CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION
CHAPTER-I

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1.1. Introduction

English has been used and studied as a language of the elites ever since the Europeans colonized India. It continues to occupy a prime position since then. In Tamilnadu, we have a plenty of English medium schools and colleges, where English is taught as a second language and used as a medium of instruction. The educational institutions in Tamilnadu teach English not only as a second language, but also provide the students the benefits of honing their communicative skills in it by using it as a medium of instruction.

The students, after completing their schooling continue their higher studies in colleges, where the medium of instruction is mostly English. English is given due importance as it plays a vital role in interaction and maintenance of decorum in the society. These social and professional needs serve as strong motivating factors to the pupils to acquire higher levels of proficiency in English language. Notwithstanding the systematic efforts taken by the educators and curriculum planners, there has been wide range of discussion about the quality of teaching English to our target pupils. Still there are a lot of problems, which stand in the way of learning English. One can attribute a lot of reasons for the problems the students encounter.
while learning English. Socio-economic background, educational set up, lack of motivation etc., are some of them.

These learning problems should be reduced if not eliminated totally. Thus, it is imperative to unearth the real reasons that hinder learning of English. The present study is carried out in this direction with an aim to assess the skill of writing written composition among the college students and, to find out the problems experienced by them in the process and suggest solutions for ameliorating the situation.

1.2. Conceptual Background

English Language Teaching (ELT) focuses on various skills at various levels starting from school to collegiate level. Language is a skill and the four skills viz., listening or understanding, speaking, reading and writing have to be taught. Each skill should be given equal importance while teaching so that there is a balanced development in learning. However, certain skills have to be emphasized more at certain phases of learning depending upon the need of the individual learners. For example, in the first 2-3 years of teaching a language, listening, reading and speech practice should be emphasized for some students and in the next 2-3 years, more attention should be paid to writing probably to other set of students.

We choose different texts for different audience and reasons. Our main intention is to communicate our ideas, thoughts, and feelings or put our message across. However, we have to learn
different styles and we should know the culture of writing (ethnography of writing) and various types of language to be used in different domains (pragmatic aspect of writing). If we wish to judge writing, we must always see whether it has communicated effectively considering the above factors.

Writing requires greater precision and care than speech, as it is a more formal activity, producing a permanent record. When we speak, we can judge the quality of our speech from listener's response and clarify any points, which may not be comprehended by the listeners. As no such interaction takes place in a piece of writing, our communication skills have to be unambiguous. Our writing will be effective only if it is clear, concise, exact, and appropriate. When we speak we adopt different tones of voices to reflect our moods and also the formality of the situation. In writing also, we have to pay attention to tone, stress, etc., through appropriate use of stylistic features and know when to use a formal style or an informal style. Our speech and writing can tell people a great deal about ourselves and perhaps, this is why we sometimes feel inhibited about situations requiring formal and informal speech or writing. In this respect, writing skill can be considered as a permanent testimony of the individuals' personality.

1.3. Acquisition of Second Language

P. Gurrey (1966) says that “all languages are used for communication, for expressing anything that we have attended to, for recording information, for thinking and for getting what we want and
so on. Language plays a great part in the mental, emotional, and social development of a person”.

Many people do not acquire a second language to a high level of proficiency. This has two interrelated consequences working on second language acquisition. First, it has led to the assumption that acquiring a second language is in some sense different from acquiring a first language and secondly, it has led to the institutionalisation of second language learning to a greater extent than with first language. Clearly, there are two ways in which the acquisition of a second language must differ from that of a first language. First language acquisition is in some sense the simultaneous development of the faculty of language as well as of the structure of a particular language, and it is apparently a natural and automatic product of the process of socialization with adult human beings. The close connection between language and social relationships applies both to first and second language development, and that there need not be basic differences between adult and child learning. There is interaction between language development and psychosocial situation and most intensive second language learning takes place in classrooms.

