

Perspectives in Writing

Some of you wish to be writers, some of you wish to be correspondents, some of you wish to translator, while others wish to be teacher. No matter what career you choose, the ability to write is a necessity in life. Luo 1989:26

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Abstract

Writing plays a vital role as it is an effective mode of judging the student performance. It gives an opportunity to students to develop their professional knowledge and experience. Raimes (1991) outlines four approaches to second language writing instruction as – focus on form, focus on the writer, focus on the content and focus on the reader is a purposeful and goal oriented skill. researchers have proposed different views on writing and these views on writings Writing is a dynamic process and it is an act of discovery. The writer grows in his imagination through exposure to his writing. Thinking and composing processes are connected to the student who uses different ideas and thoughts to create; hence, writing and thinking go hand in hand. Different modes of writing is discussed here like: Writing as a mode of thinking, Writing as a Mode of Communication, Writing as a mode of Learning and Writing as a Discourse Cohesion and coherence is important in writing Cohesion is the grammatical and lexical links within a text or sentence that holds a text together and gives it meaning.

Keywords: writing skills, mode, communication, discourse, Cohesion, coherence.

Writing

Writing is one of the skills which include listening, speaking and reading. Writing helps a person to put her thoughts into words in a meaningful form. Writers need writing motions and knowledge of letter shapes; they need to recognize the need for space between words. The person develops writing through systematic formal instruction. Written form of communication results in a product and it holds social and legal commitment.

White and Arndt (1991) state that, “through writing we are able to share ideas, arouse feelings, persuade and convince other people”. We can share feelings, articulate ideas in ways that only writing makes possible. The term writing has been also defined by many researchers.

According to Byrne (1979), the introduction and practice of some form of writing enables us to provide for different learning needs and styles. Some students face problems and cannot learn through oral practice and writing helps in this.

Writing is very important to test students. Exposure to the language through writing helps them to be more effective in that language. Written work is a concrete proof that students are making progress in that language.

Irmscher's (1979) view of writing is that it is a deliberate attempt which helps us to determine what we know and what we do not know. It requires discipline and focus. Writing helps us to grow and develop and it opens avenues. Writing is a representation of our thoughts in graphic form. Competence in writing reflects overall achievement in language and the students who develop the ability to communicate effectively in the written mode of a language have indeed made the language their own.

Writing is a graphic representation and once it is written, the writer becomes the reader and as the critic Murray (1978) says as part of his work on why to teach writing, "writing is the process of using language to discover meaning in experience and to communicate it." Murray's definition of writing emphasizes writing as a process of discovery.

Emig in his writing as a mode of learning says, "writing is often our representation of the world made visible, embodying both process and product, writing is more really a form and source of learning".

L. Flower and J.R. Hayes (1981) in their work, problem solving strategies and writing process state that, "the process of writing is best understood as a set of distinguished thinking process which writers organize during the act of composing". These are some definitions of writing from varied perspectives. The following are some of the features of writing derived from the sources which help us to understand the act of writing:

- The process of writing is the process of learning through the act of discovery
- Writing is a goal oriented and purposeful activity
- Writing is a graphic product (Emig 1977)
- Writing is in solitude and does not get immediate feedback
- Writing is a complex sub-process which is non-linear and a recursive one

Writing is a type of opportunity and power. The ability to write effectively is crucial for letters, reports, notices and writing plays an important role in professional success. Good writing helps to develop relationships; it can also help to get promotions at work.

Writing is a similar skill like listening, speaking and reading. Speaking and talking, especially one's native language is an inborn skill whereas writing has to be learnt.

Speaking comes first to us, it is a natural thing; speaking is the real thing and writing is its representation. Earlier, few could write but now it has changed. Speaking is spontaneous and writing can be done in isolation where the writer thinks, corrects, gathers ideas, organizes. It is evidence - when we speak, we use tone, facial expressions and we need a place and audience but writing has grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, dividing in paragraphs and pause.

The difference between writing and speaking as given by Emig:

Writing is a learned behavior	Talking is natural
Writing is artificial	Talking is not
Writing is a technological device, not the wheel	Talking is natural and organized
Writing is a barren medium	Talking is rich and sometimes redundant
Writing creates its own context	Talking is contextual with environment
Writing's end result is a visual product	Talking is not visual
Writing does not have any audience	Talking has audience
Writing lasts for a long time and is more responsible and committed	Talking is only momentary
Writing is a representation of the world and learning and learning is possible through it	Much learning is not possible through talking

(Emig 1977:123-4)

The above points indicate that writing is complex; a learned behavior slower than speech. Writing requires the writer to be efficient. Byrne (1979:6) states that writing is transforming our thoughts into language; it requires physical and mental activity on the part of the writer.

