

Enhancing Writing Skills of ELLs at Tertiary Level: A Lexical Approach

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Abstract: *Vocabulary building is a very important aspect in language development and learners with good vocabulary skills use language confidently and fluently. Especially in writing, the choice and range of words a learner uses presents the proficiency level achieved by them. Entry level tertiary learners particularly those pursuing an engineering programme in Tamilnadu find it difficult while attempting writing tasks because of their limited vocabulary stock. This study attempts to improve the vocabulary skills of learners based on their ability to use a variety of content words with specific reference to short online posts. The extended objective is to help them learn vital communication skills for use in daily life and in their profession.*

Key Words: *language development, fluency, writing skills, vocabulary skills.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Writing skills is one of the most studied aspect in ELT especially in Second Language Acquisition because English Language Teaching basically started with the structuralist approach. In writing skills structures are very much emphasized unlike speaking. In India, especially in Tamilnadu, among the four skills the focus was more on Reading and Writing. The reason is that English is not much used for speaking as much as it is use in a native country. The second reason is provision for assessing writing task is easy since it can be tested for a large number of students in one go. Thirdly, in literature importance is more about elucidating and explaining the character or the theme. So writing was preferred than speaking. In writing, vocabulary is an important element to achieve a good level of proficiency; learners are expected to master the words since it carries greater part of the meaning of a text. In order to enhance, and incorporate newly learned words, writing will always be a good task for the students and also it has a higher recall of words than reading (1). Writing helps in words retention which is comparatively higher than reading. It is understood that having a varied range of vocabulary is the sign of possessing communicative competence and mastering vocabulary should be viewed as an indispensable part of learning a language, because of the fact that it promotes good communication (2). Learners of second language should have good vocabulary range to produce a good text. It is believed that knowing more words will definitely help to say what exactly need to be conveyed. Along with grammar vocabulary is also an inevitable tool for improving one's writing proficiency This paper highlights the importance of vocabulary learning for having a good command over writing skills and also attempts to improve the vocabulary skills of the learners based on their ability to use a variety of vocabulary with specific reference to short online posts and also tries to bring out various strategies that can be used by the learners to improve their vocabulary skills and thereby improving the writing skills.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

2.1 Role of Vocabulary in Writing

Vocabulary is considered as one of the elements that determine the proficiency of student's writing performance. Significant research has been conducted on the effects of vocabulary instruction on reading performance but studies investigating vocabulary instruction and writing are few. "In teaching writing, many teachers focus on the grammatical well- formedness of a composition. However, lexis may be the element requiring more attention" (3). Required amount of vocabulary is needed to learn the target language and also to write the language (4). He also added that vocabulary plays a significant role in writing by making use of the language in an active way. It plays a major role in language acquisition both in L1 and L2 to have an overall understanding about the language. Having a good range of vocabulary will help students to use the language effectively and efficiently. It is very important for students of college to attain a good writing skill to be successful both in academic and before beginning the professional life. This vocabulary knowledge helps students to put forth their ideas perfectly using appropriate choice of words. In addition to this, acquiring a greater number of rich vocabularies will aid students to create semantically

and syntactically well-structured sentences which obviously promotes the writing skills of the students. The ability of learner to write well depends upon the knowledge and range of vocabulary more than reading a text (5). Among four skills writing is the most difficult one to master especially in a foreign language because it is not only about organizing ideas coherently but also producing a meaningful text that can be read and understood by the readers (6). Vocabulary knowledge has a greater impact in the ability to write (7). But the matter of fact is that it is very difficult to learn new words and store it in the repository for future use.

2.2 Types of Vocabulary

Vocabulary is important because the lexis carries more meaning of the text than grammar (8). Many languages, especially the Indo- European languages have divided their vocabulary into two major categories. They are Content words and Function words (9). Content words include nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs. These words give a concrete meaning and can be represented. Function words consist of prepositions, articles, auxiliary verbs, pronouns, demonstratives, quantifiers and conjunctions. These words play a significant role in producing good structure than meaning. The phrase open-class and semantically richer words is used for Content words and closed-class and grammatical words for Function words (10). Content words or open class words are huge in number and countless number of new words can be created. Content or lexical words comprises of nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs and other words that signifies ideas, actions, objects. Appropriate content words employed in a sentence defines the syntax and semantics of it.

2.3 Vocabulary Learning Strategies

In spite of the researches that are going for past 25 years; many learners use the traditional methods of learning vocabulary like memorizing the words, learning synonyms and antonyms, learning new words through teacher's explicit instruction, reciting from word list and so on (11). Not only students, teachers also employ conventional way of teaching strategies to teach vocabulary like giving list of English words with their equivalents in native language, letting students recite new words, writing sentences with target vocabularies, explaining the meaning of vocabulary in native language, repeating vocabulary and these kind of teaching is named as intentional or explicit learning which is a direct method that is focuses on the word that are to be learned (3). This method doesn't promote contextual learning of vocabularies. On the other hand, unintentional or implicit learning is an indirect way of grasping the words when exposed to different contexts learning which is more efficient and effective. Along with the context, language and words are also learned without any conscious effort.

3. CLT AND COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCY:

Communicative Language Teaching supports learners to engage in meaningful conversation with the content that is relevant, purposeful, interesting and engaging (12). According to the theoretical framework of communicative competence it is divided into linguistic competence, pragmatic competence, intercultural competence and strategic competence (13). All the four skills of the language have laid their foundation on these competencies lead to discourse competence which is the crux of communication. They have also remarked that writing skills is the ability and knowledge to produce a text linguistically and pragmatically accurate sentences in an appropriate context of sociocultural norms with the ability to use strategies to produce effective communication.

3.1. Research Question:

1. Are content words an important aspect in improving the writing skills of the students?
2. What strategies can be employed to improve their writing skills?

4. DEVELOPING LANGUAGE THROUGH ONLINE POSTS:

Traditional way of conversing and socializing with people through has drastically come down. Instead socializing with people is done through online posts. Critical thoughts on a particular topic of interest are shared on social media which is becoming very popular. So, using such platforms as a tool for learning grab the attention of the young learners. Learning to write in a foreign or a second language primarily improves their features of the text, methods of composing and interaction to an appropriate social context (14). The integration of learner-oriented activities, like writing an online post, creates a platform for learners to practically experiment their writing skills. This aids the language learning process generate their ideas and views and such tasks make the learners more independent and they learn through peer interaction, correction and feedback. This kind of learning increases their exposure towards the target language and provides them with a rich experience of joining the group and sharing their experience.

5. CONCLUSION:

Using online platforms to teach writing skills in among engineering students of tertiary level has created a conducive environment that help them to learn the language efficiently. This task has also created interest among the learners because of flexibility available in learning with reference to time and place and the use of modern gadget and the social media platform. Apart from these conveniences it also aids them to understand and contextualize the context more effectively. In addition to this better writing skills is exhibited as they interact, respond, communicate, comprehend and read the samples of their peers.

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