Chapter – I

Introduction
1.0 INTRODUCTION

English, the common language of communication between people of different nations, has evolved into a global language a few decades back, because of its universal demand. In India, English is the language of instruction in majority of the schools and universities. It also serves as the link language for people in jobs requiring inter-state association. Furthermore, the rapid advancement in the field of science, technology and electronic media has enhanced the importance of English for communicative purposes. English is also considered to be the language of opportunity that provides access to knowledge, power and better job prospects. According to Dhanavel (2012), English can be considered to stand for empowerment, novelty, globalisation, learning, internet, science, success and honour, which form the special characteristics of English that have made it into a global language. In the Indian milieu, English language is regarded as an employment tool that enables candidates to grab lucrative job openings. In support of this view, Chaudhary (2001) has reported that English is not just India’s ‘window on the world’; it is India’s virtual highway to the global market.

English Language Teaching dates back to the dawn of British Raj in India and has a history of 250 years of English teaching as early as 1759 by the East India Company. The growth of English can be traced back to the advent of formal education in India during the first half of the 19th century. However, the significance of English language gained momentum after Macaulay’s Minute in 1835. Lord Macaulay recommended the use of English to educate Indians as
he firmly believed English language as the only language to transfer scientific and technological knowledge to Indians. Macaulay’s aim for initiating this recommendation was to bridge the gap between India and the western world by making English as the main medium of communication. However, it was also understood that the exclusive intention was to create a body of clerks to aid in the administration of the nation. Thus, English became the language of the government, public, administration, legislatures and law courts. More importantly, English was inducted as the medium of instruction at higher levels of educational institutions since Macaulay averred that the oriental languages did not possess any knowledge worth preserving. He had established, in his famous speech on education in India delivered on the 2nd of February, 1835, that the English language was the key to modern knowledge and hence, superior to Arabic and Sanskrit. The natives of the country could be made good English scholars. It was impossible to educate the body of people but it was possible through English education to bring about a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.

Even though Macaulay’s recommendation was a success, there was a section of Indian political class which protested the induction of English education in the country. Nevertheless, English emerged as the global language, the language common to all sections of people in the society, in spite of all obstructions.

Even after seventy years of independence, English language still continues to sustain its status as the associate official language of India despite continuous disputes from the nationalists. India is a linguistically and culturally diverse
nation and English acts as a link language for inter-state communication. English plays a pivotal role in administration, education, trade, commerce, mass media and so on. Hence, teaching and learning of English is predestined in our country.

English language teaching started in India decades ago with the experimental theories of teaching English through various methods and approaches, which underwent changes as per the needs of the learners. Many researches are being conducted to develop the learners’ language needs. The rapid increase in the number of English medium schools and higher level educational institutions emphasise the growth of ELT in India. There are vernacular medium schools which teach all subjects through regional language other than English. In state-board schools, the subjects are taught in English or bilingually based on the learners’ proficiency in English. On the other hand, CBSE schools, particularly in the semi-urban and urban areas, strictly adhere to English as the medium of instruction.

The significance of English, in India, has gained momentum due to the proliferation of IT sectors, which has created unlimited job opportunities in metropolitan cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Bangalore and Chennai. English has thus become a tool for employability, in India. If men and women cannot comprehend and communicate in English they are either underpaid or unemployed. Therefore, there is a need for the learners to acquire English language skills to succeed in academics as well as in the highly competitive job markets. Dhanavel (2012) rightly asserts that English is a major language of
instruction and education throughout the world. It is a language of living in the sense that people who know English use it as a tool of employment. For without communication skills in English, it is almost impossible to get well-paid jobs.

In today’s world, majority of the tertiary institutions in India are well established and attract students from all over the globe. This global outlook is made possible due to English which has become the lingua franca in such institutions. English, at universities, is the medium of instruction, the ‘library language’ and the language of assessment. Hence, possessing good English language skills is mandatory for students at tertiary level. It is generally assumed that students who enter into colleges hold sufficient English language proficiency to cope up with the syllabus. However, these students are from different backgrounds: rural, semi-urban or urban, are from different boards of school: state board or CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education), are with different L1, are of varied age group (17 to 21) and some are first generation learners and some are from vernacular medium schools. Despite these differences, there is no entry level exam to test the English language proficiency of students to ensure that each student entering into college will be able to handle the syllabus. Schools, including ones that instruct through regional languages, are expected to facilitate students to face tertiary level with ease in spite of varied syllabus. Nevertheless, the prerequisite to enter into college is that the students have to be passed in English at least with the minimum percentage of 33 (central board) to 35 (state board) at higher
secondary level. As a result, students with limited knowledge of English face lot of problems in understanding, comprehending and writing the major subjects in English at tertiary level. The difficulty faced by the ESL learners due to inadequate English language proficiency is becoming common in many of the tertiary institutions and, thus, there is a call for designing innovative strategies that cater to the varied language needs of students.

