



Teaching writing to Students of English as a foreign language: The Challenges Faced by Teachers

Zanyar Nathir Ghafar^{a*}

^aESP Department, National Institute of Technology, Sulaimaniyah, Kurdistan Region, Iraq

*Corresponding author: zanyareng92@gmail.com

Abstract

Teaching writing to students who need a more strong command of the English language presents a unique set of challenges for their instructors. People who are not native English speakers may find it challenging to enhance their writing talents due to language barriers, cultural differences, and a lack of knowledge of writing standards. This may make it difficult for students to improve their writing abilities. It is within one's power to succeed despite these challenges. Despite this, it is possible to do this successfully with enough preparation, well-targeted teaching strategies, and a friendly and welcoming atmosphere for learning. This article will analyze the challenges teachers face when teaching writing to students whose first language is not English and will present actionable suggestions to enhance these students' educational experiences. The article will also discuss the problems teachers face when teaching writing to students whose first language is not English

Keywords: problem-solving, higher education, writing skill, teachers, students

Acknowledgments: Thanks to all parties who have supported the implementation of this research. I hope this research can be useful.

For citation:

Ghafar, Z., N. (2023). Teaching writing to Students of English as a foreign language: The Challenges Faced by Teachers. *Journal of Digital Learning and Distance Education*, 2(2), 483-490. <https://doi.org/10.56778/jdlde.v2i1.123>.

Introduction

Instruction in writing for individuals who are not native speakers of English may be challenging for people who are not native English speakers to communicate effectively in writing because they have a poor grasp of syntax, vocabulary, and the structure of sentences. These challenges are sometimes referred to as linguistic obstacles. It is possible that those who do not

speaking English as their first language have access to a smaller vocabulary than those who do. As a consequence of this, some people may have difficulty effectively articulating their thoughts in writing, which may cause their writing to be fragmented and ambiguous (Cumming, 2001). Conventions of the English language, such as word order, subject-verb agreement, and verb tenses, are sometimes complicated for those who still need to learn English as their first language. The consistency and understandability of their work may be improved due to these grammatical faults. Their inability to convey their views properly may also be hindered by their lack of familiarity with slang terms and colloquial expressions. Non-native English speakers may need help constructing phrases that accurately reflect the message they are trying to convey.

They need help putting together complicated sentences, making the right connections, and keeping the flow of thinking consistent. Because of this, their writing could come out as coherent and consistent as a result. The short vocabulary, sentence structure, and syntactic skills of non-native English speakers may have a significant unfavorable influence on their writing abilities. This impact may be strong enough to prevent them from becoming proficient writers. Explaining and making complex concepts or arguments obvious may be difficult for them. Readers should help understanding their writing because it needs more truth and clarity, resulting in a twisting of the intended message. As a direct result, the quality of their writing was incapable of meeting the standards of professional or educational discourse.

The following techniques may be used to help decrease the impact of these challenges and improve the writing abilities of individuals whose first language is not English: The students' instructors might give them specific lessons as well as practice exercises in order to assist the students in expanding their vocabularies. Word families, collocations, and idiomatic phrases are all topics that might be covered using this kind of instruction. Students have a better chance of expanding their lexical repertoire if they are exposed to many reading opportunities and are assigned vocabulary-building assignments.

Teachers should give specific grammar education to target distinct areas of difficulty in their students' language acquisition. This may include providing many opportunities for practice, specifying grammatical standards, and providing insightful feedback. According to research by Kitchener and Knoch (2010), getting students involved in activities that are both relevant and rich in context may help them better absorb grammatical principles. Students should get explicit coaching and modeling to assist them in writing complete sentences, and they should also practice the structure of sentences. In order to assist students in enhancing the coherence of their writing, instructors may provide sentence-level tasks that concentrate on the usage of complicated phrases, exercises that combine sentences, and the use of cohesive techniques.

Methodical Approach to the Writing Process A non-native English speaker's ability to arrange their thoughts and concepts might be improved by taking a systematic approach to the writing process. According to Devi Bommanaboinav and Guduru (2021), teachers may lead students via pre-writing exercises like brainstorming and outlining in order to assist them in effectively structuring their work. Students have the opportunity to strengthen their writing as well as their language abilities if they are given feedback throughout the whole writing process. This includes the phases of revision and editing. Grammar reference books, dictionaries, and online language-learning resources are a few examples of language assistance materials that instructors may provide. Students may use these resources as a roadmap to help them independently develop and correct their language skills. By overcoming these language barriers with targeted instruction and many opportunities for practice and feedback, non-native English speakers may gradually enhance their lexicon, grammar, and sentence structure skills, raising their writing competence (Ferris, 2003).

