
DEVELOPING WRITING SKILLS AMONG THE EFL/ESL LEARNERS

PARUPALLI SRINIVAS RAO

Lecturer in English,

English Language Centre, King Faisal University,

Al-Hasa, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

ABSTRACT

Language is a tool of communication to express one's ideas, thoughts, feelings and emotions. Hence, language, communication and speech are the three main important and essential tools that are useful in sharing our ideas with others. Humans have to acquire the skills of a particular language in order to communicate well with their fellow human beings. In the case of English also, humans should learn all the four language skills, i.e., listening, speaking, reading and writing. Once the learners of English get a good command over these skills, they can communicate well in English. Among the four skills, writing is the most difficult skill and it needs a lot of practice, time and patience. Since the EFL/ESL learners face many difficulties in performing the given tasks that are related to writing, the teachers have to understand the reasons for them. Some of the reasons may be the complexity of the English language structure and the vocabulary, grammar and coherence. Furthermore, the learners find monotony with the out-dated teaching techniques that are implemented in their classrooms. Therefore, the English teachers should understand the needs and interests of the EFL/ESL learners and try to adopt a variety of new strategies in their classrooms in order to improve their writing skills in English. For this purpose, the English teachers have to shift from their traditional way of teaching to the modern approaches that have been developing in ELT. This paper throws a light on the importance of writing skills and also brings out different ways of developing writing skills among the EFL/ESL learners. This paper lays more emphasis on the techniques of teaching writing skills to the learners of EFL/ESL. This paper also focuses on the salient features of writing skills and also explains how to motivate and develop the ESL/ESL learners to improve their writing skills. Moreover, it also supports the idea of pair work and group work which develops the learners' writing skills enormously in a learner-friendly environment. Finally, the EFL/ESL learners and teachers are given valuable suggestions in improving their teaching-learning skills with a variety of language activities in their classrooms.

Key words: activities; classrooms; EFL/ESL learners; ELT; English; needs and interests; strategies; teachers; writing skills.

Introduction

In the world of globalization, there is a great demand for communication skills. Language highly influences the everyday lives of humans of all castes, communities, races, creeds, regions and nations around the globe. Language is useful in expressing humans' thoughts,

feeling, ideas, desires, ambitions and queries to the people all around the world. Human beings are entirely different from the rest of other animal kingdom because of their reasoning and communication skills. It has become a mandatory for all human beings to possess good oral as well as written communication skills in order to sustain in this modern world. Language plays a vital role in developing their relationships with the people all around the globe. In order to keep contact with the people of various parts, regions and countries of the world, humans have to learn the basic skills of language. Learning language skills is the need of the hour because everything depends on how we communicate. As people's real success is based on their way of communication, they realize the importance of these communication skills and try to acquire them. It is possible for the learners to acquire these skills with an ounce of practice. So the learners of a language have to think of developing these skills to improve their communication skills.

Learning a language is a mixed experience of easiness and difficulty. Some people acquire the skills of a particular language very easily whereas it becomes very difficult for some others. Whether it is easy or difficult, learning a language is necessary for all human beings. Language serves various purposes and communication is one of the important aspects of it. When there is no language to communicate, humans are supposed to express their ideas, thoughts and feelings merely through signs and gestures. Humans cannot imagine where there is no language and it may lead them to the dearth of communication. Hence, language plays a very significant role in communication. Furthermore, language skills occupy a major role in leaning a language. So the learners of a language need to learn all the skills of that particular language in order to communicate well with their fellow human beings. Language skills are the signs that can be easily distinguishable codes which help as a guide for the development of human beings. Nevertheless, almost all young learners reach an over-all time and age by the time they reach the essential capabilities of using the language as an effective communication skill.

As there is a need for a common language to communicate internationally, people opt for English as it is spoken widely all over the world. English has been recognized as an official language of many countries and a lot of official and business correspondence is also done in English. Hence, the people of the twenty-first century recognize the need of leaning English language communication skills and try to learn the basic skills of English. In order to learn the English language in a systematic way, first of all, the learners need to learn the basic skills of the language.

