CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSION

This chapter presents a detailed discussion of the results tabulated in the previous chapter. It is divided into three sections. In the first section, the investigator discusses the possible contributing factors to the students’ perception of essay writing and expectations of writing instruction given by the teachers and the latters’ views on writing instruction and their opinion about their students’ writing skills. In the second section, the results of the diagnostic test are discussed and in the third section, the results of the experimental study are discussed. Sample responses are cited and a qualitative study is done. The category ‘reason’ under each question in the tools, gave the participants an opportunity to offer any answer they wished. It provided them with a breathing space to articulate their views without any constraints.

4.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDENTS

Student respondents of the survey were mostly from rural backgrounds with home-environments that had minimal exposure to English language. Since there is limited foundation for students to draw upon, teachers are faced with the challenge of helping them develop a base of knowledge and experiences so that they have somewhere to start with. Factors such as the quality of student learning behaviours, home environment, past experiences with education, and teacher attitudes are among the many influences on student achievement.
4.2 USEFULNESS OF PART II ENGLISH SYLLABUS

Five questions had been asked to the students as to what their expectations were of the Part II English syllabus. Teachers were also asked similar questions as to what was actually given to the students in the Part II English course.

4.2.1 PREPARING STUDENTS FOR LIFE

In terms of usefulness of the Part II English course, results show that the majority of students strongly agree that the syllabus should prepare them for life. Some of the reasons they have given are as follows:

- *The syllabus should teach me how to speak and write well because that is important in life.*
- *English language helps get jobs.*
- *It must give me many informations (sic) on communication.*
- *English help (sic) me go to other places.*

Some students have said that their respective major subjects make them more knowledgeable in their subjects alone. They feel that only Part II English will expose them to the language. So they expect the syllabus to equip them with communication skills which will help them face the challenges of life. These are the illustrious students who have understood the importance of learning the English language, especially writing in English well. Some others, a negligible percentage of the sample, are of the opinion that, to them, their major subject is more important and that they learn Part II English just because it has been prescribed for them. So they do not pay much attention to Part II English. These students seem to be unaware of the fact that they need proficiency in the language in order to learn their subjects. They also do not
know that only when they are able to write in English well, their presentation will be good in their examinations.

On the other hand, a majority of teachers feel that the Part II English syllabus does not equip students for life. They say that the present system trains learners only in mastering the literary content of the syllabus. There is not enough scope for practising writing skills. Some teachers say that students are asked to memorize an exhaustive list of synonyms, antonyms and homonyms, in which more than fifty percentage of words are those which are used less frequently in their day to day life. Learning those words and their meanings might increase students’ passive vocabulary but not their active one. Only when they are able to use the words learnt in practical situations will they benefit from learning them. In addition to this, there are exercises like ‘Telegram Writing’ in the syllabus. Telegram is an outmoded way of communication which is irrelevant in today’s context. Rather ‘E-mail Writing’ which has been included in the second year Part II English syllabus could be introduced in the first year itself.

4.2.2 PROMOTING STUDENTS’ CREATIVITY

When asked whether the Part II English course should promote their creativity, majority of the students wanted it to be so. Following are some of the opinions given by students:

- *Creativity is important in this fast advancing world.*
- *Part II English should make me imaginative.*
- *I should be able to write stories on my own.*
- *I can able to (sic) write poems.*
Teachers say that the syllabus does not help the students improve their creativity and that it is students’ memory power that is tested and not creativity in the examinations. For instance, as said earlier, rather than being made to memorize an exhaustive list of synonyms, antonyms and homonyms, students can be encouraged to learn those words contextually and asked to frame sentences using those words. Students can be asked to write poems or re-tell a story from another person’s point of view apart from the narrator’s. A nursery rhyme, like ‘Jack and Jill’ can be given and students can be asked to write it in the form of a story for one page. Similarly, students can be made to write stories from comics. This will enable them improve their narrative techniques. When such activities are incorporated in the syllabus, they allow students to express their feelings and thoughts imaginatively and to experiment with the language.

4.2.3 PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THE EXAMINATION

Majority of students strongly agreed that they wanted the Part II English syllabus to prepare them for the examination. The reason most of them have given for their answer is that they need to get through in Part II English apart from their major subjects in order to get their degree. So they felt that it was enough if they got a pass mark. Only a negligible percentage of students wanted to score well in Part II English. Teachers too strongly felt that the syllabus was examination-oriented and prepared students only for the examination.

