

**A TEMPLATE FOR TEACHING ACADEMIC ENGLISH TO EFL LEARNERS
(UNIVERSITY OR HIGH SCHOOL)**

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ABSTRACT

My view of language education incorporates strands from historical and current second language acquisition approaches. In short, Input (nature), Output (behavioral) and Interaction (negotiation) are all important. Learning the language as well as learning through the language is needed for higher level thinking. Moreover, a student's prior knowledge needs to be built and linked upon. Student to student interaction needs to be used. Finally, critical thinking levels need to be raised. This poster presentation incorporates the above philosophy and introduces concepts for teaching the English language skills of Reading, Listening, Speaking, Writing, Vocabulary and Critical Thinking with an emphasis on the edict: "if we expect students to learn, then we have to teach them how to learn". The approach teaches students HOW to think, not WHAT to think. The poster offers methods to acquire, understand and evaluate information, rather than memorizing an overload of facts. The poster's content is mostly useful for teachers of Academic English and/or Critical Thinking but also for EFL/ESL students who aspire to/are interested in raising their language/knowledge to a higher level.

Keywords: Curriculum, syllabus and materials design, Academic English

Introduction

Learners take multiple years to gain a high level of language proficiency to perform on par with native English speakers. Academic English entails various dimensions such as discourse patterns, complex grammatical structures, and vocabulary (Patricia et al., 2014). Accordingly, this paper describes six elements including reading, listening, speaking, writing, vocabulary, and critical thinking skills and offers concepts within each element that should be included in an Academic English EFL course designed especially for university or high school students. The core assumption of the paper believes that if we expect students to learn, then we need to teach them how to learn.

Understanding Academic vs. Non-academic Reading

Academic reading is an evolving area which has emerged for academic and educational purposes. The practice differs with other forms of reading in terms of content, the approach used in reading, and expectations from the author (Aharony & Bar-Ilan, 2018). Essentially, academic reading includes traditional books, journal articles, dictionaries, encyclopedias, and a vast number of resources accessed online. The elements for the critical reading sub-category include deep reading, critical thinking, and dialogic thinking (Aharony & Bar-Ilan, 2018). Effective reading involves elements such as introduction to reading skills, scanning for specific information, introduction to speed reading, identification of text types, predicting strategies for reading, reading to identify main points, scanning, skim-reading practice, and scanning for specific information (Aharony & Bar-Ilan, 2018). At the university level, some of the academic reading materials include selected chapters from textbooks, allocated weekly readings, academic

sources such as peer-reviewed journals and articles, books, the content of discussion forums, and lecture slides.

Non-academic reading involves evaluation of the materials written by non-scholars in an informal language (Shan-Shan, 2013). Non-academic materials are written in a personal, emotional manner, subjective, and impressionistic in nature. For EFL learners, non-academic materials include memos, digital media, newsletters, articles, magazines, newspapers, and letters to editors. EFL learners are required to read academic sources to build their understanding of specific concepts which cannot be acquired from non-academic sources. Leisure is also a source of motivation that enhances the reading of non-academic materials. Readers select from a wide range of extended texts since the practice is socially or intrinsically motivated and pleasurable activity for the students.

Active Reading

The practice involves reading materials with a determination to evaluate and understand its importance (Kuzborska, 2015). EFL learners are required to critically and actively engage with the content in order to learn or gain knowledge. Active reading skills act as a catalyst for critical thinking skills which enable learners to effectively interpret, examine, and describe academic concepts (Kuzborska, 2015). With active reading, students normally ask questions, track crucial information, make connections, evaluate, predict, and visualize texts (Yanghee Kim, 2012). Various strategies used at the high school and university level include, but are not limited to: annotating, chunking, connecting, evaluating, inferring, paraphrasing, predicting, previewing, scanning, skimming, summarizing, and visualizing. Emphasis is given to annotating, previewing, skimming, and scanning. Annotating enhances students understanding, recalling, and comprehension of the text. The practice enables readers to note the theme and identify key areas of focus hence enabling readers to reference their previous understanding. Previewing strategy enables students to recall prior knowledge. Students are required to skim the text before looking for various information and features during the actual reading. In regards to skimming, students are required to read the main ideas to gain an overall impression of the content. Finally, scanning strategy requires the learners to look for a specific fact from the text.

