

They Ask, You Answer (TAYA) in Copywriting Education: An Exploratory Analysis of Blog Article Topic Formulation

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Abstract

Introduction: Contemporary content marketing increasingly relies on identifying users' informational needs and creating content that responds to questions arising at different stages of the decision-making process. One approach reflecting this perspective is the *They Ask, You Answer* (TAYA) concept, which emphasizes educational content addressing users' actual questions and concerns. However, little is known about how individuals learning copywriting understand and operationalize TAYA categories when formulating blog article topics. **Research Aim:** The study aimed to examine how postgraduate copywriting students understand and apply the TAYA framework. **Method:** The exploratory case study examined an instructional exercise involving 18 postgraduate copywriting students. The exercise was embedded in a process-genre approach and focused on the pre-writing stage. Participants worked with a fictional language school brief, analyzed user queries generated using SEO tools, and created topic proposals corresponding to three TAYA categories: prices and costs, user problems, and comparisons. **Results:** In total, participants generated 75 topic proposals. Alignment with TAYA assumptions was highest in the comparisons category (59%) and lower in user problems (43%) and prices and costs (35%). Participants frequently transformed user concerns into instructional content or replaced cost-related questions with promotional messages. A tendency toward overly broad or slogan-like topic formulation was also observed. **Conclusion:** The findings suggest that familiarity with audience needs does not automatically translate into the ability to formulate TAYA-consistent topics. The findings indicate that copywriting education should address the difficulties involved in translating user questions and concerns into precise topic formulations

Keywords: *They Ask, You Answer* (TAYA), pre-writing, blog writing, copywriting education, topic formulation, process-genre approach



TAYA (ang. *They Ask, You Answer*) w edukacji z zakresu copywritingu: Analiza eksploracyjna procesu formułowania tematów artykułów blogowych

Streszczenie

Wprowadzenie: Współczesny content marketing w coraz większym stopniu opiera się na rozpoznawaniu potrzeb informacyjnych użytkowników i tworzeniu treści, które odnoszą się do pytań pojawiających się na różnych etapach procesu decyzyjnego. Jedną z koncepcji odzwierciedlających tę perspektywę jest *They Ask, You Answer* (TAYA), która kładzie nacisk na treści edukacyjne odpowiadające na rzeczywiste pytania i obawy użytkowników. Niewiele jednak wiadomo o tym, jak osoby uczące się copywritingu rozumieją i operacjonalizują kategorie TAYA podczas formułowania tematów artykułów blogowych.

Cel badania: Celem badania było sprawdzenie, jak słuchacze studiów podyplomowych z zakresu copywritingu rozumieją i stosują ramy TAYA. **Metoda badań:** W eksploracyjnym studium przypadku przeanalizowano ćwiczenie dydaktyczne z udziałem 18 słuchaczy studiów podyplomowych z zakresu copywritingu. Ćwiczenie zostało osadzone w podejściu procesowo-gatunkowym i koncentrowało się na etapie pre-writing. Uczestnicy pracowali na fikcyjnym briefie szkoły językowej, analizowali zapytania użytkowników wygenerowane za pomocą narzędzi SEO i tworzyli propozycje tematów odpowiadające trzem kategoriom TAYA: ceny i koszty, problemy użytkowników oraz porównania. **Wyniki:** Łącznie uczestnicy stworzyli 75 propozycji tematów. Zgodność z założeniami TAYA była najwyższa w kategorii porównań (59%), a niższa w kategorii problemów użytkowników (43%) oraz cen i kosztów (35%). Uczestnicy często przekształcali problemy użytkowników w treści instruktażowe lub zastępowali pytania dotyczące kosztów komunikatami promocyjnymi. Zaobserwowano również tendencję do formułowania zbyt ogólnych lub sloganowych tematów. **Wnioski:** Wyniki sugerują, że znajomość potrzeb odbiorców nie przekłada się automatycznie na umiejętność formułowania tematów zgodnych z TAYA. Wskazują również, że kształcenie w zakresie copywritingu powinno uwzględniać trudności związane z przekładaniem pytań i problemów użytkowników na precyzyjnie sformułowane tematy.

Słowa kluczowe: *They Ask, You Answer* (TAYA), pre-writing, pisanie artykułów blogowych, dydaktyka copywritingu, formułowanie tematów, podejście procesowo-gatunkowe

1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary digital environment, businesses increasingly use inbound marketing to attract users by providing information that supports their decision-making (Halligan & Shah, 2010). Content marketing is a key component of this approach, as it involves creating and distributing relevant content in response to users' information needs (Bakalarska-Stankiewicz, 2020). Its effectiveness therefore depends not only on content visibility in search engines but also on how well the content addresses users' questions, problems, and search intentions (Barabasz et al., 2024).

One of the frameworks that places particularly strong emphasis on audience-oriented communication is the *They Ask, You Answer* (TAYA) concept developed by Marcus Sheridan (2021), which assumes the systematic creation of content addressing customer questions regarding costs, problems and comparisons of products or services. Existing publications have focused primarily on the marketing effectiveness of transparent communication (Lambillotte et al., 2022; Montecchi et al., 2024). Much less attention has been paid to its application in copywriting education, particularly at the stage of topic formulation.

This gap appears particularly important from the perspective of copywriting education. The starting point for the present case study was an analysis of projects completed by postgraduate copywriting students. As part of their final project, students prepared a website in Google Sites and two educational articles: a pillar article and a related article. The assignment was based on the topical cluster model, which assumes the organization of content around a central issue. While the pillar article was intended to serve as an extensive guide for beginners (e.g., "Gym Training – A Beginner's Guide"), students had greater freedom when creating the related article, which was designed to develop a selected aspect in greater detail.

