

Challenges in implementing the Composition Curriculum at TVTC College of Technology Adham, Saudi Arabia: A Study

Sreekanth Reddy

English Trainer, TVTC Branch College of Technology, Adham Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the EFL writing challenges in the TVTC college of Technology Adham, Saudi Arabia. The prescribed academic writing curriculum does not incorporate the recent developments in the linguistic theory. In that connection, this article tries to convey the view that learners' writing problems can best be addressed by the adoption of the genre approach to writing rather than following the prevailing curriculum which is grammar-based. At this institute, the students consider writing activity as an exercise in English grammar rather than practice it for communicative purpose. After teaching the writing courses for the 3rd level students in TVTC Adham, I have come to an understanding that most of these courses focus only on drilling and not on real communication. This issue is presently taken up to study the need to revamp the existing writing practices of the students at the higher level at this institute.

Keywords: Curriculum, Lexico-grammatical structure

In view of the prestigious **Vision 2030**, the young Saudi learners have to put in a keen interest in recognizing the English language as a language of existence in business and in education. Many educational institutes in Saudi Arabia have now introduced diverse courses in English language such as English for Academic Purposes, English for Technical Students, English for Specific Purposes, etc. The government and educational institutions are working hard to project the wide popularity and demand of the English language. But, it was observed that students at the grass-roots level are yet to show great interest in acquiring and mastering the basics of English language. As part of my observation,

several challenges and obstacles were identified. Some of the challenges were lack of motivation, spelling mistakes, difficulty in pronunciation and inappropriate curricula. Finally, a written exam at the end of the semester was the testing tool. So, much focus is given to make the students ready to appear for a written exam.

Writing is a most important skill to be practiced by both professional writers and students. Thus, in academic and technical institutions, this basic skill in English is considered to be a matter of great importance and includes a good deal of writing courses in their curriculum, they also introduce writing courses to prepare

learners for academic and non-academic purpose. So, unfortunately communication skills involving listening and speaking skills are totally neglected by a majority of educational institutions in Saudi Arabia and the focus is on the writing component. They mainly concentrate on content-based knowledge rather than emphasizing the oral communication skills. Many of the writing courses in Saudi universities prefer to advocate writing practices characteristic of guided and controlled composition, where the lexico-grammatical concept dominates the composition skills. But it is commonly observed that most of the students' scripts are of 'errors', 'unsemantic', 'absence of concord', 'no proper paragraphing' and have a number of spelling mistakes. These observations are the most commonly prevailing drawbacks.

At this juncture an action research was carried out by the researcher. This action research mainly focuses on the issue of the writing skills of the students at TVTC College of Technology Adham. The researcher has carried out this research considering the various pedagogical as well as cultural issues. The Saudi's mother tongue has a great influence on the speaking of the English Language. They do not have the sound of 'P' but instead they pronounce 'P' as 'B'. So initially it was assumed that in academic scenario writing skills should be taught more extensively rather than speaking and listening skills. In this context we have to know the relevance of Lexico-Grammatical concept. This concept advocates the extensive use of grammatical

usage of sentences. A basic knowledge of grammar is essential in framing sentences. A basic drilling in grammar rules is a must for better construction of meaningful sentences. So, grammar was judiciously incorporated in the prescribed syllabus. Every unit has a definite grammar to be practiced. It is to say that only this aspect of language was given importance – that is being able to learn and reproduce the grammatical structures based on the given context.

Literature Review

Hymes' theory of communicative competence mainly stresses on writing. This theory mainly advocates about the role of "context" in writing. In principle, the term "context" is conceived to be the aggregate of linguistic, situational, social and cultural variables that surround linguistic units such as the text, discourse, utterances, etc. Context is also similar to what Halliday calls the social aspects of language use which comprises the establishment of familiarity and distance, boundary maintenance, personal interaction and settings of language use. The well-known 'context theory' gives impetus to the concept of 'writing genres'. Since this paper strongly proposes that the 'genre' concept provides a solution to the challenges of 'writing' at advanced levels in TVTC College of Technology, Now let us recall some of its defining features.

Generally speaking, the term "genre" is defined as a social, dynamic and interactive process that emphasizes the nature of

Table (1): Writing Genres Mauranen (1998).	Massi (2001)
Press reportage	A letter to the English teacher
Editorials	Sending a letter abroad
Reviews	Writing a letter to the author of a story
Religion	Email writing
Skills and hobbies	Film
Biographies	Providing an alternative ending
Official documents	An introduction to the anthology of short stories
Academic prose	Journal writing
Fiction	Personal anthology
Humor	The writing portfolio
Personal letters	
Professional letters	

language as “a social action” (Mauranen, 1998). Berkenkotter (1995), as cited in Mauranen, 1998, associates “genre” with five defining features. First, it is conceived to be dynamic in that it changes over time in line with its ‘users’ socio cognitive needs’. Second, “genre” is situational; viz. its driving force is embedded in the language users’ “participation in the communicative activities of daily professional life”. Third, it is dually-structured in the sense that as language users get involved in “professional activities”, they constitute and at the same time reproduce “social structures in professional, institutional and organizational contexts”. Fourth, “genre” is community-specific, i.e. it establishes disciplinary conventions employed by a given discourse community. Finally, “genre” is both form- and content-sensitive. In other words, genre knowledge includes “a sense of what content is appropriate to a particular

purpose in a particular situation at a particular point in time”.

