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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This is a study which aims at finding out the expectations of the students regarding writing instruction, assessing their writing skills, developing strategies for the acquisition of writing skills and experimenting the strategies on a sample of students. This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section traces the history of English and English Language Teaching (ELT) in India, gives an account of the four language skills with special reference to writing skills, an analysis of the role of grammar in writing instruction, an overview of the various methods of teaching writing, the origin, the objectives, the need and the significance of the study. Next, the research questions are presented along with the hypotheses upon which this study is based. Some basic terms used in this study are also explained briefly. Finally an overview of a few effective strategies for the acquisition of writing skills is presented. Review of literature in this regard, serves as a basis for investigation. Therefore, in the second section of this chapter, an overview of available studies on different topics relevant to the current study is presented.

1.1 WHAT IS LANGUAGE?

The ability to communicate is one of the primary factors that distinguish human beings from animals. Language, the principal source of communication, is one of the fundamental aspects of our lives. As Yadav (2007) says, “Language consists of words, idioms and syntax and it is through language that we learn to think, feel, judge and express. The rich heritage of great ideas and actions passes over to the young generation in terms of its language” (p. 115). A person’s native language is referred to
as his first language or L1 and the language that is learnt in addition to the mother
tongue is known as his second language or L2. In the Indian context, the L2 of the
majority of people is none other than English.

1.2 THE ADVENT OF ENGLISH INTO INDIA

English started penetrating into India way back in 1612 when English
tradesmen came to India as the English East India Company. Initially English was
presumed to be used only for the purpose of trade. Eventually, in due course, the
Britishers took control over India. No doubt they started imposing their language over
the Indians. They lured Indians into receiving English education by giving them
preference in government jobs. In 1835, Macaulay published his ‘Minutes on
Education’. In it, he remarks:

‘The claims of our own language, it is hardly necessary to recapitulate….It
stands pre-eminent even among the languages of the west….We must at
present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the
millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but
English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect’ (qtd. in Mishra, 2009).

Independence from British rule in 1947 did not free Indians from the clutches
of the English language because English had already permeated into every field of
education. Right from that time, there have been two extreme views with regard to the
place of English in India. There are people who acknowledge the indispensability of
the language, considering it a legacy and a boon from the British. There are others
who advocate a ban on the use of English as an official language, considering English
a curse on our tradition and culture. Whether one likes it or not, modern means of
communication like the internet, email and mobile phones have become more accessible throughout the world. It has been estimated that 75% of all internalized communication in writing, 80% of all information in the world’s computers and 90% of the internet contents are in English. According to David Crystal (2003), “a quarter of the world’s 6.5 billion population uses various forms of English for a range of communicative tasks” (p. 106).

Analyzing the importance of English in post-colonial India, S.K. Verma and Krishnaswamy (1989) have remarked:

Though some thought that it was unpatriotic to learn the language of the rulers, there was a growing realization that the English language was not the language of the English rulers alone and that a knowledge of English was and is necessary for the economic, scientific, technological and literary progress of India, since English is the most effective catalyst for progress and modernization. (p. 343)

When the constitution of independent India was framed in 1950, the Indian Parliament decided to retain English as the official language along with Hindi at least until 1965, when this decision would be reviewed. However, in 1965, no alternative could be agreed on and English continues to be the ‘associate official language’ of India.

Realizing the need and significance of English as a second language, several Education Commissions like the Mudhaliar Commission (1952), the Kothari Comission (1964-66) and the National Policy on Education (1986 and 1992) in their language policies have repeatedly emphasized the importance of retaining and promoting teaching of English in independent India. It should be admitted that
English language teaching and learning received a major setback due to inevitable reasons like inadequate exposure to the English language, the largely unrealistic examination system, the outdated textbooks and above all the prevailing psychological attitude of teachers and learners towards English teaching and learning. All the Education Commissions and reports of the Committees set up by the Indian government have tried their best to curb the falling standards.

The Radhakrishnan Commission (1948) recommended the continuance of the study of English in high schools and in the universities in order that “we might keep ourselves in touch with the living stream of evergrowing knowledge” (cited in Zoha, 1998, p.2).

The Kunzru Commission (1955) stressed the importance of the use of special methods in English language teaching and the study of linguistics as the essential prerequisites for ensuring adequate proficiency in English at the university level (Zoha, p. 2).

The Official Language Commission (1956) recommended that English should be taught as “a language of comprehension rather than as a literary language so as to develop in the students learning it, a faculty of comprehending writings in the English language, more specially those relating to the subject matter in their specialized fields of study” (Zoha, p. 2).

The Kothari Commission (1964) emphasized the role of English as a library language. It observed, “It should be the responsibility of English units to adjust their teaching to the needs of the different categories of students and to ensure that they are all given at least that essential command over the language which will enable them to use it efficiently as a library language” (Zoha, p. 2).
The Study Group I (1967) recommended a programme for teaching English focusing on the functional aspects of the language. The group also recommended the introduction of special courses in English to meet the needs of various categories of learners (Zoha, p. 3).

The Study Group II (1971) extended the argument in favour of English for special purposes and foresaw a situation when the learners without any previous knowledge of English would seek admission to the colleges at least in some parts of the country and suggested a number of courses for such learners (Zoha, p.3).

The Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) was set up by the University Grants Commission in 1987. The report discusses learners’ needs and learner-centred teaching for the first time and the need for attempts at institution level to be innovative in the language teaching (Zoha, p. 3).

The recommendations of the various commissions reiterate the fact that, with the exponential growth of the use of English all over the world, it is necessary for a great emphasis to be placed on the teaching and learning of English. Indubitably, as Mekala (2009) says:

The recommendations of the various commissions reveal how much importance is given to the study of English and also the indispensability of the language. The literature curriculum needs to be attitude-oriented, which refers to the kind of learning experience that is attained through various relationships developed in a particular environment that prevails in the classroom. (157)
1.2.1 THE PRESENT SCENARIO

It is an undisputed fact that English is the passport to success in today’s corporate world. No one can deny the prominence of English on the international scene. English has become the language of the government and administration, law and higher education. It is the language of science and technology, discoveries and inventions, the language of trade and commerce and the language that assures cosmopolitanism. It is a means to get international recognition. It will help get a decent job, promotion and even favour in the eyes of everyone. It is an undeniable fact that the upsurge of MNCs and BPOs has propelled students to prepare for placement there. In the fast-growing and challenges-filled world, what institutions and industries need are persons adept in the art of articulating with expressive creativity since English is widely considered the most effective catalyst for progress and modernization.

In India, at present, we have a number of institutions that promote the study of English. We have the Regional Institute of English (RIE) in Bangalore and in Chandigarh. The Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (CIEFL), now known as English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU) was established in 1958, with the twin objectives of training teachers and producing materials to improve the ELT in our country. A number of English Language Teaching Institutes (ELTIs) and professional organizations like the English Language Teachers Association of India (ELTAI) Chapters all over India strive to enhance the teaching-learning process by disseminating innovative practices of teaching English. The Institutes prepare teachers and researchers to be competent enough for taking up the challenges arising in the field of English education.
English is taught in Tamil Nadu as a compulsory second language from Standard three onwards in government schools. It is also the medium of instruction in almost all the private schools. By the time children complete their school education, they will have had ten years of formal instruction in English.

1.2.2 PROBLEMS FACED BY STUDENTS

Some of the problems faced by students while learning English are because of the peculiar nature of the target language. There is no correspondence between spelling and pronunciation; the same letter is pronounced in different ways when it occurs in different words; almost all rules have exceptional cases; the list goes on like this. This complex nature of the language baffles learners. In most of the schools, teachers who teach English are not graduates in English language and literature. This makes teaching difficult for them because most of the time they themselves are not equipped with the knowledge of the language. Factors of a heterogeneous nature varying from place to place and situation to situation do exist and create difficulties. In many cases, unmanageable numbers, poor classroom conditions, poor motivation, lack of support from home and society, pressures of unwieldy syllabus in the subjects, too many subjects to be studied at the same time and unhealthy attitudes of authorities are factors that interfere with the teaching and the learning of English. (Mohammed, The Hindu, 1995. May 23).

It is in this context that the investigator decided to identify and study the pertinent influence of some relevant variables on English language acquisition with special focus on writing skills.
1.3 LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

The term ‘language acquisition’ is used for the process where a language is acquired as a result of natural and largely random exposure to language: the term ‘language learning’ is used where the exposure is structured through language teaching. Language itself is a formation of habits and to develop a second language is to establish a new set of habits (Ellis, 1994, p. 31). Learners pick up those linguistic elements that are similar to their native language in a relatively simpler manner than those elements that are different. Acquisition is a subconscious process through which the learner gets a feel for what is and what is not correct. Conversely, language learning is a result of direct instruction in the rules of the language wherein learners have conscious knowledge of the new language. In this study, the terms ‘learning’ and ‘acquisition’ are used interchangeably as it is found that both occur simultaneously where proficiency in L2 is concerned.

Various theories have been propounded as to prove how an individual acquires the language. Behaviourists say that children learn the language merely by being rewarded for imitating. Chomsky was of the opinion that the ability to learn is inborn (Language Acquisition Device). Piaget said that language is a reflection of thought.

