CHAPTER-3
THE STATUS QUO OF WRITING

3.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the execution of the English course at the Intermediate level with specific reference to the “writing” component. A detailed description of the objectives of the course and the contents of the textbooks is given along with Teaching Methodology and Evaluation procedures. A brief description has been given about the Board of Intermediate, Andhra Pradesh, an authoritative body which prescribes courses and oversees their execution.

3.2. Intermediate Education in Andhra Pradesh

The Board of Intermediate Education regulates and supervises the system of Intermediate education. It executes and governs various activities that include devising of courses of study, prescribing syllabus, conducting examinations, granting affiliations to colleges and providing direction, support and leadership for all educational institutions under its jurisdiction.

The Board of Intermediate Education aims (as cited in the website-www.bieap.gov.in) at continuous improvement of education in the state and promotes the vision of world-class education in Andhra Pradesh through quality leadership, support and services.

The combination of courses offered by BIE are of two broad types: General and Vocational. M.P.C, Bi.P.C, M.E.C and C.E.C are the most
popular groups among the students. Very few students choose the Vocational courses.

Of all the courses mentioned above, the number of students who chose M.P.C, Bi.P.C and M.E.C courses as optional are more than 60% as per records. English is the first language and any one of the following languages could be taken as a second language depending on its availability in the college where a student studies: Telugu, Hindi, Urdu, Sanskrit, Arabic, French, Tamil, Kannada, Oriya and Marathi.

3.3. Importance of English and Writing in English at Intermediate level

‘Intermediate’, as the term itself indicates is an intermediary stage both in the personal and academic life of a student. Having completed their tenth standard by fifteen years of age, the students are at the prime of their teen age when they come to the Intermediate level. Students go through a stage of physical, mental and emotional transition during this stage. They acquire a new identity as ‘college students’, while they were mere ‘school children’ till their tenth standard.

The rather difficult choice of subjects the students makes at this stage, by and large, decides their future career. For instance, a student wishing to become a doctor has to take Bi.P.C group (Biology, Physics and Chemistry) and a student wishing to become an engineer has to opt only for M.P.C group
(Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry). Thus the Intermediate stage is very crucial as students need to make their general career choices at this stage.

The only common compulsory subject for all the students who join Intermediate, irrespective of their group, is English. Given the importance of English in settling the students in any profession, the Board of Intermediate Education has made English a compulsory subject for all the students.

It is significant to note that the number of students opting to do their intermediate in English medium has been increasing rapidly for the last few years.

Some of the private colleges have actually done away with Telugu medium completely. When the researcher went to one of the corporate colleges in Tirupati for the conduct of survey, it was learnt that this college has in all 125 sections of first and second year Intermediate students and they do not have a single Telugu medium section. It was also learnt that the college did have Telugu medium sections till three years ago but as the numbers kept dwindling, it did away with them.

The drastic fall in the number of students opting for Telugu medium and the rapid increase in the number opting for English medium speak volumes for the growing importance of English in the academic and professional domains.

Writing, though considered secondary to speech is a very important skill used extensively in both academic and professional fields. Hence
students need to be trained as good writers right from school level and more focused training is to be provided from Intermediate stage.

3.4. Execution of the First and Second year English courses vis-à-vis the Writing Skill

This section examines how the different components of the English course, namely, objectives, syllabi, text books, teaching methods and examinations accommodate the writing skills in them.

3.4.1. Objectives and Contents of Intermediate English text books

Board of Intermediate Education, Andhra Pradesh, under the aegis of English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad has designed two books for I and II year students. One is the text book and the second one is a workbook which is an authoritative supplement.

The Board of Intermediate Education has not issued any explicit objectives for the English courses. But one could draw the implicit objectives of the courses from the forewords prefixed to the text books. As the Chief Coordinator of the text book preparation committee, Prof. Hemalatha Nagarajan points out in the first year book.

The primary aim of this book is to develop an interest in English among students and motivate them to learn the language. Research in second language acquisition has shown that one of the most important factors in learning a language is ‘motivation or affect’.

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The foreword contains nothing specific about the development of writing skill. It, however, points out that the text books have followed a skill-based approach where all the four skills are integrated. It further specifies that the literary texts used in the text book are meant to be taught for promoting the language skills and not so much for literary skills:

“On the whole, the approach is a skill-based one where all the four skills are integrated. Integrating the four skills presents a ‘holistic’ view of language and prepares students for the use of language in the real world.

