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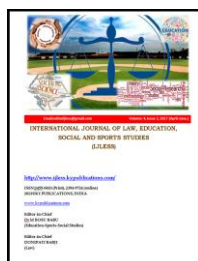


An Investigation on the Difficulties and the use of Think Aloud Technique in English Essay Writing Skills of + 2 Tribal Learners

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ABSTRACT

The common problem with all the L2 learners of English is that they conceive the idea in their mother tongue and translate it into English. So, technically the transition is from L1 to L2. In the case of tribal learners the same transition takes place from L1 (tribal language) to L2 (Odia which is the language of the State) to L3 (English which is medium of instruction in schools). In maximum cases the transition is very rough. There lies a huge gap between thinking skills and execution skills and L2 and L3 learners use think aloud techniques as a bridge between these two skills. Essay writing skills demand good amount of thinking and to be precise it revolves around choosing a topic or to write on a given topic, preparing framework or outline of the ideas and writing introduction, body and conclusion. The above mentioned systematic steps in essay writing give birth to difficulties related to deficits, interpretations and institutional failings. In this they verbally describe their future course of action or speak aloud the subsequent sentences while performing the activity of writing. It reduces the probability of occurrence of mistakes and errors committed by the learners. This paper aims to investigate the difficulties associated with English essay writing skills of the tribal learners and how think-aloud technique helps the tribal learners to come out of the mental block of writing an essay in English.

Keywords: +2 Tribal Learners, Think-Aloud Technique, Writing Habits

1. Introduction

Essay writing is a platform which exhibits high level of linguistic maturity. It is a writing activity which starts at school level. The examiners or teachers wish to see whether the child has understood the question and has organized the work clearly with a logical thought process and displays good amount of evidence of reading. There are various stages involved in writing essays and if these steps are not strategically carried out then it becomes a clear indicator of weak implementation of English knowledge in real life. Analyzing the task, awareness of the topic, framing a structure of the essay and reflecting on the plan and drafting the content in phased manner are all stages of essay writing.

Essay is a platform which helps the student to exhibit knowledge which they may have attained by reading, exploring and researching. Talent lies when students paint their essay writing skills by

critically analyzing, discussing and evaluating ideas. The entire emphasis of writing an essay is on the structure which carries paragraphs sub divided into introduction, body and conclusion. It revolves around constructing argument or generating ideas and less focus on description.

The introduction carries the whole essay it sets the context on which things will be placed. It should discuss the main point and the context in which the main point is being discussed. It should also carry the main argument progressing from general to a specific question or issue.

The main issue or question is discussed in the body of the essay and is supported by reading materials and drawing reference from works of others. It is written in paragraph form and calls for linguistic maturity while giving shape to the essay by categorizing it into introduction, body and conclusion. This requires good amount of expertise in writing skills which demands coherence, connectivity, correlation to be included while writing and the conclusion demands a summary of the write up, evaluative comments and a link to the conclusion. It also includes suggestions from the side of the writers.

1.1) Challenges associated with essay writing

These are the major challenges involved in the art of essay writing

- 1) Understanding the words used in the title of the essay.
- 2) Identifying the key words in the text and key task words to be specific.
- 3) Do justice to the important aspects like 'discuss' 'describe' 'evaluate' 'analyze' and 'elaborate'.
- 4) Good amount of reading is needed.
- 5) Linguistic maturity is required when thoughts are moving from general to specific points.
- 6) Principles of good writing have to be followed.
- 7) The information in all the paragraphs should be balanced.
- 8) The essay should be away from common errors and mistakes.

All the above mentioned points contribute to the degree of challenges involved in writing essay. Working on the relevance, signposting, sticking to the main points, referencing and creating structure are again some of difficulties associated with essay writing.