One’s mother tongue is naturally acquired and developed by a person. First, the person listens to the different sounds he hears in his mother tongue, tries to imitate the sounds and then attempts to speak. After that, when admitted to school, the person is taught the alphabet and then to read and write. But the phased approaching of acquiring L1 skills, namely LSRW is not followed in Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Young learners are taught to read as they listen simultaneously. Writing follows, and last of all, speaking. This makes the process of learning complicated.
‘Language acquisition’ involves subconscious learning and ‘language learning’ involves deliberate attempt on the part of the learner to master the language. So it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between the two terms. Whatever the case may be, the learner has to be immersed in the language and stay connected to the language by listening, speaking, reading and writing it everyday. Language is not taught by teaching a person something. It is learnt by experiencing. But still, learning a new language involves a number of skills that are to be fostered and developed by constant practice.

1.4 THE FOUR LANGUAGE SKILLS: LSRW

Learning a new language means developing skills that allow an individual to process what other people say in that language and to communicate what he wants to say in the target language. The concept of the four basic skills is not a new one as language educators have been using it for a long time. Listening and reading are receptive skills. Speaking and writing are productive skills.

1.4.1 LISTENING

Among the four skills one probably spends more time using listening skills than any other skill. However, it is listening to understand that is real listening. Hearing, understanding and judging are also involved in the listening process.

1.4.2 SPEAKING

Speaking is more than just pronouncing words. The individual should be able to speak with proper pronunciation, stress and intonation. Speaking skill also involves
use of the body language to improve the effectiveness of the message conveyed
during an oral interaction. Clarity of thought is reflected in the way of speaking and
choosing the right words. Speaking can be mastered only through practice.

1.4.3 READING

Reading involves being able to identify words and their significance in the
text. This skill includes being able to comprehend and interpret the text in the right
manner. It also involves being able to pronounce words correctly with proper stress
and proper intonation in sentences and pausing at the appropriate places.

1.4.4 WRITING

Writing is the presentation of thoughts in a structured way. This skill includes
how the thought process is converted into structured sentences. It also includes
understanding how to connect ideas logically within a sentence. Writing, among all
the other skills, emphasizes on clarity, accuracy, beauty and proficiency. Writing skill
encompasses certain sub skills like using correct spelling and capitalization, proper
lower and upper-case distinction of letters, appropriate punctuation, accurate
grammar, coherent joining of sentences, writing legibly and choosing the right
vocabulary. Lower order writing skills refer to copying and dictation; higher order
writing skills refer to free writing. The investigator agrees with Varghese (1990)
when he remarks:

The student who learns to write English has not only to cope with the
mechanical problems connected with the script of the language but also with
the problems of ease and fluency of expression, of grammatical and lexical
accuracy and of the appropriateness of the style of writing as demanded by the occasion or situation. (p.78)

Writing involves more than just producing words and sentences. To be able to produce a piece of writing, one should be able to write a connected series of words and sentences which are grammatically and logically linked, so that the purpose one has in mind will suit the intended readers.

The power of writing resides in its ability to convey knowledge and ideas. Writing helps to gather, preserve and transmit information widely with great detail and accuracy. Its permanence makes ideas readily available for review and evaluation. Students use writing for the following purposes – to communicate, share knowledge, learn, persuade, explore feelings and beliefs. Writing is the primary instrument that teachers use to evaluate academic performance. In some instances, the amount of writing involved is minimal; with other assessments, writing demands are considerable. Writing has become a central component in today’s life.

1.5 IMPORTANCE OF WRITING

In teaching English, the teacher aims at developing four abilities – ability to understand, to speak, to read and to write. The ability to write occupies the last in this order, but it does not mean that it is least important. According to Bacon (1851), “Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man and writing, an exact man” (p. 171). In such a context, mastery over the language can be ensured only when the student is able to do the following tasks successfully:

• Use grammatically structured language.
• Use appropriate and a rich fund of words, phrases and idioms.
• Use a variety of sentence patterns.
• Build a proper sequence of sentences using appropriate connections.
• Use relevant thoughts.

Writing is an essential tool for communication, learning, and self-expression. Many jobs require a basic competence in written language. It is through writing that a learner’s knowledge is tested and through which instructors can establish the extent and nature of students’ understanding of subject matter (Maclellan, 2004, p. 75). By writing, it is not meant writing in a high sounding language, but being able to arrange a few ideas on any idea or matter in ordinary written form in a coherent manner with grammatical accuracy and clarity of thought.

Writing, as all other communication skills, is an inevitable part of the study of the content of any subject thus reflecting the students’ development of an aspect of socio-cultural competence. It does not, as many people think, pertain only to language studies. It extends to other disciplines too. Students should not assume that good English is to be practised only in composition and literature courses. They should remember that it is also of prime importance for effective work in history, in biology, and in all other branches of the curriculum.

1.6 LEARNING TO WRITE AND THE DIFFICULTIES INVOLVED

It is said that learning to write fluently and expressively is the most difficult among the four skills for all language learners regardless of whether the language in question is a first, second or a foreign language. Students may be able to hear and understand spoken English but confuse sentence structure and grammar when writing the same thing. According to White (1981), writing is not a natural activity. All
people have to be taught to write. Like speech, writing needs constant practice. Bell and Burnaby (1984) point out that writing is an extremely complex cognitive activity in which the writer is required to demonstrate control of a number of variables simultaneously. At the sentence level, these include control of content, format, sentence structure, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling, and letter formation. Beyond making a sentence, the writer must be able to structure and integrate information into cohesive and coherent paragraphs and texts.

Students may learn to write only when they have adequate pre-communication input, when they have something to write about and when they know what they want to write. Indeed, acquisition of writing skills requires conscious effort and practice in composing, developing, and analyzing ideas. It can be difficult for students to write clearly in a second language, as their native language may have different requirements for tenses and placement for sentence structure. Compared to students writing in their native languages (L1), students writing in the target language (L2) is a bit more complicated as they need to acquire proficiency in writing strategies and in following the techniques in the use of the language as well (Narayanan et. al, 2008, p 1).

It is true as Gagne, et. al. (1993) reported that “writing is a highly complex activity with many component processes...requiring the acquisition of both declarative and procedural knowledge and a conceptual understanding of the nature and purpose of writing” (p. 314-15). Young learners experience writing problems at two levels. These include problems with lower level skills, including grammar, punctuation, capitalization, handwriting, and spelling. At the higher level, the problems include audience awareness, content generation, planning, revising, and the knowledge about the topic. Flower and Hayes (1980) identified two fundamental but very demanding problems that writers face during the composing process: the
knowledge problem and the communication problem. On the one hand, writers must produce an organized set of ideas for a paper by selecting and arranging a manageable number of concepts and relations from a vast body of background knowledge and experiences. On the other hand, writers must fit what they know to the needs of the reader and the constraints of formal prose (Flower and Hayes, 1980). They basically need to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of story components, language skills, vocabulary, mechanics, conventions of print, audience needs and characteristics, and an ability to focus on abstract topics. Writing also calls for meticulousness in the choice of vocabulary and the ability to set out a coherent chain of ideas.

Writing as a skill is not imparted at the tertiary level, yet, the principal skill in which the students are tested is writing. The typical writing classroom is dominated by a product-oriented approach. Students are given a ready-made essay or composition which they reproduce in the examination. Persistent writing problems, therefore, make it difficult for students to reach their educational, occupational, and personal potential. Eventually, struggling writers have little awareness of the writing process and have underdeveloped skills and techniques in addition to the fact that they are teacher-dependent. Struggling writers need to practise writing by doing exercises which involve copying from a text or reproduction of learned material in order to learn the conventions of spelling, punctuation, grammatical agreement, and the like. They should be engaged in a variety of activities of controlled nature.

Writing is therefore considered a skill that is not mastered easily, but acquired gradually as a result of considerable changes in a writer’s basic composing skills. The learner should improve his/her knowledge about writing and practise self-regulatory or strategic behaviour. It should be remembered that writing is a personal activity that
can be practised outside the classroom too. Along with these, if there is motivation and persistent effort, individuals will move from novice, to competent, and then to expert writers.