There are two ends to teaching literature: firstly, literature for literature’s sake and secondly, language through literature. Our endeavor in this textbook is the latter. It shows how different genres like prose, poetry, short stories and plays can be exploited by the teacher to teach the nuances of the English language”.

3.4.1a. Contents of the first year text book

The text book is divided into various sections, namely, Prose, Poetry, Short stories, Grammar, Study Skills and Communication Skills.

The prose section contains essays that are authentic pieces which deal with varied topics like science, sport, gender issues, lateral thinking, the triumph of human spirit in times of crisis and the education system. Each of the prose lessons is followed by a glossary (which includes a phonetic
transcription of the word or phrase, its meaning and an example of its usage and tasks in vocabulary, grammar and writing). The format is as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-tasks</th>
<th>Reading tasks for skimming and scanning</th>
<th>Vocabulary tasks</th>
<th>Grammar tasks</th>
<th>Writing tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The poems deal with themes like friendship, the evil effects of television on young minds, a witty poem on the spider and the fly, lessons learnt by a father from his son and celebration of Mother’s Day.

Grammar, study skills and Communication Skills together form a separate section. Grammar exercises are given and the Communication Skills focus on different functions of language like asking for information, apologizing, complaining etc and also teaches students to transfer visual to verbal data. Reading comprehension, dialogue writing and answering questions are the other units in this section.

The second year text book also contains a foreword which contains the same view as that of the first year text book:

This textbook is designed for use by Intermediate Second Year students of Andhra Pradesh. The primary aim of any text book is to ignite curiosity and interest in students in the subject taught. This book is designed to develop in students an interest in the English language and motivate them to learn it. This text book is not an end to itself but a means to the end of achieving proficiency in the language.
Research in second language acquisition has shown that one of the most important factors in learning a language is ‘motivation or effect’. To achieve this end, topics of general interest in simple, conversational English have been chosen.

Regarding the teaching of writing skill nothing is said in the foreword except to repeat the same sentences used in the foreword of the first year textbook.

From a close study of the implicit objective that can be derived from the forewords to the two year text books, it can be concluded that the English courses for the first and second year do not have separate objectives. They are offered with the main aim of motivating the learners to learn the language by incorporating in the text books “topics of general interest in simple, conversational English”.

It is to be noted that no specific objectives are spelt out for the development of the writing skill in the students, though writing tasks are incorporated in the text books.

3.4.1b. Contents of the second year text book

The text book is divided into Prose, Poetry, Non-detailed text and Study Skills and Communicative Skills. Most of the essays are authentic pieces which deal with varied topics like science, qualities required to succeed in life, body building, lives of great people, motherhood and the ill-effects of spoon feeding. Each prose unit is followed by a glossary (with phonetic
transcription), notes on usage, vocabulary, grammar and writing tasks. The format is as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-reading tasks</th>
<th>Reading tasks for skimming and scanning</th>
<th>Vocabulary tasks</th>
<th>Grammar tasks</th>
<th>Writing tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

There are five poems in the poetry section. The poem “Equipment is an inspirational one that teaches us that all men are equal”. The “Giving Tree” is a beautiful analogy of the sacrificing nature of the parents, especially, mother who expects nothing in return. Human family reinforces the point that all human beings belong to one family in spite of surface differences. “Bull in the city” is the sarcastic comment on modern man who is busy with daily chores that has no time to stare or savor the beauties of life” Harvest Hymn” is a serious comment on man’s callous attitude to nature.

The third section, which is a non-detailed text, is a condensed version of George Orwell’s political satire “Animal Farm” where the dictum “All animals are equal” gradually changes to “All animals are equal but some are more equal than others”.

The fourth section on Study and communication skills focuses on practical aspects of conversation in formal and informal contexts, letter writing, describing a process, writing a resume or curriculum vitae, reading
comprehension, understanding the language of advertisements, form-filling, vocabulary building, and pronunciation practice, especially word-stress.

3.4.2. Teaching Materials

The Board of Intermediate Education has prescribed CDs, text books and work books as a part of teaching materials for the English courses.