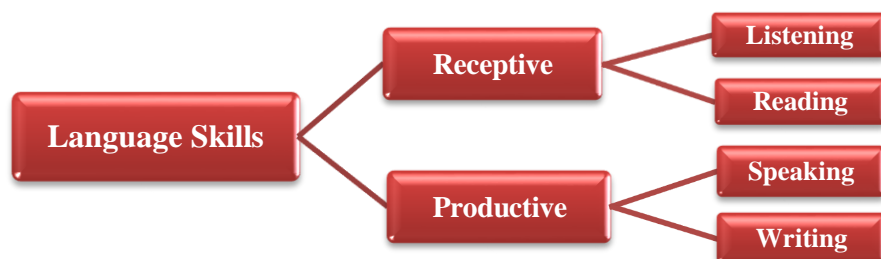


Fig: The Four English Language Skills

When the EFL or ESL learners want to learn English, they have to get mastery over the four language skills, viz., listening, speaking, reading and writing. Among them, listening and reading are receptive skills whereas speaking and writing are productive skills. The EFL/ESL learners have to concentrate more on these four language skills as the main aspect of learning the English language mainly depends on learning these skills. As the primary goal of learning these skills is to develop the learning abilities of the learners to produce good oral as well as written communication, the teachers have to pay more attention towards the learners in improving these skills among the EFL/ESL learners.

Each language skill has its own importance in learning English. The main concern of EFL/ESL learners is to acquire good listening as well as speaking skills in English. In order to promote the learners' listening and skills, the teachers have to concentrate more on the latest trends of aural-oral skills of English. Listening is an activity that involves the listeners to pay attention to the speaker's words and get the meaning of it according to the context. So, listening embroils understanding of a speaker's pronunciation and accent, vocabulary, grammar and grasp the meaning of what the speaker expresses. In this context, Underwood (1989) asserts, "For successful communication, listening skills is essential, so it should be taught to students". It is an undeniable fact that listening is the most often used skill among the four language skills. Furthermore, most of the EFL/ESL learners spend most of their time on listening to English than producing it because the main concern of learning a language depends on listening to it. Listening skill provides the opportunity for the learners to speak, read and write good English. The English teachers have to implement suitable approaches and strategies to teach listening skills to the EFL/ESL learners.

Speaking is a productive and very useful skill in communication. Moreover, communication does not take place without speech and language merely remains as a script without speech. Language is used in several contexts in the form of speech. People need more practice and special training in speaking skills if they want to become good speakers. There is no doubt that one needs to be proficient in all the language skills, but when a person has got good speaking skills, he/she will have certainly more advantages. When speaker's speech is with full of clarity, it shows that the speaker's thinking is crystal clear. Bailey and Savage (1994: 7) say, "Speaking in a second or foreign language has often been viewed as the most hard of the four skills". Moreover, it is important to know that the effective speakers always get the attention of the listeners and the listeners grasp the complete speech of the speaker. Furthermore, speaking skills are required to get success in one's career.

Reading is a receptive skill and the EFL/ESL learners read something related to their subjects. Moreover, people read throughout their lives in order to get some information. Learners cannot learn anything without reading their subjects or lessons. Learners cannot achieve good results in their exams unless they read their study materials properly. According to Stauffer (1969), "Reading is getting information from the printed page". Whenever anyone reads a text, there should be a purpose beyond his or her reading because reading is an activity that is done with a purpose. Readers read texts in various ways according to their purposes and need. Just as we filter the unimportant points in a speech, we also filter the

unimportant matter in reading while reading any written material. Reading is a fun activity that enhances readers' knowledge enormously. A well-read person's wisdom increases a lot. Reading skill increases readers' vocabulary and word power. Reading is an important skill that is to be continued till the end of one's lifetime. Therefore, the teachers of English have to train the EFL/ESL learners to be more proficient in reading the texts and they have to apply several strategies to improve the learners' reading skills.

Writing is one of the productive skills and it empowers the learners to communicate their thoughts, ideas, feelings and expressions in the form of writing. Among all the four language skills, writing is considered to be the most difficult skills. Moreover, it is a productive skill which is very important for communication. Writing needs a lot of hard work and patience. As writing is a productive skill and EFL/ESL learners find it difficult when they try to write something. So they have to put considerable effort and allot more time for it in order to develop their writing skills. In the twenty-first century, there is a huge demand for writing skills in the EFL/ESL classrooms and the teachers have to apply various strategies and approaches to develop the writing skills of the learners. As writing is a quite difficult task and it demands both cognitive analysis as well as linguistic synthesis, the teachers have to motivate and inspire the EFL/ESL learners to improve their writing skills.

