

Секция «Методика преподавания иностранных языков и лингводидактика: Актуальные проблемы методики преподавания иностранных языков»

### **Diversifying academic writing tasks in the university courses**

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University disciplines have become quite diverse, and the assessment tasks vary depending on their requirements. Even though the courses might be of a different nature (i.e. humanities, social sciences, or applied disciplines), they might have similar written assignments.

Essay is a commonly used task in the higher education establishments. Nesi and Gardner [2012] in their research identified thirteen genres at the tertiary level, and an essay accounted 43.3% of the total [cited in de Chazal, 2014]. Although this type of academic writing is applied in different disciplines (e.g. humanities, social sciences, and applied disciplines), it is the most problematic genre. One of the main reasons is the way the essay is defined by the university lecturers. Alexander, Argent and Spencer suggest considering an essay to be a tool for learning as it “provides evidence of their (students) ability to apply the concepts, models or theories”, but it seldom reflects the writing in real life [2008:182]. Another important aspect is the discipline requirements, as the students might be asked to interpret, evaluate, compare or analyse an issue. For instance, in the English class, learners might be required to explain the main causes of the globalization, but in the history class, their task might be linked to the evaluation of a certain past event.

Despite being a traditional assessment form, an essay is still recommended to be introduced in the academic settings. In order to avoid assigning a five-paragraph essay used in the school subjects and showing the students’ ability to produce a well-structured task [Alexander, Argent, Spencer 2008], at the tertiary level, students should be required to write an argumentative essay. De Chazal explains that “argument involves making a statement based on reason, logic, and evidence”, which also serves as the “thread that holds the text together and where most of the writer’s material is directed” [2014:181-182]. Depending on the university discipline, forms of argumentation may differ. For instance, in humanities, experts’ points of view are recommended, but in the social sciences, some statistical data can be incorporated [Coffin et al 2003]. It is therefore important for students to be able to differentiate between the types of evidence and their appropriateness for the discipline.

Another commonly used type of written assignments is a report. The lecturers of the university disciplines (e.g. business studies, accounting, or education courses) might understand this genre differently. Generally, reports present a result of “investigation of a situation, event, or series of events” [Gillett, Hammond, Martala 2009:9]. Students are required to identify and examine an issue, and find the solutions to this problem. De Chazal [2014] clarifies that most reports have quite a conventional structure with some variety of the details depending on the discipline. Gillett, Hammond, Martala [2009] also explain that unlike an essay this form of writing includes headings and subheadings, and usually have the IMRAD (introduction, methods, results and discussion) sections to be produced.

Case studies are becoming more popular not only in the business subjects, but also in other applied disciplines. Similar to a report, there is an issue to be investigated and solutions to be found. However, an “aspect of a real-world problem” should be studied by students from many

different viewpoints [Gillett, Hammond, Martala 2009:234]. Unlike other genres, a case study aims at addressing both a lecturer and real-world audience because the task requires application of the theoretical knowledge into practice [Coffin et al 2003]. Case studies might have a similar structure to the research reports, but should include implications for the professional practice.

In comparison to other written assignments, a portfolio is considered a form of alternative assessment. Education, literature, and applied linguistics are the areas in which a portfolio has become very popular. In contrast to other writing tasks, portfolios do not have any conventional structures, as they are a collection of different written forms. For example, they can contain essays, poetry, diaries, test scores, notes, and other short written assignments. As the main purpose for students is to demonstrate the progress in the discipline, Gottlieb [1995] recommends considering CRADLE attributes (collecting, reflecting, assessing, documenting, linking and evaluating) to be important in the portfolio development [cited in Brown 2003]. In case lecturers do not realize the developmental nature and purpose of this assignment, students might find it challenging. Brown [2003] therefore suggests providing clear objectives, explaining the portfolio components, and clarifying the evaluation procedure.

As the number of university courses is increasing due to the technological development in all spheres of life, it is important for higher education lecturers to develop the assignments, which allow them to appropriately assess the students' knowledge and skills. The review of the commonly used academic writing tasks demonstrates an opportunity for the university teachers to diversify them and to avoid assigning the traditional 'coursework'.

#### **Источники и литература**

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