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*Jotiram Gaikwad

St. Xavier's College-Autonomous,

Mumbai, India

Email: jotiramg274@gmail.com/jotiram.gaikwad@xaviers.edu

**Tripti Karekatti

Department of English, Shivaji University,

Kolhapur, India

Email: triptikarekatti@gmail.com

IMPROVING WRITING SKILLS OF COMMERCE STUDENTS

Abstract

English writing skill is an essential requirement for the students who want to make carrier in the global market. However, most of the commerce students lack English writing skill. The present study is concerned with the development of writing skills in English of the undergraduate commerce students. It is an experimental research and it was conducted on twenty students of First Year of Bachelor of Commerce (F.Y.B.COM.). English was taught over a period of three months as per the designed teaching/learning module (TLM) developed by the present researcher. The data was collected through an essay writing task before and after the teaching to assess, evaluate and compare their performance. The research aimed to test the progress of the students from the pre-test to the post-test in writing skills of English. The analysis of collected data shows improvement in students' performance from the pre-test to the post-test as a result of teaching learning module (TLM).

Keywords – writing skills in English, global market, experimental research, teaching/learning module (TLM), essay writing task

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing refers to “the expression of ideas in a systematic way to organize the graphic conventions of the language” (Rivers, 1968, p. 243); “complex, cognitive process that requires sustained intellectual effort over a considerable period of time” (Nunan, 1999, p.

273); and “...the method of human inter-communication by means of conventionally visible marks” (Jordan, 1999, p. 41). Of the four language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing – writing is the most difficult skill for second and foreign language learners to master because “writing is far from being a simple matter of transcribing language into written symbols: it is a thinking process in its own right” (White and Arndt, 1991, p. 3). It is viewed as the most difficult and complex function of language as it involves different skills such as cognitive, psychological, rhetorical and critical and different mechanisms such as capitalization, spelling, punctuation, word form and function.

Writing, though difficult, is a very essential skill of language. Good writing skill in English has now become essential requirement of the global market. However, most of the students who wish to make career in the global market lack writing skills. According to the study conducted on behalf of the Association of American College and Universities, only 27 percent employers said that the recent college graduates are prepared for the workplace in the area of written communication (Hart Research Associates, 2015, 12). The aim of the present research is to improve the current state of affair.

The present study is concerned with developing writing skills in English of the undergraduate students using teaching/learning module (TLM) developed by the present researcher. The students were given training using a teaching/learning module for three months to find out effectiveness of TLM in English Language Teaching (ELT). The present paper is divided into five sections – section-1 is an introduction which describes the aim of present study, section-2 spells out the research design, section-3 deals with data analysis, section-4 states the findings and section-5 provides the concluding remarks.

2. RESEARCH DESIGN

In this section, subjects of the study and teaching/learning module (TLM) are discussed. The techniques employed for data collection and data analysis are also described.

2.1 Subjects of the Study

The present study was conducted on twenty students of First Year of Bachelor of Commerce (F.Y.B.Com.) class of St. Xavier’s College - Autonomous, Mumbai, during the academic year 2013-2014. This number (20 students) couldn’t have been further increased as they were to be intensively trained over a period of three months.

2.2 Teaching/Learning Module (TLM)

Before the 1970’s, writing instruction focused on the rules of grammar (Pour-Mohammadi, Zainol Abidin, & Cheong Lai, 2012). Today, instructional material

concentrates less on conventional rules of writing and more on expression of ideas (Shaughnessy, 1998). Traditionally, in India, writing skills are confined to three forms of writing: letter writing, paragraph writing and essay writing, and these are developed as pointed out by Tickoo (2003: 57):

1. The teacher sets a writing task.
2. The pupils write a composition and hand it in.
3. The teacher corrects its grammar and spelling often using a lot of red ink, or asks the pupils to either copy the model composition written by him/her or follow the one found in their composition book.
4. The pupils look at the teacher's corrections.
5. They (may) hurriedly rewrite or make changes to satisfy the teacher.

