Methods to Improve Writing Skill in English of Students in Bihar

Md. Shahbaz Khan
Research Scholar
Department of English
TMBU, Bhagalpur, INDIA

Abstract

In India English is taught as one of the main subjects in higher secondary schools and it is necessary that students get a good education in this subject. This investigation is based on different literary sources, interviews with teachers and feedback from students and the background information is the foundation for the interview questions and the questionnaire. Writing and speaking are two essential basic skills of any language spoken in the world, including English. This article focuses on the writing skill and its importance. It also deals with the problems faced by teachers in working on the writing skill of the students in Bihar. Writing skill cannot be skilled by completing syllabus and passing out the examination given at the end of the course. Ironically, the picture of syllabus is vulnerable in a way that students cannot achieve excellence over writing skill, which has been a great puzzle for researchers and critics since the beginning of language learning in education. Under such circumstances the role of the teacher becomes crucial in utilizing the given period in improving the language proficiency of the students.

Key Words: English teaching, writing skill, language proficiency.

English is one of the main subjects in higher secondary schools in India and it is necessary that students get a good education in this subject. Since writing and speaking are such essential parts of the English language, the teacher has to possess knowledge of how to develop students’ skill in a competent way. It is very important to know how to use this knowledge when the teacher is expected to invent different methods for lessons, evaluate the exercises and give proper feedback to the students.

Writing and speaking are two essential basic skills of any language spoken in the world, including English. Since English is recognized as the lingua franca of the world, it is essential that Indian students have knowledge of English. Otherwise it would cause difficulties in their career beyond Indian borders. Today in this globalized world if Indian students are achieving great success, knowledge of the English language is a significant reason. Thus, they are aware of the value of having command over this language.

To simplify the process of learning, variation is a key word in this case. A language teacher must have variation in his teaching. If a teacher uses the same writing and speaking exercises over and
over again the students are less likely to learn than if the lessons are varied. Concerning students’ speaking development, Susan Brindley has a good example where a student promotes student participation by explaining that students learn a lot more by interacting with others rather than just listening to a teacher. Together with speaking, writing is the most significant means of giving vent to our thoughts and feelings. This quote reinforces this opinion:

Students and their teachers are finding that writing can be a powerful means of making sense of experience and constructing meaning. Whether first graders or engineering majors in college, students can be shown how to use writing to think, understand, and learn (R. Indrisano, J.R. Squire, 14).

Several methods can be used to improve students’ writing. I will not bring up every single method there is since that would take too long. Instead I will focus on a few methods that I think will be useful in a classroom, but of course all the methods will be taken from certain sources that I have chosen.

In many cases, the hardest thing for a student concerning writing is to get started with the entire writing process. According to Cowley, there are different reasons why students have trouble with this. One reason could be that the students are afraid of failing and that they are under pressure to perform. The teacher must calm them down and persuade them that if they do make mistakes, it is not a disaster. They will just have to correct them afterwards. There could also be other methods. Cowley mentions warm-up exercises, rewards and challenges for the students to increase their motivation (S. Cowley, 3-5).

What to write about is quite a common problem. The process of collecting information and coming up with ideas is not easy for everyone. Making mind maps is a recommended option. If you have the topic like Diwali, the teacher tells the students to close their eyes and think of all the things they can come up with that are connected with Diwali.

Cowley writes in her book that the teacher should give students inspiration and create an atmosphere for writing. One idea is that the students could write a letter to their favorite person or to pretend that they are producers of a TV-documentary. In order to create an atmosphere Cowley maintains that if certain students work best when they are listening to music they should be allowed to have a Walkman while writing. Dramatic sounds like wind or maybe owls howling could be a good inspiration if the students are supposed to write for example ghost stories.

However, the capacity to write in a good way is not an artlessly acquired skill; it is normally learned or culturally transmitted as a set of practice in formal learning environments. Moreover, the students’ skill in writing in a second language has to cope with numerous challenges. There can be many social as well as cognitive reasons for this, such as a negative attitude towards the target language, cultural distance between them and the target language, and lack of motivation. Students are even unaware of the fundamental set of laws and structural patterns which they are expected to have learnt at the school level. Some teachers who teach English as a second language to Indian students may be confused by such problems in their writing classes and are unable to find an efficient way to awaken students’ imagination and set their minds working. As a result, students feel that using the English language amidst all their doubts and uncertainties is a demanding thing.

Another reason is the scarcity of time to practice writing in the classroom in the presence of the
The teachers have the pressure to complete the syllabus in the given period of time. Therefore they face the problem of having inadequate time to make their students practice.

Students in Bihar do not have enough English writing skill practice in their higher secondary classes. They have been taught English from an examination point of view and they have been habituated to mug up the answers including grammar rules. So they are trained in this subject from theory purview but not from its practical requirement perspectives. The majority of Bihari students studying in government schools are reluctant to express themselves while writing in English.