4.2.4 SCOPE FOR IMPROVEMENT OF WRITING SKILLS

Students were asked whether they expected Part II English syllabus to give them scope for improvement of writing skills. Majority of them said that they require
writing skills to write essays flawlessly and in future for jobs. Given below are a few responses of students:

- *I expect exercises to improve my writing skills.*
- *I write (sic) letters and reports in future.*
- *I want my essays to be free from mistakes.*

On the other hand, teachers said that Part II English did not give students much scope for improvement of writing skills. The portions prescribed for study and the type of questions asked in the examination do not give room for improvement of writing skills; rather, they rely on the students’ power of memorization. Exposure to functional texts will surely promote appreciation and use of language. When students learn to appreciate the language, they progress through the years. In this way they will learn to use the language at increasing levels of difficulty and sophistication.

### 4.2.5 BEING INTERESTING

To the question whether they expected Part II English to be interesting or not, all the students strongly agreed or agreed that they wanted it to be so. Some of the reasons they have given for it are as follows:

- *Major subject is serious and difficult. So Part II English should be interesting.*
- *It should be interesting to gain the attention of students.*
- *English interesting, then high marks (sic).*

Almost all the teachers are of the opinion that the Part II English syllabus is not interesting at all and that many uninteresting pieces of prose and poetry have been prescribed. Most of the students are from the Tamil medium schools and they are
baffled when they read the lessons prescribed. The bulky volume on grammar prescribed in the syllabus is almost like a malaise to them. The activities they are supposed to do are also monotonous. It is true that only when the subject is interesting students get involved in learning it. Writing activities should include interesting features like giving the first line of a story and asking them to complete it and making them re-tell stories. When such activities are introduced in the syllabus, students will definitely learn with involvement and interest.

On the whole, based on the responses given by the students and the teachers selected as samples, it is understood that the course components of the existing syllabus do not meet the requirements and expectations of students. Researches show that reading greatly influences writing. Students should be made aware of the fact that an inadequate knowledge of how language is used in different types of texts causes an impact on their writing styles. So care can be taken to develop students’ critical thinking, imagination and enjoyment of writing by helping them observe and process the different ways in which language is used in various texts to convey the meaning.

4.3 METHODOLOGY OF TEACHING WRITING

Six questions were asked to the students so as to ascertain what methodology of teaching they expected their teachers to adopt while teaching writing. The same set of questions was asked to the teachers to determine what methods were actually used in the classrooms.

4.3.1 MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION

When students were asked what medium of instruction they preferred in Part II English classes, majority of them wanted the bilingual medium. Majority of
teachers said that they used both English and Tamil in the classroom as most of the students came from rural areas and did not have enough exposure to the English language. Only a few teachers used only English in the classes. They say that maximum exposure to the target language will result in a better rate of acquisition of skills. Two teachers alone admitted that they used only Tamil in the Part II English classes because all their students were from a very poor educational background and were not able to follow even simple sentences in English. Their comments were as follows:

- *We are accountable for the results that we produce. Hence our primary aim is to make the students pass. For that, we are forced to use the students’ mother tongue to make them understand better.*
- *As it is, students are unsettled in the English classes in the first year. Confounding them by using English alone in the classes will make them all the more uneasy. So we are compelled to use Tamil in the class.*

This is one of the few areas in which the teachers’ responses concurred with those of the students’. It is true that maximum exposure to the target language alone can bring about marked results in proficiency of the language. But there are certain concepts which can be understood by students only when they are explained in their mother tongue. So there is no harm in switching over to the mother tongue to clarify abstractions.

**4.3.2 METHOD OF WRITING INSTRUCTION**

As for the method used to teach writing, majority of students preferred the audio-visual method while most of the teachers used a combination of the four
methods mentioned. Rarely did they use audio-visual aids. While giving the reason for their choice of method, students said that learning through audio-visual method would make it easy for them to understand easily. A few reasons given by students for the choice of method are given below:

- Using computer and tape-recorder for teaching will make the classes interesting.
- It will help students understand better.
- Computer teaching (sic) interesting.
- Explanation method easy (sic) to understand.
- Product method is simple.

Most of the teachers felt that for writing instruction, the choice of method depended on the type of exercise to be taught, the availability of time and the strength of the class. Here are a few of the teachers’ responses:

- It is difficult for teachers to teach writing because some students are more concerned about the content rather than appropriate ways of teaching writing.
- Since most of the students are from rural areas and do not have exposure to the language, they are unable to express themselves. Therefore, ‘spoon-feeding’ has to be done most of the time.
- Not one particular method can be followed throughout a writing class. A combination of different methods, especially the first three, is used.

