

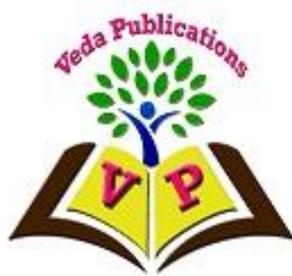


AN AUTO PILOT ROUTE TO WRITING

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ABSTRACT



“Writing makes our thinking and learning visible and permanent”. Writing as we all know is an expression of human thoughts and ideas through letters, symbols and spaces in a readable form. Can we really teach the skill of writing in the name of writing? Is it something teachable and transferable? This paper argues that writing cannot be taught by procedures, norms and rulings. It is an art that can be learned naturally through reading, but it cannot be tutored and coached. This study examines the practices behind the acquisition of writing skills in second language learning in order to put these practices as thumb rules for the EFL learners, particularly in the Dhofar region of Oman. Writing is the key footing upon which a learner’s knowledge, intellect and work are assessed at his work place. This is an area from where the appreciation, dignity, regard or criticism and disfavor emanates. This study centers on how the writing skill can be acquired naturally by concentrating more on the acquisition of vocabulary through reading, rather than on the techniques of writing, right from the early stages of learning to higher education. With the growth of technology and the soaring digital revolution, foreign-language teachers should reflect on the advanced methods to generate better foreign–language teaching or learning environment that are sub-structured by multimedia technologies.

Keywords: *Writing, Vocabulary, Teaching /Learning Pedagogies, Talent, Perception.*

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INTRODUCTION

There seems to be no compelling reason to argue that “writing is the act of putting pen to paper or fingers to keyboard or even thumbs to phone pad. Any time you record language in script, whether that's a tweet or the next great American novel, you're writing” (Vocabulary.Com Dictionary). In other words, a casual hypothesis about writing is putting our words, observations, remarks and comments in a visible form. If I tell my next door neighbor that I would give half of my fortune to her after my departure from the world, she would like me to put it in writing to make it more visual. “Writing is portable and permanent. It makes your thinking visible” (Rebecca, 2011). Writing skill, in fact, should be treated only as a job skill at the college level. It is a skill on which one's reason, understanding and education is assessed in an organization, society and culture, and our career and employability depend on this competence, but this expertise cannot be acquired simply by learning the techniques of writing like hook sentence, thesis statement and background information and learning different types of essays as illustrated from the following student's notes:

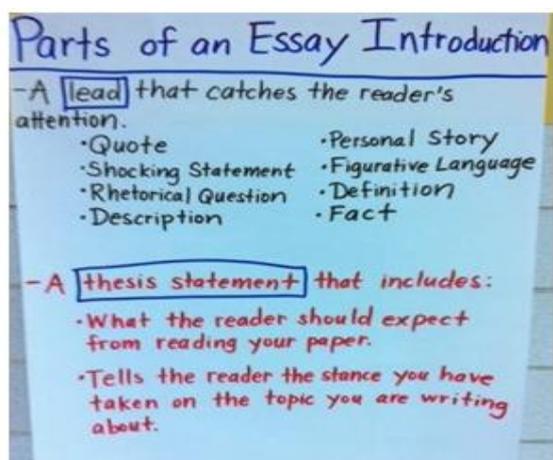


Figure-1 Parts of an Essay

In spite of all this training in writing, it is observed that our students do not write as well as we expect them to write. “Our students can't write very well. It's no mystery” (Tucker, 2017). “The complaints about the quality of students' writing are perennial, which says as much about the complainers as it does students” (Warner, 2017). One mother complained to her son's coach who was preparing him in his

college admission essay. “He gets good grades, so I was surprised to see his essay was not that good. I know they'll teach him to write in college—I just hope he gets into a good one.” “I didn't say the ugly truth, that her bright boy might not graduate as a solid writer, no matter how well the college” (Maquire, 2016). Prof. William Harris unfolds the mystery of why students can't write : “When we ask why Johnny can't write, we also have to ask the more important and basic question: Why can't he read?” (Harris, 2009) Stephanie White is an instructional developer at the University of Waterloo, Canada. An excerpt from her dialogue with her colleague is produced below to hypothesize the research question in the present studies.

