

Effect of Communicative Approach on Proposal Writing Skills of Distance Learners at Allama Iqbal Open University Islamabad

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to find out the effect of communicative approach on proposal/synopsis writing skills of students at Allama Iqbal Open University Islamabad as it was found from the literature that Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) had a noteworthy influence to improve proposal writing skills. The researcher used the quasi-experimental research method for this study. The design of the study was pre-test post-test non-equivalent control group design. The sample was chosen by convenience sampling technique at Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) Islamabad. The students were 60 M. Phil scholars. The tool employed for data collection was proposal writing test. The validity of test was checked by experts' opinion and the reliability was measured by Chronbach Alpha. Both the groups were pretested and post-tested before and after intervention of Communicative lessons. The tests were scored in the light of scoring rubrics. Threats to validity were undertaken properly. Data were analyzed by t-statistics. The experimental group performed significantly better than the control group. CLT is recommended for distance learners in other educational institutions of Pakistan where Open Distance Learning (ODL) is being offered. It might be useful to teach other genres related to writing as well.

Keywords: communicative approach, proposal/synopsis writing, communicative language teaching (CLT), open distance learning (ODL), distance learners.

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Introduction

The importance of writing can be decided from the reality that writing is an ability acquired through conscious effort and essential for the people living in a specific area to communicate the world beyond their limits. Most of the examination systems prefer to judge the abilities of students through analyzing their writing skills even in Open Distance Learning (ODL). Learner can produce the written text in many different forms to facilitate the communication (Harmer, 2006). In AIOU, the scholars seldom write research plans innovatively and genuinely as during job at this varsity as faculty members this had been observed. The situation can be improved significantly, as evident from literature, the researchers decided to find out the effect of CLT for improvement in synopsis writing skills of the distance learners who were the research scholars at AIOU Islamabad, the researchers' workplace.

Pakistan is a developing country. Pakistan is struggling hard to keep pace with other countries in the education. According to Rahman (2007), teaching methodology used in Pakistan does not fulfill the demand of standards of education. Teachers are not guiding the pupils appropriately for developing writing skills. Jin (2009) explained that communicative procedure is initiated through the exposition of dialogue to promote the determination in learner for the discussion about topic or setting. Agbatogun (2014) stated that reading, writing, discussion, analysis, synthesis and evaluation actively engage the learner in the learning process than passively receiving the lectures related to the subject matter. Communicative approach involves the learner in fluency-based tasks in the classrooms to create confidence in them for expressing meaningful communication. Authentic communication is a key to achieve success in learning in real life situations. (Felder & Brent, 2009).

Writing at various level of education specifically proposal/synopsis writing had not been given importance in ODL. Consequently, students copied verbatim the subject matter related to the synopsis work but did not develop the skill of proposal/synopsis writing. This situation highlighted the need of research on the effect of communicative approach on proposal/synopsis writing skills of the distance learners who were research scholars of Allama Iqbal Open University Islamabad.

This study will assist to boost the proposal/synopsis writing skills of students at university level. This study will give direction to the researchers to apply other methods of teaching for teaching proposal/synopsis writing to science students. The curriculum developers, policy makers and Government will be benefitted for the designing and

contrivance of communicative syllabus for teaching of proposal/synopsis writing at ODL university level.

Literature Review

According to Jeffery (2009), genre discourse focuses on a point that writing should be used for communicative purposes. The real-life situations offer advantage of developing writing skill of learners. The learners become competent in the desired goal of writing i.e. communication. The quality of writing can be judged on the basis of communication being delivered through it. Anson Yang and Chan- Piu Cheung (2003) considered that discussion in the classroom boosts the proposal writing skills of students. They said that communicative approach and co-operative learning have some common attributes. Students take interest in project works such as connecting the different parts of report not only in the classroom but also outside the classroom. Drowns, Hurley and Wilkinsons (2004) depicted that writing can act as an instrument to assess what is happening in student's mind about a particular subject. The rationale of writing functions is to provoke the students' interest in writing skill. Walker and Sampson (2013) related that use of Argument Driven Inquiry (ADI) instructional model involving peer review on proposal/synopsis of students and revising the written report after peer review helped to improve the proposal/synopsis writing skills of students. It enables the better communication to reader through writing that is convention of science. Downs and Wardle (2007) suggested that practice is required for writing.

