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## Research Article

### A GLIMPSE INTO THE PREREQUISITES OF COMPOSITION WRITING

Tanuja Waghmare SR

Department of Education, St Teresa Institute of Education, University of Mumbai

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#### ABSTRACT

The English language has had a great influence over the centuries in determining the governmental, public, financial, academic and traditional life of India and is still serving as a vibrant force of social change. English is one of the notable international languages in the world. If one has command of the English language in all its aspects of communication, vocabulary, structure and connotation, the more will it be to our advantage, this contribution will enable the development of our country as a modern nation on the verge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The article has dealt with important issues in composition writing. The present situation and its shortcomings was an eye opener. The course books in English featured the details of the new curriculum. The need of the study enabled the researcher to make composition writing simple yet interesting. The sad situation in most of the schools is that composition which fosters writing skills is the most neglected subject. As a result, students are very weak at writing and score very poor marks in composition. The survey that was conducted was of great help to the researcher.

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#### INTRODUCTION

“Writing requires a great deal of skill. Just like painting does. People don’t want to learn those skills”. John Milius

“All languages are used for communication” said P.Gurray, “for expressing anything that we have attended to, for recording information, for thinking and for getting what we want and so on.” Language has an important part to play in the communal, rational and responsive progress of a person. The English language has had a great influence over the centuries in determining the governmental, public, financial, academic and traditional life of India and is still serving as a vibrant force of social change. English is one of the notable international languages in the world.

The English language is the opening up of the vast vision of human success and signals to new perspectives and possibilities. If one has command of the English language in all its aspects of communication, vocabulary, structure and connotation, the more will it be to our advantage, this contribution will enable the development of our country as a modern nation on the verge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

A brief bird’s eye view would help one to see the status of the English Language in the Indian scenario. The National Policy on Education 1968 suggested that regional language should be adopted as medium of instruction at the university stage. The Kothari Commission’s advice and the (National Policy of

Education) NPE’s observation, the State Government and universities took effective steps to promote regional languages as media at school and college. After much discussion it was agreed upon that with the Kothari Commission, English could be made compulsory for three years with the option of a longer study for those who were interested.

The educational experts have recommended various levels of linguistic achievement for those who wish to pursue their studies in English. This could either be for cultural reasons or sheer interest in the English Language. In keeping with the new position of English in India as a second or third language. Experts differed about the age at which a second language could begin. Many felt that children have no difficulty in learning more than one language. According to Prof. Peter Wingard, there was no need for a child to learn a second language only on a superficial basis in the classroom because they did not need it in their daily life.

Problems crept in as the students started mastering this new Foreign language. The conditions for learning in schools are totally different. There is no real impulse to learn the new language since their own mother tongue and the regional language would suffice for their survival. Another important aspect is that when one tries to learn the foreign language the habits of the mother tongue interfere with the learning of the new foreign language. If one does not master the English pattern one is bound to make blunders and rectifications become exasperating.

\*Corresponding author: *Tanuja Waghmare SR.*

*Department of Education, St Teresa Institute of Education, University of Mumbai*

Even after so many years we still find that there are loopholes which need to be amended. At the school level because of the large number of students' oral work is affected. Many schools cannot afford to have appropriate instructional aids. Teachers feel that they should train the students for the examination level, thus the end up teaching English as a content subject. Therefore the skills of listening and speaking are neglected. The syllabus in English is too burdensome for the students. There are far too many structures and words to learn. Frequent changes of policy in the teaching of English is also an encumbrance. This too affects the students. On the whole we can say that learning to speak and write is quite a tedious job.

Although writing is more difficult as compared to oral communication a person can acquire the art of writing through proper training and adequate practice. Therefore, the researcher has developed a programme for Std. IX students to enhance Composition Writing Skills through the use of different teaching methods. Since linguistic skills and experience play an important part in Composition Writing this particular class was selected because at this stage students are mature enough to understand the different types of Compositions. It is helpful to give them a good base in Composition writing so that they can perform well in the Std. X Board Examination.

Unfortunately composition writing is the most neglected subject. For the students it is an extremely tedious job. They are neither interested nor motivated. Students have not been guided in this art they are reluctant to compose essays and they feel they are incompetent. As a result the quality of their composition is pathetic. The number of students is too large in each class and the teachers find it impossible to guide the students individually. Corrections are done haphazardly.

