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Challenges and Solutions in Teaching Writing to Azerbaijani Learners of English

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Abstract

This study explores the challenges and potential solutions in teaching English writing to Azerbaijani learners, focusing on linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical factors that impact writing proficiency. Through a mixed-methods approach involving surveys, interviews, and classroom observations, the research identifies key difficulties such as grammatical errors, rhetorical differences, and the influence of educational practices. The study also highlights effective strategies, including process-oriented writing activities and culturally responsive teaching methods, which enhance both writing skills and learner engagement. Despite the valuable insights, limitations such as sample size and the focus on short-term outcomes suggest the need for further research, particularly in exploring long-term impacts and the role of digital tools in writing instruction.

Keywords

Azerbaijani learners, English writing, language acquisition, pedagogical strategies

1. Introduction

Writing skills are a crucial component of English language acquisition, serving as a foundation for effective communication and academic success. For Azerbaijani learners of English, mastering writing skills presents unique challenges due to the significant linguistic differences between Azerbaijani and English, as well as cultural and educational factors that influence language learning. Azerbaijani, a Turkic language, differs considerably from English in terms of syntax, vocabulary, and sentence structure, which can lead to difficulties in translating thoughts into coherent English sentences. Moreover, cultural nuances play a role in how ideas are expressed in writing, often resulting in Azerbaijani learners struggling with the more direct and explicit style typically favored in English academic writing. These challenges are compounded by the educational practices in Azerbaijan, where traditional methods may not always provide the necessary support for developing advanced writing skills in a foreign language. Thus, understanding these specific challenges is essential for designing effective teaching strategies that cater to the needs of Azerbaijani learners (Amanov, 2023).

The primary obstacles encountered in teaching writing to Azerbaijani learners can be broadly categorized into linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical challenges. Linguistically, the significant differences in grammar, word order, and the use of articles between Azerbaijani and English often result in common errors that persist despite repeated instruction. For instance,



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Azerbaijani lacks the definite and indefinite articles found in English, leading learners to frequently omit or misuse these elements in their writing. Culturally, the way ideas are structured and presented in Azerbaijani differs from English norms, which can cause confusion when learners attempt to adapt their writing to fit English standards. Pedagogically, the focus on rote memorization and translation exercises in some Azerbaijani schools may limit students' opportunities to engage in meaningful writing practice, further hindering their ability to develop fluency in English composition. Recognizing these challenges is the first step in developing targeted solutions that can help Azerbaijani learners overcome these barriers and achieve greater proficiency in writing (Kakhramonovich, 2021).

The purpose of this study is to explore and analyze the specific challenges that Azerbaijani learners face in mastering English writing skills and to propose effective solutions to address these issues. This study will investigate key research questions, including identifying the primary challenges in writing English, understanding the influence of cultural and linguistic factors on learners' writing abilities, and evaluating strategies and methods that have been successful in overcoming these obstacles. By focusing on these areas, the study aims to contribute to the broader field of English language education by offering insights into how educators can better support Azerbaijani learners in developing their writing skills. Additionally, this research will provide practical recommendations for teachers, suggesting pedagogical approaches that are culturally and linguistically responsive to the needs of Azerbaijani students. Ultimately, the goal is to enhance the teaching and learning of English writing in Azerbaijan, ensuring that learners are equipped with the skills necessary to succeed in both academic and professional contexts (Asadova, 2024; Hajiyeve, 2024).

The literature on second language writing acquisition provides a variety of theoretical frameworks that are relevant to understanding the challenges faced by Azerbaijani learners of English. One prominent theory is the process writing approach, which emphasizes writing as a recursive process involving multiple drafts, feedback, and revisions. This approach contrasts with more traditional methods that focus on the final product rather than the developmental stages of writing. By encouraging learners to engage in brainstorming, drafting, and revising, the process writing approach helps them to improve their writing skills incrementally, making it particularly useful for non-native speakers who may struggle with organizing their thoughts in a new language. Another key theory is contrastive rhetoric, which examines the influence of a learner's native language and cultural norms on their writing in a second language. This theory suggests that the rhetorical patterns and organizational structures that are common in one language can interfere with writing in another, leading to challenges in producing coherent and culturally appropriate texts in English. Understanding these theoretical frameworks is essential for educators who seek to address the specific needs of Azerbaijani learners (Chen, Hung, & Yeh, 2021; Singh, 2019).