The tool of writing can be used to intervene different activities. Fulwiler (2008), Kiuhara, Graham &Hweken (2009), Weiss, Banilower, McMahon & Smith (2001) quoted that teachers feel that they are not competent enough to teach writing in research. Teachers have limitations for the completion of syllabus in the required time to fulfill the demands of curriculum. The shortage of instructional time keeps them apart from teaching of writing to science students. Indrisano & Paratore, 2005; Kelly, Regev, & Prothero, 2008; Saul, 2004 said that mostly science students have not given circumstances to write according to the norms and standards of proposal. Yore et al. (2003) disclosed that the improvement of grammar, spelling, and punctuation can help the students for better writing in research. Mulat (2003) has a view that the inclination of teachers towards communicative approach can help in its successful implementation. Jin (2009) observed that the wide range of discourse strategies can be used in the classroom. Discourse strategies involve the

raising of questions by the teacher to actively encourage the participation of learner in the classroom discussion. Discourse proceeds in such a way that teacher initiates the discussion by asking a question (initiation) student shows its response by answering the question (response) and teacher comments on the student's answer (feedback). Usually teacher evaluates the student's response very rare. Initiation -Response-Feedback pattern (IRF) can be adopted by the teacher in various forms. Teacher ensures the participation of pupil to set up his confidence in the classroom activities. They desired to conduct more researches to prove that interactive teaching raises the interest of students to involve them in classroom activities.

Objectives of the Research

The objective of the study was to find out the effect of communicative approach on proposal/synopsis writing skills of ODL students at AIOU Islamabad.

Research Questions

Does communicative approach help in improving proposal/synopsis writing skills of ODL students at AIOU Islamabad?

- i. Does communicative approach help in improving grammar of proposal/synopsis writing?
- ii. Does communicative approach help in following proper sequence of proposal/synopsis writing?
- iii. Does communicative approach help in improving mechanics of proposal/synopsis writing?
- iv. Does communicative approach help in improving fluency of proposal/synopsis writing?
- v. Does communicative approach help in improving form of proposal/synopsis writing?

Methodology

The procedure employed for this study was quasi experimental involving pre-test post-test non-equivalent control group design. The control group was selected from AIOU Islamabad by convenience sampling technique. Both groups had 30 students each. The tool used for data collection was test of proposal/synopsis writing in the subject of Chemistry. The pre-test and the post-test were same. The validity of the

test was checked by the expert's from faculty of education, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad. The reliability of test (0.881) was determined by Cronbach's alpha . The scores of tests were analysed in terms of grammar, sequence, mechanics, fluency and form by using scoring rubrics also validated by expert's opinion. Data analyses were done by t-test.

Data Analysis

Table 1

Comparison from Pretest to Posttest Gain Scores of Control and Experimental Groups in Proposal Writing Sub-Skills (Grammar)

Group	Pre-Test Mean	SD (Pre-Test)	Post-Test Mean	SD (Post-Test)	Gain	df	t-value	Sig (2-tailed)
Control (N=30)	0.18	0.39	0.39	0.56	0.21	58	7.53	0.00
Experimental (N=30)	1.52	0.94	2.52	1.42	1.00			

In case of grammar, the control group had scored 0.18 in pre-test and 0.39 in post-test in task 3 of proposal/synopsis writing. The improvement in the score of control group was 0.21. In case of grammar, the experimental group had scored 1.52 in pre-test and 2.52 in post-test in task 3 of proposal/synopsis writing. The improvement in the score of experimental group was 1.00. The comparison of the scores of control group and experimental group was done through t-test having value 7.53 at df (58). i.e. significant.

Table 2

Comparison from Pretest to Posttest Gain Scores of Control and Experimental Groups in Proposal Writing Sub-Skills (Sequence)

Group	Pre-Test Mean	SD (Pre-Test)	Post-Test Mean	SD (Post-Test)	Gain	df	t-value	Sig (2-tailed)
Control (N=30)	4.55	0.56	4.82	0.39	0.27	58	1.45	0.15
Experimental (N=30)	4.24	1.06	4.91	0.29	0.67			

In case of sequence, the control group had scored 4.55 in pre-test and 4.82 in post-test in task 3 of proposal/synopsis writing. The improvement in the score of control group was 0.27. In case of sequence, the experimental group had scored 4.24 in pre-test and 4.91 in post-test in task 3 of proposal/synopsis writing. The improvement in the score of experimental group was 0.67. The comparison of the scores of control group and experimental group was done through t-test having value 1.45 at df (58) i.e. not significant.