#### ***The Present Situation and its Shortcomings***

English Composition is a neglected aspect today in schools. Students hate to write compositions, as they have not been guided properly in this art, and the teachers are reluctant to correct their careless and meaningless work. Students are not able to score marks in composition writing because they are not able to compose good compositions. They tend to use the wrong tense; they pay no heed to spelling, vocabulary or unique ideas. This is because most of the students do not read books. For the students 'Composition Writing' is just a task that has to be completed and therefore it is done in a haphazard manner.

Very often when the topic is given in class, the students do not have a clear understanding of the topic. They do not jot down points, nor do they organize thoughts but they just start writing. After writing a few sentences, they are at a loss for words and ideas. They are unable to write in a systematic manner- no introduction, no division of ideas, no paragraphs, no quotations and no conclusion. Topics discussed in the class by the teacher or other students are reproduced in the same manner. At times, parents dictate the compositions to students when homework is given.

The reasons for these shortcomings are that the number of students today is too large, about 70 to 80 students in each class, and hence the teacher finds it impossible to guide the students individually. Since the teachers find it difficult to correct all the compositions written by the students, the students are unaware of their errors.

There is no proper correction scheme and no positive feedback or reinforcement given by the teacher. Very few compositions are written during the academic year. Teachers give maximum attention to the text lessons and also to grammar, but compositions are not given much consideration. Students are aware that their compositions are rarely corrected by the teachers and so they lose interest in writing compositions, feeling it is a waste of time.

The problem is aggravated by the fact that English is not the mother tongue of the students and hence they find it difficult to converse and express themselves in this language. To learn a new language and especially a foreign language is a tedious task and to understand, repeat, manipulate and then to use this new language in conversation or written composition, requires tremendous effort. The home environment does not nurture the English language that is the medium of instruction at school. Hence they are compelled to speak in an unsatisfactory manner using unstructured sentences and committing grammatical errors. At times students are ridiculed by others because of their incompetence in the use of language. Due to these various reasons, students find it difficult to cope with the English language and hence Composition Writing in English becomes monotonous and a mind numbing activity. This is the plight of our educational system where writing is concerned especially composition.

#### ***Insight into the Course books in English - 1996 and 2006***

The new curriculum of English has been prepared keeping in view the recommendations of the National Policy of Education 1986, the National Curriculum Framework for School Education 2000, the National Curriculum Framework 2005 and the policy of the Government of Maharashtra. Some of the other considerations have been the NCERT Model Curriculum of English, the Curricula of English in the other states of India, the Curriculum of English for Classes 1 to VIII in Maharashtra and the views and opinions expressed by teachers, parents and other stakeholders on the existing Curriculum.

These important recommendations were not considered in the 1996 Course book. The researcher found that the Kumarbharati course book in English for Std. IX is based on the new curriculum of English at the Secondary level. One needs to understand the basic philosophy behind the new curriculum.

#### ***The characteristic features of the new curriculum are***

The Curriculum is Skills-Based. The focus is on the development and refinement of the skills of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. The other skills of communication such as narrating, describing, reporting, summarizing have also been considered.

The Curriculum is Needs-Based. The needs of the learners with regard to the use of English in a variety of contexts have been taken into account.

The Curriculum is Learner-Centered. The role of the teacher is that of a facilitator of the process of learning. The role of the student is that of an active participant in the process of learning. The focus is on the process of learning itself.

The Curriculum is Value-Oriented. Language education cannot focus only on the development of language skills. It has to nurture appropriate human and cultural values as well.

These characteristic features were not dealt with in the old course to some extent.

Unlike the old course the new course has elaborated the general objectives of teaching/learning English (First Language) at Std IX / X are:

To enable the student:

- to develop his/her language skills to a fair degree of proficiency; - to acquire communication skills in English useful for higher education and also for real life situations such as social interactions, vocations and entrepreneurship development;
- to enrich his/ her vocabulary;
- to use dictionaries, encyclopedia and such other reference materials; - to develop the ability to use English for the development of personality and for the building of character;
- to cultivate a broad human and cultured outlook.

[Candes, Khatri, Dhingra and Ukhalkar. 2006, introduction]

A look at the arrangement of the sections along with the sub-divisions will help one to see the difference between the old and the new course.

