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Teachers' Written Feedback Practices in Promoting Academic Writing Skills of ESL Learners

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Abstract: Higher education students, need to develop strong academic writing skills to be successful. Therefore, improving one's command of the English language, and specifically, one's command of academic writing at the undergraduate level, is essential for educational excellence. The most significant difficulty, on the other hand, is related to untrained instructors and inefficient pedagogical practices as a major cause of poor academic writing skills. As a result, this study was undertaken using a qualitative technique to investigate students' perceptions about the written feedback practices their teachers employ to improve academic writing skills among them. The population of this study consisted of all the enrolled students in the universities in the province of Sindh. By using a convenient sampling technique, 30 students were recruited to collect the data from conducting interviews. The findings indicated various helpful written feedback practices teachers utilize to develop academic writing skills in university students, which include grammatical correction, constructive suggestions, highlighting errors, and providing corrections. Based on these data, it is vital for concerned authorities to organize workshops or training programs to enhance teachers' capabilities to employ various kinds of written feedback techniques to promote academic writing skills among undergraduate students.

Introduction

Because of the enormous number of people who were born speaking it, English is currently the most common language used all across the world. In addition to that, the number of people who are able to speak this language is just a third of the total. In this regard, English has the ability to bridge cultural, academic, social, or political differences, create mutual respect and understanding, and be the language that has the most users in the world because it is the most commonly used language in the world (Bice & Kroll, 2019).

When it comes to information and communication technologies, English serves as more than just a means of communication; in fact, more than half of the websites that are visited the most are written in English. Because more than a billion people use the internet, students have access to a wide selection of learning groups and tools that can assist them in improving their English language skills (Lee, 2018; Abdelrady & Akram, 2022). In addition, English not only serves as Pakistan's official language, but it is also a need for many high-salaried occupations in the country. In addition, Pakistan's official language is Urdu. This is owing

to the fact that the majority of employment firms use an understanding of the English language as a qualification criterion (Akram et al., 2020; Paulsrud et al., 2021). In the same vein, it has turned into a language that is taught in higher education due to the fact that the majority of information that is available today can only be found in the English language, which has increased the importance of learning English (Rahman & Singh, 2020). At the same time, the most significant difficulties that have been experienced are butted up against the level of English language proficiency, which includes incompetent teachers and inadequate amount of resources (Akram, 2020), students' academic and social discrepancies (Haidar & Fang, 2019), foreign language speaking anxiety (Akram et al., 2019), a scarcity of possibilities for teachers' professional progress (Akram & Yang, 2021), and students' low socioeconomic backgrounds (Haidar, 2019),

In this regard, improving students' English language skills, particularly in the area of academic writing at the higher education level, is considered to be a precondition for advancing and growing scholarly and professional research areas both inside and outside of educational institutions. This is the case whether the research is being conducted inside or outside of educational institutions. On the other hand, it's been shown from previously conducted studies that typical English language programs fall short of the academic writing requirements of universities (Sadia et al., 2021). This is something that is required of students who wish to pursue degrees in higher education. This is because the majority of undergraduate students in Pakistan do not display any capacity to write, particularly academic writing skills which are essential to encourage scientific and professional research activities. Thus, the ability of rookie writers to engage in critical discourse and to think critically about the norms of the field can be improved by using a critical progressive method to learn academic English. Additionally, students in

higher education are required to write critically; accordingly, their academic writing capacities should be improved with the help of linking writing to a particular subject, in order for them to be able to think strategically about what they write (Bloor & Bloor, 2013). Regardless of whether or not students are proficient in the components of writing, the student's overall academic success has a significant correlation with their command of all four primary aspects of language, which are reading, writing, grammar, and vocabulary. This is true even if the students are proficient in the components of writing (Gan et al., 2021).

In addition, students who are enrolled in higher levels of education are obligated to write academic writing such as publications, reports, and synopses, and finally a comprehensive research thesis. This requirement is in place to ensure that students are able to demonstrate their mastery of the material. Thereby, this is a prerequisite that has to be satisfied in order to be accepted into and graduate from bachelor's degree programs as well as other degree programs at a higher level in nearly any area of research. Besides, Academic writing tasks at higher education levels need critical literacy to synthesize data and prove a theory. But the majority of the students are struggling because their teachers have high expectations for them and believe that academic writing skills were supposed to be taught to them by their language instructors in previous sessions and mastered by those instructors. As a result, the majority of our students are in a state of confusion (Khan et al., 2016) and they don't receive proper feedback from their teachers (Ghazal et al., 2014). On the other hand, Mumtaz (2021) underlined the necessity for University of Education, Lahore students to increase their vocabulary through enough practice in order to convey themselves more effectively to the readers. According to Ghazal et al. (2014), one of the primary factors contributing to the difficulty of academic writing is a lack of appropriate feedback from their instructors. While Fareed et al. (2016) identified

untrained instructors and inefficient pedagogical practices as a major causes of poor academic writing skills.

