A New Paradigm of Evaluation Techniques to Develop the Writing Skill of Professional Students: A Step Toward Learner Autonomy

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Abstract: Grading technical writing is a challenging task which is comprised of content, style and form of the message. Testing, examination, measurement and evaluation are usually used words that signify the process of assessing or grading students' performance. Evaluation is an integral part of teaching which includes a series of activities designed to measure the effective of the teaching-learning system as a whole. In this regard, the present study has adopted a qualitative approach to explore the writing problems, factors that obstruct writing development, and suggestions to improve writing skills of Professional students using evaluation techniques like Comprehensive Continuous Evaluation and Portfolio Method. Language is used as a means of communication in both speech and writing. Writing is not only a linguistic to be acquired for its own sake, but it is also an important aid in fixing the language material already learnt.

Index Terms: Evaluation Techniques, Obstructions, Portfolio Method, Suggestions, Writing Problems

I. INTRODUCTION

Language is used as a means of communication in both speech and writing. Writing is not only a linguistic to be acquired for its own sake, but it is also an important aid in fixing the language material already learnt. Written communication demands various traits like content, organization of thoughts and style of language. As Sylvia Plath [5] says, "Imagination to improvise", writing as a skill involves the power of imagination and thereby the students gain control over their thoughts. Their thoughts and imagination help them to pursue the skill of writing which in turn shapes not only their perception of themselves but also the world around them.

Written communication is the second form of communication which is transmitted through words. Hyland [3] believes that performance in language development is subject to improvement in writing skills. In the professional world, effective writing skills are required to write document such as business memos, email, proposals, minutes, notes and so on. Both professionals and students need excellent writing skills to survival and excel in their pursuits as there is hardly any academic or professional activity that does not required writing skills. However, writing is often considered as complex skill for language learners to excel. The difficulties lie not only in manipulating and correlating the ideas, but also in transforming these ideas into comprehensible text.

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According to Smith, "For some people writing often comes easily, others find it a continued struggle. Some people find writing a strain, others a release. Students very often find it hard to compose a piece of writing since they do not know the right words, they do not know the right grammar or they are not good at composing and organizing. Sometimes they cannot even think of anything to write. This results in dry, flat, mechanical prose full of grammatical errors and empty of life and contents."Therefore, the development of writing skills elicits considerable concentration to acquire from the very early stage of language learning. Nunan [4] argues that writing is an extremely difficult cognitive activity which requires the learner to have control over various factors.In every stage of life, we are familiar with writing. On the other hand, in education system writing is one of the means of evaluating learner achievement test. So, this focuses on the education techniques and tools of the present day and also prescribes some evaluation techniques which foster development in the writing skills.

II. DEFINITIONS OF EVALUATION

Evaluation is an integral part of teaching which includes a series of activities designed to measure the effectiveness of the teaching-learning system as a whole. It is a process of delineating, obtaining and providing useful information for judging decision alternatives.Quillen and Hanna said that "A measurement of the allround growth of a child, including his physical social and intellectual development, as his interests, aptitudes and abilities".Dandekar stated that "Evaluation can be defined as a systematic process of determining the extent to which educational objective are achieved by the students".

Kothari Commission briefed that 'Evaluation is a continuous process; it forms an integral part of total system of education and intimately related to educational objectives.'

A. Characteristics of Evaluation

Evaluation is a more comprehensive term than measurement or testing.

- It presents a continuous process and overall efforts for knowing about the progress of the learner.
- It provides quantitative as well as quantitative description of the outcomes of a teaching learning process.
- It helps in knowing about the changes in behavior related to the domains of learner's behavior as a result of process of teaching learning.