<b>The Old Course – 1996</b>	<b>The New Course – June 2006</b>
A. Pre-reading Activity	A. Pre-reading Activity/Pre-listening Activity
B. Reading Activity – Text followed by Glossary and Notes.	B. Reading Activity / Listening Activity Glossary and Notes
C. Aids to comprehension	C. Aids to Comprehension.
D. Language Study	D. Language Study <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vocabulary</li> <li>• Grammar</li> </ul>
E. Further Reading	E. Further Study <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading Assignment</li> <li>• Communication Skills                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Oral Activity</li> <li>2. Writing</li> </ol> </li> <li>–Pre-writing Activity</li> <li>–Writing Tasks</li> </ul>

The Course book that was published in the year 1996 had slightly different objectives. Greater attention had been given to language than to literature. It was believed that the students were fluent but often lacked accuracy. They were adequately proficient in listening and speaking but often lacked the ability to read and write well enough. Therefore of the four language skills, reading and writing had been emphasized.

The new Course book aims at making the learner a good and effective user of English. The Course book is learner-centered. It is designed to emphasize the role of the learner as an active participant and the role of the teacher as a facilitator. Unlike the old course the new course has given importance to all the four skills, preference is given to pre-listening and listening skills.

In the sub-topic, 'Aids to Comprehension,' the new course stresses on both the aspects of 'reading texts' and the 'listening texts' these had to be read by the students so that they comprehend the text as well as relate it to their personal experience.

The activities in Language study section in both the courses focus on various aspects of the use of language, both for literary and everyday purposes. But the new course book explains the necessity to sensitize students to the complexities

of word-meaning and to build their word power. It also includes dictionary skills. Different types of vocabulary tasks have been included under the sub heading, Vocabulary.

The new course book gives grammar tasks for almost all the reading texts. It is believed that teaching grammar for its own sake is of no use. Grammar should be based on context and should be linked to 'communication'.

In dealing with the sub-topic, 'Further Study', reading assignment and communication skills are given importance. The purpose of the oral activity is to give more opportunities to students for making oral presentations, such as role-playing, reporting, narrating, giving short speeches, participating in debates and in group discussions. This feature had been omitted in the old course.

The new course book has a topical or thematic design with a clear focus on themes such as Human Values, Science and Inventions, Society, etc. Language education cannot focus only on the development of language skills; it has to nurture basic values as well. Efforts have been made to select 'interesting' as well as 'useful' reading texts. They have also selected culturally, sociologically and educationally appropriate reading texts. Aspects such as the student's age, social / cultural background and aspirations have also been considered.

Both the courses have introduced the students to self-study techniques, independent interpretation, enjoyment and appreciation of literary texts. The basic philosophy is that the emphasis has been shifted entirely from teaching to learning. The students are recognized as the centre of all learning, and the responsibility for learning has been squarely placed on them.

The course book focuses also on the development of writing skills. Writing involves thinking about many things at the same time: handwriting, spellings, grammar, punctuation and layout, choice of words, organization, suitable title, contents (ideas) and checking and revising what has been written. To help students handle such a complex skill, writing is presented in two stages: pre-writing activity and writing task. The writing tasks cover the full range including narration, description, exposition and argument as well as the usual forms such as composition, paragraphs, letters, dialogue writing, writing slogans, fact file, information transfer etc.

The researcher has taken into consideration all the above topics and decided to make an attempt to make composition writing as interesting as possible. Armed with the knowledge that composition writing skill can be acquired through training and practice, the researcher decided to develop a training programme to enhance English Composition writing skill.

### ***Need for the Study***

English is a global language. It is the only link language today within India. Learning the English language is just a necessary skill. It is an enormously useful skill. English is understood in every country in the world and as much as one-fourth of the world's population can communicate in it to some degree. Effective communication is indispensable without English. English opens the doors of success to all. Scholars point to a historically unprecedented situation; they feel that no other language has ever enjoyed this kind of pre-eminence before.

Much of the world's scientific, technical and social scientific knowledge exists in English. This is evident in the corporate world. Non-English speaking countries are racing to teach English to their populations. Of course, it is easier to land a job if your English skills are better. That is why there is grass root demand for learning English. The need of the hour is that the four skills need to be taken into consideration. Academic writing has a goal. Hence, composition writing is a topic where linguistic skills and experience plays an important part. The basic skills in the writing of composition need to be mastered. The sad situation in most of the schools is that composition, which fosters writing skills among students, is the most neglected subject. As a result, students are very weak at writing and score very poor marks in composition.

