



From prompt to impromptu: Analyzing the writing skills of students through the lens of NEP 2020

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Abstract

The landscape of education is continuously evolving, with a growing emphasis on skills beyond rote memorization. In India, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a significant shift towards fostering critical thinking, creativity, and holistic development. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes self-directed learning, encouraging students to take ownership of their learning and develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and creative skills. It promotes a shift away from rote learning towards a more holistic, experiential, and personalized learning approach. NEP 2020 aims to foster the development of not just cognitive skills but also social and emotional intelligence, character building, and overall well-being. This paper aims to compare the students writing skills based on – impromptu essays and traditional exam assessment writing – and elucidate how their respective strengths and limitations align with, and are reformed by, the transformative vision of NEP 2020. We will specifically consider impromptu essays for evaluating higher-order cognitive and communicative skills.

Keywords: Self-directed learning, cognitive skills, communicative skills, critical thinking, National Education Policy

Introduction

The landscape of education is continuously evolving, with a growing emphasis on skills beyond rote memorization. In India, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a paradigm shift towards fostering critical thinking, creativity, and holistic development. It envisions a holistic and multidisciplinary education system that emphasizes conceptual understanding and application of knowledge over rote learning.

NEP 2020 signifies a move towards a more comprehensive and continuous assessment system that aims to:

- **Promote holistic development:** By evaluating a wider range of skills and competencies beyond just memory recall.
- **Reduce the pressure of high-stakes exams:** Through continuous and varied assessment methods.
- **Enhance learning and understanding:** By focusing on conceptual clarity and the ability to apply knowledge.
- **Provide meaningful feedback:** To students for improvement and to teachers for adjusting their pedagogy.
- **Ensure equity and inclusion:** By using diverse assessment methods that cater to different learning styles and abilities.
- **Align with 21st-century skills:** By emphasizing critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration.
- **Integrate technology:** To make assessment more efficient, transparent, and adaptive.

Discussion

This study is conducted in a class of I Year Engineering for a group of 65 students. As a part of their regular curriculum they have a language lab (English Language Communication Skills Lab-ELCS LAB) constituting 2 credits with 2 hours per week and a theory paper for English also constituting 2 credits with 2 hours per week (English

for Skill Enhancement - ESE). The multi media lab adopts an integrated approach towards improving LSRW skills among the learners.

Writing essays at this level of under graduation the student is required to move ahead from who, what, when, where, whereas to how and why. Students should know the technical aspects of essay writing. Students may have considerable difficulty developing their conceptions of essay writing (McCune, 2004) ^[17]. In all essay writing, argumentation is regarded as a vital component. However, studies also show that students have only partial or incorrect understanding of the concept's argumentation (Helberget et al., 2021; Wingate, 2012) ^[15]. High-quality argumentative essays can be a challenge for students to write (Kellogg & Whiteford, 2009) ^[14]. Students can have resistance to academic writing, which can be based on anxiety, poor academic performance, and lack of recognition of the importance of having writing skills (Martinez et al., 2011). An ambition in higher education is to improve students' critical thinking and ability to engage in critical approaches to various literature sources (Friberg & Lyckhage, 2013) ^[16]. The theoretical inputs essential for writing essays were given by the teacher, which assists the students to develop their ideas in the framework of a proper Introduction with a quotation/saying /proverb/anecdote and a thesis statement which leads to the supporting sentences and a conclusion further.

Samples from their regular assessment tests based on the curriculum prescribed are taken in order to analyze the implication of NEP 2020. In the regular assessment tests the teacher ensures coverage of core curriculum from the prescribed book which provides clear boundaries and objectives for what students are expected to learn, making it easier for both students to prepare and teachers to design assessments. The assessment tests were based on the curriculum prescribed and instructional inputs by providing the prompts. When the tests were analyzed the results are promising as many students could follow the instructions

given by taking the leads from the prompts. Further to analyze the implication of Self-learning which is a key feature in NEP 2020 the same class of students were given an impromptu essay.

Before the impromptu essay was given to the students they were given the following questionnaire:

Positive responses in percentages	
Writing is an easy task	93.75%
I enjoy writing	27.5%
I usually write a lot	6.25%
I contemplate the topic before I start writing	18.75%
Often, writing assignments was a last minute task	90%
Regular assessment tests in writing are easy	97.5%
Writing helps me get good scores	87.5%
I concentrate on the length of the writing	93.75%
Writing when prompts are given is easy	100%
I prepare a rough draft initially	12.5%
I revise the sentence before writing the next one	6.25%
I check for spelling and punctuation before submitting	15%
Essays were meant to fill the pages with words	88.75%
Essay writing gives me good grades	90%
Impromptu writing is challenging	95%

Alongside an essay writing topic is given to the students and they are asked to develop their ideas impromptu and type it in Microsoft word in the multimedia lab. The students are not allowed to use mobile or internet while developing their essays and the minimum word limit for the essays is 200. The auto-correct option is disabled and the students are advised to check for spellings and punctuation before submitting.

Impromptu Argumentative Essays: A Window into Spontaneous Criticality

- Impromptu argumentative essays are timed writing tasks where students are presented with a topic and expected to formulate a reasoned argument, often taking a stance (agree/disagree), without prior preparation. these essays basically follow one of the two models either The Toulmin model or The Rogerian model.
- The Toulmin model begins with an introduction, follows with a thesis/claim, and gives data and evidence to support that claim. This style of essay also includes rebuttals of counterarguments.
- The Rogerian model analyzes two sides of an argument and reaches a conclusion after weighing the strengths and weaknesses of each.

