

Action Research: Developing students' writing skills using Flipped Writing approach (2022)

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Abstract

The research aims to develop students' writing skills by implementing the Flipped Writing approach in Grades 7–8. The study was conducted among 108 students aged 13-14 years old over six months. A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was used to analyze written works and students' feedback. The assessment of writing tasks was based on such criteria as task response, genre and style, lexical resource, grammar range and accuracy, and coherence and cohesion.

The results of the research demonstrate significant improvement in lexical resource and coherence, and understanding of the genre. However, it was noticed that grammatical accuracy remained an area requiring further development. The study proves that the analysis organized before the writing practice and guided classroom practice while writing noticeably contribute to higher student independence and positive writing outcomes. Practical recommendations for implementing the approach are provided.

Relevance and Rationale:

In the context of Nazarbayev Intellectual School in Pavlodar, students of the mentioned level have to be able to produce extended pieces of writing in various genres. Meanwhile, based on the observations, conducted by a group of teachers, and analysis of the internal assessment results, several difficulties became evident. Many students demonstrate a limited vocabulary range, struggle to organise their ideas logically, and show insufficient awareness of genre features. Grammatical inaccuracies are noticed to be quite frequent, and in some cases writing tasks are completed in a mechanical way, without a clear understanding of the structure.

The development of academic literacy and independent learning skills is one of the strategic priorities of the school. For this reason, improving students' writing performance through a more structured pedagogical intervention appeared to be both timely and necessary.

The Flipped Writing approach was chosen as a possible solution. The rationale behind this choice is that it enables students to analyse model texts at home at their own pace and then apply structural and lexical features during guided classroom practice, where teacher support and peer interaction can strengthen understanding.

Aims and Research Questions

The study aims to investigate how the Flipped Writing approach influences the development of students' writing skills.

The study addresses the following research questions:

1. How does the Flipped Writing approach affect the task achievement?

2. How does the Flipped Writing influence the lexical, grammatical resources, and coherence?

Theoretical Framework

In today's fast-paced world, a teacher must prepare students for a variety of writing assignments, including essays, official and informal letters, announcements, advertising, directions, motivational letters, and more.

According to J. Harmer (2004), writing is the mental activity of generating ideas, deciding how to convey them, and structuring them into statements and paragraphs that are understandable to a reader.

As J. Scrivener (2015) says, some teachers believe that writing is largely a solitary activity and that no effective in-class work can be done on it. Notwithstanding this fact, there are many possible steps between assigning the writing task and collecting it, such as actively encouraging and assisting students in completing a series of preparatory steps before producing the final text, and students becoming more aware of that process so that it can be done more independently and transparently in the future.

From the point of view of N. Peachey (2020), Flipped Learning is a type of blended learning that incorporates both synchronous and asynchronous individual study, which forms the relationship between the independent study that students do alone and the work they do together. Prior to group study time, individual study is utilized in a flipped learning approach to input basic ideas, concepts, or language. Students focus on practical work during group study time to gain a better comprehension of their new information and to broaden their abilities.

In accordance with T. Tangpermpoon (2008), the Product Approach reinforces writing skills in terms of grammatical and syntactical forms, and it raises students' awareness of writing from a lower level of language proficiency to a higher level of language proficiency through a variety of activities in product-based writing.

Methodology

This study was conducted as an action research project. The participants included 108 students in grades 7-8. The research group consisted of three English language teachers and a senior manager of the Center of Excellence that develops training programs for teachers.

A mixed-method approach was used, which included quantitative analysis of students' written works and qualitative analysis, including students' feedback.

Students' written works were assessed according to the following criteria: task response, genre and style, lexical resource, grammar range and accuracy, coherence and cohesion.

