



Enhancing Writing Proficiency In Esl Tertiary Learners Through Task-Based Language Teaching Framework

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Abstract : Language proficiency is the cornerstone of academic writing, as it ensures the structuring of complex ideas with a clear, consistent flow, thereby providing clarity of thought. Expressing ideas clearly is an integral part of writing. ESL learners often struggle to organise their ideas coherently. When a text is said to be coherent, it is built on a sequence of thoughts, expressed in a language that follows the metrics and mechanics of good writing skills. At the tertiary level, learners are expected to have basic or average knowledge of writing skills, as they are likely to write large content of text at this stage of education. Boosting their competence in their use of language can help them excel in their writing as well as communication. To cultivate language proficiency among tertiary learners, this study designed an instructional Task-based Language Teaching framework that can be followed in the classrooms. This framework would benefit learners to a great extent as it encourages them to be active participants in an activity-based environment. TBLT encourages the practical use of language in real-life situations, it helps them boost their competence. A structured framework is designed based on the cyclical frameworks of Willis, Ellis, and Skehan. In this framework, each component of writing is paired with a functional task to promote effective language learning. Ultimately, this pedagogy shifts the focus toward learner autonomy. Integrating activity-based learning can systematically improve the writing proficiency of ESL tertiary learners, helping them to bridge the gap between fragmented ideas and level them to professional academic discourse.

Keywords: Language Proficiency, Task-Based Language Teaching, Academic Writing, ESL tertiary learners, activity-based learning

I. INTRODUCTION

Writing is a creative and structured way of representing language based on the thoughts and ideas that a writer wants to express. This is an important skill for every ESL learner to acquire, but they don't find it at ease because of factors such as grammar, vocabulary, form, organization, etc. Therefore, mastering this skill requires a great endeavour, adequate resources, and exploring various methods and techniques to refine our language proficiency. It is quite a challenging and complex skill that, in some situations, even native speakers find difficult to recollect or provide the exact terms to express something at a critical juncture. Developing competence in this complex intellectual activity would enhance his/her thinking ability and help in accomplishing their academic goal (Sanford, 2012).

Lengthy history in pedagogical discourse attests to Task-Based Language Teaching's (TBLT) significant influence and ongoing efficacy in the classroom. Since the work is a crucial component of this method, studying grammar or any other feature of writing directly is diminished as the student concentrates on the active engagement of doing the task. When opposed to conventional, passive training, this active engagement results in better retention. By reorienting the teaching focus from rote memorization of grammatical rules to the actual use of language in real-world circumstances, TBLT emulates the successful activity-based philosophy of Montessori. In a similar vein, the use of the language in everyday contexts is emphasized.

Students are compelled to go beyond simple syntax when they are given cognitive tasks like filling in knowledge gaps, creating stories, or participating in official writing contests. To guarantee consistency and fluidity, they must instead carefully arrange their ideas, naturally giving the content of their message priority. Through a meaningful contextual exchange of ideas rather than isolated repetition, this functional approach ensures competency while fostering learner autonomy and assisting them gradually in meeting their linguistic needs.

II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Does the Task-Based Language Teaching method serve as an efficient approach for alleviating writing anxiety among ESL tertiary learners?
2. What specific types of tasks can be implemented in technology-driven classrooms to promote immersive and engaging learning experiences?
3. To what extent does the suggested instructional framework enhance the writing proficiency of ESL learners within higher education contexts?

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Mastering writing skills is a continuous and challenging process that needs regular and dedicated effort. Developing the right writing style while following proper structure involves more than just practice; it also needs a strong understanding of language rules, how to organize ideas, and how to express thoughts clearly, all of which take time to build. Mekala and Ponmani (2017) studied the effect of corrective feedback on the writing abilities of ESL students at the tertiary level. In their pre-proficiency test, they found that low-proficiency ESL learners faced many challenges in their writing. The analysis of this test showed that these learners mainly struggled with grammar elements like prepositions, verb tenses, articles, and subject-verb agreement, which made up a large part of their mistakes (62%). Specifically, errors in prepositions made up 22.07%, verb tenses 15.37%, articles 12.81%, and subject-verb agreement 12.12%, which were the most common issues and were therefore identified as main problems.

These learners had major weaknesses in how they built sentences, and they also lacked metalinguistic awareness, especially when it came to keeping verb tenses consistent, using relative pronouns, and forming questions. This lack of basic grammar knowledge made it hard for them to spot their own mistakes or correct themselves effectively. As a result, these ongoing grammar issues stopped them from properly learning correct language forms, which in turn stopped them from becoming more fluent, accurate, and able to express ideas clearly in writing.

