A Detailed Study on the Development of E-Writing Skills of Undergraduate Students

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ABSTRACT: *This paper makes an attempt to analyze whether there is a need for strategy instruction to improve the writing skills of engineering undergraduates of JNTUK colleges, Andhra Pradesh, India. Having studied English as a second language for more than 10 years, most of the engineering undergraduates are found to be making grammatical mistakes and writing incoherent sentences in their paragraphs. Based on the researchers' teaching experience over the years and also the review of the literature to the present study, the experiment was conducted at GVPCOE (A), Visakhapatnam, with third-year B. Tech undergraduates of Computer Science and Engineering (CSE) branch. This study aimed to examine the strategies used in email writing among 121 engineering undergraduates. The pretest questionnaire data collected through Google Forms from a total of 121 students: 63 in the 'experimental group' class and 58 in the 'control group' indicate that the learners need to be taught and given extensive practice in using various strategies to improve their writing.*

Keywords*: re-writing, awareness of writing strategies, extensive practice in writing*

I. INTRODUCTION

Nunan (1999) states that the most troublesome errand to do in language learning is to create a reasonable, familiar, expanded bit of composing, which is much all the more trying for second language students. Composing is viewed as a procedure whereby authors find and reformulate thoughts as they endeavor to make meaning. In moving toward composing errands, scholars are really looking for answers for a progression of issues (Hyland, 2008). In this way, composing is a complex subjective movement including various procedures and techniques. The utilization of techniques in the composition procedure is basic to the fruitful composition. The way to delivering great composition or articles depends on the sorts and measure of procedures utilized, and on the guideline of the techniques for creating thoughts or for reconsidering what has been composed (Riduan and Lim, 2009).

The L2 composing process is deliberately, logically and etymologically not the same as the L1 composing procedures and beginner L2 scholars must be educated L2 composing methodologies unequivocally (Mu and Carrington, 2007). However, students are seldom guided on the use of strategies in the process of writing that could help them to become good at writing. In the Indian context, teachers provide little guidance to their students on writing strategies because they may have a poor understanding of their students' knowledge of writing. It is also true that large classrooms are a hindrance for teachers for effective correction and feedback of students' written work.

The main aim of the preliminary study is to identify whether the engineering undergraduates are aware of the writing strategies and their use.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE TO THE PRESENT STUDY

Research on the L2 composing process started since the mid-1980s (for instance, Lay, 1982; Raimes, 1985; Zamel, 1983, among others). L2 composing is an intricate procedure of disclosure which includes conceptualizing, different drafting, input practices, amendment, and last altering. It is not the same as L1 writing in that ESL journalist (L2) have more than one language available to them (Wang and Wen, 2002). Concentrates on the L2 composing process have additionally recognized different explicit composition systems utilized by L2 writers.

Writers with various capability levels will, in general, utilize diverse methodologies. Zamel (1983) found that the talented ESL scholars in the examination reconsidered more and invested more energy in their papers than the incompetent ESL journalists. The gifted ESL understudies were increasingly worried about the thoughts first, modified at the talk level, and showed reclusiveness in their composition procedure and in the altering done toward the finish of the procedure. The incompetent ESL understudy essayists, notwithstanding, updated less and invested less energy composing contrasted with the talented understudies. Raimes (1985) convention based investigation of eight incompetent ESL understudies uncovered that

the L2 essayists did negligible arranging previously or amid composing, gave less consideration to re-examining and altering and continued rehashing their work to create thoughts. An examination of the making procedure out of ESL students, basically focussing on modification and altering, featured the significance of correction and altering in the creation of fruitful papers (Polio, Fleck and Leder, 1998).

