

USING VISUAL SPATIAL INTELLIGENCE BASED ACTIVITIES TO DEVELOP WRITING SKILLS

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Abstract- Lack of interest and motivation on writing activities can be noticed among undergraduates, and it hinders the development of their writing skills. The focus of this study is to explore the effectiveness of the use of visual spatial intelligence based activities to motivate undergraduates to develop writing skills. The participants of this study included 39 undergraduates selected randomly. A pre-test was conducted to measure the students' existing proficiency of essay writing skills. Among the 39 students, 54% earned less than 09 marks out of 20. Most of the students' essays did not have a clear introduction. Further, other common planning and structure errors include poor structure with little or no linking expressions, weak or non-existent topic sentence, the absence of examples to support the main idea. In addition, lack of motivation to complete the given writing task was also observed. As a remedy an intervention was designed including visual spatial intelligence based writing activities which were different from traditional lecturing. To measure the effectiveness of the intervention, a post-test was conducted. The results appeared positive in various aspects. The statistical analysis of students' pre and post test marks showed that there was a significant difference between the mean scores of the pre-test ($M=9.833$, $SD=2.3657$) and the mean score of the post-test ($M=15.08$, $SD=1.620$), $t(38) = (-20.663$, $P = .00 < .05$ (two tailed). The post-test results indicated that visual spatial intelligence based essay writing activities were effective in developing the undergraduates' essay writing skills. Further, the students were enthusiastic in completing the given essay writing tasks due to visual prompts, which led them to conduct research on the given topic, brainstorm and write rich contents in their essays. This study shows that using visual spatial intelligence-based teaching techniques stimulate thinking ability,

which enhances students' performance in essay writing. Visual-spatial intelligence-based teaching techniques can be easily applied in the English language classrooms in which students are demotivated.

Keywords- Visual Spatial Intelligence, Teaching Writing, Multiple Intelligences, Traditional Method

I. INTRODUCTION

Developing writing skills of undergraduates is important to provide them with an essential skills to gain good grades in their academic studies. Though writing skills should be given prominence in academic context, lack of interest towards writing activities is visible among undergraduates due to various factors. Basically, it delays their improvement in learning writing in English. It seems that there should be effective strategies to motivate the students to improve their writing skills. Visual learning plays an important role in language teaching, but there are limited studies on visual approach in teaching essay writing skills. This study focused on using visual spatial intelligence based activities to motivate undergraduates to write their essays effectively.

Giving a special attention to individual differences in creating lessons is an effective technique, which helps the students to engage in activities willingly. Visual spatial intelligence is one aspect of Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory (1983). According to Gardner everyone has his/her own learning process, and their intelligence levels are different from each other. He emphasized that in the teaching process, teachers can

reach their students by addressing the intelligence of each student in the class. At the same time, it is believed that the learners can be motivated easily when a special interest is given to their prominent intelligence.

II. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Motivation in language learning has been a major topic among teachers throughout the years as it is a significant aspect in language learning process. Motivation is essential to complete the given task successfully. It is visible that students find writing as a laborious task, and they do not show interest doing writing activities, which would hinder the development of their writing skills. At the same time, though academic writing is the main aspect of teaching and learning in higher education, it is often a neglected area of the curriculum because there is a notion that academic writing is assumed to be part of the 'common sense' knowledge which students should have, and it is not often taught explicitly within disciplinary courses.

There are various reasons behind the lack of interest towards writing activities. It is obvious that "language of academia is a very specialized discourse which presents a problem for all students whether they are first or second language speakers" of English (Archer, 2010). They "need to develop their writing skills in order to cope with university course work" in different disciplines (Bacha, 2002). It is commonly identified that students may show lack of interest towards writing lessons, which is a main barrier of effective learning process. In this regard, their lack of willingness to complete the given writing task hinders their development of writing skills. According to Dislen's (2013) traditional teaching method such as argumentative teaching and boring colourless lessons, and too many similar types of exercises and questions lead to lack of motivation and enthusiasm in students towards language learning.