Task response criterion determines students' ability to formulate and develop a position in relation to a given question or task. Genre and style criterion helps to identify students' awareness of the peculiarities of various genres and the style of language that can be used in particular genres. Lexical resource criterion refers to the range of vocabulary and the accuracy of its use by the student. Grammar range and accuracy criterion assesses students' range and accurate use of grammar structures. The criterion of coherence and cohesion is concerned with clarity and fluency of the written text (IELTS Score Guide, 2018). Each criterion was assessed separately and constituted 100%. After that, the average percentage of all criteria was calculated. To make the assessment as transparent as possible, rubrics for each criterion were developed (Suastra & Menggo, 2020).

The two cycles of action research were conducted during the period of six months.

The pre-intervention stage included the analysis of the students' written works with the focus on the criteria chosen, development of a consolidated table for documenting students' results during each research cycle and the questionnaires that allowed the researchers find out the information about students' satisfaction with the Flipped Writing approach.

During the first cycle students analyzed the model essays at home, identified the genre features, extracted the topic-related vocabulary and target grammatical structures. In the classroom, the teachers organized discussions, which helped them check students' understanding of all required essay components, followed by writing a draft paragraph of their essay that included the focus grammar structure, topic-related vocabulary and linking phrases. The guided writing stage asked students to turn their drafts into a complete essay using the detailed instructions prepared for each cycle. Differentiation was also planned for struggling students who could ask the teacher for support throughout the lesson. Each learner received detailed feedback on their essays. The analysis of both individual and common mistakes on each criterion helped the researchers to plan their further work. The cycle concluded when students wrote their summative assessment essay on a similar topic and its results were added to the consolidated table for comparative analysis. The analysis together with a feedback from the students helped the teachers make all necessary changes to the next cycle to improve the methodology used.

The materials and the results of the first cycle combined helped to improve the procedure of implementing the second one. Most of the improvement was done in introduction of some grammar-focused scaffolding. Besides, it was planned that students would need to complete some structured grammar micro-tasks before independent writing.

Findings

The results have shown that the students made a considerable progress in each of the five criteria within the given period.

The highest percentage was reached in the lexical resource criterion which increased by 13% in December. Higher level vocabulary and word repetition avoidance through using synonyms were noticed among the factors which made this progress possible. The most tangible progress was made in the criterion of coherence and cohesion, which initially was the lowest (41%), as students had had extremely poor knowledge about structuring and connecting their ideas. While using the Flipped Writing approach the result finally increased to 60%. The criterion of task response (+6%) as well as the genre and style (+7%) showed sufficient growth. The least noticeable progress was observed in the grammar accuracy criterion – around 2% - and was considered as the area for further development and research.

Answering the questions of the surveys, 87% of the students pointed out the benefit of the step-by-step instructions that helped them work independently and assess their progress themselves. Less confident students found it useful to have a guided writing practice in the classroom, when the teacher could support them throughout the process. However, 1.5% of the students with advanced language skills showed their concern that the detailed instructions could negatively influence their creativity in writing. It was concluded that for such students the process writing approach would be more suitable.

Practical recommendations

The team is convinced that there is a strong necessity to continue implementing Flipped Writing in higher grades to maintain continuity and further strengthen the positive aspects of the approach. Besides, integrating focused grammar micro-lessons within flipped cycles will insure that students address grammatical difficulties more systematically.

Also, it is recommended that other teachers who are going to implement this approach in their practice, take students' feedback about their instructions seriously as timely adjustment can help them meet their students' needs.

The authors are aware of limitations of the research and the possible inaccuracy of the results that can relate to the number of students participating in the study, the fact that the instruments used for analyzing the data are not world-wide recognized, as well as some other factors that were not taken into account.

Conclusion

The findings of the action research have confirmed that the Flipped Writing approach positively affected students' lexical skills, their ability to present their ideas in a coherent and logical way, and apply their knowledge of genre features in writing. Overall, writing independence of students increased. However, grammatical accuracy remains an area for further improvement, which is going to become the focus of our further research.

The approach demonstrates sustainability and practical applicability within the school context; it offers potential for broader implementation in high school for external exam preparation.

A methodological toolkit, based on the studied approach, has been developed. This resource includes writing samples and exercises for students' self-study, and can be used both in the classroom and during students' individual preparation.

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