



## Developing writing skill in english of secondary school students: A process approach

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### Abstract

Writing skill is the skill of expressing thoughts, ideas, feelings etc. in written form. For becoming a good and successful writer one must have to acquire mastery over the language and the skill of writing. But there needs extra effort and concentration if the language is other than the mother tongue. And for this practice and effort are essential and must. The present research work deals with the problems that the secondary school students have to face in acquiring the skill of writing in the second language (English) in India. Besides all these, it also suggests some probable solutions to such problems. The researchers have reviewed some research articles and books of other writers and have sorted out basic problems that the secondary school students of India face while acquiring the skill of writing in the second language. They have also categorized the problems and gave tentative solutions to such problem. The present status of second language in India and specifically in West Bengal is also discussed. The result reveals that the present condition of second language in Indian education system is very poor and not satisfactory. Government should take some necessary steps to uplift English language from this present distressed condition.

**Keywords:** writing skill, secondary school students, second language, education system, English, ESL/EFL

### Introduction

For the proper acquisition of a particular language one has to learn some basic skills of language. There are four major skills of language learning and writing skill is one of the most important of them. The four major skills of language learning are listening, speaking, reading and writing (LSRW). Among these, speaking and reading are receptive skills which need less participation of the learner and rest speaking and writing are productive skills which need active participation of the learner. And the most important and difficult skill to acquire is the writing skill. It is the system of written symbols representing the sounds, syllables or words of language with different mechanisms like capitalization, spelling and punctuation, word form and function. In our present competitive society, person with good writing skill is always a good and strong competitor for any field. To be successful in any field, writing skill is must. None can avoid it.

### Definition of Writing Skill

Writing skill is the ability of a person to express his/her thoughts, ideas, feelings etc in written form in paper or in digital form. It doesn't mean to accumulate words randomly side by side but it is an art of arranging words in a sequence to produce fruitful meaning with which one can express himself/herself. According to Nunan, "Writing is an extremely complex cognitive activity in which the writer is required to demonstrate control of variables simultaneously. At the sentence level, these include control of contents, format, sentence structure, vocabulary, spelling and letter formation. Beyond the sentence, the writer must be able to structure and integrate information into cohesive and

coherent paragraph and text." Nunan (2003) <sup>[18]</sup> states that writing is the process of thinking to invent ideas, thinking about how to express into good writing, and arranging the ideas into statement and paragraph clearly. It plays a major role in expressing one's ideas, thoughts, opinions, and attitudes.

According to Klein (1985) <sup>[11]</sup>, writing is the ability to put pen and paper to express ideas through symbols, this way, representations on the paper will have meaning and content that could be communicated to other people by the writer. Writing skills are specific abilities which help writers put their thoughts into words in a meaningful form and to mentally interact with the message. Writing is not just about conveying content but also about the representation of self. Writing is about more than making our thoughts and idea visible and concrete (Ghaith, 2002) <sup>[6]</sup>. Nystrad (1998) states that writing is a matter of elaborating text in accordance with what the writer can reasonably assume which the readers know and expect. And process of reading is a matter of predicting text in accord with the reader assumes about the writer's purpose. Pak-TaoNg (2003) <sup>[22]</sup> suggested that writing consists of a lot of activities which result in understanding. Such an understanding includes a process of thinking about the topic, notes gathering, data collection, etc. which makes a reflective thought for you at the end. Zamel (1983) <sup>[27]</sup>, a pioneer in ESL writing research, considered writing process as a "non-linear, exploratory, and generative process whereby writers discover and reformulate their ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning" (p.165).

Writing is a way to produce language that comes from our thought. By using the method of writing, we can share our

ideas, feelings or anything that exist in our mind by putting these down on a paper or a computer screen. The writing of a particular writer is influenced both by personal attitudes and social experiences of him/her and the impact of particular political and institutional context is also clearly marked on that writing. It is also a process that is influenced by constraints of genre and has to be present in learning activities.

### The Importance and Need of Writing Skill for Students

Harmer (2004) <sup>[8]</sup> lays stress on the essentiality of the writing skill saying “the reasons for teaching writing to students of English as a foreign language include reinforcement, language development, learning style, and most importantly, writing as a skill in its own right”. Janet Emig (1977) <sup>[5]</sup> described writing as “a unique mode of learning” involving the active participation of both the left and right hemispheres of the brain. Researchers have agreed that writing enhances thinking skills; the higher cognitive functions of analysis and synthesis seem to develop most fully with the support of written language. Writing is meant for conveying thoughts, ideas, and facts in easy and lucid language. Students have to learn the art of good writing which is essential in order to excel at both academic and professional levels. Good writing skills are needed for all the students in order to accomplish their educational and employable requirements, for improving communication skills, for improving creativity, exploration, and essential for self-understanding.