The starting point for the present study was an observation that a substantial proportion of related article topics were broad and highly competitive, relying primarily on a traditional guide-based model (e.g., "Why You Should Trust Natural Cosmetics"). Only few topics demonstrated greater alignment with audience-centered approaches to content marketing, particularly those emphasizing informational needs and decision-making processes (e.g., "Can I Start Learning to Dance After 40?").

In response to these observations, elements related to the TAYA concept were introduced in the subsequent teaching cycle, including both theoretical instruction and practical exercises.

The present exploratory case study examined how participants formulated blog article topics during a TAYA-based instructional exercise. It addressed two questions:

RQ1: What types of interpretive difficulties occurred when participants formulated topics within the selected TAYA categories?

RQ2: Which TAYA category was most frequently represented by topics consistent with the task criteria?

The case study was conducted during regular online classes. Participants worked with a brief for a fictional language school, analyzed user queries, and formulated topics corresponding to selected TAYA categories. The analysis focused on patterns and difficulties visible in the resulting topic proposals. Unlike dominant analyses of content marketing effectiveness, the adopted approach focuses not on the reception of completed content but on the process of topic formulation among individuals learning copywriting. In doing so, the study addresses a gap concerning the educational application of TAYA and provides a better understanding of the difficulties that arise during the planning stage of user-oriented content.

2. INBOUND AND CONTENT MARKETING

Inbound marketing constitutes a response to changes in the ways audiences obtain information in the digital environment. Unlike the outbound model, which is based on brand-initiated contact and interrupting audience activity, inbound marketing assumes that users themselves initiate the process of information seeking, most often through search engines (Halligan & Shah, 2010). Communication in this model is based on providing content that supports the audience's cognitive and decision-making process, thereby fostering the gradual development of trust and a more relational form of brand interaction.

A key tool of inbound marketing is content marketing, defined as a "strategic approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience - and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action" (Content Marketing Institute, 2026). The effectiveness of content marketing remains closely linked to SEO, as content visibility depends on its alignment with queries entered by users into search engines. Long-tail keywords are of particular importance in this regard, as they make it possible to capture more precise search intentions and better respond to users' specific informational needs.

In the early stages of content marketing development, communication effectiveness was assumed to depend primarily on the systematic publication of content related to a given industry. Halligan and Shah (2010) recommended creating a broad spectrum of materials - guides, expert commentaries, trend analyses, and industry updates - intended to increase brand visibility in search engines and generate organic traffic. In practice, however, this often led to a focus on the quantity of published materials at the expense of their value to the audience.

The development of Google's search algorithms gradually transformed the understanding of effective content marketing. Updates such as Panda (2011), promoting high-quality and unique content; Penguin (2012), limiting spam practices; Hummingbird (2013), taking semantic context and long-tail queries into account; and BERT (2019), using machine learning to interpret user intent, shifted the focus from the quantity of published materials to their usefulness and alignment with search context (Barabasz et al., 2024). As a result, content value increasingly became associated with relevance to audiences' actual needs. This marked a departure from the "content factory" approach, in which materials are difficult to associate with a given brand (Stawarz-García, 2017). Effective content marketing is not based solely on publishing materials around a specific topic, but rather on creating content aligned with users' language, associations, and expectations (Bakalarska-Stankiewicz, 2020).

The importance of content marketing is clearly increasing. The report *The State of Content Marketing in Poland* (2024) indicates that 81% of organizations regard owned media - websites, blogs, and online stores - as a key communication channel, accompanied by a growing emphasis on high-quality native content. This does not mean, however, that content marketing is always properly understood and implemented. In practice, many organizations continue to rely primarily on content distribution techniques, focusing on their own messaging rather than on what audiences are actually seeking (Bakalarska-Stankiewicz, 2020).

From the perspective of copywriting education, a shift away from creating content merely related to a given industry toward content that addresses users' informational needs becomes particularly important. The ability to identify such needs is emerging as a key component of contemporary copywriting competence. At the same time, educational observations indicate that novice content creators do not always spontaneously formulate topics that take into account audiences' specific concerns, more often selecting broad guide-based themes instead. In this context, content marketing approaches based on the systematic identification of user questions and transparent communication become especially significant.

3. THE THEY ASK, YOU ANSWER (TAYA) CONCEPT AS A FRAMEWORK OF TRANSPARENT COMMUNICATION

The TAYA concept, developed by Sheridan, assumes that the foundation of effective content marketing lies in transparently responding to the questions, concerns, and objections of audiences. In the present study, TAYA is treated as a practitioner-oriented marketing framework used as an analytical and pedagogical approach to examining topic formulation rather than as a validated educational or psychological construct.

Sheridan (2021) formulated this strategy based on experiences related to running a blog for a swimming pool company during the economic crisis following 2008 in the United States. The approach is based on the systematic creation of educational blog content responding to real user questions, especially those that brands often avoid for fear of raising doubts or weakening the sales message. As Sheridan (2021) emphasizes: "If they can eliminate all fears and negative emotions from the buying process, all that remains is trust".

A central element of TAYA is the so-called "Big 5" topics: pricing, problems, comparisons, reviews, and "best in class" content. These categories correspond to the questions users frequently enter into search engines during the purchasing decision process. Particular importance is attributed to content concerning prices, since the absence of financial information increases uncertainty and makes it more difficult to evaluate an offer. Sheridan emphasizes that audiences do not expect merely a single specific price, but rather an explanation of pricing mechanisms and the factors influencing service valuation.

Content concerning problems and limitations, metaphorically described as "skeletons in the closet", also plays an important role. These do not refer to instructional questions, but rather to purchase-related concerns, fears of ineffectiveness, and topics that brands usually omit in promotional communication. Sheridan assumes that users will encounter negative opinions or product limitations anyway, making it worthwhile to address these issues openly in educational blog articles.