The reason for this is:

- Too many students in each class;
- Inability of the teacher to provide individual attention;
- Lack of proper correction scheme for the compositions;
- Inability of the teacher to provide timely feedback and reinforcement; • Lack of interest in writing on the part of the students.

Due to these various reasons, students find it difficult to cope with the language, and writing becomes an ordeal.

#### ***Survey of Problems in Composition Writing***

Once the researcher decided on the topic she wanted to find out the various problems that the students faced because this would help in preparing the training programme.

Before venturing into the training programme it was necessary to collect information about the teaching of Composition and most importantly to investigate into the very crucial part of highlighting the errors that are committed by the students. It was, therefore, decided to go to fifteen schools which followed the Syllabus prescribed by the Maharashtra State Board of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education for Std. IX. The researcher collected seventy five English Composition notebooks of Std. IX students and, analyzed the errors. It was observed that except for one school, corrections were done in a haphazard manner. In a few schools corrections were done just to please the education inspectors. Some schools gave model essays. In one school no teacher was appointed for that particular term, and hence no corrections were done.

The present standard of English is declining, both in written as well as oral form. The main problem lies with grammatical errors. Compositions that are written by the students are not up to the mark because of faulty construction of sentences, spelling errors, wrong usage of tenses and words, careless mistakes, no punctuation, and also poor handwriting. All these and many other reasons can be taken into account as to why students write poor compositions.

#### ***Survey of Problems Faced by Students in Writing English Composition***

Some of the students were of the opinion that composition was taught in an inappropriate manner. According to them, the topics for English Composition should appeal to their interest. Few felt that teachers did not give sufficient encouragement, and at times they were even humiliated in the class. Some

admitted that they lacked practice and that they did not pay much importance to writing of English Compositions.

The students agreed that writing a composition necessitated proficiency in English. They felt that they scored poorly, especially in the Composition section because of silly grammatical mistakes, bad handwriting, improper use of vocabulary and inability to express their thoughts in good language. Moreover, the mother tongue was also a hindrance to a certain extent. The common trend among the students to communicate with one another, in Hindi and other regional languages resulted in poor communication and writing skills. Peer pressure caused students to speak in different languages and English seems to be ignored. These are few of the impediments that hamper English Composition Writing.

#### ***Survey of Methods and Techniques used for Teaching English Composition***

A questionnaire was given to thirty teachers from fifteen schools regarding the present state of composition writing.

The analysis of methods and techniques used by these teachers for English Composition Writing revealed the use of following methods and techniques.

- Encouraging students to read good books, magazines and other articles.
- Advising them to do reference work.
- Using charts and appropriate pictures to develop a composition.
- Assigning grammar exercises for practice.
- Motivating the students to read newspaper on a daily basis, to improve their writing skills.
- Giving model essays.
- Discussing extra topics, essays with parallel type of examples and current news.
- Giving suggestions and guidelines. • Giving the format and asking the students to develop compositions based on the ideas that are discussed.
- Giving important points on the black board and asking students to elaborate on them.
- Asking students to read out articles and essays wherein the positive and the negative markings
- are done with the involvement of the students.
- Giving positive remarks to encourage the writing of better essays.
- Preparing scrap books of new words to be learnt one word a day.
- Advising students to practice assignments in their revision book.
- Encouraging students to collect information from the internet.

The small survey that was conducted was of great help to the researcher in preparing the training programme. The researcher has tried her level best to make Composition Writing as interesting as possible. The main concern was to enable the students to write better compositions, as also to help them improve their writing as well as communication skills. The training programme was prepared with a view to help students to perform well for the Board Exams and also to fortify and groom them for bright future prospects.

## CONCLUSION

From the above article it is clear that the present situation and its shortcomings enabled the researcher to understand the situation and work on the essentials of composition writing. The insight into the course books in English – 1996 and 2006 has brought to light the characteristic features of the new curriculum. The need of the study showed that the four skills reading, writing, listening and speaking need to be taken into consideration. Composition writing is a topic where linguistic skills and experience plays an important part. The survey of problems faced by teachers and students has helped the researcher in enabling the students to put in their best efforts in composition writing. Thus benefitting the students to perform well in their academic life as well as personal life.

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