

# Developing L2 Academic Writing: Going Beyond CLT and TBLT

R Rajeshwari

Research Scholar, English and Foreign Languages University, Lucknow

## ABSTRACT

*This paper aims at emphasising the importance of developing academic writing skills in students at the tertiary level through employing pedagogical instructions for the same in all areas: arts, humanities and sciences. The limitations in the existing pedagogy at the primary and secondary levels have been analysed so as to suggest necessary pedagogical instructions at the tertiary level. Emphasis has been laid on the establishment of writing centres in India, as Academic Writing finds little importance in college syllabi, except in some language courses. The analysis of primary and secondary level language syllabi and teaching methodology has been done based on research done by means of tutoring school students upto XII standard (CBSE) in Delhi. Statistical analysis of IELTS score of 2017 has also been done so as to show that writing skills require explicit instructions.*

**Keywords:** *ELT in India, Developing academic writing, Writing centres at tertiary level.*

## Introduction

The Institutionalisation of English Studies in India, chiefly by Thomas Macaulay, Trevelyan and Raja Ram Mohan Roy, has travelled far since the period of Imperialism; in the post-independence era through the Radhakrishnan Commission, the Kothari Commission and the Ramamurti Commission to its present status as a second language; from Raja Rao's opinion, "it is to convey in a language that is not one's own, the spirit that is one's own", to it (English) occupying one's mind and heart. India is a country of the 'outer circle' wherein English has attained the status of second language (Kachru, 1985).

After globalisation, English has made its way as an important language not only in pedagogy, but it has also become a communicative language in India. As it is required everywhere – schools, colleges, jobs etc., people have realised that for keeping themselves well informed about the worldwide knowledge, they need to become proficient in the global language which is English. Hence, English medium schools are the most opted for in India.

## Prevailing Language Teaching Methods

It is important to understand the methods followed till date for language teaching (L2). Various researches in language teaching in the 'inner circle' countries have provided

many methods (for us). As is well known, Grammar Translation Method was followed earlier, wherein students were encouraged rote learning. As there was lot of dissatisfaction in teaching the forms of the language instead of the function, Communicative Language Teaching found precedence. It was based on Dell Hymes' theory of 'Communicative Competence' (1966) which was propounded by him in resistance to Chomskian theory of Linguistic performance and Competence (1965). CLT plays an important role in teaching language as (according to Hymes) it is based on 'ethnography of Communication', i.e it is socially determined. In India, the importance attached to 'spoken English' and the mushrooming of institutes offering classes for the same are evidences to show that it is more important to know the functional aspect of the language than learn its forms. (Hymes).

Similarly, N.S.Prabhu's Task Based Language Teaching (1987) has gone a long way in teaching language as it is based on tasks which the learners are expected to perform following instructions provided therein. His tripartite model of information gap, reasoning gap and opinion gap was instrumental in changing pedagogical instructions at the school level in India.

TBLT has found a potential place in pedagogy. The CBSE position paper (2006) is a case in point, wherein the importance of teaching English through Comprehensible Input has been given prime importance. It also prescribes Teachers' Proficiency (TP) and organising Teachers'

Training programmes for this purpose. It also emphasises the importance of Task Based Language Teaching.

The increasing importance and role of digital technology in language learning and teaching (CALL – Computer Assisted Language Learning) has seeped in India too. In school pedagogy it has taken the form of Educomp and FlipLearn which are digital applications provided by schools to all the students. It is quite well known by such students and parents that these portals provide pre written answers to questions and exercises under the guise of providing the students with Comprehensible Input. This is hampering and hindering the writing creativity of the students to such an extent that it has turned out to be a substitute to the rote learning in the earlier Grammar Translation Method; and we are regressing instead of progressing. Comprehensible Input (CI) (Stephen Krashen, 1981) is fundamental in language learning; but the role of Comprehensible Output (CO) and Feedback (by the teachers) (Swain, 1985) is irrefutable. Hence, production of language, oral or written, is essential for developing that aspect of language. It will be apt to refer to Nicky Hockley (2013) at this juncture. In his research he has studied the effect of Interactive White Boards in a language classroom. He has also called upon earlier researches on the use of technology in a similar context. He surmises that the mere introduction of technology in a classroom does not guarantee an enhanced learning environment.