### Factors Involved in Second Language

Writing is a productive skill. It is one of the most difficult and therefore frustrating subjects to teach particularly in an ESL/EFL programme. This research work is an outcome of teachers’ concerns and efforts to identify areas of difficulty in the writing skill among ESL students and improve their writing through feedback. Hinkel (2004) <sup>[9]</sup> argues that there is often too much emphasis on teaching the process of writing in ESL courses instead of teaching the practical skills that students need. The writer presents findings which show that ESL students’ academic papers are often perceived as vague and confusing (p. 4). She argues that this is a result of the process-writing curriculum, which emphasizes content and structure while only sparsely and inconsistently addressing grammar and lexis. Cazden (1988) believes that talk among peers at school gives students opportunities to engage in academic discourse. Likewise, important is “the potential value of such interactions for social development in a pluralistic society” (p. 134). In case of language learning and skill development teacher and learner constitute the two sides of the same coin.

### Teacher Factor

In the words of Swami Vivekananda, “True teacher is one who can immediately come down to the level of students and transfer his soul to the student’s soul and see through and understands through his mind” (Maheshwari, 2012) <sup>[13]</sup>. Teachers are very much capable of doing so and make their effort great. According to Nunan (1988) <sup>[19]</sup>, techniques and procedures for collecting information to be used in syllabus design are referred to as a needs analysis (p. 13). The teacher is thus able to find out the potential knowledge and abilities that the learners possess at entry level and what they do not know and cannot do in English. Nunan also

argues that the teachers should find out what their students think and feel about what and how they want to learn. Oakes (1985) <sup>[21]</sup> found teachers and students to be much more positive in their appraisal of relationships in high-track classes than in low-track classes. These positive relationships were shown to be part of a formula that results in high student achievement. A relationship with a single teacher is unlikely to determine a student’s entire academic trajectory; however, a series of negative relationships cannot help but diminish a student’s academic self-concept.

### Learners Factors

There is universal agreement that teaching in the first language (L1) is beneficial and that transfer of literacy skills almost always occurs to the second language (L2). However, the following studies looked at the question of how to deal with students who have limited skills in their L1 and were attempting to acquire writing skills in English. Richards (1974) <sup>[23]</sup> characterizes learners’ limitations as “inability to learn language, low intelligence and poor cultural background”. They do not get much exposure to the language due to economical scarcity and their familial background and thus they face a lot of problem for using it correctly and appropriately. Leki (1992) <sup>[12]</sup> opines that ESL students become disappointed while dealing with difficulties in understanding word implication and meaning. It is obvious that there is a disparity in writing between the first and the second language. They are also tackling difficulties in writing assignments, meeting deadlines as well as getting the best quality of their final writing. As a result, the present study not only concerns about some of the common writing problems among ESL students, but also suggests some solutions based on the experiences of the teachers and the researchers which can be very much helpful in developing writing skills.

### Problems in Writing

During writing, the students come across different kinds of problem. The problems are mainly related to the language. The lack of mastery over the language is also one of them. Besides language, the learners also face some problems related to thought and diction. Keeping all these things in mind, the problems can be categorized as follows:

**Internal Problems in Writing:** For writing a topic or content, the learners come across many internal problems which can hamper their whole writing. These problems are great barriers to become an efficient and expert writer. These internal problems in writing are as follows:

- Grammatical Problems:** Most of the students of ESL face face problems related to grammatical structure of the language. Their problem is mainly about syntax of the language. Kharma (1987) <sup>[10]</sup> and Melese (2007, p. 12) states that students have grammatical problems with subject verb agreements, pronoun references, and connectors.
- Problem of Word Choice:** Writing in a second language using the appropriate words in the appropriate place is a problem for most of the students. They lack appropriate words while writing. Thus, the writing becomes immature and raw. So, the effort of the writer

to impress the reader leads to a problem of diction.

### Cognitive Problems

1. **Punctuation Problems:** According to Byrne (1988, p. 16) <sup>[3]</sup>, the fact that punctuation has never been standard to the extent as spelling, makes it problematic.
2. **Capitalization Problems:** Capital letters are useful for sentence initials, the beginning of important words, in topics, headings etc. The problems occur because of the difficulty to classify nouns as proper and common nouns (Gowere *et al.*, 1995).
3. **Spelling Problem:** Due to the influence of other languages, variant pronunciations and other historical reasons, the English spelling system which has become inconsistent is complex for students (Gowere *et al.*, 1995).
4. **Content Problem:** Learners of English as a second or foreign language also face problems of exploring ideas and thought to communicate with others. This language inefficiency becomes a great barrier in their writing process.
5. **Problem Organization:** Learners face problem in structuring the paragraph, development of topic of a paragraph, structuring the whole discourse and theme in a discourse. They also face problems in differentiating the topic and supporting ideas or in general and specific details.

