



Research Article

DEVELOPING WRITING AND SPEAKING SKILLS IN FRESHMAN STUDENTS THROUGH A CONVERSATIONAL GRID

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the development of writing and speaking skills in freshman university students through the implementation of a Conversational Grid. The Conversational Grid is a pedagogical tool designed to integrate both dialogue-based and composition-based learning, providing students with a structured framework for enhancing communication proficiency in both oral and written forms. The research investigates how this grid approach can foster student engagement, improve clarity in expression, and facilitate a deeper understanding of academic content. Over the course of a semester, freshmen participated in activities that involved structured conversations, collaborative discussions, and writing exercises, all framed within the Conversational Grid. The results of the study indicate that students who engaged with the grid experienced notable improvements in their writing organization, argumentation skills, and spoken communication abilities. Moreover, students reported greater confidence in their ability to articulate complex ideas both verbally and in writing. This paper highlights the effectiveness of the Conversational Grid as an innovative pedagogical approach to bridging the gap between spoken and written communication, suggesting it as a valuable tool for fostering holistic communication skills in first-year students.

KEYWORDS

Conversational Grid, writing skills, speaking skills, Freshman students, Academic communication, Pedagogical tools, Oral communication, Writing development.

INTRODUCTION

Effective communication is an essential skill for academic success, particularly in the first year of

university, where students are expected to navigate complex coursework and express their understanding



both orally and in writing. Freshman students often face challenges in adapting to the rigorous demands of academic discourse, where clarity, coherence, and the ability to articulate complex ideas are crucial. While traditional writing courses focus primarily on written communication, the integration of speaking and conversation skills into academic learning is equally vital. The ability to engage in meaningful dialogue, present ideas confidently, and structure arguments both verbally and in writing are foundational skills that contribute significantly to a student's success in university.

To address this gap, this study introduces the concept of the Conversational Grid, a pedagogical framework designed to simultaneously support the development of both writing and speaking skills. The Conversational Grid is an innovative tool that combines structured conversational exercises with writing tasks, aiming to create a dynamic learning environment where students can engage with both verbal and written forms of communication. By integrating dialogue-based learning with compositional tasks, the Conversational Grid provides a holistic approach to communication that allows students to explore the intersections between spoken and written language.

The purpose of this study is to examine how the Conversational Grid can enhance freshman students' ability to communicate effectively in both speaking and writing. Through a series of structured activities—such as peer discussions, presentations, and writing exercises—students learn to organize their thoughts, refine their arguments, and present their ideas coherently across multiple formats. The Conversational Grid is designed not only to foster a deeper understanding of academic content but also to help students gain the confidence and skills necessary

to participate actively in classroom discussions and produce well-organized, persuasive written work.

This study explores the potential benefits of implementing the Conversational Grid in a freshman curriculum, with particular focus on student engagement, improvements in writing quality, and enhanced verbal communication abilities. The research also aims to provide insights into how such a tool can bridge the gap between written and oral expression, creating a more integrated approach to communication skills development in higher education. By addressing the dual needs of writing and speaking proficiency, the Conversational Grid offers a comprehensive method for equipping students with the communication skills essential for academic success and professional development.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach to explore how the Conversational Grid can enhance writing and speaking skills in freshman university students. The methodology combines both quantitative and qualitative research to measure the effectiveness of the Conversational Grid in developing students' communication abilities. The study was conducted in a university setting, involving a cohort of 100 freshman students enrolled in a first-year composition and communication course. The study was carried out over the duration of one academic semester, providing a comprehensive view of the impact of the Conversational Grid on student learning and skill development.

Participant Selection

The participants in this study were 100 freshman students from diverse academic disciplines enrolled in an introductory writing and communication course. These students were chosen because they represented



a typical cross-section of first-year students, each with varying levels of prior writing and speaking experience. The participants were divided into two groups: an experimental group (n = 50), which used the Conversational Grid as a part of their learning activities, and a control group (n = 50), which followed a traditional writing-focused curriculum with no integrated speaking exercises. The two groups were matched based on demographic factors such as age, gender, and prior academic performance in relevant high school courses. Both groups were pre-assessed to gauge their baseline communication skills in writing and speaking at the beginning of the semester.

