RESEARCH ARTICLE

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DELIBERATIONS ON A WEBQUEST - AN INQUIRY-ORIENTED LESSON FORMAT TO HONE WRITING SKILLS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AS FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN INDIAN MILIEU

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ABSTRACT

It is a universally accepted statement that English is the easiest language to speak well but the most difficult to write well. A number of linguists have tried to contribute in their own ways to improve the writing skills at various levels of academics. However, these methods do vary from tutor to tutor. In the last couple of years, the advances of science and technology have taken a quantum leap in improving the academics. A WebQuest is one such format. A WebQuest is an inquiry-oriented lesson format in which most or all the information that learners work with comes from the web. These can be created using various programs, including a simple word processing document that includes links to websites. Hence, one has lots of programs available that can assist one's language learning process covering all the four skills. This well-thought-out paper attempts to focus on the application of WebQuest in improving the writing skills in particular.

Keywords*: English Language Skills, Technology, WebQuest.*

INTRODUCTION

A well developed writing skill is very significant in academic and professional escalation across the globe. Competent writing skills connect one to all others. It has become a pre-requisite today. Many exams validating English Language skills test all the four parameters – Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. However, current academic syllabuses of any university do not give proper attention in catering to the needs of all these four. There has been a very less importance given to all the four cumulatively. In most cases it has not been developed by teachers in primary stages of language learning process. They are quite neglected and this is more troublesome with the countries where English has been taught as Foreign Language or Second Language.

"In the state of Gujarat, the students who study English or Communication Skills are dissatisfied with the way they are taught at both school and undergraduate level." (Brahmbhatt 245) The biggest challenge which has been observed in students and teachers both is that they have lost interest in teaching and learning. One more thing that has been observed in Indian context is very weak or very poor motivation to write in English. Teachers do try but somehow the strong desire to encourage students to put their thoughts, ideas and notions on paper is missing. Moreover, whatever writing skills that the students have been demonstrated or are introduced to, have been very ordinary or not satisfactory. There is a very poor range of lexical resources. There is limited range of grammatical structures demonstrated or used. There is hardly any logical compartmentalization of ideas. Students are found arguing that there has been a very less access given to them towards improving their writing skills. There has been limited or almost no exposure to various nuances of writing strategies. Apart from it there is rarely any feedback given to whatever is being written. There has been no meticulous evaluation too. Teachers rarely provide constructive comments over students' write ups. Moreover, there remains a communication gap. It is a fundamental responsibility of a tutor to seek that every student is given appropriate assistance either from his side or he should be generating a communicative group of students doing the needed. Students' writing skill has always been remained a shining area for research. Endless researchers must have tried to develop it. However, remarkable development has not been seen even today. Students' writing skills can be developed and can be taken to the level of excellence if appropriate feedback is provided to their writing on regular base through advanced technological manner than conventional concrete form.

The recent decades have recorded tremendous leap of inculcation of technology in pedagogy. Changes have been seen by everybody irrespective of any domain of learning. There are lots of tools and technology developed in making English Language Teaching and Learning palatable.

Language training with computer-aided instruction system is one technique in the middle of those well thought-out to be suitable to the requirements of schooling these days. The use of computer in language education is able to persuade the efficiency of instruction and students' competence of language dexterity. In the plethora of such tools one has one of the tools which is very well used by many students and teachers is WebQuest which deploys the use of computer and internet connectivity in language learning process through pre-designed or spontaneously created learning task of language. This has proven as one of the best ways of learning various skills of language.

The present research paper endeavors to understand the finer aspects of wring skills and modus operandi of WebQuest in teaching writing skills in particular with concluding remarks as the words of suggestions.

NOTIONS OF WRITING IN ENGLISH

At the outset, the expression writing has been defined by the Oxford Dictionary as - the activity or skill of marking coherent words on paper and composing text." Writing Sills are the imperative way of communication in any set-up. Actually, a study goes on to say that nearly 30% of work is accomplished all the way through written communication. As a result, the proficiency of thoughtful script is indispensable to reach to academic and professional objectives. Regrettably, these days, these skills are being uncared for. "Writing is more than just putting on paper what

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exists in one's head. It is not an exercise in grammar, spelling or memory." (Hanbury 1) If one desires to realize his/her aims, the skills of better-quality writing are essential.

SCALE & SIGNIFICANCE OF IMPROVING SKILLS OF WRITING

1. VERBAL (WRITTEN) EXPRESSIONS:

To become skilled at to write effectively is one of the vital modes of conveying thoughts, views, ideas and opinions to others. A few have the intrinsic aptitude to put their thoughts into words. Writing is further advantageous, in particular for those who are emotional, and cannot put across orally. Good writing skills permit them to state their ideas, thoughts or their existing psychological stipulation, that or else, may not be feasible. People communicate themselves by writing novels, short stories, biographies, and even individual diaries, etc. amusingly, 93% of teens in American schools are fond of writing, when it's not a part of their school curriculum; rather when it is for themselves. So, by appropriate direction, the writing capabilities of these teens can be channelized in such a way that, they could stand in excellent stead in the preferred path of their lives.