They also feel that they do not have sufficient vocabulary and clear grammatical knowledge of English. So, they worry about making mistakes while writing in English. In this way they feel themselves inferior in terms of English communication skills.

These students do have a sound knowledge of their subject but as they have to express their knowledge in English, they hesitate in doing so.

Students have to depend upon cramming and memorizing the text, which can be reproduced in the examination. Students tend to memorize question-answers, essays, letters, reading comprehension or other paragraphs from different grammar books available in the market. They write the same answers when they are expected to. They believe that if they employ bookish language or tough words in their writing, their writing will be valued. In fact, this is not the right way. Such an approach hampers their mind’s creativity. They never come up with original ideas so their creative faculty never improves. The fault certainly lies in our education system.

Even now, there are those English teachers who for the sake of their own convenience and time saving dictate essays to the students and tell them to memorize the same by heart. They do not encourage students to write and express their ideas in their own way.

On the other hand, others take extra pain and make extra efforts to enhance the writing skill among the students. They try to employ different techniques in order to do so but they face difficulties, as students are not trained to do so since their early schooling.

Students are not motivated to enhance their reading skill, which is one of the major causes behind improper writing skill of Bihari students from government schools.

They are not habituated to read supplementary reading material in English other than examination. Unfortunately, they themselves also do not show interest in reading books. They hardly make time to visit a library for reading books apart from their syllabus. To prepare for the examination students often go to the bookshops for cheaper readymade guides which have endless editing mistakes and it results in harming their writing abilities.

Agriculture is the main occupation in Bihar. Therefore education ratio is less among the people and therefore, the students who come from such background do not have exposure of English and they are afraid to use English in their day-to-day life. Educational institutions are the only places where they can get an atmosphere to communicate in English but it is sad to say that all the major professional courses/programmes students choose after HSC like BBA, B.Sc., BCA, B. Pharma, Engineering, are in English medium but teachers do not use English for the instructional medium, they teach in the native language with which the student community is familiar.

The teaching of English language skills becomes boring as teachers are confined to limited
methodologies. There is no exposure to the different styles of writing.

Students are not encouraged and inspired to do extra work as it is an important and supplementary skill to improve writing skill. The teachers should apply effective techniques in refurbishing writing skills in English if they take initiatives of their own. They should understand their role as a teacher. It is their duty to contribute their knowledge by conducting a range of activities in the class.

Another problem is teachers being ill-equipped with the latest methods of teaching English language particularly writing skills. Teachers do not get sufficient time to justify the subject as they have to abide by the time provided by the boards or universities. They have to be busy in various activities as a part of the system like conducting mid-term tests, collecting/assessing assignments, evaluating overall personality in terms of class behavior, regular attendance, preparing students for other extracurricular activities etc. All this affects teaching in an adverse way. The official periods, allotted by the school and colleges for the syllabus, are not sufficient to teach writing skill properly. They have to bring the syllabus to the end in the allotted time in one way or the other.

In a state like Bihar, writing skill needs to be taken care of properly. It requires regular practice and it is difficult in over-crowded classes. Supervision and evaluation is quite difficult in such situations. Writing is an art that needs time and genuine effort to be expert in it. Teachers don’t get enough opportunities to pay visit to the prominent institutions and universities as the institutions where they are employed, do not provide them with leaves for such activities.

The libraries in government schools have less number of books of latest publications, which motivate the students to study and develop their vocabulary and cultivate habits of reading books that are not prescribe in the syllabus.

Language learning depends on all four basic skills. The four skills i.e. listening, speaking, reading, and writing can be divided into two groups like receptive skill and productive skill. Listening skill and reading skill are taken into account as receptive skills as these skills assist learners to receive the information in the language which he/she wants to command over. It is researched if anyone wants to learn a second language or a language other than the mother tongue; one should be trained in a way that he is able to communicate fluently in that language. Everybody is born with one language and it is well thought-out as first language or the mother tongue of that person.

Reading is helpful in stimulating the internal skills among learners like critical thinking skills, decision-making skill. Writing skill is a skill to convey our statements in a coherent manner.

The students can master the four skills in just a limited span of under-graduation courses. Students do not write systematically. Students commit the same mistakes even though that particular chapter or rule is taught for so many times, which indicate that students do not take this subject seriously. Students belong to a background where they do not have parents well educated in speaking English. Students in Bihar are often not fluent in English and they use words improperly. In many situations, students do not use their brain in creating meaningful communication by applying knowledge, which is taught to them in the classroom. Students require lots of training and practices to acquire command over English.