It is obvious that using visual aids in language teaching is a common practice, specially in primary and secondary levels. However, in the university sector due to the large group lecturing, students lack interactive learning opportunities with visual aids which promotes student-centred learning. It seems that in the university sector student-centred teaching is not much popular. The reason is lecturing is a simple, fast and cheap method to present the vast issues to many groups of learners (Fathnejad and

Mokhtari, 2007). On the other hand, lecturing is one-way communication which does not promote active leaning and they forget what they heard sooner. Moreover, as the learning process is tiring and lacks interest, the students are demotivated, and it hinders their skill development. Due to the above-mentioned limitations it is important to consider a new approach which promotes active learning specially in teaching writing skills which needs motivation and enthusiasm to finish the given task successfully. Therefore, this study focuses on effectiveness of using visual spatial intelligence-based activities to motivate the undergraduates to develop writing skills.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Visual spatial intelligence is one of the many types of intelligences described in Multiple Intelligence Theory. Multiple Intelligence (MI) is a concept introduced by Howard Gardner, a psychologist in his book, *Frames of Mind* (1983). He claims that humans do not possess a single intelligence, but a range of intelligences (Gardner, 1983). He listed seven intelligences: musical/rhythmic, verbal/linguistic, visual/spatial, bodily/kinesthetic, logical/mathematical and intrapersonal /interpersonal. According to Gardner, most of the learners have all these intelligences, but in each person one or more of them is more pronounced. Multiple intelligences are becoming a popular approach in language teaching. It identifies leaners as different individuals in designing lessons. MI Theory opens the doors to a variety of teaching strategies that can easily be applied in the language classroom. It gives opportunities to widen modern teaching strategies and activities.

According to Gardner (1983) visual spatial intelligence incorporates a capability to perceive and represent the visual spatial context precisely and to shape and control mental pictures. Lohman et al (1987) defines that spatial intelligence is an ability which helps to manipulate the information presented in a visual, diagrammatic, or symbolic form in contrast to verbal, language-based modality. It is widely accepted that students have preferred learning style. In this regard, visual learning is a learner style. If teachers can stimuli their preferred learning style, it increases the students' motivation.

People with strong visual/spatial intelligence often have a strong visual memory and are artistic. 'Visual-spatial thinking develops from birth, together with language and

other specialized abilities, through interactions between inherited capabilities and experience'(James, 1999). According to Alejandro (1994) there is a connection between art and literacy and both aspects depend on each other. The New London Group (1996) mentioned that there is a requirement of broadening the literacy practices in the classroom. As an example, 'multimedia technologies used for communicative purposes, such as visual design in desktop publishing suggest that using a visual pedagogic approach within the classroom is an effective way to capture students' attention and in doing so, it facilitates learning'.

The students who show lack of interest to do writing activities in the classroom may prefer to do activities which are based on visual spatial activities. Most of the language teachers seem to agree that the use of visuals can enhance language teaching. According to Brinton (2000) visual aids help teachers to bring the real world into the classroom, they make learning more meaningful and more exciting.

Visual aids that can be used are diagrams, charts, pictures, visual organisers, videos and all the other extra linguistics features. They are effective in deriving meaning from context. Though many researchers emphasised the preferred learner styles, many visual spatial learners have been neglected by the traditional textbooks which do not have visuals. Therefore, teachers should make lessons by incorporating visual clues as 'Visual aids stimulates thinking and cognize' (Kishore, 2003).

Many studies have found that artistic activities help students to develop interest and skills of writing. According to Kauffman and Khan (2000) giving students time to sketch before getting into groups help to think their personal connections before discussions. Miller (2000) mentioned that the drawings help as a rehearsal for writing and help to develop creativity. At the same time Hoyt (1992) found that students who have difficulty in writing may find that artistic expressions serve them to organise their thoughts and find a way to express their opinions.

A. The Significance of the Study

The significance of this study includes the fact that the traditional lecturing process only provides much attention on giving students the basic ideas on essay writing, and it

is not adequate to produce a motivated language learner who likes to complete the given writing task successfully. Hence, Sri Lankan universities should promote visual spatial learning instead of lecturing method to teach writing skills.

B. Hypothesis

The hypothesis of this research is that visual spatial intelligence based techniques are effective tools that should be used to teach essay writing to undergraduates who are not motivated in writing activities.

C. Objectives

The objectives of this study are as follows.

- 1) To explore the effectiveness of the activities based on visual spatial intelligence to improve undergraduates' motivation in essay writing
- 2) To find out in what ways the undergraduates are motivated in writing tasks based on visual spatial intelligence

III. METHODOLOGY

Methodology of this study includes both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The study included a pre-test, post-test and an intervention. Qualitative data was collected through classroom observations and quantitative data was collected through the students' pre and post test marks. The sample includes 39 second year law undergraduates. A pre-test was conducted to measure the students' existing skills in essay writing 57% of the students obtained less than 12 out of 20 marks. The intervention was conducted throughout five weeks. Five lessons were conducted as the intervention of the study to teach argumentative essay writing including writing topic sentences and paragraph writing. The lessons were based on visual-spatial intelligence based techniques.