3.4.2.1a. CDs for listening exercises

The section on speech practice has an audio CD to go with it which can be played during leisure to enrich and enhance the listening and speaking skills of the students, but the CD is not sold along with the text books, it is not freely available. No student or teacher among the subjects interviewed for the survey has either seen or heard the CD. It is mentioned in the Academic Organizer (2012-2013 edition) which is published by the Board of Intermediate Education that a total of 26 CDs both for I and II year are available. One has to contact them through their website and place order for them where each CD costs Rs. 25/- but neither the private college nor the government college teachers are aware of them.

3.4.2.1b. Work books for first and second year students

The work books have been introduced as supplements for the text books with a view to provide ample grammar exercises for practice. Elaborate explanation has been provided for the lessons included in prose, poetry and short stories. The questions given at the end of every lesson have been
answered along with grammar and other exercises. Apart from the “Writing tasks” that were given at the end of every prose lesson, additional writing tasks are given in the workbooks. Similarly, the questions and the tasks at the end of poetry also have been answered in the workbooks. Additional grammar exercises have been solved. In the first year and second year workbooks, the exercises from study and communication skills have been dealt with at length in a systematic manner. Elaborate exercises have been provided, so that the student gets sufficient practice. These exercises serve a dual purpose as they have been designed such that they can enhance the understanding of the text.

All this has been done for the benefit of those thousands of students, who do not have good command over the language and who depend heavily on “guides” which are of dubious quality. Students are expected to practice the exercise given in the workbooks.

However, the workbooks are prescribed as optional materials as a result of which no student from the private colleges included in the survey have bought them.

3.5 Weightage given to writing in the syllabus/text books

Writing as such is given less weightage in first year text book and workbook. Items of grammar such as parts of speech, articles, prepositions, verb forms, direct and indirect speech, active and passive voice, question forms and tags and degrees of comparison of adjectives have been emphasized.
The Annual Academic Plan clearly describes the number of hours allotted for writing skills. The table included in the text book is given below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month No. of working days</th>
<th>Poetry &amp; Prose</th>
<th>Non detailed text</th>
<th>Reading/writing skills</th>
<th>Communication skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jun 25 days</td>
<td>Introduction to Syllabus (2) Model paper (2)</td>
<td>Parts of speech (5) Comprehension (5) (unseen)</td>
<td>Silent letters (2) Missing letters (3) Odd sounds (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jul 26 days</td>
<td>On Friendship (4) thinking out of the Box: lateral Thinking (6) After Twenty Years (4)</td>
<td>Articles (3) Prepositions (3) Comprehension (2) (unseen)</td>
<td>Vowels Diphtongs Consonants (4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug 25 days</td>
<td>Television (4) Gender bias (5) The Gold Frame (3)</td>
<td>Verb forms (7) Transcoding Information (3)</td>
<td>Transcription (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep 23 days</td>
<td>A Spider and a fly (5) the Art of Wicket Keeping: The Uttakh-Bhaitakh Breed (5) The Story Teller (3)</td>
<td>Direct and indirect speech (4) Transcoding Information (3)</td>
<td>Dialogue Writing (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 20 days</td>
<td>Mother’s Day (4)</td>
<td>Active &amp; Passive Voice (5)</td>
<td>Transcription (6) Syllable (5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 23 days</td>
<td>Anecdote for Fathers (4) Robots and People (5) The Face on the Wall (3)</td>
<td>Combining Sentences (6)</td>
<td>Vocabulary (5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 24 days</td>
<td>You’re on the 87th Floor and Something’s Terribly Wrong (5) The Nightingale and the Rose (4)</td>
<td>Question forms and Question tags (6) Degrees of Comparison of Adjectives (4)</td>
<td>Dialogue-Writing (4) Odd sounds (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 18 days</td>
<td>The Refund (6) Bepin Choudhury’s Lapse of Memory (3)</td>
<td>Correction of Sentences (6)</td>
<td>Revision</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 22 days</td>
<td>Revision</td>
<td>Revision</td>
<td>Revision</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At the end of every prose lesson, a writing task is given preceding a model passage for the students to follow it. The contents that fall under writing category are parts of speech, unseen comprehension, articles, prepositions, verb forms, transcoding information, direct and indirect speech, active and passive voice, combining sentences, question forms and question tags, degree of comparison of adjective and finally correction of sentences. All these components are considered a part of writing skill as per the academic plan which is mentioned above. The amount of time allotted for the writing skills is 28 percent of all the teaching hours. But when we take into consideration components like Transcription, Dialogue Writing and Vocabulary under writing, the amount of time allotted becomes reasonably high that is 38.3 percent. The academic plan clearly shows that these contents fall under communication skills. Here writing could also be seen as a communication skills.

