



A Universal Design for Learning (UDL)-Based Lesson Plan to Develop Writing Skills in Diverse ESL Classrooms: An Instructional Design Study

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Abstract--This paper presents the design of a lesson plan align with the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to enhance writing skills in diverse English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms. Recognizing the variability in learners' needs, preferences, and backgrounds, the lesson plan integrates multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression to support inclusive writing instruction. Learner preference data, gathered through a structured questionnaire, informed the development of flexible instructional strategies without restricting learners to fixed categories.

The instructional design focuses on developing writing skills through scaffolded activities, multimodal inputs, and varied opportunities for learner expression. The lesson incorporates visual aids, collaborative tasks, guided writing frameworks, and reflective practices to address diverse learning needs.

This paper contributes to ESL pedagogy by offering a theoretically grounded and practically applicable lesson plan that aligns UDL principles with writing instruction. It also demonstrates how learner-informed design can enhance accessibility and engagement in heterogeneous classrooms. The study is limited to the design phase and does not include implementation or empirical evaluation, suggesting scope for future ESL classroom-based research.

Keywords-- UDL, ESL, lesson plan, engagement, representation, action, scaffolding, pedagogy, inclusive

I. INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study:

English has become a global language and plays a crucial role in education, employment, and communication. In English Language Teaching (ELT), writing is one of the most complicated and challenging skill for learners. Many students, especially in ESL classrooms, struggle with organizing ideas, using appropriate vocabulary, and maintaining grammatical accuracy.

Traditional teaching methods often fail to address the diverse needs of ESL learners in the classroom. Students are not same in language learning style, motivation, and background knowledge.

As a result, many learners become reluctant in developing writing skills and show low engagement in writing tasks in ESL classroom.

The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach provides a flexible framework to address learner diversity. Therefore, its attention shifted from traditional method of lesson plan to proactive lesson plan which focusses on Multiple means of engagement, Multiple means of representation, and expression, thereby creating inclusive learning environments. Applying UDL principles in ESL classrooms can help improve students' writing skills by making learning more accessible and motivating.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The increasing diversity of learners in English as Second Language (ESL) classrooms has created a need for more flexible and inclusive instructional approach, particularly in the teaching of writing skills. Writing is widely recognized as the most intricate language skill which needs linguistic, cognitive as well as drafting skill in an organized manner. Hyland (2003). Traditional method of writing instruction often follows a uniform approach, which may not adequately address the various needs of learners from diverse linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds. As a result, the contemporary educational frameworks such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) have gained more popularity and attention for their potential to promote equitable opportunities in the education.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL), developed by the Centre for Applied Special Technology (CAST), is a research-based framework that emphasizes providing multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression to accommodate learner variability. CAST (2018). UDL was rooted from neuroscience and aims to remove barriers to learning by offering flexible pathways rather than single model. Studies have shown that UDL-based instruction can enhance student engagement, motivation, and academic performance across diverse educational settings.



Meyer, Rose, & Gordon (2014). In ESL contexts, UDL is particularly relevant because learners often differ in language proficiency, prior knowledge, and learning preferences. The unique features of UDL have captured the imagination of many educators and policy makers in education sector. Edyburn, D. L. (2010).

Writing instruction in ESL has evolved from product-oriented approaches to more process-oriented and learner-centered models. According to Ken Hyland (2003), effective writing pedagogy should include opportunities for planning, drafting, revising, and feedback. Integrating UDL principles into writing instruction allows teachers to scaffold these processes through varied instructional strategies, such as visual organizers, collaborative tasks, and multimodal resources. Research indicates that such approaches can improve learners' ability to generate ideas, organize content, and express themselves effectively in writing. Graham & Perin (2007).

Learner variability has often been explored through the concept of learning preferences, including models such as the VARK questionnaire developed by Neil Fleming Fleming (2001). The VARK model classifies learning preferences into Visual, Auditory, Read/Write, and Kinesthetic learning styles. Understanding learner preferences can provide useful insights for designing flexible instruction. Moreover, UDL does not advocate tailoring instruction to a single preferred mode, it encourages the provision of multiple options to benefit all learners.

In the context of ESL writing, a UDL-based instructional design can incorporate diverse materials and activities that address different learner needs without restricting them to predefined categories. For example, providing options such as visual prompts, peer discussions, structured writing templates, and interactive activities can support both language development and learner engagement.

Despite the growing interest in UDL, there is a need for more design-focused studies that demonstrate how UDL principles can be applied in specific classroom contexts, particularly in ESL writing instruction. Many existing studies focus on implementation and outcomes, but fewer provide detailed models of lesson plan.