2. CONFIGURATION OF OPINION FOR/ABOUT THE PERSON

It is said by Voltaire, "Writing is the painting of the voice". Writing is always the reflection of the self. Any individual wiring expresses the thoughts, ideas, opinions, notions, ideology etc. of the writer. Moreover, by reading that one very often forms the opinion or belief about the writer or author. However, if narrow the context, academic writing is very essential to be explored to the maximum for achieving academic laurels. Because the learning at schools, colleges or universities is to a larger extent determined by knowledge represented in competent writing skills. And the development of writing skills at the very primary level forms the building blocks of good student.

3. ELASTICITY & RIPENESS OF LANGUAGE & THOUGHTS

Language is dynamic. It has great elasticity. It gets evolved continuously. It has cut across the boundaries of nation. Writing is an art, which one develops over a period of time. Every prominent

writer and author has significantly contributed to the development of language. Hence, the teaching and learning of English as a native and foreign language have got a due prominence. English language has brought the world of learning together. Every domain of learning in any corner of the world has got explored. That's why it is very vital to hone the writing skills of learners to be developed. Understanding of the language will make the students learn the elasticity, the language as. It will make them very mature writer. Moreover, the more one writes the more elastic one's visualization and reflection progression become towards the requirements and demands of the readers.

4. WRITE TO BE EXPRESSIVE

Whilst writing, one has to be further watchful pertaining to the manner and mood of the language, language rules, spellings, etc., with the intention that the person who reads can make sense of the anticipated connotation of the content. Whilst one puts in writing something, there is a propensity to read the content time and again, for probable errors or mistakes. By doing this, one meticulously comprehends what one has written, and how one can get better, to explicate to the reader in a straightforward and succinct approach what one is trying to put into words.

5. WRITING – AN EVIDENTIARY DOCUMENT

Any piece of writing has always been taken as documentary evidence for various reasons. It is a permanent document. For example, the advances of science, technology, commerce, management, medicine, humanities and all other allied disciplines of learning can indeed be communicated orally but it is must for us to document them permanently by giving them the shape and size of "Information in Writing" as evidence and to be used for future references. Even if one talks about the academics, many students are good with writing skills, then it is equally important that they preserve what they have written and in the class, it can be explored before other students to encourage the rest to write.

WRITE TO COMMUNICATE – INTRA, INTER, ACADEMIC & BUSINESS

Trade & Commerce: English has always been the language of Trade & Commerce. Written Communication is inseparable in any business entity.

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It is in the form of proposal, report, survey, emails, correspondence with stakeholders, circulars, memos and so on. The drafting of these requires utmost care and precision. Weak or inappropriate communication leads to damage of business.

Academic Endeavors: Students acquire their art of writing in school days in particular. School is the platform for their written expressions in the most creative ways. And the teachers/tutors must promote to them to the maximum. Teachers can create various and varied writing options for the learners and can hone their skills. As per a national survey by the Pew Internet & American Life Project, and the National Commission on Writing, both the teenagers and their parents believe that "good writing is bedrock for future success". Also, 8 in 10 parents, now, are of the opinion that writing has become more important today, than it was 20 years ago.

Writing for Academics: Entry level exams for various academics like: SAT, GRE, ACT, GMAT, IELTS, TOEFL, PET etc., test the linguistic skills as well as numerical skills of candidates. Over and over again, candidates who are competent at math, numerical aptitude and interpretation, but meager in written communicative flair are getting rejected hence the tutor of all the subjects ought to lay emphasis on improving all the skills uniformly. Today there are pretty number of learning tools are available on internet that can testify the writing or verbal ability. And this linguistic flair makes the students comfortable overseas.

Job Preparation – Preparing Resume/CV: Lot of recruiters obtains thousands of resumes that they refer to. They don't have time that they read everything written in resumes hence prospective candidate has to write what is required to be written. Students of colleges must be taught to make use of the words very carefully while preparing resumes. The curricular, co & extracurricular credentials must be presented in logical way. So that affirmative impression in the minds of prospective recruiters can be built up. There must not be any error of syntax and semantic elements. Moreover the precision in write up of resumes is must.

In short, it can be summed up that students necessitate acquiring writing skills with the purpose of describing the accurate data, dispose the answers in a straightforward, well thought-out mode, and persuasive configuration of sentences. Skills of writing can be developed overnight. It wants utmost endeavors of both the tutors and learners. Tutors have to create the communicative learning setting that is no longer conventional. Appealing and interactive instruction methods can be applied. And use of applications of WebQuest is one such novel mode of teaching-learning.

USE OF TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPING SKILLS OF WRITING IN LANGUAGE CLASS

Since many years, Information Technology has been used by tutors of various languages and they have got very affirmative results. It has added the features of sound, animation, visuals, graphics, interactive exercises and so on. The experts have termed this type of learning as Computer-Assisted Instruction (CAI).

The well-thought-out execution of CAI in teaching and learning English creates ample number of avenues for the prospective learners. "The Computer technology and CAI deals the problems more effectively and more flexible kind of branching is possible in CAI students can learn with their own pace and time." (Netragaonkar 651) It creates the zeal and enthusiasm of learning among the young & inquisitive learners. It has invited active class participation, increase in concentration span, quick understanding and learning and a lot more benefit to cite for.