When a person writes what he reads, the reading speed is determined by the reader; he can go back and re-read but when we talk or listen this is not possible. Speed is determined by the speaker or the machines on which we are listening.

Writing helps the student to express their thoughts and ideas; the written word enables the writer, perhaps for the first time, to sense the power of language to affect another. Through using, selecting and rejecting, arranging and rearranging language, the student comes to understand how language is used (Greenberg and Rath, 1985, pg. 12)

White and Arndt's proposal says writing is a cyclical process, which offers a great variety of activities and other factors like cognitive, psychological and linguistic, makes writing more demanding. The writer has to control lot of variables while writing.

Walter (1983:17) says, "writing is the last and perhaps the most difficult skill students learn", if they ever do. Byrne expresses the same idea by dividing writing into psychological, linguistic and cognitive problems. The Psychological problem is a communication gap between reader and writer. The Linguistic problems are like grammar mistakes in writing which cannot be accepted and writing has to be error free to be understood in the absence of certain features of spoken language like immediate feedback between the listener and the speaker. While speaking, we cannot check every phrase or sentence and so grammatical mistakes can be overlooked. The third aspect, cognitive problems are where writing can be acquired only through formal instruction.

Chrissie Boughey in her article, "Learning to write by writing to learn: a group work approach in ELT" adds more meaning that writing is taught through formal instruction. She observes:

“All writing is for an audience even if (in the case of a diary or a journal) the audience is the writer him or herself. The need to pay attention to the audience of the text prompts writers into anticipating and considering viewpoints other than their own.”

Writing is achieved and produced in a context, it must not be explicit. Understanding the need to be explicit forces writer to engage with the propositions contained in their text, more than in speaking.

Writing is a lonely process - it requires writers to explore, oppose and make connections between propositions for themselves, a process which is conducive to learning.

Writing requires thoughts to be organized. White (1987) states that, “writing is a challenging task for ESL/EFL learners, it involves discovering ideas and discovering how to organize them and discovering what it is that one wants to put across to the reader.” Writing is closely linked to thinking; it can evoke frustration and anxiety in the writer. In order to be efficient, writers/students need concentration, patience, practice and instruction. It has been identified that teaching writing is crucial in language. The teacher can help students to develop an understanding of grammar, structures etc.

Writing is crucial for communicating - what nature of writing helps students to get this skill, context of reader and how meaning is conveyed through writing are some of the questions that are addressed by the scholars in an attempt to explain what constitutes writing.

Perspectives in Writing

Writing is a purposeful and goal oriented skill. It has been recognized that the importance of teaching writing is crucial in language learning. With this view, researchers have proposed different views on writing and these views on writings are discussed below.

Writing as a mode of thinking

Writing is not only a means of communication but it also promotes thinking. The writer has to put his ideas on the paper and here the writer has to put in a lot of effort to use the appropriate word, phrase and sentence. Therefore, we say that there is an interaction between thinking and writing. The writer puts his ideas on paper and the writer's thoughts make a fine piece of writing which helps him to communicate more accurately with the audience.

Scardamalia and Bereiter (1987, 307) say “we do not write in order to be understood, we write in order to understand”. This supports the above mentioned point.

Thinking is a mental activity - our minds are capable of perceiving, imagining, feeling, judging, reasoning and so on.

Kellog puts it in this way. “Thinking involve a set of mental skills that create, manipulate and communicate to others the personal symbols of mental life” (10).Thinking involves reflection, meta-cognition or critical consciousness.

Zamel (1976), Flower and Hayer (1981), Raimes (1987), Sommers (1989) and Horonist (1986) say that thinking and composing are inseparable. They say that pre-writing (planning), drafting (composing) and rewriting (revising, editing stages) have an hierarchical structure.

Emig (1977:125) says that writing is an organized function. It involves the functioning of the brain, which requires total participation in the process of both the left and right hemispheres. The writer has to select

appropriate words, organize them in a precise manner; she has to organize thoughts, focus on them and think clearly.

Zamel (1983:166) says that ideas are explored, clarified and reformulated as thoughts come together to make a pattern of thought. All these views reinforce the point that writing and thought are together. Writing is a form of thinking; if the writer has good thinking he can produce a good work of writing.