Review of Literature

Writing is one of the important skills of language learning and it is the most difficult skills to learn for the EFL/ESL learners. Most of the learners feel comfortable while they listen to any one or read something. But they face problems when they have to speak or write it. Writing has undergone many changes and developments in the recent phenomenon. In this context, Harmer (2007: 1) states, "Human activity of writing is a fairly recent development in the evolution of men and women ... some of the earliest writing found so far dates from about 5,500 years ago". People in the early ages relied mostly on drawing various paintings and methods to represent different things that are connected to their everyday lives, but they did not write anything. So it was only in the form of pictures, figures and images. Yule (2010: 212) claims, "Human beings started to write some 20,000 to 25,000 years ago". Crystal states that ancient people used pictograms to represent different symbols. Later on, these pictograms have changed to be ideograms that play a vital role to become a part of writing system.

In the process of the development of writing, it developed from pictograms (picture-writing) to ideograms (idea-writing) to logograms (word-writing). The Sumerians' followed purely word-based writing system. Between 1700 and 1500 B.C., pictographs were replaced by the alphabet in the Sinaitic word. Then the Chinese philosopher, Tien-Lcheu in 2697 B.C. invented the ink and by 1200 B.C. In the same year, i.e., in 1200 B.C., the paper was also invented in China. Then onwards, writing has become more popular.

The Definition of Writing

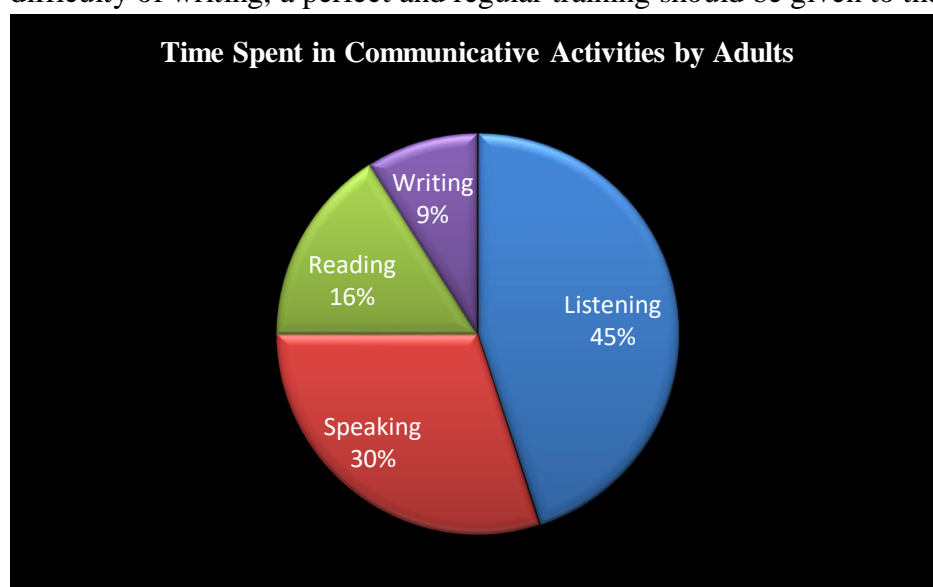
In simple terms, writing is the representation of graphic symbols which are known as letters. Writing becomes so complex when it involves generating meaningful and clear message in any language. In this context, Widdowson (2001: 62) states, "Writing is the use of visual

medium to manifest the graphological and grammatical system of the language". In the process of writing, learners must have mastery over the graphic system, selection of relevant vocabulary and the grammatical structure of the language. Whereas, Crystal (2006: 257) states, "Writing is a way of communicating which uses a system of visual marks made on some kind of surface. It is one kind of graphic expression". And for Bloomfield (Cited in Crystal, 1994: 178), "Writing is not language, but merely a way of recording language by means of visible marks". Furthermore, Olshtain (1991: 235) states, "Writing as a communicative activity needs to be encouraged and nurtured during the language learner's course of study". Richards and Schmidt (2002) assert, "Writing is viewed as a result of complex processes of planning, drafting, reviewing and revising".

