

THE IMPORTANCE OF IMPROVING WRITING COMPETENCE IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

This paper discusses the concepts of “writing”, “written speech” and “writing competence” in terms of methodology and introduces approaches to enhance this very competence of students in higher education. Indeed, writing seems the most problematic skills as opposed to other ones since it requires creativity, language awareness and critical thinking. So far various individual methods have been applied in a bid to increase writing competence of learners in both schools and higher education. However, instructors and other stakeholders have realized that employing a single method is not effective in this process and, thus, they have suggested to integrate several approaches in order to encourage learners to be engaged in writing. We initially discuss these very concepts from the perspective of various scholars prior to presenting relevant approaches applied in this field. We conclude that in order to understand the whole matter of writing competence one should refer to the concepts of “writing” and “written speech” in the first place.

INTRODUCTION

One of the main prerequisites of the modern education system is to create and enhance students’ skills in one or more foreign languages. Currently, in Uzbekistan significant work is being done to enhance the effectiveness of teaching foreign languages, students’ interest and motivation towards learning, as well as to prepare a competently qualified staff, since foreign language knowledge is necessary for the development of society, science and education as well as for the establishment of cooperation with developed countries of the world. Therefore, in the following years, many decrees, resolutions and state programs on foreign language teaching have been adopted by the Uzbek government. An example is the resolution “On measures to further enhance the quality of teaching foreign languages in educational institutions” adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2017. Hence, the primary objective of this decision is “to ensure the standard of teaching foreign languages to the younger generation at all stages of the system of continuing education, to dramatically improve the system of training specialists who are proficient in foreign languages, to ensure the continuity of educational programs in this direction, to grant and encourage students, undergraduates, and postgraduates and educators”. Accordingly, “Starting from the 2017-2018 academic year, the level of foreign language acquisition at all stages of the continuing education system is determined by the state educational standards based on the development and implementation of the assessment of Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking skills” and other similar tasks are considered in the same resolution.¹

In addition, on May 6, 2021, the President of Uzbekistan Mr. ShavkatMirziyoyev held a special meeting on the priorities of foreign language learning and noted that it is high time to create a new system that will become a solid foundation for the future teaching of foreign languages in the country. In this context, the improvement of foreign language teaching quality in all educational institutions of Uzbekistan, the authoring of textbooks and methodological manuals that meet international standards, the gradual introduction of special discipline teaching in foreign languages in higher education and other relevant issues were discussed.

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At present, like all higher educational institutions, Tashkent State University of Law puts more emphasis on the development of communicative and writing competence in teaching foreign languages,² given that it is important for a perspective lawyer to be able to work with various legal documents not only in Uzbek, but also in foreign languages, which explains why the focus of this article is the writing competence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of competence has so far been studied by many scholars. In the context of our article, we have considered the following definitions of competence:

- The concept of abilities or capabilities being applied to the performance of tasks is included in the concept of competence or it is a relation between a person's abilities or capacities and the successful accomplishment of appropriate tasks. (Hager & Gonczi 1996: 4);
- a set of knowledge, skills and abilities for language learning (Arutyunov 2014: 316-317);
- a set of cognitive skills acquired in the course of training that make up a meaningful component of learning (Aitov 2006: 43);
- the general readiness or ability of the student to act on the basis of experience and knowledge obtained by a person who independently participates in the educational and cognitive process of the subject (Shishov 2005: 41);
- the learning outcome gained in the process of preparing, implementing and achieving the set goals (Osmolovskoy 2007: 210);
- knowledge and experience of a person on a specific issue or phenomenon (Ojegov 1989: 924).

Modern methodology proposes a joint application of the concepts of “writing competence” and “writing”, and currently there are different approaches aimed at understanding their full potential. For instance, considering the concept of writing and including its technical and communicative aspects, Galskova & Gez stated that writing is an analytical and synthetic activity related to the creation and correction of a written text (Galskova & Gez 2006: 249). However, Shchukin advocated a more detailed consideration of this issue and focused on the technical aspect of the letter by putting forward the view that writing is a method of constructing written words from letters, the ability to express thoughts using written speech, which is an effective aspect of speech activity, and the writing system adopted in the language (Shchukin 2011: 299).