Emig says that writing involves a continuing attempt to discover what it wants to say. The writer has only an idea; with thinking, he develops the ideas and therefore writing is a tool for thinking and the student learns what he thinks about the subject.

Writing as a Mode of Communication

Written communication is a permanent means of record and it is precise. With globalization, the need and importance of English is growing. Students need to acquire communication skills in English at both the Academic and Non-Academic levels.

Writing as a means of communication helps to share joys, sorrows, fears, dreams, ambitions, ideas and attitudes. Writing is an important tool of communication with which one can communicate easily.

Writing requires specific training to achieve sophisticated development studies. It indicates that one effective way to ensure writing processes is to teach students to be good writers. (Flower and Hayes, 1981; Greenwald, Persky, Campbell and Mazzeo, 1999)

Davies and Widdowson (1974:162) observe that the best methods to teach the functional aspects of language are through writing. Writing is part of every aspect of our lives as it helps for human interaction. The ability to write articulately gives one the power and opportunity to share ideas and thoughts.

Mary Mehel writes, "the value that we place on writing and reading comes out with a shared need to be literate people" and this is a function of our society and culture (1991, p .13).

The emphasis on writing as a mode of communication emerges from the current interest in communication in language teaching. A learner at various levels needs different forms of writing like letters, essays, paragraphs, notice, memos, lecture notes, research articles, etc.

A good piece of writing has different parts of speech, punctuation, grammar, reproduction, organizing. In grammar it has morphology and syntax.

Writing is an ever developing skill which allows us to draw upon our inner resources to expose many different aspects of ourselves as unique individuals.

Irmscher (224) says that writing helps us to make connections, 'fashioning a network of associations and increasing our potential for learning'.

Little John (1993) and Raimes (1991) emphasize that writing in English is a useful instrument for language learning, for it is important for communication.

Kroll (1990), Celce Murcia (1991: 291) says that writing in addition to being a communicative skill also helps the learner to plan and think the communicative process.

Therefore, the writer should be clear in ideas and expressing the thoughts as writing is a creative expression and students need writing as a tool for survival in the real world as well as the classroom.

Writing as a mode of Learning

Writing is a stimulating, challenging activity central to all learning and development. Irmischer says, "once we move students beyond the basic level of proficiency (grammar, structure and basic punctuation) we then see new dimensions of expressions, imaginativeness and intellectual growth in their writing".

Murray (1968) suggested, "if we want to teach students to write we have to initiate them into the process that writers go through and not give them a set of rules. Students need to write in classroom, take lecture notes, appear for written exams."

Writing involves the thought process, the ability to arrange words, phrases, sentences, linkers.

Byrne (1979:7) says, 'writing is one of the major skills in a language teaching course and is known to be a powerful tool of learning'.

Writing helps the learners to develop fluency in the language and also other skills like reading are enhanced and again through reading, writing skills are reinforced.

According to Raimes (1978: 244), writing helps us to consolidate learning in the areas of listening comprehension, speaking and reading and gives the writer practice in manipulating structural variants, adding the reinforcement of the kinesthetic image to the auditory and the visual.

Emig (1977: 122) says that writing represents a unique mode of learning; not merely valuable, not merely special but unique. Writing helps us to improve more and more; we express ourselves using different expressions of writing, the more we acquire writing skills.

For a student who is shy to speak in a group, writing can provide an opportunity to improve his skills. What writing skills students acquire also contribute in accruing other skills. Sommer says writing is a way of learning other subjects - it can be used for both teaching and learning. Thus, how one teaches one subject is closely allied with how one teaches writing (Sommer 1989: 3)

Writing as a Discourse

Discourse has varied meanings. It originally comes from Latin Disputatio 'which denotes 'conversation speech'. Discourse is a continuous stretch longer than a sentence, often constituting a coherent unit like narrative, sermon, argument or a joke (Crystal 1992: 25). The term discourse analysis covers a wide range of activities like socio-linguistics, psycholinguistics, philosophical linguistics and computational linguistics.

Discourse falls into narrative, descriptive, expository and argumentative. Each form has its own function, its own subject, its own organizational patterns and its own language. Discourse analysis is important to language teaching since learners want to learn how to produce and comprehend texts and not just sentences (text and communicative occurrence).

According to Raskin and Weiser (1987), any theory of discourse limited to the forms of discourse or patterns of arrangement can give only an incomplete idea of what a successful discourse is. The relationship among writer, reader, subject and language implies not only that a writer uses language to communicate to a reader about a subject, but also a purpose. The purpose is important for a discourse.