Some teachers said that the infrastructure of the colleges they belonged to was not suitable for using advanced methods of teaching using audio-visual aids. The
large strength of the classes was not favourable for the audio-visual method. Using only the audio-visual method in all the classes is a remote possibility in most of the colleges. And following any one particular method throughout the class will also be monotonous. As most of the teachers have said, they have to decide which method to use according to the type of activity and the needs of the students. So a judicious combination of all methods would make teaching writing effective.

4.3.3 AREA OF FOCUS DURING WRITING INSTRUCTION

Students were asked to specify which area in writing they would like their teacher to focus their attention on while teaching writing. Majority of them specified that they wanted grammar to be given more attention to. This expectation that writing instruction should focus on grammar is consistent with Hayes and Flower’s (1986) finding that novice writers will focus to a greater extent on error avoidance than on communicating meaning. Whereas, majority of teachers said their focus of attention, while teaching writing, was on all aspects mentioned in the choices. Very few of them concentrated on grammar because grammar was taught separately using a prescribed text. Most of the teachers are of the opinion that all grammar should have been taught in school itself and so there is no need to concentrate on it. So they concentrated more on word order and mechanics. Some other teachers said that they focused their attention on word choice because they felt that a sound vocabulary will enhance writing skills. Here are a couple of teachers’ responses:

- Students do not have spontaneity of thought and so they are poor in sentence construction. More attention is given to word order.
Students lack clarity of expression because of dearth of vocabulary. So word choice is given more attention to.

4.3.4 FREQUENCY OF WRITING PRACTICE GIVEN

To the question how often they wanted writing practice, majority of the students responded positively. Almost an equal number of students wanted to be given practice everyday or three to five times a week. Here are a few responses they had given:

- Practice makes a man perfect. So we need practice in writing everyday.
- Often writing practice (sic) easy to write good (sic).

Very few students wanted writing practice once a week. This shows that they are not interested in writing and do not bother about enhancing their writing skills. A couple of students’ responses are given below:

- Writing exercise is boring. Only speaking is interesting.
- No writing exercises want (sic) because lesson learn and write (sic).

Teachers felt that with the vast amount of portions to be completed within a stipulated period they are hard pressed for time. Therefore they are unable to give enough practice for students. Only occasionally are they able to give them writing practice. Only two teachers had mentioned that they give their students writing practice at least three to five times a day, if not everyday.

The more students are made to write the better they write. So opportunities must be given to students to write as and when time permits. Teachers need not necessarily spend time in the class making students write everyday. They can ask
them to do writing exercises at home. Teachers can correct students’ work and encourage them. When students write regularly, they turn out to be great writers.

4.3.5 PREPARATION FOR EXAMINATIONS

Most of the students preferred using guides while preparing for their exams. They felt that those notes were simple and short enough for them to learn. Teachers said that only intelligent students did not rely on any prepared materials and were willing to write essays on their own. So the rest were given notes prepared by the teacher. Only a negligible percentage of teachers used guides.

Bazaar guides might help students get through in examinations easily but with minimum marks. In the long run, students will not be benefitted in any way. Teachers should not encourage students to use such guides. Rather, they can encourage students to prepare their own essays. At the initial stage, average students can be helped with notes and later on they can be guided to write on their own.

4.3.6 FREQUENCY OF ENCOURAGEMENT TO WRITE ON THEIR OWN

Majority of the students agreed or strongly agreed that they wanted to be given encouragement to write on their own frequently. Whereas teachers felt that no amount of encouragement could make them write on their own. Since they were used to writing prepared essays, they did not have any interest in writing on their own. Following are some remarks the teachers made:

- *To pay individual attention to every individual in a writing class to encourage them is a remote possibility as it is time-consuming.*
• *In a writing class, what my students expect is a ready-made essay. They would be uncomfortable when I ask them to write on their own.*

• *Sometimes when essays are not given and when students are asked to write on their own, students feel that the teacher is not prepared for the class and is just filling in the time.*

Moreover, when the concentration in the teaching-learning process is most of the time to meet the criteria of standardized tests, instruction is often rigid and formulaic, hardly contributing to the conditions it takes to inspire real high-quality writing.

Considering the responses of students and teachers, it is implied that students’ expectation of the methodology used to teach writing is only partially fulfilled.