Every language has three constituents. They are sound, structure and vocabulary. The chief problem in learning a foreign language is to master its sound system, i.e., to understand the stream of speech, to hear the distinctive sound features and to approximate their production. The second problem is to grasp the structure of the
language, i.e., the arrangement of words into sentences. The third problem is to learn the vocabulary.

In learning a foreign language, the first task for the learner is to understand the sounds of the language. His/her second task is to master the way words are used to make sentences. The learner must have vocabulary to operate. Having mastered the sound and sentence patterns the learner can expand his/her vocabulary to any extent.

Fries (1948) says that "a person has 'learnt' a foreign language when he has thus first, within a limited vocabulary, mastered the sound system (that is, when he understands the stream of speech and achieves an understandable production of it) and second, made the structural devices (that is, the basic arrangement of utterance) matters of automatic habit." The fundamentals of the language, such as - the sound system and the structures within a limited vocabulary should be mastered through speech. It is through speech that the student is able to make the sentence patterns an automatic habit. To master a language, it is not necessary to read it, but to read a language, it is important to first master it orally. Without mastering a language orally, the process of reading is reduced only to translation, i.e., finding word equivalents. Such a reader never grasps the thought and spirit of the foreign language. Thus, we may say that a pupil knows a language if he has mastered its basic speech and grammatical patterns and essential vocabulary through the basic skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing.
1.4. Writing

Writing is perhaps one of the most demanding of skills. It has to be deliberately cultivated. Unlike listening and speaking, it is not something, which is natural to humans - it is a skill, which has been developed, in civilized society to pass on knowledge or messages beyond the constraints of here and now.

The skill of writing includes a number of sub-skills. The sub-skills are:

1. Mechanics - Handwriting, spelling, punctuation, etc.
2. Word choice - Vocabulary, idiom, tone.
3. Organisation - Paragraphs, topic and support, cohesion and unity.
4. Syntax - Sentence structure, sentence boundaries, stylistic, etc.
5. Grammar - Rules for verbs, agreement, articles, pronouns, etc.
6. Content - Relevance, clarity, originality, logic, etc.
7. The writing process - Getting ideas, getting started, writing drafts, revising, etc.
8. Purpose - The reason for writing, justification.

In writing, even a simple thing like the direction of writing can be a problem. In English, we write from left to right but learners whose primary schooling has been in Urdu would have learnt to write
from right to left or from top to bottom. Different approaches to teach writing are used in different classes, depending on when students begin to learn English.

In teaching writing skills, teachers concentrate on paragraph writing. This means that writing is more important than good handwriting, motor-mechanical skills, knowledge of grammar etc. Then the emphasis is on communication of ideas. It means that focus is on the sequencing and linking of ideas and sentences, rather than on grammar.

Coherence or clarity of ideas and their cohesion or linkage is what is important. Cohesion is achieved linguistically with linkers and connectives, whereas coherence is the way where ideas hang together, not necessarily only through linguistic devices, but essentially through an expression of clarity that exists in thinking. Both fluency and accuracy are important in writing. This means knowing what to say and writing it accurately are important. So, good writing is an expression of clear thinking.

Writing aims at clear and efficient communication. Ann Raimes (1983) diagrammatically represents the complexity of sub-skills that go to make a piece of writing coherent, effective and communicative. The following diagram shows what writers have to deal with as they produce a piece of writing.
1.5. Producing a Piece of Writing

Ann, Raimes (1983)

As teachers have stressed different features of the diagram, combining them with how they think writing is learnt, they have developed a variety of approaches to the teaching of writing.

1.6. Aim and Scope of the Study

This study aims at "A Linguistic Assessment of the Writing Skill of Graduate Students in English Composition". The study is carried out on the college students studying in the affiliated colleges of Bharathiar University, located both in urban and rural areas of Coimbatore. From those colleges, 143 samples representing important variables have been drawn for the present study.
The chief focus of this study is to assess the performance of the college students in English writing skill, so as to identify the problematic areas and propose remedial measures. Though the collegiate students have studied English language for more than a decade, they are not at ease while writing in English. The grammatical structure of English language is a problem to the learners who learn English as a second language. The students' socio-economic and psychological background influences their performance in writing English. So the data elicited was subjected to analysis for evaluation.

