A Study to Investigate Engineering Students' Problematic Areas in English Writing Skills: An Action Research

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Abstract : Writing is one of the four linguistics skills, recursive and generative in nature and a vital tool to communicate to a range of audiences. Students need to gain English writing competency to articulate their ideas, thoughts and knowledge effectively and meaningfully through various written channels. To achieve various academic purposes, such as, to write lab report, term paper, exam paper, assignment, and project report, and to take notes in the class, it is significant for Engineering students to master on English writing skills. In the context of Bangladesh engineering students are assumed to be bright and expected to come out with a success in their respective disciplines, however, findings demonstrates their poor performance in English writing skills. This study is conducted among the undergade engineering students at Chittagong University of Engineering and Technology (CUET), Chattagram, Bangladesh. To undertake this study, an action research approach is adopted and data have been collected from multiple sources such as, questionnaire survey, class test script, personal notes, group and individual interviews to examine engineering students' problematic areas of English writing skills that hiders their writing ability. Data have been triangulated to ensure validity, reliability and generalizability of the findings. To the extent, an assessment has been made to improvise the teachers' pedagogical instructions and to enhance engineering students' writing skills, in particular, paragraph writing in classroom practice. Besides, this study widens the scopes for further research.

Keywords: engineering students, problematic, writing skills, English, action research

Introduction

Writing which is one of the vital English language skills plays a significant role to communicate one's ideas, opinions, views and experiences through various channels in different contexts. It is recursive and generative in nature and opportunities remain open to correct mistakes and errors to make it appropriate until to final submission (Alexander, et al. 120; Hedge 66). Hence, Seely points out that in order to write competently both linguistics aspects or writing mechanics and writing process are important to practise simultaneously (87). Linguistics aspects involve grammar knowledge, such as, tense, subject-verb agreement, articles, and word classes: noun,

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pronoun, adjective, adverb, preposition and conjunction. Secondly, use of appropriate sentence patterns categorically divided into three types, for examples, basic, functional and structural. Thirdly, right use of vocabulary to maintain meaning in writing and finally, use of various punctuation marks for writing appropriately (Scrivener 80; Greenbaum and Nelson 87). Besides, writing is a process, an integral part of writing practice, gives importance on doing activities step by step. Brown maintains that writing is a thinking process (285). The writing process consists of three stages, such as, pre-writing, while writing, and post writing.

Pre-writing activities are associated with a brain storming session that deals with generating ideas to write, and to jot down the key ideas, and to choose the more relevant ideas to write about the topic given. These activities help selecting the writing topics. While writing stage focuses on only writing. It concentrates on writing as much as possible without being conscious about length, mistakes and appropriateness of writing. Finally, post stage of writing deals with reread, revise, and editing activities to get the revised draft of writing. In addition, this stage focuses on self-review, peer review and subject experts' feedback and comments to get the final draft (Wahdan and Buragohain 10). Researcher claims that it is important to maintain these three stages of writing along with linguistics aspects for an effective writing. Hedge claims, "Writing is the result of employing strategies to manage the composing process, which is one of gradually developing a text. It involves a number of activities: setting the goals, generating ideas, organizing information, selecting appropriate language, making a draft, reading and reviewing it, then revising and editing" (302).

A paragraph is a piece of writing in which a single idea is developed coherently. There are three key points that it maintains structurally, such as, unlocking sentence, main body and locking sentence. The unlocking sentence is the topic or key sentence that deals with the key idea given in the title. This idea is developed in the main body following definition, explanation, description, exemplification, and data interpretation in need of the topic given or chosen. The locking or concluding sentence restates briefly what is articulated in the main body or rephrased the unlocking sentence (Bailey 70; Savage and Masoud 9). Robert Claims, "A paragraph normally contains several sentences but they are all concerned with the theme contained in the topic or key sentence" (13). In a paragraph every sentence is equally important. In addition, paragraph-writing skills are comprised of generating and developing ideas, right paragraph structure, appropriate sentence structure, correct use of grammar, appropriate vocabulary, linking sentences together for meaning, and use of correct punctuation (Wahdan and Buragohain 12). As far as length is concerned a moderate length is expected Bailey asserts, "The length of paragraphs varies significantly according to text type, but should be no less than four or five sentences" (78). He further states that from the language functions point of view, paragraph can be of different types, such as, expository, descriptive, argumentative, narrative and recount. Paragraph writing is the largest unit of writing, if someone can write it correctly; he or she is believed to be competent in writing in the boarder contexts, such as, exam paper, assignments, journal articles, reports and theses.