### 4.4 PERCEPTION OF WRITING SKILLS

Students were asked a set of questions to find out what they thought about their own writing skills. Teachers were asked a similar set of questions to determine whether their responses concurred with those of their students.

#### 4.4.1 LEVEL OF WRITING SKILLS

When asked what they felt about their own writing skills, most of the students admitted that theirs were satisfactory. Only a handful was confident enough to say that theirs were excellent. Some of them said that they were good in grammar but when it came to the part of writing in a descriptive manner they were not good. Teachers also felt the same about their students. They said that it was obvious that
students had not been given enough writing practice at all earlier and so they struggled a lot in college.

### 4.4.2 AREA OF INTEREST

Students were asked which area in writing they were interested in and surprisingly most of them said it was grammar. The survey revealed that teachers also felt the same. Though students were not sound in grammar, they were interested in it when it was taught well. They understood that grammar was pivotal to writing and working out exercises in grammar was more interesting than the work of composing or any other component of writing skills. Some of them were interested in vocabulary too. The idea of learning new words seemed to be fascinating to them. Almost an equal number of students were interested in word order because they felt that learning to place the words in the correct order in a sentence will enable them to present their ideas clearly while writing.

On the other hand, majority of teachers felt that more number of students were interested in word order than in grammar. At this point the responses of the teachers and those of the students do not concur at all. Teachers say that students do not respond positively in the grammar classes and so they are not inspired to teach them well. It might be that the lack of attention students show in grammar classes and poor performance of students in grammar tests might have driven teachers to say that students are not interested in grammar. Four teachers alone felt that their students showed equal interest in all aspects of writing.
**4.4.3 AREA TO IMPROVE**

When asked in which area of writing they had to improve, majority of the students had chosen the option ‘grammar’. Some others who had chosen the option ‘word choice’ said that when it came to writing, most of the time they struggled because they did not get the right word to express themselves.

On the other hand, majority of the teachers said that their students had to improve in placing the words in the proper order. Many teachers were of the opinion that students had to improve in all the four aspects of writing mentioned. Some of the responses of the teachers are given below:

- *Students are very poor in mechanics. They misspell even simple words. Most of them do not know even to capitalize the personal pronoun ‘I’. Some others do not place a period at the end of a sentence.*

- *Faulty constructions of sentences show that students need to improve in placing the words in the right order.*

- *Students need to improve in all the four aspects mentioned above because all four are equally important and students in the first year of tertiary education are very poor in all of these.*

It is the investigator’s view that all four aspects should be given equal importance to while teaching writing because they all complement one another. They are inter-related and lack of proficiency in one area is likely to affect another. Effective language use involves the development of a rich vocabulary and the deliberate selection and use of words in various combinations of structures to create the desired meanings and to express a variety of intentions and nuances. While
students’ knowledge of grammar guides the combination of words in various structures, and skill in the use of mechanics, a rich vocabulary will provide students access to knowledge and ideas in a wide range of texts. It will also give students a wide spectrum of words and expressions to effectively convey subtle differences in the range of ideas, thoughts, actions and emotions and skill in the use of mechanics.

By and large, the consolidated responses of the teachers and those of the students show that teachers are not satisfied with the existing level of writing skills of their students. Most of them attribute the reason for this to be lack of proper foundation given in school. The dissonance between what students expect and what they receive is another factor that explains their poor writing skills. Teachers should combine explicit, systematic teaching of grammatical items and structures with contextualized instruction. They should also provide opportunities for students to apply their knowledge of grammar to the other areas of language learning. Teachers must explicitly reinforce the grammatical items and structures they have learnt previously. This will help them consolidate their knowledge and grammatical rules, and their ability to combine words to form phrases, clauses, sentences, paragraphs and texts.

4.5 OBSERVATIONS ON PERFORMANCE IN DIAGNOSTIC TEST

The results of the diagnostic test given to students show that on an average, students who formed the sample for the survey had poor writing skills. It was worth noting that as shown in figure 3.11, they scored better in grammar, word order, word choice and mechanics than in the descriptive answer. This concurs with Hillocks’
(1986) research that grammar study had little or no effect on the improvement of writing.

It was observed that only a handful of students could frame error free sentences from the hints given. Most of the answers were fraught with errors. Some of the common errors encountered while correcting the answer scripts have been discussed below.

**Use of tense**

The problem with most of the students who commit these types of errors is that they have not actually mastered the rules of tenses. Some who are aware of the rules always get carried away when writing due to absent-mindedness and as such do not realize even when violating the rule. In addition, many of the students do not know when to use a particular tense from another. Therefore, we have that indiscriminate use of the various tenses.