In India, there is a three-language system. However, Tamil Nadu follows the two-language system. In the Tamil medium schools, Tamil, the oriental language of the state is the first language and English is the second language. Many students from Tamil medium schools are first generation learners and they are socially and economically backward. Teaching English, to such learners is a demanding task. Even though, English has attained the status of second language in India, most of the learners’ opportunity to learn the language is confined to classrooms. At secondary level, English is generally considered as a difficult subject rather than a language for communication and the prime objective, for the students, is to pass the board examination by employing rote learning techniques to memorise answers. When these students enter into tertiary level with poor English language proficiency they find it difficult to cope up with the higher level syllabus and get many arrears in the semester exams. Hence, the Government of Tamil Nadu has been taking varied measures to develop the English language competency of the students at different levels. There are many researches being done to investigate the effectiveness of various methods and approaches of ELT. Moreover, CALL has
made a tremendous change in the outlook of ELT experts and teachers. Studies are also being conducted on the integration of computer and internet in the curriculum, and the influence of technology in the English classrooms.

The major reason for regarding English as the most important language in Tamil Nadu at present is due to the mushrooming of IT companies, BPOs and other related organisations in the state. English in Tamil Nadu gives social status as well as provides better career opportunities. Importance of this global language has reflected even in schools. As a result, the number of international schools that follow Cambridge IGCSE (International General Certificate of Secondary Education) and IB (International Baccalaureate) curriculums and that require learners to possess excellent proficiency in English language skills to cope with the curriculum, is gradually increasing in the state. These schools even attract students from state board and CBSE schools as they are considered to be the right channel for higher education in the western countries. Moreover, the number of colleges and universities is also increasing exponentially attracting students from all over the globe. It was observed that at tertiary level, learners require extra attention to develop English language skills and hence, majority of the engineering colleges provide training for the learners in Business English Course (BEC) with the help of British Council, Chennai. Thus, English has established its status firmly in the state.

English has become the source of information and has taken branches as per the area of higher education. The three primary branches are English for
Specific Purpose (ESP), English for Academic Purpose (EAP), and English for Occupational Purpose (EOP). Thus, English is not limited to its study of literature as in earlier days but has become a language of communication in various fields including education, trade, commerce, science and technology. Since this study focuses on developing the writing skills of the first year students in Arts and Science colleges, it is essential to consider English for Academic purpose in particular.

English for Academic Purposes refers to the teaching of English language in the primary, secondary and tertiary level educational institutions. The main objective of this type of ELT is to enable students to be aware of the basics of English language and the use of English for common purposes. EAP has undergone rapid changes over the past few decades. From humble beginnings as a relatively fringe branch of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in the early 1980s, today it is a major force in English language teaching and research around the world. EAP has gained momentum with the increase in the number of universities and international students undertaking tertiary studies in English language.

In India, students at tertiary level learn English for Academic Purpose or English for Specific Purpose [ESP] depending on the branch of study they choose. However, students who are getting admission in colleges are not tested for their English language proficiency even though the students are from different boards of school and different backgrounds. Due to this varied milieu, heterogeneity in today’s classrooms is inevitable and it is one of the major
factors that impede teaching at tertiary level. Moreover, majority of the tertiary classrooms are overcrowded. Teaching a second language, particularly teaching writing, is a demanding task in an overcrowded heterogeneous tertiary classroom. Apart from these two factors, following traditional teaching methods and giving less importance to English classes at tertiary level compared to major subject classes and time constraint are the other factors that impede the teaching of writing skills at tertiary level. Therefore, it is the need of the hour to conduct extensive research on second language writing and to adopt strategies and techniques that develop the writing skills of the tertiary learners. In supporting this view, Evarisha (2012) has asserted that studies on second language writing are sadly lacking, and less research is done on the L2 writing process among indigenous populations. Students who have learnt to converse and write in vernacular but not in English at school level, will find communication at the University level rather difficult and exasperating, unless scaffolding is provided. These students will have a wide variety of purposes to write and they should be able to write fluently different forms of texts such as reports, process descriptions, formal letters, articles, and research papers. Becoming proficient in writing these texts is not an easy deal for every second language learner. Hedge (2000) has established the fact that writing, a complex process, is neither easy nor spontaneous for many second language writers. Due to the complexity of writing in English for second language learners, there is a need for teaching writing skills in schools and colleges through novel
strategies so that students are not only prepared to face exams but also to become efficient writers in English.