This methodology focuses on testing writing than creating awareness about writing as a process. In order to balance, TLM developed by the present researcher gives importance to the process of writing too. The process of writing is an effective method of teaching writing because it helps students to focus on the process of creating text through the various stages as shown in the table-1.

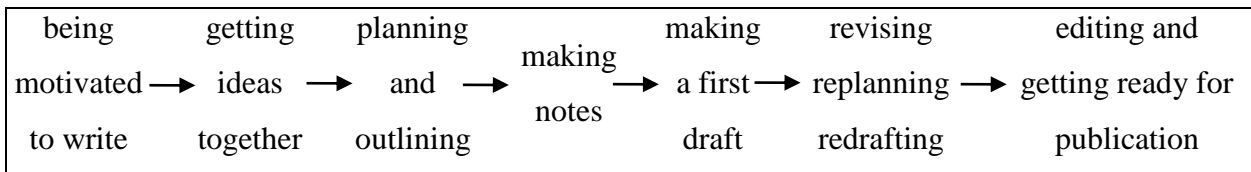


Table-1: Stages involved in process writing (Hedge, 2005, p.51)

The present teaching module developed by the researcher was a working plan for teaching English. It was prepared on the basis of the subject 'Communication Skills in English' of F.Y.B.COM. It included the following components of the regular syllabus of 'Communication Skills in English':

1. Writing: developing an idea, using appropriate linking devices, cohesion and coherence, self-editing
2. Paragraph writing
3. Letter writing: parts, structure, full block form, modified block, semi block, principles of effective letter writing
4. Personal Correspondence: statement of purpose, job application letter and resume, letter of acceptance of job offer, letter of resignation
5. Reports: parts, types, feasibility reports, investigative reports

In addition to the above mentioned topics of the subject 'Communication Skills in English', the following additional topics were included in the TLM:

1. Refreshing Grammar: parts of speech, tense, auxiliaries, modal verbs/modals, sentence, phrases, clauses and articles
2. Process of writing
3. Essay writing

English was taught using TLM in the regular classroom as per the regular time table of the college where the syllabus of the regular course and the teaching module overlapped. For the additional components of teaching module, extra classes were conducted.

During teaching, importance was given to practicing English than just teaching and lecturing as practice provides many opportunities to the students for developing their writing skills. Practice promotes students to see their writing in a new light during each revision in order to strengthen their writing. The research also supports that repeated practice improves writing and thinking skills (Ashbaugh, Johnstone & Warfield, 2002; Kellogg & Whiteford 2009; Welker & Berardino, 2009).

2.3 Data Elicitation Tools

Data was collected through written tests before and after the experiment. The participants were asked to write an essay of about one page on any one of the given topics for the pre-test and the post-test. The topics given for the pre-test were:

- If I were the PM
- What I plan to do after graduating
- An accident I witnessed

The topics given for the post-test were:

- If I become the Manager
- The things I want to do in the summer vacation
- A person I met recently

2.4 Data Analysis Tools

The data is analysed qualitatively and quantitatively. The qualitative analysis is done on the basis of the organisation of text. The data is also analysed to check the increase in number of words used from the pre-test to the post-test. The main aim of the analysis is to see to what extent the teaching module designed and activities conducted could improve the performance of the students in English.

3. ANALYSIS

The qualitative and quantitative analysis of the essay writing task was done on the basis of the ability to organise the text, and the number of words used in the pre-test and the

post-test. In the quoted examples, strikethrough part indicates cancelled part by the participants; and figures in bracket – 01, 02, 03, and so on, indicate participant's number; I01, I02, I03, and so on, indicate participant 01, 02, 03, and so on, in the pre-test; and II01, II02, II03, and so on, indicate participant 01, 02, 03, and so on, in the post-test.

3.1 Ability to organise the text

A detailed analysis of the essays found the following things on the organization of text in the pre-test and the post-test.

Some participants have written organized essays. These essays are considered organized as they have beginning, middle and end. For example,

* Many people will do plan to ~~what they are doing after they~~ finished his ~~wor~~ work students are also take so many plans after the graduating.