Comparative content, juxtaposing different solutions, service models, or alternative methods of action, serves a similar function. In the TAYA approach, the blog author does not limit themselves to promoting a single solution, but rather points out both the advantages and limitations of various options. Sheridan describes this approach as "disarming", since openly discussing the strengths and weaknesses of different solutions increases the sender's credibility and strengthens audience trust in published content.

4. TAYA IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF INFORMATION ASYMMETRY AND BRAND TRANSPARENCY

The TAYA concept can be interpreted through the lens of information asymmetry between seller and consumer, described by Akerlof (1970). In the "market for lemons" model, sellers possess greater knowledge about product quality than buyers, increasing uncertainty and perceived transaction risk. Traditional marketing practices often reinforced this imbalance by limiting access to information about prices, product disadvantages, or constraints. As Pink (2014) notes, negative perceptions of selling - including associations with manipulation or dishonesty - stem partly from this historical informational advantage of sellers.

The development of the Internet has substantially reduced information search costs, enabling consumers to compare offers, verify reviews, and confront brand communication with external sources. As a result, organizations face growing pressure to disclose information, since a lack of transparency may encourage audiences to seek answers elsewhere (Board & Lu, 2018).

TAYA constitutes a practical response to this shift by promoting systematic responses to customer questions and the voluntary disclosure of information often omitted in marketing communication. Its effectiveness can also be explained through signaling theory, according to which transparency serves as a credible signal reducing informational imbalance and strengthening trust, particularly when brands openly discuss costs, disadvantages, or comparisons (Lambillotte et al., 2022; Montecchi et al., 2024).

At the same time, research suggests that transparency alone does not guarantee trust. Brand-generated communication may still evoke skepticism due to perceived persuasive intent (Yoo & Jeong, 2014), while excessive disclosure can lead to information overload (Branco et al., 2016). In this context, TAYA may be understood as an attempt to combine transparency with audience needs by aligning information with users' questions and decision-making processes.

5. PREPARATORY KEYWORD ANALYSIS

Prior to the instructional activities described in this study, a preparatory analysis of keywords related to language education was conducted. The aim of the analysis was to determine whether users formulate questions concerning costs, problems, and comparisons related to the selection of educational services, as well as to identify the dominant types of queries in the

investigated area. This made it possible to assess the relevance of TAYA assumptions for planning educational blog topics in the context of a language school. This analysis served as preparation for the instructional task rather than as a measure of participants' performance.

Keyword analysis (in SEO, the term is used interchangeably with key phrases) involves identifying expressions entered by users into search engines in order to obtain specific information. From SEO perspective, keyword selection constitutes one of the fundamental elements of an on-site strategy, as it affects content visibility and the ability to reach audiences at different stages of the decision-making process (Barabasz et al., 2024). In the context of teaching copywriting, however, keyword analysis serves not only a technical function but also a cognitive one - it enables a better understanding of users' language, their informational needs, and the ways in which they formulate questions regarding a given issue. Of particular importance are long-tail phrases, that is, more extensive, multi-word queries that usually reflect specific user expectations and may serve as a starting point for creating blog articles (Barabasz et al., 2024).

The dataset included a list of queries generated using the AnswerThePublic and AlsoAsked tools. Both tools rely on data derived from Google mechanisms, such as query autocomplete (Google Autocomplete), "Related Searches" (Google Related Searches), and the "People Also Ask" section, enabling the identification of long-tail phrases. Three general phrases were analyzed: "speaking English", "English course", and "language school". The phrases were intentionally limited to one or two words, as tools of this type generate more extensive long-tail queries most effectively on this basis. In total, 165 unique queries were collected: 53 for the phrase "speaking English", 57 for "English course", and 55 for "language school".

It is worth noting that the analysis was limited solely to the stage of identifying potential keywords. It did not include an assessment of the popularity of individual phrases or their monthly search volume. The objective was therefore not to determine the SEO potential of particular queries, but rather to identify a possible repertoire of audience informational needs that could become the basis for proposing blog article topics consistent with the TAYA approach.

To avoid counting the same phrases multiple times, a single-classification rule was applied: each query was assigned exclusively to one dominant category. In borderline cases, a phrase was assigned to the category that best reflected the query's primary purpose. For example, the question "Is Duolingo good?" could partly relate to the problem of learning effectiveness; however, it was classified under the "opinions/reviews" category because the dominant intention concerned evaluating a specific solution.

6. CATEGORIES OF USER QUERIES AND TAYA ASSUMPTIONS

The analysis showed that queries corresponding to the TAYA concept accounted for 49.7% of all phrases (Table 1). The remaining 50.3% belonged to instructional, parametric, definitional, and career- and earnings-related categories. The strongest TAYA category proved to be "price and costs" (24.2%). Users primarily asked about course costs, lesson prices, tutoring rates, the cost-effectiveness of learning, and language school fees (e.g., "How much does an English course cost?", "How much does one hour of an English lesson cost?", "How much does an hour with a native speaker cost?"). These queries indicate that audiences seek not only specific prices but also orientation within the market and an understanding of educational service pricing mechanisms.

The second important category concerned problems related to learning effectiveness (15.8%). In the TAYA concept, these correspond to the category colloquially referred to as "skeletons in the closet", that is, hidden fears, doubts, and psychological barriers users wish to verify before making a decision. In the analyzed material, questions concerning age (e.g., "Can you learn a language after 40?"), the time required to achieve results (e.g., "Can you learn English in 3 months?"), the effectiveness of self-study ("Can you learn English by yourself at home?"), and doubts regarding one's own language competences (e.g., "Why is my English poor?") predominated.

The highest number of comparisons appeared for the phrase "English course". Users compared courses and applications, language schools and self-study, different teaching methods, as well as online and in-person lessons (e.g., "What is the best method for learning English?", "Which course is best for people learning English?", "Which English course do you recommend?", "Where is the best place to learn English?"). Although the share of this category was relatively small (4.2%), comparative questions indicated a later stage in the decision-making process, in which users actively evaluate available options.

