Enhancing Analytic Writing Skills in the Context of English Literature through Guided Writing Strategies: Addressing Challenges Faced by HNDE Students in Crafting Literature Responses

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of Guided Writing Techniques (GWT) on enhancing Analytical Writing Skills (AWS) among Higher National Diploma English students, focusing on their ability to respond effectively to English literature questions. From a population of 50 first-year students, 25 participants were selected through purposive sampling. This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative pretests and post-tests with qualitative structured interviews to gain insights into students' challenges and progress in Analytical writing. The study commenced with pretests, which, along with structured interviews, highlighted specific difficulties students faced in crafting responses to English literature questions and in AWS within this context. The intervention activities guided participants through three stages, each designed to build essential skills for producing effective literary responses: Literary Analysis Skill (LAS), Higher-Order Thinking Skill (HOT skill), and AWS, structured around GWT. Short stories, a form within the prose genre, were exclusively selected as the primary material for these activities. Following each stage of the intervention, individual post-tests were conducted to assess the development of core competencies. The findings revealed a significant improvement in students' AWS, evidenced by a correlation coefficient of 0.8914, underscoring the effectiveness of GWT. These techniques, mediated by LAS and HOT Skills, enabled students to craft focused, well-structured responses that thoroughly engage with literature questions. The study concludes that GWT, when integrated with LAS and HOT skills, is highly effective in enhancing AWS in English literature, highlighting their potential as a valuable instructional approach in similar educational contexts.

Keywords : Guided Writing Techniques; Analytical Writing, Literary Analysis Skills; Higher Order Thinking skill

Introduction

Students who have obtained a credit pass or higher in the English Language at the G.C.E. Ordinary Level examination are eligible for enrollment in the Higher National Diploma in English program at the Advanced Technological Institute, Jaffna. As part of the curriculum, they are required to study English Literature alongside other subjects, including Writing Skills, Speaking Skills, Listening Skills, and Reading Skills. Given that most HNDE students begin studying English Literature for the first time at the Advanced Technological Institute, Jaffna, they are likely to face several challenges.

Higher National Diploma in English (HNDE) students, though familiar with the prescribed literary texts, struggle to write effective and appropriate responses to English Literature questions due to gaps in analytical writing abilities. Students face substantial challenges in mastering analytical writing. Many students continue to struggle with balancing description and

analysis, often reverting to summarizing content rather than critically engaging with it.

This challenge is particularly pronounced among students with less exposure to analytical tasks before entering higher education. Without prior exposure, students struggle with understanding complex literary texts, themes, and terminologies. The unfamiliarity with LAS, such as critical interpretation, evaluation of literary devices, and thematic exploration, further hinder their ability to engage with the material. Additionally, students find it difficult to structure coherent and well-argued responses to literature-based questions, as this requires a combination of both analytical and writing skills.

This difficulty results in disengagement, causing students to potentially withdraw from participating in class discussions or completing assignments. Additionally, the lack of foundational knowledge causes students to rely on surface-level interpretations, preventing them from developing deeper analytical skills. As a result, they experience a prolonged learning curve, rely heavily on external resources, and face difficulties in improving their analytical writing abilities, all of which affect their overall academic growth in the course. Therefore, this study focuses on improving students' analytical writing abilities using GWT, offering structured support to bridge this gap.

In this research, GWT is employed as the independent variable to enhance analytical writing skills, which serves as the dependent variable. To uncover the underlying mechanisms through which this intervention leads to improved analytical writing, LAS and higher-order thinking skills such as synthesis, evaluation, and interpretation are incorporated as mediating variables. These mediating variables are essential to clarify how the GWT influences the development of analytical writing skills. Together, these skills enable students to gain the tools to craft well-supported arguments, offer unique perspectives and go beyond basic understanding and create insightful, comprehensive, appropriate responses.