This means writing happens through various operations and ultimately it becomes the final draft. For that, the graphic symbols must be arranged according to some conventions in order to form words, and words to form sentences, and sentences to form paragraphs and essays. Accordingly, writing is not producing or making list of words, as inventories of items of a shopping list. Even though this shopping list does not provide an example of sophisticated writing, it states something about the writing process. The final achievement of writing should be linked with the unity of words or sentences that are arranged in a logical order and joined together to give appropriate meaning. In this regard, Bailey (2003: 1) states, "Learners at schools (and universities) must master the academic writing which was needed in writing essays and paragraphs or other assignments for exams".

Writing is the Most Complex Skill for EFL/ESL Learners

Writing is the most complex and difficult skill for the EFL/ESL learners to get mastery over it. In this regard, Rivers and Temperley (1979: 263, Cited in Azzoui, 2009) say, "To write so that one is really communicating a message isolated in place and time, is an art that requires consciously directed effort and deliberate change in language". Besides the complexity and difficulty of writing, a perfect and regular training should be given to the EFL/ESL learners.



This issue was thoroughly examined by Hedge (2000) and his results disclose, "All the time

spent in communicative activities, adults devote 45% of their energies to listening, 30% to speaking, 16% to reading and 9% to writing". The above diagram unveils that only 9% of adults spend their time on writing and the majority (91%) of them feel more stressed and cannot convey the message what they exactly want to express. It also shows that most of the EFL/ESL learners have this stress in writing activities as writing involves more concentration and a lot of practice. It is true that writing is more difficult than any other language skill and the learners have to get more command over both vocabulary and grammatical structures. In this regard, the EFL/ESL learners have to put more efforts to acquire much vocabulary as well as more grammatical structures of English. Hence, the EFL/ESL learners have to devote more time on writing skills and practice these skills with more devotion and dedication.

The Nature of Writing

According to Crystal (2006: 257), "Writing is a way of communicating which uses a system of visual marks made on some kind of surface. It is one kind of graphic expression". Writing is a very complex process and one must have the mastery over several levels of language including morphological, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic and discourse levels. When we compare writing with speaking, writing comprises different vocabulary and syntactic structures, many linguistic systems and also complex clauses. That is the reason why many language experts consider writing the barometer of one's proficiency on a particular language. Moreover, writing is a productive skill that needs to carry out the messages and the contextual meanings in the form of writing. Since writing is purely message-oriented, the writer's main goal is to convey the information appropriately, effectively and accurately to the readers. Moreover, the writer has to clearly express the ideas in his writing and the language that the writer uses must be very effective and there should not be any ambiguity in his writing. Furthermore, the readers should feel comfortable while reading the text. At the same time, the writer should convey his/her message to the readers in a simple language so that they can read the message and understand it thoroughly.

What does Writing Involve?

According to Richards and Renandya (2002), "Writing is the most difficult skill for L₂ learners, since they need to generate ideas, organize them and translate these ideas into readable text which can be very difficult for students". Even though most of the written communication takes place electronically, the learners have to write their language exams by hand only. In addition, spelling also plays a dominant role in both literacy and writing. The main reason that the EFL/ESL learners have the difficulty in spelling is that the relation between the spelling of the word and its pronunciation. There is no correspondence between the sound and spelling. In English, a single sound has got various spellings, whereas the same spelling has various sounds. That is the greatness of the English language and the EFL/ESL learners find it very difficult to get mastery over the spelling and pronunciation.

Furthermore, punctuation and layout are more essential in writing. These two are different in writing communities and cannot be transferred from one language or community to another. To get success in learners' own language or any other language, the learners should know the format or the layout. In case of English, the English teachers have to guide the EFL/ESL

learners to follow the punctuation and layout properly in order to develop their learners' writing skills in English. As a result of wrong punctuation, the meaning of the entire sentence changes and sometimes it also leads to ambiguity. Therefore, the EFL/ESL learners have to follow both the layout and punctuation properly in order to make the written text as simple as possible for the readers.

How to develop the Writing Skills among the EFL/ESL Learners?