**External Problems in Writing:** Besides internal problems, the learners of ESL also face some external problem in their writing. These external problems are as follows:

- a. **Lack of Knowledge about Writing:** Stages Byrne (1988, p. 4) <sup>[3]</sup> classifies the writing complexities into psychological, linguistic and cognitive problems. It means that writing does not come naturally but rather gained through continuous effort and much practice. It becomes a complex skill.
- b. **Lack of Learners' Motivation:** Writing tasks can be developed rapidly when students' concerns and interests are acknowledged, when they are given numerous opportunities to write and when they are encouraged to become participants. It means learners will be encouraged to write if writing tasks motivate them and keep them interested.
- c. **Inadequate Time:** Learners need time for gathering ideas, organizing their ideas, writing drafts, proof reading and re-writing. According to Guantun and Chakraverty (2000, p. 22), writing which is an important part of language learning, is essentially a reflective activity that requires enough time to think about these specific topics.
- d. **Lack of Practice:** According to Davies (1998, p. 25) <sup>[4]</sup>, "writing is essentially a creative process and good writers must learn to communicate their ideas clearly to an unseen audience. In addition, learners must take the responsibility for their learning if meaningful learning is to take place. Furthermore, to become a good writer, a student needs to write a lot.
- e. **Teachers' Feedback:** Byrne (1988, p. 29) <sup>[3]</sup> thinks that if teachers are to be truly readers rather than judges, they should perhaps look not so much at what the learners have failed to achieve but rather at what they actually succeeded in doing. This might help student writers to appreciate receiving comments and use them

in their revisions.

### Position of English Language in Education System of India

Nowadays, English is used as a second language in India. The phrase second language means the language which is acquired later than the first language. A second language may not be native of any social group because it is used for purposes such as commerce, industry, law, administration, politics, education etc. It is a global medium of communication. In India English was considered integral to the globalization process (Annamalai, 2005). So English is used as a compulsory subject in each and every state of India. The nature of English teaching in India is such where the learners can use it in both formal and informal situation. After Hindi, it is the most commonly spoken language in India and probably the most read and written language (Vijayalaxmi & Babu, 2014). The importance of English language study has been well articulated in The National Curriculum Framework (2005) in the following words: "English in India is a global language in a multilingual country. A variety and range of English teaching situation prevail here owing to the twin factors of teacher proficiency in English and pupils' exposure to English outside schools." It is indeed unfortunate that English has so far remained associated with the rich, elite or upper middle class. It should be the effort of the Indian education system to provide opportunity to learn English to every Indian child and to ensure that she/he gains a sufficiently high level of proficiency in it and not become a subject of discrimination.

### Position of English Language in Education System of West Bengal

The position of English as a second language in the Education system of West Bengal is not very much pleasing. The condition is not better than the worst. Banerjee (2016) <sup>[2]</sup> discovers that in the schools of West Bengal English is taught as a second language but it is not given much importance. The teachers are also not competent enough to teach the subject properly and effectively. Saranya (2018) suggested that the teachers should to equip themselves with the latest technology and gain mastery over English to improve all four language skills. Besides this, the teachers are not careful enough regarding the learning of the students. Malarvizh (2018) remarks when English is taught as a second language, the teachers tend to overlook the errors made by the students. She recommended the need to use English aptly in an everyday basis. Teaching aids are one of the most important aspects in the language learning process. The schools should have new and innovative modern teaching aids for the proper understanding of the students. But Malaynathan (2016) <sup>[15]</sup> observed that most of the schools of West Bengal have no modern aids like audio-visual aids, projector etc. rather there are only the traditional teaching aids, such as blackboard, white chalk etc. The National Council of Education, Research and Training (NCERT) suggested generating socio-cultural contexts both inside and outside the classrooms of elementary level students that would encourage children to participate actively in understanding and creating appropriate communicative practices.

### Problems of Bengali Medium students in English

The students of Bengali mediums are often seen facing

problems when they are asked to be present in English based surroundings. Language learning becomes hard for the Bengali medium students due to the lack of actions taken regarding the practice of English in classrooms.

Now-a-days, we see students who have an ambition to achieve higher studies. They like to taste the achievement of studying abroad for making them perfectly fit in multinational or international companies. In these companies, the capabilities of excellent English speaking and writing are highly valued. But the students of Bengali medium “face problem during their higher studies. In spite of having good result and clear concept they can’t do well at international level (Tiba, p. 8).

Students passing out from state run schools are taught English as a second language and that is why these students fail to compete with students coming from private schools. Therefore, the poor status of teaching, ill qualified teachers, ill equipped secondary schools for teaching English language, less weight age given for teaching English, no proper transactional strategies adopted for teaching are the main drawbacks (Banerjee, 2016) [2].

### Summary and Conclusion

So, in conclusion it can be said that writing skill is a complex cognitive skill to be learnt and mastered by the students to shine in their career and everyday life and the students of Bengali Medium schools need a special care, attention and guidance to succeed in developing writing skill. And the position of English in West Bengal is not at all satisfactory. It needs lots of innovations in the language teaching process in the secondary schools of West Bengal. Many researches usher and nurture the path of developing English Language skill among secondary students and this particular research work may help to establish the way of development of writing skill in English among Bengali Medium Secondary School students by discussing all the aspects. Besides all these, the government should take necessary steps to solve the problem of English language learning among the secondary school students.

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