Conversational Grid Framework

The Conversational Grid framework utilized in this study was designed to integrate both conversational and compositional tasks. The grid itself was a structured tool that outlined key communication objectives for each week, including specific goals for both verbal and written activities. Each session included a combination of peer-to-peer conversation exercises, individual reflections, and writing tasks that were linked to the topics discussed in the conversations. For example, in one session, students might engage in a guided discussion on a particular topic, followed by writing a short essay or report on the same subject. This design encouraged students to link spoken discussions to their written work, helping them to organize their ideas and arguments coherently across both modalities.

The Conversational Grid was organized as follows:

Week 1-3: Introduction to basic communication skills, including listening, speaking, and organizing thoughts.

Week 4-6: Collaborative group discussions and reflective writing, focusing on developing arguments and counterarguments.

Week 7-9: Peer feedback on both oral presentations and written drafts, with emphasis on clarity, coherence, and persuasive techniques.

Week 10-12: Integration of research-based discussions and formal writing tasks, preparing students for presentations and academic papers.

Week 13-15: Final project involving a formal presentation and a research paper, where students had to demonstrate the ability to communicate effectively both orally and in writing.

Throughout the semester, students in the experimental group were required to complete weekly activities based on the Conversational Grid, while students in the control group were only assigned writing tasks and occasional in-class presentations without the integrated conversational exercises.

Data collection for this study involved a combination of surveys, assessments, and qualitative feedback from both the experimental and control groups. The following methods were employed:

Pre- and Post-Assessments:

At the start of the semester, both groups completed a pre-assessment that measured their writing and speaking skills. The pre-assessment consisted of a short essay on a given topic and a recorded oral presentation on the same subject. This provided a baseline for evaluating improvements in both areas by the end of the semester. A post-assessment was administered at the end of the semester, which mirrored the pre-assessment in format, allowing for a direct comparison of progress in writing and speaking proficiency.

Surveys:

At the conclusion of the study, both groups completed a survey that measured their perceived satisfaction with the course and their confidence in using both



speaking and writing skills. The survey included Likert-scale items on a range of topics, such as: "The weekly conversational exercises helped me improve my writing skills," and "I feel more confident in my ability to speak and present ideas after completing the Conversational Grid activities." Additionally, open-ended questions allowed students to provide qualitative feedback on the grid's structure and its perceived impact on their learning.

Qualitative Interviews:

A subset of 15 students from the experimental group was selected for in-depth interviews. These students were chosen based on their engagement in the Conversational Grid activities and their overall performance in both speaking and writing tasks. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing for a deeper exploration of students' experiences with the grid. Questions included: "How did the Conversational Grid affect your approach to writing assignments?" and "What aspects of the conversational exercises did you find most helpful for improving your speaking skills?" These interviews provided qualitative insights into how students perceived the integrated approach to learning and communication.

Observations:

Weekly classroom observations were conducted by the research team to monitor the students' interactions during conversational exercises. Observers took note of how students engaged in discussions, how well they articulated ideas, and how they incorporated feedback from peers into their writing and speaking tasks. These observations helped contextualize the survey and interview data, providing a richer understanding of how students were applying the skills they developed through the Conversational Grid.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected from the pre- and post-assessments and surveys were analyzed using paired t-tests to determine significant changes in writing and speaking performance within the experimental group compared to the control group. Comparisons were also made between the experimental group and control group to assess the impact of the Conversational Grid on student outcomes. The qualitative data from interviews and observations were analyzed using thematic analysis. Common themes and patterns were identified to understand students' perceptions of the grid's effectiveness in improving their communication skills.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines for research involving human participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were assured that their participation was voluntary and that all data would remain confidential. Students were also informed that their academic performance would not be affected by their participation in the study. Data was anonymized and aggregated to maintain privacy, and all recordings were securely stored and accessible only to the research team.

RESULTS

The results of this study indicate that the implementation of the Conversational Grid significantly improved both writing and speaking skills in freshman students. Data collected from pre- and post-assessments, surveys, qualitative interviews, and classroom observations suggest that the experimental group, which used the Conversational Grid, experienced marked improvements in their communication abilities compared to the control



group, which followed a traditional writing-based curriculum.

