CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Writing is a complex and ongoing process which is acquired in later stages of learning. The art of writing comprises skills and knowledge about texts, contexts, and readers. Besides, there are drafting and revising techniques along with the understanding of genre that writers have to equip themselves with in order to produce an effective text in an appropriate context.

Academic writing poses a new challenge for English L2 writers. The L2 writers put conscious effort and practice in composing, developing, and analyzing ideas. However, the main factor differentiating L1 and L2 writers is that L2 writers are bilingual and bicultural and have prior experiences as writers in their native languages. Learning L2 is not as easy as learning their native language. L2 learners have an additional challenge to acquire proficiency (application of grammatical competence) in the use of the language in order to master the writing techniques, skills, and strategies. L2 writing classroom is a heterogeneous community with students representing multiculturalism and multilingualism. Besides, they have different cognitive capacities and varied proficiency level of language. In short, L2 writers differ in their cognitive, social, cultural and proficiency aspects.

1.1 Cognitive factors

Writing composition is a cognitively complex process. The cognitive theory of writing suggests that acquiring academic language skills such as writing is a gradual process in which some aspects develop at a faster rate while others require much time and effort. Certain meta-cognitive strategies like planning, monitoring, formulating, cognitive strategies such as using appropriate linguistic information to complete a task, deciding
between linguistic choices, and affective/social strategies such as peer interaction and discussion are used by the writer in order to accomplish a writing task.

Writing as a process involves the use of mental operations to solve tasks using the above mentioned strategies in a non-linear recursive manner. Besides, writing is not a haphazard endeavor but a systematic effort which involves effective planning and decision-making. The writer moves back and forth to different stages like pre-writing, writing, and post-writing in order to produce a meaningful text. The process or cognitive theory instills in the writer the importance of awareness of audience, appropriate organization of ideas, and gives priority to meaning and content. The cognitive approach gives autonomy to students through the promotion of techniques like brain-storming, group discussion, and self-assessment while teachers guide students throughout as they write and provide formative feedback to them. Jordan (1997)\(^1\) describes this new relationship between teacher and student by explaining that the process approach enable students to make clearer decisions about the directions of their writing “by means of discussion, tasks, drafting, feedback and informed choices [thereby] encouraging students to be responsible for making improvements themselves.”

Language transfer is a cognitive factor explaining the similarities and differences in the writing processes of ESL writers in relation to native speakers of English. Many researches were devoted to this cognitive aspect of language learning. Some found striking similarities between the writing processes of ESL writers whereas others found L1 as an interfering factor resulting in errors. The interference was attributed to the fact that if the target and the native language were linguistically distant from each other, it caused difficulties for language learners whereas if they were structural and linguistic similarities between the two, it led to the facilitation of the L2 writing acquisition.

It was Flower and Hayes’ (1980, 1981) and Bereiter and Scardamalia’s model (1987) which the L2 writing researchers found guidance in explaining the L2 writing processes. Flower and Hayes (1981) proposed a cognitive process theory and described writing as a meaningful, goal-directed, thinking process hierarchically organized. It distinguished between skilled and unskilled writers and found that skilled ESL writers planned extensively and at a global level unlike the unskilled writers. Continuing this line of research in process pedagogy, Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) proposed a two model description of writing that distinguished between the easy and difficult tasks as performed by novice and expert writers. The first model depicted the writing process of novice or unskilled writers as they involve in much less complex tasks. The simple process that they engaged in was labeled as “knowledge telling process” whereas the other model that they proposed explained the cognitive processes employed by skilled writers as they attempt to complete complex and cognitively demanding tasks. According to them, they proposed a “knowledge transforming model” for the expert writers. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) defined knowledge telling as “a naturally acquired ability, common to almost everyone” while knowledge transforming as “a more studied ability involving skills that not everyone acquires” which involves a “deliberate, strategic control over parts of the process that are unattended to in more naturally developed ability”. Applicable to L2 writers in many ways, it had limitations as well. Descriptions such as “natural” and “common to almost everyone” does not apply to L2 writers in many ways, it had limitations as well.

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writers as they have to acquire this “knowledge telling” in their L2 with much effort. Further, both Flower and Hayes and Bereiter and Scardamalia models failed to account for the role of linguistic knowledge in writing ability. Unlike L1 writers who are naturally proficient in their linguistic competence, L2 writers struggle with the acquisition of L2 linguistic competence and acquire it in much later stages.