1.7. Objectives of the Present Study

1. To identify the methods of teaching written composition adopted by the teachers.

2. To test the performance level of the students in written composition from the point of view of discourse.

3. To evaluate the performance of the college students in written composition and possibilities to correlate their performances with the various social variables such as sex, educational background, parents educational level, occupation of the parents, place of domicile: urban or rural etc.,

4. To evaluate the use and frequency of the vocabulary in compositions.

5. To evaluate the use of content words in compositions.
6. To describe the morphological features as found in the compositions of the informants.

7. To study the problems involved in framing sentences and their transformations.

1.8. Methodology

Any type of research problem requires series of rigorous steps to arrive at accurate results. As far as this study is concerned, the researcher has selected the descriptive method for the present analysis.

The first part of the questionnaire prepared for this study was used to elicit information on the socio-economic and educational background of the students and their interest and efficiency in using English language. The second part of the questionnaire elicited information on their skill, by testing their writing skill in written compositions, in the following genres through descriptive writing.

1. Letter writing
2. Job application
3. Invitation
4. Dialogue
5. Developing the hints and
6. Comprehension passage
Administering the above tools, data was elicited from 143 students studying in colleges located both in urban and rural areas of Coimbatore, Tamilnadu.

1.9. Review of Literature

The empirical data made available through some of the studies in the field of English language teaching in India and abroad, focus on the points of the difficulties in writing English at various levels. The studies have concentrated on error analysis at syntactic level, classroom interaction, curriculum planning, comparative studies on various aspects at school and college level of second language learning/teaching and so on.

A review of the previous works is presented in this section. "A Work on Composition-rhetoric, Creative Writing and Institutional Reform: toward a New Subject", by Stephan Randall (Albany 2003), examines the radically different ways that writing and writing pedagogies have been constructed within the two institutional enterprises responsible for teaching undergraduate writers: composition-rhetoric and creative writing. He argues that composition-rhetoric and creative writing artificially divide writing into binaries, they offer students working in either curricular location partial and partisan definitions of writing and this restricts students' potential and identities as producers of text. Thus it encourages students to approach writing as simultaneous discourse and art, work and play-without.
Yet another work is “Finding our “own words”: Teaching and Learning Summarizing in a First Year College Composition Course”, by Troutman Mike Que (Maryland 2003). This study was developed from previously teaching summary paper to college freshmen in a composition course. Students were given the assignment of writing a summary of a piece of expository text. Issues surfaced in regard to quoting, patch writing, paraphrasing and reading comprehension. The research returned to the college for this research study to ask, what are the understandings of summarizing for college freshmen in the context of learning it? Students highlighted issue using the words of the author either in direct quotations or not. They summarized the author's text with problematic interpretations that showed challenges with reading comprehension. And they demonstrated a desire to incorporate their opinions, which included manifestations of selection of main points, using their own words, critical thought of the article, and appreciation of the author's ideas. Students learned that it is their thinking that is valued in a written assignment.

Nickoson-Massey, Lee Anne (Illinois 2003) entitled, “The Making and Unmaking of the Authorities on the Complexities of Writing Assessment as a Rhetorically and Institutionally Situated Activity”, have argued that writing assessment marks a key point of contact between individual writing processes and larger social forces and thus provides a promising area of research in continuing discussions of post-process composition. This dissertation illustrates and extends theories of rhetorical and political agency as complex, contingent, and
socially situated by explicitly demonstrating the multiple-directed flow of power in the composition classroom. Their actions suggest the students are introduced to dominant discourses by internalizing institutionally sanctioned standards of writing assessment, a reading reinforced by their refusal to actually use their expertise as assessors to influence each others' grades. Yet, read another way, the students' actions constitute a politically astute act of resistance to make attempt at de-centring a classroom that from an institutional point of view can never truly be decentred.