1.7 EFFECTIVE WRITING INSTRUCTION- DETERMINANTS AND DETRIMENTS

Writing is at the centre of academic experience and at certain levels it extends beyond that too. Language teachers are faced with the job of assisting students to write well. Historically, when writing was explicitly taught in higher education, the emphasis was on students’ writing as final texts or ‘products’. Teaching writing – whether in formal writing classes or as an activity within discipline-based courses – often entailed presenting students with models of good writing, and asking them to imitate those exemplars. Often, little analysis occurred of the various rhetorical aspects of the texts or the social contexts in which the texts functioned. The focus instead was on specific features of the written texts: for example, spelling, text structure, vocabulary and style. In addition, little attention was typically paid to the process of writing, including the conscious and unconscious decisions that writers make in order to communicate for different purposes and to different audiences. In an era in which students may have been more homogenous and shared previous educational experiences and social backgrounds, the assumption was often made that students could pick up how to do academic writing through this process of imitation. There is an abiding concern with the nature of students' composing processes, and how teachers across the grade levels might more effectively gear instruction to individual needs, backgrounds, and interests. Hence, process-oriented instructional approaches have become common, with teachers providing opportunities to
brainstorm ideas, complete initial rough drafts, receive peer and teacher feedback, and revise and proofread. As Connor (1996) observes, there has been a paradigm shift in the teaching of second language writing over the past few decades:

The emphasis is no longer on the product. Instead, writing is taught as a process, in which each stage – pre-writing, composing, and editing – is important. In addition, writing is not considered a solitary act; it involves teachers, peers, and other readers. The responses of other readers are a vital part of writing considering considered as a social construction of meaning. The second language teacher who is familiar with the teaching of writing as a process does not teach her students to write through model compositions. Instead, she focuses on helping students make revisions in students’ drafts from the beginning to the final editing. (p. 168)

In order to teach effectively, a language teacher should have the following language-specific competencies. These include the ability to do the following kind of things:

- To comprehend texts accurately
- To provide good language models
- To maintain use of the target language in the classroom
- To maintain fluent use of the target language
- To give explanations and instructions in the target language
- To provide examples of words and grammatical structures and give accurate explanations
- To select target-language resources (e.g., newspapers, magazines, the Internet)
- To monitor his or her own speech and writing for accuracy
• To give correct feedback on learner language
• To provide input at an appropriate level of difficulty
• To provide language-enrichment experiences for learners

Grammatical errors in writing is another problem teachers identify among students while teaching writing. Teachers often face problems with sentence formatting and grammatical requirements needed for writing to be coherent. Activities and practice material focusing on recognizing and using words with the correct spelling are key elements of instructing students in English as a Second Language, (ESL).

Explicit writing instruction must be integral to the course, as part of the course content and as a significant, recurring activity. Through instruction, students should learn about writing, including its structures and functions, and should practise writing in a variety of modes and settings appropriate to the discipline. The forms and types of writing instruction that will be used in the course should be explained in the syllabus or supporting teaching materials. According to Hyland (2003), an emphasis on language structure as a basis for teaching writing is typically a four-stage process:

1. Familiarization: Learners are taught certain grammar and vocabulary, usually through a text.

2. Controlled Writing: Learners manipulate fixed patterns, often from substitution tables.


4. Free Writing: Learners use the patterns they have developed to write an essay, letter, and so forth. (pp.3, 4)
The goal of writing instruction can never be just training in explicitness and accuracy because written texts are always responses to a particular communicative setting (Hyland, 2003, p.5). Ostensibly, students are unwilling to write because of the anxiety they have about their ability to construct sentences and paragraphs. Therefore, as Harmer (2004) says, “with students like this who lack familiarity or confidence with writing (or need enthusiasm for it), we need to spend some time building the writing habit – that is making students feel comfortable as writers in English and so gaining their willing participation in more creative or extended activities’ (p.61).

Given the challenges posed by the teaching-learning process of writing, language teachers should be well-prepared to face them. Before the commencement of the class, the teacher should ask himself / herself the following questions:

- What level are my students?
- Why are they taking this course?
- Do they need writing skills for specific reasons? (business correspondence, college application letters, etc.).
- What do you expect them to produce? (a short email for beginners; an essay for an examination).
- What is the focus of the exercise? (structure, tense usage or vocabulary).

Once the teacher gets a clear idea about the skills students need to develop, the next step is a wide variety of writing tasks that may be assigned to students to help them hone their writing skills. But careful consideration of the questions answered above should help the teacher narrow down his / her options and begin to focus on how to involve the students in the activity thus promoting a positive, long-term learning experience. As in correction, the teacher must choose the most appropriate
manner for the specified writing area. If formal business letter in English is required, it is of little use to employ a free expression type of exercise. Likewise, when working on descriptive language, attention to writing skills might be given to presentation and coherence of points.

In every language class, the teacher plays a great role in making the writing tasks as achievable and productive as possible. The teacher should:

- Make the written tasks a frequent occurrence to reduce anxiety around them.
- Make the tasks meaningful to students personally and in general.
- Give appropriate teacher feedback and give the students a chance to revise their drafts (as this promotes self-correction and noticing). Feedback should focus on improving the students’ work, not correction for correction’s sake.
- Give the students time to reflect on the writing process (what worked, what didn’t, what was enjoyable, etc.).
- Do not always grade the tasks; students should not be writing solely for credit.
- Establish real-life situations to engage the students (i.e., set up an email pen pal system between another school, etc.).

Above all, the teacher should know that a learner might know how a language ought to be spoken or written without any flaw, but only when he is able to use it in a real context it can be understood that the individual is a master in it.

### 1.8 COMPETENCE AND PERFORMANCE

It was Chomsky who first differentiated ‘competence’ from ‘performance’ in his book *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (1965). He said that we can make a ‘distinction between competence, the speaker-hearer’s knowledge of the language,
and *performance*, the actual use of language in concrete situations (p.4). *Competence* is the potential ability of an individual based on his / her knowledge of the language. *Performance* is the actual spoken / written ability of an individual. Anyone can ‘perform’ a job but they might not be ‘competent’ at doing it. The learner might know how a language ought to be spoken or written without any flaw but only when he / she is able to use it in a real context it will be understood whether the person is a master in it or not. According to Chomsky, grammatical competence defines an innate knowledge of rules rather than knowledge of items or relations. It is regarded to be innate because one does not have to be trained to develop it and will still be able to apply it in an infinite number of unheard examples. *Competence* and *performance* involve “knowing” and “doing” respectively. Most of the language courses have focused more on the “knowing” (competence) part of learning a language wherein words and sentences are presented and practiced in a way to best help learners internalize the forms. The assumption here is that once the learners have ‘learned’ the information, they will be able to use it through reading, writing, listening and speaking. The disadvantage of this approach is that the learners are unable to use the language in a natural way. Having been trained to learn the language through “knowing”, learners have difficulty reversing this training and actually “doing” something with the language. In brief, it is difficult to assess whether the learners’ insufficient proficiency is due to limitations of competency or a lack of performance. In order to make learners focus more on the “doing” part of learning, which allows a more accurate measure of learners’ language proficiency, a more communicative approach to teaching can be used. This type of approach concentrates on getting learners to do things with the language. When students are encouraged to learn through the language instead of strictly learning the language, there is a more
balanced focus on both competence and performance. This brings us to the question whether explicit grammar instruction is needed or not to write well.

1.9 TO TEACH OR NOT TO TEACH GRAMMAR

The role of grammar in second language teaching has always been the subject of controversial opinion. The place which grammar should occupy in composition classes is a confused issue as teachers of English “on the one hand recognize that the stress in the methodology which reaches them is very much against grammar in favour of meaning and communication, while on the other hand students and curricula continue to place grammatical concerns at the forefront of their needs” says Munice (2002). Views of grammar have changed over the years. The investigator endorses Carrico’s views in her article ‘Grammar’:

• During the middle of the previous century, grammar was thought to take place through a process of verbal habit formation (p.20).

• With a rise of generative grammar and its views of language as a system of rules, grammar learning was seen to take place through a process of ‘rule formation’ which itself was brought about when students formulated, tested and revised hypotheses about grammatical structures in the target language (p. 28).

• With a shift toward a more communicative approach to language teaching, views of grammar learning changed once again. Some held that grammar learning took place implicitly and most effectively when students’ attention was not on grammar at all (p. 30).
Dr. Ballard pointed out, “To speak any language whether foreign or native, entirely by rule is quite impossible” (as cited in Kumar, 2006). Language is a skill subject. It is learnt by practising and not by just memorizing the rules of grammar. Bakhtin (2004) calls attention to the fact that “students who recognize, successfully identify, and correctly punctuate certain grammatical or syntactic structures do not necessarily employ those same structures in their own writing” (p. 15). The grammatical devices of a language are not to be learned as an end in themselves. It is the capacity to express meaning that is the end. The grammatical system provides the necessary means. Views of linguists and researchers show that grammar is just one aspect of teaching and learning English. Knowledge of a language is a matter of both grammatical competence and of communicative competence. The word ‘grammar’ is an umbrella term which encompasses a wide range of items like nouns, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, spelling, capitalization, punctuation, vocabulary and so on. In fact it is central to the study of language. But it does not include all that is needed for the successful communication of meaning. Even if a learner has mastered all the grammatical features of a language, he would still not know the correct construction of sentences.

Krashen (1993) describes the effects of grammar instruction as “peripheral and fragile” (p. 725), arguing that explicit grammatical knowledge about structures and rules for their use may never turn into implicit knowledge underlying unconscious language comprehension and production. Truscott (1996) also rejects the value of explicit grammar instruction on similar grounds, arguing that its effects are short-lived and superficial and that grammar instruction alone may not promote what he called “genuine knowledge of language” (p.120). Truscott suggests that if studies have shown benefits for form-focused instruction, such results have been obtained from
tests that measure only explicit metalinguistic knowledge, not the learner’s ability to use the target language in spontaneous communication. Hillocks (1986) observed that grammar study had little or no effect on the improvement of writing. He went on to say that the findings of research on the composing process do not give us a reason to expect that the study of grammar or mechanics will have any effect on the writing process or on writing ability as shown in the quality of written products.

