

## Use Of Debates To Develop Argumentative Paragraph Writing Skills Of Engineering Students

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### ABSTRACT

This study probes into the connection between debate and its effect on developing argumentative paragraph writing skills. Paragraph writing is a basic form of writing that every student should master to communicate well both in academic and professional settings. This paper expounds how debates can help students enrich their argumentative paragraph writing skills. After a thirty-period intervention program using debates to trigger their ideas for better argumentative paragraph writing skills through process approach, it has been understood that students have demonstrated a marked improvement in their argumentative paragraph writing skills.

**Keywords:** Paragraph writing, Debate, Process Approach, English Language Teaching

### 1.Introduction

English has become genuinely a global language and it has been used in every industry and every domain of study as a medium of communication. Crystal (1997:79) has estimated that 85 percent of international organizations use English as one of their working languages. Undoubtedly, English is the most widely spoken and written language in the world. In the Indian context, English is not only an associate official language with reference to business, commerce, government, and higher education but also it is regarded as a second language.

On account of this, there has been consistently a growing need in recent times to learn English for academic and professional purposes. In the academic arena, it is the most preferred medium of instruction because higher education in any discipline is offered in English. Every student is expected to gain proficiency in English language skills i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing skills to excel in their academics. Out of the four language skills, writing is generally considered the toughest skill by the students. But effective writing skills will give an edge over others if the students master them.

Hyland (2003: viii) says, “Learning how to write in a second language is one of the most challenging aspects of second language learning. Perhaps this is not surprising in view of the fact that even for those who speak English as a first language, the ability to write effectively is something that requires extensive and specialized instruction.” If any student wants to write well, he needs to understand and learn different sub-skills of the writing to gain competence in writing. For this study, the researcher has chosen debates to be conducted before the students attempt argumentative paragraph writing as it is hypothesized that if students are participated in debates, the process helps the students get equipped with many relevant ideas for effective argumentative paragraph writing.

#### 1.1. Objectives of the Study

The present study is driven by two objectives:

- To know what extent debates can help students enrich their argumentative paragraph writing.
- To understand the effectiveness of the process approach to writing.

#### 1.2. Research Questions

- Do the students writer better argumentative paragraph after their participation in debates?
- Does the process approach really help them write the argumentative paragraph effectively?

#### 1.3. Hypothesis

The hypothesis of the study is:

If debates are conducted before instructing the students to write argumentative paragraphs, the students can write better argumentative paragraphs.

## 2. Literature Review

Writing skills are of paramount importance to every student irrespective of their field of study as they need to communicate well in written mode frequently in their academic and professional settings. Generally, every student considers that developing good writing skills is both difficult and time-consuming. Students need to master the sub-skills of writing and get sensitized with nuances of formal writing in due course of time. For any form of writing, paragraph is the basis. Zemach, Dorothy E and Rumisek, Lisa A (2005:11) define that “a paragraph is a group of sentences about a single topic. Together, the sentences of the paragraph explain the writer’s main idea about the topic”. If students understand what constitutes a good paragraph and have sufficient and relevant ideas at their disposal, they can produce a well –developed paragraph. If the students understand the different components of a paragraph like topic sentence, supportive sentence, concluding sentence, connecting these sentences both coherently and cohesively, they can produce a good paragraph. Argumentative paragraph is one of the important types of paragraphs which students feel a bit difficult to write. Raman, Meenakshi and Sharma, Sangeeta (2011: 369) explain that “an argumentative paragraph is used when we want to express an opinion and convince the readers using facts to substantiate our stand.”

