

**DEVELOPING WRITING SKILLS OF TOURISMAND HOSPITALITY
MANAGEMENT SPECIALIZATIONS STUDENTS, USING ACTIVITIES OF WRITING
TO LEARN APPROACH**

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ABSTRACT

This article highlights the effectiveness of Writing to Learn approach in developing writing skills of Tourism and Hospitality Management specialization students. Writing to Learn approach links the students' writing skills and the subject matter of respective specializations. The approach also helps students' thoughts and understanding grow and clarify through the process writing. WTL approach is designed to make sure that students have frequent and significant opportunities to write, revise, and discuss their writing in their classes, whatever their major course of study is. Students of Tourism and Hospitality Management specialization need to express what they learnt from their curriculum, properly and systematically in their writings. In this study, 30 Tourism and Hospitality Management students were chosen as the subject of the study, to verify the effectiveness of WTL approach, and the instruments of the study were tests (pre-test and post-test), and observation checklist. The study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) design and had been done in one cycle in which planning, acting, observing, and reflecting are included. The quantitative data analysis of two tests reveals that students gained enhancements in their writing ability in content, vocabulary, grammar and mechanic. This article aims to encourage English teachers to improve their students' disciplinary formation through writing to learn activities mentioned in this study.

Key Words: Writing to Learn Approach, Writing In the Disciplines, Tourism and Hospitality Management, disciplinary formation.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to the IWT (Institute for Writing and Thinking) "Writing is not only a record of completed thought, but also an exploratory process that deepens learning across discipline" [3].

Writing to learn approach is the one in which the activities are short, informal and low-stakes writing tasks but can help students think through key concepts or ideas presented in the course. The approach has originally associated with WAC (or) WID movement. This movement made teachers in different disciplines interested in their students writing and to relate their disciplinary education with writing skills [9]. Many studies indicate that the act of writing improves the students' ability to think critically and then support learning skill. Tourism and

Hospitality Management specialization students have to write learning logs, reports, assignments, summaries and projects in their disciplinary area. However, the writing skills of the students are not satisfactory due to their background level of command of English. As interdisciplinary task, the Sustainable and Responsible Tourism Management subject, one of their specialization subjects, was taught through the WTL/WID approach, by working English teacher and Tourism Specialization teacher. The results showed that. The students' writing skills developed due to the writing to learn activities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

WAC (or) WID movement has originally been associated with Writing to Learn approach. WAC is the Writing Across Curriculum, and WID is Writing in the Discipline. This movement made teachers in different disciplines interested in their students writing and to relate their disciplinary education with writing skills [7]. WAC offers 'Writing-centered pedagogy' to students of various disciplines in the universities [10]. In WAC, students' critical thinking can be reinforced in such a way that writing is an integral part of learning process. WAC brings a model of active student engagement rather than the lecture mode of teaching, and students will learn more and become better thinkers and communicators after leaving university if they write consistently and repeatedly throughout their specialization courses.

Nowadays, English language teachers from various disciplines and institutions are seeking for the better teaching methods and practices to relate language skills and particular field of disciplines such as Science, technology, engineering, mathematics, computer technology, tourism, nursing, etc. In this case, the foundational writing practices and activities of IWT are very useful and applicable [3]. By means of these writing practices, the teachers from diverse disciplines can enhance the critical thinking skills of their students and promote the understanding of their subject area, building their disciplinary knowledge and education [7].

Many scholars have contributed teaching strategies, approaches and activities to promote students' writing skills and to apply language skills in studying different kinds of subject areas. According to Bazerman (2005), writing skill, among the language skills, has been celebrated as a central learning process [1] while Janet Emig said writing to be "a complex, recursive process worthy of being studied and taught in its own right". In 1997, Emig contributed to 'writing to learn' movement by an article "Writing as a Mode of Learning" This article shows that writing is integrative, connective, active, and available for visual review [1]. Besides, this is the landmark article for Writing to Learn movement and stands as a charter document for the movement. Rolls et al, (2012) states in the article 'Points of Departure' that writing needs to be embedded in the discipline [2]. In the article, Rolls emphasizes the notion of Writing Across the Curriculum WAC or Writing In the Discipline WID.