Analytical writing has been the subject of considerable research across educational disciplines, with a focus on its critical role in fostering higher-order thinking and promoting in-depth engagement with texts, arguments, and data. Analytical writing is characterized by its requirement to break down complex ideas, assess evidence, and present structured, logical arguments. It is not simply descriptive but requires students to critically engage with content and convey their interpretations in a clear, well-organized manner.

Several studies have been conducted in the EFL classroom context regarding the problems EFL learners face in analytical exposition writing. Students displayed an unsatisfactory level of competence when it came to writing thesis statements, arguments, reiterations, language features, vocabulary, and mechanics; in fact, students need to master all these skills to produce analytical exposition texts that are qualified and relevant (Nurlatifah, L., & Yusuf, F. N., 2022). The students frequently struggle with incorporating critical analysis into their writing, as they tend to focus more on summary and description rather than in-depth evaluation. This challenge is compounded by a lack of familiarity with literary or academic conventions and insufficient practice in engaging with texts analytically. As a result, there is a growing recognition of the need for targeted teaching strategies, including the explicit teaching of analytical techniques, to support students in developing this skill (Dolores Perin & Patrick Holschuh, 2019).

Recent studies reinforce the fact that the students engaged in analytical writing assignments show significant improvement in their ability to assess evidence, recognize biases, and formulate well-reasoned arguments and that analytical writing encourages students to go beyond surface-level understanding and get engaged with material in a more evaluative and reflective manner. The ability to analyze, interpret, and evaluate complex information correlates with the development of strong analytical writing skills. Research emphasizes the importance of cognitive abilities such as critical thinking and

reasoning (Carla Evans,2020). Hardianti, B., Jabu, B., & Salija, K. (2023) claim that individuals with strong critical thinking abilities are likely to possess proficient voice abilities in their writing.

Newer research highlights the continued importance of structured approaches to teaching analytical writing. According to Wingate, U. (2019), explicitly teaching the structure of analytical and evidence-based writing, using methods like the PEEL (Point, Evidence, Explanation, Link) or Toulmin's Model of Argumentation, helps students to organize their thoughts clearly and logically. Students who are taught to follow these frameworks demonstrate more coherence in their essays and a clearer line of reasoning.

Feedback remains a critical factor in improving analytical writing. Timely, specific feedback, particularly when it focuses on both the content of the argument and the structure of the writing, leads to significant improvements in students' analytical essays. Their research also highlights the importance of self-assessment and peer feedback, as students who engage in reflective practices and receive peer critiques tend to produce more sophisticated analyses. Revision, guided by constructive feedback, allows students to refine their ideas and improve their ability to engage critically with the material.

Recent studies emphasize the need for tailored approaches to teaching analytical writing across different academic disciplines. Myhill, D., Cremin, T., & Oliver, L. (2023) argue that writing conventions vary greatly between fields like the humanities and sciences, and students benefit from learning discipline-specific techniques. For instance, in STEM fields, analytical writing tends to focus more on logical inferences from data and empirical evidence, while in literature and social sciences, the focus is on thematic exploration and critical interpretation of texts. The research suggests that teaching analytical writing effectively requires adjusting instructional strategies to the unique demands of each discipline.

The literature also touches on discipline-specific approaches to teaching analytical writing. For example, in the humanities, especially in fields like literature, history, and philosophy, students are required to engage deeply with texts and produce sophisticated analyses of complex themes, symbols, and arguments (Bean, 2011). In contrast, analytical writing in STEM fields focuses more on evaluating empirical evidence, making logical inferences, and drawing conclusions from data (Hand et al., 2009). Thus, teaching analytical writing often requires tailoring approaches to fit the conventions and expectations of different academic disciplines.

Genre-based approach refers to an instructional method that emphasizes the explicit teaching of different text genres and their corresponding linguistic features. Martin, J. R. (1992) stated that the "Genre-based approach emphasizes the importance of teaching writing as a social practice, where students learn to write by engaging with real world genres and their communicative purposes". By providing students with a framework and specific language patterns, this approach enables them to understand and produce texts effectively. Incorporating the genre-based approach into teaching writing has shown promising results in various language learning contexts (Emilia, 2011).