Cultural variations have a significant impact on the writing abilities of non-native

English speakers. These variances impact an individual's capacity to write in English and cover a variety of subjects, including writing etiquette, rhetorical tactics, and idea organization. Conventions for writing: Each culture has its rules for formatting, sentence construction, paragraph organization, and capitalization. Language and culture may have substantial differences in the rules. Since they are used to different writing traditions in their native tongues, It could be difficult for non-native English speakers to adjust to the demands of English writing for educational purposes. They could want assistance to follow the unique conventions and standards of English writing, which would lead to misunderstanding and make it challenging to produce high-quality work.

There are many ways to communicate and express ideas in writing. There are also many distinct types of rhetorical styles. These cultural differences may have an effect on the manner in which ideas are conveyed, reinforced, and developed via written communication. Given that they may be more accustomed to other compelling customs, non-native English speakers may require assistance in acquiring the appropriate convincing method for academic English writing. This is because they speak English as a second language. This may make it hard for them to express their opinions and ideas in English in a plain and convincing manner. This may also have an influence on the cohesiveness and structure of their work. Different cultures also have different ways of organizing their ideas. It's possible that different cultures put varying amounts of importance on how information is organized and how arguments are formulated. For those who do not speak English as their first language, becoming used to the logical and linear structuring of ideas typical of academic writing in English may be difficult. They need help providing proof, being consistent, and keeping their thinking constant, all of which will lead to lower-quality work.

Methodology

This article will also discuss the problems teachers face when teaching writing to students whose first language is not English.

Results

Strategies That May Be Employed in Order to Address the Problems That Are Caused by Variations in Culture

Educators should work to increase students' cultural sensitivity and comprehension in the classroom setting. In order to do this, it is necessary to respect and acknowledge the children's diverse writing styles and cultural backgrounds. Teachers may help students who are not native English speakers understand the requirements of academic writing in English while still respecting the students' cultural heritage if they compare and analyze the various cultural standards for writing across different cultures. The specific argumentative and creative patterns anticipated in academic English writing should be taught to students clearly and plainly by their professors. This may need reasoning and proof, not to mention the significance of logical coherence. Suppose non-native English speakers were provided with samples and models of well-written English compositions. In that case, it is a simplifier for them to comprehend and replicate the required writing style.

Activities encouraging collaborative learning, such as peer reviews and group discussions, may benefit those whose first language is not English. Students can share their cultural perspectives on writing and learn from one another if they participate in these activities. Peer critique from individuals coming from a variety of cultural backgrounds has the potential to assist non-native English speakers in enhancing their jobs as well as give fascinating insights.

Those who are not native speakers of English may benefit from establishing writing centers or providing writing assistance services. Students experiencing difficulty satisfying the standards for academic English writing may get individualized instruction and help from writing centers. These centers are available to students. In addition to exploring the effects of culture on writing, teachers of writing often provide instruction on organizational and structural principles as well as appropriate language use.

Teachers may be able to assist students who are not native English speakers in adapting to the requirements of academic writing in English by encouraging collaborative learning, providing teaching that is targeted, cultivating an appreciation of cultural differences, and providing writing support services. This strategy not only helps students learn the abilities required producing exceptional writing in the English language, but it also encourages the development of diverse cultural perspectives. The inadequate exposure to and proficiency in writing, particularly in an academic setting, that non-native English speakers have is referred to as having a "lack of writing experience." It is described using the phrase "lack of writing experience." It is possible that they need to be taught to write in their mother tongue in their school system or that the writing they produce adheres to different standards and patterns. It is challenging for people who are not native English speakers to comprehend the organization, coherence, and dynamics of written English since they are unable to draw on their own previous experiences for guidance.

People who are not native English-speaking students typically attended institutions where writing was not highly valued or thoroughly taught. If they haven't experienced writing in their native language, their understanding of the writing process and the norms of written communication may be weak. This might be because they have yet to have much opportunity to practice writing. Different languages and educational systems have their own writing norms, conventions, and expectations. People who are not native English speakers may be accustomed to writing in a format or style distinct from English. They may need to be made aware of the particular requirements of academic writing in English, such as the styles of citations, the structure of paragraphs, or the many sorts of essays. Their lack of familiarity with academic writing in English may hinder their capacity to generate written work that is understandable and well-organized.

When it comes to academic writing in English, there is often a fixed format followed for presenting ideas and arguments. Because they have less experience with academic writing than native English speakers, those who speak English as a second language may find it challenging to grasp and apply these requirements for structural coherence and coherence. Their writing was more logical and better organized because they had difficulties organizing their thoughts and maintaining a continuous flow of ideas. This may be the case because of the challenges they face. To write well in English, one must also have a firm grasp of the language's syntax, punctuation, vocabulary, and spelling. Understanding and using English writing styles may be difficult for those whose first language is not English. They may employ inappropriate word choice, syntax, sentence structure, spelling and grammar, or punctuation, which would make their written message more difficult to understand and lessen its overall effect.