This does not mean that grammar instruction is not useful at all. It is suggested that learners must be given a chance to use instructed forms in appropriate situations. Instruction promotes accuracy in the use of difficult forms. For fluency, there should be enough practice. Researches show that if the goal of second language learning is development of communicative competence, then grammar and communication should be integrated.

The conventional methods of teaching grammar, like the Grammar-Translation Method, the Direct Method, the Audio-lingual Method and the Bilingual Method have been found to have their own advantages and disadvantages. These methods mostly treat the learning of English as a subject and not as a language. Although the Grammar-Translation Method can effectively lead to the development of explicit knowledge about the target language, its weaknesses in terms of developing communicative competence are well known. Larsen-Freeman (2000) says that earlier in this century, this method was used for the purpose of helping students read and appreciate foreign language literature. It was also hoped that through the study of grammar of the target language, students would become more familiar with the grammar of their native language and that this familiarity would help them speak and write their native languages better. Finally, it was thought that foreign language learning would help students grow intellectually; it was recognized that students...
would probably never use the target language, but the mental exercise of learning it would be beneficial anyway (p. 11).

The Direct Method attempts to teach a foreign language directly and not through the mother tongue. Through this method, fluency of speech, good pronunciation and power of expression are properly developed. But it doesn’t suit or satisfy all the individual learners in a large classroom. Since the learner is exposed only to the target language, he finds it baffling. Moreover, this method pays less attention to writing, reading and comprehension. So this method too is not successful. In the Audio-lingual Method, descriptive rules of grammar are presented. There is less interaction, more of drill and practice. It pays attention to speaking and listening alone. The Bilingual Method promotes both fluency and accuracy. It saves the teacher the trouble of maneuvering situations in order to convey meanings in English.

Considering the different methods of teaching grammar, one can understand that the teacher cannot follow just one method of teaching grammar. Modern methods of teaching grammar need more careful preparation of a greater display of pedagogic skills than mere conventional methods. According to Griffiths and Parr (2001),

In addition to grammar-translation, audio-lingualism and communicative language teaching, there have been, and continue to be, many other less widely adopted methods and approaches to the teaching and learning of language, such as the natural method, the direct method, the total physical response method, the silent way, and suggestopedia. All of these various methods and approaches have, in varying degrees, had some influence on contemporary language teaching and learning. In recent years the field has tended to move away from dogmatic positions of ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, ‘better’ or
‘worse’, becoming much more eclectic in its attitudes, and more willing to recognize the potential merits of a wide variety of possible methods and approaches. This contemporary tendency to eclecticism has resurrected the interest in the contribution made by the learners themselves in the teaching/learning dichotomy, and in the learning strategies which learners employ in the process of learning language. (p. 248)

Different learners respond to different approaches. It requires teachers to understand a wide range of techniques and to develop strategies to suit specific learner characteristics. It should be borne in mind that mechanical tests do not assess the ability of students to use grammar in authentic ways. Learners must acquire a deeper, more implicit understanding of target language, form-function relationships if they wish to effectively apply their knowledge in communicative contexts. Therefore real-life uses of grammar in a particular context should be used. This implies that “we must get to know the variety of patterns in the English language which are indicated in the various constructions of sentences and individual words. Get to know the frequently recurring patterns and practice them in appropriate situations. Learning of grammar in order to develop the habit of correctly using the patterns appropriate to the circumstances must be given due importance, but not something to start with” (K.Bose, p.p. 390, 391). The investigator agrees with Ann Chin (n. d.) when she says, “Rather than strive to teach all grammatical concepts to all students, teachers should prioritize and provide instruction on the grammatical elements that most affect their students’ ability to write effectively” in her article on ‘The Role of Grammar in Improving Students’ Writing’ (para. 10).

There has been considerable focus of attention on the relationship between explicit grammatical knowledge and implicit grammatical knowledge and how this
might relate to language development. It is generally accepted that explicit knowledge is acquired through controlled processes in declarative memory, while implicit knowledge is acquired through much less conscious or subconscious processes. The debate regarding whether grammar should be taught explicitly has been a constant one ever since the introduction of the Direct Method in the late nineteenth century (Richards and Rogers, 1986), which questioned its effectiveness. There are quite a number of studies of explicit grammar instruction. Of them, two that are relevant to this research are mentioned – Doughty’s (1991) and Fotos and Ellis’ (1991). Doughty investigated the acquisition of English relative clauses under rule-oriented instruction and under meaning-oriented instruction, and whether acquisition of harder structures would facilitate acquisition of easier structures. The researcher found that both the groups improved significantly against a control group with no advantage for the rule-oriented instruction. Fotos and Ellis compared explicit instruction in a number of grammatical elements with simply raising university students’ consciousness of those elements via communicative pair and group tasks. It was implied that explicit instruction may have a greater effect on comprehension tasks than on production tasks. According to the input hypothesis, as described by Krashen (1985), incomprehensible input and a low affective filter are all that are required for language acquisition to take place. Further, direct form focused instruction is inefficient and unnecessary. Grammar can and will be acquired naturally through comprehensible input. “If input is understood, and there is enough of it, the necessary grammar is automatically provided” (p.2).

In English, words are to be arranged in a fixed order to give meaningful sentences. Care should be taken to place the right word in the right order. The structural words - prepositions, articles, pronouns, conjunctions and auxiliaries - play
a significant role in deciding the meaning of a sentence. It should be remembered that a word or a structure becomes meaningful only if it is used in an appropriate situation and position. Inspite of the fact that traditional grammar instruction that isolates the teaching of grammar from language usage is simply ineffective in changing students’ language usage, grammar instruction is a staple of the English curriculum. Gurrey (1954) says that “it is the lack of adequate application of the grammar learnt that leaves pupils with the impression that grammar is a profitless study and an unprofitable theorizing about words in trite or artificial sentences” (p. 26). With the awareness that formulaic language is as prevalent as it is, it is clearly the case that we should be thinking more in terms of lexicography, rather than thinking solely of morphology and syntax. Similarly, owing to contributions from SLA research, we can appreciate the fact that the acquisition of lexicography is not likely to be accounted for by the type of learning process. Finally, due to the multifaceted nature of grammar and the learning process, we must recognize that the teaching of grammar itself is complex and multidimensional and may require a variety of teaching approaches because grammar is an important element that influences fluency in speaking and in writing.

Having established the role played by grammar in writing instruction, the investigator proceeds to give a brief account of the various approaches to teaching writing.

1. 10 APPROACHES TO TEACHING WRITING

There are several approaches to teaching writing presented by Raimes (1983). They are as follows:
a) The Controlled-to Free Approach

In the 1950s and early 1960, the Audio-Lingual Method dominated second-language learning. This method emphasized speech and writing served to achieve mastery of grammatical and syntactic forms. Hence teachers developed and used techniques to enable students to achieve this mastery. In the controlled-to-free approach, students are first given sentence exercises, then paragraphs to copy or manipulate grammatically by changing questions to statements, present to past, or plural to singular. They might also change words to clauses or combine sentences. With these controlled compositions, it is relatively easy for students to write and yet avoid errors. Students are allowed to try some free composition after they have reached an intermediate level of proficiency. As such, this approach stresses on grammar, syntax, and mechanics. It emphasizes accuracy rather than fluency or originality.

b) The Free-Writing Approach

Teachers who use this approach assign vast amounts of free writing on given topics with only minimal correction. The emphasis in this approach is on content and fluency rather than on accuracy and form. This approach is based on the premise that once students are able to put down ideas on the page, grammatical accuracy and organization will follow automatically. Thus teachers might begin their classes by asking students to write freely on any topic without worrying about grammar and spelling for five to ten minutes. The teacher does not correct the errors in the pieces of writing. She reads them and comments on the ideas expressed. Concern for ‘audience’ and ‘content’ are seen as important in this approach.
c) The Paragraph-Pattern Approach

Instead of accuracy of grammar or fluency of content, the Paragraph-Pattern Approach stresses on organization. Students copy paragraphs and imitate model passages. They put scrambled sentences into sentences in paragraph order. They identify general and specific statements and choose to invent an appropriate topic sentence or insert or delete sentences. This approach is based on the principle that in different cultures people construct and organize communication with each other in different ways.

d) The Grammar-Syntax-Organization Approach

This approach stresses on simultaneous work on more than one composition feature. Teachers who follow this approach maintain that writing cannot be seen as composed of separate skills which are learned sequentially. Therefore, students should be trained to pay attention to organization while they also work on the necessary grammar and syntax. This approach links the purpose of writing to the forms that are needed to convey message.

e) The Communicative Approach

This approach stresses the purpose of writing and the audience for it. Student writers are encouraged to behave like writers in real life and ask themselves the crucial questions about purpose and audience:

Why am I writing this?

Who will read it?
Traditionally, the teacher alone has been the audience for student writing. But some feel that writers do their best when writing is truly a communicative act, with a writer writing for a real reader. As such, the readership may be extended to classmates too.

f) The Product Approach

This is a traditional approach in which students are encouraged to mimic a model text, copy it and transform the teacher-supplied models. The primary goal of product writing is an error-free coherent text.

g) The Process Approach

There are three stages in Process Approach.