To Passov writing is one of the main independent types of speech activity, in which it is carried out at two levels: productive and reproductive (Passov 1977: 39), whereas Rogova claims that writing is a complex conversational skill that allows people to communicate using a system of graphic symbols. Besides, it is an effective activity in which a person writes a speech to convey a message to others. And the product of this activity is a text intended for reading (Rogova 1991: 287). Writing and written speech are also evaluated as a type and product of speech activity.

Accordingly, as a type of speech activity, writing is a complex phenomenon based on the following skills:

- 1) drawing of letter signs;
- 2) correct transcoding (spelling of speech sounds to suitable graphic characters);
- 3) construction of written sentences (composition);
- 4) lexical and grammatical writing skills.

The skills of the first and second groups can be called writing techniques, and the third and fourth groups differ slightly both in terms of content and quality (Passov 1989: 276).

Writing as a product of speech activity is a graphic system (graphics and spelling) for expressing thoughts in one or another graphic form such as personal and business writing, biography, résumé or essay (text genres). Moreover, the productive written speech is divided into study writing and communicative writing (Kolesnikova 2001: 224). In particular:

Study writing occurs when writing a variety of linguistic and conditional speech exercises aimed at mastering productive lexical and grammatical skills, speech skills, including communicative writing skills.

Communicative writing is an expressive kind of speech activity aimed at oral communication in writing. The purpose of teaching such speech is to develop the ability to create different types or genres of written message/texts.

It is also worth noting that the basis of writing competence is the concept of written speech. Written speech is one of the four types of speech activity (speaking, listening, writing, reading), which is the process and result of communication, embodied in the form of text.

According to Solovova written speech is an independent system of communication, it has a number of independent functions and allows to master the knowledge accumulated by people, as well as expanding the circle of communication (Solovova 2008: 239).

Besides, Vygotsky, a representative of the psychological approach, noted that written speech is a special system of signs and characters, the possession of which is an important aspect of the entire cultural development of children, and unlike oral speech, written speech requires children to perform the most complex mental operations, the transition from internal speech to external speech, thereby allowing them to think independently (Vygotsky 1984: 155).

Leontiev & Shcherba believe that written speech is a specific way of carrying out speech activity, in the process of which thoughts are formed, expressed, transmitted to other people and created as a product of writing (text). At the same time, it is also important to understand these activities (Leontiev & Shcherba 265-304):

- a) Comprehension mechanism (how to set the semantic connection between the topic and rheme, fragments of sentences);
- b) the mechanism of preliminary synthesis (internal pronunciation, the idea of revealing the goal);
- c) memory mechanisms (RAM for storing and compiling material).

In his article on the methodology of teaching writing in a foreign language, Milrud conveys his thoughts about the activity of written speech and written speech activity and provides the following definitions for the abovementioned terms: “Written speech activity is purposefully and creatively bringing a thought through a written word, whilst written speech is a way of composing and forming thoughts in written signs. Written speech has also a three-step structure: intensive-motivational, analytical-synthetic, and executive. In the first step, the author will have an idea of the text that will be created in the future, in the second, the necessary tools will be selected, and in the third, the text itself will be created” (Milrud 1997: 5-11).

In fact, the ability to compose text from words is based on writing skills, and according to the fact that the product of written speech is written text. Hedge classifies the types and views of the text as follows³:

Types of writing

Study writing	Professional writing	Social writing	Personal writing	Creative writing
Essay Research work Reports Annotation Summary Abstract Review Notes	Business letter Resume/ CV Progress report Application Contracts Memoranda Articles Ads Minutes	Letter Invitation Notes Messages Instructions	Diary Journal Reminders Addresses Shopping lists Recipe	Stories Rhymes Lyrics Drama Scripts Poem

Another classification of text types is provided by Solovova: filling out a questionnaire, compiling a resume, greeting cards, personal and official letters and, reviews, comments, lectures, notes, essays, articles (Solovova 2002 :239).

In our research work, we focus mainly on improving the writing competence of university students and, thus, we have been closely familiar with the work of several researchers dealing with this issue. Accordingly, many scholars distinguish the writing competence into:

Linguistic competence, which is shown by the proper use of foreign language forms. It presupposes familiarity with the rules (phonological, morphological, syntactic, and lexical) and the ability to apply them in the course of shaping one's own thoughts and comprehending the thoughts of an interlocutor. Writing linguistic competence enables us to work openly with linguistic and speech content to create written texts that serve as a means of communication.