Another study worthy of mention is, "Academic Writing Needs: An Exploratory Study of the Writing Needs of ESL Students", by Vifansi Ezekiei Angu (Purdue 2002). The objective of this study was to determine the academic writing needs of students for whom English is a second language (ESL students) and to delineate between target and learning needs. It was concluded that besides target needs, which are stated in course goals as the behaviour expected of students at the end of the course, there are learning needs, which constitute the difficulties, ESL learners encounter, as a result of their previous experience and language background. The study suggests a number of implications for ESL writing instruction.

Next one is "Attitudes as the Key to the Writing Process", by Robie, Elizabeth Macdonald (Georgia 2003) Extending the current theory on attitudes, the anecdotal-qualitative study reviews the methodology of high school and college composition instructors, to
implement attitude as the conduct to initiate more dynamic responses from students, focusing on relevant issues. As this process approach continues to evolve any synthesis, new trends in composition instruction, the implications of positive attitude as the key to the writing, push educators towards a more serious consideration in the role of a composition instructor as a catalyst to the process.

A study entitled “The Evaluation of the Four Skills of Language of Graduate Students in English”, by V.M. Subramaniam (2002), concentrates both on academic and non-academic domains. The research has given importance to all the four skills at basic level. In this study a comprehension passage was given and the informants were asked to identify the meaning of the words through multiple choices, which has enabled the researcher to identify the problematic areas at word level. The problems at syntactic level were analysed by asking the informants to transform sentences, change the tense of the sentences, change the voice of the sentences, change the subject of the sentences, write sentences by making use of the given words and translate a conversation.

Data were elicited from the above exercises and the linguistic features like dropping’s’ in verbs, additions of ‘s’ with verbs, incorrect selection of auxiliary verbs, incorrect selection of subject, object in gender, incorrect matching of adjectives, pronouns, errors due to the wrong use of articles, prepositions, adjectives, adverbs, pronoun, noun numbers, vocabulary, homophones, spelling and some
incomplete sentences were analysed. The researcher had conducted the study by giving some general suggestions in teaching/learning of the second language for the college students in writing skill.

The researcher has concentrated only on the linguistic aspects of the informants in developing the writing skill. But this alone cannot give a good result in finding the grass root problems faced by the students in developing the writing skill in the target language.

Hence the aim of the present study is to find out the problems of the students in learning the target language and mastering the writing skill, that is, composition.

1.10. Significance of the Study

Among the four linguistic skills, the writing skill is important and imperative in all walks of life. So an in-depth study of writing skill has been taken up exclusively in a scientific way in Tamilnadu where ESL setting prevails in schools and colleges.

Necessary remedial measures have to be developed for improving the writing skill of the college students. It is said that 75 percent of the world's mail is in English and that 50 percent of the world's scientific literature is in English. Hence a country has to rely on the printed matter for ideas and information. In view of this situation, productive skill becomes an indispensable quality among students. Hence, the present study has been undertaken to evaluate the writing skill.
The present work contributes for the development of English Language Teaching (ELT) as an enquiry and as a practice. In other words, the present work tries to unearth some of the intricacies found in teaching and learning writing skill especially the compositions in English language that may improve the state of affairs of teaching English as second language.

Since the present study assesses the writing skill of the college students in English composition, the informants have been selected from a cross-section of the society so as to give representation to all social groups based on the variables such as caste, income group, place of domicile, parental literacy, etc. One can have a total picture about the scene of English language teaching and learning in Tamil Nadu in general and Coimbatore district in particular. Based on the results of the study, suggestions for remedial measures to improve the standard of teaching/learning English have been given. On the whole, the present study directly and indirectly endeavours to develop the competence and performance of the college students in the English language.