Drawing Inference from Reading

Students are required to use their knowledge to acquire an understanding of new or complex concepts while reading (Marzano, 2010). Inferences are made by students utilizing their own experience and clues in the text which aid in drawing the meanings not provided in the text (Marzano, 2010). The practice is used by EFL students to draw conclusions regarding the purpose and meaning of a particular text. For learners to make inferences from reading, they are required to develop judgment supported by previously acquired information (Marzano, 2010). From context clues within a passage, information about the reading can be deduced; hence, allowing students to evaluate and identify the meaning (Azizmohammadi, 2013). However, making strong inferences is one of the most challenging methods of reading because the practice requires a certain amount of guessing. The key processes that enhance the formulation of an appropriate inference include identification of an inference question, searching for clues, narrowing down the choices, and practicing (Azizmohammadi, 2013). Therefore, students draw inferences through reading and writing key points from the text. Reading strategy offers the opportunity to make meaning from the text and connect prior knowledge with the content. Reading enables students to predict the outcome that can be checked and confirmed. Prior knowledge is essential since it enables students to make accurate inferences about the text.

Finally, students should develop opposites and contrasts of the text by sharing opinions and forming interpretations.

Skills and Strategies to Understand Lecture

Active listening and note taking enable learners to capture the main points of the lecture, discriminate between less and more important information, and pose questions for clarification. EFL students are encouraged to sit in the first rows of the class since the practice enhances the capability to focus on understanding the lesson. Listening carefully in the first 5 minutes orients students to the topic and provides a broad overview of the material covered throughout the lecture. Effective listening requires focused and concentrated efforts to prevent potential issues that distract the attention. Rahimirad & Moini (2015) argued that listening is a challenging skill for many learners particularly those experiencing frustrations. Some of the obstacles include a speed of delivery which leads to mishearing and negative perception, and problems of recognizing words in the speakers accent (Rahimirad & Moini, 2015). Therefore, academic listening skills are essential for EFL students and future success in comprehending lectures. Sajjadi & Ahmadi (2013) proposed that improving speaking and listening skills among EFL students requires the lectures to be accompanied by oral presentations. For this reason, effective listening require predicting content, getting the gist, detecting triggers, listening for details, and inferring meaning. Therefore, these approaches are complemented by note taking whereby key points are recorded without being distracted.

Effective Note Taking

Note taking is a crucial skill for EFL learner's at the university or high school levels which allows a permanent record of information. During the lectures, effective note taking can be ensured by concentrating and paying attention, recognizing key concepts, and recognizing important information, verbal signposts, repetition, phonological cues, and closing remarks. Teng (2011) proposed that some EFL students lack effective listening skills that affect note-taking capability. During the lectures, students attempt to absorb important content as much as possible. In regards to this, effective note taking skills are essential in fostering remembrance and understanding (Teng, 2011). According to Crawford (2015), consistent practice helps students to gain confidence and improve note-taking skills. Effective note taking can be achieved through mind mapping which portrays the graphical and visual relationship between the ideas and concepts. Most importantly, mind mapping helps students to overcome potential obstacles that are associated with the organization of thoughts and ideas (Buzan, 1989). Therefore, utilizing mind mapping will enable students to create images in relation to the concepts and this fosters thinking instead of simply memorizing.

Moreover, note taking enables EFL learners to maintain focus and attention. In light of this, it encourages a more engaged posture whereas the act of writing creates the attention. When writing, students are required to summarize data that involves mental processing which in turn leads to better understanding and retention (Crawford, 2015). For language classes, effective note taking requires students to consider various practices such as listening, focusing on main ideas and key words, using a variety of organizational systems and collaborating with others. Effective note taking skills keep students alert, engages their minds, emphasizes and organizes information, and creates a condensed record for study (Crawford, 2015).