According to Katie Novak (2016), students must be given options to complete given formative assessments. Although formative assessments are usually done individually, collaborative work can serve as valuable support for learners during learning process. Students can reduce writing anxiety when they handle difficult tasks and it can promote learning autonomy. Sometimes, students may choose to work alone, we need to respect their decision.

Lesson plan should start with objectives includes why are you teaching this lesson? Also, why students need to study this lesson? Next, what students have to learn to attain their proficiency in writing skills and what dose a teacher provides multiple options in order to learn the content? Later, providing multiple options to submit their assignments in various formats and giving feedback to achieve mastery level in writing. Katie Novak (2016)

III. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite continuous efforts, many students in ELT classrooms demonstrate poor writing skills and lack motivation to write in English language. Traditional teaching practices do not adequately support diverse learners. Therefore, there is a need to explore innovative approaches like UDL to enhance writing skills. It is strongly believed that the core principles of UDL may show lot of impact on developing writing skills of undergraduate ESL learners.

IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To know ESL learners' learning styles
- To apply UDL- based lesson plan in ESL writing classrooms
- To design UDL-based lesson plan align with VARK learning styles
- To enhance students' motivation and engagement in writing tasks with proactive lesson plan

V. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study plays significant role as it explores the effectiveness of integrating Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles with VARK learning preferences to enhance the writing skills of ESL learners with diverse learning styles. Sometimes, it becomes a nightmare for many students to practice due to lot of inhibitions, and traditional teaching methods often fail to address individual learning preferences. This study is significant for the following stakeholders in education sector:

A. Teachers:

UDL help English language teachers to shift their attention from traditional way of teaching method to strategic way of approach to accommodate diverse learners in the ESL classroom. This approach caters the needs of ESL teacher in presenting content in various forms and formats with its core principles like Multiple means of Representation, Multiple means of Engagement, and Multiple means of Action and Expression.



These principles allow students to express whatever they learn in multiple ways which can reduce classroom barriers, improve engagement and make lesson plan effectively. Over a period time, the teacher can develop effective classroom management with the help of proactive principles of UDL rather than abrupt changes in the method of classroom teaching.

B. Learners:

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) empower learners who are from diverse background and with diverse learning styles. Because it was rooted from neurolinguistics. UDL gives preference to networks of the human brain. Each learner has unique learning style based on their learning preferences and intelligence. UDL offers multiple options to the students to develop writing skills by using scaffolds in the form of graphic organizers, tire two vocabulary, handouts, worksheets and speech to text tools in collaborative learning environment. Students get intrinsic motivation with a sense of belongingness because of the choices in selection of topic, material as well as in expression. This kind of sense of autonomy definitely leads to increase interest and confidence among the learners who are with diverse learning styles.

C. Curriculum Designers:

In the process of curriculum designing, UDL provides a framework to design the proactive curricula to attain the desired outcomes in writing skills. Curriculum designers have to tailor made the syllabus, materials as well as formative and summative assessments based on students' demographic details and preferred learning styles. It includes providing multiple resources which are culturally relevant to learn, conducting flexible formative and summative assessments. This approach ensures equitable learning opportunities all the learners in the ESL classroom.

VI. CHALLENGES IN TEACHING WRITING

Studies indicate that students often:

- Lack of motivation to write
- Facing difficulty in organizing ideas
- Have limited exposure to effective writing models
- Experiencing anxiety and low confidence when writing
- Teachers also face challenges in addressing diverse learner needs in the heterogeneous classroom.

VII. WHAT IS UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING (UDL)?

The UDL framework is completely depends on three core principles, they are Affective networks (The “why” of learning), Recognition networks (The “what” of learning), Strategic networks (The “how” of learning).

The UDL approach built up on three principles which instructs curriculum designers and teachers to provide multiple options to give equitable opportunities to engage and to access in learning. Katie Novak (2016).

The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach is a neuroscience-based framework that helps teachers design flexible learning environments to meet the needs of all the learners. It was developed by the CAST and is grounded in how the brain processes learning. UDL recognizes that learners' learning process is not same in how they are motivated, how they understand information, and how they express what they know. Instead of modifying lessons after students' struggle, UDL encourages planning from the beginning to reduce barriers and support diverse learners, including those with varied learning preferences.

