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LINGUA-DIDACTIC MODEL OF TEACHING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS SPECIALTY-ORIENTED ESSAY WRITING IN ENGLISH

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Abstract

The current paper deals with linguistic specificity of teaching technical high school students to write different types of specialty-oriented essays in English. This specificity represents in the lingua-didactic model, which includes four stages of training: discursive, structural, metatextual and linguistic. These stages respectively focus on developing skills of defining specialty-oriented essay genres, its structural and metatextual signs, of correct applying lexico-grammatical constructions and designing essay paragraphs. The model offers a nomenclature of major essay genres, parameters of academic discourse and exercises assigned to each training stage. The paper proposes and verifies an algorithm of students' training activities. Russia's entry into the international educational space promoted new types and forms of distance education in Russia and abroad which made high school graduates take international examinations in English in order to study abroad. Lingua-didactic model of teaching high school students specialty-oriented essay writing in English has been worked out and confirmed more efficient developing of the following skills. Integrating these skills contributes to a more efficient mastering essay-writing competence in high school students, fostering their creative development and individualization of training.

1. Introduction

The content of teaching writing in high school is currently aimed at developing complex skills: writing a personal / business letter, describing events, expressing one's opinion, elaborating a detailed draft of speech, gathering information from different sources, giving presentations of project results. Though teaching specialty-oriented essay writing in English has been the subject of research by Russian and foreign scholars and teachers, a holistic consistent approach to the development of essay writing competence in high school has not yet been worked out (Dolzhikova et al., 2018).

Essay has become currently an integral part of the learning process, a new form of final certification of high school students. So, despite the abundance of essay genres, all of them belong to written academic discourse as a specific field of educational communication, the goals of which lie in describing and explaining the facts of the world, as well as justifying one's own point of view (Pereverzeva & Shamne, 2017).

2. Problem Statement

Both numerous recommendations for training students in various types of writing in English for the Unified State Examination and personal teaching experience enabled the authors to identify the many challenges of discourse, syntactic, structural and linguistic nature, which senior students face while designing essay in English. These include:

- discursive ones, related to misinterpreting essay genres, misunderstanding the task and, as a result, incomplete or inaccurate elaboration on proposed topics, which results in incorrect discourse scheme and inability to formulate the essay thesis, often substituted by the task wording;
- syntactic ones, connected with inaccurate highlighting of a thematic sentence in the text; loose interpreting of an author's communicative purpose and presenting an argument / counterargument, correlated with a conclusion;
- structural ones, manifested in poor knowledge of metatextual means of the main parts of an essay and communicative intention of the writer; in logical consistency and coherence of essay; in division text into paragraphs, and paragraphs, respectively, into thematic / topical, supporting and concluding sentences;
- linguistic ones, associated with a limited lexical and grammatical repertoire which does not allow implementing a variety of linguistic units in producing and editing various types of essay – description, argumentation, narration, etc. (Adelshina, 2017).

3. Research Questions

In this regard, the study and description of essay-writing competence in English, namely, its components, specificity and means of its development in senior students of a secondary school at the present stage of its modernization are of particular relevance (Korobova et al., (2017). Furthermore, to be successful in essay writing in English students should follow the rules of specialty-oriented essay writing in the target

language, understand and observe features of the text structure and consistency of idea development, clearly articulate the thesis of essay (Kaplan, n.d.).

4.   Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to propose and verify an algorithm of students' training activities in the proposed lingua-didactic model.

5.   Research Methods

Analysis of the level of writing competence acquired by high school graduates shows that introduction of the Unified State Examination has led to a more conscious attitude of students to specialty-oriented essay writing in English and articulation of ideas; greater awareness of different types and genres of essay (description, argumentation, narration, etc.); their communicative orientation and structural arrangement.