You: (Colleague) “My students are smart, but they can't write!”

Me: (Stephanie, Instructional Developer) “I know what you mean about UWaterloo students! The undergraduate and graduate students I teach and work with here continue to impress me with their knowledge and abilities. They write, but they write in genres completely unknown to them” (Stephanie, 26th Jan, 2017).

Michael Skapinker narrates a story on his blog “Does It Matter If Students Can't Write?” (June 26, 2013). He recalls a professor was reprimanded by his dean for teaching writing in Law and MBA classes. The students complained to the dean so strongly that the dean had to urge the professor to stop teaching writing. “The students said that in business today they did not need to know how to write. Emails and tweets are the medium of exchange” (Skapinker, 2013). To a certain extent, the students seem to sound reasonable. In the present study, it is developed that a student of journalism or business need to be taught in a different style and pattern from a student of engineering, computer science or any other stream. Teaching writing cannot be same for all the students. The basic function of language is the expression of thoughts. “One of the main goals of language teachers is to provide students with the tools to be effective communicators” (Bilash, May 2009). As far as language for the purpose of art is concerned, it is the domain of the novelist, poets and dramatists where the main focus is on aesthetic beauty.



It is quite clear from the above illustration that one needs to have thoughts and words in order to be able to write. If you have only thoughts and no words, you can't express your feelings. You can't share your ideas. Comprehension is the final target of all reading, so the importance of words cannot be underappreciated. On the basis of evidence currently available, it seems fair to suggest that a rich and copious vocabulary is quite crucial for sound reading and writing ability. Laflamme (1997) asserts that current research has identified knowledge of vocabulary as the single most important factor in reading comprehension. Similarly, there is no dearth of studies showing a strong link between reading and writing. "Reading and writing are two analogous and complementary processes in that both involve generating ideas, organizing ideas into a logical order, drafting them a number of times to achieve cohesion, and revising the ideas as is appropriate" (Laflamme, 1997). There is another writer who demonstrates the importance of vocabulary by suggesting an analogy of a mechanic and his tool box: "Every good mechanic has a toolbox full of tools. Just as really good mechanics can pull out the right tools to make a good engine even more powerful, good writers can pull out the right tools at the right time to make good writing even more powerful. One tool that can "power up" your writing is a strong vocabulary" (Time 4 writing, 2017). Academic success starts with reading.

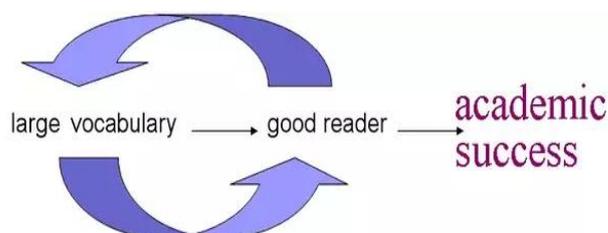


Figure-4 Interdependence of Vocabulary, Reading Ability and Academic Success

"A good vocabulary means that you know how to express yourself so that the reader will understand your material. It is worthwhile to constantly work at improving your knowledge of words" (Kurts, 2012). There is an age old saying by Confucius: "The beginning of wisdom is to call things by their right name." It is thus conveyed that writing is a continuous process of choices. When a student plans a writing assignment, he/she chooses a topic, method and sources and as he/she starts writing, he/she chooses words to be used in his writing. When it is time to revise the first draft, again it is the time to make more choices. Finding words that capture your meaning and convey that meaning to your readers is challenging. "We can shape events in each other's brains with exquisite precision" (Pinker, 2007). There is a famous saying by Voltaire which sounds the same theme: "The secret of being boring is to say everything." It is quite evident now from the foregoing discussion that commanding a good vocabulary is the first step towards writing.