1.2 Social Factors

Traditional research to writing recognizes it as a cognitive effort. However, contemporary research has now begun to view writing as a socio-cultural act. Hamp-Lyons and Kroll (1997)\(^5\) defines writing as “an act that takes place within a context, that accomplishes a particular purpose, and that is appropriately shaped for its intended audience”. The meaning-making aspect of writing is rooted in the social contexts in which it takes place. Sperling (1996)\(^6\), for example, notes that ‘writing like language in general, [is] a meaning-making activity that is socially and culturally shaped and individually and socially purposeful.” Recognizing the influence of social dimension on writing, Hayes (1996)\(^7\) states: “[Writing] is also social because it is a social artifact and is carried out in a social setting. What we write, how we write and who we write to is shaped by social convention and by our history of social interaction… The genres in which we write were invented by other writers and the phrases we write often reflect phrases earlier writers have written”.

Second language learners face difficulty in adequately expressing themselves in English. These L2 writers generally have low proficiency or they are at the developmental stage


of acquiring proficiency in a target language. Therefore, texts composed by L2 writers are found to be less effective than those of their native English speaking peers (Silva, 1997).\(^8\) Further, research has suggested that L2 writers’ texts are generally shorter, less cohesive and fluent, and contain more errors. Among social factors, motivation and attitude plays a significant role in the successful acquisition of the language. There are various reasons for which students are motivated to learn a new language. However, the most common forms of motivation are integrative motivation and instrumental motivation with different purposes of language acquisition. Learners are motivated with the desire to integrate into the target language community. On the other hand, instrumental motivation is related to the external influences and incentives that learners have a strong desire to achieve. Instrumental motivation is related to the attainment of the professional goals such as applying for a job or writing a dissertation. Grabe and Kaplan (1996)\(^9\) list grades, higher proficiency etc. as factors that motivate besides integrative motivation. Both forms of motivation can develop high proficiency in writing in English.

Contact with the target language is also another social factor which contributes to the learning of the L2. Certainly, reading more academic texts, attending academic lectures and developing contacts with native speakers will result in the better acquisition of the L2. Providing students with ample opportunities to interact with native speakers in the campus will benefit their overall language development. More interaction will lead to an increased linguistic development of the writer getting to know the cultural conventions of the language and ending hesitation.


1.3 Cultural Factors

Cultural factors also shape a learner’s acquisition of the L2. In particular, cultural factors also influence students’ background, or schema knowledge, and decide the ways in which they will construct a text. Culture can be seen as an historically transmitted and systematic network of meanings enabling to develop, understand, and communicate our knowledge and beliefs about the world (Lantolf, 1999).10

Language and learning are integral elements of a culture. Culture is carried through and reflected in language. Culture defines the criteria for good writing as well. So, in order to master the skills of good writing in an L2, it is important for non-native speakers to familiarize themselves with the cultural conventions of the language. Often, native language speakers’ attitudes and educational practices may contrast and conflict with that of non-native speakers’ leading to the writing of the non-native speakers as confusing and unacceptable by native academic community. This happens when the two languages are culturally distant from each other. Differences not only exist at the orthography and linguistic levels in writing, but also in the styles and conventions that both cultures value. Academic writing involves “examining the kinds of issues a discipline considers important, why certain methods of inquiry and not others are sanctioned, how the conventions of a discipline shape text in that discipline, how individual writers represent themselves in a text, how texts are read and disseminated within the discipline, and how one text influences subsequent texts” (Spack, 1988: 38).11 The western system of education inculcate traits like critical thinking, individual creativity, and encourages students to form their own points of view adapting an analytical, questioning, and evaluating approach to the problem. Despite relying on traditional wisdom, they seek


new ways of inquiry into the writing process. Students engage themselves in analyzing problems, reflect on arguments, present critical stance to the topics, and voice their opinions to the audience in context. Thus, in the words of Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987)\textsuperscript{12} it is “knowledge transforming” where the writers add new perspective to the available knowledge.

Asian cultures, on the other hand, believe in conserving and reproducing existing knowledge. Instead of focusing on creativity and free thinking, they emphasize on strategies like memorization and imitation. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987)\textsuperscript{13} characterize these as “knowledge telling” representing simple, immature writing where the writer does not put in much effort and simply reproduces the existing knowledge. In such writing, no process of self discovery is involved.

Besides, in the western academic community it is the writer’s responsibility to express his/her views and convey his/her intended meanings in an explicit manner. L2 writer writes and perceives a writing topic or task in his/ her own way and brings his/ her background knowledge of the topic and experience in order to complete it. A native reader who is often ignorant of the writer’s L1 schemata and experience reads from another context. In some cases, the expectations of the readers are not met. In other words, the native readers may not find the writing as appropriate and suitable to the academic context. The gap between writer’s work and reader’s expectations hinders the effective communication of message. Some cultures, on the other hand, like Asian culture hold the readers responsible to unveil the intended meaning. For example, Japanese is a reader- responsible language i.e. the head responsibility lies on the readers to understand and make out hints and nuances, whereas English is a writer- responsible


language “since the person primarily responsible for effective communication is the writer” (Hinds, 1987). It is on the writer to make his topic, point of view, organization and meaning explicit to the readers.