There are four linguistics skills in English language: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Writing is the most essential of all language skills (Pearsall and Donald 85). In addition, Harmer maintains that writing skills play a crucial role to present ideas and feeling in the written form (71). Thus it helps achieving various purposes, such as, academic, professional, recreational, science and technology, engineering, medical science and business. As a result, engineering students have to learn writing skills to communicate with different academic communities: teachers, supervisors, examiners, and fellow members for achieving their academic purposes.

Nevertheless, EFL students commit mistakes and face problems for achieving ability in writing skills. Engineering students, in the context of the study, are assumed to be bright students and expected to be communicatively competent in applying four linguistics skills. Considering the needs, they must be competent particularly in writing skills. Brown claims that students need to be competent in grammar, vocabulary and punctuation to write correctly and appropriately (235). However, many students find writing skills difficult to master and use, and the students are generally lacking knowledge in using grammar, sentence structure, vocabulary and punctuation appropriately (Meiranti 92). A number of studies were carried out to investigate EFL students' problem areas, mistakes, weaknesses and their level of competency in English writing skills (Mulune 2; Karim 31; Wahdan and Buragohain 11; Ahmed 190; AlTameemy and Daradkeh 220; Hyland 100). A few studies were conducted to investigate engineering students' competency in English writing skills, and particularly, in paragraph writing.

This study was carried out among tertiary level engineering students of Chittagong University of Engineering and Technology (CUET), Chattagram, Bangladesh. Most importantly, two potential aspects such as linguistics issues and writing process influence effective writing. Engineering students generally encountered problem in these two areas. This becomes apparent in their paragraph writing.

Objectives: Adopted an action research approach, drawn data from questionnaire survey, personal notes, class test scripts, students' interviews and group interviews; it was designed to answer two questions: What are the students' weaknesses in writing skills? What are the problems students encounter in writing a paragraph?

Rationale: And it is expected that this study could help exploring students' problematic areas of writing skills, and to provide feedback for developing writing skills, and eventually, would enhance their ability in paragraph writing. Further, this would be of help for students to be aware of their problems and difficulties regarding paragraph writing. To the extent, this research would help teachers to select and practise appropriate teaching methodology in classroom practice, and to change and modify their pedagogic instructions to make them in shape in need of teaching learning context.

Research Methodology

An action research approach was undertaken for this study. Action research is generally undertaken in educational institutions. However, it can also be carried out for organizational and instructional purposes to take measures quickly to improvise the situation. It is mainly investigative, evaluative and analytical research method

designed to find out the problems and weaknesses in the contexts concerned (Carr and Stephen, 179; Bird, et al. 25). Meiranti claims that "Action research is any systematic inquiry conducted by teacher, researcher, principals, school counselors, or other stakeholders in the teaching/learning environment" (91). Teachers apply this process to investigate teaching and learning so as to develop their own and their students' learning. Methodology for undertaking a research is a vital issue for gaining valid data, reliable findings and the results to generalize. To conduct this study several methods, such as, questionnaire survey, class test answer scripts, personal notes, face-to-face individual interview and group interview with students were applied (Creswell and David 92; Louise et el. 212; Silverman 91). Golafshani maintains, "engaging multiple methods, such as observation, interviews and recordings will lead to more valid, reliable and diverse construction of realities" (44). A multiple method approach proved a best way to collect data to undertake this study as this study aimed to investigate the engineering students' problematic areas in writing paragraph.

Questionnaire survey

Given the view of literature study and theoretical outline a questionnaire was designed for collecting quantitative data. Dörnyei and Tatsuya claim that questionnaire survey serves the best as a tool to collect a large number of responses among the participants rapidly and helps processing collected data easily (175). Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16.0 was used to analyse the quantitative data. Each of the Likert-Scale items in the questionnaire was presented in descriptive statistics including frequencies and percentages. The questionnaire was prepared with a four-point Likert Scale (LC) questions ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree designed following 22 statements to draw out responses in percentage on the three stages of writing: pre, while, and post, and aspects of paragraph writing skills, such as, grammar, sentence structure, vocabulary, punctuation, sentence connection, and paragraph structure. The questionnaire was distributed among 175 students belong to Electrical and Electronics Engineering (EEE) department, Level-1 Term -2 (L1T2), in the beginning of even semesters in academic year 2018-2019. A purposive sampling method was used to select questionnaire participants to undertake this study. Besides, one class test answerer script was used as a tool to investigate students' skills in paragraph writing.