6.   Findings

In numerous essay writing manuals for the Unified State Examination a lot of attention is paid to the strategies and consistency of the topic development (Gnewek & Gorshkova, 2015; Kuznetsova & Gorizontova, 2011; Milrud, 2017; Verbitskaya & Makhmuryan, 2017), which let the authors dwell on less investigated stages of developing essay writing competence in high school students. In the proposed lingua-didactic model, we distinguish four stages of teaching high school students specialty-oriented essay writing in English (Figure1): discourse analysis of identifying main essay genres; adequate essay structuring and assigning metatextual signs to its elements; correct applying of academic discourse categories; syntactically precise structuring of complex sentences and essay paragraphs.
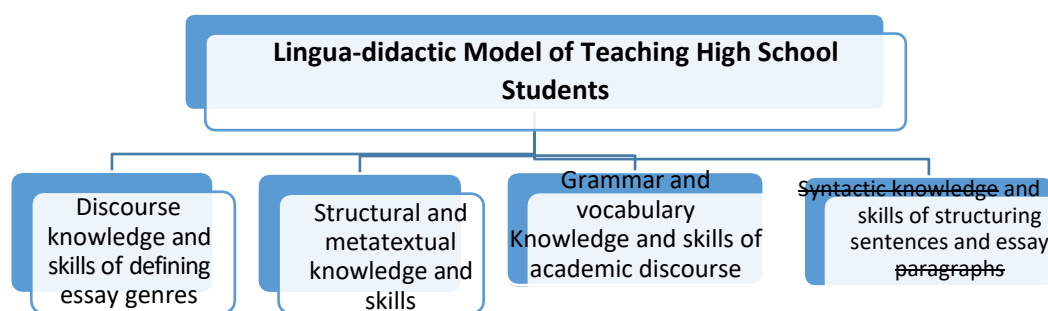

Figure 01. Lingua-didactic model of teaching high school students specialty-oriented essay writing in English

The **first stage** of developing essay-writing skills in English begins with the study of discursive features of different essay genres, i.e. discourse analysis of essay-description, essay-narration, essay-argumentation (Konobeev, 2001). Therefore, students are taught to distinguish the structure of each essay type.

Narration is mainly based on chronological sequence of events, cause-and-effect relations, definition

of problems and ways of solving them, the order of information / actions significance. A narrative essay is a story in which the author tells about one or more events related to each other, observing a sequence of the narrative: introduction, main content, the conclusion. We propose the following tasks to develop skills of writing narrative essays in English:

Exercise 1. *Look at the pictures below and give a narrative account of the development of the event.*

Exercise 2. *What are your earliest memories? Write down one or two of them in as much detail as you can.*

Description is predominantly based on spatial elements of discourse and order of their importance (from most important / visible to the least important / invisible, from specific to general and from general to specific). Descriptive essay is focused on depicting a person, object or place in such a way that one could vividly imagine phenomena described, feel impressions shared by the author. Therefore, repetitions, long incomprehensible sentences and inaccuracies should be avoided. The following exercises can be used to develop skills of descriptive essay in English:

Exercise 3. *Describe in a few sentences for a purpose of identification:* a) a person who has disappeared; b) a lost animal.

Exercise 4. *Write a brief description of one of the following events:* moonlight night in the city; dawn in the country; your native town as seen from a high building or hill; the forest after a rainstorm; the beach on a snowy day.

Argumentation is based on narration or description and often is created by making arguments in favor of validity of comparison, opposition or classification in order to support or refute the proposed opinion. Argumentative essay is the most complex type of the deployed statements in which students will express their own and other people's opinions, argue their own and someone else's point of view, voice their disagreement with the opponent, cite evidence and examples in order to draw conclusions, arrange a written statement logically and coherently, respecting neutral style of academic discourse. Unlike other essay genres, argumentative essay structure consists of five paragraphs: introduction, main body, first thesis with argumentation / examples, second thesis with argumentation / examples, antithesis with argumentation / examples, conclusion. The following exercises can be used to develop skills of writing argumentative essay in English:

Exercise 5. *Read the argumentative essay: correctly arrange its and match paragraphs 1-4 to the descriptions. Is the writer for or against space tourism?*

a. Conclusion: your opinion on the topic. _____

b. Advantages: the positive arguments. _____

c. Introduction: general idea about the topic. _____

d. Disadvantages: the negative arguments. _____

Is space tourism a good idea?

1. For some people, travelling to another country is not exciting enough. When they go on holiday, they want to travel into space!

2. On the one hand, there are important advantages. Firstly, imagine the amazing things you could see in space! We have always travelled to new places to learn and to progress.

3. On the other hand, the expense is a big disadvantage. It costs so much money to fly into space

that only very rich people are able to do it. Secondly, is it safe? If something goes wrong, it would be a disaster.

4. In conclusion, space tourism is an exciting chance to find out more about other planets, however, we need to think about the danger. In my opinion, space tourism is a great idea, but we must be sure that it is safe.

The **second stage** of developing specialty-oriented essay writing skills in English involves the study of metatextual elements, assigned to the major parts of essay as a kind of support for a more accurate expression of author's communicative intentions and functions of the main essay parts:

1. Title of essay, reflecting the theme of narrative.
2. Introduction in 2-4 short sentences revealing the subject of essay.
3. The major part s in2-3 paragraph, fully revealing the essence of essay with a thesis (argument) and its reasoning.
4. Conclusion in 2-4 sentences summarizing the written information and making a general conclusion on the topic of essay.