In this study, the question under discussion is how the students can learn and retain a large

vocabulary. The simple answer is technology or, better said, digital technology, and this can be achieved by blending the teaching mission with interest, curiosity, thrill and diversity. This essentially involves a judicious use of power point, videos, audio files, images and music for reinforcing the vocabulary. "We as educators need to reconsider our roles in students' lives, to think of ourselves as connector first and content expert second" (Richardson, 2008). "If we teach today as we taught yesterday, we rob our children of tomorrow" (John Dewey, 2016). Technology can not be a substitute for teachers but the teachers who don't use technology will be substituted by those who use.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historically speaking, a great amount of research and pedagogy has isolated reading and writing (Shanahan, 2006). Links between reading and writing have been examined widely over the past few decades. Most studies have concluded that a strong connection exists between reading and writing. (Jetkins, 2004; Berninger 2002; Abbott & Berninger, 1993; Tierney & Shanahan, 1996; Juel, 1988; Loban



1963, Shanahan 1984) and have conveyed that reading and writing energize overlapping in brain zones. In the domain of language acquisition, researchers have shown interest in the area of writing composition. Studies conducted by the various investigators measure students' perspective towards writing. They affirm a strong link between reading and writing skills. Till 1970, reading and writing were separate fields or perhaps could be looked upon as linked language processes. Prior to this, writing as an academic subject found its source in the Aristotelian approach towards writing as rhetoric. Its focal point was on techniques, grace, presentation and rendering. During the 18th century, the study of Aristotelian rhetoric "dominated course work in colleges and later the focus shifted to bringing appreciation of the art of writing into the commonplace tradition" (Langer & Allington, 1992,). By the end of the 19th century, these customary perceptions of writing were replaced by realistic and utilitarian notions that transformed the traditional approach towards writing. It still abided by the laws of rhetoric until 1960s.

A greater amount of concern and interest between the learner and the text was noticed in the 1970s and 1980s when the focus shifted to language and cognition (Anderson & Bower, 1973; Chafe, 1970; Chomsky, 1965). A review of interrelationship and developmental studies was published by Stotsky in 1983 that explored the relationship between reading and writing. She claimed, "Better writers tend to read more than poorer writers, and that better readers tend to produce more syntactically mature writing than poorer readers." She also asserted, "Studies that sought to improve writing by providing reading experiences in place of grammar study or additional writing practice found that these experiences were as beneficial as, or more beneficial than, grammar study or extra writing practice"

Current studies have examined the seemingly unconnected components of reading and writing on the basis of levels of language approach that separate the levels of the word, sentence. "This conceptualization is substantiated by the intra individual differences that pervades across levels of language" (Vellutino, Tunmer, Jaccard & Chen, 2004). To put it in simple terms, reading impacts writing and

writing impacts reading. Research has established that when students read broadly they become better. "You wouldn't expect a child to make a movie if they had never watched TV or visited the cinema, so why, oh why do we expect children to be able to write when they don't read and aren't encouraged to by the primary Literacy Strategy?" (Shoorayner) "The most important thing is to read as much as you can, like I did. It will give you an understanding of what makes good writing and it will enlarge your vocabulary." - J. K. Rowling

quotes fromBrainyQuote.com.

RESEARCH METHOD

The present research was organized at Dhofar University. On the whole 4 groups consisting (4x40=160) students with the same course materials and curriculum were selected for the study. Let us call the two groups consisting of (2x40=80) students each as experimental groups and controlled groups. Two complete units of reading writing, listening and speaking from the text book *Unlock -4* (Sowton & Lewis, 2014 Cambridge University Press) were selected. The experimental groups were taught the two units using digital media with all its paraphernalia. The other two groups (controlled group) were taught the same units in traditional style without using power point, flash cards, images and graphics. To ascertain the validity of the results two other groups of 40 each were taught randomly for a week using the traditional method and digital technology.

The present study deployed a quantitative method with a survey model to examine the efficacy of digital tools like audio, videos, text file, PowerPoint, images and music etc. The purpose of the present study was to explore how far these tools can be utilized in reinforcing, registering and enhancing the level of vocabulary. The questionnaire was composed of 13 items used on a Lickert scale commencing from 1(strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) which later became 15 after a validity test by experts and authorities where items were added and some were deleted. The questionnaire was first trial tested on an extensive sample at the Dhofar University, and two items were deleted due to their being low corrected items. On receiving the questionnaire back, only 219 (91%) were found valid.



For the data investigation the Descriptive Statistics Independent –Sample t Test, and the Pearson correlation coefficient were conducted to respond to the research questions. The graph that emerged after the study is produced below.