The "opinions" and "best in class" categories appeared relatively less frequently than questions about costs or problems, accounting for 2.4% and 3.0% of all queries, respectively. Within the opinions category, users primarily sought evaluations of the quality of specific solutions, method effectiveness, and recommendations based on other people's experiences (e.g., "Is Duolingo good?", "Is the Helen Doron method effective?", "Is it worth attending a language school?", "Which English course do you recommend?").

In turn, "best in class" questions reflected the need to identify the solution considered most effective or best suited to a specific educational objective (e.g., "What is the best method for learning English?", "Which course is best for people learning English?", "What is the best app for learning spoken English?", "What is the best way to practice speaking English?"). Although together both categories accounted for only 5.4% of the analyzed phrases, they may indicate

the moment at which users move from problem recognition to selecting among available options and seek arguments justifying the choice of a specific solution.

At the same time, the analysis revealed a strong procedural component. Instructional, parametric, and definitional categories together accounted for 49.2% of all queries. Users frequently asked how to learn, where to begin, how many words should be known, and how to achieve speaking fluency. This finding suggests that, in foreign language education, users value content that guides them through the learning process step by step. Such informational needs remain highly relevant and partly explain why guide-based content continues to dominate educational blogs.

However, the findings also indicate that relying exclusively on instructional content may leave important informational needs insufficiently addressed. Nearly half of the analyzed queries reflected concerns that extend beyond procedural advice and align with the framework of TAYA, including uncertainty about costs, doubts regarding learning effectiveness, fears of failure, and comparisons between available solutions. From the perspective of content planning, this suggests that educational blog topics should not be limited to broad how-to formats but should also address users' uncertainties, decision-making dilemmas, and psychologically salient concerns. In this sense, TAYA appears not as a replacement for guide-based content but as an important complementary framework that broadens the scope of educational content and supports a more user-centered approach to topic formulation.

Table 1 *Distribution of User Search Queries by TAYA and Non-TAYA Categories (N = 165)*

Category	N	%
TAYA-related categories		
Price and costs	40	24.2
Problems ("skeletons in the closet")	26	15.8
Comparisons and alternatives	7	4.2
Reviews / opinions	4	2.4
Best-in-class	5	3.0
Non-TAYA categories		
How-to / instructional	25	15.2
Parametric / quantifying	28	17.0
Definitional / orientational / formal	28	17.0
Career / salary	2	1.2
Total	165	100.0

Note. TAYA = *They Ask, You Answer*. Categories were derived from qualitative coding of unique user search queries related to foreign language learning. TAYA-related categories accounted for 49.7% of all analyzed queries, whereas non-TAYA categories accounted for 50.3%.

7. METHOD

7.1 Participants

The study included 18 adult postgraduate students of copywriting. The classes were conducted in the winter semester of the 2025/2026 academic year in a synchronous online format via the Microsoft Teams platform. The language of instruction was Polish, and participants formulated their responses in this language.

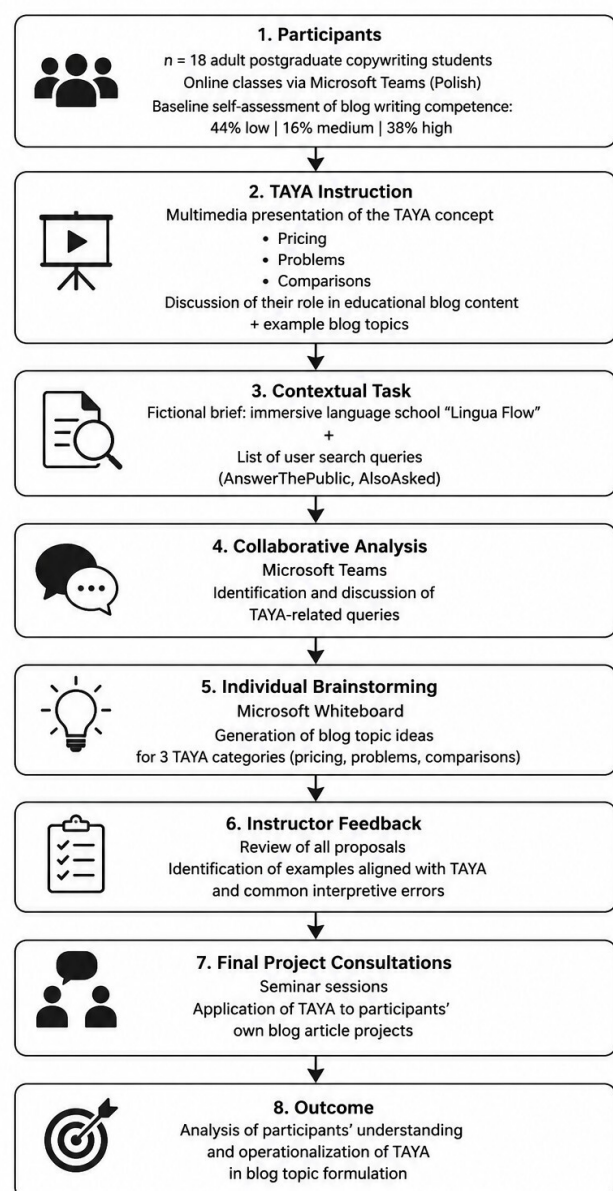
The initial level of the participants was determined based on a self-assessment questionnaire conducted before the start of the program. Respondents evaluated their own competencies on a five-point scale (1 – very weak, 5 – very good). The results indicated a clear diversity of experience related to blog content creation. In total, 44% of participants rated their competencies as very weak or weak, 16% as average, while 38% as good or very good. This means that the group was not homogeneous in terms of preparation for working with blog articles: alongside individuals beginning their copywriting training, there were participants declaring prior experience in content creation. At the same time, the predominance of low and medium ratings (60%) suggests that most participants entered the program with a limited sense of competence in writing blog articles, which justified the didactic focus on the stage of content planning and topic formulation.

