Teaching academic writing in English: approaches and products

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Abstract. English is the number one world language today. Writing in this language is the main task of every staff, including students. The article describes the difficulties that students encounter when mastering a written language in a foreign language course in English for Academic Purposes in the context of the specifics of the course. Methodological approaches to teaching foreign language written speech are analyzed, their strengths and weaknesses are identified, the possibility of using tasks inherent in these approaches in the course of academic writing to overcome the described difficulties is considered. Examples are given illustrating how tasks can be combined when writing an essay and annotation. The article shows some experiments with tables and explanations. The results of this article can be used in various scientific works and educational manuals in the future.

1 Introduction

In the modern information world, English proficiency is the most important condition for meeting the requirements of the time. In general, learning English involves mastering such skills as listening comprehension, reading, speaking and writing. The practice of working at school shows that one of the main problems in teaching English is the development of students' writing skills. At the same time, the analysis and monitoring of English language skills shows that it is the writing skill that causes certain difficulties for students.

In order to solve this problem, the theoretical material on the methodology of teaching writing was studied, an action plan was drawn up, which includes tools and strategies for use in the classroom. Feedback and student reflection have been identified as key methods for improving student writing skills. The effectiveness of using feedback and reflection to improve writing skills is supported by many studies. Research shows that constructive feedback is a powerful tool that students can use to improve and plan for future progress.

Academic writing in English is taught in various forms around the world. Recently, the centers of academic writing began to appear in Russian universities [1]. Leaving aside terminological disagreements, by academic writing we mean the creation of written texts in academic discourse.

The analysis of student works revealed the following difficulties that students face when writing academic texts:

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1) inability to logically organize the text in accordance with the given requirements;

2) inability to use adequate linguistic means to provide logical connections;

3) the use of lexical means and structures that do not correspond to the required register and level.

For example, a study conducted by P. Baker and I. Chen [3] showed that collocations and lexical connectives used in academic texts by authors whose native language is not English differ from lexical combinations used by native speakers. In addition, the variability of linguistic expression in the works of native speakers is greater; non-native speakers use an extremely limited repertoire of such phrases in writing. Moreover, the structure of the text reflects the peculiarities of the culture of its creator [4]. I. Leki notes that English speakers expect from the text a consistent organization, logical coherence of ideas, original but understandable content of the work, in which the reader rarely has to think of anything. In English, the author is responsible for being understandable to the reader [6]. In the Uzbek language, on the contrary, written utterances do not have such a clear structure, and the reader has to complete part of the idea [7]. In order to learn how to write academic texts in English, a foreign language student must understand and accept the canons of English academic discourse.

The features of the academic text and the difficulties that are closely related to them leave an imprint on the methodology of teaching academic writing. This article attempts to analyze different approaches to teaching writing, to identify the types of tasks that are appropriate to use when teaching academic writing in English to a Russian-speaking audience, and to suggest options for combining tasks when teaching how to create various types of texts.

2 Experimental part

The application of criteria to tasks made the feedback constructive and, accordingly, the use of criteria became an integral part of each lesson. Thus, in the process of working at the lesson before doing a written task, for example, writing an essay, students proposed, discussed and created criteria for evaluating the work. Involving students in the creation of criteria for tasks has allowed us, as teachers, to ensure a deep understanding of the tasks by students. At the same time, in the process of this work, the role of the students in the lesson changes. They become readers, advisers, which creates the conditions for students to become independent in the future and be able to regulate their own progress. Then, using predetermined criteria, the students evaluated and commented on each other's work. For example, the characteristic criteria for written work were:

• Grammar design.

• Lexical stock.

• Compliance with the structure.

• Content.

At the next stage, after analyzing the comments of classmates, the students wrote a reflection on their work, taking into account the feedback from classmates. The students identified what could be improved in their work and noted the positive points. Students' reflection showed that students use feedback from teachers and classmates to improve their written work, identify weaknesses in terms of English proficiency and suggest ways to improve. However, practice and observations of colleagues have shown that if you use points instead of comments on the work, students are interested in the final score they received for the task, and only then in how they can improve their result.

Let us describe approaches to teaching writing [9–11] and discuss how they can be used in teaching academic writing.

The Controlled to Free Approach has its roots in the audiolingual method. This method assumes that speaking is the leading skill, while writing is an auxiliary skill aimed at reinforcing grammatical and syntactical forms. The letter is carefully structured, and each step is aimed at developing a specific skill. First, exercises are performed at the sentence level, such as drawing up a sentence according to the model, combining simple sentences into complex ones, putting the members of the sentence in the appropriate order. The following exercises focus on paragraph structure and sentence agreement. Only after that comes the turn of controlled writing, editing and proofreading, and then students can express their thoughts in a free form. The main goals of the approach are grammatical accuracy and correctness of writing; fluency and originality play a secondary role. Since the presence of supports and training exercises makes it possible to fill in gaps in knowledge and develop the skill of organizing a written statement, the elements of this approach in writing lessons are indispensable.

