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THE PECULIARITIES OF A BANK OF TASKS DESIGNED TO ENHANCE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' COMMUNICATIVE ENGLISH WRITING SKILLS

Omurzakova Arna

omurzakovaarna31@gmail.com

4th year student by profession “Foreign language: two foreign languages” of the Eurasian National University named after L.N. Gumilyov, Astana, Kazakhstan
Scientific adviser - G. A. Khamitova

Introduction

This article aims to analyze the peculiar aspects of developing a bank of tasks designed to enhance the communicative English writing skills of high school students. It begins by stating the aim of the bank of tasks, delving into the goals and outcomes. Following this, a detailed examination of the textbooks serving as foundational resources for these tasks is undertaken. Subsequently, the article delves into the exploration of the structure and organization of the bank of tasks. Finally, an analysis is conducted to evaluate how the tasks within the bank effectively address key aspects of language proficiency and writing skills.

The aim of this bank of tasks is to foster the development of high school students' communicative writing skills in English. *Communicative English writing skills* extend beyond mere proficiency in conveying thoughts, ideas, information through writing: they encompass a nuanced understanding of the context, audience, and purpose. Mastering these skills helps students navigate diverse communicative situations effectively, thereby enhancing their overall competence in English language proficiency [1; 2].

When choosing tasks for inclusion in the bank, it was crucial to ensure that they align with the guidelines outlined in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) [3]. Consequently, only textbooks adhering to the CEFR standards were selected as resources for the bank. Given that high school students are expected to possess an Upper Intermediate (B2) level of proficiency, English language textbooks appropriate for this proficiency level were specifically chosen.

Methodology

The analysis of all the materials selected as a resource for the bank of tasks is conducted in this section. The description of each resource from which the tasks were selected is given in the following paragraphs.

“Upstream” is a renowned series of English language coursebooks designed for learners of English at different stages of language proficiency. The textbooks include “Writing” units, offering a wide range of writing activities accompanied by vibrant visuals (pictures, notes, maps, etc.), serving as scaffolding for students [4].

“English File” is a widely used series of English language coursebooks tailored to address the needs of learners at various stages. The series is full of writing activities aimed to enhance students' communicative writing skills [5].

“New Headway” is also a series of English language coursebooks designed for learners at different levels of proficiency. The textbooks contain “Writing” modules, offering writing activities inspired by real-life situations [6].

“Outcomes” is another series of English language teaching textbooks, focusing on developing learners' communication skills in real-life contexts. The textbooks include eight “Writing Units” which teach eight different styles of writing. Each of them features a model text, extra vocabulary and grammar exercises that help to write each of eight kinds of texts [7].

Another valuable source for communicative writing tasks is a sample B2 First for Schools exam, crafted by Cambridge examiners to align with the CEFR standards. The exam includes the “Writing part”, encompassing different communicative writing task types.

Table 1 below outlines the types of writing activities present in all of the afore-mentioned resources.

Table 1 Types of writing activities found in selected materials for the bank of tasks

Textbook	Writing activity types
Upstream	Letters, Transactional letters, Reports and letters of application, Making suggestions, For-and-against writing, Narratives, Opinion, Reviews
English File	An informal email, A short story, For and against, A blog post, Describing a photo, Expressing your opinion, A report
New Headway	A CV and a covering letter, Narrative writing, Report writing, For and against, Describing places, Writing for talking, Formal and informal letters and emails
Outcomes	Giving advice, Letter of complaint, A leaflet/poster, Stories, Personal statements, Reports, Arguing your case, Formal and informal emails
B2 First for Schools exam	an essay, an article, an email, a review, a story

As can be noticed, some of the types of writing activities in these resources align with the CEFR standards outlined in Table 1. All of them contain writing modules dedicated to formal and informal emails/letters, reports.