Interview

Interview is one of the essential tools to collect rich data and to gain in-depth understanding and explanation of occurrences happen in respondents' life (Fontana and James 67). It is designed in such a way that a respondent has the chances to talk about various issues happened in life. In addition, in in-depth interviews participants are given opportunities to make clear their answers, to explain their experiences and to figure out examples to support their description (Rubin and Irene 55). After completing the questionnaire survey, face-to-face semi-structured individual and group interviews were conducted with students. A purposive sampling method was adopted for selecting interview participants. In semi-structured individual interviews 20 students were selected and each interview continued 15-20 minutes. Similarly, for

group interviews 5 groups were selected comprised of 7 students each and carried on 25-30 minis. Interviews were recorded and notes were also written down for further use. As part of qualitative data, one class test script was used as an instrument to assess students' performance in paragraph writing. To carry out this assessment, given the theoretical view, various thematic codes were used, such as, idea generation and development, right paragraph structure, appropriate sentence structure, correct use of grammar, appropriate vocabulary, linking sentences together for meaning, and use of correct punctuation, and these were quantified in percentage (Weigle 89; Grabe and Robert, 102).

Many scholars (Cook, 18; Ochs 170) argue that transcriptions are value-laden and reflect the transcribers' interests and assumptions. Before transcribing, I listened to all the recordings of the interviews and group interviews several times. Given the view of my research goals, I transcribed the relevant interviews, and also translated them into English as the majority of data is in Bangla. I used software ExpressScribe to transcribe my interview data. For analyzing interview data thematic theory was applied. Boyatzis asserts that thematic analysis is a systematic and uniform technique for categorizing qualitative data (11). This process is well designed and effective as in it themes are emerged from a secure study of the collected data and themes are developed inductively (Aronson 3; Braun and Victoria 89). N-vivo software was used to analyse interview data.

Ethical issues

It is potentially important to maintain and practise ethics in undertaking research. Stutchbury and Alison claim that research ethics are often multifaceted in academic institutions as to design to deal with human participants (495). Ethical issues: morality, confidentiality, honesty, rapport building, and informed consent were firmly maintained undertaking this study. The measures were taken appropriately to look after human participants and to keep away them from dangers and complications (Flinders 89). Additionally, every single opportunity was made use of to build a good relationship with the participants and they were assured that there would be no harm in participating in this research. Keeping the view of research ethics, participants' names were remained anonymous and I obtained participants' informed verbal consent in undertaking each research activity.

Role as a researcher

I was a participant observer during data collection. I also conducted a questionnaire survey. I took personal notes, a diary to record everyday classroom activities, methodological issues, environmental aspects, and pedagogical aspects. I talked informally with students. I also interviewed students. As I undertook the data collection and analysis, I maintained the role of reflexivity legitimately. Reflexivity is an important feature of action research, which allows the researcher's active involvement undertaking research activities. Emerson states that fieldwork is a "deeply personal as well as a scientific project", where subjectivity and emotional experiences are bound up with the interpretative process (184). Eisner claims that in social science research a value-free interpretation is impossible (170). So, instead of

denying that my subjectivity can contaminate the data, my approach is to lay it out in the open and make it part of the analytic process. Being reflective allows researchers to reflect on their own interactions, feelings, and make this clear in their reports. However, reflexivity allows the researcher to connect the process of data collection and data analysis to help ensure rigour in the research (Hammersley and Paul 37). Hence, I would make sense of the research process by recounting the processes, problems, choices, and errors that emerged during my data collection.

Data analysis

Data collected from multiple sources such as, questionnaire survey, class test script and interviews have been analysed to examine engineering students' problematic areas of English writing skills.

Questionnaire data

Questionnaire data compromised of prewriting activities, while writing activities, post-writing activities and linguistics aspects of writing.

Prewriting activities

Pre writing phase deals with thinking about the given topic, and to gather key ideas, and to write down the most relevant ideas among the ideas, and then articulate these ideas. In addition, this is a brainstorming phase, a potential stage for generating ideas to write. This phase is potentially important for while stage writing activities, most importantly, it leads to while writing activities. Frequency of activities of this stage is given in the following table.