According to the research findings, it is confirmed that students who possess course material through writing retain that information longer, and improve critical thinking skills and become more familiar with details and precise meaning. The more the students write in a course, the more they engage with the contents in the course. Langer and Applebee (1987) noted that rather than other activities, those which are dedicated to the improvement of writing skills can grant the

students' improvement in their learning process [8]. Doing the variety of writing activities, students are automatically familiar with different kinds of knowledge, information data and topics. Gillis (2001) found that journal writing, a very common activity of WTL, integrates classroom and clinical experiences in the nursing courses [5]. Teachers who use writing to learn approach must understand how to show examples of discipline-specific writing, how to write about subject-specific texts, to assess students writing assignments and to give feedback [10].

2.1 The Activities of WTL used during the Action research.

“Writing to learn activities are generally short, impromptu or otherwise informal and low-stakes writing tasks that help students think through the key concepts or ideas presented in a course” [11]. Sometimes, tasks in WTL approach are limited to less than five minutes of class time.

The IWT (Institute for Writing and Thinking) contributed a lot of writing activities to use in the classrooms of different disciplines. Based on the nature of discipline, there may be more various writing tasks. It is obvious that writing a laboratory report of an engineering student may be quite different from writing algorithms in pseudo code. [6] An academic report for a Tourism and Hospitality Management student will be quite different from a meeting minutes of a Business Management student. Thus, teachers of English can work together with the particular specialization teachers, to help students learn their disciplinary knowledge through writing activities in English. Teachers need to adapt the activities according to the nature of the discipline they are to deal with (to teach).

Some of the activities of WID approach that are adaptable and feasible in the context of Tourism and Hospitality Management specializations are

- The learning log
- Solving real problems/Using cases
- Pre-test Warm-up activity
- Note-taking
- Response Paper activity.
- Summary Writing/ nutshell writing

2.1.1 The learning log

Among the several WTL activities, ‘learning log’ is a very simple and engaging activity for students of any discipline. In this activity, students have to reserve a space to write, a notebook or, a word file in the computer, in which they can write their thoughts, feelings and things they are not quite clear about what they are studying.

The THM students have to write the meaning of a word, a usage, or a new concept in Sustainable Tourism Management, one of their major subjects. They have to write mainly on the concepts and questions about the subject including key words. They can also write the key concept or the explanation of a theory they understand well from the lesson. They have to write regularly, everyday or twice a week. Writing this way, the students remember, get familiarity and understand the concepts of the subjects. They can highlight the main points they know, and still need to know, so that they can clarify these highlights with the peers or respective teacher.

The learning log is also something like diary writing, in that students have to write about previous lecture at the beginning of the class, that they get warm-up for the lesson. At the end of the class, they have to write reflection topics like “today’s most interesting point” or “thing they are not happy.”

One important point is that, this activity is quick and ungraded, that it gives no stress to students for entry.

Activity:

As an easy starter for this activity, the teacher conducts a pilot activity. The teacher lets the Tourism Management students designate a space for their learning log, then distributes the copies of a written assignment about “Myanmar Cultural and Heritage sites” to every student, lets them read and respond individually for 5 minutes about what they learned or still need to learn.

They write about the definition of the topic, the sites mentioned, the words and terms they are unclear, and so on. Then feedback in general is given. After that the students get the idea of writing learning log.

The following points are the starters for learning log entry.

The main point I learned from the lesson

How I understand the key concept

The point I am still unclear

The word I do not understand though I already checked in the dictionary (due to the context, or referential meaning).

The teacher collects the logs after every two weeks, or sometime picks up from a couple of students to know students’ thoughts and feelings about the lessons, and gives feedback. The teacher always checks if there is anyone who would like to get immediate response and answer for the entry, and gives feedback, such as the meaning of an idiom or the usage or jargon. Some teachers pick up a single response, particularly after introducing a key concept. By doing snapshots of students’ comprehension occasionally, teachers can know how well students understand the material. Teachers can then tailor the next lecture to clarify and elaborate as his best for students.

2.1.2 Solving real problems/ Using cases

In the activity “Solving real problems”, teacher asks students to analyze a case study; an authentic problem in the industry, either in group or individually. Students are to write down the problem as well as the solution they think to be true. For the sake of being quick and easy, teachers should choose the simple cases related to the subject matter. Sometime, the teacher set up scenario, and different students have different writing tasks.

Activity

The teacher assigns THM students authentic and updated problems from different Tourism businesses, under triple bottom line field, to think for the best solution in group or individually, and write down the solution on a piece of paper. Due to the time frame, some case studies can be extended. This activity is very useful for the students as they get experience before they write formal business reports in the industry.

2.1.3 Pre-test Warm-up activity

It is sometime a kind of extension of the problem solving activity that the materials used in the activity are the sample of their test. Sometime to give out sample test questions before the real exam.