7.2 Research procedure

The research had the character of a case study and was conducted as part of regular teaching classes. The analysis examined the topic proposals produced during a TAYA-based instructional exercise, focusing on their consistency with the assigned TAYA categories and on recurring interpretive difficulties.

The study was carried out in several stages (Figure 1). In the first phase, the instructor presented the TAYA concept using a multimedia presentation, focusing on three thematic categories subsequently used in the study: prices and costs, user problems, and comparisons. The selection of these categories was purposive - a previous keyword analysis showed that they belonged to the most frequently occurring queries in the context of language education, jointly accounting for a significant share of TAYA-consistent phrases. These categories were considered particularly important from the perspective of designing educational blog content, as they refer to questions appearing at different stages of the audience's decision-making process - from cost orientation, through uncertainty reduction, to comparison of available solutions. During the classes, their relevance for creating educational content was discussed, and example blog article topics corresponding to these three categories were presented.

Figure 1 *Study design and instructional procedure for implementing the They Ask, You Answer (TAYA) framework in postgraduate copywriting education*



Source: author's own work.

Next, participants received a brief concerning a fictional language school, *Lingua Flow*. The school was presented as teaching foreign languages through immersion in everyday communicative situations, based on practical tasks, conversations, and cooperation with native speakers. The brief also included a description of the target group: adults aged 25-45, with language proficiency at A2-B1 level, who had previously used language courses without achieving expected speaking results, worked in an international environment, or showed skepticism toward language schools.

In the next stage, participants were provided with a list of queries generated using the *AnswerThePublic* and *AlsoAsked* tools for three general phrases: "speaking English", "English course", and "language school". The aim was to identify a possible repertoire of users' informational needs that could serve as a basis for topics consistent with the TAYA concept. After individually reviewing the list of queries, participants commented on their observations in the Microsoft Teams chat, and then jointly with the instructor analyzed the phrases. Students were tasked with identifying queries consistent with TAYA, while the instructor shared a screen with a document containing the list of phrases, highlighted selected examples, supplemented missing cases, and clarified interpretative doubts.

In the main part of the activity, participants individually generated proposals for blog article topics corresponding to the three TAYA categories: prices, problems, and comparisons. Topics were entered on digital sticky notes placed on a shared Microsoft Whiteboard. The categories were spatially separated, and each was assigned a distinct color of sticky notes to organize the material. After the brainstorming phase was completed, the instructor discussed all proposals, identified and marked examples consistent with the TAYA framework, and pointed out the most frequent interpretative errors.

In the subsequent stage, carried out during seminar sessions, participants consulted with the instructor regarding article topics prepared for their own final projects, receiving support in applying the TAYA concept.

The exercise combined brainstorming, a shared professional brief, user search queries, and teacher-guided analysis. This design reflected the pre-writing stage of the process-genre approach by combining genre modeling, joint interpretation, and individual topic generation (Badger & White, 2000). The shared brief standardized the task context and reduced the influence of participants' different domain knowledge.

Because the instructor provided examples, guided the joint analysis, and clarified interpretative doubts, the resulting proposals reflect performance within a scaffolded instructional context rather than an independent measure of TAYA competence.

7.3 Data analysis

The 75 topic proposals generated during the instructional exercise were coded according to their consistency with the TAYA category assigned to each task. A proposal was classified as TAYA-consistent when it addressed the relevant category and reflected a recognizable user informational need. Coding was performed by the author. Borderline cases were assigned according to the proposal's dominant communicative purpose. Because the coding was conducted by one researcher, no inter-rater reliability measure was calculated; this constitutes a limitation of the study.

The materials analyzed in this study were produced as part of regular teaching activities. The participants had completed the program before the present analysis was prepared, and individual participants cannot be identified from the reported material. No personal data are reported.

7.4 Topic as a starting point for text development

In textology, the topic constitutes the starting point of an utterance and organizes discourse development (Bartmiński & Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska, 2012). In digital communication, analysis of key phrases can help approximate users' informational needs and shared areas of reference. Effective writing requires an appropriately focused topic aligned with communicative purpose and recipient needs (Lisowska-Magdżiarz, 2006; Zaśko-Zielińska et al., 2008). In the present study, topic formulation was therefore treated as the transition from a broad subject to a specific idea capable of organizing an educational article.

7.5 Formulating article topics in a process-genre perspective

The exercise described in this study can be interpreted as an example of didactics embedded in the process-genre approach (Badger & White, 2000). The combination of process and genre approaches seems particularly important in teaching copywriting to adults, who usually have educational experiences based primarily on a product approach, dominant in school writing instruction. The product approach assumes that the development of writing competence results mainly from mastering linguistic correctness and imitating model texts, making it more reproductive and teacher-centered. To a lesser extent it takes into account the social function of the text, its recipient, and the process of arriving at a finished result. Meanwhile, in the professional practice of a copywriter, effective writing requires not only linguistic proficiency but also the ability to recognize communicative purpose and the context in which the text functions.

The process dimension of the exercise manifested itself primarily in concentration on the pre-writing phase, considered one of the key stages of the writing process. According to the process approach, writing includes interconnected phases: pre-writing, drafting, revising and editing, with the preparatory stage playing a special role in planning content

(Badger & White, 2000). Formulating the topic constitutes one of the key stages of pre-writing, because it determines the direction of text development.

The process approach seems particularly useful in adult education, because it supports participants' autonomy, reflectivity and practical application of knowledge (Knowles et al., 2005). It may also be important in work with people with limited writing experience – especially since most participants initially defined their competence in this area as low – because it frames writing not as a result of innate predispositions, but as a process requiring planning, experimentation and gradual improvement (Onozawa, 2010).

