

AUGMENTING DISCOURSE-LEVEL WRITING COMPETENCY USING FLUID INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY

Hasbulla E.,
Research Scholar,
Dept. of Studies in English,
Kannur University, Kerala.

Dr Santhosh V. M.,
Associate Professor of English,
Payyanur College, Payyanur,
Kannur District, Kerala.

Abstract

Instructional materials impact crucially in all language education programmes. In the wake of the debates between the pro and anti-prescriptive materials factions in English Language Teaching (ELT), this study probes into the efficacy of fluid instructional materials (FIM) in actuating discourse-level writing competency among the target students. The study hinges on the theoretical premises of postmethod pedagogy popularized by B. Kumaravadivelu. Instead of using the materials from the prescribed textbooks, FIM allows the teacher to evolve contextually-fitting materials to actualize the curriculum objectives in the language classroom. An experimental study of this kind would help evolve a workable strategy to innovate language education.

Key Words: Discourse-level Writing Competency, Fluid Instructional Materials, Postmethod Pedagogy.

1. Introduction

The burgeoning of innovative technological gadgets has made significant impact in all social spheres, needless to say, in education also. This change has necessitated a paradigmatic shift in teaching methodologies for a better classroom environ. The prescriptive textbook-based teachings have been challenged in terms of their inadequacy in engaging the new-generation learners in language classrooms.

The present study enquired whether a fluid mode of materials in language teaching can deliver better results in English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms. The study was carried out in the Kerala higher secondary education context. The population of the study comprised students and teachers from Kozhikode district. The theoretical anchor of the study was the Postmethod pedagogic tenets propounded by B. Kumaravadivelu. As for this line of thinking, the teacher is to be at the centre of any pedagogic activity to plan and execute context-specific language teaching materials in classrooms.

Fluid instructional materials which are designed and employed by the teacher in language classrooms can bring about positive impact in enhancing the linguistic competency of learners. While contesting this aspect, an argument for traditional prescriptive textbook materials poses a question about their diminishing roles in the modern language pedagogy. Postmethod pedagogy advocated by B. Kumaravadivelu sheds much light on this shift from the top-down to bottom-up teaching practices in English language pedagogy. The teacher can go for macrostrategies and their respective microstrategies to apply the said freedom in evolving materials that are contextually-fit and feasible to attain the learning objectives. In an age of unprecedented technological innovations, a study of this kind would buttress the timely revamping of the fundamental fabrics of language pedagogy to suit the needs and aspirations of the learners. An experimental study of this kind would invariably impact the whole stakeholders in the second language education. The ensuing sections of this paper will elaborate how well these procedures were carried out in the present empirical study.

2. The Method Era in ELT

Umpteen methods have been evolved and practised in ELT for a long while. These methods have been much instrumental in language education in classrooms. Brown (2000) criticizes methods as a prescriptive order and demands for flexibility for practitioners in teaching. Methods are essentially a colonial construct where the

theorizers exercise higher position over the practitioners in ELT. This domination in language pedagogy continued till late 1990s. Methods like grammar translation method, direct method, audio-lingual method, bilingual method, and structural method were central to this discussion. In all these methods, the common frame is that of a central agency that dictates things in classrooms, be it with method of teaching, materials in use, techniques to be used, and evaluation techniques. Teachers are passive assimilators of these theoretical assumptions.

3. The Postmethod Era in ELT

By the turn of the millennium, there were arguments against this dominant power structure in language pedagogy. Postmethod era places the practitioners at the centre stage of language education. Kumaravadivelu (1994) explains the situation as follows: “If the conventional concept of method entitles theorizers to construct knowledge oriented theories of pedagogy, the Postmethod condition empowers practitioners to construct classroom oriented theories of practice” (29).

As the practitioners are in constant touch with the learners, they have all rights to negotiate and decide the things to be transacted in classrooms. It is this change in power structure that can challenge the supremacy of the theorists in ELT that is fundamental in the postmethod era. Teachers become theorists of their practices in this new language pedagogy.

4. The Experimental Study

This study was geared to find out the effectiveness of the fluid instructional materials (FIM) in enhancing discourse-level writing competency and to compare the effectiveness of fluid instructional materials (FIM) and the existing prescriptive materials in ELT in improving discourse-level writing competency in English of the higher secondary education (HSE) students in Kerala.

4.1 Methodology of the Study

The present study was carried out among the higher secondary students of Chennamangallur Higher Secondary School in Kozhikode district in Kerala. For this purpose the researcher took a sample population comprising 80 students from class XII. Two groups were formed with equal number of participants. A pre-test was administered in both the groups prior to the intervention. The interventions were carried out in two modes, the traditional textbook-based instruction was used for the first group and the second group was taught with the FIM module evolved by the researcher. The focus of the study was on writing competency and how well the students perform the discourse-level language activities such as preparing news reports, developing character sketches, attempting announcement scripts and writing appreciation of poems. After the intervention, a post-test was carried out and the scores were analyzed by using statistical tools and techniques.

4.2 Hypotheses of the Study

1. There is no significant difference in the mean pre-test scores of discourse-level writing competency between the experimental and control groups.
2. There is a significant difference in the mean pre-test and post-test scores of discourse-level writing competency of the experimental group.
3. There is a significant difference in the mean post-test scores of discourse-level writing competency between the experimental and control groups.
4. There is a significant difference in the adjusted mean post-test scores of discourse-level writing competency between the experimental and control groups by considering the pre-intervention functional linguistic competency of writing in English as the covariate.

4.3 Design and Method Adopted for the Study

The method adopted for the study was quasi-experimental study with pre-test, post-test non-equivalent groups design. A Pre-test was conducted for the experimental group and the control group. After the intervention phase, a post-test was conducted.