SL. No	Statements	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %
1	I don't storm my brain to generate ideas.	57.71	24.57	7.28	10.42
2	I don't write down the key ideas to writie about.	42.85	34.28	8.57	14.28
3	I don't select the most important ideas realted to topic given.	40.57	48.28	6	5.14
4	I just start writing onec asked to write.	53.85	32.57	6.71	4.57

Table 1: Frequency of students' pre writing activities

In table 1, it is obvious that only 7.28% students strongly accounted that they come across brain storming session, whereas, most of the students (57.71%) strongly disagreed. It is clear that most of the students (53.85%) reported that they start writing once they are asked to write. It is also clear that majority of the students (42.85%) stated that they fail to generate the key ideas. Besides, it is evident that a few students (6%) claimed that they are able to select the most relevant ideas among the ideas, whatever, they generated. It is apparent that only 6.71% students answered that they practise pre writing activities.

While writing activities

While writing stage focuses on only writing as much as possible without thinking about the mistakes, correctness, and appropriateness of writing. Table 2 demonstrates the frequency of while writing activities in percentage.

SL. No	Statements	Strongl agree %	Agree %	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %
1	I just write as much as possible in this stage.	11.42	17.14	42.85	28.57
2	I always aware of my mistakes.	54.28	20.85	8.57	16.28
3	I always correct my mistakes.	42.85	31.42	13.28	12.42
4	I used to look into dictionary for vocabualy.	28.57	37.14	25.71	8.57
5	I feel that I cannot write.	45.71	28.57	8.57	17.14
6	I feel that my writing is correct.	10.42	14.28	41	34.28
7	I do not like this stage.	65.42	10.28	15.28	10

Table 2: Frequency of students' while writing activities

Table 2 demonstrates that a few students (11.42%) strongly expressed that they only keep focus on writing, however, data revealed that majority of the students (54.28%) strongly agreed that they became aware of the mistakes while writing, only 13.28% students asserted that they do not pay attention correcting mistakes. It is clear that a good number of students (37.14%) responded that they consult with dictionary, however, only 8.57% students answered that they do not use any dictionary at while writing stage. It is evident that 45.71% students strongly stated that they feel that they cannot write; nevertheless, only 10.42% students answered that they can write correctly. It is clear that majority of the students (41%) reported that their writing is not right.

Post writing activities

Post writing is vital for getting the final draft of writing. It focuses on reread, revise and edit of write-up. It is also vitally important to incorporate self-review, peer review and subject expert opinion in post writing stage.

SL. No	Statements	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %
1	I do not reread my writing.	35.28	45.71	15.28	8.57
2	I do not review my wriiting.	32.42	34.28	20	13.28
3	I do not incorpoarte others' feedback.	45.71	40	8.57	5.71
4	I cannot edit my writing	43	31.28	14.28	11.42
5	I become lazy to practise post writing activities.	57.14	17.14	9.42	16.28

Table 3 : Frequency of students' post writing activities

Table 3 presents the percentage of students' post writing activities. Data demonstrates that only 8.57% students answered that they reread once finish writing, however, 35.28% students strongly asserted that they do not reread. Majority students (34.28%) stated that they do not review it. It is evident that only a few students (5.71%) incorporate feedback from others. It is clear that most of the students (43%) did not edit their writing, however, only 11.42% students practised editing. Data reveals that most of the students (57.14%) became lazy practising post-writing activities.

Linguistics aspects of writing

Table 4 presents the frequency of linguistics aspects of writing, such as, sentence structure, punctuation use, vocabulary, grammar, sentence connectors, sentence linking, and finally paragraph structuring. These skills are must along with practising stages of writing to be competent in writing, in particular, paragraph writing.