The opposite is the Free Writing Approach. Students are invited to randomly express their thoughts for a limited period of time (five to ten minutes). It is believed that the more a student practices free writing, the better he masters it: literacy and mastery of structures come with time. Undoubtedly, in this way the fear of writing is removed and the habit and fluency of written speech are developed. However, in a situation where English is a foreign language and there is no language immersion, in order to master grammatical and lexical forms, in our opinion, purposeful work is needed.

There is an approach that focuses on the formation of the Paragraph Pattern Approach, which is extremely important for mastering academic writing. Exercises to develop this skill include putting parts of a paragraph in a logical order, choosing or creating a sentence that expresses the main idea of the paragraph (topic sentence), or a final sentence summarizing the information presented (closing sentence), analyzing and simulating models. The focus is on grammatical accuracy and product orientation.

The Grammar Syntax Organization Approach also focuses on form, but the final product is the pivot point. Students are given a task, and they must decide for themselves what structures are necessary for its successful completion. The form here is the possibility of passing the desired value. After selecting vocabulary and structures, students are presented with a set of questions that lead them to the correct organization of the text. The undoubted advantage of this approach is the search activity, students learn to select the lexical and grammatical structures necessary to convey this meaning, while assimilating them.

All the approaches described above are product oriented. An approach that prioritizes the very process of writing a text (Process Approach) is proposed in the framework of the communicative methodology of teaching a foreign language [12–13]. It is emphasized that writing is a complex skill that includes many skills related to determining the purpose of writing a text, satisfying the reader's requests and the process of writing a text itself. What is also important is the content, its relevance, organization, coherence and originality. The skills of choosing linguistic components appropriate to the task, such as grammar and vocabulary, also need to be purposefully formed. Note the mechanics of writing, that is, handwriting, spelling and punctuation. From these positions, the process of mastering written speech is so complicated that it comes to the fore in comparison with the final product.

At the next stage, a draft version of the text is created. The focus is on the development and improvement of ideas and their linguistic representation. Further refinement of the content and structure takes place, when self-Q and mutual evaluation play an important role, since they give students the opportunity to look at their work through the lens of established criteria or to compare it with the work of a peer. The text can be revised as

many times as necessary, and only in the latest revision does the student concentrate on superficial characteristics such as spelling or grammatical accuracy.

A process-centered approach to writing prepares the student for independent writing by giving him the tools and steps to create it. In the future, the student will be able to autonomously, without the support of a teacher, create a text and evaluate it. Among the positive aspects of this approach, one can note a communicative act at the output, the discovery of new language forms for the student, the development of educational and cognitive skills, such as the ability to analyze and graphically organize information, plan a text, work with criteria in self-Q and mutual assessment, etc. However, it should be noted that some students prefer a more structured approach, ie. presence of supports. Work on draft versions can take a significant amount of time, individual for each individual student. Thus, different approaches to writing have their strengths, which can be used in teaching academic writing (Table 1).

Table 1. Strengths and weaknesses of approaches to teaching writing

An approach	Strengths	Limitations
Controlled-to-free approach	- Possibility of consistent practice in creating text elements; - enhanced work on the organization of the text; - development of underdeveloped skills; - the presence of supports	- Excessive focus on the form; - no room for creativity
Free-writing approach	- The fear of writing is removed; - fluency in writing develops; - developing the habit of writing	- Not suitable for teaching students with a low level of language proficiency; - ignoring the grammatical side of speech
Paragraph-pattern approach	- Development of literacy; - enhanced work on the structure of the paragraph	- Excessive focus on the form; - no room for creativity
Grammar-syntax-organization approach	-Students are motivated and involved; - a connection is established between form, meaning and content; - there is an involuntary assimilation of language forms	-Insufficient work on the organization of the text
Process approach	- Simulates the process of creating text in real life; - takes into account the requests of the potential audience (including the register and the level of language proficiency); - teaches how to create a text in several stages (preparation - writing - evaluation - processing - creating a final version); - develops independence and other learning and cognitive skills	- Takes a lot of classroom time; - lack of supports

As we can see, some approaches allow you to clearly structure the educational process, teach text organization, allow you to expand vocabulary and achieve grammatical accuracy. Others give the teacher the opportunity to develop educational and cognitive skills and educate independent writers. Thus, the use of a combination of different approaches in teaching academic writing makes it possible to make it more effective.

3 Results and discussion

Let us give an example of how it is possible to combine tasks and approaches when working on a primary text (Table 2). Let us propose the steps for creating a cause-effect essay, which provides the causes of any phenomenon and possible consequences (adapted from [13]). V.N. Nazarova lists the pedagogical conditions in which effective teaching of academic writing takes place [10].