IV. RESULTS

Quantitative data was analysed statistically. The results of Paired Sample t-tests of the pre-test and post-test of the group indicated that there was a significant difference

between the mean scores of the pre-test ($M= 9.833$, $SD= 2.3657$) and the mean score of the post-test ($M= 15.08$, $SD= 1.620$), $t(38) = (-20.663$, $P = .00 < .05$ (two tailed). It is evident that students' scores increased after using visual spatial intelligence theory-based techniques. These results suggested that visual-spatial intelligence-based activities helped to develop the writing skills of the students.

Qualitative data was collected through classroom observations. Teaching essay writing skills were done using five lessons which were designed to teach the structure of a paragraph, writing topic sentences, structure of an argumentative essay and researching about the essay topic. The students were taught the structure of a paragraph using a picture of a hamburger to visualise the organisation of the topic sentence, supporting details and concluding sentence of a paragraph. According to the classroom observations students were delighted to have a worksheet of a hamburger where they had to write their paragraph in it. It promoted subconsciousness learning. For them visualising the structure of a paragraph using a picture of a hamburger was memorable and enjoyable.

The next lesson was introducing the structure of the argumentative essay using a diagram. This lesson was a remedy for students who found it difficult to understand the organisation of the essay. When the structure was visualized using a diagram, the students could understand the pattern and they can adhere to the given structure which helped to produce a good and well organised essay.

The next lesson was designed to motivate the students to write an essay successfully through proper research and critical thinking. After presenting the structure of the argumentative essay students were asked to write their opinion on Somalian Pirate issue, a topic under Law of the Sea, which they would study as law students. The above-mentioned topic was selected as the students should be provided an opportunity to practice the target language items in a meaningful context.

After analysing students' writings, it was clear that they lacked idea generation on the given topic and organisation of the essay contents though they were explained the structure of the argumentative essay. Further, according to the classroom observations it was visible that they were not motivated to complete the given task and they produced lesser contents as they did not have much information to include in their essays due to

lack of research on the given topic. Lack of awareness on the Somalian piracy issue hinders their idea generation process. After analysing students' writings which were not successful they were given an opportunity to watch the movie *Captain Philip* which is a 2013 American biographical survival thriller film directed by Paul Greengrass. The movie is based on a true story from 2009 about a Somali pirate attack on an American container ship. Films can be used as a pedagogic means to introduce academic writing skills, based on the premise that, since viewing film is already a common literacy practice for many students, its use can help to facilitate learning inside the writing classroom (Baratta, 2008). After watching the movie, the students had a discussion on the issues discussed in the movie and it seems that the movie was thought provoking and the students were emotional and sensitive on the fate of Somali pirates. According to the classroom observations the discussion went successfully as the students actively participated in the discussion by presenting their opinions.

According to Seferoğlu (2008), films provide authentic language input and a stimulating framework for classroom discussions. Specially, they developed logical arguments on Somali Piracy issues on different perspectives. It was observed that they did further research on piracy and Somalia and they were given an opportunity to present their opinion on the themes discussed in the movie. As a production the students wrote an argumentative essay on Somalian Piracy Issue. After analysing students essays it was found out that students included rich contents. At the same time, it was visible that they clearly understood the structure of an argumentative essay.

Findings of this study may be served as guidelines for teachers when implementing visual based teaching to motivate the students to complete their writing activities. At the same time, it was visible that visual learning creates interesting learning environment where students leads to think critically and express their opinions willingly in the form of writing.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that using visual- spatial intelligence-based teaching techniques stimulate thinking which enhance students' performance in essay writing. Visual-spatial intelligence-based teaching techniques lead to

innovative teaching strategies, which can be easily applied in the English language classroom in which students are demotivated.

The active participation of the students makes them responsible for their own learning. At the same time these activities help to break the monotonous learning environment where students show lack of interest to complete the given writing task willingly. Further, students experienced a pleasant and enjoyable learning process and they complete their writing task enthusiastically.

It is obvious that teaching essay structures using visuals found interesting for students. Further, providing visual prompts to write essay is more effective than assigning them a topic which they do not have any interest. Therefore, the findings and the intervention of this study can be used by English language practitioners in the university sector to motivate the students to develop their writing skills because visual-spatial intelligence-based activities are effective than traditional lecture method which hinders the improvement of students' writings. Future studies can be done to explore new strategies of teaching essay writing skills using visual spatial intelligence.

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