Another alternative for pre-test warm up writing is to give out sample test questions in advance of the exam. Students can work individually or in groups to write out responses. They know the test material will come from the WTL activity, students are likely to prepare more carefully. During this activity the gain better awareness of the subject matter.

Activity.

In the class of Tourism and Hospitality Management (THM) specialization, the students are divided into groups of five, in which they have to negotiate on an environmental/ social or economic issue. Two from each side are taking the roles of representatives of an organization or business firm, and one of the group member writes down the minutes. Teacher gives outline for the negotiation, and after 5 minutes, they have to end up the meeting and finish the writing in group. The similar material with a little different but authentic situation is set for the test, that they are quite familiar with the writing task, as well as the concept of negotiation.

2.1.4 Note taking

Notetaking is in fact, not a particular activity but a way of learning through writing. While listening to a lecture of the curriculum, some students highlight, while some underline the text book, but some write down short notes of key points and difficult words. Those who write down the notes can remember the lecture better than others. Some of the scientific concepts are easier to understand once they are written down as different types of note writing style such as spider chart, vanned diagram, circles and arrows, flow-chart and/or tree diagram etc.

The teacher provides the different forms of note taking such as flowchart, tree diagram, table, spidergram, headings and notes, timeline, two columns and so on.

Activity

The teacher gives a short lecture on Food security and food source, during which students have to take notes in a way they like. The teacher then let them study their notes and recompose the text.

2.1.5 Response Paper activity.

In this activity students are to read the assigned reading text from their specialization subject, and write responses which analyze key features of reading. This activity is different from the summary writing, in that, the students have to react and write responses that analyze the features of the assigned reading specifically (the quality of data, the focus of research reported, the validity of research design, the effectiveness of logical argument). Sometime they might write arguments for the text and/or write counter-arguments. By this way students of any specialization can raise awareness of their disciplinary knowledge.

This activity is something like giving feedback from one's own point of view or writing review on the contents of the text.

Activity

The teacher assigns the THM specialization students with an authentic, argumentative, updated news article to read and respond in pairs or individually. This writing activity can also be done individually extensively as homework, which the students have to write well by analyzing, planning, organizing, editing, and proofreading before they submit to the teacher. Then the teacher lets them peer checked for content, organization and, language.

2.1.6 Summary Writing/ nutshell writing

In order to capture the main points and key details of a lesson or reading text, and write in a shorter form, summary writing is used. These summary writing practices help students understand original reading text more when they are first assigned to write. They remember the points clearly for later tests or homework assignments. Providing key questions about the lesson can help students narrow in on the main ideas to emphasize and remember from the lesson.

Writing abstracts is one of the example, that students have to analyze the abstracts in a major professional journal and write similar abstracts of the readings they are assigned in the course.

Activity

The teacher uses easy-to-read content text from Sustainable Tourism Management field, "Waste Management". The teacher provides the students with key questions and lets them write down the main points first. Then the teacher lets the students write the summary based on the main ideas, together as a group work. Then, using another content text, the teacher asks students to

read with partners and create a summary together as pair work. Finally, when students seem to write summary well in pairs, the teacher assigns the students to generate summary individually.

Nutshell writing is the technique in which the whole idea of a text or a lesson is summarized in one sentence. This term originally comes from the idiom “put it in a nutshell”, meaning that putting the things in the smallest place possible. Sometimes the ideas in the discipline are needed to be written in short, this kind of writing is effective for their writing.

Example:

We collaborate locally to compete globally.

The maroon leaves Crusoe on an island where he must learn to survive himself for years.

3. METHODOLOGY

The research design was a Classroom Action Research because the purpose of the study is to develop students’ writing skills using WTL activities. The study had been done in one cycle in which the stages such as planning, acting, observing, and reflecting are included (Ferrance, 2000) [4]. The instruments of the study were using tests (pre-test and post-test), and observation checklist.

In order to achieve the goal of the study, the detailed plan was implemented in the planning phase. The subjects were thirty students (third year) specializing in Tourism and Hospitality Management who were enthusiastic in developing their writing skills. A pre-test was administered by the researcher and two collaborators a. In carrying out the acting phase, a twelve-week plan of developing writing skills was implemented. It included a detailed procedure of lesson plans together with teaching strategies and materials which equipped students with an understanding of layout, organization, grammar and lexis, and mechanic.

The researcher made sure every activity overlooked the important elements of successful writing which included planning content, peer correction, and collaborative writing. Participants took the four writing classes (four periods) for two days a week. In the first period of every week, the context of the lesson was introduced. To motivate the learners and to create an interactive environment, the teachers assigned most of the tasks to discuss, predict, identify, consider, and apply to their own experiences.

