



RESEARCH PAPER

The Effect of Four Skills Integrated Approach on Students' Ability to Write an Expository Essay

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PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: February 16, 2022 Accepted: April 10, 2022 Online: April 15, 2022	The research paper investigates the impact of four skills integration approach to teach expository essay at the undergraduate level in Pakistani context. The study uses a quasi-experimental research method. Ninety students participated in this study. Four intact classes were selected to draw the sample. A language proficiency test was given to select the sections which are homogenous in terms of English Language proficiency. Two clusters were formed based on two different teaching approaches. The cluster which was taught in a traditional way was termed as control group and the cluster which received intervention, which was four skills integration, was termed as treatment group. The data run on SPSS and the result shows that treatment group scores appeared greater than the control in the post-test. This study highlights the importance of integration of reading, writing, speaking, and listening to develop students' language proficiency in general and ability to write expository essays specifically. The research also points out to other alternative research methods to draw insight into the process of learning to write essays.
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Introduction

The importance of writing skills cannot be undermined even today when we see ubiquitous use of technology in all fields including education. Foong (1999) emphasizes on the utility of learning writing for language, communication, discovery and cognitive process. English as a language spoken globally considered to be a medium of gaining and imparting knowledge and writing is one of the skills accentuated in academia for conveying philosophies. It is highly valued in educational institutions. University students are engaged in variety of writings ranging from compositions to writing research papers. They are usually required to have knowledge and linguistic competence to write on varied topics. Therefore, many of them found writing to be a tedious and grueling task. Literature in ESL unfolds numerous approaches and methods to teach and learn writing in English Language, but the need is felt to investigate the method or approach which can help students write naturally without much boredom. This research paper aims to investigate the effectiveness of four skills integration strategy or approach to develop students' ability to write an expository essay.

Literature Review

Three approaches to teaching writing have been widely discussed in the ESL literature. They are product oriented, process oriented and genre based approaches.

Researcher present varied stances about them. Critically viewing the product approach, Hedge (2005) thinks that old approaches to L2 writing principally test grammar pattern and support oral patterns. (Hedgcock 2005,p 604)

These product oriented approaches favour “controlled compositions” and avoid open ended writing activities. (Hedgcock, p. 604). Kröll notes that first language (L1) composition teaching changes its focus from product to process oriented approach in the late 1960s which was the result of numerous studies demonstrating that the text producing methods used by the writers are not essentially compatible with the models being transmitted traditionally. (Kröll 1991). Process oriented is widely accepted but it also has its drawbacks. Hedgecock (2005) pointing out one of its disadvantage states that process writing may not be well-suited in institutions with different cultural, educational and philosophical bearing. (Hedgcock,2005,p 605)

The genre approach is also valued in teaching of writing skills along with product and process. Ferris & Hedgcock (2005), Grabe (2003), Hinkel (2004), Hyland (2004), and Johns (1999) address the need for L2 students to know a variety of genres. Hyland states,

That learners are inclined to learn to write in variety of genres as it allows them to choose diversified careers, make life choices, and bear positive identities.

All above approaches are useful and have been discussed widely in the ESL literature. But they mainly focus on one skills which may sound exhausting to learners. Nation (2009) in his book ‘Teaching ESL/EFL Reading and Writing’ suggests that writing can be best learned through other skills: listening, speaking and reading. Nation’s recommendation to use other skills to teach writing is closely related to the approach which focuses on integration of four skills.

Language skill integration is a prevalent approach worldwide these days. It comprises connecting the four language skills of listening, reading, speaking, and writing with the aim to emphasize real, expressive communication. It also includes assimilating skills which support learning like grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, development along with the general aspects of culture, which is cannot be separated from language. (Oxford, David C. Lee, M. Ann Snow, Robin C. Scarcella, 1994).

Eli Hinkel points out that language skills are employed effectively when used together instead of in isolation. (Hinkel 2006: 113) His assertion makes sense as in reality we see integration of speaking and listening naturally. Widdowson (1978) proposed the integration of four language skills. He stressed that almost all language are used the discourse form and in particular social backgrounds. He observes that teaching of four skills separately probably carried out to facilitate management like divide and rule. (1978:144). He further explains that comprehension and production of language does not happen in disconnected “units” , therefore, learners need to learn both receptive and productive skills to develop spoken and written discourse.

Four skills integration is considered to be a helpful approach for language development but the need to investigate to what extent it can assist learning writing skills is felt. This research papers aims at investigating the impact of four skills integration on improving writing skills in general and its effect on learners’ ability to write specifically.