Skills Needed to Lead Class Discussion

Class discussion is a major aspect of EFL education with respect to fostering critical thinking skills in the English language. According to Leal (2013), discussion skills are crucial because they enable students to improve classroom interaction during a group discussion. These skills allow learners to develop the confidence and courage to decompose the language and derive meaning. First, listening skills are vital because they influence members to focus on the topic being discussed. Listening for repeated ideas helps the leader to direct group members in reaching a specific agreement. These skills are important parts of effective communication during a class discussion because learners develop the ability to accurately receive and interpret messages (Leal, 2013). Listening skills play various roles such as enabling students to show interest and concentration, encourage speaker to communicate fully, develop a selflessness approach, avoid distractions and preconceptions, and gain accurate understanding of the speakers' ideas. Secondly, group leaders need rephrasing skills which enables them to seek clarification from members during the discussion. These skills also help the leader to view topics from different angles and interpretations. Rephrasing skills enhance the understanding of others and further increases the impact of another's comments (Leal, 2013). During a class discussion, rephrasing skills enable students to verify if members understand each other, capture highlights of communication, and make communication more efficient. Finally, discussion group leaders require emotional control skills to take on the lead discussion duty when tempers flare. In regards to this, students are supposed to work towards diffusing anger and instead redirecting emotions with constructive suggestions. These skills help students to express confidence of group members by showing positive affect towards them.

Introduce American Classroom Culture

Notably, the American classroom culture is highly interactive and relatively informal. Group discussions play a central role in ensuring EFL students adopt American culture. Introduction of the American culture in the EFL classroom discussion requires instructors to express enthusiasm, assertiveness, warmth, and confidence (Al-Hosni, 2014). However, student's active involvement in the discussion depends on the level of confidence and the learning environment created by the teacher. According to Aljumah (2011), university students unwillingly participate in class discussion due to the fear of being seen as challenging their teacher's views. Some of the factors that contribute to the active involvement of the students include fostering teamwork and cooperation, reinforcing the lectures, and facilitating understanding with hands-on experience, exchanging ideas among students freely, and training students to speak publicly.

Academic Writing

According to Ghlolaminejad, Moinzadeh, Youhanaee and Ghobadirad (2013), mastery of writing skills means that EFL students are capable of efficiently expressing their feelings, plans, desires, and thoughts on paper without misinterpreting the source of information. Writing also plays a significant role in classrooms because it the means through which an instructor assesses students. Hence, learners are expected to have a balance in different aspects of writing such as mechanics, organization, vocabulary, purpose and content to demonstrate the skill of writing (Jahin & Idrees, 2012). However, Azizifar et al. (2010) notes that special attention should be paid to academic readings because most of them often fail to motivate students to develop their communicative skills. It is in this sense that Hosseini et al. (2013) argued that language art programs

should consider the multidimensional nature of writing in language development, assessment, and instructional practices.

Writing is the most important skill which EFL learners should be most conversant with (Salma, 2015). Hiroshi and Barroga (2019) note that scholarly writing is an overwhelming task for most learners; hence, learning institutions need to establish writing programs and editing systems to improve student writing and editing competencies. Nonetheless, Wischgoll (2017) attaches significance to the skill of text quality, as an aspect of writing competence which requires mastery of sub-skills such as summarization, text structure application, and language use. It is also imperative for EFL learners to possess selection, organization and connecting skills in order to establish coherence in academic writing. While producing different types of writing requires different levels of research or academic sources, the quality of such writings depends on learners' grasp of discussed skills. Moreover, it is down to the effort they put in improving their low-key skill areas.

Essays to Consider

There are different ways in which EFL students express their writing skills such as writing essays. While persuasive essays require students to possess effective skills that help to lure readers to accept their writing views, compare and contrast essays require learners to mention the differences and similarities of an event to help comprehend different topics. On the other hand, problem-solution essays entail in-depth analysis of a given challenge before an EFL learner devises practicable solutions for the problem. In an opinion essay, the important skills which EFL learners should possess are clear revelation of one's thoughts on a subject matter and disclosure of various viewpoints backed up reasons and examples.

Problem-solution essays require students to devise solutions which are easily applicable and future proof. In this sense, learners should widely read and demonstrate the ability to organize thoughts in a logical manner. Nevertheless, brainstorming skills are significant in generating different solution approaches before a student drafts the most feasible solutions. Coming up with quality opinion essays is quite difficult because target audiences may not subscribe to the author's views on a topic(s). For this reason, EFL learners need to develop opinion essay titles which provoke the curiosity of the intended audience(s). More importantly, students must develop essay clarity and logical flow skills in order to win the interest and concentration of readers. It is also advisable to be organized in terms of paper style because most readers dislike unsystematic essays.