Discursive competence, which consists in the possession of different modes of discourse demonstrates discursive competence. This element of the competence of a foreign language written speech necessitates the ability to link one sentence to the next, as well as the ability to objectively convey thoughts in a written communicative context. Some researchers define discursive competence as the ability to combine grammatical forms and semantic content to produce coherent oral or written texts of various genres that work in various social interactions (Canale 1980: 25), while other writers opine that the ability to properly organize the semantic content of the oral and written text is determined by verbal, nonverbal, and paralinguistic experience (Scarcella 1990: 159). Discursive competence, according to Brown, is the capacity to combine sentences into discourse fragments and construct a coherent meaning from a set of statements (Brown 1987: 467). Russian experts describe discursive competence as the ability to connect individual sentences into a microtext (paragraph) using grammatical, logical, lexical, and figurative means and construct a written text / discourse that serves as a means of written communication, taking into account the perspectives of foreign writers (Kudryashova 2007).

Pragmatic competence, for Norris, the ability to accomplish an objective in oral and written correspondence using a variety of methods of collecting and transmitting information is referred to as pragmatic competence. In the methodological paradigm, pragmatic competence is characterized as the ability to correctly convey semantic content by making optimal use of linguistic means to solve a communicative problem (Norris 1991).

Strategic competence, or the ability to compensate for a lack of language means in the process of communication is a strategic competency. This competence is a collection of skills and communication skills that enable choosing and, as needed, adjusting the appropriate situation of intercultural communication, a foreign language model of written text / discourse, acceptable to the author's communicative intentions and the expected semantic material, as part of foreign language written speech competence. During the course of researching methodological works, it was revealed that self-control skills play a significant role in strategic competence content. The author must keep track of the spelling correctness of words, as well as the structural, semantic, and logically compositional nature of his work, while writing a written text.

Socio-cultural competence, which entails the possession of history, geographical, and general cultural awareness acquired by a specific people and representing their culture, lifestyles, and traditions. Awareness of the ethnosocial and cultural context of particular circumstances of foreign language written communication, value orientations of participants in written communication, communicative and speech etiquette of written communication, linguistic-cultural features of the logical compositional structure of foreign language written texts are all included in this competence.

As Pustovalova mentioned the fact is that along with these types of competence, the main factors including lexical-grammatical, stylistic and spelling-punctuation, socio-cultural and other components in the formation of foreign-language writing competence are considered (Pustovalova 2012: 14):

Lexical-grammatical component	-the ability to select suitable lexical units in accordance with the set communicative task; -the ability to use various grammatical and syntactic constructions; -ability to choose suitable language means, grammatical and syntactic constructions for a communicative task
Stylistic component	-ability to distinguish writing styles (academic, formal, public, conversational, literal); -the ability to follow the style chosen for the communicative task; -ability to use different stylistic methods in composing texts
Spelling and punctuation	-the ability to write written sentences correctly;

component	-ability to split text into sentences using correct punctuation
Sociocultural component	-the ability to follow the socio-cultural characteristics of the written language of the target language; -ability to adequately present linguocultural evidence and facts; -ability to follow the written rules of etiquette adopted in this language
Structural-organizational component	-ability to follow the format of the functional type of written text; -ability to use logical means of communication in composing text; -ability to divide texts into logical and semantic paragraphs; -ability to follow the structure of speech
Psychological component	-the logic of the learning process and the readiness of students to perform written tasks of varying complexity in accordance with the stage of training; -interests, desires, motives of students

It should also be noted that Hedge, author of several books on writing and writing skills, points out eight components needed to teach writing (Hedge 1988: 8). In particular: a) getting the grammar right; b) having a range of vocabulary; c) punctuating meaningfully; d) using the conventions of layout correctly; e) spelling accuracy; f) using a range of sentence structures; g) linking ideas and information across sentences to develop a topic; and h) developing and organizing the content clearly and convincingly.

METHODOLOGY

Currently Uzbekistan, like other countries, relies on foreign experience in improving the foreign language writing competence of students in higher education institutions, and develops methods based on the above types and components of competence.