1.2) Statement of the problem

Writing continues to be a persistent problem that not only affects native speakers but also non-native speakers of English. Possessing bad essay writing skills makes them weak writers, poor marks in exams, increase in grammatical and spelling mistakes and incoherent paragraphs. The blunt truth is that all these years students have mastered the art of hiding or camouflaging their reading and writing skills and it is a herculean task to identify these weaknesses until students appear an examination. These deficiencies are bound to occur. This gives rise to the need of developing and protecting academic writing skills. It is always not the case that self-strategies affect the performance of the students. Competency of the teachers and effectiveness of the methods also contributes to the performance of the students. One method may work for a student and may not work for another student. This calls for the need of persistency in writing and teachers must look for strategies if they want to improve the writing skills of the students. Positive and team efforts will lead to the improvement of the writing skills of the students and it will be reflected in their essay writing skills as well. Tribal learners are low on confidence level and lack self-belief. The entire onus lies on the shoulder of the teacher to motivate them to elevate their standards.

Academic writing demands to carry out an investigation to learn whether students faced difficulties in academic writing and other writings like essay writing, report writing etc. Good writing requires practice and appropriate feedback.

Essay writing no doubt is a difficult and challenging activity even when written in native language. It is worst for the students who are learning English as a second or foreign language and the case of tribal learners is all the more worse.

Some of the problems which have come to the forefront are that the tribal learners do not understand some of the topics hence cannot perceive the content of the essay. In some of the cases the topic lacked clarity, teachers failed in choosing appropriate methods, techniques or strategies to teach essay writing skills. Not many steps have been taken to improve the learning process of essay writing skills and help them to understand each topic in depth and create good essays or compositions.

1.3) Challenges faced by Tribal students during the writing process and Think Aloud Technique

Research says that grammar, spellings, sentence construction and sentence structure continue to be the major difficult areas relating to the writing skills of the tribal learners. These problems are external in nature, the main problem is internal in nature and intervention is required in the areas of cognitive, thinking and narration skills of the tribal learners. The major challenge lies in the fact that my samples are first generation learners and hence only time can say if there will be any improvement in the pedigree. The moot question is will the next generation evolve in terms of their writing skills.

As per a study conducted it came to the forefront that the academic writing language and literary skills of the adolescents must be honed. In a study by Nandwana and Joshi in 2010 adolescents deserve more care and love and hence emotional intelligence is essential to handle the situation. The case of tribal adolescents does not carry a very rosy picture as there are high rates of dropouts because of socio economic issues, lack of exposure to the modern world, not a very open mindset towards learning, problems associated with linguistic maturity and psychological issues related to English language. (V.A, H and Mohammed.A.P.,2014)

The study of Varghese and Nagaraj in the year 2013 brought into limelight that reading and writing becomes difficult for the tribal learners because of their oral culture and a gap in home language and school language. A study also revealed that cognitive, social, psychological and linguistic problems do affect the education of the tribe.

Think aloud techniques are used by second language learners or third language learners to bridge the gap between home language and school language. According to Ericsson and Simon (1993), the think aloud technique permits the participants to access short term memory streams and the process of verbalizations talk about the cognitive processes that are necessary for the completion of the task. As per the report of Gordon Rugg (2006) think aloud technique gives insights into the task in progress and also gives a cue to the person who is accomplishing that task as to how to proceed and what to do next.

1.3) Research Methodology

The study was conducted on the +2 1st year Science tribal students in Bhubaneswar with sample size of 58. The aim of the research was to find out whether students follow think aloud techniques while writing in English and here in this case we are specifically focusing on essay writing skills and the reason has already been justified above. The research was carried out through distribution of questionnaires and personal interviews and the responses of the students were analyzed using relevant tools and techniques.

1.4) Hypothesis

H1 - to check whether there is a direct relation between English essay writing skills and think aloud technique.

H2 - to check whether there is dependency on think aloud techniques while writing essays