Based on the available literature, only a limited number of studies have been carried out about enhancing analytical writing skills using structured guidance. This study differs from others by using GWT as the independent variable and Analytical Writing skills within the context of English Literature as the dependent variable, with LAS and HOT Skills serving as mediating variables. The following are the research objectives of this study.

Research Objectives
1. To identify the challenges HNDE students face in analytical writing within the context of English literature.
2. To design targeted intervention activities utilizing Guided Writing techniques to

enhance analytical writing skills.

3. To evaluate the effectiveness of Guided Writing Techniques in improving students' analytical writing skills.

Materials and Methods

This study employed a quasi-experimental mixed-methods design. The study implemented a structural intervention and assessed its impact on the analytical skills of the participants. The study adopted a mixed-method approach, combining both qualitative and qualitative data collection techniques. The quantitative component focused on pre and post-tests to measure participants' improvement in LAS, HOT Skills, and analytical writing skills whereas the qualitative component explored students' perceptions of the GWT.

Of the 2nd year HNDE students who obtained 40 to 50 marks in the pretest, 25 students were selected for this study. Participants did not have previous exposure to English literature prior to their being enrolled to the HNDE and they belonged to the same age group and had approximately the same level of proficiency in English.

From the pretest and the semi-structured interviews, the researcher was able to identify the challenges HNDE students face in analyzing and interpreting literary texts for literature responses. Students face substantial challenges in responding to literature questions. Many students with their limited analytical depth struggled to independently identify and interpret themes, motifs, and deeper meanings in complex texts. Structuring analytical responses posed additional challenges. Many students had difficulties balancing description and analysis and reverted to summarizing content rather than critically engaging with it. Some students had difficulty in maintaining coherence and logical organization. Higher-order thinking remained another hurdle, as dissecting question prompts and crafting in-depth responses require advanced critical thinking skills that some students found difficult to fully meet. Additionally, connecting abstract literary themes to real-life issues

often proved challenging for many students.

There were five stages in the intervention activities. Each stage was designed to progressively build students' analytical writing skills. Since the effect of intervention activities on analytical writing skills mediated through LAS and HOT skills, these skills were also incorporated in the intervention activities. In the first stage, students received structured support in analytical writing, emphasizing thesis creation, logical evidence organization, and coherence. In the second stage, they developed foundational skills in literary interpretation, focusing on themes, motifs, character analysis, and techniques to uncover deeper meanings. The third stage deepened interpretive skills, particularly through contextual analysis and perspective-taking exercises, enabling students to explore varied viewpoints within texts. The fourth stage trained students to analyze literary prompts and develop responses that reflected higher-order thinking. To consolidate learning in the final stage, peer reviews, self-assessment checklists, genre diversity, and real-life connections enriched their understanding, while experiential activities like role-playing and dramatic readings enhanced critical thinking and interpretative engagement.

Limitations of the study

This study includes its focus on enhancing the analytical writing skills (AWS) of Higher National Diploma in English (HNDE) students, specifically targeting their ability to respond effectively to English literature questions. Although literature encompasses various genres, this study was limited to prose. Within prose, which consists of both fiction and non-fiction branches, only the short story form was selected, excluding other forms of non-fiction that may also contribute to analytical writing development as this allowed for a concentrated exploration of analytical writing skills in response to English literature questions, though it inherently limited the breadth of literary forms analyzed.

Results and discussions

The following four hypotheses were formulated by the researcher.

H1: GWT positively affects Literary Analysis Skill

H2: GWT positively affects higher-order thinking Skill

H3: GWT positively affects Analytical Writing Skills.