- It provides greater scope and flexibility for the use of variety of means and techniques rather than limiting itself to certain test or conventional examinations.
- It represents a comprehensive plan of better testing and measurement for inquiring into the quality of the output in the light of the set objectives.
- It provides sufficient value judgment about the progress of the learner, teacher's efforts and effectiveness of the instructional programs.
- Evaluation is a very comprehensive term. It involves objectives, content, learning activities and evaluation procedures.
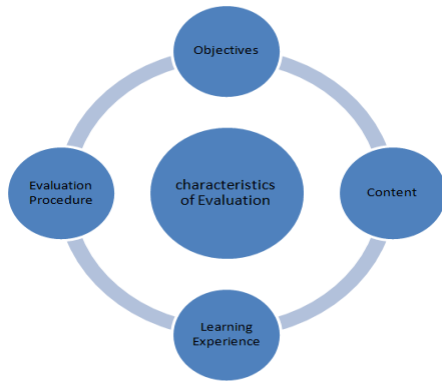

Fig.1. Characteristics of Evaluation

B. Contemporary Evaluation: A Critique

At present, there are semester system exists at the college level which evaluate the student's scholastic ability in a certain period of time. In that system, the non-scholastic aspects are dispensed with this become the major cause for student poor writing skills.

Evaluation in English is always partial that it almost measures only the memory power of the students. Huang. J [2] argues that evaluating is indispensable from language learning and teaching.

English is a skill-based subject but it is evaluated as knowledge based like science and all. The present day teaching of English focuses on completion of syllabus and getting through the examination. As a result of this, the teaching of English language has become an exam oriented rather than skill oriented to the learners. The impact of this teaching reflects the miserable condition of the learners that even after their completion of a UG programme or PG degree, they are not in a state to which in English properly, through they study right from their kinder garden level.

In a nut shell, Evaluation in English language in the recent trends is not completely developed to assess the learner's attainment level in the writing skills which is the requirement of teaching English. So, it is indispensable to reconstruct the techniques and tools of Evaluation.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study selected a qualitative approach to examine the problems in writing skills, the factors that restrains from development, and recommendations to promote writings of professional students. The study was done to find the solutions for the following questions:

• What are the vital issues of Professional students in writing skills?
• What are the factors that affect Professional students in developing writing skills?
• How can Professional students' writing skills be improved?

II. RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

To gain more complete data, it is important for the researcher to apply several research instruments, namely, interview, questionnaire, and examining records. Specifically, the researcher uses the following techniques:

A. Open-ended Questionnaires:

In this research, the researchers distributed open ended questionnaires in order to have factual data regarding with the students' difficulties in developing the writing skills as well as to find out what they really want and need to improve their ability in writing.

B. Semi-structured interview:

The principal aim of Semi-structured interview was to investigate the students' perception regarding the factors that hinder them in developing the writing skills. It is advantageous when the respondents are similar and their interaction yields the best information, Creswell[1]

C. Examining learners' writing skill:

The researcher analyzed the students' writing that she collected from the lecturer to find common errors done by the students. In addition to the Semi-structured interview, the researcher analyzed the data of 30 professional students. The collected data was analyzed using thematic analysis since thematic analysis strives to identify patterns of themes in the interview.

III. OUTCOME OF THE STUDY

The outcome of the study has been put down as: Obstacles in writing skills of Professional students, factors restrains from writing development and recommendations to develop the writing skills of professional students.

A. Professional students' Problems in Writing Skills

As the step of collecting data is done, the open-ended questionnaire results the following graph:

Fig.2. Problems in writing skills (GR: Grammar, CC: Cohesion & Coherence, ORG: Organization of thoughts, VOC: Vocabulary, DIC: Diction)

From the chart above, it can be seen that the students' major problems in developing writing skills are on grammar and vocabulary aspects, followed by diction, cohesion and coherence and organization of thoughts. Specifically, in grammar, mistakes are found in tense, subject verb agreement, articles, preposition, pronoun and use of auxiliary verbs.

B. Factors Restrains from Writing Development

The result disclosed the multiple causes that inhibit the progress of professional students' writing skills. Our education curriculum, doesn't give much space to enhance the students' creative writing. Due to time constrain, the passive skills are not encouraged to proliferate and hence remain ignored. Moreover, students have never been imparted the idea of being a good writer. Likewise, the examination system does not encourage students' higher order thinking instead, it encourages rote memory. 'Our examination system fails to motivate our students to be analytical or critical. This results in writing anxiety which becomes the major cause for downfall of writing skills.

