



TEACHING ANALYTICAL AND CREATIVE ESSAY WRITING TO PROFESSIONAL UG CLASS LEARNERS: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT



Writing skills, though, considered as an integral part of communication skills are sidelined by many learners. It is essential for the professional undergraduate learners to submit original and analytical Statement of Purposes for pursuing higher studies abroad.

For the purpose of the present case study on teaching analytical and creative essay writing skills, two different classes with a total strength of 80 learners are considered. Three different and interesting levels are introduced to the learners to improve their expressive, analytical, persuasive skills and their ability to infer the concept. In the first level, Creative songs in unknown languages and famous speeches by eminent personalities are played. In the second level, pictures of paintings and still photographs are shown. In the third level various topics, popular proverbs and sayings are given. The learners are instructed to write essays of about 400 words based on the given topic, proverb or saying.

Two separate studies are conducted in which different tasks are chosen to inculcate analytical and creative skills in the learners. The findings are used to deduce whether these methods can enhance the creativity and higher order thinking skills in the learners.

Keywords: *Writing Skills, Analytical Skills, Creative Skills*

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INTRODUCTION

Writing skills are an integral part of communication skills. Securing a seat for higher studies in a prestigious University, retaining a job in today's competitive world or trying for promotion in the work force call for, not only expertise in the subject but also, excellent communication skills. Writing skills cannot be developed overnight. Writing skills require knowledge in the subject, ability to judge, zeal to share and skill to organize in the required format.

Essay writing helps learners to develop creative writing on specific topics expressing ideas or opinions in a clear manner. In general, expository (explains an idea, an issue or a short theme), persuasive (convinces the readers to adopt the writer's viewpoints), analytical (analyzes and interprets a book, an event, play or any work of art) and argumentative (attempts to prove the veracity from the writer's viewpoint) essays are taught in a classroom.

To some extent these skills can be enhanced at the undergraduate level. It is a fact that there are a lot of restrictions in conducting today's classroom where the curriculum of the course and time are the major hurdles. Yet, the facilitators should be able to identify the needs of the learners in the competitive world they would be entering in the near future and be willing to spend some time to design classes in an innovative way to address the needs of the students. Once the learners grasp the idea that the facilitators are putting in some efforts to address their future requirements they would be more than willing to take up the challenge. The need for the study and the expected outcomes should be discussed with the learners before conducting the study. The assessment criteria for the final review when the learners are tested to know the outcomes should also be discussed with them.

Communication skills need to be instilled in the learners at undergraduate level itself as the demand for these skills is pressing in the immediate future. It is up to the facilitators to spread various activities throughout their course period in such a way that maximum number of opportunities are

offered to the learners to work on and improve their communication skills especially written skills.

OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this study is not only to enhance the writing skills of the learners but also to ignite creativity in them so that they would lean towards innovative ideas to address tasks that they find mundane. Thus the studies carried out were designed so as to help them enhance their artistic bent and communicative skills.

METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of the present case study two different classes with a total strength of 80 learners were considered. Three different and interesting levels were introduced to the learners to improve their expressive skills, analytical skills, persuasive skills and their ability to infer the concepts or ideas.

Two separate studies were conducted in which different tasks are chosen to inculcate analytical and creative skills in the learners. Out of 80 learners only 65 learners participated in both the studies. 11 learners were absent for one of the two studies and 4 learners were absent for both the studies.

STUDY 1

For study 1, "Alliyambal Kadavilannarakku Vellam" a Malayalam song from the movie, "Loud Speaker" was played. It is a soothing song sung melodiously by K. J. Yesudas, a renowned singer. None of the students in these two classes know Malayalam language. As the song is in an unknown language, it is impossible for the learners to comprehend the meaning. But the song was picturized in such a way that it does not require the knowledge of language to appreciate it. The many visuals present in the song evoke nostalgia in the viewers' minds. Also the visuals have the power to make the audience interpret without the benefit of knowledge. Before playing the song, the learners were given clear instructions regarding the points to focus on like the symbolism, music, creativity, connecting to their prior knowledge, any other relevant issues or current affairs. The expected outcomes like interpretative skills, keen observation, and ability to relate to known facts were discussed before playing the song. The learners were



instructed to write an analytical essay based on the song. They were given clear instructions on how to analyse the song and discuss the aesthetics in the essay.

The song is available at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ubsCuvJripk>,

16th November, 2014

In the second level, the picture of a painting, "Icarus Falling" considered to be by Pieter Bruegel was shown to the class. The background story was explained in detail and the learners were instructed to interpret the artist's depiction of Icarus' Fall. The learners were instructed to write an analytical essay based on the artist's interpretation of the incident.



Source:

https://www.google.co.in/?gws_rd=ssl#q=bruegels+icarus+painting

In the third level, the learners were given two sayings "Pen is mightier than the sword" and "Penny wise and pound foolish" and are instructed to write expository/persuasive/argumentative essays in about 400 words each. The concept is to observe the development of writing skills, depending on visuals.