SCOPE & DEVELOPMENT

Today, many companies have exclusively prepared Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) modules that exclusively take care of all the aspects of language. Many schools and colleges have been using and have got very encouraging results. Various studies in developed countries like US, UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand etc opine that the computer-assisted (CALL) teaching and learning process has been supportive in grabbing the hold of the learners' attention.

MERITS AND MECHANISM

Deployment of IT with internet connectivity in language learning tasks reinforces the learning procedure. In doing so it has augmented the communicative skills of English Language among the students. Teaching and learning all the way through

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computers delivers the lessons separately and straight to the learners. Students are capable of interacting straightforwardly with the subjects that have been programmed into the server of work-stations (PCs).

It is also equally imperative that tutors orient the students regularly. At the same time the content of English Language of the work-stations is required to be updated. There must be enough and graded content that can give satisfaction to slow, moderate and advance learners. This can finally be closely monitored by the tutors in constructive way. Assimilating technology, pedagogy and human resources, in this case the instructors, in English teaching and learning procedure will smooth the progress of the requirements and attention of students towards enhanced English Language Learning. Consequently, the careful deployment of computers and internet in teaching and learning progression explores the prospect that the learners can work out for the necessary English Language competence.

WEBQUEST – AN INTRODUCTION

WebQuest is "an inquiry oriented activity in which some or all of the information that learners interact with comes from resources on the Internet, optionally supplemented with video conferencing." (Dodge 10). An exciting training approach that consents the tutors to coalesce English Language and technology is all the way through the application of WebQuest. WebQuest is a very practical, useful as well as constructive educational activity based on the various well designed tasks and learning resources with the purpose of making learners at ease. According to Simon, WebQuest is a convenient that adds to consequential knowledge. By this application, familiarity to various linguistic tasks is improved. Bernie Dodge, the creator of WebQuest, delineates WebQuest as a strategy-oriented activity that some or all of the data integrated with the students derived from sources on the internet. Bernie Dodge created the WebQuest strategy in 1995 in San Diego University. WebQuest was fashioned to facilitate tutors/teachers amalgamate the influence of Web with students' lessons.

DEFINITIONS

WebQuest is an education configuration that uses the links to vital sources of learning sources available on World Wide Web. Its genuine tasks are to give motivation to learners, ways to answers the questions, progress of individual proficiency as well as involvement in groups for learning. The first-rate WebQuest motivates the learners to experience the thematic correlation, to facilitate the input to the authentic learning and to replicate their own meta-cognitive processes. WebQuest is used to produce an obligatory condition to set up oral and written communication skills.

WEBQUEST ENCOMPASSES 06 FOREMOST COMPONENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

Introductory part orients everybody with background information and circumstances of scenario. Here, the tutor can help students in understanding the topics to be conversed. Furthermore, this section gives glance to the learning objectives to the learners.

2. TASK

A task is a proper explanation of what should be accomplished by learners at the last part of the activities, and the worksheets to be done by learners.

3. PROCESS

Procedure is a narrative of the steps to take by learners so as to arrive at the set objectives. Process is the most imperative juncture in the learning activities.

4. EVALUATION

Evaluation is being done by using simple mathematical formula of rubrics and students and teachers together can have conversation to understand the work done by the learners.

5. RESOURCES

Resources list out the names of all the required websites that students can access before or during their assignments of any linguistic aspects.

6. CONCLUSION

Conclusion gives the learners of the summary of what they have learned and has a progressive look by understanding their own work performance.

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DEVELOPING THE WRITING TASKS/ACTIVITIES

WebQuest also gets connected to internet. Hence, it becomes more powerful tool to explore the global linguistic opportunities. Moreover, the content becomes reliable, momentous and learning takes place in its right perspectives. Through WebQuest, we can alter the various features of it and exclusively design the writing activities for the class. In the pre-writing phase, the learners are given the narration of the project/task/lesson/activity then the students/learners are given the steps to conclude them. This can lead them to self evaluation with the database of WebQuest.

And during the writing stage, the learners can evaluate and assimilate the content that they have written and got from the WebQuest. This type of comparisons will make them self-paced and autonomous learners and critical inputs from the instructor can indeed be useful. And in the final state of writing, the learners can get the content that they are finalizing, revised or review through sharing and discussion. This activity based learning gives the tremendous boost in their writing skills. And the final write up that the students come up with makes them very much contented. And later all their writing tasks would be filtered from the beginning. The subsequent writing tasks/exercises will not take much time.

CONCLUSION

Queries have always been raised by the critics of the evaluation. However, the evaluation takes place through the conversation using varied networks like learners-Artificial Intelligence, learners – tutors, and learners-learners. So there is always scope to work together. During the process of exchanging of ideas/views/opinions and notions, learners go on developing their understanding and go ahead based on the information communicated all the way through the WebQuest. Learners can work independently, in pairs or groups compliant with the necessities of WebQuest.

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