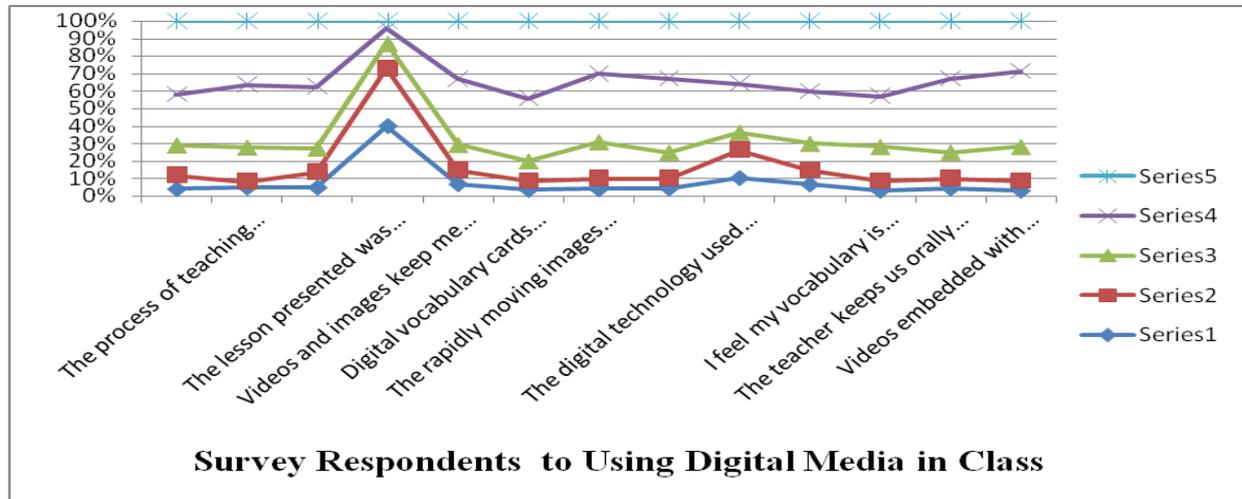


Figure-5 Survey Respondent to Using Digital Media in Claa

The following (SAQ) self-administered questionnaire was designed to elicit the responses of the students. The following data were collected and analyzed:

Table-1 Share of Responses for Each Statement

| S# | Questions | SD | D | N | A | SA | Mean |
|----|---|----|----|----|----|----|------|
| 1 | I understand the vocabulary fast if they are digitally explained in my mother tongue. | 9 | 17 | 38 | 63 | 92 | 3.7 |
| 2 | The process of teaching vocabulary is enjoyable. | 11 | 7 | 43 | 78 | 79 | 3.8 |
| 3 | Flash cards used during the lesson increases my interest. | 11 | 19 | 30 | 77 | 82 | 3.8 |
| 4 | The lesson presented was not engaging. | 88 | 72 | 31 | 19 | 9 | 2.6 |
| 5 | Videos and images keep me focused on the targeted vocabulary. | 15 | 17 | 31 | 80 | 71 | 4.2 |
| 6 | Digital vocabulary cards flashing at a rapid pace keep me mentally and orally busy. | 8 | 11 | 25 | 78 | 97 | 3.9 |
| 7 | The rapidly moving images evoking the targeted vocabulary help me remember the vocabulary faster. | 9 | 13 | 46 | 85 | 66 | 4.1 |
| 8 | Music present in the videos arrests my attention while showing vocabulary words. | 10 | 12 | 33 | 92 | 72 | 3.9 |



| | | | | | | | |
|----|--|----|----|----|----|----|------|
| 9 | The digital technology used in the class keeps my attention focused. | 23 | 35 | 22 | 61 | 78 | 3.2 |
| 10 | The classroom environment created by digital technology is conducive to overall learning. | 15 | 17 | 34 | 65 | 88 | 3.6 |
| 11 | I feel my vocabulary is growing fast. | 7 | 12 | 43 | 63 | 94 | 3.9 |
| 12 | The teacher keeps us orally engaged throughout the lecture with different digital devices. | 10 | 12 | 33 | 92 | 72 | 3.60 |
| 13 | Videos embedded with vocabulary words and music capture my attention. | 7 | 12 | 43 | 94 | 63 | 4.2 |
| | Mean | | | | | | 3.7 |
| | SD | | | | | | 0.4 |