Tips for Discussing Your Previous Writing Experience

Compositional structure, mechanics, and organization are three aspects of English writing that instructors must provide students with specialized instruction on. For the students to achieve this objective, they will probably need guidance about the organization of essays, the composition of paragraphs, the formulation of thesis statements, and the use of citations. By adhering to clear directions and studying examples, non-native English speakers may learn the standards and practices of writing for academic purposes in English. This is achievable if the

instructions and examples are clear enough. Providing non-native English speakers with literary works as models of excellent English writing can assist them in learning the organization, coherence, and style of academic writing. Students have a higher chance of understanding what is required and acquiring the requisite writing abilities if they analyze and converse about sample texts.

Activities that help reduce the writing process down into more manageable phases are beneficial for those whose first language is not English. Students may be assigned scaffolded writing assignments by their professors, concentrating on writing abilities such as sentence construction, paragraph development, or citation styles. These writing activities are designed to help students improve their writing skills. According to Matsuda and Silva (2005), one way to help students progress in developing their writing abilities is to gradually increase the degree of difficulty of the writing projects they complete while also offering continual feedback and support. Non-native English speakers who take part in creative writing classes and evaluation activities may get comments on their writing from the teacher and their peers. Because of this collaborative teaching method, students can enhance their writing abilities while simultaneously learning in an atmosphere that encourages them to do so. The criticism students provide for one another may be very helpful since it exposes them to different ways of writing and points of view.

It is helpful to provide students who are not native English speakers with individual writing tasks and projects so that they may practice the skills they have recently learned in various settings. Students can develop confidence and autonomy in their writing talents when they get constructive comments and direction for independent writing. Non-native English speakers can overcome their lack of writing experience and progressively improve their writing abilities in academic English by participating in writing workshops, receiving explicit instruction, reading model texts, receiving supervised practice, and having chances to write independently. They may acquire the competence necessary to effectively communicate their thoughts in writing with sufficient practice and direction. It is necessary for non-native English speakers who wish to enhance their writing talents to have the drive and the confidence to do so; otherwise, they won't be able to develop their writing skills. Writing in a language that is not your mother tongue might provide a number of difficulties for the writer, every one of which has the potential to deplete your energy and shake your self-confidence. It is common for people who are not native English speakers to be nervous about making errors while writing in the language. They are free to worry about errors in syntax, selection of words, or the structure of their sentences. It may be difficult for them to write freely or express their thoughts because they are anxious about making mistakes in what they have written. According to Hyland (2003), having a lengthy dread of being poorly perceived may lead to feelings of self-doubt and an abundance of trust regarding one's writing abilities.

Those who do not speak English as their first language may have anxiety around the possibility that their peers, teachers, or anybody else may evaluate their writing or language abilities. Because of their fear of being mocked or criticized, some people may experience feelings of vulnerability and be unwilling to share their work. Due to this limitation, people may be unable to improve their writing skills because they cannot communicate their thoughts fully or are unwilling to take chances. Absence of a Learning Environment That Encourages Participants: It is essential to have a supportive learning environment to cultivate both the drive to write and the confidence to do so. Not native English speakers can feel demoralized or underappreciated if they are not provided with encouragement, constructive criticism, or a secure environment where they can express themselves. The absence of an encouraging learning environment might make their fear of producing errors and lack of motivation to improve their writing skills even further.

Managing Self-Drive and Inspiration

In order to foster a positive attitude toward writing and to encourage students to take risks, teachers may cultivate a supportive and safe atmosphere in the classroom. This may be accomplished by encouraging students to have a "growth mindset," applauding their accomplishments, and emphasizing the process of learning more than just the result. It is possible to assist children in becoming more self-motivated and self-assured by providing a secure environment where they feel appreciated and respected. The feedback students get from their teachers should be timely and highlight their areas of strength and improvement. Teachers may assist students who are not native English speakers in developing their writing abilities while also helping them keep their self-confidence if they focus on the student's achievements and provide particular guidance on how things may be done better. Students who are inspired to consider their own learning and analyze it may eventually develop the self-assurance necessary to take charge of their own educational experiences. It may benefit non-native English speakers collaborating with their peers and participating in activities such as peer reviews and group discussions.

Peer connections alleviate the dread of being assessed by superiors, and these ties can also give diverse writing viewpoints. Students may cultivate a feeling of community and become more interested in the writing process if they work on writing assignments together in group settings. Setting goals and keeping track of progress is essential for those who are not native speakers of English because it allows them to monitor their development and take pride in even the tiniest of their minor victories along the way. Large writing assignments may be divided into smaller, more manageable goals. This can prevent writers from becoming overwhelmed while boosting their drive. Students can examine their development over time as a result of regular check-ins and progress tracking, both of which allow students to reflect on their work and make improvements.