Previous studies have extensively documented the challenges that non-native English learners face in acquiring writing skills, with a particular focus on those from linguistic backgrounds that differ significantly from English. Research has shown that learners often struggle with grammar, vocabulary, and syntax, as well as with the rhetorical conventions of English



academic writing. For Azerbaijani learners, these challenges are further compounded by the linguistic differences between Azerbaijani and English, as well as the educational practices in Azerbaijan, which may not provide sufficient opportunities for authentic writing practice. Studies conducted in other contexts, such as those involving Turkish or Persian speakers, have identified effective strategies that could be adapted for Azerbaijani learners. These strategies include the use of contrastive analysis to highlight differences between the learners' native language and English, the incorporation of culturally relevant materials to make writing tasks more engaging, and the implementation of collaborative writing activities to build confidence and fluency. These findings underscore the importance of tailoring writing instruction to the specific linguistic and cultural background of learners to improve their writing proficiency (Kasap, 2023; Tiwari, 2019).

Despite the valuable insights provided by existing research, there are still significant gaps in the literature that need to be addressed. One area that requires further investigation is the role of cultural identity in shaping the writing practices of Azerbaijani learners. While contrastive rhetoric provides a useful framework for understanding how cultural differences influence writing, more research is needed to explore how Azerbaijani learners navigate these differences and how their cultural identity impacts their writing in English. Additionally, there is a need for more research on the effectiveness of specific pedagogical interventions in Azerbaijan, particularly those that are designed to address the unique challenges faced by Azerbaijani learners. For example, studies could examine the impact of integrating digital tools into writing instruction, as well as the effectiveness of process-oriented approaches in improving writing outcomes. By addressing these gaps, future research can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence writing acquisition among Azerbaijani learners and inform the development of more effective teaching strategies (Amanov, 2023; Chan & Hu, 2023).

3. Methodology

This study utilizes a mixed-methods research design, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and potential solutions in teaching writing to Azerbaijani learners of English. The quantitative aspect involves the systematic collection of numerical data through surveys and standardized writing assessments. These tools will measure specific components of writing proficiency, including grammar accuracy, vocabulary richness, sentence structure, and overall coherence in written texts. The data collected quantitatively will provide a statistical foundation, enabling the identification of prevalent writing issues among Azerbaijani learners. Meanwhile, the qualitative component is designed to delve deeper into the contextual and experiential aspects of writing acquisition. This will be achieved through semi-structured interviews with students and teachers, as well as classroom observations. These qualitative methods are intended to capture the learners' perceptions, experiences, and the specific challenges they face, as well as the strategies employed by educators in addressing these challenges. The integration of these methods allows for a triangulation of data, providing a more robust and nuanced analysis that captures both the measurable outcomes and the lived experiences of the participants (Amanov, 2023; Singh, 2020).



The study involves a diverse participant group, consisting of 150 Azerbaijani learners of English aged between 16 and 22 years. These participants are recruited from a variety of educational settings in Baku, including public high schools, private language schools, and universities. The selection process is based on several criteria, including the participants' current level of English proficiency, which is determined through a preliminary English language test. This ensures that all participants have at least a foundational knowledge of English, allowing for a more focused study on writing skills rather than basic language acquisition. The participants are categorized into three distinct groups based on their educational background: high school students, university undergraduates, and language school attendees. This stratification allows for a comparative analysis of writing challenges across different educational levels and contexts. Additionally, the study includes 20 English language teachers from the same institutions, whose insights are invaluable in understanding the pedagogical challenges and strategies related to teaching writing. These teachers provide a critical perspective on the instructional methods used and the specific difficulties they observe in their students' writing development (Asadova, 2024; Kakhramonovich, 2021).