Arranging methodologies have been observed to be critical to gifted understudy scholars (Mu and Carrington, 2007; Ridhuan and Abdullah, 2009). In correlation, the writing demonstrates that many low achievers detailed less utilization of these methodologies (Chien, 2010). Powerless understudies don't regularly design their composition and every now and again start composing promptly (Ridhuan and Abdullah, 2009). Then again, gifted understudies vary regarding time spent on arranging the composition task. They more often than not utilize drafting to create unpleasant plans on the most proficient method to display their papers and accordingly, invest more energy in arranging (Ridhuan and Abdullah, 2009). Hu and Chen (2007) saw that great ESL essayists weigh cautiously on choices on what to compose and on the most proficient method to continue, demonstrating the significance of nature of arranging after some time spent arranging. Powerless understudy journalists, in any case, regularly spent quite a while albeit such endeavors neglected to produce thoughts, and plans grew universally were for the most part insufficient. As she would see it off the composition practices of four essayists from various social foundations, Indra (2004) found that the great Chinese author in her examination arranged his thoughts utilizing plots while the great Indian essayist arranged by putting down visual portrayals. Conversely, the other two frail understudy journalists spent quite a while for arranging which was done rationally, and the exertion some way or another ended up being incapable in helping them to create thoughts for their composition task another vital methodology that separates talented understudies and less gifted understudy scholars are the modifying system. As indicated by Chien (2010), high achievers in his examination focused on amending and altering. What's more, they saw composing as a procedure to express thoughts. The great scholars rolled out important improvements, a state of mind and clearing up implications for themselves, and did not focus just on mechanics. Mu and Carrington (2007) announced that for the members in their investigation, the substantial modification was viewed as most essential pursued by structure and vocabulary. Interestingly, all scholars incorporating talented essayists in Hu and Chen's (2007) think about change for the most part lexical and linguistic components as opposed to the talk structure which mirrors a surface composition approach.

A recent study by Chen (2011) (as reviewed by Nooreiny Maarof & Mazlin Murat, 2013) that investigated the English writing strategies of 132 Chinese, non-English significant understudies found that in spite of the fact that the understudies utilized some composition techniques in the pre-writing stage, while-writing stage and revising stage, they were as yet not visit clients of a large number of the methodologies. Information from the composition system poll showed that the understudies utilized all the more composition procedures in the while-composing stage contrasted with the prewriting and the amending stages. Baker and Boonkit's investigation (2004) demonstrated that despite the fact that there was no critical distinction in the recurrence of the composing procedure utilized among high and low achievers, there were a few contrasts in the sorts of methodologies utilized. The low achievers appeared to begin composing without having any plans and much of the time utilized the interpretation methodology all through the composition procedure .

Nooreiny Maarof & Mazlin Murat (2013) conducted a study involving an aggregate of 50 Form Four upper optional school understudies from a suburban region of the territory of Selangor in Malaysia. They were separated into two gatherings dependent on the English language grade acquired in the national, institutionalized Malaysian Examination or Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR) that understudies sit toward the finish of their lower optional dimension of tutoring. Understudies with grade An and B are sorted as "high-middle of the road capability", level C and beneath as "low capability". The examination found that composition methodologies were modestly utilized by ESL understudies and this finding is steady with the outcomes found in Chen (2011). Reliable to Baker and Boonkit (2004), this investigation likewise found no huge contrast in the recurrence of composting system use between high-middle of the road and low capability understudies. Despite the fact that ESL understudies of contrasting capability level used a few sorts of systems in the pre-composing stage, while-composing stage and overhauling stage, they were as yet not visit clients of a significant number of them.

III. PARTICIPANTS AND RESEARCH DESIGN

A total of 121 third year B. Tech undergraduates of Computer Science Engineering branch of Gayatri Vidya Parishad College of Engineering (A), Visakhapatnam, A.P. India, were involved in the study. The study used pretest questionnaire data from a total of 121 students. They were divided into two groups The pretest questionnaire data from a total of 121 students: 63 in the 'experimental group' class and 58 in the 'control group' indicate that the learners need to be taught and given extensive practice in using various strategies to improve their writing.

IV. THE RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The engineering undergraduates face the campus interviews in their fourth (final) year of B.Tech. In their interviews, they are screened through oral and written skills in English. TCS (Tata Consultancy Services), a software company, which has a lion's share recruiting the students from the college, recently introduced email writing as a component as part of the screening examination. So, equipping the engineering undergraduates in re-writing skills is the need of the hour. Once they get selected, they occupy the positions of team leaders, project managers, and business correspondents and so on. In this connection, they must possess excellent communication skills in both spoken and written English. They need to be spoken English skills as they are to conduct meetings, make telephone calls and so on. They need to be written English skills as they are involved in business correspondence such as writing letters, memos, emails, reports, proposals, newsletters, fliers, resumes, and brochures and so on.