I also have one plan after I graduate. First ~~my dream is~~ I want to speak good English because I want all our given me ~~eeeeet~~-respect and also I want my self respect. without English my life is incomplete ~~but I want my complete life~~. after I study about English and talk with my friends in English language. I felt very proud of my self.

Secondly I want complete my aim which is become a good teacher. and for that hard work is very important If I complete my ~~dream and~~ aim I ~~just feel that~~ I'll teach my students everything. i touch sky and this feeling give me and my family very much happiness my success is a main point of my life and plan is Naturaly comes in hard work ~~so hard work is my plan~~.

So this is my plan after ~~I complete my~~ graduation and achive a success in life. (I08)

The quoted essay is on the topic, 'what I plan to do after graduating'. It is an organized essay as it has beginning, middle and end. It has a beginning where the plan of vacation is declared. The plan is further illustrated in the middle. The essay is concluded with strong assertion of execution of the plan.

Most of the participants have written partially organised essays. These essays are partially organized as they lack either beginning or middle or end. For example,

* In the summer vation. I thing, I will go to village. There are so many ~~relation~~ relatives are there. When I will go to there, who ~~re~~ are ready to food special for me. There are not leaving me alone. In ~~my~~ my village so many interesting places are there. And we have our own ~~g~~ Agricultur land in my village. When I will go to there, I will go to in my agricultur land. because

there so many person work in warm. and I'm also like to help them. & Another thing, In my one wild also there. Me I & my village friends go to in the wild. & There is ~~river~~ is here ~~one~~ a river, we are swimming in the river. (II04)

The quoted essay is on the topic, 'The things I want to do in the summer vacation'. The essay has a beginning and middle. In the beginning the plan of vacation is declared and further the plan is illustrated. The essay lacks the concluding remarks.

Some participants have written badly organized essay. These essays are considered badly organized as they have either beginning or middle or end and not all. For instance,

* I am commplited the graduating. This is very good Diploma. But I plan is very difcalt. This is very most Diploma. My timing is very dificalt and cancel the Rejainig my jop. And very dificalt manejement. (I13)

The quoted essay is on the topic, 'What I plan to do after graduating'. It tells about the plan to pursue a diploma course. The essay neither describes the plan nor gives any concluding remarks.

Figure-1 shows the organization of the text in essays written by the participants in the pre-test and the post-test.