1.11. Plan of the Study

The study has been reported in the following eight chapters:

1. Introduction

2. Discourse Structure

3. Socio-Economic Profiles
4. Use of Vocabulary Items
5. Lexical Choice
6. Morphological Features
7. Syntactic Patterns
8. Conclusion

The layout of each of the chapters is drawn as follows:

1.11.1. Chapter I: Introduction

This chapter deals with the importance of English language, objectives of teaching English, conceptual background, acquisition of second language, approaches of teaching/learning and writing. This chapter also contains a review of literature, aim and scope of the study, the method of study, particulars about the questionnaire, data elicitation and processing.

1.11.2. Chapter II: Discourse Structure

This chapter presents some of the aspects of teaching written composition, introduction on types of composition, aims of oral and written composition, types and varieties of written composition and its forms. An elaborate introduction with detailed information on the situation and use of the compositions in letter writing, job application, dialogue, developing hints, invitation and comprehension passage are given in this chapter. The students were asked to answer the questions on all the compositions. It was later analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively, to find out whether the students have
produced all the features correctly while writing the compositions in English. The analysis probes the difficulties experienced in producing the compositions. The researcher towards the end of the chapter has suggested some remedial measures for the problems.

1.11.3. Chapter III: Socio-Economic Profiles

In this chapter a null hypothesis has been framed so as to find out whether the socio-economic variables such as the generation of literacy, residential area of the students, parents' education and occupation and sex affect the medium of study. The social parameters that control the choice of medium of education in the Indian context have been probed in a detailed manner in this chapter. The data collected using the questionnaires were statistically analysed using the chi-square test technique.

1.11.4. Chapter IV: Use of Vocabulary Items

Word power of the students and the frequency counts of occurrence of lexical items are analysed here in the non-native Indian situation. The maximum and minimum counts were differentiated through the statistical spreadsheet in excel to present the performance of the students while writing the compositions in English.

It has been found out that the students' maximum and minimum counts depend not only upon the medium of study at school level but also on their socio-economic background. Informants have
produced more than 300 words per hour when they were tested on the writing skill. The myth, that the students who have studied in matriculation schools master the target language (English) well, has been disproved through this study. The miracle is that the students who have completed their schooling in Tamil medium at times perform well than the students from English medium schools.

1.11.5. Chapter V: Lexical Choice

The chapter contains an introduction to lexical categories. Most challenging of all, however, is the confusing number of words that look and spell the same, but have often widely different meanings. This chapter on lexical choice discusses about the basic property of words and the arbitrary relationship they exhibit between meaning and form. The analysis was made to find out the lexical choice of the informants in written composition. From the data we could find that the students have committed errors at the phonological and grammatical levels. The errors found in the phonological and the grammatical categories are analysed in detail.

1.11.6. Chapter VI: Morphological Features

The internal structure of words and processes of word formation in English as used by the college students while writing composition are analysed in this chapter. The morphemes, the minimal syntactically relevant items are categorized into two main distinctions, that is, free (lexical) and bound (grammatical) morphemes. The bound (grammatical) morphemes are the plural markers, (-s), noun, verb
agreements, tense markers etc. The free (lexical) morphemes are nothing but the simple words. The responses from the students were subjected to analysis in all the morphological categories given above. Some other morphological errors are found due to inflectional affixes, zero morpheme, case marker, singular plural agreement, derivations and infinitives.

1.11.7. Chapter VII: Syntactic Patterns

This chapter gives a brief introduction to English syntax, types of sentences, simple sentences, complex sentences in particular, transformation of sentences, long sentences, punctuations and some grammatical features like prepositions, articles, etc. The data was analysed with focus on the categories mentioned earlier. This chapter comprises of problems encountered by the informants in framing sentences while writing compositions in English. While constructing long sentences they use improper punctuations.

1.11.8. Chapter VIII: Conclusion

This chapter summarizes the results of the study in a nutshell. Some suggestions to tackle the problems of teaching/learning the target language in general and the writing skill in particular are presented in this chapter.