The writer writes because they want to share something with the readers and may use different modes in a single discourse like description, narration, exposition and argumentation that helps them to achieve their purpose.

The teachers try to help the learners in vocabulary, grammar and mechanical conventions, i.e., syntax or style but they also help in writing effective discourses like essay, letter or paragraph. This is affected through cohesion and coherence in writing.

Cohesion

Cohesion is the grammatical and lexical links within a text or sentence that holds a text together and gives it meaning. According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), a text is “a unit of language in use”. What distinguishes a text from a non-text is its texture. The texture is provided by the cohesive relations that exist between linguistic features that are present in the passage and can be identified as contributing to its total unity.

Cohesion is a textual feature and is attained through the use of grammatical and lexical elements that enable readers to perceive semantic relationships between words and sentences. Coherence contributes to the continuity of text, in the sense that the ideas expressed in the text are connected to one another and to the overall unity of the text.

According to Halliday and Hasan (1976) who analyzed the concept of cohesion in detail, it can be divided into two types: grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion. The former refers to a combination of terms between sentences that form grammatical aspect. The latter refers to a combination of terms between sentences that form lexical component. Grammatical cohesion can be divided into reference, substitution, ellipsis, lexical cohesion and conjunction. The first type of cohesive device is reference; it contributes to cohesion by pointing to another element in the text and creating a continuity of text. The kinds of grammatical cohesive ties discussed by Osisanwo (2005) are reference, substitution, ellipsis and conjunction. This is represented below for explicitness.

Grammatical Devices

Nominal	Anaphora	Nominal	Coordinating
Verbal	Conj.	Verbal	Compound Adv
Verb+Objec	Cataphora	. Clausal	Subordinating
Verb+Adv	Conj.		Continuatives

Osisanwo (2005:38)

Coherence refers to the relationships of ideas and the ability of those ideas to function together for the purpose of conveying the meaning (Mclinn 1988: 15). Coherence refers to the relations held between the underlying surface text, which is made of concept (refers to knowledge) and relation (refers to connections between text) and the amount of their relevance to the central thought of the text. Coherence is frequently used in textbooks of composition and rhetoric. It is applied for a wide range of linguistic and non-linguistic phenomena (Hyland, 2003). Coherence in writing means that all the ideas in a paragraph flow smoothly from one sentence to the next in developing the central idea.

Coherence refers to the logical development of thoughts in writing. The piece of writing communicated with the reader, with respect to punctuation, tenses, flow of ideas from one to another. A paragraph needs unity. Unity is flow of thought. Unity in a paragraph means that the paragraph is of one piece, a single clear controlling idea or main idea. It has a topic sentence and support sentences. Unity can be achieved in a paragraph when we state the main idea in a single sentence and relate every sentence in the paragraph to it.

The writer has to learn the use of transitional words and phrases (cohesive devices) and to use techniques which give the essay wholeness. If the essay lacks coherence, the reader cannot follow the ideas and it will look like separate statements rather than a complete unit. Effective writing shows coherence where the reader gets the feeling of a complete whole. Therefore, writing should have coherence where the paragraphs have unity and coherence.

Hyland (2003) gives the criteria for a coherent essay. The writer identifies the topic and does not change from the topic, uses a clear plan and organizes the points and avoids making errors. The writer tries to use cohesive devices such as conjunction, reference and lexical cohesion to combine sentences and paragraphs to make it a complete whole. The writer makes the close of the topic with a proper statement bringing in a proper closure. The writer avoids making mechanical and grammatical mistakes that disturbs the discourse or the reading process. Thus, according to Hyland (2003), coherence refers to the consistency of voice, purpose, content, forms, style and so on of a discourse as intended by the writer, achieved in the text and perceived by the reader.

Cohesion and coherence are significant in the written discourse. In coherent discourse, the writer communicates the message to the readers employing language and cohesive devices and creates a wholeness of the topic. Writing should communicate the message to the reader and writing that does not have coherence cannot communicate to the reader its intended message. Having discussed coherence and cohesion in written discourse, the next section discusses the problems in learning writing as part of First and Second language.

Conclusion

To conclude with Byrne (1979:7) , 'writing is one of the major skills in a language teaching course and is known to be a powerful tool of learning'. Teaching writing skills increases learner's grammar and composition skills. Sasser and John Steiner say written words are the "fragile bridges upon which our thought must travel".

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