Writing is considered to be the most difficult skills among the four language skills of any language. In English language also, writing involves the complex process where the learners have to concentrate not only on spelling, punctuation and grammar, but also in the selection of vocabulary and the organization of sentences and paragraphs. Although writing is a difficult skill to acquire, there are certainly some important issues which help the EFL/ESL learners to develop their writing skills. One among these is genre which signifies the standards of various types of writing. In other words, genre in English writing refers to a particular style or type of writing. Genre helps the readers to recognize the type of text whether it is a scientific text, an advertisement, a biography, a romantic fiction, a formal letter or poetry.

When the teachers want to teach a particular genre to their EFL/ESL learners, first of all some model writings of that genre have to be shown in their classrooms. After that, the learners understand the techniques involved in writing the particular genre and try to work on their own. When teachers give proper training to their learners in writing the text using a particular genre and give some activities related to that genre for their accuracy practice, the learners develop their writing skills in a particular type of text. Moreover, the teachers should also suggest the learners how to write and what to write and leave it for the choice of the learners so that they develop writing in a free and independent way.



Fig: Various Techniques involved in Developing Writing Skills

Another important technique that the teachers have to implement in their classes to develop their EFL/ESL learners is by doing the work in groups or pairs. When learners work in groups or pairs, they try to contribute more on the given work and get good results of it. This is also more convenient for the teachers to assist the learners when they need any kind of help. When learners work in groups or pairs, they try to finish the given work in a short time with a lot of perfection. The teachers have to select the writing topics according to the level and interests of the EFL/ESL learners. Consequently, the learners pay more attention on the given work and produce a nice work with a lot of encouragement and cooperation from their peers.

Another important aspect of developing the EFL/ESL learners' writing skills is by adopting collaborative work or cooperative work in the classrooms. The main concept of collaborative or cooperative work is to allow the learners to perform the given task in groups where they share their ideas among the members of their groups. With this type of learning environment, the EFL/ESL learners can perform the given writing task effectively by their active participation. There is no doubt that some learners can perform better when the work is given for the individuals. But when the same work is done in collaborative or cooperative classrooms, the writing process takes place in groups and it also welcomes a thorough and constructive feedback. In this regard, it is wise to quote the sayings of Harmer (2007), "To write in groups, whether as part of a long or short process, is very motivating for students to develop this skill". Therefore, the English teachers should always encourage the learners to maintain good relations with the group members in order to perform the given tasks well.

The other approach which is more suitable to implement in EFL/ESL classrooms is creative writing. Being the concept of imagination as the main base in writing stories, poetry and plays, the EFL/ESL learners can produce high quality writing with their own imagination. When the writing is done with more imagination, the readers also find interest in them to read such type of writings. In this regard, Ur (1996) says, "Most people feel pride in their work and want it to be read". It is true that readers pay more attention on imaginative and creative writings than some other written products. Moreover, creative writing is a journey towards self-discovery which promotes effective and active learning. EFL/ESL learners concentrate on the topics related to imaginative writing as the learners are very much involved in doing their level best in producing a wide range of accurate and more appropriate language than they use normally for the regular and routine tasks given the classrooms.

Another approach involves in developing EFL/ESL learners is brainstorming. The concept of brainstorming is mainly used in EFL/ESL classrooms at the initial stage of writing assignments. The teachers give certain topics to the learners and ask them to finish the assignments. Before the learners start writing the given assignments, the teacher generates some creative ideas, solutions and important points through discussions. The learners are encouraged to suggest ideas related to the topic. This is a technique followed in a group activity to find a solution for the given topic by collecting a list of ideas that are contributed spontaneously by the EFL/ESL learners. In brainstorming session, the learners express their

ideas freely as they are not criticized by any. Most of the EFL/ESL learners are highly motivated in writing the given assignments as they are supplied with some important points related to the assignment.

It is a known fact that writing is a very important skill and the English teachers have to develop this skill properly among the EFL/ESL learners. Hence, the English teachers have to motivate their learners to adopt good writing skills. The teachers should encourage the learners using various techniques, methods and approaches in their EFL/ESL classrooms. When the learners are highly motivated, they participate in the given tasks very actively with a lot of enthusiasm and try to produce very good products. While selecting the topics for the assignments, the teachers have to consider the interests and needs of the learners so that they will work with more interest in an enjoyable and friendly environment.