SL. No	Statements	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %
1	I cannot write grammatically correct sentences.	8.57	14.28	5.17	48.57
2	I cannot use right punctuation marks (such as, comma, colon, semi-colon, full stop, inverted comma etc.).	14.28	22.85	27.42	35.42
3	I cannot use right vocabulary.	11.42	18.85	25.71	44
4	I cannot use appropriate grammar (such as, subject verb agreements, tense, articles and conjunctions).	4.57	19.14	45.71	7.17
5	I cannot use sentence connectors (such as, in addition, hence, conversely etc.).	58	10.28	26.57	5.14
6	I cannot link setences together for meaning.	54.28	8.57	31.42	5.71
7	I cannot maintain the paragraph structure (for examples, unlocking sentence, main body and locking sentence).	60.85	6.57	9.71	22.85

Table 4: Frequency of students' linguistics aspects of writing

The table shows that a number of students (48,57%) stated that they can write grammatically correct sentences, however, only 8.57% students answered that they

fail to produce sentences correctly. Besides, a number of students expressed that they are able to use punctuation marks, such as, comma, colon, semi-colon, full stop, inverted comma etc., right vocabulary and grammar, in percentage, 35.42%, 44%, and 45.71% respectively. It is also obvious that majority of the students (58%) unable to use sentence connectors, such in addition, hence, besides, conversely etc., yet, only 26.57% students could use sentence connectors. Most of the students (54.28%) responded that they fail to connect sentences together for meaning; only 5.71% students can do it. In addition, majority of the students (60.85%) answered that they cannot maintain paragraph structure, most likely, faces problems in paragraph structuring. Nevertheless, a few students only 6.57% were familiar with paragraph structuring.

Class test data

This study includes a class test script to examine students' skills in writing a paragraph. The students were asked to write a paragraph on their own choice of topic in ten sentences. It was examined and marked. In order to carry out this study a checklist was prepared focusing on skills needed for paragraph writing. These include idea generating and development, right paragraph structure, appropriate sentence structure, correct use of grammar, appropriate vocabulary, link sentences together for meaning, and use of correct punctuation
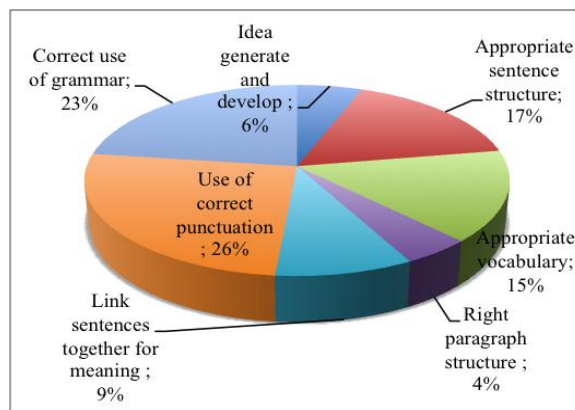

Figure 1: students' skills in paragraph writing

In figure 1 it is evident that only a few students are correct in paragraph structuring (4%), generating ideas and its development (6%) and linking sentences (9%) together to maintain meaning and unity. It is clear that a number of students are able to write grammatically correct sentences (23%), however, majority students (91%) fail to link these sentences together for unity. The figure presents that 19% students can master on grammar items, such as, subject-verb agreement, appropriate tense, sentence connectors, and articles etc. The figure demonstrates that only 15% students can use appropriate vocabulary. It is obvious that only in the use of punctuation students score good, 26% students can use punctuation marks correctly.

Findings suggest that majority of the engineering students face problems in idea generating and developing, linking sentences together, and paragraph structuring, seemingly, hinder their writing skills. Data further reveal that a number students are good at using punctuation, however, the use of punctuation marks is limited in

paragraph writing. Besides, data shows that students are also poor in the area of correct grammar use, appropriate sentence structure, and appropriate vocabulary use.

Interview data

Interview data reveal the various problematic areas emerged as themes that engineering students face in gaining competence in English writing skills.

Lack of practice of writing stages

In interviews, students stated that they are not familiar with these steps of writing, further they added that they did not practise writing following the processes. All the students claimed that lack of practice of writing processes impedes their writing skills. Students claimed:

> We are studying engineering discipline. We know that now writing is very important to us. The thing is that we were not familiar with these three stages of writing. Yes, it is nice to follow the step-by-step writing activity and it helps us learning writing skills easily. We need to practise these steps and to be familiar with these activities. The problem is that we were provided with little opportunities to do these activities for learning writing. (Group interview)

Lack of grammar knowledge

Interview findings showed that majority students are familiar with use of subject-verb agreement, word classes, however, they further added that they are poor in using articles and sentence connectors, such as, however, hence, nevertheless, in addition etc. It is also obvious that students generally memorise the grammar rules, however, they further added that opportunities are limited for them to use these items practically in writing, perhaps, it hinders students' writing competencies. Students claimed:

> English grammar is very important for writing, not only for writing but also for reading, speaking and listening. We learned grammar rules by memorising. We know about tenses and use them in sentences. We know about parts of speech and their functions as we memorised but some times face problems. We are week in connecting sentences. We are not familiar with sentence connectors. We think that use of articles is easy but we also face problems in using articles rightly. (Group interview)

Appropriate sentence structure

All the students unanimously stated that they can make simple sentences, however, they face difficulties in producing complex and compound sentences. In addition, they expressed that they fail to form appropriate sentence structures in need of written communication that apparently creates problems to achieve competencies in writing skills. Students asserted:

> We can form sentences and most of the times these are simple sentences. Simple structures are not always enough to communicate our ideas. It is also necessary to form complex and compound sentences too. It is true that we face problems to construct complex and compound sentences. It is a big problem for us to master writing skills. (Group interview)

> I know how to make simple sentences and it is easy to me. It is also true that if I use same structure again and again it seems unusual communicating in written mode. Nevertheless, I do not have strong command over complex and compound sentences. It is difficult for me to write these sentences. (Individual interview)

Appropriate vocabulary

To know appropriate use of terms, words and terminology, in true sense formal in types, is a vital writing skill. Students' interviews revealed that they were looking for appropriate words to use however sometimes they got it, but most of the time they failed. They further included that they struggled to find out the right word in right place. They claimed that deficiency in vocabulary hinders their writing skills. Students asserted:

> We know vocabulary but these are insufficient. We always struggle to get right word in right place. Most of the time we did not get it. It is a big problem for us. It is true that we are lacking idea about formal and informal vocabulary and their appropriate use in need of situation and context. We need to develop our vocabulary to communicate properly. And it will certainly improve our writing skills. (Group interview)

Punctuation

It is significant to know the various punctuation marks and their appropriate use in written communication. Students collectively claimed that they have little knowledge about punctuation marks and their correct use in written mode of communication. Students claimed:

> It is important to know about punctuation marks and their use. Unfortunately we are familiar with few of them but we do not know most of their use in writing. It is a big problem. We may use only full stop and comma. It certainly creates problems gaining ability in writing. (Group interview)

> I do not know about punctuation marks very much. I only know about full stop and comma. I need to about other types punctuation marks and their use. It is a must to write properly. It is a problem for my writing. (Individual interview)

Lack of familiarity of paragraph structure and length

In Interviews all the students asserted that they are unaware of parts of the paragraph and additionally their idea about the length of a paragraph is not clear. They further claimed that because of this ignorance they have been suffering from gaining competency in English writing skills. Students asserted:

> We are now facing problems to write a paragraph. We were even not taught about paragraph structure, structural aspects and length. We also practice writing many paragraphs to acquire proficiency in writing a paragraph. We also write lot of words but we do not have clear about the length of a paragraph. This is a big problem. At this I think our learning was not enough in writing, as a result, we are facing problems in gaining ability in English writing skills. (Group interview)

Lack of confidence

In interviews students stated that they feel that they cannot write, their writing is not correct, they are making mistakes and they cannot write in way what their teachers want them to write. They further added that they cannot keep faith on their own writing and they become nervous. Lack of confidence is a major problem for the students to gain competence in English writing, in particular, paragraph writing, as they asserted. Students claimed:

> When we are asked to write a paragraph, we start writing but think that we cannot write correctly, we are making mistakes, our writing is not good, and we cannot score good marks. These are usually come in our brain when we write. This is a big problem for us to achieve ability in English writing skills, particularly writing paragraph in English. (Group interview)

Discussion and findings

The questionnaire survey examines the engineering students' practices of pre, while and post writing phases and presents their level of frequency which are vital for achieving ability in English writing skills, in particular, paragraph writing. Questionnaire survey reports that only few students practise pre writing activities, such as, only 7.28% students follow brain storming session to gather ideas, 8.57% practise writing down key ideas and only 6% are able to select the most relevant ideas finally to write about. Data shows that 53.85% students start writing without doing the pre writing activities. Data further reports that students are not familiar with and cannot practise pre-writing activities, as a result, they are facing problems in gaining competence in English writing skills. Additionally, interview data echo the questionnaire survey report. Besides, observation findings recorded in personal notes also account that most of the students do not follow the pre writing activities and it obstructs their English writing skills. It is evident that lack of familiarity and practise of pre writing activities impedes engineering students' acquiring competence in English writing skills.