- *It is once a status symbol and now very common.*
- *Mobile phones were cheap nowadays.*
- *It was dangerous to use while driving.*

Students seem to be unaware of the concept of time relations. Teachers might need to raise students’ consciousness to the kinds of verbs that students tend to commit errors in tense marking and to take steps to avoid them in order to strive for higher grammatical accuracy in their composition.
Subject-verb agreement

Agreement between the subject and the verb is determined by the subject whether it is singular or plural. Failure to recognize this leads to failure in using the correct form of the verb. Carefully studying the students’ essays, a good number of gross violations of this rule were observed.

- There are increase in the usage of mobile phones.
- It affect our health.
- Using mobile phones have many disadvantages.

Students should be made to observe carefully that it is the subject that determines the verb.

Use of verb

It is obvious from the illustrations given below that students have serious problems in verb-formation.

- It is easy to used.
- It can dangerous to use while driving.
- They have once a status symbol.
- We all are use the mobile.

This kind of error indicates that they have a poor knowledge of basic verb forms. Apparently students do not know how to combine the different derivatives of the verb with ‘be’ forms and the modals resulting in erroneous combinations. Care should be taken not only to rectify such errors but also to reinforce the use of correct forms.
Use of preposition

The investigator found ample evidence in the answer scripts that students were poor in using prepositions.

- Some people misuse in the mobile.
- We should use in this phone with the right way.
- In the dangerous to use in the driving.
- The mobile phone is a recent development on the world.

This acute problem of using prepositions inappropriately can be rectified if students are made to observe and internalize the various ways of using prepositions to show place, time, position, etc.

Use of article

Errors in the use of articles were identified in plenty.

- Recent development is a increase in the usage of mobile phones.
- It is cheap and fast way of communication.
- It is an useful thing.
- We can take a many photos.

It is clear that students are aware of the common idea about the usage of articles, that, the indefinite article “a” is used before nouns which begin with a consonant and that “an” is used before a vowel. Very few students seem to be aware of the different rules governing articles. Most of the respondents seem to be unaware of the fact that there is a matter of sound in using articles before words like “useful” which though begins with a vowel has a consonant sound initially in the word. To be
able to use an article properly, the students have to be sensitive in differentiating the use of definite article, indefinite article and even using no article at all.

**Word choice**

Apparently, the respondents had great difficulty in choosing correct or appropriate words to express their ideas clearly. Some messages were totally obscure due to incorrect word usage. Most of the respondents wrote very little, and this might be attributed to the limited vocabulary they possessed. They couldn’t think of appropriate words and phrases to express their ideas.

- *Mobile phones are dangerous to use and they conduct accidents.*
- *Today easy means of communicate.*

Given the poor socio-economic environment most of the students belong to, lack of exposure to reading and listening activities in the target language have proved to be responsible for their poor vocabulary.

**Sentence formation**

Incorrect sentence structure can interfere with the reader’s understanding of the text. In a sentence, students are expected to place words in the right order. It was an alarming thing to note that majority of students did not know how to frame even simple sentences. For most of them, it was just a random set of words put together. Following are some of the incorrect sentences:

- *Demerits the dangerous to use while driving the accidents.*
- *The easy to use the cheap and fast way communicating.*
- *Day by day people life the change.*
• *Ears mobile phones dangerous.*

These errors show that students do not know basically what a sentence is. Lack of awareness of the proper structure in L1 also might account for the students’ erroneous construction of sentences.

**Mechanical errors**

Under mechanical errors, there were punctuation and spelling errors. These mistakes can be attributed to mother tongue interference and the inherent problems in the language system. For instance, in the scripts, it was observed that the students spelt most of the English words the way the words are pronounced.

• *Carefully*
• *Important*
• *Developement*
• *Cheep*
• *Usful*

Errors in spelling might be due to the fact that students spell out words by referring to the sound of words. They might also be attributed to carelessness.

There were cases of punctuation errors, omission and misuse of apostrophe. Punctuation errors involve wrong uses of punctuation marks and their complete omission. Punctuation marks are very important in writing. The function of punctuation marks is to make the meaning of a passage clearer, easily understood by everybody who reads it. The absence or misplacement of punctuation marks can cause complete difference in meaning when read. Some marks such as the period mark and the comma equally indicate the length of a pause. Others like the question mark and exclamation mark indicate inflection of voice. Punctuation errors are quite many in
the essays. We can say that punctuation problem is common to all the students irrespective of the social class they represent. This is quite disheartening, considering the importance of punctuation marks in our essays. As a result of these problems, some scripts were almost unreadable.