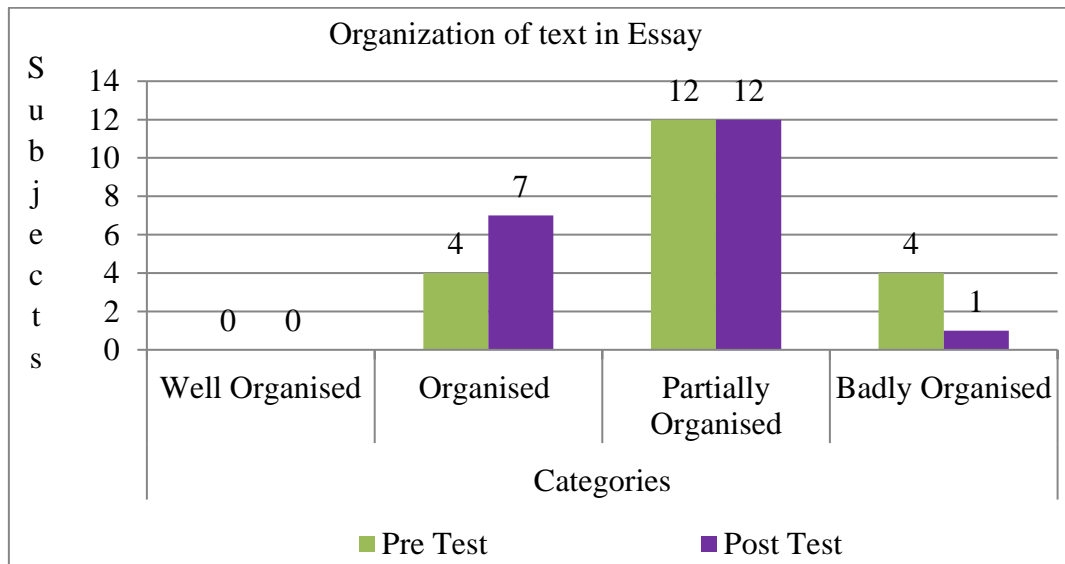


Figure-1: Organization of text in Essay

Four participants (I01, 02, 08, 20) in the pre-test and seven participants (II01, 02, 06, 08, 10, 11, 16) in the post-test have written organized essays. Twelve participants in each the pre-test (I03, 04, 05, 06, 07, 09, 10, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19) and the post-test (II03, 04, 05, 07, 09, 12, 13, 14, 17, 18, 19, 20) have written partially organized essays. Four participants (I11, 12, 13, 15) in the pre-test and one participant (II15) in the post-test have written badly organized

essay. Not a single participant has written a well-organized essay either in the pre-test or in the post-test.

It is clear from the figure-1 that the performance of the participants has improved in writing essay from the pre-test to the post-test as the number of organised essays has increased, the number of partially organised essays has remained the same and the number of badly organised essays has decreased though not a single essay written by a participant was found to be well organised.

Improvement in the performance of the participants from the pre-test to the post-test can be the result of teaching module used for teaching English and communicative activities conducted during the training period. However, their grammatical competence doesn't show the same level of improvement.

3.2 Increase in the number of words

The data collected is also analysed to check the increase in the number of words from the pre-test to the post-test. The following figure (Figure-2) presents the number of words used by the subjects in the pre-test and the post-test in essay writing task.

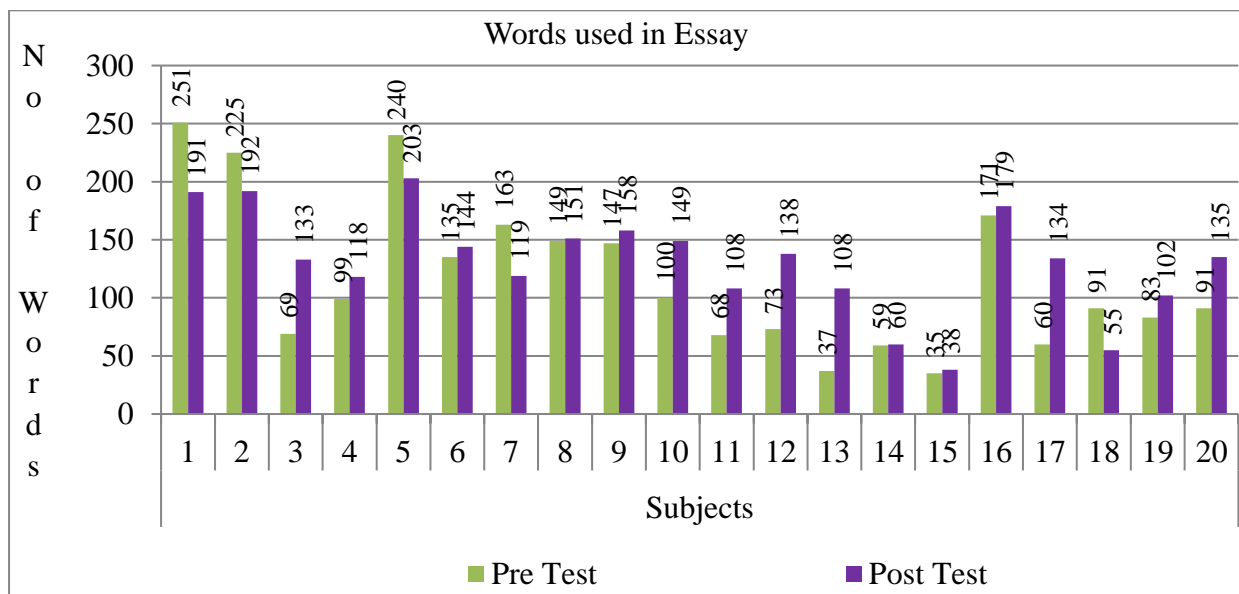


Figure-2: Words used in Essay

The use of words from the pre-test to the post-test has decreased in the case of five participants (01, 02, 05, 07 and 18) and has increased in that of the remaining fifteen participants. The number of words has increased in the majority of students from the pre-test to the post-test.

