

From 'Typing' to 'Writing': Re-conceptualizing This Paradigm Shift

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Introduction

Language is “a system of arbitrary vocal symbol by means of which a social group cooperates”, this is how Bloch and Trager define it (Pathak 11). For any professional or engineer in this highly specialized working scenario, it is mandatory to have enthusiastic, effective, efficient communication skills within the group and with other groups as well. This process of communication can be formal or informal, verbal or non-verbal, oral or written.

Technical institutes in Gujarat impart education of English language to these technical students through various subjects and activities. Students are thoroughly taught different components of the language like non-verbal, paralanguage etc. As an observation, it is felt that students acquiring technical education in Gujarat experience and exhibit their love for technology in their day to day life. When they are asked whether they can ‘write’ in English, they always believe that they can ‘write’ at least, but actually it’s an act of ‘typing’ only which has many limitations as well. When they are asked whether they write letters, their ‘email-typing’ would be in their minds while answering positively. The very concept of writing in the minds of students is like a horizon which doesn’t exist in real sense. Mostly, students write their assignments as a mechanical act with a lot of mistakes or answer papers during their exams with a lot ambiguity.

Relearning and re-emphasis on writing skills is as needed as the learning English in Gujarat. Students must be motivated for writing worth reading and with ease and flow, with correctness and effectiveness. According to Ben Franklin, “Either *write* something worth reading or *do* something worth writing’.

Before Writing

Simply, when the students are given a task of writing in class rooms, they start writing or 'typing' in a case, they are provided the technological gadgets. But they are strongly suggested to think before writing a word. If they have many ideas, they will be shown the way to keep them in proper and effective order so that the desired message/s can be communicated. Lastly, one should be careful for his/her expressions through language. Proper word at a proper place is as much important as a correct grammar in any linguistic structure.

Observations

It is also observed that while typing a matter, machine (computer as an example) automatically corrects spellings. A red underline with an incorrect spelling directs the writer/typist to have a correct spelling to be chosen from other options. This attribute of a machine mars the capacity of recalling and remembering correct spellings. On the contrary, instead of British spellings, it is found that in many cases, computers give 'incorrect' spellings which may be accepted in other Englishes, i.e. American English etc. This limitation deteriorates the level of written ('typed') material.

In written script, students tend to write self-created abbreviations and short forms as they are used to them at social networking sites and in the note making process etc. like 'betⁿ' (instead of 'between'), 'thnx' ('thanks') etc. These e-spellings and wrongly spelt words may fulfill the very concept of communication process as it is to be understood by the recipient/s. But a written material with a lot mistakes create a negative image of its writer.

Motivation for Writing

As a teacher of communication skills/English for technical students, one needs to motivate students for improving their writing skills in which they actually 'write' with lucidity, correctness, appropriateness and effectiveness. The Task-oriented approach can be selected for this purpose so that students can be given tasks in which they will be instructed to write. Debate, discussion, presentation may follow it, but the task of writing will give them much exposure of this skill. There may be varieties of activities which provide writing experiences

to students. It is also believed that a drop of ink makes thousands think. If the students have to write something, they need to think, to give proper order to their ideas, to express with correctness. If mistakes are committed by the students, the committed teachers correct them patiently.

Effective Writing: A Need

It's firmly believed that the presentation should not be given to impress others but to inform. If a written material is prepared with good content and correct grammar, it will surely be impressive too.

For effective writing, the following steps/strategies can be followed for the students by the teachers.

- Developing good reading strategies
- Creating powerful presentations
- Tone
- Punctuation, grammar and spelling
- Organizing your thoughts
- Structuring paragraphs & sentences
- Writing to keep the reader engaged
- Softening a negative message

Any good writing process consists of the following steps. (a) Planning, (b) Composing, and (c) Evaluating. During the planning phase, one can use methods like brainstorming, branching, flow chart etc.

Composition of the material is very much important which tells its reader about 6W and 1H. (answers to what, when, why, whom, where, who and how). At this level, methods like comparison-contrast, problem solving etc can be utilized. The last element in this exercise is evaluating the content, its structure and review. Here the writer is taught how to add, edit, delete, simplify content etc.

Suggestions

The teachers should propose various activities which can be done with the students inside and outside the classrooms which can give learning experiences to the students through which

they can improve their writing. The following is a list of those activities which may be exercised during class room teaching/laboratory sessions.

- Note making/taking
- Story writing/completion
- Paragraph writing
- Dialogue writing
- Précis/Summary
- Presentation points/writing
- Letters : formal/informal
- Technical reports
- Technical description
- Bio data/Resume writing
- Application writing

To provide more opportunities for writing, students should be motivated to submit their assignments, reports in written form only. This will also help them improve their handwriting which is also missing in today's scenario. Teachers can also implement other strategies for providing more activities and for improving writing skills of students. These instructions can be as follows:

- Fill in the gaps using proper word/form
- Transform into direct/indirect speech
- Comprehension :
 - Answer the questions based on the paragraph
 - Draft questions based on the answer given

Conclusion

The following two sentences are different with their different messages. The appropriate word (either 'I' or 'me') can define its meaning clearly.

- (a) He loves you more than I. (b) He loves you more than me.

A written note with a correct message, correct usage of grammar, appropriate words, right spellings will surely create impression. It's difficult but not impossible to bring this change among students that they are motivated to move from mere 'typing' to 'writing'. It's a paradigm shift which has to be kept in learning language process, meant for these technical students. More and more exposure to writing has to be given to students which will make them think properly, draft effectively and express correctly. For such a scenario, everyone needs to work harder whether it's a teacher or a student. As Abraham Lincoln believes, "If I had eight hours to chop down a tree, I would spend six sharpening my axe."

It's a high time when we feel the need of the reconceptualization of this paradigm shift which will lead students from 'typing' – a mostly mechanical process to 'writing' – a more thoughtful and learning process.

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