Similarly, Nusrat Adiba (2016) looked into what ESL learners need and found that their struggles with grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure are often due to a lack of interest, low motivation, and not enough practice, which lead to poor writing results and slow skill development. Many learners also lack confidence and are afraid of making mistakes, and they feel responsible for any errors they make. Large class sizes and not enough teaching resources also make it hard to give each student the attention and guidance they need for effective learning.

Taye and Mengesha (2024) conducted a study involving 680 undergraduate students at Mizan Tepi University to explore the common challenges they encounter in writing English, with the aim of improving their language skills. The results showed that while most students have an average level of writing proficiency, they experience considerable difficulties in areas such as vocabulary use, grammar, spelling, punctuation, and organizing their ideas effectively. A number of students also mentioned that

the limited time spent on writing activities in class is a major obstacle to developing their writing abilities. Although motivated, students often struggle with systematic writing processes and rely heavily on independent writing strategies. Instructors emphasized the need for focused grammar instruction, vocabulary expansion, and organizational skills training.

Based on the research explored in understanding the difficulties of the learners in developing overall proficiency. This study sheds light on the thrust areas that require attention and designs a framework for approaching these errors in writing. The common list of errors revealed in the studies is presented below.

Common Challenges faced by ESL Learners in writing
Table 1: List of challenges in relation to writing component

S.No	Writing Component	Specific Issues Identified
1	Vocabulary	Limited lexical range; inappropriate word choice; inability to express ideas precisely
2	Grammar	Errors in tense, subject-verb agreement, singular/plural forms, and sentence construction
3	Sentence-Level Clarity	Unclear meaning; missing words; poor sentence formulation
4	Organization of Ideas	Difficulty structuring essays logically; weak paragraph development
5	Coherence and Cohesion	Inadequate use of linking devices; poor flow between ideas
6	Mechanical Accuracy	Spelling, punctuation, and capitalization errors
7	Writing Time Constraints	Insufficient classroom time for writing practice and revision
8	Writing Strategies	Over-reliance on independent writing without adequate scaffolding
9	Student Motivation	Variability affects engagement
10	Independent Writing Practice	Limited or irregular writing outside the classroom
11	Overall Writing Proficiency	The majority of students exhibit average or low writing proficiency; no outstanding level was observed

Addressing the above mentioned challenges, this study believes that the TBLT method of teaching with minimal exposure to technology can help the learners overcome these challenges and enhance their ability to produce good writing. By addressing these common and basic errors in writing, the learners' challenges related to fearfulness, anxiety, confidence, lack of interest, and motivation would gradually dissolve as they engage in a task-based learning environment.

IV. TASK-BASED FRAMEWORK TO ENHANCE PROFICIENCY IN WRITING

Task-Based Language training (TBLT) is a strategy that uses tasks as the primary unit of planning and instruction in language training. Some of its proponents (Willis, 1996) see it as a logical extension of Communicative Language Teaching since it relies on certain concepts that were part of the

communicative language teaching movement in the 1980s. For instance, authentic conversation is crucial for language acquisition. Activities in which language is employed to complete meaningful tasks encourage learning. Language that is relevant to the learner enhances the learning process. Tasks are effective vehicles for implementing multiple tasks in connection with the achievement of a particular aspect of writing. The Malaysian Communicational Syllabus (1975) and the Bangalore Project (Beretta and Davies 1985; Prabhu 1987; Beretta 1990) were two early examples of a Task-Based strategy within a communicative framework for language instruction.

The conceptual utility of tasks has gained significant importance among second language acquisition (SLA) researchers focused on bridging the gap between theoretical frameworks and pedagogical application. Since the mid-1980s, researchers have come to see tasks as the basic components of language teaching programs, as noted by Long and Crookes (1993). This approach has shifted the emphasis from grammar-focused lessons to the thinking processes involved in learning a language. This research questions the effectiveness of traditional grammar-based teaching methods. Studies show that grammar-centered activities, which are common in many classrooms, do not match the way people naturally learn languages in real-life situations. As a result, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) better reflects the mental processes that support real language learning.

Strategies for successfully implementing TBLT would be to maximize the advantages of TBLT while minimizing its obstacles. Instructors can adopt the following strategies to implement tasks effectively in the classroom.

4.1 Task Scaffolding: This divides jobs into smaller, more doable segments and provides assistance at each level. We can give clear directions to allow students to understand and grasp the expected outcome and direct them in employing specific tasks.