CLT and TBLT have played their part in

inculcating 'awareness and understanding' of the (second) language in India. It is time to go further and realise the importance of developing the writing skills in English as a Second Language.

### **Importance of Writing**

Writing is an essential tool for the manifestation of thoughts which will prevail and not fly away as speech does. Therefore, writing finds an important place in the life of human beings, whether in curriculum or otherwise. Education, the ability to read and write, transforms lives and societies; being numerate and literate gives advantages to human beings.

In education too, the measuring scale of any exam, whether language or any other skill, is the writing ability of the student. If the student is unable to exhibit his or her knowledge through his/her writing, it does not find recognition. Hence the ability to write is important for first language as well as for second/foreign language learners.

### **Literature study**

Second language writing attained the importance and status for research since the 1950s and 60s with the aim of developing pedagogical instruments for the teaching and learning of second language writing for international students who started enrolling in vast numbers in English speaking countries; but it derives from studies and research in L1 writing.

Since beginning, the main aim of a writing task has been the product obtained thereof; but lately the focus has shifted to the

Journal of English Language Teaching LX/6, 2018

process involved in writing. According to Jeremy Harmer (2004), process involved in a writing task is more important than the product obtained. She observes that to encourage an L2 learner to write, the product should be considered only as an impetus to develop the process. There has been a shift from grammar and spelling to coherence, cohesion, sentence structuring, organization of ideas, etc. Researches in academic writing have refuted the claim of Jeremy Harmer, as in the following study:

Figueroa et al(2018) , in their research on Academic Language and Academic Vocabulary on Chilean VIII graders have quoted Graham and Sandmel that the latter, in their research, found the process approach insufficient in developing writing quality. Hence Figueroa et al opine, "Therefore, the process approach appears to be explicitly overlooking the contextual dimension of writing, both at the level of writer diversity—according to their performance—and of writing as a situated practice." They also observe that writing, specially academic writing, requires high cognitive and linguistic efforts. For analysing the argumentative and explanatory essays of the students, they considered the following epistemic markers to be important: Syntactic structure, vocabulary, genre knowledge, idea development and discourse organisation

Halliday and Hasan's taxonomy has been instrumental in analysing writing. In 'Cohesion in English' (1976), they have established the important role played by cohesion in the 'texture' of the text. They

have used 'texture' synonymously with coherence. Coherence and Cohesion studies attained great importance in assessing writing tasks. Carrell (1982) acknowledges the importance of cohesive devices and coherence in a writing task; but she rejects Halliday and Hasan's claim and observes that a text can be coherent even without employing cohesive devices.

Ruegg and Sugiyama (2013) consider the importance of organisation of ideas in establishing the coherence of a writing task. Their research studies what raters are sensitive to while evaluating the writing tasks. They observe that organisation of ideas may be assessed at two levels- physical aspects of organisation such as paragraphing and the existence of organisation markers; and deeper textual aspects such as coherent flow of ideas. They have surmised that both cohesion and coherence are assessed while rating a text.

Hinkel (2013) has foregrounded the importance of teaching Grammar to L2 writers. According to him, L2 writers need to be taught such rules of Grammar which are required in academic writing; and not the entire range of grammatical rules which seldom find a place in use. He has also provided certain features which academic writers should refrain from using, e.g. subjunctives or noun clauses as subjects etc.