DISCUSSION

The outcomes of the present study suggest combating the issue of vocabulary retention with the maximum use of digital tools like audio, videos, images, digital flash cards, interactive diagrams, short text files, power point presentation, and last but not the least, music, as is evident from a higher percentage of responses to question 8; the mean of which comes to 3.9%. It was learned during the experimental study that a teacher's intensive preparation for keeping the students engaged is a fundamental step to encounter the classroom boredom as reflected from the response no. 12 which is 3.60%. It was also noticed that the rapid movement of vocabulary images and flash cards helped students retain the vocabulary items, as evidenced by the reply to question no.7 which is 4.1%. The rule of thumb was discerned as investing greater energy for the preparation of a lesson and is crucial. The lesson was not only prepared well but the several items in the folder were placed serially and a digit was given in continuing order to avoid a moment's delay in switching over to the next file.

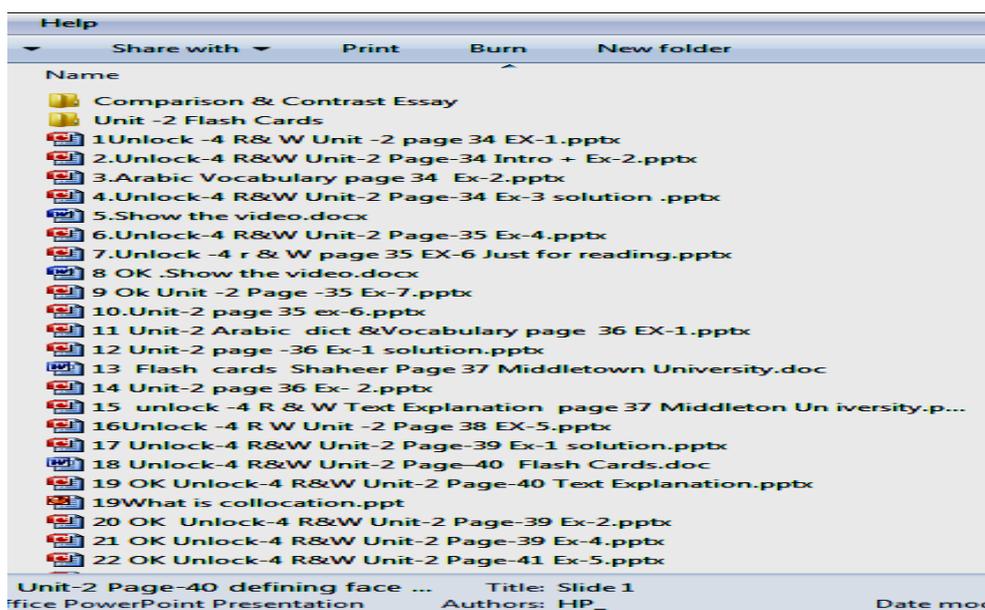
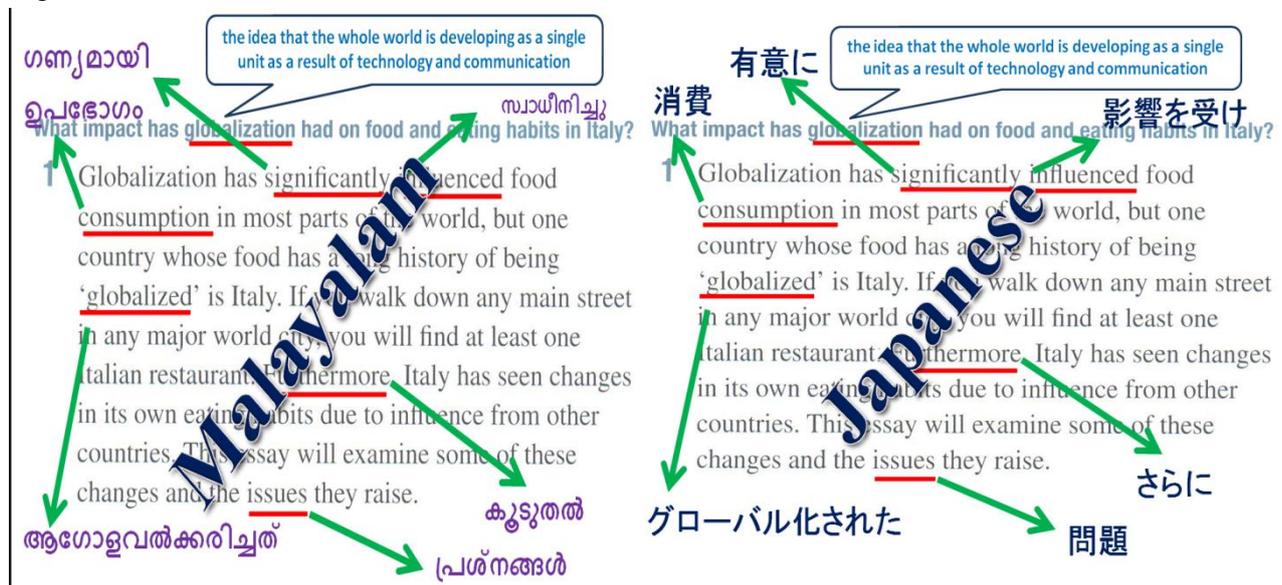


