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Research Papers

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**Topic: A Study of the Problems in written Communication among the Engineering Students: an Analysis of Students' Self Evaluation**

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**Abstract**

*English is learned everywhere because people have found out that knowledge of English is a passport for better career, better pay, advanced knowledge, and for communication with the entire world. In higher education English is the premier prestige language. Careers in any areas of business or commerce, or within the government, or in science and technology require fluency in English.*

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Written communication involves any type of interaction that makes use of the written word. Communicating through writing is essential in the modern world and is becoming ever more so as we participate in what is now commonly called the information age. In fact, written communication is the most essential and common form of business or professional communication.

Writing is an expression of human language by means of visible signs. Messages conveyed through written symbols or visible signs constitute written communication. It has some definite and distinct advantages over oral and non-verbal forms of communication. It gives accuracy and better understanding. It remains permanent record and promotes uniformity in policy and procedure. It also provides as records, references, legal validity and so on, without which an organization will virtually come to halt. Due to this importance of written communication, the researcher wants to study the problems in written communication of

engineering students.

**Some Definitions of Writing**

'Writing is one of those activities by which we locate ourselves in the enmeshed systems that make up our social world. It is not simply a way of thinking but more fundamentally a way of acting'. (Cooper 1986:373)

Whereas Flower (1985), in an interesting comment on the skills of reading and writing describes 'reading' as transferring of 'symbols' into 'thought' and 'writing' as the transferring of 'thought' into 'symbol'.

Murray (1973) says that writing is a skill which is important (in college and after college) in a complex and changing society. More people are needed who can write, who can order and communicate information and experience ..... Writing for many students is the skill, which can unlock the language arts.

Peacock (1986) says, that writing has been described as a struggle to compose ideas in the

head and construct a visible and tangible form out of sentences. Similarly, writing evolves from the first draft to the final copy reflecting our mental process.

#### Significance of the Study

It is observed by the researcher that the students of Engineering Colleges of Shivaji University have rather low competence in written communication and face a lot of problems with the various aspects of writing skills. Engineering is a technical course. On the completion of the course, the engineering graduates serve either in industries, professional institutions or business organizations. In any organization, communication is said to be its life blood. Hence, acquiring effective written skills by them is an essential academic and non-academic need.

#### Statement of the Problem

Problems in written communication interfere with the correct transmission and understanding of the message. If engineering students have to become consistently successful professional communicators, they have to develop their ability and skills of communicating through writing effectively. The engineering students have to identify their problems and understand the reasons for poor written communication.

#### Objectives of the Study

1. To evaluate and identify the problems in effective written communicative competence of the students of Tatyasaheb Kore Institute of Engineering and technology, Warananagar.
2. To identify and obtain information from the students regarding their view towards the writing skills, writing process, methods and materials in academic and non-academic settings.

#### Hypothesis

The engineering students of Tatyasaheb Kore Institute of Engineering and technology, Warananagar, affiliated to Shivaji University, Kolhapur have problems in using correct grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, appropriate vocabulary, and appropriate formality in written communication.

#### Methodology

A preliminary study was conducted at Tatyasaheb Kore Institute of Engineering and Technology, Warananagar. We collected the primary data by structured questionnaire in order to find out the problems in students' writing at the tertiary level at both academic and non-academic settings. The target group was the second year engineering students from different disciplines.

They were selected with a simple random sampling method. The questionnaire consisting of 15 questions was given to a group of 40 students, selecting 10 each from 4 branches of Chemical, Mechanical, Electronics and Computer Science Engineering.

Students' Questionnaire was divided into three parts for the better comprehension of the questions by the students required for an appropriate response. They covered the following areas.

Part A	Background Information
Part B	Non-Academic Writing
Part C	Academic Writing
	Categories for Analysis

For the purpose of effective analysis, a set of categories was formed. The students' questionnaire was analyzed after dividing the questions into the following different categories.

- Factual information
- Self-motivated use of English
- Performing different types of writing tasks
- Writing Process
- Error Analysis

#### ANALYSIS OF THE STUDENTS' RESPONSES

Students' responses were analyzed according to the list of categories mentioned above.

As the sample size is small, a simple average method of analysis was adopted. The method of research became Descriptive and Analytical.

#### Factual Information

It was observed from the students' responses that majority of the students (34) have studied in the regional medium at high school and (06) in intermediate level. It is only when they joined UG degree, medium of instruction changed from vernacular to English.

Even though the medium of instruction at high school and intermediate level was vernacular, all the students have received minimum eight years of exposure to English. Self Motivated use of English in Non - Academic Setting

Self Motivated use of English in Non - Academic Setting

	Use of English	No. of Students	Percentage (%)
a	Read English Newspapers/ Magazines	18	45
b	Watch TV serials, movies, and news in English	20	50
c	Reading English books/novels/stories/etc	16	40
d	Communication in English with Family members	10	25
	Friends	18	45
	Teachers	20	50
	Others	14	35
e	Express feelings or emotions	04	10
f	Correspondence	12	30
g	Take part in some competitions	16	40
h	Gather information	08	20
i	Give information	06	15
j	Express ideas in writing	04	10

Table No. 1. Use of English in Non-Academic Setting

Information in the above table no.1 reveals the fact that frequency of using English in non-academic setting by the students is very low. Some of the students have mentioned that they speak in English with the teachers and friends some times. However, all the 40 students admitted that they write in English at home sometime or the other.