Material and Methods

The research has used pretest-posttest non-randomized control-group design as it is widely used in research pertaining to language learning. Zyzik (2011) examined the effects

of knowledge of lexis and methodological sequencing on learning of Spanish idioms using pretest-posttest non randomized control-group design.

Population

The study involves undergraduates in a Pakistani university who are studying English as a subject. The whole target population was not possible to access, therefore, accessible population of one campus of a university was chosen which was located in DHA Karachi. The university offers degrees in civil engineering, mechanical engineering, electrical, computer science and management sciences. It has around three thousand students. The students in the university come from all areas of Karachi and belong to varied backgrounds.

Sampling

Convenience sampling has been used for this study which is one of the non-probability sampling. Dörnyei considers it as most widely used type of sample in L2. This type of sampling usually involves students of researchers' own institutions. (Dörnyei, 2007). Four intact classes were selected to draw the sample. A language proficiency test was given to select sections who are homogenous in terms of their language proficiency. Two sections which showed almost the same language proficiency level were selected for the experiment. One section was termed as treatment group which means undergraduates in that cohort learned to write an expository essay by integrating the four skills whereas the other the students in other section was termed as control group. The students in this group were learned to compose an expository essay in a traditional way which resembled product oriented approach to teaching writing.

Participants

Two sections comprised of students of first semester were selected. Each section had 50 students which included both genders, males and females. The total sample involved 100 participants. Their language proficiency ranged from pre intermediate to advanced level. This means each section included students with overall pre intermediate, intermediate and advanced level language proficiency. The data of ten students were discarded as they were not regular.

Research Instruments

Pre-test

A pre-test (Appendix-A) was constructed for assessing students' essay writing ability. The pre-test was comprised of just one essay question. This was done to control effect of content itself as a variable.

Validity and Reliability of Pre-test

The pre-test for expository was prepared by a group of expert language teachers who had more than five years English teaching experience at the university level. It was then analytically examined by another cohort of English Language Teaching experts. Inter-rater reliability was used. The same test was run on both groups. A mark scheme was drafted after the consultation of senior professors. Most of them suggested it to be broad as at the university level instructors assess setting their own criteria. However, scripts were sent to two different examiner who were experienced and highly qualified in the field.

The inter-rater reliability was checked which was quite consistent. Moreover average was taken of both raters' scores.

Post test

A post-test was constructed for assessing students' expository essay writing. It was run on both groups. A mark scheme was drafted after the consultation of senior professors. Most of them suggested it to be broad as at the university level instructors assess setting their own criteria. However, scripts were sent to two different examiner who were experienced and highly qualified in the field.

The inter-rater reliability was checked which was quite consistent. Moreover average was taken of both raters' scores.

Validity and reliability of Post-test

The post-test for expository writing contained the same topic with slight modification. This was done to control the effect of content variable.

Procedure

After selecting two sections the lesson plans and contents for teaching were drawn. After discussing with the senior and expert teachers it was decided to allocate four weeks to teach writing expository essays. The topics and objectives, and one lesson plan given in (Appendix C). The treatment group was taught through all four skills with writing skills as the target in mind. Whereas the control group was taught through traditional method.

Controls

Following controls were put in use to minimize the effects of other factors

- The same teacher taught both clusters.
- Both clusters had the same topics
- The objectives for both cohorts were the same
- Teaching timings were the same but days were different.
- Students' and teacher compatibility for both groups was also matched through a discussion with them by a senior faculty member.
- Students were not told that they were participating in a research although after post-test it was revealed.
- Both groups were chosen based on the result of a language proficiency test which showed fair homogeneity.
- The control group was taught in a traditional way with no integration of four skills. That means reading, writing, listening and speaking were not integrated. However, integration of reading and writing minimally employed which was traditionally used in intact classes.
- Same time and sessions were allotted to both groups.

- Exercises and material related to writing skills was kept same to control teaching writing approach variable.
- Same mark scheme was set for both groups.

Results and Discussion

To check if both the treatment and control groups did not differ in terms of their capability to write an expository essay. The means of their pre-test scores were compared. This was done using an independent –samples t-test. Results can be seen in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1
Group Statistics on Pre Control and Experimental

Groups	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Treatment	45	6.00	2.089	.311
Control	45	5.38	1.386	.207

Table 2
Independent-Samples-Test on Pre-test Control and Treatment groups

Pre Control and Experimental	Levene's Test for Equality of variances		t-test for Equality of means			
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Equal Variances assumed	2.232	.139	1.665	88	.100	.622
Equal variances not assumed.			1.665	76.465	.100	.622

An independent t-test was run to examine the substantial gap between mean marks of pre-test of the control group with pre-test of experimental group. The p-value (sig.value) of Leven's test of equality of variances appeared to be 0.139. This directs that variances of responses of both control and experimental group are supposed to be equal. The test statistics value of independent t test is 1.665 with df=88 and its related p-value (significance value) is 0.10. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no noteworthy difference between the average marks of Pre-Test Control and Pre-Test Experimental groups. This also means that both experimental and control group possess homogeneity in their pre-test scores.