UDL is mainly built on three core principles that guide teaching practices. The first is Multiple means of engagement, which focuses on the ‘why’ of learning-how to motivate and interest students through choice, collaboration, and meaningful activities. The second is Multiple means of representation, which addresses the ‘what’ of learning by presenting content in different ways, such as text, images, videos, and demonstrations, so all students can understand. The third is Multiple means of action and expression, which focusses on the ‘how’ of learning, it allows learners to express their knowledge in different formats like writing, speaking, drawing, or using IT tools.

In practice, UDL might include providing captions on videos, offering flexible deadlines, using visual aids along with explanations, or allowing students to choose how they complete assignments. The goal is not to lower standards but to give equal opportunities for success by removing unnecessary barriers. On the whole, UDL creates inclusive classrooms where every learner can participate, stay engaged, and achieve their full potential.

VIII. RELEVANCE OF UDL IN ESL CLASSROOMS

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is highly relevant in teaching writing skills because it provides equitable learning opportunities for the students with diverse needs, abilities, and learning preferences. Writing is often considered a challenging skill since it requires generating ideas, organization of thoughts, vocabulary, grammatical accuracy and drafting skills. UDL helps removing these barriers by offering flexible methods of teaching and learning environment.

Firstly, UDL promotes multiple means of representation, where teachers present writing concepts through multiple forms such as charts, examples, videos, graphic organizers and model texts. This helps learners understanding writing structures more effectively.

Next, UDL promotes Multiple means of action and expression, it allows students to demonstrate writing in different ways such as handwritten, typing in MS word, mind maps, collaborative writing, or oral planning before writing. This reduces writing anxiety and builds confidence. UDL also encourages multiple means of engagement by giving students choice of topics, interactive activities, peer feedback, and real-life writing tasks. This increases motivation and participation.

In ESL classrooms, UDL is especially valuable because learners differ in language proficiency, background knowledge, and learning environment. It helps teachers accommodate all learners, including those reluctant to write and struggling with sentence frames.

So, UDL is relevant in writing instruction because it makes writing inclusive, learner-cantered, motivating, and effective, enabling every student to improve writing skills successfully.

IX. RESEARCH DESIGN

A. Participants

The participants of the study consist of 39 students from VFSTR (Deemed to be university) Vadlamudi, Guntur, Andhra Pradesh. The participants were studying B.Tech. First year level and have similar proficiency in English.

B. Research Instruments

The following tools were used for data collection:

The researcher has used VARK Questionnaire (see Appendix-1) to know students learning styles in order to design flexible lesson plan for all the students with diverse learning styles.

C. Procedure of the Data Collection

The data was collected by using VARK questionnaire, it is a standard tool to identify students' diverse learning styles such as Visual, Aural, Reading/Writing and Kinesthetic learning styles. The VARK questionnaire has given to only selected number of 39 students in the ESL classroom. The researcher has instructed the learners to read each question and choose the correct responses based on the given questions in the questionnaire. Students were given ample time to complete to complete the task and collected their responses in an excel sheet for further descriptive analysis.

D. Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed using pie chart in figure-1.

Distribution of Learning Preferences

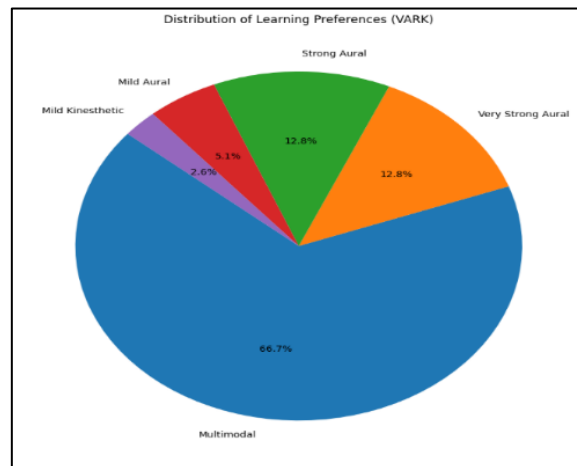


Figure 1

Descriptive Analysis of the Data Collected

Total Respondents: 39 students

Distribution of Learning Preferences

Learning Preference	Frequency	Percentage
Multimodal	26	66.7%
Very Strong Aural	5	12.8%
Strong Aural	5	12.8%
Mild Aural	2	5.1%
Mild Kinaesthetic	1	2.6%

E. Interpretation

Majority Multimodal Learners (66.7%)

Most students prefer using more than one learning style. This indicates that they learn best when teacher includes multiple methods like visual, auditory, reading/writing, and kinesthetic material.