Table 3

Comparison from Pretest to Posttest Gain Scores of Control and Experimental Groups in Proposal Writing Sub-Skills (Mechanics)

Group	Pre-Test Mean	SD (Pre-Test)	Post-Test Mean	SD (Post-Test)	Gain	df	t-value	Sig (2-tailed)
Control (N=30)	0.06	0.24	0.27	0.45	0.21	58	7.39	0.00
Experimental (N=30)	1.42	1.03	2.30	1.38	0.88			

In case of mechanics, the control group had scored 0.06 in pre-test and 0.27 in post-test in task 3 of proposal/synopsis writing. The improvement in the score of control group was 0.21. In case of mechanics, the experimental group had scored 1.42 in pre-test and 2.30 in post-test in task 3 of proposal/synopsis writing. The improvement in the score of experimental group was 0.88. The comparison of the scores of control group and experimental group was done through t-test having value 7.39 at df (58) i.e. significant.

Table 4

Comparison from Pretest to Posttest Gain Scores of Control and Experimental Groups in Proposal Writing Sub-Skills (Fluency)

Group	Pre-Test Mean	SD (Pre-Test)	Post-Test Mean	SD (Post-Test)	Gain	df	t-value	Sig (2-tailed)
Control (N=30)	0.03	0.17	0.21	0.42	0.18	58	6.85	0.00
Experimental (N=30)	1.24	1.00	2.33	1.49	1.09			

In case of fluency, the control group had scored 0.03 in pre-test and 0.21 in post-test in task 3 of proposal/synopsis writing. The improvement in the score of control group was 0.18. In case of mechanics, the experimental group had scored 1.24 in pre-test and 2.33 in post-test in task 3 of proposal/synopsis writing. The improvement in the score of experimental group was 1.09. The comparison of the scores of control group and experimental group was done through t-test having value 6.85 at df (58) i.e. significant.

Table 5

Comparison from Pretest to Posttest Gain Scores of Control and Experimental Groups in Proposal Writing Sub-Skills (Form)

Group	Pre-Test Mean	SD (Pre-Test)	Post-Test Mean	SD (Post-Test)	Gain	df	t-value	Sig (2-tailed)
Control (N=30)	0.03	0.17	0.21	0.42	0.18	58	7.46	0.00
Experimental (N=30)	1.21	0.89	2.36	1.43	1.15			

In case of form, the control group had scored 0.03 in pre-test and 0.21 in post-test in task 3 of proposal/synopsis writing. The improvement in the score of control group was 0.18. In case of form, the experimental group had scored 1.21 in pre-test and 2.36 in post-test in task 3 of proposal/synopsis writing. The improvement in the score of experimental group was 1.15. The comparison of the scores of control group and experimental group was done through t-test having value 7.46 at df(58) i.e. significant.

Table 6

Overall Comparison from Pretest to Posttest Gain Scores of Control and Experimental Groups in Proposal Writing

Group	Pre-Test Mean	SD (Pre-Test)	Post-Test Mean	SD (Post-Test)	Gain	df	t-value	Sig (2-tailed)
Control (N=33)	4.85	1.09	5.91	1.83	1.06	58	6.25	0.00
Experimental (N=33)	9.64	4.26	14.45	5.69	4.82			

Overall, the control group had scored 4.85 in pre-test and 5.91 in post-test in task 3 of proposal/synopsis writing. The improvement in the score of control group was 1.06. Overall, the experimental group had scored 9.64 in pre-test and 14.45 in post-test in task 3 of proposal/synopsis writing. The improvement in the scores of experimental group was 4.82. The comparison of the scores of control group and experimental group was done through t-test having value 6.25 at df (58) .i.e. significant. The results are aligned with the already existing research in terms of writing skills in other countries of the world.

Findings

The communicative approach has a significant effect on grammar of the proposal/synopsis writing of experimental group than control group as specified by the t value. The communicative approach has no significant effect on sequence of proposal/synopsis writing of experimental group than control group as specified by the t value. The communicative approach has a significant effect on the mechanics of proposal writing of experimental group than control group as specified by the t value. The communicative approach has a significant effect on the fluency of proposal writing of experimental group than control group as specified by the t value. The communicative approach has a significant effect on the form of proposal writing of experimental group than control group as specified by the t value. The communicative approach has a significant effect on overall score in proposal/synopsis writing of experimental group than control group as specified by the t value.

Conclusion

Communicative approach enhances the proposal/synopsis writing skills of science students at ODL university level. The communicative approach depicts significant effect on grammar, mechanics, fluency and form of proposal/synopsis writing but the communicative approach does not depict significant effect on sequence of proposal/synopsis writing. The reason behind this is that students were given explicit guidance for adopting the proper sequence of proposal/synopsis writing in test. This guidance was easily understood by the students of both the control group and the experimental group.

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