Factors that cause students to commit errors include interference of mother tongue, ignorance of rules and inappropriate application of rules. The more they repeat the errors, the more difficult it becomes to eliminate them. When teachers understand students’ errors and the cause of their occurrence, they can improve their instructional process. Moreover, teaching of grammar should not linger at the sentence level; it should be considered with reference to context. Whenever teaching grammatical rules, teachers should provide their students with these limitations or restrictions of these rules and teach them how to use in a variety of meaningful contexts. Moreover, it is important for teachers to realize that errors are a natural and important part of the learning process itself.

Examining the written compositions of the students, it is quite evident that many of them have not reached commendable level of competence in the English language. The level of their expression and logical presentation of sentences is very poor. They use such sentences that are incomprehensible many a time. These students cannot be proficient in the language until they learn the basic patterns and rules of forming correct sentences in English. One significant cause for concern was that many students had not even attempted to answer the question. It implies that students were either not interested in writing or did not know what to write. The negligence on their part might be attributed to their lack of motivation and lack of exposure to writing in English. Majority of the students who had attempted to write had written only two or three lines and had failed to proceed. They were given minimum marks.
The poor performance of the majority of students can be attributed to the fact that students lack spontaneity in writing. The most plausible reason could be the fact that students go by their thoughts and not by patterns. Students’ overdependence of resources from teachers limits their creativity. Related to this is the lack of awareness of the importance of writing for their future. However, this is not surprising considering that during the first year of tertiary education, students are not yet familiar with writing having come from poor educational backgrounds. Finally, it is possible that the students have inadequate exposure to English as they have totally neglected extra reading of English books, newspapers or watching English movies or news bulletins.

Adding to their poor socio, economic and educational background is the unfulfilment of expectations. In this way the obstacles towards acquisition of writing skills are exacerbated. What occurs in the classroom has a significant impact on the students’ achievements. Teachers should ensure that what they provide in the classrooms is aligned with the expectations of students. It is true that their perception of the potential importance of English is high, but when it comes to enjoying learning the language, there is a moderate fall in their intrinsic motivation. Most of the students are motivated mainly by a feeling of duty to meet the needs or desires of parents or teachers. It is a weaker form of motivation that is likely to make them more concerned to prevent failure in examinations rather than seek out opportunities for genuine learning. When they are asked whether they like to learn English, all of them unanimously say that they would like to as it is important for their future. However, it is often only a minority who invest the considerable effort necessary to learn the language and master the skills. Teachers are also faced with satisfying institutional demands. Since they are forced to follow contemporary textbooks, they teach lessons
on the ideal written product, focusing on words, sentences, and paragraphs as component parts, and emphasizing usage and style. Student essays are graded on the basis of how well they approximate these forms and conventions.

A good starting point for teachers would be recognition of the students’ existing socio-economic background, existing language skills and figure out ways to hone their skills. No doubt, it will take considerable effort and time for students to become adept writers. Students should keep in mind that when they are able to write error-free sentences, they will gain confidence to strive towards mastery over the written language.

4.6 METHODS SUGGESTED BY TEACHERS OF ENGLISH FOR WRITING INSTRUCTION

There was overwhelming response from the teachers for the question on what innovative methods could be incorporated while teaching writing. Though no practice characteristic of a specific teacher or college was identified, the collective responses and recurring ideas of teachers have been consolidated as follows:

- *Provide an English-speaking environment in the classroom exposing them only to English.*
- *Encourage them to have as much contact with the English language through listening, reading and writing as possible.*
- *Give them exercises like description of places / objects / experience / incidents / persons, etc.,*
- *Make them work out substitution tables.*
- *Make them write and read their work aloud.*
• Encourage them to write essays on their own.

• Ask them to develop hints given, recreate a story, write a poem or a write-up on a topic or event.

• Stimulate them to read English newspapers, stories and watch programmes in English.

• Make students learn new words everyday.

• Listening is the first step. Making them listen will help them speak which will ultimately lead them to acquire good writing skills.

• To avoid fossilization of errors, they can be corrected on the spot with positive encouragement.

• Use power point presentations to make them interested.

• Give topics in advance, make them discuss in groups and then in common to arrive at a good composition.

• Prizes can be given for good performance.