Oxford dictionary (2020) defines the word “debate” as “a formal discussion of an issue at a public meeting or in a parliament”. So, it is understood that debate is a basically a discussion. Johnson (2009:12) defines that “a debate is a contest of the arguments used to prove or disprove the motion.” It is hypothesized by the researcher that if debates are conducted as pre-task before writing argumentative paragraph, the students will get sufficient and relevant ideas to write the argumentative paragraph effectively. The researcher has used the process approach predominantly to help the students learn argumentative paragraph writing. Harmer, Jeremy (2004:4) defines the process approach as “the stages a writer goes through in order to produce something in its final written form. The process may be affected by the content of the writing, the type of writing, and the medium it is written in.” Zemach, Dorothy E and Ghulldu, Lisa A (2011) say that “process approach to writing is where students work on invention, peer response, editing, and writing multiple drafts with a pragmatic approach to learning the basics of writing.” Hence, the researcher has used both debates and process approach to writing to develop the argumentative paragraph writing skills of the first year engineering students in this study.

## 3. Research Methodology

Qualitative research methodology has been used in this study.

### 3.1. Research Tools

The research tools used in this study are pre-test, post-test and interviews with teachers.

### 3.2. Research Sample

Thirty-first-year engineering students were chosen for this study using simple random sampling technique.

### 3.3. Intervention

A group of thirty-first-year engineering students have been selected for this study. Firstly, a pre-test has been conducted to understand their ability to write argumentative paragraph and to know their awareness of the basics of the paragraph writing skills. The pre-test scripts were evaluated qualitatively. Secondly, ten teachers were interviewed. Next, the students have been sensitized with basics of debate and its procedure for correct and effective participation. The students have been given a thirty-hour intervention for fifteen days. Every day, the students have involved in the intervention for two hours i.e. from 1 pm to 3 pm. The students have been divided into three ten member groups and they were monitored by three teachers. The everyday session plan has been that students, firstly, were given twenty-minute preparation time to make sure all were ready. Secondly, they were involved in debate for 20 or 30 minutes. Immediately after the debate, they were asked to jot down the points they expressed in the debate in groups. Last, they were asked to write the first draft of the argumentative paragraph and then asked to revise three to four times using process approach principles to produce the final version. A post-test has been conducted to understand the effectiveness of the intervention the program.

### 3.4. Data analysis and interpretation

Qualitative approach techniques have been used to analyse and interpret the data. Firstly, after evaluating the students’ Pre-test answer scripts, it was found that the following problems had been identified. Some of them are: no paragraph structure, no sufficient and relevant ideas, and both coherence and cohesion were affected. After the intervention, a post-test was conducted and the answer scripts were evaluated qualitatively. It has been observed that the students’ writing has shown a good improvement in terms of paragraph structure, sufficient information, cohesion, coherence, etc. Thirdly, opinions from the ten English teachers involved in the intervention were collected through interviews to know their opinion on this study and its effectiveness.

**Some of the opinions of the teachers are given below:**

- Paragraph writing is a basic form of writing which students must learn to excel in it.
- Activities like debates equip students with a set of ideas so that it enhances their confidence level to write paragraph effectively
- Process approach should be used in every writing class irrespective of the age of the students to achieve effectiveness in writing.
- More periods should be allotted to teach writing skills

**4. Discussion**

This study proved that if students had the right and sufficient inputs to write, they would write well. Students, who showed some problems to produce a good length paragraph, showed a marked improvement in their argumentative paragraph writing. In addition to that, they wrote coherently because of the process approach procedures. The students were able to write the topic sentence correctly which was well supported by the supporting sentences.

**5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

Based on the understanding of the intervention program in this study, the following conclusions/suggestions have been specified.

1. Speaking activities like debates trigger a lot of ideas in students and other participants' contribution help the students with sufficient ideas for any writing tasks. The more the speaking activities, the better for the students for the development of proficiency in writing.
2. Students must be encouraged to develop consistent reading habits to enhance their writing skills.
3. More intensive testing practice should be given to understand the efficacy of speaking activities to enhance students' writing skills

**6. Limitations**

Firstly, one of the limitations of the study is the small sample size and thirty period intervention program. Secondly, the teacher has developed the assessment parameters based his understanding and requirements.

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