Introduction is a rationale for the choice of topic and consists of logically related components. Algorithm of work on Introduction involves definition of a problem, key issues, contradictions; selection of quotations, examples, concepts, theses, opinions, arguments, names, events; brief justification of key points of view on the problem.

The major part poses argumentation and analysis, their justification, based on available data, other arguments and opinions on the issue. The main content of essay is supported by subheadings, which indicate key points of the argumentative narration. The genre of essay determines the type of analysis, which is based on the following categories: cause – effect, general – specific, form – content, part – whole and constancy – variability. The proposed thesis requires appropriate evidence or illustrative material. One can follow the offered algorithm of work with the major part of essay:

- correlation of one's own opinion with the theme of essay and presented points of view;
- brief argumentation of one's own opinion in respect to each of the analyzed points of view: selection of spectacular quotes, accurate thoughts, interesting facts, compelling argument;
- thesis should be followed by argumentation, based on facts from public life, opinions of experts and renowned people.

Conclusion is a generalization on the topic that summarizes essay; reinforces its major part. In conclusion, one should use repetition, illustrations, quotes, the most vivid ideas, summing up argumentation of the author.

The following exercises can be used to develop skills of structuring essay and applying metatextual signs to its main elements (Table 01; Table 02):

Table 01. Exercise 6. Match the words with their definitions:

1. In conclusion	a. These words can be used to appropriately structure an argument logically and sequentially
2. Firstly, secondly, thirdly	b. This word should be used whenever you need to introduce a contrasting idea to one that was made prior.
3. Yet	c. This is usually used to introduce the concluding paragraph of an opinion or any other type of essay.

Table 02. Exercise 7. Match the words with their definitions:

Words	Definitions
1. Compelling	a. Use this the same way as "notwithstanding.
2. In conclusion	b. This is another way of saying 'significantly', 'particularly', 'especially'.
3. Notably	c. This is usually used to introduce the finishing paragraph of an argumentative or any other type of essay.
4. To give illustration	d. This word can be used in a similar fashion as the phrase 'despite this', 'nevertheless'.
5. Notwithstanding	e. Use this when you are about to give an example to clarify a statement made prior.
6. Nonetheless	f. This is usually used in the same way as 'persuasive', 'irresistible', 'convincing'

The **third stage** focuses on assimilating lexical and grammatical means necessary to create a logically structured, holistic text, expressing arguments and counterarguments, cause-effect and conditional dependence in accordance with the proposed genre of essay. Structural and grammatical analysis of essay in English indicates a fairly stable prevalence of simple extended sentences with passive voice, infinitive, gerundial, participial constructions, comparative phrases, modal verbs and adverbs. The tense-aspect forms of the verb are presented mainly in the Indicative mood (Present Indefinite, Future Indefinite, Present Continuous, Present Perfect Tenses); Conditional sentences of the I and type II account for a small proportion of examples. As a result, the following language skills are being developed:

- acquisition of academic discourse categories and correct implementation of their language markers;
- replacement of general polysemantic verbs (be, have, see, get, understand, etc) by their more precise synonyms of academic discourse (exist, possess, observe, receive, realize etc);
- proper use of active and passive voice in the tense-aspect system of the English verb;
- appropriate arrangement of actual division of the sentence, as in English basic information (rhema) is predominately placed at the beginning of the sentence (who, where, when, how, why) to orient the reader, while the theme is passed at the end of the sentence.

The following exercises can be used to develop lexical and grammatical skills of academic discourse used in essay (Table 03):

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Table 03. Exercise 8. Match language signals and categories of academic discourse used in essays

1. Argumentation	**a.** avoidance of contracted forms (isn't, hasn't, couldn't), words of Latin and French origin
2. Modality	**b.** It is known that...; According to recent reports, …etc.
3.Lexico-grammatical cohesion	**c.** might, could, may, can, should, have to; probably, possibly, apparently, partly etc.; possible, certain, probable, undoubted, etc.
4. Formality	**d**. therefore, however, furthermore, moreover, in addition, although, as a result; as it was mentioned before…; as follows from the previous paragraph ...
5. Objectivity	**e.** the official statistics has emphasized; on the contrary, in contradiction to, etc.; appealing to, referring to, to remind, etc.; it is most important that…; despite the fact that, etc.
6. Completeness	**f.** all in all …, in conclusion, thus, in summary …

Exercise 9. Try to identify errors in the following text. The answer key will let you know which aspects of grammar you may need to study more.