The very nature of these essays, especially on contemporary and debatable subjects demand a unique set of skills:

1. **Spontaneous Critical Thinking and Idea Generation:** Students must rapidly analyze the prompt, identify key arguments for and against, and decide on a clear position. For instance, on the topic of student jobs, they need to quickly consider economic independence, time management, academic impact, skill development, and social experience. Similarly, for the smoking ban, they must weigh individual liberty against public health,

economic impact on businesses, and the rights of non-smokers.

2. **Logical Reasoning and Persuasion:** The core of an argumentative essay lies in constructing a coherent and persuasive argument. This involves developing a thesis, supporting it with relevant points, evidence (even if anecdotal or generally known), and logical reasoning, while also acknowledging and refuting counterarguments.
3. **Organization and Structure Under Pressure:** Within strict time limits, students must quickly outline their thoughts, ensuring a clear introduction, well-developed body paragraphs, and a conclusive summary. This demonstrates their ability to structure complex ideas efficiently.
4. **Effective Written Communication:** Beyond content, these essays assess clarity of expression, vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and overall writing fluency. The ability to articulate complex thoughts precisely and compellingly is paramount.
5. **Application of Knowledge to Real-World Issues:** Unlike questions that test recall from a textbook, these topics require students to draw upon their general knowledge, understanding of societal issues, and personal perspectives to construct a relevant and informed argument.

For Impromptu Argumentative Essays

NEP 2020 significantly elevates the importance and utility of impromptu argumentative essays. These essays are a direct manifestation of the policy's emphasis on:

- **Critical Thinking and Communication:** The ability to articulate a well-reasoned argument on complex topics like student employment or public health directly aligns with NEP 2020's focus on developing higher-order thinking and effective communication skills. These are not just academic exercises but preparations for informed civic participation.
- **Problem-Solving and Real-World Application:** The topics chosen for these essays are contemporary and relevant, requiring students to apply their understanding of society, economics, ethics, and personal values. This fosters a connection between learning and real-world challenges, a key tenet of NEP 2020.
- **Formative Assessment:** Impromptu essays, when used regularly as part of continuous assessment rather than just high-stakes evaluations, can provide invaluable formative feedback. Teachers can assess students' ability to organize thoughts, construct arguments, and use language effectively, offering targeted support for improvement in these crucial areas. This aligns with the "assessment for learning" philosophy.
- **Reduced Rote Learning:** By their very nature, impromptu essays cannot be rote-learned. They demand genuine understanding and the ability to synthesize information on the spot, directly combating the memorization-centric approach NEP 2020 seeks to dismantle.

Evaluation Rubric Example

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Emerging	Unsatisfactory
Introduction	Started with a quotation/saying /proverb/anecdote and a thesis statement	Writing is well articulated	Introduction is weak; writing is disorganized	Simplistic or missing	Confusion about topic
Supporting Ideas	Consistent thought expressed lucidly	Ideas are well supported	Supporting evidence is simple	Supporting ideas are unclear	No supporting ideas
Conclusion	Paragraphs are well developed to lead to an appropriate conclusion	Logical and organized	Requires refinement further	Disorganized	Completely inconsistent
Punctuation	Necessary punctuation marks are well included as required	Appropriate punctuation marks are used	Slight errors in comma usage	Considerable errors in punctuation	Punctuation is not at all taken care of
Grammar	No errors	Few errors	Some errors	Several errors	Numerous errors; it's unclear what's being said.
Spelling	No errors	Few errors	Some errors	Several errors	Numerous errors
Vocabulary	Appreciable diction, novelty and accuracy maintained	Accurate diction used throughout	Adequate word choice; could use more variation	Simplistic words with much repetition	Constant repetition of words and incorrect usage

Based on the evaluation rubric the outcome of the student's impromptu essays depicted the following results

Category	Students	Percentage
Excellent	3	4.6%
Good	10	15.4%
Fair	16	24.6%
Emerging	30	46.2%
Unsatisfactory	6	9.2%
Total	65	100%

Conclusion

NEP 2020 champions a transformative approach to assessment, moving towards a system that is holistic, competency-based, and focused on genuine learning rather than mere memorization. In this evolving paradigm, both impromptu argumentative essays and traditional exam assessment papers hold significant, albeit reformed, roles.

Impromptu argumentative essays, particularly on relevant and debatable topics like student employment or public health, are invaluable for assessing spontaneous critical thinking, logical reasoning, and persuasive communication – skills vital for navigating the complexities of the 21st century. They provide a direct measure of a student's ability to form and articulate an informed opinion.

Concurrently, traditional exam papers, when reformed to align with NEP 2020's principles, can effectively measure the breadth and depth of conceptual understanding and the application of knowledge across a curriculum.

Ultimately, NEP 2020 advocates for a balanced and integrated assessment framework that leverages the unique strengths of various methods. By strategically employing tools like impromptu argumentative essays alongside reformed exam papers, educators can cultivate students who are not only knowledgeable but also critical thinkers, effective communicators, and engaged citizens, truly embodying the aspirational goals of the new education policy.

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