It is also very important for the English teachers to understand the common problems faced by the learners in writing. When the teachers give a certain writing task to the learners, they have to suggest the learners how to express ideas and organize the given task. The teachers have to guide the learners with the process of writing that needs to divide the writing activity into several stages where each activity involves sub-skills in doing this process. Therefore, the teachers have to guide the learners properly in order to involve them in the activities with a lot of motivation and encouragement.

Therefore, the English teachers have to understand the intelligence level of the EFL/ESL learners and try to adopt the latest techniques in ELT in order to improve their writing skills. As writing is the most difficult skill to acquire for the EFL/ESL learners, the teachers should concentrate more on their learners' writing skills by involving them in a variety of activities. Therefore, the teachers are supposed take the EFL/ESL learners' interests and needs in consideration so that the learners' involvement in the given writing task increases. Moreover, the EFL/ESL learners participate in the tasks very actively and they will produce qualitative and productive results in their English writing skills.

Conclusion

This paper has focused on the importance of writing skills and it has also brought out various ways of developing writing skills among the EFL/ESL learners. This paper has thoroughly discussed why writing is considered the most difficult skill for the EFL/ESL learners among the four language skills. This paper has also investigated that writing involves many things so it has become quite difficult for the EFL/ESL learners to get good command over writing skills. Furthermore, the nature of writing and the things involved in writing have been profoundly highlighted. As most of the EFL/ESL learners find it difficult to write in English, this paper has emphasized on various strategies of developing the learners' writing skills. Finally, this paper has also concentrated on giving some useful tips for both the EFL/ESL teachers as well as learners to improve their teaching and learning of writing skills.

The second or foreign language learners of English find it very difficult in performing the tasks in writing in their English classrooms. Moreover, the complexity of the English language has become a major problem for them to do the given writing assignments. As spelling, vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, unity and coherence are the most

important elements to perform will in writing in English, most of the EFL/ESL learners find it difficult to have a good command over them. Therefore, the English teachers have to put more efforts to make the writing skills easy and simple for their learners. In this regard, the EFL/ESL teachers have to adopt innovative teaching techniques in their classrooms in order to make the learners involved more in their writing tasks. The learners should follow the guidelines given by the teachers and try to concentrate more on their writing skills by participating in pair or group activities. Furthermore, the EFL/ESL learners have to spend more time on writing skills as these skills are more difficult for them to acquire. Therefore, they are suggested to put more practice on writing skills by choosing the topics of their own interest. At this juncture, the EFL/ESL teachers have to accept the latest techniques of writing and implement them in their classrooms in order to involve their learners more on their writing skills.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The author, Parupalli Srinivas Rao, has a vast experience of teaching English at various levels. He has been specialized in ELT and has authored 10 books and published several research papers related to ELT in various international journals. He has attended several national and international ELT conferences and also presented some papers in them.

He has been on the Editorial board for ten international English journals including American Research Journal of English and Literature, Research Journal of English (RJOE), ELT Vibes, Literary Endeavour, South Asian Academic Research Journals (SAARJ): ACADEMICIA, Alford Council of International English and Literature Journal (ACIELJ), Trans Asian Research Journal (TARJ), Research Guru, International Journal of English and Studies (IJOES) and Shanlax International Journal of English. He has also done several prestigious projects including a project done for the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), Government of India and another one for King Faisal University, Saudi Arabia. He has attended several in-service training programs in ELT. He has taught English in India, the Republic of Maldives and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for 27 years. At present, he is working as Lecturer in English at English Language Centre, King Faisal University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. He is very much interested in research activities and preparing study material for Undergraduate and Master's Degree courses. He is a member of ELTAI, the prestigious organization for English language teachers.

The author did his M. A. (English) from Osmania University in 1991. He also completed his PG Diploma in Teaching English (EFL University) and later he did B. Ed., M. Ed. and M. Phil. from Osmania University. In 1999, he did PG Diploma in Functional English from Andhra University. He did Cambridge CELTA in London in the year 2008. He also completed two onsite ELT courses, namely, Pronunciation for Language Teachers and Teaching Grammar in Context from University of Edinburgh, UK in 2008. At present, he is pursuing his Ph. D. in ELT.