

DEVELOPING COMMUNICATIVE WRITING HABIT IN SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS.

Mr. Rinji D. Ngowong (M. Ed English)

Abstract

Writing as the written form of language (English), is not commonly done by most students at the secondary school level. Even if it is, it is poorly done. It does not make meaning to readers. One of the reasons for this may be attributed to the fact that the teachers that teach the skills have not developed the habit of the written expression in the students. The teachers also, probably, cannot perform well in the written expression. Similarly, the approach and method used for the teaching of writing is not quite helpful in a classroom situation. This paper presents communicative approach to writing as the most useful instrument for teaching it. This is done by the use of specific communicative writing activities, the paper also discusses some similarities and dissimilarities between the spoken and the written expression.

Introduction

Writing is viewed as a complex skill that should be taught to students at the primary and secondary schools after the other three skills of language have been taught. This is the view held by the structuralist approach to teaching the skill. Consequently, (lie learners are also scared at mentioning of “ writing”. Hence, they do not form the habit of writing, and they really find it difficult to write communicatively.

When we talk of “ writing” as it is in this paper, we do not refer to “hand writing ”, We refer to the use of language in written expression. This is for the purpose of communication between the writer and the reader. In other words, it implies the intelligibility of the written expression.

Relationship Between Written and Spoken Language

Writing and speaking are two unavoidable media of expressing one ‘s feeling in a language, though there is always a choice between the two; while the latter occurs on daily basis, the former is less frequent. The two have their peculiarities in terms of use and uses. Finegan (1994) considers the following as differences between the two.

- i. Speaking has features as intonation, voice pitch and use of gestures for the purpose of conveying messages, but writing is only based on written word and syntax.
- ii. One does not require much time to plan to speak, while in writing, much time is needed for planning.
- iii. Speakers and addressees are always in face- to face contact, but this is absent among writers- and
- iv. Speakers in most cases rely *on* the context of the interaction more than the writing.

However, there is no distinguished differences between the two when considering the outlined above. There are instances these differences do not exist between the two. In his word, Reid (1998:7) observes that:

... The differences between the oral and written discourse form a kind of continuum, which is dependent on situation, task, audience and function. Therefore it is reasonable to say that writing and speaking have a close relationship.

Considering this relationship between the two, it is necessary to create enabling environment for the leaners at the secondary school level to use the written expression of the language as frequently as the spoken form. Thus, communicative writing habit is created in them. The teacher therefore, has the daunting task in the approach of teaching writing in the classroom.

Using Communicative Writing Activities to Improve Speaking

To use communicative writing activities to improve students’ speaking ability at the secondary school level may be a strange idea to many teachers of English worldwide. But after discussing the similarities and the dissimilarities, it should not be a strange idea as such.

There are a number of merits in using communicative writing activities for the purpose of improving the language of the students. However, there are four main advantages of using such writing activities to promote the spoken language. These are as seen below:

- a. It is easier for the teacher to handle writing for the students who do not want to speak the oral language in the classroom. This may be due to some psychological and /or physical problems with the students.
- b. The teacher can use writing to reinforce what has been practised orally when providing useful practice in the forms that can be more fully realized in the written language (Rivers and Tempclry 1978).
- c. The teacher can apply writing activities to a large class if the activities may not require response from them.
- d. The students' written material may be discussed by means of asking questions, clarifications and comments made.

Bearing the above in mind, teachers should always seek for means of using the written expression of the language for oral proficiency development in the same language. Nevertheless, it is not easy to expect the learners to improve their spoken language drastically, solely via the writing activities. In his word, Takagaki (1997:48) observes " writing activities are expected to facilitate speaking in an indirect way, and expected to be used as a warm up activity and homework."

Communicative Writing Activities

As mentioned earlier, writing and speaking share some features in common. In this sense, the teacher can deliberately control a number of variables to enable him to make writing a habit in the learner, and to make it closer to speaking. The teacher should also bear in mind that writing activities should not be very difficult when the objective of writing is to improve the use of language, both in the written and spoken forms. For this reason free-writing method and communicative approach to teach writing are considered to be the most appropriate to achieve the objective. In the situation where the students have already internalized the basic skills of writing such as the use of grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, and the likes, the task is made easier for the teacher and the students as well. On the other hand, if the students lack the basic skills, it compounds the problem of teaching the skill, and the teacher is expected to make effort to take care of such in (he process of teaching.