Allowing non-native English speakers to alter their writing assignments in accordance with their interests, past experiences, or cultural viewpoints may boost their motivation and engagement. Giving kids the ability to express themselves artistically via writing encourages risk-taking and helps them find their voices. When a variety of writing genres and subjects are praised in the classroom, students are motivated to enhance their results on writing assignments. If teachers provide a positive learning environment, offer constructive criticism, encourage peer collaboration, set objectives, and support customization and originality, they may help non-native English speakers with their writing. They grow more willing to take risks, discover their abilities, and actively engage in the writing process as their self-esteem rises. This enhances their language development and writing skills, which makes them better writers.

Instructional Advancements in Writing for Individuals Who Are Not Native English Speakers

Targeted teaching may help students enhance their language skills, which should be a top focus for instructors who want to overcome the challenges posed by linguistic boundaries. This may be accomplished by including supervised writing assignments, grammar exercises, and vocabulary-building activities in the course material. Students who struggle with language-related issues may benefit from receiving honest feedback about their language use from their teachers and being encouraged to increase their vocabulary size (Lesi, 1992). Educators should work to increase students' cultural sensitivity and comprehension in the classroom setting. Educators can establish learning environments that include various forms of writing traditions if they acknowledge and appreciate their students' diverse backgrounds in culture. The writing skills of the students could be enhanced. if they are taught the standards of English writing if cultural differences in rhetorical methods are discussed, and if they are encouraged to think

about the differences and similarities between their home language and English (Kaplan, 1966).

Teaching writing, known as "breaking the writing process down into manageable segments," is effective for pupils whose native tongue is not English. Teachers may give comprehensive recommendations for organizing concepts, presenting evidence, and constructing paragraphs. Students can learn and practice the writing process better when they are exposed to examples of writing strategies and interactive activities that teach writing approaches. According to Silva and Matsuda (2001), providing students with constant feedback and gradually increasing the degree of complexity of the writing projects they are assigned might assist students in developing their writing skills.

By accessing authentic materials, individuals whose first language is not English can gain familiarity with various writing standards and styles. Examples of authentic resources are real-world literature, journal articles, and academic writing samples. Authentic materials also include examples. Students could improve their comprehension of the norms and conventions of English writing if they studied these materials and discussed them with one another. Reading aloud to students and having them copy passages from well-written books are two activities that may assist students in developing their language skills and creativity (Zamel, 1982). It is essential to create a learning atmosphere in the classroom that is encouraging and motivating for students to increase their writing confidence and motivation. Teachers could use strategies such as class discussions, exercises in collaborative writing, or reviews from students' peers, for example.

Conclusion

Teachers can boost students' confidence and a good attitude toward writing by providing constructive criticism and recognizing their accomplishments. Students' levels of interest and engagement may rise if they are given a chance to express themselves and have their writing assignments customized. It may be challenging to teach writing to those for whom English is not their first language due to possible linguistic, cultural, past writing abilities, and self-confidence issues. However, teachers may effectively help students improve their writing skills by using helpful strategies and creating a friendly environment in the classroom. By putting an emphasis on the acquisition of language proficiency, encouraging multicultural awareness, using scaffold instruction, incorporating elements of nature, and cultivating students' motivation and confidence, teachers can help students who are not native English speakers become proficient writers in the English language.

Conflict of Interest

There is no competing interest among the authors of this manuscript in submission.

References:

- Bitchener, J., & Knoch, U. (2010). Raising the linguistic accuracy level of advanced L2 writers with written corrective feedback. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 19(4), 207-217.
- Cumming, A. (2001). Learning to write in a second language: Two decades of research. *International Journal of English Studies*, 1(2), 1-23.
- Devi Bommanaboina, R., & Guduru, R. (2021). Self-Assessment of Engineering Learners' Perception of Usefulness of Pre-Writing Strategies. *Canadian Journal of Language and Literature Studies*, 1(3), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.53103/cjlls.v1i3.18>
- Ferris, D. (2003). *Response to student writing: Implications for second language students*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

-
- Hyland, K. (2003). *Second language writing*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Kaplan, R. B. (1966). Cultural thought patterns in inter-cultural education. *Language Learning*, 16(1-2), 1-20.
- Leki, I. (1992). *Understanding ESL writers: A guide for teachers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Matsuda, P. K., & Silva, T. (2005). Writing. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning* (pp. 515-532). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Silva, T., & Matsuda, P. K. (2001). Writing. In M. Celce-Murcia (Ed.), *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (3rd ed., pp. 315-334). Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.
- Zamel, V. (1982). Writing: The process of discovering meaning. *TESOL Quarterly*, 16(2), 195-209.