Exercise 10. Supply a suitable connector in the gaps in the sentences.

a. Many people believe that nuclear energy is clean ... it is potentially more dangerous than any other technology that we use.

b. The Internet has brought many opportunities to people....... it has also increased the gap between rich and poor people and societies.

Exercise 11. Rewrite the example into one or two sentences, using more sophisticated vocabulary and sentence structures.

Many people are worried about the environment. And they think we should be better. For example, instead of using fossil fuels we can use the sun's heat to make electricity. And can also use water to make electricity.

The **fourth stage**, focused on the development of syntactic skills of specialty-oriented essay writing in English, represents the greatest difficulties for students and includes the study of:

- structure and types of sentences (compound and complex sentences); conjunctions and conjunctive adverbs, contributing to the arrangement of various kinds of complex sentences;
- form words, signaling transition to the next section of essay or paragraph; different types of logical connection between parts of a complex sentence;
- structure of a paragraph as the basic unit of essay and arrangement of topical, supporting and final sentences with their language markers (Astafurova & Kolyabina, 2019).

These skills can be developed with the help of the following exercises:

Exercise 12. Write either but or yet in the blank spaces connecting the two clauses in these sentences:

1a. Too much sun damages the skin,_____many people still do not use sunscreen.

b. Too much sun damages the skin,_____too little sun also causes health problems.

2a. The company's sales increased last year,_____its profits declined.

b. The company moved its marketing division to Phoenix, the operations' division stayed in Boston.

Students should learn to identify topical sentence in the main part of an essay, serving as an "Introduction" to the paragraph, clarifying the sentence, developing and confirming the idea expressed in the topical sentence; to find the final sentence of the paragraph by language markers, expressing the conclusion.

Exercise 13. *Choose the topic sentence, which matches the extract below.*

a. Some people enjoy putting their lives at risk.

b. On the other hand, most extreme sports have a negative side.

c. To begin with, extreme sports are very popular.

They can be dangerous because there is no excitement without risk. Besides, the special equipment and training required can be very expensive (Table 04).

Table 04. *Exercise 14.* Match the topic sentence (1-3) to supporting sentences (A-C).

1. There are many advantages to downloading music from Internet, instead of buying CDs in shops.	a. To begin with, some of the latest devices cost a lot of money, and their job is to do something that a person can easily do without technology.
2. A video game is not always the best present to buy for a young child.	b. Songs cost less when you buy them online, and you can also save money by buying only the songs you like, instead of the whole album.
3. People today may be spending money they cannot afford on gadgets they do not really need.	c. Children need to be outside socializing with their friends, and not sitting in front of a PC, playing games, many of which show violence.

Exercise 15. *Compile a paragraph from the shuffled sentences.*

_____ a. Another important change was that people had the freedom to live and work wherever they wanted.

_____ b. The earliest significant change was for farming families, who were no longer isolated.

_____ c. The final major change brought by the automobile was the building of superhighways, suburbs, huge shopping centers, and theme parks such as Disney World in Florida.

_____ d. The automobile revolutionized the way of life in the United States.

_____ e. The automobile enabled them to drive to towns and cities comfortably and conveniently.

_____ f. In fact, people could work in a busy metropolitan city and drive home to the quiet suburbs.

7. Conclusion

Russia's entry into the international educational space promoted new types and forms of distance education in Russia and abroad which made high school graduates take international examinations in English (as lingua franca of the third Millennium) in order to study abroad (Minin et al., 2019). This has significantly increased their interest in written communication, as the level of language proficiency is predominantly determined in a written form within the framework of the Unified State Examination (Politsinskaya et al., 2019). The most difficult component of the Unified State Examination is verification of graduates' ability to create a written text in the form of essay, maintaining logical composition of its

genre, implementing parameters of academic discourse (coherence, objectivity, formality, modality, etc.), its vocabulary and grammar, correctly arranging complex sentences and the structure of essay paragraphs.

Thus, lingua-didactic model of teaching high school students specialty-oriented essay writing in English has been worked out and confirmed more efficient developing of the following skills:

- discourse analysis of essay genres (description, narration, argumentation);
- correct essay structuring and assigning metatextual signs to its basic elements (Introduction, Major part, Conclusion);
- accurate implementing of academic discourse grammar and vocabulary;
- precise structuring of complex sentences and essay paragraphs with topical, supporting and final sentences.

Integrating these skills contributes to a more efficient mastering essay-writing competence in high school students, fostering their creative development and individualization of training.

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