Obviously, in the English methodology, until the 1970s, teaching writing in a foreign language was not primarily intended as a goal, but as a means, and writing was used only to perform grammar exercises or to ask questions to texts. However, the situation has gradually changed, and as a result, the so-called “Guided-writing” method has become prevalent in the United States, characterized by the transition from controlled practice to free practice. At the beginning of the 21st century, writing began to be seen as a social communicative movement, and thus teaching writing became the goal of language acquisition (Reid 2001: 28). Therefore, various approaches to teaching this type of speech began to gain popularity. It is apparent that process-oriented and product-oriented approaches are widely used in English language teaching to improve writing competence.

Product-based approach

The product-based approach is one of the traditional methods of teaching writing, focusing only on the rules of correct grammar and correct writing, i.e. form. In this model the emphasis is on the “final product” rather than on the writing process. For instance, students are given a writing topic or asked to reshape the topic. Usually, creativity is not encouraged in this way. As a result, students did not favor writing. Another distinctive feature of this approach is that the development of written speech is closely related to the receptive form of written communication - reading.

Principles:

1. In a second language, teaching writing is often similar to teaching grammar or sentence structure.
2. The concepts of audiolingual theory, which evaluates writing as a written type of oral expression, are reflected in this style of writing.
3. Correct sentence structure is an integral aspect of writing; grammatical skills are highly valued.
4. By supplying students with writing samples, they can avoid making mistakes.
5. The majority of students do not learn from their mistakes.

Techniques include:

1. Providing minor modifications and substitutional models/samples to students;
2. Extending plan or conclusion
3. Using frames, tables, and other guidelines to make paragraphs;
4. Responding to a series of questions in order to compose a text;
5. Combining sentences: using various combination rules to create complex sentences (Lázaro 1996 :92-93).

Process-oriented approach

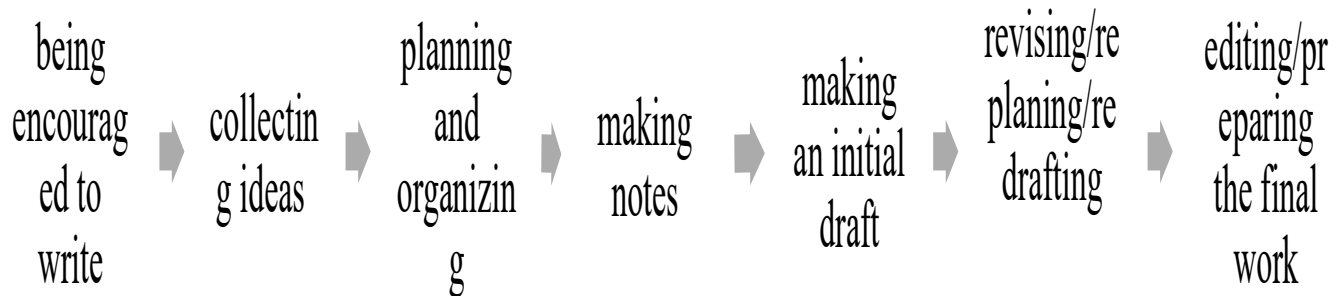
By the mid-1970s, the process approach replaced the product-oriented approach. According to Tribble, this is a teaching writing approach that shapes a writer’s creativity and focuses on developing good writing practices rather than imitating models / patterns, and includes four stages of writing (Tribble 1996: 160):

- pre-writing
- composing / drafting

- revising
- editing

This method mainly puts the stress on the process, and the given steps can be repeated throughout the process. For example, it is natural for a student / writer to move back from the editing stage to the pre-writing stage in order to develop a new idea or express it more clearly.

In addition, the process focuses more on revision and feedback from others. Hence, students can create a new draft by crossing the sentences in the paragraph and spelling and punctuation correction in the early stages is not of importance. Hedge also explains this process in the following steps (Hedge 2003: 51):



Writing processes can be seen, the writing process is a recursive activity as the text being written can be copied, modified, reduced, or expanded several times. *Principles:*

1. Writing lessons should include the planning, drafting, and reviewing stages of the writing process.
2. Students should keep track of what they wrote and how they wrote it, as well as assess their own work.
3. Teachers should serve as facilitators, sharing their experiences in helping students develop successful writing strategies.
4. Students should complete written texts (rather than individual sentences) while keeping the context in mind.
5. It is important to consider why (understanding the purpose) and to whom (addressee) this form of writing is written.
6. Students should write during class time as well (not only homework).
7. Group composition: The group's interaction and collaboration effectively contribute to the writing process at each point of the session.