While findings regarding writing skill report that most of the students (54.28%) become aware of their mistakes, majority of them (42.85%) correct mistakes and 37.14% students look into dictionary at while writing stage, nevertheless, these activities are not allowed at this stage to maintain proficiency in English writing skills. Findings further show that 45.71% students feel that they cannot write and it also illustrates that only 10.42% students write correctly which apparently accounts for their lack of confidence in English writing. It is also obvious that most of the students (65.42%) do not like this stage. Interview findings report that most of the students are not familiar with and not used to practising post-writing activities. It also reports that most of the students lack confidence in English writing skills. Besides, observation findings and the findings of the survey and interview report reveal same results. It is now obvious that lack of familiarity, practice, and confidence in post writing activities hinder students' English writing skills.

Post writing survey demonstrates that a few students are practising post-writing activities, such as, only 15.28% reread once they have finished writing, 20% review

their writing, 14.28% practise editing and only 8.57% incorporate others' feedback. Besides, survey further reports that majority of the students (57.14%) becomes lazy in doing post-writing activities. Lack of practice of this activity students face problems in gaining ability in English writing. It is also clear in interview report. Regarding lack of practices, the same report is revealed while observing in the writing classroom practices recoded in personal notes.

To write a paragraph it is a must to know about the structure of a paragraph, nevertheless, it is evident that most of the students (60.85%) are unaware of paragraph structure. It is more obvious in class test data; it shows that only 4% students can follow right paragraph structure. In addition, interview data reveal that all the students are unaware of parts of the paragraph, particularly, structure and length of a paragraph. Students claim that lack of knowledge of paragraph structure and length impedes their writing skills. Moreover, it is obvious that majority students report that they can write grammatically correct sentences, presumably, that shows students' positive attitude but paragraph writing needs to know both writing grammatically correct sentences and to join them together following the paragraph structure for maintaining the unity. However, data shows that majority students fail to connect sentences meaningfully for maintaining the paragraph structure that ostensibly creates problems for gaining competence in paragraph writing. It is further clear in class test data; only 9% students are able to link sentences together. Besides, interviews and personal notes echo the same results.

Questionnaire data further reveal that 35.42% and 44% students can use right punctuation marks and vocabulary respectively, but interview data and my personal notes demonstrate that students are struggling for appropriate vocabulary and they are familiar with a few of punctuation marks to use in writing which reveal a different picture. Class test data report that only 6% students can generate and develop ideas. Interview data demonstrate that most of the students fail to generate ideas and to develop these ideas for writing. Personal notes report the same result.

Limitations of the study

This study was carried out among the students of Electrical and electronics students (EEE), examining one class test script, however, a study would be conducted to examine students' gradual development of English writing skills taken into account all the summative assessments in English writing. Besides, this study could have added rich data to improvise teaching learning context, if it would include English and subject teachers' interviews.

Recommendations

This study further recommends that for appropriate and meaningful writing students should essentially be taught how to apply the processes of writing: pre, while, and post. It is also important for teachers to examine and keep records of the gradual development in English writing skills. Further researcher would address theses issues.

Conclusion

Writing is one of the potential tools of communication. Engineering students need to be competent in English language skills, in particular, writing skills to achieve the academic goals. This paper investigates the problematic areas that impede acquiring engineering students' writing skills. Findings suggest that lack of opportunities to learn writing and practising writing skills in their previous academic lessons hiders their ability in writing skills, particularly, paragraph writing. Data further imply that lack of familiarity with the steps of writing and the lack of practice of writing processes impedes their writing skills. It is also evident that students are familiar with use of subject-verb agreement, word classes; however, they are poor in using articles and sentence connectors. Findings reveal that students generally memorise the grammar rules, however, opportunities are limited for them to use these items practically in writing, apparently, obstructs students' writing competencies.

Findings suggest that students face problems to use appropriate word rightly, this deficiency hampers developing their English writing abilities. Data further imply that students have little knowledge about punctuation marks and their correct use in written mode of communication. This paper demonstrates that students cannot generate and develop ideas for writing, in addition, they are ignorant about the structural patterns and length of a paragraph that cause problems to gain competency in English writing skills. Finally, findings suggest that students cannot keep faith on their own writing and they become nervous.

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