STUDY 2

In the second instance, Malala Yousufzai's speech at the United Nations on 12th July, 2013, was chosen to be played in the class. The speech was presented in mute so the learners are forced to pay attention to the kinesics of nonverbal communication, ambience and other physical details that substantiate the learners' presumptions. The author feels that using an unknown language or showing the speech in mute is essential to elicit the power of observation in the learners. The learners are aware of Malala Yousufzai's predicaments and

her demonstration of strength in times of adversity. The desired outcome is to build up the ability to understand the significance of the situation and write creatively about it using prior knowledge.

The speech is available at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oRKINJfsZiM>,

15th December, 2014

In the second level, a picture of a village fair was shown. The learners were instructed to write an expository essay based on the picture. The desired outcome is to develop the ability to describe and narrate in the learners.



Source: http://www.balifoods.com/?page_id=7

In the third level two topics were given to the learners: 1. Both parents and teachers are responsible for the development of a child, 2. Give your views on mandatory retirement age for politicians in India. The learners were instructed to write argumentative/persuasive essays of about 400 words based on these topics.

FINDINGS

The concept behind the study is to take the learners gradually to the required level using visual aids and finally help them to utilize their imaginative power without any external help in writing creative essays.

It was observed in study 1 that from the time the study was introduced, the learners found the study very innovative. They were allowed to discuss for about ten minutes among themselves and through these discussions they were able to come up with relevant material for the essay. It was amazing to note the inferences they drew in spite of not knowing the language of the song. In fact all the



persons involved in the making of the song should be applauded for their creativity.

Coming to the picture, the class was bewildered and needed a few hints to come to an understanding. Once the key was given to them they had little problem in writing the essay.

The learners found the sayings a bit problematic as they had no visuals to follow. They had to depend on their prior knowledge and resources to write the essay.

In the second study, the learners knew the significance of Malala Yousufzai's speech and understood that she was speaking in front of UN as they could recognize the UN General Secretary, Ban Ki-moon.

They paid attention to the visual and the body language of the speaker and the audience to support their inferences. They used their imagination to guess the details of the speech and majorly succeeded.

In the second level, where the picture of a village fair was shown, the learners could connect with the picture as there is a fair scheduled once in a week in the village near the college. This fact actually helped them to write beyond just the description of the fair. Some of the learners wrote about traffic jams and hygiene connected with the village fairs.

By the time they reached the third level, the learners were able to creatively focus and utilize their prior knowledge in the required manner to present critical writing material.

DISCUSSION

It is to be noted that all the learners were not involved at the same level. About six learners could not write in spite of several hints. These learners were unable to write creatively on the sayings or given topics as well. But they did meet after the class and definitely showed interest to learn. Learners with good writing skills showed a lot of interest in writing tasks and developed fine creative writing skills.

An interesting secondary development was also observed. One learner came forward and shared his poetry in which he was very much interested in. The study brought out his latent talent in writing short verses and he was happy to share it with the

class which he had never done before. In some professional classes, it was observed that some artistic students try to hide their creative writing skills for fear of being ragged by their peers. Dealing with creative writing within a classroom setting and given constraints in the class literally opened new vistas for the learners who were oriented towards creative writing.

Feedback was taken from the students after the study was over. Learners admitted that this study helped them to observe details better and connect it to their prior knowledge. They also stated that this study helped them focus on current affairs and general topics which they have not done before. It was observed that the learners understood that life exists beyond technology and it is imperative to deal with that. The Malayalam song, "Alliyambal Kadavil" in the first study and Malala Yousufzai's speech made them think of the issues which were never discussed in the classroom due to time and curriculum constraints. Many issues were discussed after the essays were turned in due to the learners' inputs based on the visuals and their prior knowledge. The author is content that all this was achieved within the time slot given in the lesson plan to teach essay writing.

For this particular study popular novels and movies can also be included. The learners should come prepared after reading the novel or watching the movie as it is not possible to do this in the classroom. The facilitator should take care to choose the movies and novels so that they can be directed towards the required goals. The expected outcomes should be stated well before so that the study is focused and oriented towards the target.

CONCLUSION

Of course, the author understands that it is not totally accurate to generalize the findings of the study. Yet it can be said that the study led to the conclusion that a major segment of the 80 students belonging to the two classes could achieve the required levels. It is true that every classroom setting is different from the other. What may work for one classroom may not work for another classroom. Also the requirements of the classroom may differ. It depends on the facilitator's passion for teaching to



design the study program to address the required needs of the class.

Generally, professional undergraduate learners are more inclined towards Sciences than Humanities. But some learners are equally interested in both. Based on the study it can be deduced that these methods can enhance the creativity in the learners. Teachers/facilitators of present day classrooms have to innovate teaching methodologies to generate interest in the learners. No doubt, there are many constraints to teach in today's classrooms, but with a little ingenuity a lot of issues can be addressed. Using the given curriculum one can develop interest and bring out the dormant skills to the fore.

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