V. METHODOLOGY

The study aimed to examine the strategy used for email writing among the engineering undergraduates. Specifically, the study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What writing strategies are used by the engineering undergraduates at the pre-test questionnaire?
(i. e. students in the control group at the beginning of the study and those in the experimental
group prior to strategy instruction)
2. Are the learners already aware of any other strategies (other than mentioned/used in the questionnaire)?

In the questionnaire, Part A comprised 20 items which provided the researcher with the respondents' background information and their self-evaluation of the target language knowledge.

Part B of the questionnaire had 32 statements adapted from Radhika (2010) which tried to elicit respondents' second language writing behavior. The response options consisted of a Likert type scale indicating different degrees of the agreement; with strongly disagree at one end and strongly agree at the other. It was administered through Google Forms.

VI. RESULTS

In order to answer the research question 1, the Pre-Strategy Instruction Questionnaire data for the total sample (N=121) was analyzed. Descriptive statistics were calculated for total strategy use and for each strategy category at the pre-test. The main focus of the present study is on the use of strategy categories i.e. planning, formulating, revising and so on. Out of the 32 strategy items in the questionnaire, four items (Strategy 1, 5, 8, and 18) had an opposite direction where the higher the mean value, the more the informants disagreed with the item. For the other twenty-four items, a higher mean value meant more agreement with the item.

Strategy Use of the Total Sample at the Pre-test
Research Question 1:
What writing strategies are used by the engineering undergraduates at the pre-test? (i.e. in both Control group and Experimental group prior to strategy instruction)

Strategy Category	N	Rank	Mean	Std. Deviation
Resourcing	121	1	4.36	0.673
Evaluation	121	2	4.26	0.747
Monitoring	121	3	4.09	0.559
Planning	121	4	3.86	0.611
Formulating	121	5	3.79	0.511
Revision	121	6	3.38	0.655

Table 1: Rank wise strategies according to the highest mean to the lowest mean value

Table 1 reveals that Resourcing strategies are most popular reported strategies with M= 4.36 and

S.D=0.673. The next most popular strategies are Evaluation strategies with M=4.26 and S.D=0.747, Monitoring strategies are the third most popular strategies with M=4.09 and S.D=0.559. Planning strategies and Formulating strategies are the fourth and fifth-ranked strategies by participants with M=3.86 and S.D=0.611, M=3.79 and S.D= 0.511 respectively.

The least reported strategies among all are Revision strategies with M=3.38 and S.D 0.655. It is observed that all the participants on an average reported a medium level strategy use as per Oxford's (1990) key to understanding mean scores on SILL based questionnaire. The scale ranges from 1 to 5 as follows:

High	Always or almost always used.	4.5 to 5.0
	Usually used.	3.5 to 4.4
Medium	Sometimes used.	2.5 to 3.4
	Generally not used.	1.5 to 2.4
Low	Never or almost never used.	1.0 to 1.4

Table 2: Oxford's (1990) key to understanding mean scores on SILL

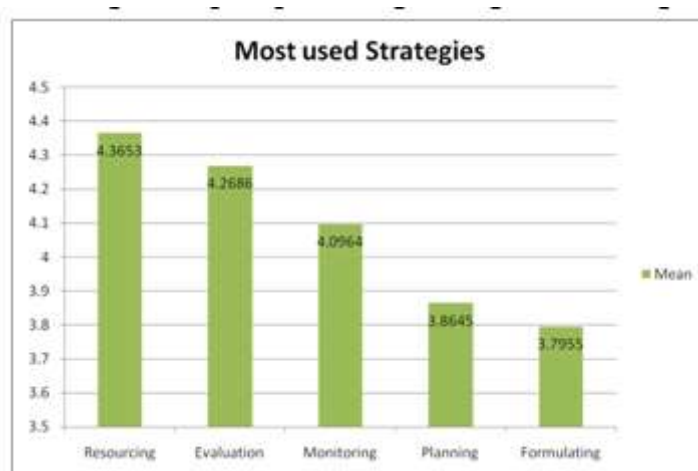**Fig 1:** Graph representing strategies according to their mean values in ascending order Strategy wise frequency Tables:

Planning Strategy				
Strategy Use	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
LOW	2	1.7	1.7	1.7
MEDIUM	24	19.8	19.8	21.5
HIGH	95	78.5	78.5	100.0
Total	121	100.0	100.0	

Table 3: The frequency of the learners' Planning Strategy

The table 2 shows that majority of the participants (N=95, 78.5%) reported High use of Planning Strategy, while 24 participants (19.8%) belonged to Medium strategy use, and only 2 participants (1.7%) out 121 reported low use of Planning Strategy.

Monitoring Strategy				
Strategy Use	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
MEDIUM	16	13.2	13.2	13.2
HIGH	105	86.8	86.8	100.0
Total	121	100.0	100.0	

Table 4: The frequency of the learners' Monitoring Strategy

The table 3 shows that majority of the participants (N=105, 86.8%) reported High use of Monitoring Strategy, while 16 participants (13.2%) belonged to Medium strategy use, and none of them reported low use of Monitoring Strategy.

Evaluation Strategy				
Strategy Use	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
MEDIUM	16	13.2	13.2	13.2
HIGH	105	86.8	86.8	100.0
Total	121	100.0	100.0	

Table 4: The frequency of the learners' Evaluation Strategy

The table 4 shows that majority of the participants (N=105, 86.8%) reported High use of Monitoring Strategy, while 16 participants (13.2%) belonged to Medium strategy use, and none of them reported low use of Monitoring Strategy.

Formulating Strategy				
Strategy Use	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
LOW	1	.8	.8	.8
MEDIUM	28	23.1	23.1	24.0
HIGH	92	76.0	76.0	100.0
Total	121	100.0	100.0	

Table 5: The frequency of the learners' Formulating Strategy

The table 5 shows that majority of the participants (N=92, 76%) reported High use of Formulating Strategy, while 28 participants (23.1%) belonged to Medium strategy use, and only 1 participant (0.8%) out 121 reported low use of Formulating Strategy.

Resourcing Strategy				
Strategy Use	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
LOW	1	.8	.8	.8
MEDIUM	15	12.4	12.4	13.2
HIGH	105	86.8	86.8	100.0
Total	121	100.0	100.0	

Table 6: The frequency of the learners' Resourcing Strategy

The table 6 shows that majority of the participants (N=105, 86.8%) reported High use of Resourcing Strategy, while 15 participants (12.4%) belonged to Medium strategy use, and only 1 participant (0.8%) out of 121 reported low use of Resourcing Strategy.

Strategies Listed as the Answer to the Open-ended Question in the Questionnaire at the Pre-test

In order to answer research question 2, an open-ended question was given at the end of the questionnaire to see whether the learners used any other strategies in addition to those 32 items given in the questionnaire. Very few mentioned about the required strategies. The following statements are a few to mention as a response to the following question:

Research Question 2:

"If you use any other strategies when attempting a writing task in English, please list them in the space provided."

VII. DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study was to examine whether the engineering undergraduates are aware of writing strategies and their use for email writing. The study also aimed to know whether the learners are already using

any other strategies other than the mentioned in the pretest questionnaire. The present study found that writing strategies were moderately used by learners. Hence there is a need for students to engage in more reviewing actions that result in enhancing and improving the quality of writing.

VIII. CONCLUSION

It is a challenging task for English as Second Language teachers to promote writing strategy use so that the learners can improve writing performance. One of the results has shown that writing strategies are not frequently used, rather are moderately used by ESL students when attempting emails. Specifically, the strategies used in the planning and formulation stages deserve more attention.

It is essential for students to be taught brainstorming for ideas and planning by making an outline before they actually start writing. This would make the writing process easy and the learners could focus on conveying the intended meaning rather than continuously searching for ideas to continue writing. Revising strategies too need attention to help improve their quality of writing. This is possible only when the learners get extensive practice in using writing strategies for which teachers have to continuously give constructive feedback.

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