Figure-6 Screen Shot of the Teacher's folder Showing Intensive preparation



CONCLUSION

The current study arrives at the conclusion that the students using social media apps on mobile devices are basically visual learners as reflected from the response to question no.1 that is 3.72%. The slides of PPP were designed to serve as a visual treat. A picture quote was preferred over a text quote. The idea is further reinforced by a study that "the human brain processes images 60,000 times faster than text and 90% information transmitted to the brain is visual"(Thermopylae, 2014). The age old saying resounds in minds: "A picture is worth a thousand words." It was also discovered that a teacher should teach the students in a way that is consistent with their strength, as evidenced from response no.13 which is 4.21%. A series of fast-swinging images related to the teaching materials was shown to evoke a desired response item -6, 3.85 %.A treat to their eyes was more than a tool to discourage them from getting distracted. On encountering difficult words, the students might give an excuse to use their mobile phones for looking up a particular word. Although the teacher tries to explain the word in English, they might say they will be comfortable with a bilingual dictionary. In such a situation, a strong possibility exists that they might sneak into social media files to check their statuses or the number of likes accumulated over a particular posting. This obviously distracts the whole learning process, making it weaker. The strategy of giving bilingual translation through digital dictionaries was adopted. It was also discovered that a shift from the other to the mother tongue is made possible through online dictionaries. This strategy left no chance for the students to reach out to their mobiles saving a situation of distraction. The teacher can make ample use of online dictionaries and can facilitate the students with a word in their mother tongue. The resultant effect of such a move is ensuring a higher degree of comprehension without letting the students think of using their cell phones as dictionaries. It was also felt during the course of teaching that a teacher can give the equivalent word in the mother tongue through the judicious use of online dictionaries. Three models of using the mother tongue for different speakers are being produced below. Here special care is to be exercised by the instructor in choosing the right parallel word by going into the detail of the words in English.



The targeted study reveals that digital warm-up video and was followed by a series of easy, devices enhance visualization, facilitate the learning simple straightforward short answer questions flashing process and keep the attention of the students through power point to make the students feel arrested. The students' cognizance of shorter span comfortable, engaged and to give a major impact to which is 8 seconds as per the recorded study was taken their happiness and self confidence. For those students into consideration. The lesson started with a brief who aren't so confident, "learning new material can



feel like swimming upstream. (Cox, Teaching Hub, 2017) Special care was taken to make the exercise last only for 8 seconds. The focus of the students was constantly on the screen of the data show. The increased engagement improves learning. A strong research supports the present argument. For example, active learning is associated with improved student academic performance (Hake, 1998; Knight & Wood, 2005; Michael, 2006; Freeman, et al., 2007; Chaplin, 2009), increased student engagement, critical thinking, and better attitudes toward learning (O'Dowd & Aguilar-Roca, 2009).

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