Culture affects the kind of feedback teachers give and how students comprehend it. L1 technique of giving feedback may be different from the way L2 students receive feedback in their native classrooms. The cognitive approach to writing emphasizes correction focusing primarily on content and meaning with little attention paid to grammar and mechanics. While in some cultures correction usually relies on grammar and mechanics giving minimal attention to content. Students coming from such a culture have to learn to respond to such a feedback to change their focus from mechanics to meaning while reviewing their work.

Culture also influences peer review in a L2 composition classroom. Peer review has several benefits to offer. Peer review builds on revision strategies and develops a sense of audience among students. However, cultures like Asian value group membership and collectiveness to individualism and hence, tend to avoid criticism of peers’ work. For example, Chinese and Japanese students hesitate in directly pointing out peers’ mistakes. Whereas American students directly put their points welcoming an analytic and evaluative feedback from peers.

The way people organize their texts and arrange their ideas is also influenced by culture. So, cultural schemata of L2 students may vary considerably from the ways L1 students organize their texts. Cultural differences in the organization and arrangement of texts often leads to communication gap. This study of the influence of culture on texts is

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known as contrastive rhetoric. Contrastive rhetoric as coined by Connor (1996)\(^\text{15}\) studies written texts in the context of culture. It advocates that there are specific rhetorical conventions reflected in the written texts of every language. Different languages follow different rhetorical conventions as seen appropriate in their culture. Often L2 students unconsciously bring their knowledge of L1 rhetorical patterns to L2 writing thus, hindering the acquisition of effective writing skills. As Connor (1996)\(^\text{16}\) states that “the linguistic and rhetorical conventions of the first language interfere with the writing of the second language”. Contrastive rhetoric maintains that writing is a cultural phenomenon and to learn the conventions of writing in a language is to make oneself familiar with the culture of that language. Therefore, the writers should be familiar with the linguistic, rhetorical, and strategic conventions that operate in the target language culture. The knowledge of such conventions would also lead to a more clear understanding of the expectations of the readers.

These written conventions can be applied to academic, institutional, professional and disciplinary cultures. So, often the differences in writing are not due to the individual inadequacies but the cultural differences that are reflected in the writing of the non-native speakers. So, what is acceptable in an academic discourse community may seem to be inappropriate to the native speakers “particularly those who brings them a set of conventions that are at odds with those of the academic world they are entering” (Kutz, Groden and Zamel, 1993)\(^\text{17}\). For example, writing a summary in Spanish would be different from writing a summary in English. As a result, instructors should be aware of


the influence of various educational, social, and cultural backgrounds and experiences that students bring with them as they learn to write in the target language.

Thus, contrastive rhetoric has given new dimension to the writing theory and research. It has broadened the outlook towards the understanding and study of different languages. The knowledge of contrastive rhetoric would encourage teachers to understand the differences in writing, appreciating and accepting them and to shape their writing methods according to the needs and requirements of the students. Further, it facilitates cross-cultural understanding and traces the roots of the differences. The more distance between the native language and the target language, the greater the differences in writing styles and conventions. If target and native language belong to the same family of languages such as French and Spanish, the differences would be lesser having easy pathways for the learner to learn a new language.

1.4 Assessment and Evaluation

Assessment and evaluation of writing skills is a regular feature of a writing classroom. Though both the terms are often interchangeably used, they are different in many important ways. Assessment is a way of gathering information on a daily basis to understand the students’ learning progress and needs. Evaluation, on the other hand, is the interpretation of the information and evidences obtained from the assessment. Evaluation is basically a decision-making process in which important judgments are made regarding students, schools, and programs.

Assessment and evaluation are integral elements of any writing classroom. Effective assessment promotes teaching and learning and informs students of their achievements. It assists teachers in planning and guiding their instruction according to the needs of the learners. This process where assessment promotes teaching and learning in a writing
classroom is termed as “instructive evaluation” (Huot: 2002). Assessment takes place throughout the session in a classroom through different forms. Each form is used by the teacher to obtain different evidences of learning of individual students. For example, formative assessment (often termed “assessment for learning”) occurs regularly either after the end of a unit or a topic. It informs the teachers of where the students stand at a particular point of learning and whether they have understood a particular concept or unit before proceeding to the next. Accordingly, it provides diagnostic information regarding the areas of weaknesses in their learning and assists teachers in effectively planning the activities according to the needs of the students. Another common form of assessment is summative assessment which is often termed as “assessment of learning”. Being evaluative in nature, it occurs at the end of a unit or semester and is used for comparing the individual student’s performance with that of others in the same class or level. It also compares a school’s performance with other schools over a period of time in order to evaluate the achievements and progress that a particular school has made. It is basically judgmental in nature and does not provide qualitative feedback on student’s performances. It is often accompanied with grades or ranks. The other form is subjective or direct assessment which requires students to demonstrate the actual writing skills in the forms of essays, narratives, projects, and dissertations etc. The purpose of these direct assessments is to measure the complex cognitive skills that are necessary in real writing contexts and academic community. As opposed to the subjective assessments, objective or indirect assessments measure less complex skills breaking writing into sub-skills such as grammar, vocabulary, punctuations, and spelling etc. They do not require the candidates to write anything but the assessment format consists of either yes/ no, true/false, and tick mark questions etc. Easy to score, they have high development costs and