This deplorable state drives the students of English as a second language to psychological chaos. In light of this, the purpose of the study was to investigate the student's perceptions regarding written feedback practices employed by their teachers to enhance academic writing skills among them. In this regard, the current study is led by the subsequent purposes:

1. To investigate students' perceptions about the written feedback practices their teachers employ to enhance academic writing skills among them.
2. To provide recommendations for alternative approaches to enable undergraduate students to resolve their academic writing challenges.

Significance of the Study

Earlier research has examined the duties of educators as well as the appropriate ways for teachers to respond to the writing of students. In order to ensure that feedback is successful in assisting students in developing their writing skills, numerous theories have been developed, and these ideas are based on the outcomes of past studies. The roles of reader, coach, facilitator, and guide are some of the responsibilities that are recommended for instructors to take on. It is also recommended that instructors prioritize their remarks and offer a healthy mix of both praise and constructive criticism throughout their lessons. Therefore, with this in mind, the purpose of this research is to improve the teaching abilities of ESL teachers and to strengthen the written feedback methods they use in order to encourage proficient academic writing skills in students.

Student reactions and perceptions of teacher feedback have also been studied. However, most investigations were conducted in the West and Pakistani ESL written teacher feedback research

is scarce. Most of the research is on L1 or L2-based L1. Thus, it is unclear if local ESL students see instructor feedback the same as in the previous study. It is also unclear how students will use teacher criticism in their rewrites and how beneficial they think it is in improving their ESL writing.

Hence why, it is anticipated that the insights that were gleaned from this study will be able to help ESL teachers and students, particularly those who are enrolled in higher education institutions, to enhance the instruction and acquisition of ESL writing.

Methodology

In order to explore students' perceptions regarding how their teachers perform written feedback practices to enhance academic writing skills among them, the researcher followed a qualitative approach and collected the data through interviews with the students. The mode of interviews was semi-structured in nature, (i.e., a blend of open-ended and closed-ended questions) which were guided by probing questions, which allow the researcher to gain in-depth information (Tenny et al., 2017). Thereby, considered the most appropriate approach to explore written feedback practices employed by teachers to cultivate academic writing skills among students in detail. The interview questions were designed by following the questions developed by Tom et al. (2013) and prior literature to investigate which written feedback practices teachers employ to cultivate academic writing skills among students.

Population and Sampling

The population of this study consisted of all the students enrolled in the universities in the province of Sindh. By using a convenient sampling technique, 30 students were recruited to collect the data from them. Subsequently, all of the interviews were conducted by the researcher via direct face-to-face

communication, which lasted for 20–35 min, after getting permission from the participants. In addition, to keep the identities of the participants confidential, their names were changed to pseudo-names.

Trustworthiness of the Instrument

In qualitative research, the term "trustworthiness" refers to the degree to which the research questions are understood in a timely and sufficient manner. In order for an instrument to be useful, it needed to possess both validity and dependability. In the research conducted by Creswell (2014), it was found that a valid instrument was one that accurately measured the user's purpose. According to Patton (2015), inter-coder dependability is an essential element of open-ended questions in the study. In this regard, three peers and two specialists in their respective fields were selected to evaluate the coding method used in the study as well as the findings drawn from it. The level of consensus among independent researchers and subject matter experts was greater than 80%, which indicates a level of reliability that is adequate because it is lower than the cutoff figure established by Creswell and Creswell (2017). Following this, two interviews were carried out as a core component of the pilot scheme; however, those interviews were not incorporated into the final interviews. Following the completion of an investigation into the dependability of the qualitative interview technique, participants in the qualitative data collection were handed a consent letter in addition to the interview protocol.