H4: GWT has a positive indirect effect on Analytical Writing Skills through its impact on Literary Analysis skills and Higher Order Thinking Skills

The following conceptual map shows the variables and the hypotheses.
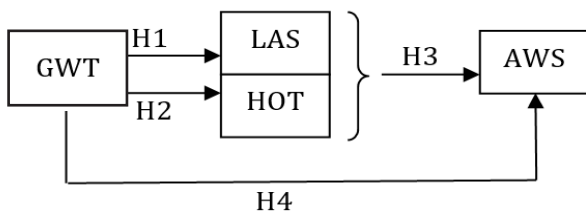
GWT – Guided Writing Technique (Independent Variable)

AWS – Analytical Writing Skill (Dependent Variable)

LAS – Literary Analysis Skill (Mediating Variable)

HOT – Higher Order Thinking Skill (Mediating Variable)

These Four hypotheses were tested using the correlation coefficient method. The findings reveal that Intervention activities have a direct positive impact on analytical writing skills, with a correlation coefficient of 0.8914, further enhanced by LAS and higher-order thinking skills as moderating variables, reflected by correlation coefficients of 0.524 and 0.149, respectively. LAS and higher-order thinking skills also showed an indirect positive relationship with analytical writing, with correlation coefficients of 0.511 and 0.1144, respectively. Therefore, all four hypotheses were accepted. In conclusion, intervention activities enhanced the Analytical Writing Skills of the participants.

When the posttests were analyzed using descriptive statistics, a marked increase was demonstrated in students in the way they structure arguments, with 60% of the participants showing improvement in organizing their essays logically with a cohesive flow. Additionally, 64% of the students were able to offer deeper insights, supporting their interpretations with relevant evidence that aligned with their arguments. A substantial improvement of 72% was noticed in the perspective-taking abilities of the students, which is essential for nuanced analytical writing. These outcomes collectively highlight the effectiveness of the intervention activities and the improved ability of the students to produce analytical writing.

Following the intervention activities, notable improvement was exhibited in the analytical writing skills of the participants who showed enhanced abilities to interpret and critique literary texts, with 58% demonstrating a deeper understanding and insight into themes, character motivations, and stylistic elements within the texts. Most of the participants (around 72%) were able to write more structured, cohesive, and logically organized analytical writing and to construct arguments well-supported by relevant textual evidence. Additionally, improved perspective-taking skills were reflected in their writing, as they began to consider and incorporate multiple interpretations, imparting depth to their analyses.

HOT skills were incorporated into the intervention activities, and after the intervention, notable progress was displayed in the analytical writing abilities of the students, with 55% demonstrating improved critical thinking skills. They were able to analyze not only the surface meaning of texts but also to explore underlying themes and symbols with great depth, as shown by 60% of participants. Additionally, 65% of students demonstrated improved skills in synthesizing information and making connections between ideas within and across texts. This deepened their arguments and enhanced the complexity of their analyses. Improvement in HOT skills enabled 68% of participants to structure their essays more coherently and cohesively, and the quality of their arguments was strengthened, by incorporating well-reasoned insights and relevant textual support.

In conclusion, the use of GWT in the intervention activities was effective in enhancing students'

analytical writing skills which was mediated by LAS and HOT skills and resulted in more coherent, persuasive, and insightful writing. The importance of integrating LAS and higher-order thinking skills was underscored by this improvement in developing analytical writing proficiency. Students were able to move beyond surface-level summaries and to present thoughtful, nuanced appropriate responses to literary questions.

Conclusion

The significance of this study lies in its potential to bridge the gap between students' literary comprehension and their ability to convey that understanding through written analysis. By evaluating the effectiveness of Guided Writing strategies, the research not only offers insights into improving analytical writing, but also contributes to the broader field of educational pedagogy in teaching literature. The outcomes of this research are expected to provide practical recommendations for educators, helping them better equip students with the critical writing skills necessary for academic and professional success.

By identifying the obstacles students encounter in critically engaging with texts, the study seeks to design and implement Guided Writing strategies tailored to improve these skills. Guided Writing has proven to be an effective instructional technique, offering structured support to help students refine their writing abilities through gradual, and targeted interventions.

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