• ‘By rote’ learning should be avoided; rather free flow of imagination should be encouraged to promote creativity.

• Make them write everyday using simple sentence patterns.

• Ask them to write a few lines regarding the subject taken that day or a write-up of the happenings of the day.

• Encourage diary-writing.

• Familiarize them with surfing the internet.

These ideas provided by the teachers belonging to various colleges served as an additional body of viewpoints which the investigator used to improvise the strategies she had planned to adopt and adapt.
The analysis of the information gathered from teachers by means of the open and close-ended questions potentially revealed facts as to why teachers teach the way they taught since, to some extent, their teaching style or methods must be based on what environment they were placed in. The students’ responses too helped understand why they learnt the way they did.

4.7 THE ROLE OF THE LANGUAGE TEACHER

Over the past few years, research identifies that there is a disconnect between what the teachers practice in the classroom and what the students actually need. Students leave colleges unable to critically evaluate and synthesize complicated information and without sufficient real-world experiences. The teacher should support active and relevant learning with the intended outcome of better preparing the students for the diverse and complex world that awaits them after graduation. Following are some of the functions that teachers have to perform in order to ensure effective teaching and learning.

a) *Motivating*

Motivate learning by selecting and varying learning experiences and activities that are enjoyable and interesting.

b) *Connecting*

Show students how to activate their prior knowledge, and help them make connections between what they know and what they are learning, and between classroom activities, texts and the wider world.
c) **Focusing**

Help students understand the learning goals of classroom activities and tasks and focus attention on attaining these goals.

d) **Reinforcing**

Reinforce learning by strengthening students’ knowledge and skills and showing them how to use and apply the knowledge and skills to new contexts so that their learning becomes meaningful and personally relevant.

e) **Modelling**

Model how to apply a skill, strategy or process by demonstrating it and providing the language that students need.

f) **Diagnosing**

Diagnose students’ needs, abilities and interests. Identify learning gaps and modify or adapt teaching methods.

g) **Monitoring**

Monitor their learning, guide them to regulate their own learning.

h) **Feedback**

Give timely and useful feedback that focuses on what students can do differently to improve and provide opportunities for them to act on the feedback by determining the next steps to improve their learning.
i) *Explaining*

   Explain directly and systematically a skill, strategy or topic by defining, describing and giving reasons for learning it.

j) *Clarifying*

   Help students become clear about a skill, strategy or topic through exemplification and through analyzing.

   Teachers should be thoughtful and flexible in their instructional planning and classroom teaching. The main consideration to take into account is the needs, abilities and interests of their students, and how the deliberate decisions and actions in teaching can impact students’ learning. Teachers have to ‘offer an earnest commitment to improving instruction and student performance’ (Andrade, 2007). By identifying students’ expectations of the instructor’s inventions, the instructor is better able to identify the dissonance between the students’ understanding of writing instruction and the instructor’s pedagogical practice. In understanding that dissonance, the instructor is better able to enter into the kind of conversation with his/her students that results in a mutual understanding of the writing process.

### 4.8 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS OF THE EXPERIMENTAL STUDY

The pre-test revealed no significant difference between the means of scores obtained by the two groups in their writing skills and so they could be considered as homogenous groups. Prior to the experiment, students in the experimental study committed many errors in their writing. Run-on and fragmented sentences were common. Resistance was expected from the students when they had to be taken back
to the basics. Care was taken to rectify their errors without demoralizing them or making them feel their skills were poor. They were made to understand that once a good foundation had been laid, they could move on to basic paragraph writing and then, on to essays.

The higher values of the means of the post-test scores clearly indicate the improved performances of all the students of both control and experimental group in all the dimensions of writing fixed by the investigator to assess their writing skills. This increase in scores might be attributed to the fact that they have been exposed to the aspects of writing in their usual Part II English classes. But the significant difference between the post-test scores of the control and the experimental group shows that the students in the latter group have progressed a lot.

Diary writing influenced students' sentence writing length and the participants, who wrote a few lines at the beginning, wrote one or more pages later and when students wrote about topics meaningful to them, they exercised more effort and time to write longer texts. Diary writing proved to be a great way to get students to write on a regular basis, plus keep track of their progress as far as writing skills were concerned. Discussions about their works were revealing as they gave the investigator a fuller understanding of what the students were trying to achieve in their writing or of the sources of errors. It is also clear that discrete grammar instruction does not reliably enhance student writing as in the case of the students in the experimental study for whom grammatical structures were reinforced unconsciously.