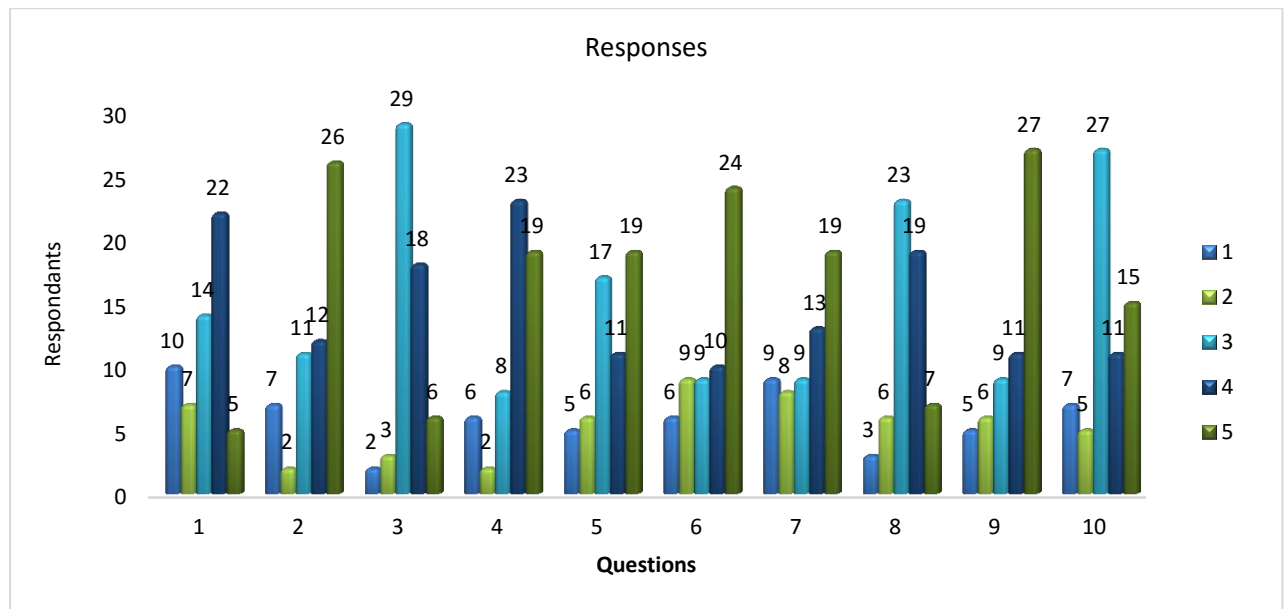
2. Discussion

2.1) Survey

Taking a study of the essay writing skills and think aloud techniques, the following were the responses of 58 students. The students were asked to answer the questions by choosing the best option on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is the lowest and 5 is the highest.

Table 1

S.No	Questions	Rate	1	2	3	4	5
1	I love writing skills		10	7	14	22	5
2	I love to choose my own topic instead of writing essays on a given topic		7	2	11	12	26
3	I feel that I take lot of time to think and conceive my ideas before writing essays		2	3	29	18	6
4	I think in mother tongue while conceiving ideas for writing an essay		6	2	8	23	19
5	I fear making mistakes while writing essays which block my flow of thoughts		5	6	17	11	19
6	I think aloud while writing and coining ideas when I sit to write essays		6	9	9	10	24
7	I am comfortable while writing when I think aloud because it gives me a clear picture of what I am going to write in the subsequent lines		9	8	9	13	19
8	I feel that think aloud technique increases my power of concentration while writing essays		3	6	23	19	7
9	I feel it is easy to convert thoughts into words using think aloud technique		5	6	9	11	27
10	I feel that I cannot write an essay without using think aloud technique		7	5	27	11	15



Graphical Representation of the Data

2 Data Analysis and Interpretation

From the above survey we learn that there is love for writing essays in the students but however fear, inhibition and elements of self-doubts have been noticed among the students. There is dependence on the teacher for topics and a lot of time is invested in conceiving ideas to write. Students show lot of dependence on think aloud technique especially when they are translating from mother tongue to English. They shared that using think aloud technique helps them in deciding their subsequent sentences. They also shared that using think aloud technique helps them in linking and connecting paragraphs. It works as developing a thread between introduction, body and conclusion for the students.

During the process of taking classes and in discussions and interviews it was observed that think aloud technique is seen not only in essay writing but also while jotting down notes or when the students are writing answers in exams.

This is a clear indication of the fact that there exists a direct relation between essay writing skills and think aloud technique and hence there is good amount of dependency on think aloud technique while writing essays.

3. Suggestion and Conclusion

From the above study we can conclude that there is lot of dependence on think aloud technique while writing essays and it acts as a bridge between competence and performance. The teachers of secondary level and higher secondary level have to deal with patience and help the students not to get addicted to think aloud technique. It is a bad writing habit and can be curbed only with continuous practice. The teachers should device their own creative and innovative modules instead of following the stereo type teaching pedagogy.

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