1) Pre-writing

The teacher stimulates students’ creativity on how to approach the given topic. For this, the teacher asks many questions and writes the answers given by the students on the blackboard. With the keywords and sentences on the board, students plan what they are going to write.

2) Focusing ideas

Then they write on the topic without worrying about accuracy. They keep on writing what occurs in their mind not bothering about coherence,

3) Evaluating, Structuring and Editing

This is the stage in which students organize the points in a coherent manner. They pay attention to the mechanics of writing as well. Peer-editing is also done. Students interchange their essays and do the evaluation.
4) *Feedback*

It is the duty of the teacher to provide feedback on students’ work. This will encourage students to do better the next time.

In the Process Approach, the teacher acts as a facilitator rather than as an instructor. Students are given considerable freedom within the task. But it could be time-consuming as teachers might not have enough time to go through all the drafts.

**h) The Genre Approach**

The Genre Approach to writing shares similarities with the Product Approach and in some ways, it can be regarded as an extension of the Product Approach. Dudley-Evans (1997) identifies three stages in Genre Approach to writing. First a model of a particular genre is introduced and analyzed. Learners then carry out exercises which manipulate relevant language forms and finally, produce a short text. Genre-based Approach sees writing as dialogic, both because it presupposes and responds to an active audience.

**i) The Eclectic Approach**

The word ‘eclectic’ is of Greek origin (‘eclectic’ means ‘to select’). The term ‘eclectic approach’ is given to the teacher’s use of techniques and activities from a range of language teaching approaches and methodologies. Not one particular method is used. A combination of different methods to suit the classroom is used. Different students have different learning styles. So teachers need to adopt an eclectic approach
to accommodate the variety of learning styles students bring with them to the
classroom. Oluwadiya (1992) advocates a "marriage" of the techniques of the
product-oriented approach with the techniques of the process-oriented approach; we
should aim at using an enriched process approach that borrows freely strategies and
techniques that belong to the product-oriented approach. Grabe and Kaplan (1996)
give a detailed discussion of teaching approaches at beginning, intermediate and
advanced levels of proficiency. At lower levels frequent, short writing activities can
help to build familiarity and develop a useful, productive vocabulary. The variety and
length of tasks can be extended for intermediate level students - developing more
complex themes and building a repertoire of strategies for effective writing. Advanced
level students need to develop a greater understanding of genres and the place of
writing in particular discourse communities. They also need to develop their strategies
and establish their own voice in the second language.

1.11 ACQUISITION OF WRITING SKILLS - AN OVERVIEW OF
EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES

If an approach refers to theories about the nature of the language and language
learning that serve as the source of practices and principles in language teaching, a
method is a general or specific activity in which an activity is done and a strategy is
one which needs planning, especially when faced with a new situation. In the
following section, the investigator proceeds to present a few strategies which can be
adapted by teachers depending upon the circumstances or the actions of the learners.

There is no one answer to the question of how to teach writing in ESL classes.
There are as many answers as there are teachers and teaching styles or learners and
learning styles (Raimes, 2003, p.7). The teacher has to choose one depending on time and the resources available. Drawing from related literature in this field, the investigator has selected a few strategies which would enable students acquire writing skills. She has applied them as she saw fit in the classroom for the experimental study.

1.1.1 MOTIVATION

“Motivation is often defined as the psychological quality that leads people to achieve a goal. For language learners, mastery of a language may be a goal” (Wikipedia). Research on motivation in L2 learning has been influenced immensely by the work of Canadian psychologist R.C. Gardner (1993:157-194). Gardner describes L2 learning motivation as a construct composed of three characteristics: the attitudes towards learning a language (affect) the desire to learn the language (want) and motivational intensity (effort). Motivation is an important variable when examining successful SLA. Higher the motivation, the more autonomous learning students want to have in the learning process. Students’ ability to study independently has a positive influence on their ESL achievements.

Gardner and McIntyre (1993) define a motivated individual as “one who wants to achieve a particular goal, and experiences satisfaction in the activities associated with achieving this goal” (p. 2). It is our duty as language teachers to make the learning experience, a constant source of intrinsic pleasure. Encouraging students to become more active participants in a lesson can sometimes assist them to see a purpose for improving their communication skills in the target language. It must be borne in mind that,
the purpose of the motivation element is to offer the students specific reasons why the lesson content is important to know, understand, apply, or perform….This motivation should appeal to each student personally and engender a desire to learn the material. (http://www.dynamicflight.com/avcfibook/methods/)

1.11.2 LEARNER AUTONOMY

This principle is based on self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985), which states that human beings have an innate need for autonomy, which is defined as the desire to be self-initiating and self-regulating in terms of one’s actions. In addition to psychologists, researchers like Dornyei (2001), Noels, Pelletier, Clement and Vallerand (2000), have viewed self-determination as a prerequisite for classroom activities to be intrinsically rewarding. When students are motivated, they are driven towards autonomy in learning, given proper guidance.

1.11.3 JOURNAL WRITING

This is a method in which students are made to write in their notebooks a record of what happened throughout the day and whatever they felt like. Learners need a rich stimulus which makes them want to write and draw upon their real experience. In that way, journal writing serves as a useful strategy. As Todd, Watson and others point out, in their article ‘Giving Feedback on Journals’, “Writing a journal stimulates reflection on learning and teaching experiences, and so enhances learning” (Todd, et.al, p.354). It helps them shape their writing in a confident manner. It is an exercise which keeps the brain sharp and active, and which also increases memory.
Journals allow freedom of expression among students. When students write every day, it serves as a way of improving their writing skill. The more students write the better and more fluent they become as writers. Journals provide an opportunity for an informal, personal type of writing in which students can make observations, reflect on questions set by the lecturer, respond to course materials, and ask questions without the constraints of creating a formal text. Although it is time consuming, when lecturers can review and respond to students’ journals, it may be a rare opportunity to engage in one-to-one dialogue. Students’ journals may be collected and reviewed once or twice a term; with smaller groups, journals may be reviewed on a weekly basis. Ideally, teachers’ responses should attend to the content of the journals and not to errors in linguistic accuracy. Such responses can stimulate students’ thinking and help them focus their ideas for writing. Teachers can promote dialogue by requiring students to respond. As Harmer (2004) says, “If journal writing is successfully encouraged – and if the conditions for journal writing are appropriate – it has a powerful effect upon their motivation too, quite apart from promoting learner autonomy in writing” (p. 127).

1.11.4 SUBSTITUTION TABLES

A substitution table is an arrangement in columns of units which can be combined to make sentences. It is built on a particular sentence pattern. Learners can be asked to go through all the possible combinations to get acquainted with the sentence patterns. Challenging structures and irregular forms can be memorized easily with the help of mechanical drills. But mechanical drills should not become ends in themselves. Students may never find out what really is to communicate in another language.
1. 11. 5 READING

In order to write well, learners have to read well. Reading enables them to become familiar with various sentence structures. A wealth of vocabulary is also acquired. Instead of spending time learning vocabulary lists, when students spend time doing voluntary reading, they are likely to acquire new words. Vocabulary is best developed through real encounters with the words in context. Gurrey (1954) says, “To enlarge vocabulary we must enlarge experience, we must extend vocabulary and increase reading” (p. 24). Reading leaves an indelible mark on the thinking process of the individual. After thinking, the individual expresses his or her thoughts. Writing or speaking is a part of the replica of the thinking process. Good readers are often very good thinkers and effective communicators. When our thoughts are clear, the expression of thoughts or ideas makes our communication lively and effective. Reading chisels clarity of thought. Not only that, the more a student reads, the better he/she is able to spell.

1. 11. 6 VOCABULARY ENHANCEMENT

An important, perhaps crucial aspect of language acquisition is, acquiring the vocabulary of the language around which different phrases are built; acquiring vocabulary means learning not just word meanings but also the syntactic restrictions that a lexical entry projects onto the rest of the sentence. It is true that “a command of language requires the manipulation of an active and expressive vocabulary and of a diverse and adaptable sentence structure, combined with a logical and discriminating management of the relations of words, as the result of a sense of the orderliness and inter-relatedness of thought, feeling and mental attitude”. (Gurrey, 1954). The
development of a rich and varied vocabulary is considered an essential step in becoming an effective writer. Vocabulary plays an important role in the writing process, especially to influence teachers’ judgements of writing quality. Students with a broader and sophisticated vocabulary may avail themselves of more potentially accurate lexical choices in their writing and hence produce qualitatively better work. Therefore, it is imperative that part of a composition course given at the college level should include language work which will promote the learning of new words. Vocabulary is learnt most effectively by way of massive exposure to and genuine production in the language. When words are learnt in isolation from thought, real experience or from some other context, they become ineffective. Learners can be asked to make a note of new words they learn and make use of them in sentences of their own so that they will know in which context each word can be used.