In the communicative approach to teaching writing, the audience and the purpose of the piece of writing are emphasized. It is also aimed at converting the oral communication into the written version (Raimes 1983).

In order to achieve this, techniques like brainstorming, skits, and interviews are of great importance. These techniques can be presented as follow:

Brainstorming: Students are given opportunity to write on personal experiences. A picture or a map of a place is shown to them, and other objects are also presented to them. For example, writing an experience for hunting of animals sometimes past, how one coped with lecturers in the previous academic years, and others. Or by looking at a map of a country or state, for instance, and describing the location of some states and towns, or rivers found in the map.

Similarly, a picture of a sheep may be shown to students and they are asked to express their feelings about the sheep in sentences like:

- " The sheep is black"
- " I think the breed is from the Northern part of the country"
- " I do not like the breed"
- " I want to keep this sheep in our house", and many other sentences.

The simplicity or complexity of the sentences written by the students may depend on the level or ability of the students. The students may be instructed to do that orally before writing it down on paper.

Skits: This technique can be used the way brainstorming is used, for example, the teacher presents a picture of a market scene to the students and asks them to describe the market, or the movement of the people in the market. The students may also be asked to list the items that may be found in the market for sale. Or, the students are asked to come up with a conversation between two friends seen in the market, like:

- John: Are you hungry?
- Peter: Yes, let's look for restaurant and eat.
- John: What type of restaurant do you want us to go to?
- Peter: How about Hannatu's restaurant?
- John: Well, for me is ok.
- Peter: Let's go.

Interview: The teacher prepares a series of questions that an interviewer may ask. He asks the questions and the students are instructed to answer the questions in writing. The sample questions may be:

- 1) . Where is your home?
- 2) . What do you do on holidays?
- 3) . How do you plan for your private studies?
- 4) . What is your best subject?
- 5) . What do you want to become after graduating from this school?

It is important to note that for all of these activities, students are given limited time to write. But, they are encouraged to write as much as possible. They are advised not to worry about making mistakes in the course of Writing

Free -writing: This is one of the techniques in the communicative approach, which makes, writing as natural as the spoken language. According to Elbow (1973), this is known as the pre-writing technique, which is aimed at encouraging the students to overcome any fear of the blank page and their conceived preoccupation with correctness in the use of the language. He further observes that:

The idea is simply to write for ten minutes (later, perhaps fifteen or twenty). Do not stop for anything. Go quickly without rushing. Never stop to look back, to cross something out, to wonder how to spell something, to wonder what word or thought to use or to think about what you are doing. If you cannot think of a word or a spelling, just use squiggly or else, write, "I can think of it...." (65)

The IVcc-writing technique, is seen as a written version of the impromptu speech. The following procedure can be accepted as the organization of free writing in the classroom:

Step I: Students in the class are assigned topics -hobbies, family, my dream, my ambition, and so on.

Step ii: The students are given five minutes to write on these topics. By this opportunity, they can write anything with any writing style at their disposal.

Step iii: Students can make as many grammatical and spelling mistakes as they may make.

Step iv: The students are warned not to refer to dictionaries or textbooks for any corrections.

They can write as much as possible, without worrying about grammar, the quality of the ideas or editing (the written expression).

These may be discussed later with the teacher in the classroom for corrections to be made and avoided in the future writing.

Recommendations

In the light of the discussion made, the paper recommends as follows:

Speaking and writing should be taught integratively in developing writing habit in the students.

Teachers of English at the secondary school level should always give meaningful and interesting writing activities to the students during lessons.

Teachers should avoid teaching the "skill" of writing to the students; on the other hand, effort should be made to truly engage students in the writing activities that are real in life situation.

Each English lesson should involve writing activities for the students, thus arousing their interest in writing.

Communicative approach to teaching writing is different from teaching "writing skills". The approach teaches the students how to be able to write communicatively. The approach is therefore, highly recommended for teachers of English.

Conclusion

The writing activities as outlined in this paper are really based on the written expression. Communicative approach to the teaching of written expression is quite important to teaching writing. As regards this, the teachers of English language are encouraged to use this approach to facilitate the teaching of written expression (writing) in the classroom, which subsequently, will improve the spoken language of the secondary

school students.

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