4.2 Task Differentiation: It talks about differentiating tasks based on the learners' needs. Through this, we adjust tasks and accommodate varied competent levels of learners in the classroom.

4.3 Technology Integration: In the current era, mobile phones and digital gadgets are at the fingertips of everyone, which cannot be ignored or avoided. Instead, use it as a tool to promote language learning using various language applications and software to engage and, at the same time, improve ESL learners' standard of gaining language proficiency. Utilizing digital technologies and resources is a key to improving work participation and cooperation from the learners.

4.4 Positive Feedback: After the completion of the task or while an ongoing task, it is often suggested to provide positive comments in finishing the given task or assignment to enhance learning. Positive feedback proved to be a better way to get good results among the learners as it encourages them in doing the task effectively and thereby builds their language competence in writing.

TBLT Framework of Writing Components and Corresponding Task-Based Interventions

Table 2: Instructional model

S.No.	Writing Component	Functional Task-Based Intervention	How the Task is used to enhance each component of Writing
1.	Vocabulary	Pre-Task Vocabulary Exposure and Practice Tasks	Introduce and reinforce target vocabulary through context-rich input and controlled exercises before writing; reduces hesitation and enhances lexical precision.
2.	Grammar	Post-Task Focus on Grammar through Revision Tasks	After initial writing, engage learners in grammar-focused revision and editing activities using their own texts to improve accuracy without disrupting fluency during drafting.
3.	Sentence-Level Clarity	Meaning Negotiation and Peer Feedback Tasks	Use peer review and collaborative tasks during or after writing to encourage real-time reformulation and clarification, improving sentence fluency and clarity.
4.	Organization of Ideas	Pre-Task Planning and Outlining Activities	Guide students to plan and outline essays before writing, reducing cognitive load and fostering coherent, logically structured texts.
5.	Coherence and Cohesion	Post-Task Reflection and Cohesion-Focused Editing	Focus on revising texts for linking devices and discourse markers, helping students internalize cohesive writing patterns.
6.	Mechanical Accuracy	Focused Post-Task Editing Sessions	Delay mechanical corrections until after drafting, then conduct targeted spelling and punctuation exercises to enhance mechanical accuracy without interrupting writing flow.
7.	Writing Time Management	Regular Short Writing Tasks and Task Repetition	Allocate sufficient and repeated writing practice both in and outside class to build stamina, familiarity, and fluency in writing.
8.	Writing Strategies	Scaffolded Writing Tasks with Gradual Autonomy	Employ modeled writing, think-aloud protocols, guided writing, gradually

			reducing support to foster independent writing skills.
9.	Student Motivation	Writing-for-Writing Tasks with Real-Life Relevance	Design meaningful, authentic writing tasks (emails, reports) to motivate students by connecting writing skills to real-world purposes.
10.	Independent Writing Practice	Enhanced self-directed writing tasks	Essay writing with prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and reflection
11.	Overall Writing Proficiency	Simulate academic demands, Engaged peer-review sessions and Instructor feedback	Timed essay, peer review, instructor feedback, revision, self-assessment

4.6 Benefits of the Framework:

- Addresses key writing challenges identified in the study with targeted, evidence-based interventions.
- Balances fluency and accuracy by separating drafting and focused grammar/mechanical correction phases.
- Encourages autonomous learning through scaffolded tasks and repeated practice.
- Supports motivation by connecting writing tasks to real-life contexts.
- Makes efficient use of classroom time and promotes writing beyond academic settings.

This framework, based on the study's findings, combines pre-task vocabulary and planning, structured and realistic writing activities, along with post-task focused editing and reflection to systematically tackle common writing mistakes made by undergraduate students. It highlights a balanced, task-based method that improves writing skills while considering cognitive load and motivational aspects, helping students become more effective and confident writers. This approach can be used for ESL students at the tertiary level to achieve better results in writing proficiency.

V CONCLUSION

This article explores the potential of Task-based Language Teaching, focusing on the suggested phases of the task cycle, to foster writing proficiency among ESL students at the tertiary level. Previous research has identified the difficulties learners encounter in developing their writing skills. By understanding these challenges, this study proposes a framework of tasks that can be applied in tertiary classrooms. These guidelines serve as a crucial resource for language learning. Aligning pedagogical tasks with the developmental needs of learners creates an effective environment for interactive communication and improved fluency. Additionally, the case for an activity-based approach is supported by its proven ability to enhance written expression. Therefore, integrating these activities into ESL instruction is likely to result in significant improvements in students' writing performance and clarity of expression.

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