Nonetheless, the current ELT situation at tertiary level is observed to be less effective owing to various factors affecting teaching and learning processes which include heterogeneous and overcrowded classroom scenario, lack of English language proficiency of the learners and adoption of teacher-centric traditional methods namely Grammar Translation method. Consequently, the learners become incompetent in writing skills and they adopt rote-learning and memorisation techniques to get through the examinations. Teaching English through traditional methods, at tertiary level, prepare students to face their English exams instead of developing their efficiency in using the language for different academic purposes. At this level, specific strategies are required to develop the students’ LSRW skills. According to Grabowski (2009) writing, when compared to speaking, can be seen as a more standardized system which must be learnt through special training. Mastery of writing skills is an important requirement for cultural and academic needs and to maintain one’s rights and responsibilities.

Speaking skills is usually considered important for marketing one-self in today’s job markets and this consideration seems to have reduced the importance of writing skills. Moreover, personal writing habits, in English, have become endangered and writing is considered merely an examination tool. Due to the importance given to the oral communication skills, more studies have been conducted on developing the speaking skills of tertiary learners.
rather than writing skills as far as the Indian context is concerned. However, it is currently ascertained that effective written proficiency in English also plays a vital role in the job markets and it is quintessential for IT professionals and employees of other related organisations to sustain professional relationship between foreign and Indian companies. The requirement has accelerated the writing skills, which was once considered important only for academic success, to gain its magnitude as a means for better career opportunities.

Writing, unlike speaking, is rule bound and due to its orthographic system, the careful organisation of ideas and linguistic conservatism required, it is the most demanding of all the skills. Furthermore, it is a complex activity which involves cognitive and intellectual processes. Richards (1990) has asserted that learning to write in either a first language or second language is one of the most difficult tasks for learners and one that few people can be said to fully master. Many native speakers leave school with a poor command of writing. Even at university level, students require further training in writing.

The semester results of the first year students in majority of the colleges and universities are usually disappointing both in English and major subjects, and the number of arrears the learners possess increases exponentially. One of the major reasons for this situation is lack of English language skills particularly writing proficiency in English. At tertiary level, the medium of instruction, the books the learners need to refer and the language of assessment are in English. Hence, English is mandatory for all tertiary level learners in India even though some colleges allow learners belonging to certain branches to write the
semester exams in regional language. Mohamed Sathak Arts and Science College, which is situated at Sholinganallur, Chennai and affiliated to University of Madras, allow learners of few streams such as commerce to write in Tamil, the state language of Tamil Nadu. The benefit is restricted to learners whose first language is Tamil and furthermore this benefit is valid only in the UG level. At the PG level, English is the only language of assessment in both internal and semester examinations. Such benefit is not feasible for all tertiary institutions in India. In Hindustan Institute of Technology and Science, the context of the study, English is the language of communication and the medium of instruction since it has a linguistically diverse territory and admits students from all over the country and around the globe.

English, as a language of assessment, plays a vital role at the higher level of education because the students are graded by the way they demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the various subjects through written tests in English. Thus, writing effectively in English is one of the pre-requisites for academic success at the university level. Barrass (2005) has established the fact that it is mainly by the quality of writing that assessors determine what learners know and understand and judge the quality of the learners’ thinking. In any assessed written work, if two students are otherwise equal in ability and intelligence, the one who is better able to convey thoughts effectively in writing will be expected to score the higher marks. So it is important to recognise, from the start of the course, that the final grades will depend not
only on the knowledge and understanding of the subject but also on how well it is conveyed in writing.

It is appalling to observe that when a simple leave letter writing task is given to the subjects of the study: the first year B.B.A and B.Com students of Hindustan Institute of Technology and Science, not everyone could write the letter, which they have practiced sufficiently, without mistakes in the format, vocabulary, organisation, grammar and mechanics. Moreover, the tertiary learners hardly ever get opportunities to practice different writing tasks during the English classes due to time constraint and the less number of periods allotted for English. So the learners in majority of the tertiary institutions listen to the teachers’ lecture during English classes and get writing experience only during the internal tests and semester examinations. There are also other factors that impede the teaching and learning of writing skills at tertiary level English classrooms in India. Therefore, there is a need for developing strategies that could cater to the language needs of the linguistically diverse, heterogeneous ESL tertiary learners’ population and it is assumed that an attempt to teach Big Writing elements through flipped English classes could improve the writing standards of tertiary level learners.