Writing Skill Development

The quantitative analysis of the pre- and post-assessment writing tasks showed a significant improvement in the quality of written work among students in the experimental group. On average, students in the experimental group demonstrated a 22% increase in their writing scores, as measured by the rubric evaluating coherence, argumentation, structure, and clarity. In contrast, the control group showed only a 10% improvement. The writing tasks completed by the experimental group exhibited a greater capacity for organizing ideas, developing clear arguments, and using appropriate academic vocabulary. These improvements were attributed to the regular integration of conversational exercises, which allowed students to verbally articulate and refine their ideas before committing them to paper.

Speaking Skill Development

Similarly, speaking proficiency showed significant improvements for students in the experimental group. Pre- and post-assessment oral presentations demonstrated a 20% improvement in the ability to express ideas clearly and confidently in the experimental group, while the control group showed only a 12% improvement. Observations from weekly peer-to-peer discussions and interviews with students revealed that students in the experimental group were more confident in public speaking and expressed greater fluency and coherence in their spoken language. Students who engaged in regular conversational exercises were able to structure their thoughts more effectively when speaking, leading to better performance in their oral presentations.

Student Engagement and Satisfaction

Surveys revealed that 80% of students in the experimental group reported higher levels of satisfaction with the course structure compared to 50% in the control group. Students appreciated the opportunity to develop both written and spoken communication skills simultaneously. Notably, 85% of students in the experimental group agreed that the Conversational Grid made them feel more prepared for both in-class discussions and writing assignments. In interviews, students reported feeling that the interactive components of the course, such as peer discussions and feedback sessions, enhanced their overall learning experience. One student commented, "The Conversational Grid helped me organize my thoughts before I had to write them down, which made my writing clearer and my speaking more confident."

DISCUSSION

The results of this study align with existing literature that emphasizes the importance of integrating both speaking and writing skills in the development of effective communication. The significant improvements observed in the experimental group suggest that the Conversational Grid provided a valuable framework for fostering communication skills in freshman students. The integration of conversational exercises with writing tasks created a synergistic effect, where students had the opportunity to orally articulate their ideas before translating them into written form, enhancing both their speaking and writing abilities.

The findings also suggest that the Conversational Grid's emphasis on peer interaction and feedback played a crucial role in improving student performance. The ability to discuss ideas with peers and receive immediate feedback allowed students to refine their arguments, enhance their clarity of expression, and



gain confidence in presenting their ideas both orally and in writing. This peer-to-peer interaction, combined with structured writing tasks, helped students internalize effective communication strategies that could be applied across both modalities.

However, while the Conversational Grid showed positive outcomes in the development of writing and speaking skills, some challenges were noted. A small number of students in the experimental group reported feeling overwhelmed by the increased number of activities and tasks. These students often expressed a preference for a more balanced approach with additional time for independent work. This suggests that while the Conversational Grid is an effective pedagogical tool, careful consideration of workload and task pacing is essential to ensure that students are not overburdened.

Additionally, some students expressed difficulty in transitioning from informal conversation to more formal academic writing. While the Conversational Grid encouraged students to structure their ideas, some struggled with applying the conversational strategies they had learned to more formal academic contexts. This highlights the need for additional support in bridging the gap between casual and academic communication styles.

CONCLUSION

The Conversational Grid proves to be an effective pedagogical tool for improving both writing and speaking skills in freshman university students. By integrating conversational exercises with writing tasks, students in the experimental group demonstrated significant improvements in both their oral and written communication abilities. The study shows that regular practice in verbalizing ideas enhances the clarity, organization, and fluency of written work. Moreover,

peer discussions and feedback played a vital role in boosting students' confidence and their ability to express ideas more effectively in both oral and written forms.

The positive outcomes of this study suggest that universities can benefit from incorporating conversational and compositional frameworks into first-year curricula, as they offer a holistic approach to communication skill development. However, further research is needed to explore the long-term effects of such an integrated approach and to determine how best to balance the workload to maximize student engagement and success.

Future studies could also explore the specific elements of the Conversational Grid that most contribute to skill development, such as peer feedback or the frequency of conversational exercises. Additionally, expanding the sample size to include students from various disciplines or conducting longitudinal studies could provide more generalized and long-lasting insights into the benefits of integrating speaking and writing instruction in higher education.

Overall, the Conversational Grid offers a promising framework for helping freshman students bridge the gap between written and spoken communication, fostering a more comprehensive approach to academic and professional communication.

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