Vocabulary

Academic writing conventions dictate that writers such as EFL students should conform to the special language demand of academic genres and the aspects of academic vocabulary (Rui, 2015). Since learners are required to produce quality academic writing, they should develop proficient English writing skills, an endeavor reliant on the ability to learn and use a diverse range of academic vocabulary. Developing EFL vocabulary is dependent on establishing pedagogical practices which meet the needs of EFL students with their vocabulary. Even though availing ESL writing courses for students is integral to teaching EFL vocabulary, it is imperative to allocate enough time for instructional time and energy for vocabulary learning (Rui, 2015). Content-based approach is the most suitable strategy for mastering new vocabularies because it provides close cooperation between an EFL learner and instructor. In a content-based learning setup, students view resources such as video clips either in class or at home before analyzing their contents and learning from them (Yu-Chin, 2017).

Teaching Students how to Think

Teaching EFL students the mechanics of critical thinking is a combination of attitude, knowledge, and performance of each student. The process requires display of critical thinking skills such as assumption recognition, deduction, perception, evaluation and interpretation (Aloqaili, 2006). The ability to process and evaluate past information in relation to current information results from deductive and inductive reasoning of solving challenges. Molnar et al. (2013) argued that inductive reasoning is a general thinking skill. On the other hand, Mousa (2017) note that inductive thinking requires the skill of general intelligence as well as the ability to effectively apply acquired knowledge. While inductive reasoning is primarily concerned with concept establishment, deductive thinking is more focused on the skill of understanding and applying rules (Mousa, 2017).

Quantitative knowledge is factual data based on conducted research while qualitative knowledge only offers insights into a given topic at the expense of being subjective or statistically-bound (Barnham, 2015). While qualitative thinking requires EFL learners to possess analytic, logical deduction and organization skills as well as the ability to cross-examine different types of studies, quantitative thinking is more mathematical-linked and requires acquaintance with mathematical and statistical knowledge. Besides, students need to develop concept application skills to enable them relate different aspects of quantitative thinking in their studies.

Learning and Practicing Reading, Writing and Critical Thinking Skills

The ability to master reading, analyzing, writing and critical thinking skills is one academic process that is entirely different from practicing those acquired skills. Honing EFL skills requires students to continuously evaluate their current knowledge and foster the creation of new knowledge in order to apply critical thinking and communicative skills (Soumendra & Ciraj, 2018). Based on the four broad skill categories, students should be skilled in actively engagement with class contents, interpretation, examination and description of different learning resources at their disposal. Additionally, they need to learn to be good listeners and communicators to facilitate easy practice and mastery of reading, writing, critical thinking, and vocabulary learning objectives.

According to Li and Yang (2014), EFL students should place great emphasis on situational contexts, cooperative interactions, and creation of authentic learning environments which enable the application of discussed skills. The RADICAL (Read, Ask, Discuss, Inquire, Collaborate, Act, Learn) model can enhance the skills required for researching, organizing and correctly presenting academic papers (Donnelly & Fitzmaurice, 2011). Based on the model, students engage in a fact-finding and critical analysis of the skills they intend to acquire/develop before prioritizing the aspects of skills to be considered for improvement. Thirdly, they should discuss knowledge deduced from the skill enhancement process and develop their skills as per initial skill weakness points. Applying critical thinking skills in the process of developing researched, organized and correctly documented papers requires students to adhere to eight key concepts. Consequently, they should define the problem in an amicable manner and slowly examine the evidence, biases and assumptions related to the problem.

Practicality of Critical Thinking

Using critical thinking in different life scenarios and linking it with the reading, writing, and vocabulary skills shows a learner's mastery of the concepts taught in EFL classes. Being in a position to think critically means that a learner is capable of encompassing the ability to comprehend the essence of considering justification behind given evidence or reasoning and deriving viable conclusions from life situation. Hence,

students should perceive critical thinking as an important requirement for approaching multifaceted real life situations and actively participating in social circles (Soumendra & Ciraj, 2018). Young and Warren (2011) reiterate the significance of this process due to existence of numerous obstacles which impede critical thinking as a learning goal. Application of critical thinking skills in an EFL environment has diverse effects on students. For instance, Salim and Ismail (2014) stated that students who undergo critical thinking lessons have higher post-test scores than their counterparts who have minimal critical thinking skills. Students who have mastered the art of applying critical thinking skills understand concepts faster and synthesize different aspects of knowledge faster than their students with minimal critical thinking skills.

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