Environment is a crucial part in developing any language in which a person lives. The child follows the instructions given to him in the language with which his family members are familiar. He is raised and taught in the mother tongue. Primarily, he gets command in the mother tongue.
Although, he does not possess the adequate knowledge of that language as in terms of its grammar, sentence structure, vocabulary, punctuation etc. he is capable of handling communication either in oral form or in written form with less number of errors in it. It denotes that one can be flawless in any language if a particular language surrounding is provided to him. In the same way, listening and reading are helpful to develop a learner’s critical faculties to comprehend the language correctly.

Speaking skill is a type of dynamic skill. The role of speaking skill cannot be overlooked in improving writing skill in English. It can also be an important factor in the development of writing if it is used in an appropriate manner. However, it is production of language medium but it can be taken as a tool for improvement in writing skill. When teachers deliver the lectures, the students have to take down the words and sentences spoken by teachers in a meaningful way. There students have to suffer from writing skill problems. They need to address ideas in an organized manner. Here, the speaking skill of a teacher can be useful in improving writing skill of the students in many ways.

Taking a note of lectures is a good way to work on the students’ writing skills. The teacher should train the students in taking notes of uttered words and how to convert oral communication in to written symbols. They can teach the dictating style of quoting words in a note by having practice of foreign words and pronunciation. By merely listening to the lectures, students cannot copy accurately whatever is spoken but they will try to translate those sentences in their own language. Speaking permits learners to distinguish between oral and written communication.

Pictures can be very handy tools in learning English as a second language. Drawing, images, photos, paintings, cartoons, posters, advertisement, graphs, tables, diagraphs, charts can be used in teaching and developing writing skill in English at all the levels. Pictures contribute at a great extent to the growth of the students in terms of language. Pictures can ignite the brainstorming process in learners. Pictures make learners find suitable words for forming the accurate and suitable sentence to describe that picture. It is a process of translating picture into words. Through that process learners can set words in to sentence in a logical way that creates sense. In addition, pictures can be used in conducting a variety of exercises on controlled composition, sentence combination, dialogue writing, and writing letters, reports, and stories and so on. According to Ann Raimes, a whole series of activities can be generated from the source of pictures.

Humanistic approaches to learning stress on the centrality and independence of the learner. Maslow’s theory (1943) states clearly that unless you take pleasure in what you are doing, you cannot get success. Therefore, in order to involve learners in the process of attaining knowledge and to give those hands-on experiences of learning, materials / resources like pictures, charts, maps etc might be used in the classroom. Hence, pictures are of great assistance in the language-learning classroom.

It may look childish to teach writing skill through telling stories but it is such a task where nobody finds it tedious. It can be a valuable means for making our students write better. In this activity, teacher has to complete many stages. First of all the teacher should tell and retell known stories from different points of view. Literature can be used as stimuli. Teacher may help students by giving them the basics of the story. The remaining part may be given to the students for description. Teachers can use cartoons, pictures or newspaper articles in order to conduct such activities.

It is very important to highlight the art of characterization by giving them some hints to begin with
like facial expression, hair style; personality etc. for the same word stock may be supplied. Students can be allowed to sit in a group to enjoy and to participate in this activity. Along with one postcard of a character can be provided to strengthen guessing ability of the students to recognize the character.

It is said that the first impression is the last impression. Therefore, the beginning of a story should be quite impressive. In *Teachers Exploring Tasks* by Edwards, the writer has mentioned a few steps about story telling:

- The teacher forms groups of four
- Every student tells a story, it does not matter about what.
- When the student has finished the story the other three students ask questions about the story or things they have not completely understood.
- When all students in the group have told their stories they receive fifteen minutes of preparation where they look up words in the dictionary or ask the teacher for support. After the fifteen minutes, the students retell their stories.

Students can be permitted to find the beginning of the stories in the reference books. Students can be taught synonyms and antonyms during the story description. Students should be motivated to use adjectives and adverbs in the sentences and before the nouns as much as possible. At the same time, a teacher can make clear simple, compound and complex sentences for giving charm to the story. Different connectors and linkers can be introduced. Students should be given explanation about distinction between narrative writing and dialog writing. Indirect speech should be used to compose the story. At the end of the activity, a teacher should give his feedback on the completed work. Students will be guided to modify their stories whenever the alteration is essential.

To conclude, English writing skill at the schools in Bihar needs to be taken care of evenly by students and teachers as it is necessary for being successful in a professional field. It is necessary to have capability to think, arrange and state their opinion and thoughts in a written form by using correct English. The present article has presented the troubles for teachers and students in developing writing skills in English. The syllabus is also a hindrance at some extent to command over writing skills as it lacks in activities, tasks, content, and practice of four language skills. Writing skill cannot be learned by completing one semester syllabus and passing the examination given at the end of the first semester. Ironically, the picture of syllabus is vulnerable in a way that students cannot achieve excellence over writing skill, which has been a great puzzle for researchers and critics since the beginning of language learning in education.

References:


Indrisano, Roselmina and James R. Squire. *Perspectives on Writing*. Newark, Dela: International