The substitution drills had made them accustomed to recurring patterns which they observed with utmost care. More repetition led to more retention and confidence. By repeating set patterns, input-response became automatic. It proved to be a
powerful technique that led to quick production of the target language. Students improved in the use of verbs, tenses, prepositions and articles. Above all, sentence structures became embedded in their mind.

Reading helped them get acquainted with different styles of writing. It helped them with the expression of the flow of thought. It also enabled them to acquire a wealth of vocabulary. This raised their level of confidence and they did not have to struggle for words while writing. It has been proved that learning to read can help students learn to write and vice versa.

Students were offered opportunities to build from basic writing tasks to more sophisticated challenges that required them to synthesize and critique information gleaned from divergent sources. The investigator, faced with the challenge of preparing diverse students to meet the demands of private, academic, and civic life, fostered interest in activities that encouraged writing as a tool for exploration and learning. The most important factor in writing exercises is that students need to be personally involved in order to make the learning experience of lasting value. The investigator focused on encouraging student participation in the activities which she felt would help refine and enhance their writing skills.

Achieving even a minimum level of proficiency requires more time than our formal classroom environment can provide. Hence it follows that the teacher should build a bridge between formal and informal activities. The changes that occurred in the experimental students’ attitudes can be deemed as the result of the free and informal activity the students did. What they learnt in a formal way was applied in an informal way. It was observed that the students in the experimental condition had become facile enough to construct sentences with minimum grammatical infelicity, if
not perfect ones. Inasmuch as the treatment received by the experimental group has proved instrumental in their progress, it is implied that the strategies did work well for them as they evinced interest in writing.

4.9 INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESSFUL WRITING

The language teacher has a multi-faceted role to play in the classroom to bring about desired results and to mould students. Certain ingredients for successful writing that emerged from the study are enumerated:

4.9.1 FOCUSING DIRECT WRITING INSTRUCTION ON THE RIGHT FEATURE AT THE RIGHT TIME

Rather than teaching a strict sequence of composition and grammar lessons throughout the year, teachers can provide students with flexible instruction in the appropriate feature when they need it most during the writing process. Teachers can teach lessons on focus and organization when students are planning their writing. During revision, teachers can provide lessons on support and elaboration or style, or, if necessary, review focus or organization. Lessons on conventions can be reserved for the editing phase of the writing process, as students prepare their work for an audience.

4.9.2 GIVING EQUAL WEIGHT (AND EQUAL INSTRUCTIONAL PRIORITY) TO EACH FEATURE

Focus and style are often neglected in writing lessons, while conventions and organizations are widely taught, sometimes to excess. By giving equal weight to all
the features, teachers can ensure that students receive the instruction they need to improve all aspects of their writing.

4.9.3 TEACHING STUDENTS TO BECOME CRITICAL READERS OF THEIR OWN WRITING

Students who are taught to diagnose and correct their own writing problems are on their way to becoming self-regulated, independent writers. By providing instructional support, including demonstrations of writing strategies, writing “think-alouds,” guided practice in small-group settings, conferences with teacher and peers, and opportunities to transfer strategies to new contexts and genres of writing, teachers can move students toward independence.

4.9.4 TEACHING STUDENTS TO BECOME CRITICAL READERS OF THE WRITING OF OTHERS

Students can use the features to evaluate their peers’ writing in order to give constructive feedback. Students can also learn to read critically and evaluate the writing of professional authors and to appropriate their techniques.

4.9.5 TOWARDS A PRAGMATIC APPROACH

The teacher should be clear on what skills he/she is trying to develop. Next, the teacher needs to decide on which means (or type of exercise) can facilitate learning of the target area. Once the target skill areas and means of implementation are defined, the teacher can then proceed to focus on what topic can be employed to
ensure student participation. By pragmatically combining these objectives, the teacher can expect both enthusiasm and effective learning.

4.10 SUMMATION

In this chapter, the investigator has discussed the results of the survey and the experiment separately. The results of the survey were anticipated by the investigator to a certain extent. The responses of the teachers and the students sensitized the investigator to some of the difficulties that may be involved in the teaching-learning process. The aspiration of teachers proves to be empractical in certain cases owing to time restrictions and non-availability of resources. In this way students’ expectations are not met with. The experimental study has certainly produced the desired result. The investigator has given plausible reasons for the results obtained from both the studies. In the next chapter, the investigator proceeds to present the findings and implications of the study and recommendations for further research.