Moreover, the students are allowed to search in the internet for the updated data, information and usages. They can use the dictionary for correct use of vocabulary and collaborations. Before students did the writing activities, they had group discussions in which they shared their ideas, gave suggestions to each other, referring the digital resources. At the same time, instructional scaffolding and necessary guidance were paid to enhance, encourage, and help students. Students revised, re-edited, and re-checked their pieces of writing and submitted them to the teacher who assessed and scored with the writing skills scoring rubric. For the first four weeks, the teacher encouraged the students to give more attention to content and not to the language accuracy.

At the end of the twelfth week, the participants did the post-test. Both the pre-test and post-test were designed in identical test types which assisted the same concept. The post-test was followed by the reflection session in which the teacher and the students discuss openly on their progress and skills that were still needed to be improved.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the analysis of data collected from the pre-test and post-test. The quantitative data were analyzed and it included the mean score of the students’ writing test on WTL activities. The evaluation of students writing had been done on four factors: Content, Vocabulary, Grammar, and Mechanic. The modified scoring rubric adapted from

(Heaton, 1988)[7] was used to analyze the students' scores.

Table-1 Students’ writing score (pre-test)

Students	Category				Total
	Content	Vocabulary	Grammar	Mechanic	
1	3	2	3	2	10
2	3	2	3	2	10
3	3	2	3	2	10
4	2	3	4	2	11
5	3	2	3	2	10
6	3	3	3	2	11
7	3	3	4	2	12
8	3	3	2	2	10
9	3	3	4	2	12
10	3	2	3	2	10
11	3	2	3	3	11
12	3	2	3	2	10
13	3	2	3	2	10
14	3	2	3	3	11
15	3	3	4	3	12
16	3	2	3	2	10
17	2	3	3	2	10
18	3	2	3	2	10
19	3	2	3	3	11
20	3	2	3	2	10
21	3	2	3	2	10
22	3	3	2	3	11
23	3	2	2	2	9
24	3	2	3	3	11
25	3	2	2	3	10
26	3	3	3	3	12
27	2	2	2	3	9
28	3	2	2	3	10
29	2	2	3	2	9
30	2	3	3	3	11
Total					313
Mean					10.43

At the start of the activity, a pre-test was administered to the selected participants. The test consisted of two kinds of WTL activities: learning log and summary writing. Table- 1 shows the students' mean score before doing the action cycle. The mean score of the pre-test is 10.4. The mean score was calculated by using the formula: $\text{Mean} = \frac{313}{30}$. The highest score is 12 and the lowest score is 9. Overall, it can be seen that three students had the highest scores at 12. The other five students got a score of 11 which rates the second highest. Three students had by far the lowest score at 9 and the largest in number in all the twenty students. It can be seen that only a few students achieved the maximum criteria. The pre-test result showed that most students needed to develop in generating ideas and organization (content), appropriate use of vocabulary, correct use of sentence structure (grammar), and mechanic.

Table-2 Students' writing score (post-test)

Students	Category				Total
	Content	Vocabulary	Grammar	Mechanic	
1	4	3	4	2	13
2	4	3	4	2	13
3	4	3	4	2	13
4	4	3	3	4	14
5	3	2	4	3	12
6	3	3	4	2	12
7	4	3	3	4	14
8	3	3	4	2	12
9	4	3	4	3	14
10	3	3	4	3	13
11	4	3	4	2	13
12	4	2	3	2	11
13	3	3	4	2	12
14	3	3	4	3	13
15	4	3	4	3	14
16	3	3	4	2	12
17	4	2	4	2	12
18	3	4	4	3	14
19	3	3	3	3	12
20	4	3	4	3	14
21	4	3	4	3	14
22	3	3	4	3	13
23	4	3	4	3	14
24	4	3	4	3	14
25	3	3	4	3	13
26	3	3	4	3	13
27	4	3	4	3	14
28	4	3	3	4	14
29	3	3	4	3	13
30	3	4	3	3	13
Total					392
Mean					13