Data collection for this study is carried out using a combination of quantitative and qualitative tools, ensuring a comprehensive approach to understanding the writing challenges faced by Azerbaijani learners. Surveys are distributed to all student participants to gather quantitative data on their self-reported writing habits, challenges, and perceived proficiency levels. These surveys also include questions related to their exposure to English outside the classroom, which may influence their writing skills. Standardized writing assessments are administered to objectively measure students' writing proficiency across several dimensions, including grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure, and coherence. For qualitative data, semi-structured interviews are conducted with a subset of students from each educational level, as well as with all participating teachers. These interviews are designed to explore in greater depth the specific challenges students face, the strategies they use to overcome these challenges, and the teachers' perspectives on effective instructional methods. Classroom observations are also conducted to capture the dynamics of writing instruction in real-time, providing additional context to the interview and survey data. This multi-faceted data collection approach ensures that the study captures both the quantitative metrics of writing proficiency and the qualitative nuances of teaching and learning experiences (Chen, Hung, & Yeh, 2021; Amanov, 2023).

The data analysis process involves both statistical methods for quantitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative data, allowing for a comprehensive interpretation of the findings. Quantitative data from the surveys and writing assessments will be analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics will be used to summarize the data, providing a clear overview of the general trends and common issues in writing proficiency among the participants. Inferential statistics, such as t-tests and ANOVA, will be employed to determine whether there are significant differences in writing performance across the different participant groups and to explore correlations between various factors, such as educational background and writing proficiency. For the qualitative data, thematic analysis will be used to identify and interpret patterns and themes



within the interview transcripts and observation notes. This analysis will focus on understanding the common challenges faced by Azerbaijani learners, the cultural and linguistic factors that influence their writing, and the strategies employed by teachers to address these challenges. By combining these analytical methods, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved in teaching writing to Azerbaijani learners of English, offering insights that are both data-driven and contextually grounded (Amanov, 2023; Singh, 2020).

4. Results

The analysis of the data revealed several key challenges in teaching writing to Azerbaijani learners of English, particularly related to linguistic and cultural differences, as well as pedagogical practices. One of the primary challenges identified was the significant grammatical differences between Azerbaijani and English, which often lead to persistent errors in areas such as article usage, verb tense consistency, and sentence structure. Azerbaijani learners frequently struggle with these aspects due to the lack of equivalent structures in their native language, which complicates their ability to transfer concepts from Azerbaijani to English. Additionally, the study found that cultural differences in rhetorical styles pose challenges, as Azerbaijani learners tend to prefer more indirect and elaborate expressions, which can clash with the more straightforward and concise style typical of English academic writing. These challenges were consistent across different learner groups, although the extent of difficulty varied. For instance, younger learners (aged 16-18) exhibited more difficulties with basic grammatical structures, while older students (aged 19-22) faced challenges with more complex aspects of writing, such as organizing essays and developing arguments.

Both teachers and learners provided valuable insights into the challenges and potential solutions for improving writing skills among Azerbaijani learners. Teachers commonly noted that students often lack confidence in their writing abilities, which can result in reluctance to engage in writing tasks. They also pointed out that students' over-reliance on translation from Azerbaijani to English often hinders the development of natural writing fluency in English. Teachers suggested that integrating more process-oriented writing activities, such as peer review and iterative drafting, could help students build confidence and improve their writing skills incrementally. Learners, on the other hand, expressed frustration with the complexity of English grammar and the difficulty of adapting to a different rhetorical style. However, they also acknowledged the effectiveness of interactive and collaborative learning methods, such as group writing projects and digital tools that offer immediate feedback. Both teachers and learners emphasized the importance of contextualizing writing tasks within culturally relevant topics, which can make writing more engaging and relatable for Azerbaijani students. Overall, the findings suggest that a more supportive and process-focused approach to writing instruction, combined with culturally responsive teaching strategies, could significantly enhance writing outcomes for Azerbaijani learners (Asadova, 2024; Kasap, 2023).