4.4 Variables of the Study

Three kinds of variables were identified in the experimentation process. The independent variables were the existing textbooks as instructional materials in ELT and the fluid instructional materials in ELT evolved by the researcher. The dependent variable was the discourse-level writing competency in English. The control variable was the pre-intervention discourse-level writing competency in English of the sample population.

4.5 Tools of the Study

1. Pre-intervention Discourse-level Writing Competency Test (Santhosh & Hasbulla, 2017)
2. Post-intervention Discourse-level Writing Competency Test (Santhosh & Hasbulla, 2017)

3. Lesson Transcripts on the Existing Method of Teaching English for the Control Group (Santhosh & Hasbulla, 2017)

4. Fluid Instructional Materials Modules for Experimental Study (Santhosh & Hasbulla, 2017)

4.6 Experimentation Procedure

In the pre-testing phase, a pre-test with special focus on discourse-level writing competency in English was conducted. Afterwards, the experimental group was taught through the FIM mode and the control group was taught in the existing method of teaching using the prescribed textbooks. During the intervention phase two discreet modules were used for enhancing the discourse-level writing competency of the target students in two groups. The writing activities given were: attempting character sketches, appreciation of poems, comparison of two poems, announcements of events, and news reports. The control group was taught by using the prompts in the prescribed textbook. The experimental group was taught using the FIM, where the materials were picked and designed by the researcher.

An achievement test with special focus on discourse-level writing competency in English was conducted after the intervention.

4.7 Statistical Techniques Used

- Basic descriptive statistics
- Test of significance of difference between means

5. Results

Pre-test scores of the variable of the experimental group

Variable	Mean	Median	Mode	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Discourse-level writing competency in English	8.75	9	10	1.63	-0.04	-0.96

The table shows that the values of mean, median and mode of the pre-test scores of the variable in the experimental group were almost similar. The standard deviation of the variable shows that the score was somewhat dispersed from the central value. The values of the skewness and kurtosis show that the distributions were approximately normal.

Pre-test scores of the variable of the control group

Variable	Mean	Median	Mode	S.D	Skewness	Kurtosis
Discourse-level writing competency in English	9.28	9	9	1.60	0.75	0.22

The table shows that the values of mean, median and mode of the pre-test scores of the variable in the control group were almost similar. The standard deviation of the variable shows that the score was somewhat dispersed from the central value. The values of the skewness and kurtosis show that the distributions were approximately normal.

Post-test scores of the variable of the experimental group

Variable	Mean	Median	Mode	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Discourse-level writing competency in English	10.35	11	11	1.44	-0.60	-0.68

The table shows that the values of mean, median and mode of the post-test scores of the variable in the experimental group were almost similar. The standard deviation of the variable shows that the score was somewhat dispersed from the central value. The values of the skewness and kurtosis show that the distributions were approximately normal.

Post-test scores of the variables of the control group

Variable	Mean	Median	Mode	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Discourse-level writing competency in English	9.28	9	9	1.47	0.11	-0.39

The table shows that the values of mean, median and mode of the post-test scores of the variable in the control group were almost similar. The standard deviation of the variable shows that the score was somewhat dispersed from the central value. The values of the skewness and kurtosis show that the distributions were approximately normal.

The statistical constants of pre-test and post-test scores of the variable of the experimental and control groups were normally distributed. This indicates that parametric test was feasible in processing the data. So, mean difference analysis was done to arrive at conclusions.

Mean pre-test scores of the discourse-level writing competency of the experimental and control groups

Variable	Experimental Group			Control Group			<i>t</i>
Discourse-level writing competency in English	N1	M2	SD1	N2	M2	SD2	1.45
	40	8.75	1.62	40	9.28	1.60	

The table shows the calculated *t* values of the variable is less than the table value 1.99 for *df* 78 at .05 level of significance. This shows that there was no statistically significant difference in the mean pre-test score of discourse-level writing competency of the experimental and control groups. This is indicative of the fact that the pre-intervention statuses of the groups were the same. So the groups were comparable in terms of the discourse-level writing competency in English.

Comparison of the mean pre-test and post-test scores of the discourse-level writing competency of the experimental group

Variable	Experimental Group					<i>t</i>
Discourse-level writing competency in English	N	Pre-test		Post-test		9.16**
		M1	SD1	M2	SD2	
	40	8.75	1.63	10.35	1.44	

***p*<.01

The table shows a significant difference between the mean pre-test and post-test scores of discourse-level writing competency of the experimental group. The mean post-test score is greater than the mean pre-test score. Hence, the FIM strategy was proved to be effective in enhancing the discourse-level writing competency in English of the target population.

Mean difference analysis of post-test scores of the discourse-level writing competency of the experimental and control groups

Variable	Experimental Group			Control Group			<i>t</i>
Discourse-level writing competency in English	N	M1	SD1	N2	M2	SD2	3.31**
	40	10.35	1.44	40	9.28	1.46	

***p*<.01

It is clear from the table that the value for the variable (3.31) is greater than the table value 2.64 for *df* 78 at .01 level of significance. Hence, it can be ascribed to the implementation of fluid instructional materials in teaching the discourse-level tasks in classroom.

6. Conclusion

The study was an attempt to empirically prove the efficacy of fluid materials in ELT to enhance discourse-level writing competency in English language classrooms. The traditional textbook-based instruction fails to deliver the aims and objectives of teaching in new-age classrooms. The study reveals that a resourceful teacher, who is all set to cross the boundaries of traditional textbooks in order to evolve workable materials, can definitely bring about phenomenal learning outcomes in L2 English classrooms.

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