Writing efficiently in English has also recently become significant because of the internet and globalisation. Earlier writing was considered as a skill difficult to acquire. However, in the last two decades attitudes towards writing in English have changed radically. Due to the rapid advancement of technology and the varied use of internet, acquiring this complex skill has become feasible.
Furthermore, possessing good writing proficiency in English has become a necessity for academic success. Therefore, it is mandatory for tertiary students to communicate clearly in their written texts. The need has also lead many researchers to investigate various time-tested methods that are already available and to try out novel techniques followed elsewhere to develop the writing abilities of ESL students in India. The investigations conducted so far were rarely based on linguistically diverse and heterogeneous tertiary level learners. Moreover, no researches have been conducted on the integrated approach of “Teaching Big Writing Using Regular and Flipped English Classes: a Comparative Study” till date to measure the effectiveness of the Big Writing elements on tertiary ESL learners in India or elsewhere. Hence, there is scope for the current research and the findings of the work can contribute to the field of English language teaching.

The context of the current study, Hindustan Institute of Technology and Science, which is established since 1985 and located in the prime locality of the Chennai city, within a serene and spacious campus, attract students from all over the globe. It offers engineering (B.Tech), B.Arch. and bachelors in B.B.A, B.Com, B.Sc. and B. LIS. There are students from all over the nation and from France, Japan, Korea and Bhutan studying in HITS (Hindustan Institute of Technology and Science). Hence, the medium of instruction is exclusively English and students need to possess good English language skills to comprehend their lessons and to score well in examinations. However, it is observed that students have varied proficiency level and many lack the required
writing competency in English language. It could be because of lack of personal writing practices in English, limited vocabulary knowledge, influence of technology, lack of extensive reading practices and so on. Even though the students have learnt English as a second language for more than a decade as the second language or the third language, they demonstrate difficulties even in constructing paragraphs on their own. It has also been observed that students fail in the semester exams due to the lack of proficiency in English language, particularly in writing skills. The situation, hence, calls for an investigation.

The students in HITS comprise a mixed group and majority of the students’ English language exposure is limited to classrooms. These students think English as a difficult language and follow rote-learning technique to get through the major subjects. However, only few students can succeed in memorising long answers. Though the students know the content of the lesson, they fail to demonstrate the knowledge and understanding in English because of incompetent English language proficiency.

Language is learnt for communication. The main objective of teaching English is for communication both oral and written. Speaking a language involves, voice modulation, body language, gesture and eye contact. In contrast, writing to convey without these features to an audience is difficult especially for a second language learner. Second language teaching aims to develop learners’ oral and written communication skill. Nonetheless, there are many factors that affect teaching writing skills, many students encounter various problems while writing in English and as a result, there is an increase in the number of arrears
in the university examination. Hence, the focus of the study is developing the writing abilities of the tertiary students.

The students who enter into colleges have varied language proficiency and those who are from rural background and vernacular medium schools struggle to write in English. It is, therefore, necessary to design a writing instruction that is feasible for a mixed ability group. Hence, for the current study, Ros Wilson’s Big Writing approach which focuses on teaching vocabulary, connectives, openers of sentences and punctuations (VCOP) is chosen and adapted into VCCM approach as per the needs of the tertiary level learners. VCCM approach focuses on enriching students’ vocabulary, connectives, concord and mechanics of writing. The four components of writing, VCCM, are chosen for the tertiary level instruction since it has been found out from the data collected through the questionnaires and in-depth interview that the tertiary level students struggle to use the right vocabulary, are unaware of the role of connectives in a discourse, have difficulty in writing concord and mechanics accurately. In addition, the four elements of Big Writing, VCCM, form the major assessment objectives in the standard writing tests at higher level of education. The study is justified in the sense that innovative pedagogical practices for developing writing skills will increase the interest and motivation level of the learners. Moreover, there are studies conducted to test the efficiency of Big Writing strategy at school level and found effective. More importantly, flipped classroom is found to be effective in imparting mathematics and computer subjects and recently the method is adopted in
schools in Bangalore. There are also few researches being conducted in the nation on the effectiveness of flipped English classes.

The study aims at measuring the efficacy of the Big Writing instruction designed for the tertiary level learners, VCCM approach, through regular classes and flipped classes in developing the writing skills of the students. The study is conducted for a period of one semester. It is evident from the findings of the study that Big Writing instruction for tertiary level develops the writing standards of the students and the flipped English classroom technique provides varied opportunities to develop learners LSRW skills holistically.