Techniques:

1. Brainstorming, free association, word mapping, rating exercises, and quickwriting techniques are used during the planning stage.
2. Reduction exercises, jumbled paragraphs, jumbled essays, writing a topic sentence, group drafting, and quickwriting are all used in the drafting stage.
3. Peer reviews, group corrective activities / group debate, rewrite activities, instructor feedback and opinion at the revision stage (Lázaro 1996: 93).

Parker compares these approaches in detail in his article, saying that in teaching writing as a process, the teacher deviates from generally accepted norms. Little attention is paid to the structure and literacy of the writing, the main purpose being to convey the author's own thoughts and experiences. However, the author can choose any form to express his ideas. When teaching writing as a product, it is important for the teacher that the students follow the established rules and regulations. Often, the purpose of such writing is to create essays or paragraphs on general topics appropriate to the topic chosen by the teacher (Parker 1972: 1328).

Genre approach

Writers employed the genre technique to research various styles of written texts in the 1980s. According to Nunan, genres have grammatical forms that indicate their communicative aims, implying that each genre requires its own language and grammatical source. This approach focuses not on general grammar but on the grammatical

features of each genre. For example, the specific grammar of a story is the adverbs of action used to describe the performers of a series of events and actions, the verbs of feeling and thinking, and the adverbs of time used to indicate that actions are related over time. According to the data, the written genre approach consists of three ways: a) for learners, the genre is modeled; b) the instructor and the students collaborate on the text; c) each student writes the text independently (Nunan 1999: 330).

However, in this approach, students have been criticized for not having sufficient knowledge of the language structure and grammar of a specially selected genre, and for focusing on the product rather than the process, resulting in underestimation of the student's ability. This, in turn, led to the emergence of a new approach.

Process-Genre Approach

Currently, there is no single strategy or technique for developing a specific form of competence. As a result, developing writing skills necessitates the use of a variety of techniques. To this end, the process-genre form of teaching writing has recently been endorsed by many educators. The uniqueness of this is that it simultaneously generalizes both process and genre approaches, in which students also learn the purpose and form structure of a particular genre through processes such as pre-writing, drafting, revising, and editing. The use of these steps increases students' knowledge of different types of text and the writing process. At the same time, this approach shapes students' writing skills that are relevant to real-life situations. In particular, Yan notes that the genre-based approach to the process helps students gain a deeper understanding of real-life situations, increases motivation, and prepares them to write for an out-of-class audience. Typically, the training procedure for this approach is divided into six stages: a) preparation; b) modeling and reinforcing; c) planning; d) joint constructing; e) independent constructing; and f) revising (Yan 2005: 22).

Thus, writing, writing skills and writing competence are inextricably linked concepts, and the formation of this type of competence in a foreign language requires reliance on foreign experience and the use of a combination of several methods. Therefore, it is important to use these approaches to improve the writing competence of law students.

CONCLUSION

Taking all the views into account, it could be stated that the purpose of teaching writing can be described in a variety of ways and it was once argued that the purpose of teaching writing should refer to the development of skills and abilities to convey thoughts in writing, while various approaches of learning how to write differ as to their content. Writing can be divided into two types: process-oriented and product-oriented. The first method entails following specific steps in the completion of a written task, while the second entails creating models for different forms of written work, such as essays or reviews. Moreover, genre and genre-process models are also highly suggested in order to practice different types of writing, but integrating existing methods, depending on the learning goals and student level, is the most efficient method, particularly in terms of legal writing. Study writing and communicative writing are the two types of productive writing and there are three stages to the built a series of exercises and tasks for writing classes and writing: the incentive-motivational, the executive and the analytic-synthetic. When it comes to writing competence, it is obvious that it is described as "the competence of a foreign language written speech" in the context of implementing the competence-based approach. This term refers to learners' abilities to accomplish a foreign language writing speech activity in the form of a collection of language knowledge and speech skills so as to produce a written foreign language text. Importantly, writing competence is realized with the help of other competence types including pragmatic, discursive, sociocultural, linguistic and strategic competence and, thus, for the enhancement of writing competence the more emphasis should be laid on the methods which could develop all of these competences.

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