Where writing is concerned, there does not seem to be consensus among theorists concerning the number and types of writing genres. Table (1) below illustrates writing genres as prescribed by two different inventories:

Regardless of the differences between these two models, so to speak, they have the potential to provide a solid basis for successful writing programs. Such genres as academic prose, fiction, letter writing, email writing, review writing, journal writing in both columns can be incorporated into the EFL writing syllabus. The rationale for so doing emanates from the fact that they empower the students to write with a purpose. Other things being equal, the students will be made to realize that they are acquiring the disciplinary discourse

associated with their subject fields. This type of language awareness is proposed to inform of who the language users are "... and whom they want to be identified with and, importantly, who they don't want to be identified with" (Hewings et al, 2007: 243). Thus, the students will eventually realize that academic writing does not always function as a tool that teachers employ to assess their performance (cf. Curry and Hewings, 2003).

Conclusion

It was quite noticeable in TVTC College of Technology - Adham that in spite of adopting the above mentioned pedagogy, the students' level in writing didn't improve drastically. Their poor basics of English language were a big hurdle to learn the advanced skills in Language. So, it was suggested to keep aside the academic books and start from the scratch. Neither the teacher trainers nor the superior academic authorities have addressed the relevance of the curriculum to the immediate academic and future career needs of the students. They just wanted the English trainers to complete the book and conduct the exams. They have taken the English language for granted. Most of the local staff and students just ignored this issue.

The present Action Research into the writing skills of Saudi EFL learners indicates that it suffers from a variety of lexicogrammatical and rhetorical problems. The findings reveal the following challenging facts about composition skills in most of the Saudi educational institutes.

First, it assumes a bottom-up approach to writing by focusing more on the manipulation of linguistic information as a necessary component of effective writing.

Second, the existing writing curriculum does not treat writing as a communicative skill, i.e. it considers writing as a mere exercise in the English vocabulary and grammar.

Both aspects of writing curriculum can jeopardize the acquisition of composing competence in students.

Third, such linguistic information as vocabulary and grammar are open-ended phenomenon. So it is unlikely that learners who reach the end of the course are able to compose satisfactorily, and even when they succeed in acquiring enough vocabulary and grammar, they cannot be expected to excel in writing because the writing skills exceed learners' linguistic competence..

Fourth, by focusing more on paragraph writing, the English departments ignore the need for writing as a communicative skill. Instead, they are neglecting the use of various genres in which the paragraph is simply a component.

In conclusion, unless these challenges are resolved effectively and the reforms be incorporated into the writing curriculum, writing will continue to be a challenging skill for Saudi EFL learners. It is unfortunate that English language teachers are more concerned about following British and American universities regarding what to appear in the curriculum rather than incorporating new developments into the

linguistic theory, i.e. genre theory, in their writing curriculum.

References

1. Al-Hazmi, S. "Writing Reflection: Perceptions of Arab EFL Learners". *South Asian Language Review*, 26/2 (2006): 36-52. Print.
2. Al-Khuweileh, A. A. and A. Al-Shoumali. "Writing Errors: A study of the Writing Ability of Arab Learners of Academic English and Arabic at University". *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 13/2. ERIC Database, Document No. EJ619935. (2000): 174-183. Web. 16 Sept. 2009.
3. Curry, M. J. and A. Hewings. "Approaches to Writing". *Teaching Academic Writing: A Toolkit for Higher Education*. Eds. C. Coffin, S. Goodman, A. Hewings and Joan Swan. London: Routledge, (2003): 19-44. Print.
4. Curry, M. J. and T. M. Lillis. "Issues in Academic Writing in Higher Education". *Teaching Academic Writing: A Toolkit for Higher Education*. Eds. C. Coffin, S. Goodman, A. Hewings and J. Swan, T. Lillis and J. Swan. London: Routledge, (2003): 1-18. Print.
5. Enkvist, N. E. "Style and Types of Context. Reports on Text Linguistics: Four Papers on Text, Style and Syntax". ERIC database, Document No. ED157373.(1974): 1-48. Web. 2 Feb. 2010.
6. Fitze, M. And R. Glasgow. "Input Enhancement and Tense Formation in Arab EFL Writing".. Web. 31 May 2009. http://www.tesoljournal.com/Articles/Example_Article.doc.
7. Freedman, A., I. Pringle, Y. Yalden (Eds.). *Learning to Write: First Language/Second Language*. New York: Longman. (1983): 179-189. Print.
8. Halliday, M. A. K. "Towards a Sociological Semantics". *The Communicative Approach to Language Teaching*. Eds. C. J. Brumfit and K. Johnson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, (1979): 27-45. Print.
9. Hewings, A., T. Lillis, and B. Mayer. "Academic Writing in English". *Learning English*. Eds. N. Mercer, J. Swan and B. Mayer. New York: Routledge, (2007): 227-256. Print.
10. Horowitz, D. "Process not Product Less Than Meet the Eye". *TESOL Quarterly*, 20/1, (1986): 141-144. Print.
11. Krashen, S. D. *Writing Research: Theory and Applications*. Oxford: Pergamon Press, (1984). Print.
12. Massi, M. P. "Interactive Writing in the EFL Class: a Repertoire of Tasks". *Internet TESL Journal*., 11/6, (2001). 11/6. Web. 13 March 2010. <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Massi.html>.
13. Mauranen, A. Another Look at Genre: Corpus Linguistics vs. Genre Analysis. *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia: International Review of English Studies*, (1998): n. pag. Web 13 March 2010. <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-93027792.html>. 10