Hinkel has acknowledged the vital role played by grammatical structures in academic writing. "In recent years, in ESL pedagogy, the research on identifying simple

and complex grammatical structures and vocabulary has been motivated by the goal of helping learners to improve the quality and sophistication of their second language (L2) production and writing." Many researches have established that grammatical accuracy is an essential component of academic writing and speaking (for L2 learners). It demands both instructions/teaching as well as intensive learning. Hinkel is critical of the methodology adopted for enhancing the communicative competence of the L2 learners as it focuses on personal experiences which is more fun instead of inculcating formal techniques of academic writing. Students are exposed to conversational language so much that they fail to differentiate between formal and informal register. In this article, Hinkel has given certain prescriptions for grammatical accuracy so as to improve L2 academic writing.

### **Developing Instructional Design at the Tertiary Level**

The existing pedagogical pattern in schools imparts either a 'copy-book-ideal' environment or an informal language, owing to CLT, to students; hence when students go to colleges and universities they face the risk of plagiarism or the register in their lexicon is not complex and academic. There is a strong need of formation of 'writing centres' in India. Other than a few language courses, colleges and universities seldom offer a course in Academic Writing in India, be it arts or social sciences or life sciences or technical sciences. To show that

development of writing skills requires exclusive instruction at the tertiary level, statistics of IELTS band score of students who attempted the exams throughout the year 2017 has been taken. (retrieved from <https://www.ielts.org/teaching-and-research/test-taker-performance>).

This score is of the students from all over the world. IELTS is assessed on a 9-band scale and reports scores both overall and by individual skill. Academic and general training test takers (2017) split between these two categories are as follows:

Academic – 78.10%

General Training – 21.9%

For this paper, the statistics in the category of Academic exam have been shown.

Table 1 shows Academic test takers' mean performance (overall and individually in all the four skills) by gender. (see Appendix A)

This indicates that both in male and female categories, the band score of writing skill is much less than the other three skills.

Table 2 shows the mean of overall and individual skill score of academic test takers from top 40 places of origin. (see Appendix B)

In this table, Indian students' test performance shows a lower score in writing as compared to the other skills. If we look carefully, this problem persists not only with Indian students, but other than one or two exceptions, this problem (of writing) persists with students of all the countries (as given in the table).

Table 3 shows the mean of overall and individual skill scores of test takers based on their first language. (see Appendix C).

Here, the writing performance of test takers with one of the Indian languages as the first language, again shows lower values as compared to the scores of other skills; other than the exception of Punjabi, wherein there is not much difference in the score of writing and the scores of other skills; because in their case, the score for Reading is lower than Writing. As for students with Marathi as the first language, their score for Listening has exceeded 7 band score, but the score for writing is quite low.

In fact, the writing score of students with English as the first language too shows a remarkable lower value as compared to the scores of their other skills because of which their overall mean has come down below 7 band score, in spite of the fact that their scores for Listening and Speaking are above the 7 band score which is not very easy to procure (as the statistics show).

It can be inferred that genre based instructions can go a long way in developing the writing skills of students at the under graduate and masters level. This will enhance the overall development of all the elements of writing. Studying through the different genres will provide the students with practical situations simultaneously with improving their academic vocabulary and grammar. Thus it is essential to develop both the macro and micro properties of the writing elements, namely:

Cohesion

Coherence (organisation of ideas)  
 Syntactic structures  
 Triad of CAF (complexity, accuracy, fluency)  
 Lexical density  
 Academic Language

Earlier researches in assessing academic writing have considered all these properties for evaluating the quality of academic writing. Therefore, it is inferred that college students in India need to be instructed for enhancing these elements in their writing tasks, so that the quality of their assignments/journal articles/research papers improves.

**References**

Carrell, P. L. (1982). Cohesion is not coherence. *TESOL Quarterly*, 16, 4, 479-488.

CBSE Position Paper by the Focus Group, March, 2006

Figueroa, J., Meneses, A., Chandia, E. (2018). Academic language and the quality of written arguments and explanations of Chilean 8th graders. *Reading and Writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 31, 3, 703-723.

Harmer, J. (2004). *How to Teach Writing*. Harlow, UK: Person Education

Limited.

Hinkel, E. (2013). Research Findings on Teaching Grammar for Academic Writing. *English Teaching*, 68, 4, 3-21.