At the same time, the exercise implemented key assumptions of the genre approach, according to which a text is embedded in a specific social context and subordinated to a concrete communicative purpose (Dirgeyasa, 2016). The task did not involve abstract invention of topics, but rather reconstruction of a real professional situation of a copywriter. Participants worked with a brief describing the brand, target group and character of the service, as well as with material resembling SEO practice – a list of user queries generated on the basis of search data. Thanks to this, the process of creating topics was embedded in a realistic context in which the article topic had to correspond both to user intentions and to the brand's business goals. In genre approach terms, this means recognizing the relationship between text form and its social function – in this case the function of an educational blog article supporting a purchasing decision.

An important element of the genre approach was also the input provided by the teacher in the form of examples of topics discussed during the presentation. The genre approach assumes that learning to write occurs partly through analysis of models, recognition of specific genres, and gradual adoption of conventions proper to a given type of utterance (Badger & White, 2000). This may be particularly important in work with people with limited writing experience, because model examples reduce uncertainty related to the task and facilitate understanding of the expected structure of the text. Research suggests that the genre approach – thanks to embedding writing in a social context and the use of model texts, and the active role of the teacher – may reduce anxiety related to writing (Ajmal & Irfan, 2020) and support the development of competence in lower-level learners (Dirgeyasa, 2016). This seems particularly important in the described study, because most participants defined their initial competence in creating blog articles as low or medium, which could increase the need for explicit modeling of the way of formulating topics consistent with the TAYA approach.

The structure of the exercise is also consistent with the wheel of literacy model described by Cope and Kalantzis (1993), assuming a transition from genre modeling to increasing participant autonomy. The phase of presenting the TAYA concept and analyzing sample topics corresponded to the modeling stage. Next, joint analysis of key phrases and generating TAYA-consistent topics had the character of joint construction of knowledge, during which the teacher and the group jointly interpreted the material and negotiated criteria of correctness. The final stage – individual creation of topic proposals and their later use in final projects – corresponded to the independent construction phase.

The applied didactic solution indicates that the process-genre approach may constitute a particularly useful framework for teaching copywriting. The process approach focuses primarily on the author of the text, supporting planning skills, reflectivity and conscious decision-making at subsequent stages of writing. In turn, the genre approach shifts the focus toward the recipient and the communicative situation, embedding writing in a realistic social and professional context and taking into account communicative purpose, user needs and conventions proper to a given type of text. The integration of both perspectives seems particularly valuable in work with adults learning to create functional texts operating in digital and marketing environments.

8. RESULTS

Across the instructional exercise, 18 participants generated 75 topic proposals. These proposals are treated as outputs of the exercise rather than as statistically independent observations. Among the topic proposals produced in the exercise, the highest proportion of TAYA-consistent responses occurred in the comparisons category, while lower results were observed in the "problems" and "pricing and costs" categories (Table 2).

Table 2 Accuracy of blog topic proposals across TAYA categories

No	TAYA category	Total topic proposals, <i>n</i>	TAYA-consistent topics, <i>n</i>	TAYA-consistent topics, %
1	Pricing and costs	23	8	34.8
2	Problems (“hidden concerns”)	30	13	43.3
3	Comparisons and alternatives	22	13	59.1
Total	All categories	75	34	45.3

Source: The table presents the distribution and accuracy of blog topic proposals generated by participants across three They Ask, You Answer (TAYA) categories during an educational brainstorming task. TAYA-consistent topics were defined as proposals aligned with the assigned category and users’ informational needs. Percentages were calculated within each category. Pricing topics focused on reducing uncertainty about costs and explaining pricing mechanisms; problem-related topics addressed fears, barriers, and concerns associated with language learning; comparison topics involved evaluating alternative solutions.

The “pricing and costs” category contained 23 topic proposals. Of these, approximately 34% could be considered consistent with the TAYA concept. These were mainly topics related to reducing purchase uncertainty and explaining pricing mechanisms, e.g., “How a language school saves time and money in learning English”. The remaining proposals were most often promotional or sales-oriented in character and resembled elements of an offer page rather than educational article topics. These proposals would work better as advertising slogans (“the sooner you enroll, the less you pay”), promotional micro-messages (“special offers”, “discount code” or “enrollment until the end of the month”), or FAQ section headings (“do I pay in advance and what if I resign?”).

This result shows that students often moved directly into promotional communication instead of responding to actual user concerns regarding costs, profitability, or service pricing mechanisms. Meanwhile, according to Sheridan’s approach, content of this type should primarily explain what determines the price, why services differ in cost, and in what situations a more expensive solution may prove more cost-effective.

The “problems” category included the largest number of proposals – 30. Approximately 43% of the topics could be considered consistent with the TAYA concept. Correct proposals primarily concerned fears, anxieties, and psychological barriers related to language learning, e.g., “What should you do if you are afraid of making mistakes in English?” or “What if I do not understand what a native speaker is saying?”.

However, the analysis showed that students very often shifted from problem-oriented topics toward instructional content. Instead of focusing on risk, uncertainty, or concerns, they proposed procedural content such as “How to memorize vocabulary quickly?”, or “How to determine your level?”. Although such topics may respond to genuine informational needs and play an important role in educational content marketing, within the framework of the assigned TAYA category they moved away from concerns and uncertainties that users seek to verify before purchasing a service.

This category also included isolated phrases, e.g., “results after one month of work”, “active conversation”, or “everyday and business English”, which are difficult to consider topics understood as organizing starting points for discourse, as they did not formulate a clear problem, question, or central idea that could guide the development of an educational article. Promotional micro-messages (“no tests, only conversations”) and examples of confusing a topic with an article title also appeared occasionally, e.g., “Motivation or consistency as the key to success” or “First steps in speaking independently”.