1.11. 7 PEER-ASSISTED LEARNING

Topping (2001) defines peer-assisted learning as “the acquisition of knowledge and skill through active helping and supporting among status equals or matched companions helping each other to learn and learning themselves by so doing” (p 2). When learners are placed in an atmosphere where they can learn from their peers cooperatively, it becomes an effective strategy for improving writing. Learners become more and more confident while writing when they are asked to review the writing of their peers. During the writing process, learners are not able to complete what they write due to negative emotions caused by anxiety about their teachers’ corrections. Peer correction and peer feedback make students freer and more independent. They are also able to self-evaluate through reading their peers’ articles. Although it cannot be agreed that peers’ corrections would make them improve much
more than the teacher’s correction, it is certain that peers’ corrections are supportive to learners. Sometimes students may feel that teachers’ feedback is most important because of teachers’ expert knowledge of the topic. They also may not feel competent to provide useful advice to each other. However, relying entirely on teacher feedback can bring certain disadvantages for students’ intellectual development. Because of teachers’ power to mark assignments, students may feel compelled to incorporate teachers’ suggestions (or directives) in subsequent revisions even if they disagree or do not understand them. Students can be encouraged with training and practice to fruitfully engage in peer review, which can help them develop their critical faculties and understand how other readers respond to their writing. Peer review is indeed time-consuming and one option is to go through the process once during the regular classes for sometime and subsequently encourage students to meet informally for peer review sessions.

This study has been taken up under the premise that if students are presented with answers, the immediate problem is solved. But if they are taught the strategies to work out the answers by themselves, they will be empowered to manage their own learning.

1.12 ORIGIN OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The inspiration for this study stemmed from the investigator’s observations on the lack of writing skills of the students of Part II English. Six years of college teaching have shown the investigator that in spite of having learnt English for not less than eight years, students in arts and science colleges still have difficulties while writing in English. Whether it is reproducing in writing what they have already learnt, or writing on their own, they are flustered. Most of the students are highly diffident
when it comes to the task of constructing sentences on their own. This is due to the fact that they have not been taught to write on their own. The overcrowded classrooms, the undue importance given to the completion of the syllabus prescribed and the heterogeneous groups of learners in the class, most of them using their mother tongue, are some of the factors that serve as obstacles to the teaching-learning process of writing.

The vast majority of students enrolled at the arts and science colleges affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, usually come from rural areas with an average intellectual and financial background. The creamy layers are streamlined into professional courses. The students who are enrolled into various disciplines are required to learn English as a Part II English paper for four semesters except students of B.Com and those of B.Sc. Computer Science who have Part II English for two semesters only. In order to get a Degree, students have to get through in Part II English as well.

The syllabus for Part II English course (2008-2009 onwards) prescribed by the Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli states that it ‘focuses on improving their skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing English, thus enabling them to fare better in the job market’. The following are the objectives stated:

- To improve the students’ word-power by building up associative systems of vocabulary.
- To give an exposure to grammar and usage.
- To develop their study skills.
- To enable the student to read meaningfully and critically.
• To train them in the listening skill and to help them speak with clarity and confidence.

• To help them write well organized and fault-free English.

English language learners have diverse backgrounds, languages and education profiles. Some enter college highly motivated to learn because of family support or an innate urge to succeed; others are compelled to learn and as a result are demotivated. These positions affect the ease with which they learn or acquire the language. The investigator set out to identify the obstacles that hinder the acquisition of writing skills and explore ways in which writing skills could be acquired.

1. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The urgent need of the majority of the students seems to be the ability to write grammatically correct sentences in simple English with correct spelling, punctuation and appropriate words. Keeping this in mind, this study was undertaken with the following objectives.

• To analyze the needs of students for writing instruction.

• To find out the teachers’ perception of students’ writing skills.

• To investigate the problems in the teaching-learning process of writing.

• To assess the writing skills of students of various arts and science colleges affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University.

• To develop strategies for the acquisition of writing skills.

• To experiment the various strategies over a sample of students at A.P.C. Mahalaxmi College for Women.

• To test the effectiveness of the strategies.
1. NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study of English has been gradually neglected since independence, which has resulted in a sharp decline in communication skill as well as in the working knowledge of English among students. For a majority of students, English is the most difficult course prescribed for study. The high level of percentage of failure at all levels of education and thereby at all levels of life style often is contributed by the failure in English. The low level of attainment of the students in the English language at college level and their inability to use the language effectively both for occupational needs and other requirements make low achievement in language skills, an area of concern. When this situation is further studied against the backdrop of the significance and role of English, both as an international language and as a source language, the situation becomes critical.

Experts on ELT claim that writing is indeed a difficult skill to acquire. Learning to write is a long-term process. The progress of students is painfully slow. Despite years of learning English, students fail miserably. Teaching and learning writing involve stressful situations. The main concern of the teacher is to make the students communicate effectively. It is crucial to establish a learning environment where students can write in their second language without embarrassment. Hence this study seeks to observe the various levels of writing skills of students belonging to different arts and science colleges in Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, in addition to the practices of teachers, so that strategies can be evolved for writing instruction.

The results of this study will be of interest to those who are in the front line of education such as teachers, administrators, curriculum developers and students.
Additionally, the research results may serve as a guide for foreign language teachers. Language teachers can develop different strategies to make language acquaintance less stressful. Very few studies on the attitudes or practices of English language teachers, or the views of the students on writing instruction and their own writing skills are available. Limited research at the national level makes this study a significant one and the need of the hour. If writing performance is to be maximized, effective instructional procedures, especially for beginning writers and those who struggle with writing, need to be identified. Such an attempt is particularly important given the fact that effective instruction can minimize writing failure for young writers and ameliorate the severity of writing difficulties experienced by other students whose primary problems are not instructional (Graham & Harris, 2002). To do well in college, a student does not have to be an excellent writer, but a certain level of competence is expected and is essential. The investigator has attempted to employ a combination of strategies on a sample of students to equip them with basic writing skills within a stipulated period of time and gauge their progress.

1. 15RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Taking into account the objectives of the study, the investigator framed the following research questions:

- Does the Part II English syllabus prescribed by Manonmaniam Sundaranar University help students improve their writing skills?
- What do students think about writing skills and writing instruction?
- What are the standards of writing skills of Part II English at Manonmaniam Sundaranar University?
- What are the methods used by teachers to teach writing?
Does proficiency in grammar help in improving writing skills?

Will strategies like motivation, diary-writing, feedback, substitution drills, reading and vocabulary enhancement improve the writing skills of students?

1.16 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND THE OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

“PRECEPT AND PRACTICE: STRATEGIES FOR THE ACQUISITION OF WRITING SKILLS, AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY”.

The terms used in the title constitute the backbone of the study and are therefore of great importance. They need to be defined in this particular context in order that they are not misunderstood or misperceived.

Precept:

The Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary defines the word ‘precept’ as ‘a rule for action or behaviour’. The investigator has used the word to mean the methods which ought to be used by teachers to teach L2 skills, with special reference to writing skills.

Practice

The word ‘practice’ means ‘something that is usually or regularly done’ according to the Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary. In the present context, it refers to the methods actually followed by teachers to teach L2 skills, especially writing, in selected arts and science colleges affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli.
**Strategies**

Strategies are the tools for active, self-directed involvement needed for developing L2 communicative ability (O’Malley and Chamot, 1990). For the purpose of this study, the term ‘strategy’ has been used to include specific methods employed by the investigator for enabling the students acquire writing skills. In this study, the investigator has used Motivation, Diary writing, Feedback, Substitution drills, Reading and Vocabulary enhancement as strategies.

**Acquisition**

While learning is the active participation and effort to learn a language, acquisition is a natural process. In the present context, both learning and acquisition are used interchangeably because when students are exposed to the language, both learning and acquisition take place.

**Writing skills**

‘Writing skills’ are specific abilities which help writers put their thoughts into words in a meaningful form. By ‘writing skills’ the investigator means the ability of students to be able to arrange a few ideas on anything and on any matter of common interest into an ordinary written form with reasonable grammatical correctness. In this study, the term ‘writing skills’ encompasses five dimensions, viz., grammar, lexis, syntax, mechanics and rhetoric.

**Experimental study**
By ‘experimental study’ the investigator means a way to determine whether the implementation of strategies evolved has the intended effect on the participants or not.

On the whole, the title of the study refers to how a personal system of knowledge, beliefs, and understandings drawn from practical experiences of teaching can help evolve a set of tactics for the acquisition of writing skills to be tried out on a set of students.

1.17 HYPOTHESES

One of the obvious uses of SLA research is to help language teaching. The route for applying research to language teaching has been mostly thought to be through the language teacher. If teachers understand the process of learning, then they can teach more effectively. All research work is initiated on some assumptions a researcher has. These assumptions can in the course of time get refined to give rise to a hypothesis. The present research was also the result of a few assumptions. ‘At the initial level, the theory developer has a hunch based on theory, past experience, observations, and/or information gained from others. A hypothesis is formulated in such a way that this hunch can be tested’. (Best, p.11)

In order to seek answers to the research questions framed, the investigator formulated the following hypotheses:

1) Are teachers satisfied with the existing writing skills of students?

2) Are the needs of students fulfilled with reference to writing skills?
3) Will strategies like motivation, diary-writing, feedback, substitution drills, reading and vocabulary enhancement improve the writing skills of students?

1. LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Reliability of the data obtained depends on the truthfulness of the respondents in filling out the questionnaires. The self-completion questionnaire as a data collection instrument allows respondents to be open, but it is difficult to determine the honesty of their responses. Some respondents may deliberately falsify their responses. But the researcher has to assume that the responses are honest.