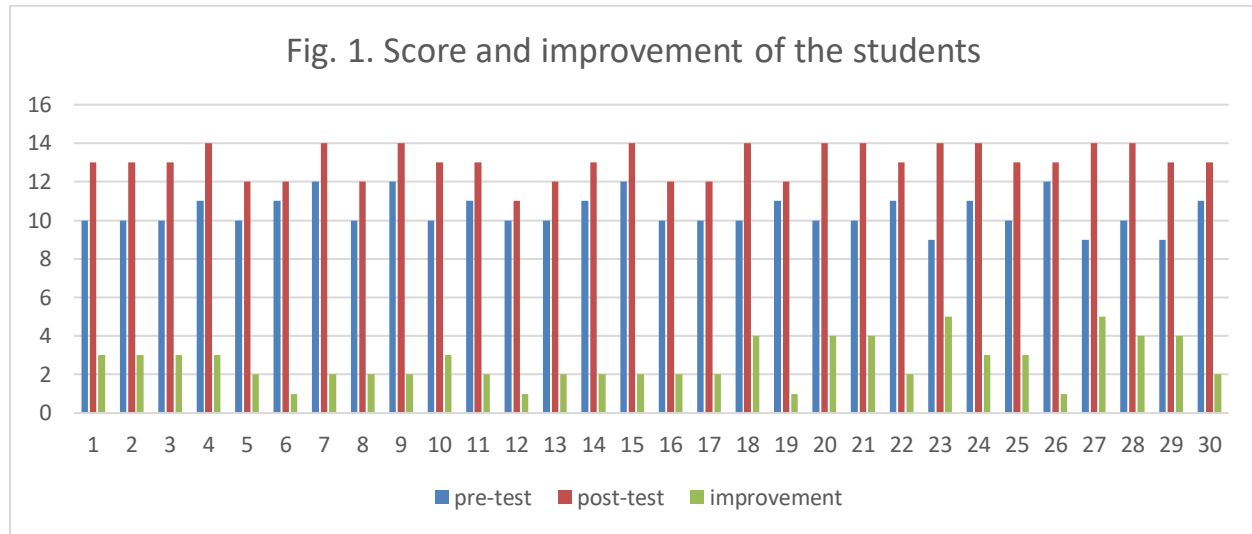


Figure (1) .Scores and Improvement of Students' Writing Skill (Pre-test and Post-test)

At the end of the twelfth week, the post-test was administered. As a result of effective teaching strategies, intensive guidance, students' enthusiasm, there were significant improvements in the post-test. The data interpretation of the post-test reveals that the mean score, 10.4 was increased up to 13. In the post-test, the highest score is 14 and the lowest score is 11. In contraction to the pre-test, eleven out of thirty scored 14. It was evidenced that all students developed in their writing ability especially in the content and grammar factors. Thus, the findings showed that after using activities of WTL approach, the writings in the specialization subject obviously improved.

4.1 Recommendations

In fact, teachers who use writing to learn activities can adapt the activities to fit with their own classrooms. As some weaker classrooms may have language difficulties, Teachers should balance between learning to write and writing to learn. Proper language input is necessary in this case. Moreover, teachers who teach writing using writing to learn approach must understand how to show examples of discipline-specific writing, how to write about subject-specific texts, to assess students writing assignments and to give feedback [10]. Teachers should balance between learning to write and writing to learn. During the WTL activities, students will get intellectual development as well as disciplinary knowledge and education. To get better awareness of the WTL approach, which plays essential role in teaching in the discipline, WTL workshop, in which teachers can have opportunity to develop an understanding of writing-based teaching, its theory and practices, and its application in the classroom. WTL approach is interdisciplinary as writing skill of English and particular discipline relate each other in teaching process. If English teachers in various disciplines use WTL approach, their students' writing skills in the discipline will surely be improved, and at the same time their disciplinary knowledge will also be improved. Making writing a regular part of the classroom, a teacher can raise students' thinking across curriculum with the best use of activities.

5. CONCLUSION

‘Writing is a unique form of learning that deserves increased experimental and theoretical attention’ [1]. Regardless of the subject matter, writing can surely empower learning. WTL aims to help students learn foundational concepts and to assess their level of understanding of course content. This study revealed that, WTL approach can help THM students to have improvement in writing disciplinary compositions. In this study, only two of the WTL activities are used to test the students’ development. Other activities can also be used to check its development in the follow up researches. Moreover, though the WTL approach aims to use for the students of any discipline, only Tourism and Hospitality Management specialization students are chosen to test as first step in this study. This means that, in the follow-up researches, the students of other specializations will also be chosen as participants, with the use of WTL activities. In fact, the writing skills of the students can be improved with the better teaching of writing strategy, and it is considerable to link their writing with the content of their specialization. In doing so, the students’ motivation can be increased.

This study is hoped to contribute to some extent to develop the writing skills of learners of every discipline in Myanmar, by introducing WTL approach.

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