The highest level of consistency with TAYA assumptions was recorded in the “comparisons” category. Of the 22 proposals, approximately 59% met the criteria of the approach, making this category clearly the best understood by participants. The board included topics such as “On your own or with a native speaker?”, “An app or a language school?”, or “Immersion method versus other learning methods”. These proposals had a correct comparative structure, included a decision conflict, and corresponded to the purchase decision-making stage.

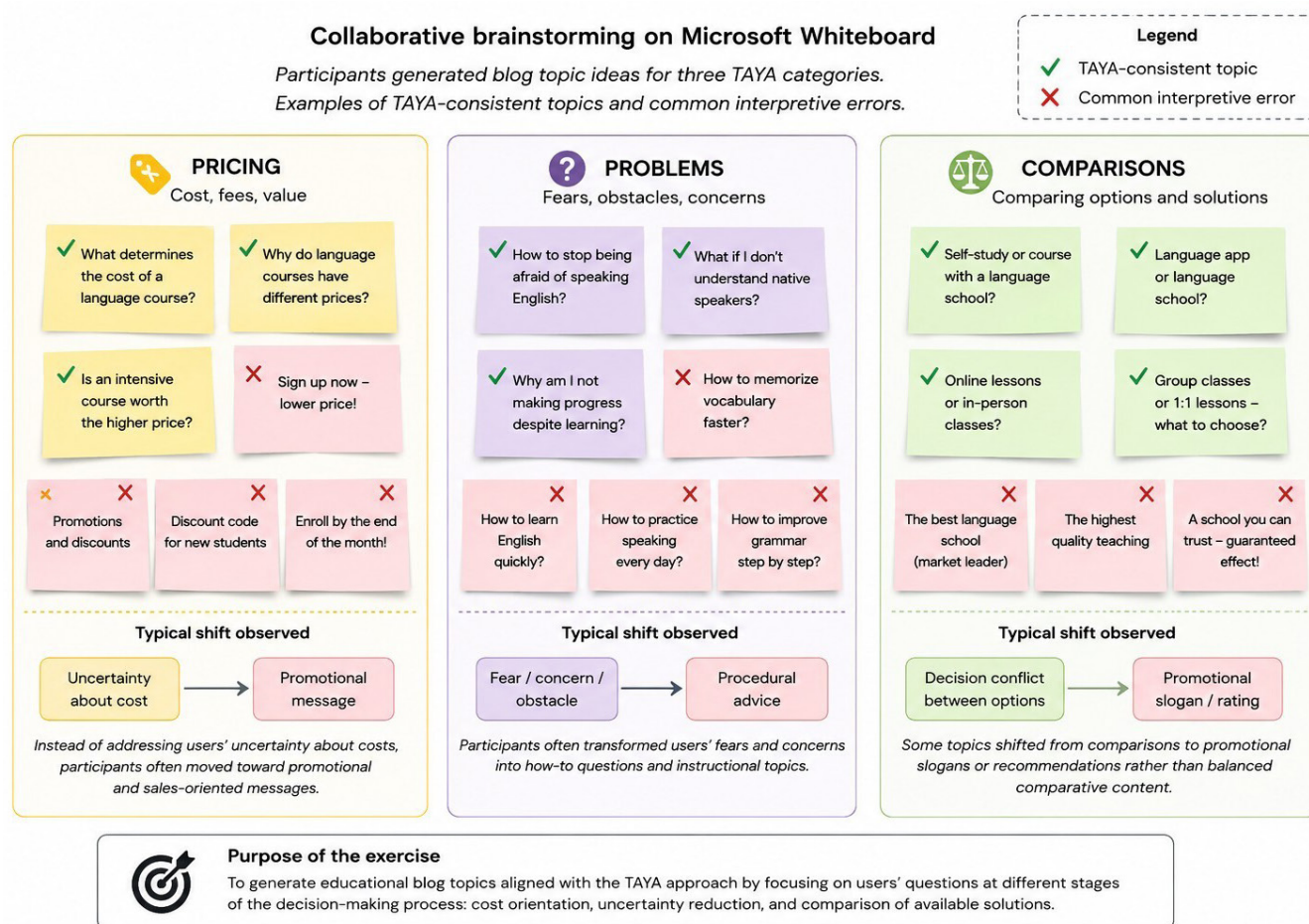
At the same time, a substantial proportion of proposals did not correspond to the specificity of comparative content. Incorrect examples included advertising slogans (“a language for life — you learn and improve”), topics closer to the categories of opinions and recommendations than comparisons (“the best language school according to learners”), as well as instructional content unrelated to comparing solutions, e.g., “Should I start with speaking lessons immediately?” or “Is it worth learning grammar at the beginning?”. The results suggest that the comparison format clearly supported participants in constructing TAYA-consistent topics, although it did not entirely eliminate interpretive errors.

Analysis of the material revealed noticeable differences in the way individual TAYA categories were understood (Figure 2). The highest level of consistency with the assumptions of the concept was recorded in the comparisons category.

Participants were relatively successful in identifying user concerns and uncertainties, although they frequently reformulated them into procedural or instructional topics rather than maintaining their original problem-oriented focus. The greatest difficulties appeared in the pricing category, where a clear tendency emerged to shift from user questions to promotional or sales communication.

Across all three categories, interpretive shifts were visible in the replacement of educational topics with advertising slogans, promotional micro-messages, or overly broad and procedural formulations that did not fully correspond to the framework of the assigned TAYA category. This suggests that knowledge of audience needs alone may not automatically translate into the ability to formulate blog topics aligned with TAYA assumptions and understood not merely as broad labels, but as precise starting points organizing audience-oriented content.

Figure 2 Examples of TAYA-consistent blog topics and common interpretive errors generated during collaborative brainstorming



Source: author's own work.