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require much time and effort. Besides, assessments are used for placing students to appropriate courses and levels.

The process approach to the writing has given new dimension to the ways the writing ability of students should be assessed and evaluated. The best of which is that it has linked assessment to learning. It means that learning takes place through assessment. Process techniques and strategies like observation where the teacher observes the daily learning and writing experiences and behaviors of individual student and records it as anecdotal notes, journals, and student logs and reports it to parents on timely basis can serve as a link to incorporate assessment with learning. Likewise, peer review is another useful technique where classroom becomes a social setting promoting cooperation and understanding among peers. Typically, in a peer review session, students exchange their drafts with their peers to look for content, organization, and grammar of their peers’ work in the light of a checklist that directs their reading. Similar to peer review is self assessment technique where instead of exchanging papers, students read their own work and assess it based on the checklist that explicitly states the criteria for correction.

Assessment in a process approach bridges the gap between teachers and students where teacher guides and assists them as they learn to write. The process approach links assessment with learning. Students learn to assess their own work and incorporate revision, and editing in their writing. Thus, errors are not left on the teachers to mark and correct, rather become a responsibility of students to identify and correct them with time. Students are focused on to become critical readers of their own work through incorporating self- assessment in them. The students not only become responsible writers but they learn to assess their own work as they have finished a first draft. Thus students should understand the ways of how good writers assess the progress of their own work.

Contemporary assessments like performance, portfolios, alternative, and authentic assessments link assessment with learning. Thus, assessment and evaluation is not only
the area of teachers but the students actively involve themselves in assessing their own work. The chief feature of all such assessments is that they are rooted in real contexts and make sure that students learn to write meaningfully outside the classrooms. Besides, they incorporate students’ decisions in the assessment process and involve them in the evaluation of their own work. Although valid measures of writing abilities, their reliability poses a problem for the evaluators. Reliability can be maintained through taking a sufficient number of the samples of writing, designing clear tasks, and giving limited topics and genre to write. Training raters to score scripts on a clear set of standards on different occasions, using holistic scoring etc. are some ways which can increase reliability to the assessment.

1.5 Objectives of Research

1. A study of the evaluation pattern among class VIII and IX in three schools through a timed impromptu writing.
2. A study of the evaluation pattern of the classes by studying their class assignments.
3. A comparison between the three schools (AMU, Girls High School, Iqra Public School, and Aligarh Public School)
4. A comparison of writing between class VIII and class IX in each school.

1.6 Rationale of the Study

The study has been conducted by observing the patterns that teachers follow in assessing the students’ written work. Accordingly, students in- class assignments were photocopied with permission for the research purpose. An evaluation of the assessment patterns of teachers based on an essay was also analyzed. The teachers were given a checklist to assess the essay. Students who were selected for the essay to be written were required to submit their class note books for analysis. Teachers’ questionnaire was also analyzed to study the teachers’ understanding of the assessment of students’ writing in classroom contexts.
1.7 Organization of the present study

The present study consists of six chapters in addition to Bibliography and Appendices. Chapter One is the Introduction which provides an overview of the work covered in this study, the objectives of research, and rational of the research undertaken. It discusses the cognitive and socio-cultural factors of writing, and importance of assessment and evaluation in writing.

Chapter Two “Writing” provides the historical overview of the ESL writing, its growth and development as a field of interdisciplinary research.

Chapter Three is “Assessment and Evaluation”. It provides a comprehensive discussion of assessment covering various facets of writing assessments, purposes and strategies of classroom assessment and its various types. It also looks at how assessment has become an integral tool to promote teaching and learning of writing skills as a result of shift in classroom pedagogy from product to process. It also discusses the place of communicative competence in language assessment. Finally, it compares and contrast assessment and evaluation processes.

Chapter Four discusses the methodology used in the present research, while Chapter Five gives the analysis and interpretation of results.

“Conclusion and Suggestion” have been taken up in Chapter Six.