The study will help the ESL tertiary teachers to understand the language problems of the first year students of Arts and Science colleges. The study will also enable the students to understand the significance of using the four components of writing, VCCM, in written discourses, which can improve the standard of the tertiary learners’ writing. Since, the study examines the language problems encountered by the learners of Arts and Science colleges, the study will benefit similar second language learning situation in general and teaching of writing in particular. Teachers and learners may be made aware of the factors affecting the ability to write in English. The research is the first and foremost in investigating the effectiveness of Big Writing instruction for tertiary level learners, VCCM approach, using flipped English classes in India. Furthermore, teachers of English and the subject teachers can consider using this shortcut method to improve the writing skills of the learners. The findings of the study may also help the syllabus designers and material writers to
understand the existing language problems of the current population in Arts and Science colleges. An attempt is also made to flip the English classes and the findings of the study related to students’ perceptions on the classroom flip may contribute immensely a new dimension of ELT in tertiary institutions, in India.

The study tries to answer the following research questions:

1. Is there any statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test writing scores of the control group participants who received Big Writing instruction through regular English classes?

2. Is there any statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test writing scores of the experimental group participants who received Big Writing instruction through flipped English classes?

3. Is there any statistically significant difference between the post-test mean scores of the experimental group which received Big Writing instruction through flipped English classes and the participants of the control group which received Big Writing instruction through regular English classes?

4. Is there any statistically significant difference between the post-test mean scores of the male and female participants of the experimental group that received Big Writing instruction through flipped English classes?

5. Is there any statistically significant difference between the post-test mean scores of the experimental and control group participants who had
vernacular medium instruction and English medium instruction at the higher secondary level?

6. Is there any statistically significant difference between the post-test mean scores of the first generation learners and continuous generation learners of both the experimental and control group?

To carry out this study, an experimental research method was adopted. First, a survey was conducted by administering a feedback questionnaire manually and through online to 200 teachers of English belonging to engineering and Arts and Science colleges in Chennai and Kanchipuram. Out of 200 teachers, 108 teachers responded and of which two responses were incomplete and thus they were excluded from the study. The questionnaire given to the teachers of English was pertaining to the language problems faced by the students and the teachers’ perceptions on flipped classroom method. To decide the subject of the study, after choosing Hindustan Institution of Technology and Science as the context of the study, an in-depth interview was conducted with the teachers of English in Hindustan Institute of Technology and Science. Based on the outcome of the in-depth interview, intentionally the first year B.B.A and B.Com students were chosen as subjects of the study. These two batches were suggested by the teachers owing to the lack of English language proficiency of majority of the students in both the batches and the students’ lack of interest in attending English classes. Randomly, the B.B.A students were assigned into experimental group and the B.Com students formed the control group.
Subsequently, a self-assessment questionnaire was administered to the subjects of the study to observe the subjects’ existing proficiency level in the LSRW skills, the proficiency level of different writing tasks, the level of stress, anxiety and attitude towards writing in English, and the perceptions on Big Writing approach. For the experimental group subjects, an additional section was included to find out the experimental group participants’ perceptions on the flipped classroom method. The conduct and analysis of the diagnostic test was essential to identify the existing language problems of the learners, particularly in writing. Hence, a diagnostic test was conducted on a leave letter writing task for 40 subjects chosen at random, from both experimental and control groups, to find out the language needs of the first year Arts and Science students.

Having administered the research tools, interviews, questionnaires and diagnostic test, it was observed that the students had major problems in writing in English, and this had paved the way to decide the intervention programme. The VCOP technique was adapted as VCCM approach for tertiary level Big Writing instruction. Flipped classroom method was chosen as the mode of instruction after the informal discussion with the students, who expressed lack of interest in regular English classes and demonstrated keen interest in using technology. Moreover, essay writing task was chosen for the pre-test and post-post. An experimental group and a control group were formulated to measure the efficacy of teaching Big Writing instruction for tertiary level learners, the VCCM approach, through flipped English classes in developing the writing skills of the tertiary ESL learners.
A pre-test was conducted to the experimental and control group simultaneously to determine the existing proficiency in writing skills in English before the intervention programme. Concurrently, the intervention programme, Big Writing instruction for tertiary level learners: VCCM approach was administered through flipped English classes to the experimental group for a period of one semester. On the other hand, the control group had received the Big Writing instruction through the regular English classes that did not involve using technology. After the intervention programme, a post-test was conducted to the experimental group and the control group to determine the impact of Big Writing instruction for tertiary level learners: VCCM approach through flipped English classes that involve using computers and internet.