9. DISCUSSION

The analysis revealed three recurring patterns: the transformation of user concerns into instructional topics, the replacement of cost-related questions with promotional communication, and the relatively greater ease of formulating comparatives.

9.1 Recurrent patterns in topic formulation

The observed tendency to formulate topics in an excessively general or slogan-like manner does not appear to be an incidental phenomenon and remains consistent with the results of the research on copywriting education. In a study devoted to the formulation of blog topics, a frequent error involved proposing overly broad topics that would be difficult to develop within a typical blog article without the risk of treating the issue superficially (Wrycza-Bekier, 2025).

The recurrence of this pattern may suggest that novice content creators tend to extend the scope of topics beyond the constraints of the task. Instead of formulating issues that could be developed within a single blog article, participants often proposed broad thematic areas, abbreviated content labels, or general directions for communication. In light of the understanding of topic adopted in this study – namely, as the starting point of discourse and the organizing basis of text development – this pattern suggests difficulty in moving from a general subject of communication (“what the text will be about”) toward a more precise guiding idea that can structure a single article and be recognized by the recipient as its central meaning. It may be assumed that this phenomenon results partly from limited experience in planning educational content and partly from the belief that a narrower topic would not allow the creation of a sufficiently extensive utterance. As a consequence, participants may have treated a higher level of generality as a strategy safeguarding the possibility of developing the text, even at the cost of its precision and compliance with task requirements.

The slogan-like character of responses may be partly associated with the digital sticky-note format used on the Microsoft Whiteboard platform, which encourages content condensation and adaptation of utterance length to limited visual space (e.g., by reducing font size in order to fit a longer proposal). However, this explanation does not seem sufficient. Similar simplifications and tendencies toward excessive generality also appeared in previous research, in which participants formulated responses in the Google Docs environment, which did not require comparable spatial limitations (Wrycza-Bekier, 2025). This suggests that the observed pattern may reflect a more persistent cognitive difficulty related to content planning and topic operationalization rather than being solely a consequence of the work format applied.

At the same time, despite the spatial limitations of digital sticky notes, the tendency toward excessively broad specification of thematic scope appeared weaker than in the previous study. This may suggest that a content structure based on user questions and clearly defined TAYA categories partially organized the pre-writing stage and supported more concrete topic formulation. The observed patterns indicate that TAYA categories can provide a useful framework for analyzing difficulties in topic formulation. This seems particularly visible in the comparisons category, in which participants most often created proposals consistent with the assumptions of the task, although this effect did not entirely eliminate tendencies toward simplification and interpretive errors.

9.2 Pedagogical implications, study limitations, and directions for further analysis

These results contribute new observations to the didactics of copywriting. To date, literature concerning TAYA has focused primarily on the effectiveness of transparency strategies, whereas much less is known about how people learning copywriting interpret the TAYA categories themselves and what errors they make while designing topics. The study suggests that particularly difficult areas are those requiring open reference to uncertainty, limitations, and potential negative experiences of recipients, especially in relation to costs and risks associated with purchase decisions.

The results remain consistent with Sheridan’s assumptions concerning the “strategic paradox” of content marketing. Sheridan indicates that organizations tend to avoid topics related to costs and customer concerns, despite the fact that precisely such content may build trust. An analogous mechanism was also revealed among study participants: they found it relatively easier to design comparative content and identify user problems than to create topics requiring transparent discussion of costs and service pricing mechanisms. The clearly lower level of relevance in the pricing category may suggest that addressing user concerns related to costs and pricing mechanisms remains particularly unintuitive even at the content-planning stage and therefore requires explicit pedagogical support.

The study also confirms the significance of the process-genre approach in teaching the writing of functional texts. The applied exercise was embedded in a realistic professional context, combining analysis of the brief, keywords, and user needs with the pre-writing phase characteristic of process writing. In the final-project material available for analysis, 58% of related articles were classified as TAYA-consistent. Because there was no pre-test/post-test design, control group, or randomization, this result provides descriptive evidence of topic use after the exercise rather than evidence of its effectiveness. 17 final projects were available for analysis because one participant did not submit a final project.

The study had the character of an exploratory case study and involved a small group of participants from one postgraduate program; therefore, it does not allow for an unambiguous assessment of the scale of the exercise’s impact on competency development. Moreover, the analysis of topic relevance was partly interpretive in nature and based on a qualitative assessment of consistency with TAYA categories.

A further limitation is the dual role of the author as both instructor and researcher. The author designed and conducted the instructional activity and subsequently analyzed the resulting material, which may have influenced the coding and interpretation.

The results suggest that effective copywriting education should include not only writing techniques but also the identification of audience questions and concerns already at the content-planning stage, together with the ability to translate them into precise topics understood not merely as broad content labels but as organizing starting points for audience-oriented texts.

10. CONCLUSIONS

The study showed that participants achieved the highest level of consistency with the TAYA concept in the category of comparative content, while they experienced greater difficulty in formulating topics related to user problems and, in particular, to costs and service pricing mechanisms. Particularly evident was the tendency to shift from user questions to promotional communication in the area of pricing and to reformulate problem-related concerns into instructional content, which may respond to legitimate informational needs but moved away from the uncertainty-oriented focus of TAYA. In the comparisons category, some participants also shifted toward recommendations and advertising slogans.

The exercise revealed substantial differences in participants' ability to formulate topics within the three TAYA categories. Comparative topics showed the highest proportion of TAYA-consistent proposals, whereas pricing topics produced the greatest difficulty. The analysis also revealed recurring shifts from user concerns toward instructional or promotional content.

These findings indicate that TAYA categories may provide a useful framework for discussing user-oriented topic formulation in copywriting education. However, the exploratory case-study design does not allow conclusions about instructional effectiveness.

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