Paired samples T test of control group

The traditional teaching method was similar to product oriented approach along with some features of process approach like brainstorming which is widely used for teaching essays. To analyze its effectiveness paired samples t-test for Pre and Post-test scores of control group was run. The results can be seen in tables 3 and 4.

Table 3
Paired Samples Statistics Paired t test for control group

Groups	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre Post control	5.38	45	1.386	.207
	6.64	45	1.554	.232

Table 4
Paired Samples Test Paired t test for control group

Group	Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-Tailed)	
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower				Upper
Pair 1 Control pre - post	-1.267	.986	.147	-1.563	-.970	-8.615	44	.000

A paired samples t-test was carried out to analyze the significant difference between responses of pre and post- tests of control group. The result displays the mean difference of 1.267. The significance shown in the table is 0.000 which is smaller than 0.05 which indicates the significant effect of teaching through traditional product oriented approach.

Pre and Post Scores of Experimental Group

The experimental group was taught through four skills integration. To find out if there was a significant difference in scores pre and post experimental or treatment group, paired samples t-test was carried out. The results are summed up in tables 5 and 6.

Table 5
Paired Samples Statistics Paired t test for Experimental Group

Pair 1	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre (experimental)	6.07	45	1.935	.289
Post (experimental)	9.11	45	1.695	.253

Table 6
Paired Samples Test

Group	Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower				Upper
Pair 1 Experimental Pre - Post	-3.044	1.381	.206	-3.459	-2.630	-14.789	44	.000

A paired samples t-test was carried out to analyze the significant difference between responses of pre and post- tests of experimental group. The result displays the mean difference of 3.044. The significance shown in the table is 0.000 which is smaller than 0.05 which indicates highly significant effect of teaching through integrating four skills.

Post Control and Experimental Groups

To analyze if four skills integrated approach is better than the traditional approach to teach expository essay, t-test for post-tests scores of experimental and control groups was run. The results can be seen in tables 7 and 8.

Table 7
Group Statistics Post control and Experimental Group

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Post control and Post	45	6.64	1.554	.232
Experimental Group	45	9.11	1.695	.253

Table 8
Independent Samples Test

Groups	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.339	.562	-7.194	88	.000	-2.467	.343	-3.148	-1.785
Equal variances not assumed			-7.194	87.346	.000	-2.467	.343	-3.148	-1.785

An independent **t-test** was carried out to analyze the important difference between responses of Post-test of the treatment group with Post-test of control group. The p-value (sig.value) of Leven's test of equality of variances appeared to be 0.562. This directs that variances of responses of both post scores of both groups are supposed to be equal. The test statistics value of independent t-test is 2.467 with df=88 and its related p-value (significance value) is .000. Therefore, it can be stated that there is a significant difference between Post-tests scores of both groups. The results depict that teaching an expository writing by integrating all four skills is more effective than the traditional approach.

The result indicates substantial difference in the average scores of pre-test and post-test of the treatment group (M= - 3.044; T= -14.789 ; SD = 1.381; P=0.000<0.05) This shows that teaching through integration of four skills (reading, listening, writing and speaking) is an effective approach or strategy to teach an expository essay. The results of the independent t-test carried out on post -tests of experimental and control groups also endorses the effectiveness of skill integration approach. The average score of post-test of treatment group is 9.11 whereas the mean score of post-test of control group is 6.64. The difference between the mean scores of post-tests experimental and control groups is -2.467. This depicts that experimental group has performed better than the control group in terms of class average. Therefore, it can be stated that teaching expository writing by integrating four skills is a better than the traditional approach. Although the pre-and post-tests scores of control group has a significant difference which shows some progression in students' ability to write the expository essay, the difference in means of pre and post-tests of the treatment group is greater than the difference in means of pre and post-tests of the control group. This means the approach used in experimental or treatment group, which is teaching writing by integrating four skills, is more effective than the traditional approach.

Conclusion

The results clearly show more progression in students' scores in the experimental group who were taught integrating reading, writing, listening and speaking as compared to students' scores in the control group who studied in a traditional way. This means students tend to write better expository essays when they are engaged in writing, reading, listening, and speaking using a particular content. However, more insightful studies can be carried out using content analysis and qualitative method.

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