Unfavorably, absence of effective teaching learning method also affects the writing days. Students get very less opportunity to practice writing skills right from their school. Our education setup fails in rendering conducive environment which results in discursive. Lack of motivation by the teachers acts as another hindering factor in developing the writing skills. Inadequacy of breeding ideas and concentration are also discussed as factors resulting in problems of writing skills.

a. Outcomes from Written Samples

The analysis of data unveiled problems in grammar, syntax, vocabulary, coherence and cohesion, spelling, paragraph organization, punctuation, diction, spoken words, and influence of mother tongue, Table 1. The maximum errors was found in grammar part which comprised of errors in tenses, subject-verb agreement, personal pronoun, word order, article, auxiliary, preposition and sentence fragment. The second highest number of errors was made in vocabulary. This was followed by diction which stands in the third position. Next in line, mistakes were indentified in organization of thoughts and cohesion and coherence. Apart from these major areas, mistakes in spelling and punctuation were also traced.

Table 1 Reliability and Validity Values

Problems Identified	Recurrence of mistakes
Grammar	541
Vocabulary	436
Diction	343
Cohesion & Coherence	117
Organization of thought	109
Word order	97
Spoken Expression	64
Punctuation	53
Others	48

IV. DISCUSSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The major problems in developing writing skills are grammar and syntax, followed by vocabulary, spelling, punctuation and others. The present study revealed many assorted reasons that affect the development of writing skills. On the other hand, it is identified that undergraduate ESL learners are not motivated to improve their writing skills. The students suggested to recruit efficient teachers to enhance the passive skills. Constructive feedback should be provided by the teachers to help learners, criticism on their writings should be minimized, and writing competitions should be organized to motive the learners. It was also suggested that these modifications should be implemented at secondary and intermediate levels so that learners face less difficulties in writing skills at tertiary level.

Therefore, based on above findings and discussion toward the students' problems in developing writing skill, the researcher offers evaluation techniques to be applied by teachers. It is high time to look into this issue which demands a new and effective writing strategy to meet the rising challenges in writing skills. The guidelines for evaluating technical writing skill are presented below:

A. Comprehensive and Continuous Evaluation

Continuous education is a continuous process so; the development of the student should be monitored regularly and effectively. Comprehensive, the term 'comprehensive' means to both scholastic and non-scholastic areas of students' growth. Therefore, the job of teaching is to build up the cognitive as well as non-cognitive abilities.Evaluation is the process of knowing up to what extend the disused change has taken place in the students. The important of continuous evaluation lies in the fact that all efforts of the teacher are ducted towards achievements of the students. Thus, it can be used for remedial work and feedback. So, comprehensive in teaching English language skills enable the teacher,

- To diagnose the weak areas.
- To know the learner level and understanding various skills.
- To find out learners' area of interest and competency.
- To provide remedial measures for the improvement and development of skills.

B. Objectives of Comprehensive and Continuous Evaluation:

- To improve teaching learning process.
- To use evaluation for improvement of students' achievement through diagnosis and remediation.
- To make sound judgment and take timely decisions for learner's growth, learning process, learning pace and learning environment.
- To maintain desired standard of attainment.
- To provide scope for self-evaluation.

Fig.3. Components of comprehensive and continuous evaluation

C. The Portfolio Method

A portfolio is a planned collection of learner achievement that documents what a student has accomplished and the steps to improve the progress. It is a type of assessments which reflects the process of writing and reflective learning. It is one of the alternative assessments that have gained much interest in the field of language teaching, an ongoing assessment. Portfolios are a means of communicating to parents, learners, and other teachers the level of learning and performance that a student has achieved. By this method, the learners come forth to analyze their strength as well as weakness in the writing skill. A portfolio is a kind of evaluation which helps in the progress of writing. Sometimes, portfolio assessment is considered as the best method to gauge the student's level of deep learning. The assessment is planned and designed in a systematic and methodical way as constructing an objective test or essay exam. Assessment techniques might include having students videotape portions of their own projects, conducting interviews with the student to probe for understanding and thinking abilities, or making a visual inspection of the product to determine whether it has the required characteristics for successful operation. These forms of assessment are intended to reduce pressures to test solely for facts and skills and to provide a stimulus to introduce more extended thinking and reasoning activities in the curriculum. A learning portfolio, or learning focused portfolio, is typically the type of portfolio used in classroom to develop the writing skills. The learning-focused portfolio includes writing at any and all stages, at any level of competency. Diverse writing samples ensure a richer reflection experience for the learner.