The bank of tasks is organized into four primary sections, each further divided into two or three subsections, as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2 Comprehensive overview: contents of the bank of tasks

1 Emails/letters 1.1 Formal email/letter 1.1.1 Email/letter of invitation 1.1.2 Email/letter of apology 1.1.3 Email/letter of inquiry 1.2 Informal email/letter
2 Reviews 2.1 Film review 2.2 Book review
3 Descriptive writing 3.1 Describing real/imaginary events 3.2 Describing processes
4 Reports and essays 4.1 Report 4.2 For and against essay 4.3 Opinion essay

Result

This section provides an analysis of how tasks within the bank cover various aspects related to language proficiency and writing skills. Initially, a table is presented to outline specific aspects of language proficiency or writing skills. Following this, representative tasks from some sections of the bank are showcased to explore how they address the aspects in the table. Table 3 below showcases important factors to take into account when teaching communicative writing skills.

The task that addresses the points in this table is from the Emails/letters section, formal email/letter subsection.

Task: Write a formal letter between 120-180 words.

You work for a mail order company and have received a letter from a customer who is unhappy about the delay in the delivery of a camera he ordered. Read the extract from his letter and the notes you made, and write a letter of apology. Give an explanation and details of what you will do to rectify the situation.

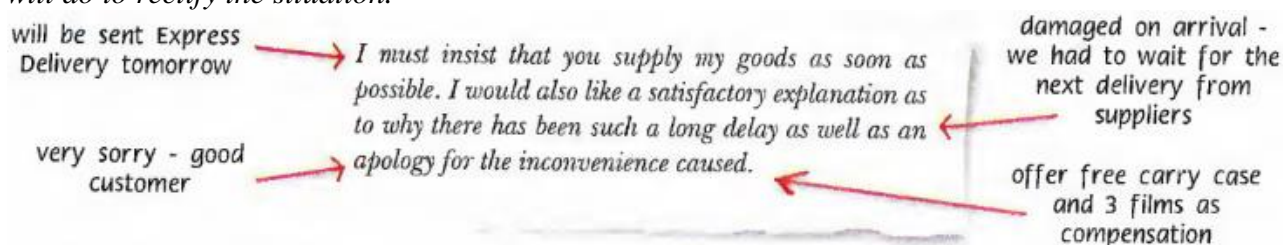


Figure 1 Example of formal letter

Table 3 Factors influencing the teaching process of communicative writing skills

Consideration	Description
Definition of communicative writing	Communicative writing involves connecting with a specific audience, not just writing for the sake of it. [8]
Real and meaningful communication	Emphasize practical use of language instead of just following the grammar rules. [9]
Differentiation and adaptability	Use teaching methods considering the complexity of writing, students diversity, learning process, and the importance of practice. [10]

This task requires students to write a formal letter of apology to a customer's complaint about a delayed delivery on behalf of a mail order company, adhering to the principles of communicative writing.

The task encourages students to understand the audience (the unhappy customer) and tailor the content of the letter in a formal and empathetic manner, addressing the "Definition of communicative writing". It also promotes "Real and meaningful communication" by encouraging students to respond to a real-life scenario (a customer complaint) to engage in meaningful communication. In other words, students are encouraged to prioritize conveying the message effectively over rigid adherence to grammar rules, ensuring that the content of their letter addresses the customer's concerns and provides satisfactory resolution. "Differentiation and adaptability" part is also addressed as teachers can adapt the task to suit students' different proficiency levels. For instance, students at a low proficiency level may focus on basic expressions of apology and explanation, while more advanced students can incorporate nuanced language.

Table 4 below displays Savignon's [11] summary of the components of communicative competence which is a broader term that encompasses communicative skills in writing.

Table 4 Key components of communicative competence

Component	Description
Grammatical	Mastering language's grammatical structure and using its features correctly for creating words and sentences.
Sociolinguistic	Understanding the social rules and nuances of language use in different contexts and situations.
Discourse	Connecting sentences coherently, forming meaningful texts that are relevant to a given context.
Strategic	Using strategies to overcome communication obstacles, such as unfamiliar rules, fatigue, or distraction.

The task selected to cover these points is from the Reviews section, Film review subsection.

Task: A magazine has asked its readers to send in reviews of their favourite films. Write your review for the magazine, mentioning the main points of the plot and including general comments about the acting and directing as well as your recommendation. You should write between 120-180 words.

It successfully addresses all the components of communicative competence in the following way:

Grammatical: the task requires students to produce a text of specific length (120-180 words), which involves using language's grammatical structures correctly to form sentences.