5. Discussion



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The findings of this study align with much of the existing literature on second language writing, particularly concerning the challenges faced by learners whose first language significantly differs from English. As observed in previous studies, linguistic differences, such as those between Azerbaijani and English, can lead to persistent grammatical errors and difficulties in sentence structure (Chen, Hung, & Yeh, 2021; Tiwari, 2019). The cultural aspects of writing, such as the preference for indirect expressions in Azerbaijani, also mirror challenges identified in other contexts where students struggle to adapt to the more direct style of English academic writing (Singh, 2020). However, this study adds to the literature by highlighting the specific impact of these challenges on different age groups and proficiency levels among Azerbaijani learners. For instance, while younger learners face fundamental grammatical issues, older students grapple with more advanced writing tasks, such as argument development and essay organization. The study's emphasis on the importance of culturally relevant teaching strategies also aligns with research suggesting that contextually meaningful content can enhance learner engagement and writing outcomes (Amanov, 2023; Kakhramonovich, 2021).

The results of this study suggest several practical implications for educators seeking to improve the writing skills of Azerbaijani learners. Firstly, teachers should consider adopting a process-oriented approach to writing instruction, which includes activities such as peer review, iterative drafting, and collaborative writing tasks. These methods can help build students' confidence and gradually improve their writing fluency, which is particularly important given the challenges identified in both basic and advanced writing skills (Asadova, 2024; Kasap, 2023). Additionally, incorporating culturally responsive teaching strategies, such as using writing prompts that resonate with Azerbaijani students' cultural backgrounds, can make writing tasks more engaging and relatable. However, educators must also be aware of the potential challenges in implementing these solutions. For instance, the reliance on technology for interactive learning methods may not be feasible in all educational settings, particularly in regions with limited access to digital resources. Moreover, while collaborative tasks can enhance learning, they require careful facilitation to ensure that all students are equally involved and benefit from the process. Despite these challenges, the proposed strategies have the potential to significantly improve writing outcomes for Azerbaijani learners when thoughtfully adapted to the specific educational context (Chen, Hung, & Yeh, 2021; Singh, 2020).

6. Conclusion

This study has identified several significant challenges faced by Azerbaijani learners in mastering English writing skills, particularly related to linguistic differences, cultural influences, and pedagogical practices. The findings highlight the persistent difficulties in grammar, sentence structure, and rhetorical style, which are compounded by the distinct linguistic features of Azerbaijani compared to English. Additionally, the study emphasizes the importance of culturally relevant and process-oriented teaching strategies in overcoming these challenges. Solutions such as peer review, iterative drafting, and the use of culturally resonant materials have been identified as effective methods for improving writing skills among Azerbaijani learners. These strategies not



only enhance writing proficiency but also increase student engagement and confidence, which are crucial for their overall language development (Asadova, 2024; Kasap, 2023).

Despite the valuable insights gained from this study, several limitations must be acknowledged. One of the primary limitations is the sample size, which, while sufficient for the scope of this study, may not fully represent the broader population of Azerbaijani learners. The study's focus on specific educational institutions in Baku also limits the generalizability of the findings to other regions or educational contexts within Azerbaijan. Additionally, the study primarily examined short-term outcomes, which means that the long-term effectiveness of the identified solutions remains uncertain. The reliance on self-reported data in some areas also introduces the potential for bias, as students' and teachers' perceptions may not always accurately reflect their actual experiences and challenges (Chen, Hung, & Yeh, 2021; Kakhramonovich, 2021).

Future research should address these limitations by expanding the scope of the study to include a larger and more diverse sample of Azerbaijani learners from different regions and educational backgrounds. Longitudinal studies would be particularly valuable in assessing the long-term impact of the proposed teaching strategies on writing proficiency. Additionally, further research could explore the role of digital tools in enhancing writing skills, particularly in contexts where access to technology is limited. Investigating the integration of digital tools with traditional methods could provide insights into how these approaches can complement each other to improve writing outcomes. Finally, more research is needed to explore the intersection of cultural identity and writing, particularly how Azerbaijani learners navigate their cultural influences when writing in English and how educators can support this process (Tiwari, 2019; Singh, 2020; Amanov, 2023).

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