Writing is given relatively more weightage in the II Year textbooks. Apart from vocabulary and grammar exercises that are given at the end of every prose lesson, writing tasks with a model and additional writing tasks are given.

Study and Communication skills section consists of various writing tasks such as letter writing, note-making, describing a process, curriculum vitae and completing a form. Workbooks are designed with an intention of improving students’ writing by providing them a variety of tasks. These books are placed just as an option before the students. Those who are interested in improving their skills can make the most out of these books.
The number of hours allotted for teaching ‘writing’ through various tasks has been mentioned in the Annual Academic plan. The Annual Academic Plan table is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month No. of working days</th>
<th>Poetry &amp; Prose</th>
<th>Non detailed text</th>
<th>Reading/writing skills</th>
<th>Communication skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jun 25 days</td>
<td>Introduction to Syllabus (3) Respond Instead of Reacting (4)</td>
<td>Introduction to Animal Farm (5)</td>
<td>Comprehension passages (5)</td>
<td>Introduction to Communication Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jul 25 days</td>
<td>How to Live to be 200 (5) Equipment (3)</td>
<td>Chapter 1(3)</td>
<td>Tables Barcharts Piecharts Tree Diagrams Flow Charts</td>
<td>Vocabulary (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug 25 days</td>
<td>Albert Einstein at School (6) The Giving Tree (4)</td>
<td>Chapters 2&amp; 3 (5)</td>
<td>Comprehension from non-detailed text (4) Advertisements (4)</td>
<td>Word-Stress (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep 20 days</td>
<td>Eight Cousins or One Brother? (4) Human Family (3)</td>
<td>Chapter 4 &amp; 5 (5)</td>
<td>Filling in Forms (3) Curriculum Vitae (3)</td>
<td>Word-Stress (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 20 days</td>
<td>Spoon-Feeding (5) Bull in the City (2)</td>
<td>Chapter 6(4)</td>
<td>Letter Writing (Formal) (5)</td>
<td>Vocabulary (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 23 days</td>
<td>Mother’s Day: One Act Play (8) Harvest Hymn (3)</td>
<td>Chapter 7&amp;8 (6)</td>
<td>Letter Writing (informal) (3) Process description (2)</td>
<td>Word-Stress (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 20 days</td>
<td></td>
<td>Chapter 9(3)</td>
<td>Note Making (8) Process Description (4)</td>
<td>Conversation Practice (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 18 days</td>
<td></td>
<td>Chapter 10(4)</td>
<td>Comprehension (2) Form Filling (2) Curriculum Vitae (2) Letters (2)</td>
<td>Word stress (2) Vocabulary (2) Conversation Practice (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 22 days</td>
<td>Revision</td>
<td>Revision</td>
<td>Revision</td>
<td>Revision</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.6. Teaching Methodology

This section examines how the writing skill is dealt with by the teachers of English in their teaching practice.

Writing in Teaching

a. Time allotted for first year

Writing in the form of tasks is not given any significant weightage in the I year text book and workbook. As per the academic plan in the textbook, the number of hours/days allotted for teaching English is 184, where parts of speech, articles, prepositions, comprehension, verb forms, direct and indirect speech, active and passive voice, transcription, vocabulary, dialogue writing, degrees of comparison of adjectives and correction of sentences accounts to 80 hours/days of teaching ‘writing’ exclusively.

Though more than 40% of the schedule is allotted for teaching writing, this does not help the students/learners in improving their writing on the whole.

b. Time allotted for Second Year

‘Writing’ is given importance in the second year text book and workbook. The total number of days/ hours allotted for teaching English is 172. Writing comprises Comprehension passages, Tables, Bar charts, Pie charts, Tree Diagrams, Flow charts, Advertisements, Filling in forms, Curriculum vitae. Letter writing, Process description, Note-making and Vocabulary.
These components are allotted 69 hours/days of teaching that is 40% of the total time.

English is given second preference of all the subjects in academics. It is taught and tested for scoring purpose, not for improving the communication skills. The students are given printed materials which have the ready-made answers at their disposal which in a way stops them from thinking and writing on their own.