This study is limited to the opinions of the subjects who responded to the constructed questionnaire. Moreover, the number of colleges selected for study was only eight. It is difficult to draw strong generalizations due to limited number of participants.

Only five dimensions of writing, viz., grammar, lexis, syntax, mechanics and rhetoric have been taken into consideration. In grammar only four areas, namely, tense, subject-verb agreement, prepositions and articles have been taken into account. The errors in handwriting, which is a major aspect of writing is not dealt with in this work, since it may become a highly subjective affair.

For the experimental study only 40 students were selected and they were from the same discipline. Furthermore, the measure used to assess students’ writing skills may also need to be revised to test whether it is adequate enough to capture differences in students’ performances from pre-test to post-test.
In the following section, the investigator discusses the chunk of available literature related to the present study.

1.19 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND STUDIES

The task of reviewing literature begins with searching for a suitable topic and then proceeds to looking for books and theses related to the selected topic. A brief summary of previous research provides information about existing problems and opens doors to sources of significant problems. It also furnishes the investigator with indispensable suggestions. For the purpose of the present study, the investigator collected books and studies from various libraries and the Internet. Only those research works which are relevant to the present work have been mentioned. The various theses and journal articles covering the area of research proposed by the investigator have been categorized as Indian and Foreign studies and arranged in chronological order.

1.19.1 INDIAN STUDIES

In the study, *Toward a core Pedagogical Grammar for the Degree students studying in the colleges of the Andhra University Area* by Veeraswamy (1983), a core Pedagogical Grammar in English for the degree students of the Andhra University based on Error Analysis has been presented. Analysis was made of the response of the teachers to the questionnaire relating to teaching of English language. A detailed analysis and classification of errors made by the students in the use of certain grammatical items was also made. The interference of L1 was found to be a predominant source of the errors. Finally, a core pedagogic grammar was presented
based on the findings of the study. The items to be mastered by the learner were listed using morphological, syntactic and semantic criteria. The investigator stated that it was a pedagogic grammar in the sense that it was result-oriented and designed primarily to help the learner rather than the specialist.

The objectives of Mohire’s (1989) study on *A critical Analysis of Methods and Means of Teaching English applied at the UG level* were to find out the difficulties experienced by teachers of English with respect to methods and means of teaching, to find out the problems of students in learning English and to suggest measures for improvement. A sample of 100 teachers and 18 students of English from the arts and science colleges of Shivaji University, Kolhapur were selected. The findings revealed that English textbooks did not cater to the communicative competency of the students. Majority of the teachers followed the traditional lecture and translation methods. The errors committed by students were due to lack of comprehension and expression, wrong punctuation marks, wrong word order and wrong usage of grammatical items.

The objective of the study *The Use of Translation as a Strategy to Develop Writing Skills in English* by Bhengra (2005) was to identify a suitable strategy for students who had their education in regional (Hindi) medium schools, and who were admitted at the intermediate level in St. Xavier’s College in Ranchi, Jharkhand. The study looked at some of the problems the learners faced in writing in English. It also aimed at finding ways in which the learners’ L1 can be used as a resource to develop their writing skills in English through the use of translation as a strategy. The findings revealed that translation tasks could be used to achieve multiple goals. It could bring about coherence in writing and facilitate expression and communication of ideas through better comprehension.
Hauzel (2006) conducted research on *Enabling Writing Through Reading in Second Language Classrooms: A Case Study*. The objective of the study was to find out the various methods of teaching and to find out whether writing skill can be enhanced through reading. The research was conducted by means of classroom observations, students’ questionnaire and structured interviews. The findings revealed that students exposed to English for six to seven years were at ease while writing in English. In most of the classes, the teacher controlled and dominated the classroom events and there was no space for discussion. The study showed that there exists a strong bond between reading and writing which was reflected in the students’ writing.

Soundiraraj.S (2006) studied the *Attitude of Learners towards teaching Grammar at Tertiary Level*. The objectives of the study were to study the attitude of learners towards the teaching of grammar to study the needs of the learners regarding teaching grammar and to provide suggestions to improve teaching of grammar. A sample of 75 B.E students of Anna University was selected for this study. A questionnaire was employed to collect data. Sample percentage analysis was done to assess the attitude of the learners. In addition to the questionnaire device, informal interviews with these selected learners were also held for the study. The findings reveal that students are not aware of the importance of grammar. Grammar lessons are not interesting. The method used by the teacher for error correction hurts the ego of students.

A sample of 81 students belonging to various disciplines from A.P.C Mahalaxmi College for Women, Tuticorin was selected randomly for Sankary’s (2007) study on the *ESL Proficiency and some of its Correlates of College Entering Students from Rural and Urban Background in Tuticorin*. The objectives of the study were to analyze the writing proficiency of a selected group of learners at the
college entry level and to examine whether there is any rural-urban divide in the proficiency of the learners on the basis of their place of domicile and schooling. The sample was divided into two groups - rural and urban, based on the place of their domicile and schooling. Exercises on reading comprehension and framing sentences were administered to both the groups. A few days later, a test of paragraph writing was administered. The findings revealed that the performance of the rural students is poorer than that of the urban group. The rural–urban dichotomy is palpably present in the skills of inferential and evaluative comprehension, the use of grammar and vocabulary in writing individual sentences and composing paragraphs and also in logical thinking and the organization of ideas. The correlation analysis between the performance of the study groups and their background variables indicated that, while the father’s occupational status and the learner’s involvement have had a positive impact on the performance of the urban students, the performance of the rural students has suffered a setback owing to their parents’ poor occupational status.

A study on the Teaching and Learning of English as a second Language at the Degree Level on the Arts and Science Colleges Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, was a study conducted by Jaya (2008). This study aimed at observing the teaching and learning techniques followed in the colleges affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, thereby identify the factors that challenged the attainment of language skills by the students. Using survey method, the investigator collected the required data from 925 undergraduate students and 81 teachers of English from 18 Arts and Science Colleges affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University. The findings revealed that the method of teaching popularly followed by teachers of English in the class was lecture and translation methods. Only a few teachers used discussion method. Students’ inability
to interact in English is one of the major difficulties faced by the teachers. The investigator has suggested action research to be the best resort to solve classroom problems and difficulties.

Sirigiri (2008) conducted a study on *Enabling Learner Autonomy in Writing through Indirect Feedback*. The objective of the study was to experiment on feedback developed to encourage engineering college students to improve their writing and to consider error correction as an active source of learning. The study explored an autonomous approach to error correction which consisted of indirect feedback and aimed to foster independence from teacher intervention and promote autonomy in writing. Experimenting on 14 college students, the findings revealed that providing students access to hands-on activity like indirect feedback creates an opportunity for individual discovery and construction of knowledge to occur. It was proved through the experiment that indirect feedback enabled autonomy in learners at an advanced level of proficiency.

1.19.2 FOREIGN STUDIES

Dialogue Journal Writing (DJW) has become popular as a learner-centered interactive technique which is applicable in many contexts and many studies have attempted to illuminate its numerous benefits. Peyton and Seyoum’s research (1988), referred to as one of the pioneer studies in this field in many other studies afterwards, examined the strategies that the teacher used for promoting student writing in the dialogue journals and the role the teacher plays in the success of the dialogue journal interaction. This case study focused on the strategies which the teacher used for journal writing and the types of interaction between the teacher and students. The
researchers came to the conclusion that teacher’s strategy can affect student’s response to some degree, although it is not the only determining factor. Moreover, they found that DJW resulted in a collaborative writing effort and the teacher and students mutually developed topics of interest to them and students wrote more freely and openly and far more than the minimum required and the length of their writing increased whenever the topics were of their interest. In another study Peyton (1990) examined dialogue journals writing of five sixth-graders from Leslee Reed’s class, a language teacher in California. The questions in this study were mainly on the acquisition of language during the time of DJW, the acquisition patterns and whether these patterns were similar between students or not. In this study, she focused on the acquisition of English grammatical morphemes, specifically six verb-related and four noun-related morphemes by students. Peyton came to the conclusion that dialogue journals writing reflected improvement in the students’ English proficiency of the said morphemes and students could write and express themselves in written English long before they completely learned the forms and structures in meaningful texts and through journal writing they gradually developed in these areas.

Of the few studies that have dealt with strategy instruction in writing, Richards (1990) has elaborated on how to apply the brainstorming strategy to develop students’ writing. Richards argues that it is essential to teach students how to interact with each other in order to activate their thinking and create ideas which are crucial to foreign language learning. This interaction process can be facilitated by training learners in the skilled use of the brainstorming strategy. The results of the brainstorming strategy training carried out by Richards indicated that the students in the experimental group were more efficient in finding a topic, finding ideas about the topic, letting ideas interact, and organizing ideas. The results also showed that the quality of the writings
in the experimental group was enhanced by the use of brainstorming strategies. The
direct effects of different types of feedback on student writing have also been
analysed. Ferris (1997) found that changes made by students in response to teacher
comments did have a positive effect on the overall quality of their papers. Villamil
and de Guerrero (1998) investigated the impact of peer revision on L2 writing and
found that it had a positive effect on the quality of the final draft. Berg (1999) trained
students in how to give effective peer response to writing. She found that this training
had a positive effect on the students’ revision types and on the quality of their texts.