Hockley, N. (2013). Interactive Whiteboards, IWBs in Mainstream Education. *ELT Journal*, 67,3

<https://www.ielts.org/teaching-and-research/test-taker-performance>

Hymes, D.H. (1972) On Communicative Competence In: J.B. Pride and J. Holmes (Eds.). *Sociolinguistics: Selected Readings*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Kachru, B. (1985). Cited in (Eds) M.Charles, And D.Pekarari. (2016) *English for Academic Purposes*. New York: Routledge.

Krashen, S.D. (1981). *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning*. US: Pergamon Press Inc.

Ruegg, R., and Sugiyama, Y. (2013). Organization of ideas in writing: what are raters sensitive to?. *Language Testing in Asia*, 3,8.

Swain, M., *The Output Hypothesis: Theory and Research*, The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, The University of Toronto

**Appendix A**

**Table 1. Academic test takers: Mean performance by gender**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Listening</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Writing</b>	<b>Speaking</b>	<b>Overall</b>
<b>Female</b>	6.26	6.18	5.66	5.97	6.08
<b>Male</b>	6.17	6.02	5.55	5.88	5.97

## Appendix B

Table 2. Mean band score for the most frequent countries or regions of origin (Academic)

Country	Listening	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Overall
<b>Bangladesh</b>	6.37	6.02	5.83	6.25	6.18
<b>Brazil</b>	6.74	6.91	5.98	6.72	6.65
<b>Canada</b>	7.09	6.78	6.16	7.15	6.86
<b>China (People's Republic of)</b>	5.9	6.11	5.37	5.39	5.76
<b>Colombia</b>	6.35	6.72	5.78	6.49	6.4
<b>Egypt</b>	6.74	6.43	5.87	6.46	6.44
<b>France</b>	6.95	7.04	6.02	6.56	6.71
<b>Germany</b>	7.76	7.52	6.6	7.36	7.37
<b>Greece</b>	7.43	7.16	6.27	6.76	6.97
<b>Hong Kong</b>	6.9	6.76	5.97	6.25	6.53
<b>India</b>	6.3	5.82	5.77	6.01	6.04
<b>Indonesia</b>	6.55	6.67	5.78	6.27	6.38
<b>Iran, Islamic Republic of</b>	6.24	5.98	5.58	6.43	6.12
<b>Iraq</b>	5.54	5.44	5.13	5.86	5.56
<b>Italy</b>	6.83	7.2	5.99	6.54	6.7
<b>Japan</b>	5.91	6.09	5.41	5.59	5.81
<b>Jordan</b>	6.27	5.89	5.47	6.35	6.06
<b>Kazakhstan</b>	6.17	6.16	5.57	5.91	6.01
<b>Korea, Republic of</b>	6.2	6.2	5.46	5.79	5.97
<b>Kuwait</b>	5.47	5.08	4.84	5.79	5.36
<b>Malaysia</b>	7.27	7.07	6.25	6.71	6.89
<b>Mexico</b>	6.54	6.78	5.81	6.54	6.48
<b>Nepal</b>	6.27	5.75	5.56	5.81	5.91
<b>Nigeria</b>	6.82	6.46	6.51	7.11	6.79
<b>Oman</b>	5.11	4.98	4.9	5.62	5.22
<b>Pakistan</b>	6.57	6.2	5.95	6.43	6.35
<b>Philippines</b>	7.27	6.8	6.2	6.85	6.84
<b>Romania</b>	7.03	6.89	6.12	6.78	6.77
<b>Russian Federation</b>	6.93	6.91	5.99	6.67	6.69
<b>Saudi Arabia</b>	5.26	5.05	4.78	5.69	5.26
<b>Spain</b>	7.02	7.16	6.11	6.71	6.81
<b>Sri Lanka</b>	6.6	6.15	5.9	6.49	6.35
<b>Sudan</b>	6.43	6.1	5.68	6.41	6.22
<b>Taiwan</b>	6.16	6.21	5.6	6.08	6.08
<b>Thailand</b>	6.25	6.03	5.46	5.91	5.98
<b>Turkey</b>	6.4	6.42	5.69	6.21	6.24
<b>Ukraine</b>	6.65	6.58	5.94	6.49	6.48
<b>United Arab Emirates</b>	4.88	4.7	4.48	5.27	4.9
<b>Uzbekistan</b>	5.63	5.63	5.27	5.61	5.6
<b>Vietnam</b>	5.97	6.17	5.59	5.71	5.92