Kathleen Blake Yancey, [6] a leading scholar on classroom portfolio and reflection, offers this insight on the purpose of portfolios: "Because they are created and used in context, these classroom portfolio projects are highly individualized, intended to serve the learning needs of students in a particular classroom who are working with a particular teacher. In other words, by their very nature portfolio make possible the developmental charting of individuals, as well as a rich portrait of the writer composing for several occasions".

D. Cognitive Skills and Dispositions

Like performance assessments, portfolios also measure the deep understanding and genuine achievement of students. They can measure growth and development of competence in areas such as knowledge construction, cognitive strategies, procedural skills, and met cognition as well as certain dispositions or habits of mind.

E. Portfolio Rubrics:

Scoring criteria, or rubrics, may vary from fairly simple checklists to elaborate combinations of checklists and rating scales. So, the primary traits and characteristics which are important for each cognitive learning outcome for each category of content in the portfolio should be listed. The sample rating scale for writing skill that describes the range of student performance is given below.

F. Writing Skill Portfolio Rating Form:

Writing skill portfolio rating form is given below: Once the Rubrics design is done for one category of writing, then the instructor has to design scoring criteria for the portfolio as a whole product. Some traits to consider while designing a scoring mechanism for the entire portfolio are thoroughness, variety, growth of progress, overall quality, self-reflection, flexibility, organization, and appearance.

S.No	Criteria	Rating	Description
1	Quality of Reflection	5	Very clear
		4	Clear
		3	Could be clearer
		2	Vague
		1	No evidence
2	Writing Convention	5	Very effective
		4	Effective
		3	Somewhat effective
		2	Errors, interfere with meaning
		1	Major errors, obscure meaning
3	Organization	5	Clearly make sense
		4	Make senses
		3	Make sense for the most part
		2	Attempted but does not make sense
		1	Does not make sense
4	Planning	5	Very clear and explicit
		4	Clear and explicit
		3	Somewhat clear
		2	Vague
		1	No evidence
5	Quality of Revision	5	Definite improvement
		4	Improvement on previous draft
		3	Slight improvement over earlier draft
		2	Ignores suggestions
		1	Made only a minimal attempt to revise

Fig.4. Writing Skill Portfolio Rating Form

Portfolios require different type of grading. The traditional grading systems are focused on percentage and grades whereas portfolio classroom are focused on feedback. This method determines the weight of the writing content and mechanics as well as the reflective components of the process. In traditional classroom, the learners have roughly four-six assignments throughout the semesters, whereas portfolio classroom has many more assignments. The portfolio classroom assigns brainstorming, outlining, one or more drafts, and then the finished products. This method looks at the semester as a whole and plan backward from the due date of the final portfolio submission.

V. CONCLUSION

Writing is a powerful instrument of thinking because it provides students with a way of gaining control over their thoughts. The skills of writing come through practices professionally; it is difficult to survive without writing skills because most electronic communications carry written material. So, it is significant to study writing skills of engineering students. In this regard, the present study enumerated evaluation tools and techniques to develop the writing skills. By means of evaluation strengths and weakness are identified. To do so, alternative forms of assessment like comprehensive continuous evaluation and portfolio can be implemented for better results. Through they have their own limitation; the extra lessons hopefully worth the time over students/learners are able to use them to increase their self-awareness as writer. It can be fruitful that the techniques and tools enumerated in the paper can be used in combination with the present testing tools. Finaly, an effective classroom assessment and evaluation calls on teachers to become agents of change in their classrooms activity using the result of assessment to modify and

improve the learning environments.

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