As far as the purpose of non – academic writing is concerned, 30% students wrote in English sometimes at home for the purpose of correspondence. 40% students wrote in English frequently to participate in some competitions. 20% students wrote in English often to gather information. 15% students wrote in English sometimes to give information and only 10% students wrote in English for pleasure and express emotions.

The students usually write in English in non-academic setting for the purpose of correspondence, competitions and to gather information. Pleasure and expression of information, expressing ideas which are mainly associated with creative writing are found less frequently used by them in non-academic writing.

#### Performing different Types of writing Tasks

The frequency of writing different types of texts in academic and Non-Academic writing

	Text Types	No. Of Students	Percentage
a	Letter writing	26	65
b	Dialogue writing	10	25
c	Essay writing	14	35
d	Report writing	08	20
e	Note making	10	25
f	Note taking	12	30
g	Diary entry	16	40
h	Précis writing	08	20
i	Short story	14	35
j	Paragraph writing	16	40

Table No.2. Texts written most frequently in Academic and Non-Academic Writing

The above analysis of students' response reveals that letter writing is the task which gets the highest importance in writing. The students perform essay writing, diary entry, short story writing and note taking to some extent. However, the students less

frequently perform the texts like précis writing, report writing and dialogue writing. The possibility of writing these texts in future cannot be denied.

#### Writing Processes

The details of the students' writing process in academic settings are as under:

	Text Types	No. Of Students	Percentage (%)
a	Write at a stretch without any plan	32	80
b	Read & imitate the written format given by the teacher & make some changes in it and write	22	55
c	Discuss with friends – write & rewrite	8	20
d	Write individually by using ones background knowledge.	18	45
e	Write with intermittent breaks and pauses	16	40
f	Write the points first and then develop those points.	14	35
g	Write by collecting points in a given group of students.	18	45
h	Make an outline to have a clear idea of what to write	12	30

'Writing at a stretch without any plan', the option selected by 80% students, usually leads to an un-organized and in effective written text because any written text needs a well-organized plan. 55% students say that they read & imitate the written format given by the teacher & make some changes in it and write. The above stated table further makes it clear about the percent of students using the various other writing processes.

#### Error Analysis in writing

The detail analysis of the errors in students' writing is summarized in the table below:

	Text Types	No. Of Students	Percentage
a	Grammatical	38	95
b	Spelling	34	85
c	Punctuation	32	80
d	Vocabulary	34	85
e	Sentence Structure	36	90
f	Paragraph structure	38	95
g	Organization	38	95
h	Irrelevant matter	36	85

We can notice in the table that many grammatical, spelling, vocabulary, punctuation, sentence structure, paragraph structure, organization of matter, irrelevant matter kind of errors occur in the students' writing, which are observed either through peer corrections or teachers evaluations. They can possibly be reduced after some practice and rewriting process.

Further, 98% of the students expressed that they would like to improve their vocabulary, different sentence structures, the organization of information and paragraph writing using cohesive devices. This shows that the students are willing to learn the methodology of writing which will be useful in their academic and non-academic settings. The students' reaction to errors was that

majority of the students accepted that they find a lot of mistakes in their writing.

On the other hand, 80% students also stated that teachers very often respond to mistakes of students by dictating the correct form in the class. 20% students stated that teachers' usual response to the mistakes is explaining personally when and why the student is wrong and then dictate the correct form. Thus, it is evident that students usually receive variety of responses from the teachers to the errors in their writing.

#### **Summary of the Findings of Students' Responses**

With the above mentioned analysis we conclude that majority of the students came from regional medium background. Their frequency of using English in non-academic settings is very low. Some of the students speak in English with the teachers as they have exposure to the language only in the classroom. They write rarely in English at home in non-academic settings mainly for correspondence, competitions, sometimes to gather and to give information.

It is observed that the letter writing task is the most important activity followed by diary entry and short story writing that learners do in the classroom and also in non-academic settings. Note making and note taking tasks are also done rather frequently by them. Tasks like paragraph writing, report writing, paraphrasing, précis, easy writing etc. get more importance only in the writing skills class.

It is also clear that students are not aware of the writing process. They write either at a stretch or imitate the models given by the teacher without understanding meaning and process involved in it. Reading is usual activity done by many students after the completion of written text. But whether reading process involves revision process or not is a crucial point for consideration.

The students' self-evaluation declares that they are able to identify their mistakes in grammar, spelling, punctuation, organization and sentence structure. Some students generally correct the mistakes on the same paper and others ignore their mistakes. The teacher's usual response to the student's mistakes is to correct it on the same paper and dictate the correct form.

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