The following Figure-3 presents the total number of words used by the participants in the pre-test and the post-test in essay writing task.

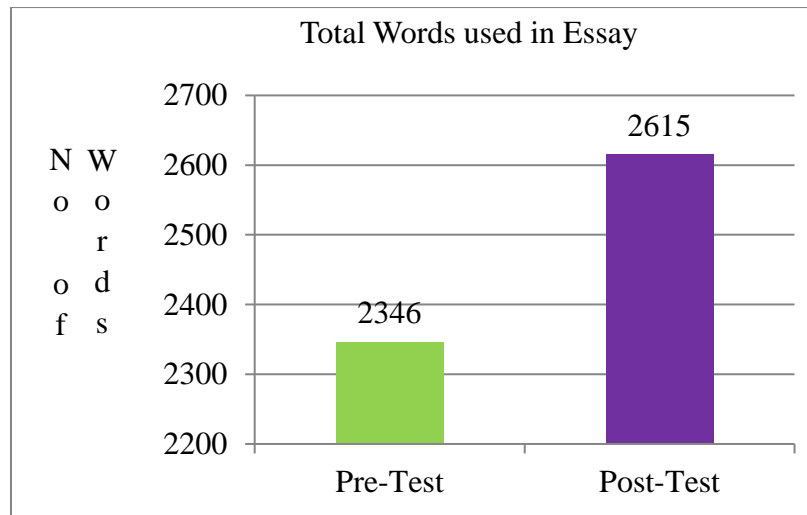


Figure-3: Total words used in Essay

The Figure-3 shows that the use of total number of words has increased from 2346 words in the pre-test to 2615 words in the post-test. The increase in the use of number of words from the pre-test to the post-test indicates that the training has boosted the confidence of the participants and has motivated them to produce longer strings.

4. FINDINGS

The findings of the analysis of the language data collected through the essay writing task are as stated below:

The teaching/learning module (TLM) used and the activities conducted for teaching English have had a positive impact and this is supported by the following observations:

1. The number of organised essays has increased from the pre-test to the post-test.
2. The number of partially organised essays has remained the same from the pre-test to the post-test.
3. The number of badly organised essays has decreased from the pre-test to the post-test.
4. The use of words from the pre-test to the post-test has increased in most of the participants.
5. The use of total number of words has increased from the pre-test to the post-test.

The greater increase in the use of number of words from the pre-test to the post-test indicates that the training has boosted the confidence and has motivated them to produce longer strings.

Though there is marked improvement in the use of number of words from the pre-test to the post-test, it was observed that the grammatical competence doesn't show the same

level of improvement. The researcher concludes that the training was not sufficient in terms of the length of the course to improve their grammatical competence.

It was found that when teaching is done for small groups of students, the results are better. Writing skills can be developed as per the learners' interests. Teacher can come to know the level of the students' writing and then provide instructions as well as training in techniques of writing according to the needs and current competence of students.

It was found that the teaching of writing could be successful when we teach writing in conjunction with practical exposure. Teaching combined with practical exposure is likely to produce positive results in writing as it gives practical experience.

It was also found that if the students are aware of the process of writing it helps them to improve their performance.

5. CONCLUSION

The discussion and results show that the overall performance of the students in acquiring or developing writing skill through the training provided through TLM was found satisfactory. There is an improvement in the performance of the majority of the participants from the pre-test to the post-test. The progress indicates that the teaching/learning module (TLM) developed by the present researcher and activities conducted throughout the academic year have had a positive impact in teaching English language.

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