Sociolinguistic: writing a film review involves understanding the social context of language use, as students must consider the audience (readers of the magazine) and adapt their writing style and tone accordingly.

Discourse: connecting the main points of the plot, commenting on acting and directing, including personal recommendations coherently forms the discourse of the review, requiring students to organize their ideas logically.

Strategic: the task encourages students to employ specific strategies to overcome communication obstacles while writing the review, such as finding appropriate vocabulary to express their opinions, structuring their arguments effectively, or using rhetorical devices to convince readers to watch the film.

Table 5 below outlines the challenges in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing according to Rao [12] and Bilal et al. [13].

Table 5 Challenges in EFL writing

Challenge	Description
Syntax (sentence structure)	Making mistakes in tenses; issues with faulty parallelism (keeping sentence parts balanced) and noun-verb agreement; having long or confusing sentences; struggling to vary sentences and use connecting words
Semantics (word meanings)	Understanding subtle meanings of words and phrases; using words appropriately depending on the context, especially with the words that show attitude
Morphology (word structure)	Forming and changing words, like using the right tense or adding prefixes or suffixes; misusing root words, inflected words, and derives words

Phonology (sounds and pronunciation)	Pronouncing sounds and words correctly; having the right intonation
Psychological difficulties	Anxiety-related challenges leading to uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, worry, declined language performance Difficulties in initiating writing due to lack of interest, laziness, confusion

The task that addresses these obstacles is from the Reports and essays section, Report subsection.

Task: You have been asked to write a report for an English language magazine on life in a modern city.

- a. *Plan the content. With a partner, decide ...*
 - *which city you are going to write about*
 - *what headings you can use to divide up your report*
 - *what information to include under each heading*
 - *the aim and content of the introduction*
- b. *Write 140-190 words, including an introduction, and three or four paragraphs with headings. Summarize the main point(s) in your conclusion. Use neutral/formal style, and expressions from Useful language. (Table 5)*
- c. *Check your email for mistakes (grammar, punctuation, and spelling).*

This task tackles several challenges in EFL writing presented in Table 6. The inclusion of Useful language helps students choose and use the appropriate expressions to achieve the required tone, addressing the Semantics (word meanings) challenge. Moreover, the step-by-step instructions (plan, write, check) on how to approach the task as well as the Useful language expressions decrease the stress during the pre-writing and while writing stages, effectively addressing the Psychological obstacles for students.

Table 6 *Useful language: Signposting*

<p><i>Useful language: Signposting</i></p> <p><i>Introductions and conclusions:</i> <i>This report describes... / The purpose of this report is to...</i> <i>To sum up / To conclude / In conclusion</i></p> <p><i>To introduce a topic:</i> <i>In terms of (transport)...</i></p> <p><i>To emphasize sth:</i> <i>(Milton Keynes) is particularly / especially (well-positioned)</i></p> <p><i>To generalize:</i> <i>In general / Generally speaking, (it's a town that's easy to walk around)</i> <i>On balance, ... / On the whole,...</i> <i>The majority of / Most (residents)...</i> <i>Things tend to be / are usually...</i></p>

Conclusion

This article explored the nuances involved in creating a bank of tasks aimed at enhancing communicative writing skills in English. The aim of the bank of tasks was stated straightforwardly as it guides the task selection process. Besides the goal, the target audience, in this case, high school students in EFL classrooms, was taken into account. This understanding of the intended users of the bank of tasks was essential for tailoring the bank to high school students' specific needs and proficiency levels.

Another peculiarity of this bank of tasks is the careful selection of foundational resources, ensuring alignment with the CEFR standards, particularly targeting the Upper Intermediate (B2) level expected of high school students. The structure of the bank is organized into four primary sections encompassing various communicative writing types outlined in CEFR standards, further subdivided for detailed coverage.

Lastly, each task was thoughtfully chosen to address specific aspects of language proficiency and writing skills, such as the components of communicative competence, elements of writing, and challenges in EFL writing.

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CHATGPT IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CREATIVE ENGLISH WRITING SKILLS IN THE MIDDLE SCHOOL

Pazylbekkyzy Altynzhan
apazylbekkyzy@mail.ru