*The Perceptions of a Group of 1st year Undergraduate Malawian Students of the Essay Writing Process* was a study by Kalikokha (2003) to explore the
perceptions of the essay writing process of first year undergraduates at Chancellor
College (University of Malawi) and to a lesser extent those of the lecturers
responsible for teaching academic skills. A mixed methods design, combining
qualitative and quantitative techniques, was employed in order to obtain richer data
for deeper understanding of the students’ writing process. Two hundred students from
the humanities and the social science faculties responded to a self-completion
questionnaire towards the end of semester one. Based on the students’ responses, an
open-ended questionnaire was administered to four full time English for Academic
Purposes (EAP) instructors. Findings from this study indicate that most students find
it very challenging to obtain sufficient and relevant source text information,
paraphrase or summarize information, and use an appropriate academic writing style.
As solutions to these challenges, the students suggested the need for timely essay
writing instruction, availability of resources for essay writing, increased amount of
time spent on essay writing instruction, and discipline specific instruction in essay
writing. EAP instructors identified lack of teaching and learning materials, large EAP
classes, and students’ negative attitude towards the EAP course, as some of the challenges they encounter when teaching the course. On the whole, the findings seem to suggest that difficulties that students encounter during the writing process and teaching challenges that EAP instructors face, have great impact on students’ perception of academic writing as well as their approach to writing tasks. The findings also suggest a lack of dialogue between the students and their lecturers.

Alice and Toh’s (2006) article *Teaching Writing to Students from Asia: Linking Approach and Motivation* is based on a study of the motivation and perceived outcomes of students from non-English speaking backgrounds enrolled in the English for Academic Study program at the Auckland University of Technology. It discusses the implications of the findings for tutors responsible for teaching writing. The findings indicate that the motivation and immediate needs of those students are mainly instrumental to write assignments and projects in a university environment, while the long term goals are to use language in the workplace. For such students, the authors argue that a writing program will need to cater to generic forms acceptable to academic as well as real (often business) world readership. They also argue that while introducing an element of ideological critique is important when teaching writing, it does not seem to immediately help students with actual use or application of the genres relevant in real world situations. However, when considering long term goals, the article looks at how the work of academic literacy thinkers can help alert students to ideological aspects of writing. The discussion in this article could also be generalized for the teaching of writing in ESL and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts.

Berg (2006) studied *Peer Assessment in University Teaching: Evaluating Seven Course Designs*. Peer assessment is understood to be an arrangement with
students assessing the quality of their fellow students’ writings and giving feedback to each other. A multiple-case study of seven designs of peer assessment focuses on the contribution of peer assessment to the acquisition of undergraduates’ writing skills. Its aim was to arrive at an optimal design of peer assignment. Factors included in this study were the quality of peer assessment activities, the interaction between students in oral peer feedback students’ learning outcomes and their evaluation of peer assessment. Most students took assessing the work of their fellow students seriously, and included the peer feedback in the revision of their work. In most conversations, students provided feedback in an evaluatory manner. In others, the interaction was more exploratory. For peer assessment, the researchers recommend a combination of written and oral peer feedback.

Lee and Munice’s (2006) study on *From Receptive to Productive: Improving ESL Learners’ Use of Vocabulary in a Post Reading Composition Task* conducted among intermediate ESL learners in Greater Vancouver showed that though intermediate learners’ use of 1,000–2,000 word-level vocabulary remained constant, their productive use of higher level target vocabulary improved in post reading composition. It also showed how, in doing so, their lexical frequency profiles improved. This improvement could be attributed to the teacher’s use of interactive presentation of vocabulary and a writing frame, and specific instruction to learners to use target vocabulary. It was obvious that teacher elicitation, explicit explanation, discussion and negotiation, and multimode exposure to vocabulary are all means of scaffolding and manipulating vocabulary that increased learner’s use of the target language. All these strategies in turn improve writing. The results suggest that this approach also makes vocabulary learning durable. Increased productive vocabulary
acquisition also implies a marked increase in recognition vocabulary, improving overall classroom language performance.

*The Influence of Learner Motivation on Developing Autonomous Learning in an English-for-Specific-Purposes Course* was a study conducted by Conttia (2007). The researcher adopted both quantitative and qualitative approaches to identify factors which motivate and hinder the science majors to take charge of their language learning in a course-based Self-Access Language Learning (SALL) programme at the University of Hong Kong. The objective of the study was also to find out the cognitive and psychological factors that differentiate learners’ levels of development of autonomous learning and the contextual and social influences surrounding the learners’ participation in course-based SALL. Data were collected from 138 students by means of questionnaires that focus group discussions and learners’ written evaluations. The results indicate that significant differences exist in identified regulation and self-efficacy between successful and less successful users of SALL. A number of social and contextual factors are found to have an impact on the learners’ success in SALL.

Rao (2007) conducted an exploratory study that investigated the effects of training in brainstorming strategy on learners’ performance and perceptions about writing. The learners who received instruction in brainstorming were two complete classes of sophomores in a Chinese university. Writing performance, at the beginning and end of the study, was assessed and compared with a third group that did not learn brainstorming strategy but completed the same pre and post-study task. The findings of this study implied that the brainstorming strategy instruction was effective in improving students’ writing performance. On the whole, the experimental classes
made more gains in terms of the grades awarded. The feedback collected at the end of the experiment also showed that the students in the experimental classes felt positive about the brainstorming strategy.

Griffiths’ (2007) study aimed to investigate the point of intersection of teachers’ and learners’ perceptions regarding language learning strategies. Using an original questionnaire developed in a classroom situation and based on student input, this study examined reported frequency of strategy use by international students and teacher perceptions regarding the importance of strategy use. Although students’ and teachers’ perceptions were not perfectly matched, results indicated that teachers regarded strategy use as highly important, and there was a high level of accord (71 percent) between strategies which students reported using highly frequently and those which teachers reported regarding as highly important.

In the study *Learning English as a Second Language in South Korea: Perceptions of 2nd year College and University Students and their Speaking Instructors* Thornton (2009) attempted to describe and investigate perceptions of EFL instruction at the collegiate and university levels in South Korea with 2nd year students and their instructors, to identify some of the strengths and weaknesses of their approach to second language acquisition, and to explore the conditions in the South Korean context that may have led to these beliefs. The investigator used quantitative survey method, complemented with qualitative interviews to a cross section of 2nd year students from a two-year junior college, a private university, and a national university in Busan, South Korea. The results showed that generally the students from all three types of education facilities shared similar perceptions towards second language acquisition. Likewise, the instructor’s results were also consistent. However, there were significant differences between the instructors and students upon
specific survey items and with their responses in juxtaposition with recent SLA findings.

It was predicted by the researchers Lin and Chin (2009) in their study on *An Investigation into Effectiveness of Peer Feedback in Writing*, that the participants in the advanced writing course at the University of Taiwan might hold a positive attitude toward learning through peer’s cooperation and interactions. Initially, the course members were trained in numerous writing strategies and skills in the first two weeks. Then they were guided to do in-class writing with assigned topics. They obtained an opportunity to read their peers’ writings and make corrections. This was monitored by the researchers. The findings revealed that most participants stated that peer correction activities did make their learning experience more relaxing, confident and inspiring. Teachers’ corrections cannot be totally replaced by peer corrections. But participants perceived that they would be able to have more insights and directions of writing based on their peers’ cognitive interactions.

The qualitative study, *An Exploration into Foreign Language Writing Anxiety from Taiwanese University Students’ Perspectives* was conducted by Lin and Ho (2009) to explore the relevant reasons why University students in Taiwan feel anxious during learning and writing in English. 16 students in Southern Taiwan cooperated with the researcher to investigate their learning experience and major factors of anxiety in writing. The findings conceptualized from students’ qualitative statements revealed that anxiety is aggravated due to teachers’ evaluation and peer competition.

Hemmati and Hamideh (2012) conducted a study to investigate the effect of Dialogue Journals Writing (DJW) as an informal, communicative activity on writing
proficiency of intermediate Iranian high school students and their attitudes toward writing. The participants were 42 Iranian female students. The students in the experimental group wrote dialogue journals daily in a period of two months while the students in the control group wrote weekly compositions. The results revealed that DJW improved students’ writing although the amount of improvement was not very significant and they hold positive attitudes toward DJW as students believed that journals enhanced their motivation to write and increased their fluency.

1.20 SUMMATION

The review of available related literature and studies has equipped the investigator with an overview of the issues concerning writing skills and has propelled her to go ahead with the task of preparing suitable research tools and finalizing the research design. Previous studies have done much valuable work in the field of language learning in general and writing in particular. The combination of these antecedents provided a firm basis for the investigator’s study. Building on these previous works, the present study differs from and aims to add to earlier research in several important ways. First, this study concentrates on expectations of students as to writing instruction. Included in this study is an investigation of strategies from teachers’ point of view. The investigator proceeds to compare the responses of teachers and students which previous studies did not attempt to. This research is different in the way that it combines both a survey and an experiment. Moreover, all studies deal with only a single strategy for acquisition of writing skills. The investigator has combined six strategies in this study. It is obvious that research on the acquisition of writing skills is extremely sparse especially at the national level and it