Aural Learners (25.6%)

A considerable number of students show preference toward auditory learning (from Strong to Very Strong and Mild Aural). These students benefit from lectures, discussions, storytelling, and verbal explanations.

Low Kinaesthetic Preference (2.6%)

Only one student showed mild kinaesthetic preference, meaning fewer students rely mainly on hands-on learning activities in this class.

X. MAJOR IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the data collected from the students reveal that most of the students prefer multimodal learning style. The teacher has to design writing instruction using multiple means of representation in multiple ways presenting the content through audio, video, charts, texts etc. The teacher also can promote multiple means of engagement through collaborative tasks to sustain student’s interest. Moreover, multiple means of action and representation assist the students presenting their ideas in writing form with multiple ways through writing, speech to text tool, or by PPTs based on their choice. Providing multiple learning materials removes learning barriers of ESL learners in the classroom and can promote equitable learning opportunities to all the learners. Therefore, the teacher has to adopt flexible and mixed method approach rather than one teaching method.

XI. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and given enough time to complete the task. Additionally, confidentiality of student data was maintained and did not reveal either their names or their registered numbers.

XII. LESSON PLAN DESIGNING PROCESS

The lesson plan was designed through the following steps:

- Identifying learning objectives to develop writing skills.
- Choosing appropriate ESL writing tasks (e.g., sentence construction like simple, compound and complex sentences, paragraph writing, article writing)
- Designing activities aligned with UDL principles
- Incorporating multimodal teaching materials (visual, auditory, textual, interactive)
- Structuring scaffolding and support mechanisms

A. Lesson Plan for developing Writing Skills

Duration: 12 sessions

Target Group: B1 Level (ESL Learners)

Learning objectives:

- To construct simple, compound and complex sentences.
- To use conjunctions, linking words and cohesive devises.
- To write paragraphs with topic sentences, supporting sentences and concluding sentences.
- To enable writing choice based short articles.
- To provide multiple means of action and expression.

B. Features of the Lesson Plan

- Use of graphic organizers and visual prompts
- Collaborative and discussion-based activities
- Providing writing worksheets and handouts
- Guided writing frameworks
- Opportunities for self-reflection and peer feedback

Pe riod	Topic	Objec tives	UDL Activi ties	Materials/S caffolding
1	Introd uction to Writin g Skills	Under stand import ance of writin g	Brains tormin g, mind map	PPTs, smart board, paper clips, tier-2 vocabulary banks
2	Simple Senten ces	Write correc t simple senten ces	Picture promp ts, pair work	Flashcards, visuals, cut up sentence activity, PPTs, handouts
3	Comp ound Senten ces	Join ideas using conjun ctions - FANB OYS	Matchi ng game, oral practic e	Charts, audio, handouts, worksheets
4	Compl ex Senten ces	Use subord inatin g conjun ctions, linkers	Story compl etion, peer discus sion	PPTs, video clips, handouts, worksheets
5.	Forma tive Assess ment & Feedb ack	To assess learne r’s unders tandin g	Assessment in hand written, PPTs, MS word, Voice-over format.	
6	Paragr aph Struct ure	Learn topic senten ce, suppor	Provid ing sample paragr aphs,	PPTs, text material from newspapers, magazines,

		ting details	check list	graphic organizers
7	Paragraph Writing	Write a guided paragraph	Visual prompts	Pictures, checklist, graphic organizers
8	Cohesive Devices	Use linking words	Connect sentence strips	Cards, chart, handout, word bank, worksheets,
9	Article Writing Format	Understand title, introduction, supporting details, conclusion	sample article from newspapers, websites	Printed samples, handouts, worksheets, writing template
10	Guided Article Writing	Write article on given topic	Collaborative writing	Laptop/mobile, hand written, MS word format, voice to text.
11	Independent Writing Task	Produce paragraph/article independently	Choice-based writing task	Visual/audio prompts
12	Summative Assessment & Reflection	To evaluate learners progress in writing	Evaluating assessments with Writing Rubric, Peer & teacher feedback	

XIII. CONCLUSION

Therefore, the lesson plan was designed systematically integrating the key elements of writing for ESL learners. Universal Design for Learning is a framework and a comprehensive approach which provides multiple means of engagement, representation, and multiple means of action & expression. This lesson plan includes topics, UDL – based activities, and scaffolding materials to use at the initial learning stage in order to remove writing barriers. This UDL-Based approach and lesson plans can promote engagement, sense of belongingness as well as intrinsic motivation. So, the lesson plan serves an effective framework to attain proficiency level of writing in ESL classroom.

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