Table 2. Stages of creating an essay

Model text analysis	1. Structure 2. Logical connections and their schematic representation 3. Language
Language practice	1. Linking words 2. Speech structures => Conditionally communicative and communicative exercises
Essay planning	1. Planning structure, language and logical connections 2. Group discussion and feedback 3. Writing a thesis and sentences reflecting the main idea of each paragraph
Essay writing	1. Create a draft essay 2. Self- or peer-assessment according to the criteria 3. Essay finalization

At the same time, the development of writing skills should take place on the basis of research and communication competencies. Therefore, at first, students work with an exemplary essay (reading), analyze its structure, highlighting the thesis statement in the introduction, as well as sentences that carry the main idea in each paragraph (topic sentences). Further, work is carried out with the content, cause-and-effect relationships are identified, and their graphical display is created. The language specific for logical connections of this type is analyzed, which is subsequently trained in conditional communicative and communicative situations. After that, students choose a topic for their own essay and draw up a schematic representation of the cause-and-effect relationships presented in it. If necessary, background knowledge on the topic is updated with the acquisition of additional information. Then an essay plan is drawn up, a thesis is written, lexical units and structures are selected that are appropriate to use in the text. The students then discuss their ideas in pairs or groups. When problems arise with the expression of thoughts, both peers and the teacher come to the rescue. In peer assessment, the student asks three questions, noting two strengths and one weakness in the peer's plan. The formulations of thesis are discussed frontally and possible options for their improvement are suggested. The last step is writing an essay according to the plan. The finished product can be self- or peer-evaluated according to predetermined criteria and recycled.

So, the analysis of the text, its deconstruction in the logical and linguistic sense, ends with the synthesis of one's own work. The presence of a sample allows the student to see in advance the goal to which he will come after the lesson. Despite being product oriented, the process includes communicative tasks and exercises that show the student the process of its

creation. Subsequently, when performing such a task independently, the student will be able to autonomously go through all the steps described above. It is also necessary to note the language support provided to the student, which, from our point of view, is important in conditions of limited contact with the language being studied.

Let us give an example of writing a secondary text - an annotation that has a fairly fixed structure and volume. Both students and teaching staff of Uzbek universities experience difficulties in writing annotations, in most cases trying to arrange them as a direct translation of the Uzbek counterpart. Since writing annotations is an important skill for a person functioning in an academic environment, the lesson in the course "English for Academics" is devoted to the formation of this skill [8], which was created with the participation of the author of this article (Table 3).

Table 3. Working on an annotation

Motivational stage	1. Discussion 2. Create a mental map
Working with structure	1. Revealing meaningful elements of the structure 2. Recognition of elements in the text 3. Identification of functional phrases characteristic of each of the elements
Language work	1. Revealing the meaning of lexical units from the context 2. Determination of logical links reflected by certain links 3. The use of academic vocabulary and linking words in the context of annotations 4. Using the studied material to describe your research
Annotations from different sciences	1. Recognition of specific features inherent in annotations from different fields 2. Working with grammar and vocabulary (passive voice, academic vocabulary)
Writing an annotation for your own article	1. Writing an abstract 2. Peer evaluation according to the criteria 3. Refinement of the annotation

At the motivational stage, students discuss what an annotation is, for what purposes and for what audience it can be created. The main work begins with the analysis of the annotation and the derivation of its structure. We emphasize that the students work independently, while the teacher plays the role of a facilitator. Next, work is carried out on the speech structures inherent in each element of the annotation; academic vocabulary and collocations are also in focus. It is important to pay attention to the words/links that make it possible to logically connect the elements of the annotation, as well as to the structural and linguistic features of annotations from different sciences (for example, the use of passive voice, which is characteristic of natural science annotations). The exercises are designed in such a way that students themselves notice these features, and then use this information in tasks, the complexity and openness of which gradually increase. The final product is an annotation in English to one's own article; it is also peer-reviewed against well-defined criteria and reworked based on comments from peers.

Thus, on the one hand, students "live through" the process of writing an annotation and subsequently can go through it again without the support of a teacher. On the other hand, they receive support in the form of structural elements and speech patterns that help build the process of writing a text, achieve coherence and consistency. In addition, the vocabulary is enriched with academic vocabulary and collocations, which contributes to the understanding of the features of the functioning of lexical units and functional phrases in

the context and their appropriate use. In general, there is a development of general cultural competencies, such as the ability to evaluate work, analyze and synthesize, and plan activities.

4 Conclusion

Creating a written text is a complex process that requires the simultaneous application of many skills. These skills - not only language skills, but also educational and cognitive ones - need to be formed and developed, and the task of the teacher is to choose the most effective approaches and tasks for the successful solution of this problem. In our experience, it is the combination of the possibilities of different approaches, taking into account the needs of the students, that provides the optimal conditions for developing writing skills in the context of an English language course for academic purposes. A reasonable combination of techniques offered by different approaches makes it possible to level their shortcomings and use their advantages to their advantage.

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