### Appendix C

**Table 3. Mean band scores for the most common first languages (Academic)**

<b>Language</b>	<b>Listening</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Writing</b>	<b>Speaking</b>	<b>Overall</b>
<b>Arabic</b>	5.63	5.37	5.06	5.88	5.55
<b>Azeri</b>	6.42	6.16	5.58	6.12	6.14
<b>Bengali</b>	6.45	6.11	5.88	6.31	6.25
<b>Chinese</b>	5.97	6.15	5.41	5.46	5.81
<b>English</b>	7.21	6.71	6.35	7.14	6.92
<b>Farsi</b>	6.29	6.03	5.61	6.47	6.16
<b>Filipino</b>	7.31	6.86	6.22	6.87	6.88
<b>French</b>	6.91	6.95	6.03	6.59	6.68
<b>German</b>	7.8	7.55	6.62	7.39	7.41
<b>Greek</b>	7.35	7.03	6.24	6.73	6.9
<b>Gujarati</b>	6.18	5.71	5.63	5.86	5.91
<b>Hindi</b>	6.67	6.13	5.94	6.37	6.34
<b>Ibo/Igbo</b>	6.6	6.27	6.47	7.09	6.67
<b>Indonesian</b>	6.54	6.67	5.78	6.26	6.37
<b>Italian</b>	6.83	7.22	5.99	6.53	6.7
<b>Japanese</b>	5.9	6.09	5.41	5.59	5.81
<b>Kazakh</b>	6.06	6.04	5.51	5.81	5.92
<b>Khmer</b>	5.92	5.73	5.48	5.92	5.82
<b>Korean</b>	6.2	6.21	5.46	5.79	5.98
<b>Malay</b>	7.03	6.86	6.07	6.54	6.69
<b>Malayalam</b>	6.73	6.34	6.1	6.39	6.45
<b>Marathi</b>	7.06	6.49	6.23	6.69	6.68
<b>Nepali</b>	6.28	5.75	5.56	5.82	5.92
<b>Other</b>	6.6	6.29	6.18	6.96	6.57
<b>Polish</b>	7.36	7.25	6.29	6.99	7.03
<b>Portuguese</b>	6.86	6.94	6.04	6.8	6.72
<b>Punjabi</b>	5.92	5.47	5.56	5.67	5.72
<b>Romanian</b>	7.01	6.89	6.12	6.79	6.77
<b>Russian</b>	6.74	6.71	5.89	6.52	6.53
<b>Singhalese</b>	6.58	6.14	5.89	6.46	6.33
<b>Spanish</b>	6.65	6.89	5.93	6.62	6.59
<b>Tagalog</b>	7.17	6.68	6.14	6.8	6.76
<b>Tamil</b>	6.86	6.41	6.05	6.54	6.53
<b>Telugu</b>	6.34	5.8	5.75	6.08	6.05
<b>Thai</b>	6.24	6.03	5.46	5.9	5.97
<b>Turkish</b>	6.42	6.42	5.7	6.22	6.25
<b>Ukrainian</b>	6.62	6.57	5.94	6.48	6.47
<b>Urdu</b>	6.61	6.21	5.97	6.47	6.38
<b>Uzbek</b>	5.57	5.56	5.23	5.55	5.54
<b>Vietnamese</b>	5.97	6.17	5.59	5.71	5.93

\* First language as self-chosen by test takers drawn from a wide range of nationalities