Data Analysis

Each of the interviews using a semi-structured format was recorded and then transcribed. The researcher listened to each recorded interview and analyzed it to determine how well it fell into the categories of students' interviews. The researcher used data triangulation to produce a rich, thorough picture of students' perceptions of

the written feedback approaches and tactics their teachers use to promote academic writing skills among them. The qualitative analysis included the creation, processing, and categorization of transcriptions as part of the methodology. It required locating the data, defining it more precisely, categorizing it, and extending it (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). We looked at themes from interviews as well as themes from literature. After the coding was complete, a detailed description was provided for each theme. The key issues and maybe a variety of discoveries were disclosed when the primary themes were clarified, grouped, and merged. At long last, a story provided an explanation for developing ideas (Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

Results and Discussion

The participants' comments, guided by the study's research objectives, indicated various helpful feedback approaches and tactics their teachers utilize to develop academic writing skills among, which are outlined below.

The method 'written feedback' technique given by the teachers was the one that was found very effective according to the students. It is the best practice, according to the students, to provide them opportunities to recognize their errors and mistakes and avoid repeating them in the next writing tasks. According to Hosseiny (2014), giving constructive feedback on ESL student writing projects helps them receive self-correction on the one hand while enhancing their writing skills on the other.

Grammatical Correction

Grammar consideration is the most crucial aspect of academic writing in the English language. Therefore, students struggle the most in this area while writing essays or comprehensions. In this regard, the grammatical correction method of highlighting errors students' mistakes was indicated as the most effective technique by the

students. Regarding grammatical correction a student, KI mentioned:

"I find it most helpful when teachers point out errors in my grammar."

Regarding sentence writing, a student, HG mentioned:

"I think grammatical error feedback improves my writing the most since it helps me produce the right phrases with the right meaning."

The findings disclosed by Algburi and Razali (2022), also identified that students' biggest concern was related to the grammatical challenges they face while writing, thereby grammatical corrections were perceived as the most beneficial feedback technique by the students. It is therefore crucial for teachers to provide pupils with feedback that both celebrate their abilities and provides critical criticism on grammatical errors. This will assist pupils in avoiding making the same mistakes in their following assignments.

Constructive Suggestions

In addition, some students perceived that feedback in the form of suggestions benefited them the most. A student, SU mentioned:

"When teachers point out my errors and offer suggestions, I find that to be the most beneficial since it enables me to repair my own flaws while also offering me new ideas and new methods to rework the essays."

The findings disclosed by Tom et al. (2013), also identified that feedback in the form of suggestions was perceived as most beneficial by the students. It is therefore vital for teachers to give students feedback that both compliments their strengths and offers critical comments that draw attention to their flaws. This will help students avoid making the same errors in their subsequent work.

Highlighting Errors and Providing Corrections

In addition, the method of highlighting errors and providing the right answers for students' mistakes was indicated as another most effective technique by the students. The mistake restoration may include making changes to the punctuation, vocabulary, and verb usage in the sentences. Wirantaka (2019) also determined that students favored receiving feedback in the form of error correction because the teacher immediately provided the appropriate form of writing. However, teachers are not encouraged to provide too much feedback through error correction because, according to Amara (2015), error correction is harmful to students because it allows students to know the correct form without allowing them to participate in the learning process, making them dependent on the teacher. In this regard, a student, TF mentioned:

"When teachers highlight my faults and give me the correct answers, I find that to be the most beneficial feedback they can deliver."

Recommendations and Conclusion

The findings indicated various helpful written feedback techniques that teachers employ to enhance academic writing skills among them, which include grammatical correction, constructive suggestions, highlighting errors, and providing corrections. However, faculty members make an effort to play a supporting role by providing constructive criticism to students in an effort to develop the student's academic writing skills. Still, in order for the faculty members to be successful in achieving their goals, the university must provide assistance. In this regard, in light of the findings of the current study, a few of the following suggestions may be considered to improve the academic writing skills of undergraduate students in Pakistan:

1. In the classroom, it's important for teachers to provide constructive criticism on both grammar and content.

2. The outcomes and conclusions of this study imply that instructors ought to give greater consideration to the remarks or suggestions that they write on their students' papers before actually doing so.
3. In order for pupils to view constructive criticism as a source of inspiration, teachers should provide positive comments even when students get something wrong.
4. Universities should organize workshops or training programs to enhance teachers' capabilities to employ various kinds of feedback techniques to promote academic writing skills among undergraduate students.
5. a teacher should make sure that whatever feedback is given are understandable and useful for the improvement of the student's writing.

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