3.6.1. Time allotted for teaching English in Colleges

It is to be noted that though no focus on writing skill is reflected in the objectives of the text books, the academic plan does provide 40% weightage to the teaching of writing by allotting ample time for the teaching of grammar and vocabulary which are seen as essential for the mastery of language in general and writing in particular.

English is the most neglected subject in colleges while other group subjects like Science, Mathematics, Commerce and Economics are given more importance. These subjects are considered important for it is believed that a student’s career is secured by focusing more on these content subjects.

The number of hours allotted for teaching English in most of the private colleges is three hours a week, where it has to be six hours a week. There is a step-motherly treatment towards this language which results in the poor performance of the students.
The interviews conducted with the teachers in private colleges reveal that they are hard pressed for time to take up the exercises and activities given at the end of every lesson. They are just given three hours per week, whereas teachers in government colleges are given six hours a week. This clearly points to the undervaluing of English by the private colleges.

3.6.2 Execution of teaching materials in colleges by students and teachers

The Board of Intermediate has prescribed textbooks, workbooks and CDs for the students as well as the teachers. Though enough teaching material is provided, neither the teachers and students of private colleges nor of the government colleges follow them.

a. Private colleges

In private colleges the students use textbooks and the printed material of the syllabus given by the colleges. Most of the time students do not buy the textbooks. Workbooks are totally ignored. Students rely either on the printed material supplied by the college or on the ‘guides’ that are available in the market. Teachers also do not have to struggle teaching ‘writing’ as a skill because everything is readily available and students are habituated to spoon-feeding.

b. Government colleges

The teachers and students from government colleges follow the textbooks and guides. Once again the workbooks are neglected.
The students can make the best out of the given material. The irony is, the teachers in private colleges are not given sufficient time to make the students workout all the exercises that are given. Moreover the workbooks are prescribed as optional by the Board of Intermediate Education. It is just meant to enrich the skills of the students. So the workbooks are not read and practiced. As a result, students were at a loss in March 2013 Board Examination where 2 lakh students from I year failed in English for the reason that many questions from grammar in the final examination were given from the work book which the students had never gone through.

### 3.7. Evaluation Procedures

The students are tested and evaluated through written examinations. The Board of Intermediate Education conducts exams annually which are Intermediate Public Examinations (IPE).

#### 3.7.1 Writing and Examination pattern

The final examination the students take in English at the end of the course cannot be viewed as an exam that tests exclusively the writing skills of the students, as the students are expected to write their answers in the exam. In this sense, an exam in English is as much a written exam as one in Physics or History where students actually write their answers in English.

This section examines to what extent the final English exams conducted by the Board of Intermediate Education tests the writing skills of
the students, by critically looking at the items included in the model question papers of both first and second years.

3.7.1.a First year

The performance of students in their academics is tested through writing. The first year English examination conducted at the end of the academic year includes:

- text-based questions
- questions on Comprehension passages (seen and unseen),
- grammar,
- transcoding the information-table to text, text to diagram, vice versa, transcribing words to phonetic script
- and dialogue writing.

Dialogue writing partially tests the writing ability of a student; mostly the speaking ability where the student thinks of what he would speak or converse and write it in the form of a dialogue. Hence writing as a process of thinking on one’s own is not given any weightage in text books in the form of a syllabus or in examinations.

3.7.1.b Second year

The second year students are also tested in ‘writing’ in their examinations. The question paper contains purely text-based questions, which comprises annotations, questions from prose, poetry and advertisement
followed by questions, interpretation of verbal data, letter writing, preparation of curriculum vitae.

The model question papers of first and second year are appended which will give a clear picture of the marks allotted exclusively to writing.

3.8 Conclusion

The present chapter has examined the status quo of writing skill at the intermediate level in Andhra Pradesh by taking into considering the different components of the two year English courses:

The objectives of the courses which may be derived from the fore words of the text books do not make an exclusive mention of the writing skill. However, writing can be seen as a part of the “integrated skills” they mention.

The text books and the work books provide amply for the teaching of the writing skill.

The focus of the teaching methods, however, does not match with that of the text books. Teachers in the private colleges do not make the students do the exercises on writing given at the end of every lesson as they are given only three hours of English a week as against the stipulated six hours by the Board of Intermediate Education.

The English examinations conducted at the end of the first and second year text the writing skills of the students only partially.