58
	20 - 23	69	53	122
	23 - 25	9	8	17
	Above 25	5	0	5
Total		105	103	208

Similarly, following facts were acquired regarding the learning experience. The figures show that sample includes a diversity of learners on the basic of their learning experience. The facts are given as under:

Table No.07: Learning Experience Gender Cross tabulation

		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
Experience	5 Years	53	36	89
	5 - 10 Years	30	18	48
	More than 10 years	22	37	59
	5.00	0	1	1
Total		105	92	197

Table No.08: Training Gender Cross tabulation

		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
Training	Yes	22	31	53
	No	83	72	155
Total		105	103	208

Table No.09: Previous Education Cross tabulation

		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
English Medium		44	66	110
Urdu Medium		8	7	15
Sindhi Medium		53	30	83
Total		105	103	208

Table No.10: Social Media Cross tabulation

		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
Facebook	Yes	98	84	182
	No	7	21	28
Total		105	105	210

Table No.11: Facebook user time and gender cross tabulation

		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
FB_Time	less than 1 hour	67	53	120
	1 - 2 hour	29	35	64
	2 - 4 hour	4	0	4
	5.00	1	0	1
Total		101	88	189

Research Instruments

For data analysis, students were invited to write an academic paragraph on various topics from literature like: *Greek Tragedy, Criticism, Beauty, Wisdom, Society and Literature*. It was ensured that the topics were of general nature and any student of literature could easily develop a brief draft on extempore. To have an objective opinion the researcher did not deliberately direct or instruct the students to follow any disposition as it might have altered the existing writing disposition of students. To find the correlation of students' knowledge and skill a separate questionnaire was developed on Likert's rating scale. The relationship was analyzed on SPSS by applying the statistical application of t-test. The instrument was applied after assessing its reliability and validity through Cronbach's Alpha and face validity respectively. The questionnaire was designed with five rating points based on Likert scale. The options were: (1) Always, (2) Sometimes, (3) Hardly, (4) Rarely and (5) Never.

Data Collection

The whole data was collected by researcher in person. As proposed in the sampling, a total number of 210 students participated in this research. The institutes were requested to grant a total number of two hours for each session. The students were asked to compose a small

controlled paragraph for the assessment of writing disposition. Later the students were given the questionnaire designed for their opinion on academic writing skills. The researcher himself was present during the data collection process and guided the students in person regarding the questionnaire. All the students were volunteer participants and the researcher carefully ensures that no student was made feel forced to participate.

Data Analysis

As the chief aim of the research is to explore the problems faced by the students of literature at English academic writing, hence in the light of the nature of the study, the researcher has employed analytical statistical description. The paradigm of qualitative research rests upon the fundamental principle that we can measure or observe everything with some measuring and observing tools (Glense & Peshkin, 1992). It is also viewed as an objective approach as it merely tests a hypothesis and announces it whether or not it should be accepted (Kahn 2004). Hence, it involves a number of measuring and scaling tools and devices in all the forms of data collection and data analysis.

For a clear and fair analysis, the drafts written by the students were distributed among four teachers of literature and they were requested to rate the drafts on each area separately on a scale of 5 points. After the assessment the t-test was applied on the data to obtain the results.

Discussion

The following results were derived when the results obtained on drafts and responses of the students on the questionnaires were analyzed on t-test:

Table No. 2 Introduction

Introduction	Knowledge	Skill
Mean	2.622009569	4.475
Variance	1.043936327	0.692839196
Observations	209	200
Pooled Variance	0.872269671	
t Stat	-20.05738345	

Table value at 0.05 = 1.965 df = 407 Significant at < 0.05

The calculated value at the 0.05 level of significance is -20.057 which is greater than the tabulated value. Thus it is rejected that there is a significant performance of skill and knowledge on this area of disposition.

Table No. 3 Method

Method	Knowledge	Skill
Mean	2.803827751	4.5
Variance	1.43729297	0.683417085
Observations	209	200
Pooled Variance	1.068690265	
t Stat	-16.58710194	

Table value at 0.05 = 1.965 df = 407 Significant at < 0.05

This table shows that the calculated value at the 0.05 level of significance is -16.587 which is greater than the tabulated value. Therefore it is safe to reject that there was any significant relation of skills and knowledge in this area of writing disposition.

Table No. 3 Results

Results	Knowledge	Skill
Mean	2.471153846	4.475
Variance	1.090951319	0.632537688
Observations	208	200
Pooled Variance	0.866260894	
t Stat	-21.73985306	

Table value at 0.05 = 1.965 df = 406 Significant at < 0.05

Almost similar result is reflected in this table too as the calculated value is 21.73 which is greater than the tabulated value at significant level of 0.05. Hence it is rejected that students are on equal level of knowledge and skill in this area.

Table No. 4 Discussions

Discussion	Knowledge	Skill
Mean	3.125	4.505
Variance	1.153381643	0.653241206
Observations	208	200
Pooled Variance	0.908238916	
t Stat	-14.62162417	

Table value at 0.05 = 1.965 df = 408 Significant at < 0.05

That calculated value on this table is -14.621 which is also greater than the tabulated value. Hence, it is rejected that students show can equally perform in this area of disposition.

All the tests have resulted in rejection showing a clear contrast in the knowledge and skill of students on writing disposition. It shows that they, to some extent, know about it but on the other hand fail to demonstrate in their drafts. The higher mean in the portion of skill shows a poor display of deposition.

Conclusion

The corpus analysis of these drafts shows that hardly any student tried to follow the standard disposition of academic writing such as IMRAD or any other recognized guideline. They have failed to draw a proper introduction to the argument in the paragraph. The points were laid in haphazard manner and were lacking the basic logic behind the claim by the writers. In case of support, most of the have applied subjective approach and tried to support their claim on the basis of their personal liking or disliking. The drafts miss empirical discussions and did not carry any logical references or citation. The drafts also miss an appropriate conclusion or results as most of them just end abruptly. Most of the writers have failed to bring their arguments towards a logical end and consequently their drafts end up with incomplete thoughts and present and absurd impression.

Recommendations

Academic writing should be treated with its due role for the students of literature. There should be special arrangements to help students improve upon this skill by added relevant subjects in the curriculum for BS and MA English programs. The universities must hire trained professionals to teach this skill. Purpose oriented opportunities and events shall be designed and incorporated with academic calendar. Apart from this, the assessment pattern must be revisited to allow the students with weak written expression to demonstrate their knowledge through other assessment tools. The over dependence on writing needs to be revised as the research indicated that everyone cannot perform through writing no matter he possesses all the required knowledge.

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