

Details of the Grant

Grant: University of Colombo small research grant for the year 2017

Title of the Research Project: A collaborative action research to improve students' writing skills in English

Project no: AP/3/2/2017/SG/05

Total Amount of the allocation: Rs. 483,800.00

Proposal

A collaborative action research to improve students' writing skills in English

Rationale

Public examination results in Sri Lanka confirm that Second Language students' writing skills are generally weak. Analysis of National assessment of grade 8 students (NEREC, 2014) revealed the students' inability to string the words to obtain a meaningful sentence or translate their generated thoughts into correct linguistic forms and their inadequate knowledge of grammar.

According to G.C.E. O/L Examination - 2012 English Language Evaluation Report students have performed badly on all the writing tasks. Compared to the other skills, writing has the lowest facility. According to the report "low percentage of language of the candidates reflects their inability to constructing sentences free of grammatical, spelling and punctuation errors". The analysis of the students' writing also indicates that even though the candidates have points they are unable to express their ideas in English due to inadequate knowledge of the basic grammar. National Assessment of Grade Eight students 2012 confirms that writing is the weakest skill of the students. According to the findings of this study students of 1C and Type 2 schools are performing very much below that of the students of 1AB and National schools. A similar low performance in the achievement of competencies in writing is noted in the National

Assessment of Grade 4 students 2015. All these reports highlight the need to pay special individual attention to improve the writing skills of low performing second language learners.

The Evaluation report 2012 recommends that students should be given more practice in class in the use of mechanics of writing and basic grammar such as correct form of the verb be and pronouns.

Since basic grammar is expected to be taught in the primary classes it is assumed that the students have not got a good foundation in the primary classes. Therefore, there was a need to find out whether this assumption is correct and take remedial action at the beginning of the secondary grade cycle.

A collaborative action research was conducted in 2014 as a pilot study using a type 1C and type 2 school. The collaborators were a university lecturer (myself) two Regional English Support Centre (RESC) staff and two teachers. The main purpose of this collaboration was to utilize a product based approach to improve the writing skills of the students. The findings indicated that the students' language competencies had improved. Therefore, there is a need to implement the same programme with a large sample

Objectives of the Study

1. Analyze the writing difficulties of the participants.
2. Identify the basic competencies that need to be developed in the students.
3. Plan a remedial programme to teach the basic competencies.
4. Train the collaborative teachers in implementing the programme.
5. Implement the programme.
6. Analyze the intervention and plan for further intervention.

Methodology

The methodology used in this study will be a collaborative action research. The collaborators will be two university lecturers, four Regional English Support Centre (RESC) staff from Gampaha and Kandy. forty teachers. A pre test targeting the writing competencies expected to achieve in the primary grades will be administered to identify the shortcomings in writing of

grade 6 students. A remedial programme will be designed and implemented to improve the identified writing competencies. Three workshops will be held by the lecturers with the help of the RESC staff for the teachers to train them to implement the remedial programme. A post test will be administered to find out whether the students have improved in achieving the identified language competencies. In addition the students and the teachers will be interviewed, classroom observations will be conducted by the RESC staff and students' task sheets will be utilized for data collection.

Activity Plan

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| 1. Identifying the expected writing competencies and designing the test. | Dec 2016 |
| 2. Administering the test and analysing | Jan 2017 |
| 3. Designing the remedial programme and training teachers | Feb2017 |
| 4. Implementing the programme | Mar–Nov 2017 |
| 5. Classroom observations and adapting the programme if necessary | |
| 6. Interviews of teachers and students | |
| 7. Administering the post test and analysis and completing the report | Dec 2017 |

Proposed Outcomes

1. A set of learning materials will be developed to improve writing skills
2. A group of teachers will be trained in developing students' writing skills
3. RESC staff will be trained in action research and developing writing skills
4. RESC staff will be able to implement such programmes in other educational zones
5. The two academic staff members will be able to design such programmes to develop the writing skills of B,Ed undergraduates.
6. Introduce a course module in improving writing skills for the Post Graduate Diploma in Teaching of English Course.

Impact of the study

An improvement in writing skills in English

Progress up to 31.07.2017

In Gampaha the action Research has commenced in 15 schools involving 18 classrooms and 900 grade 6 students.

Three work sessions for the RESC staff and two workshops for the teachers were held.

Pre test held and data analysed.

First intervention was planned in collaboration with the principal researcher, three RESC staff members and the teachers of the 15 schools.

The first intervention was conducted during June 2017 – July 2017

The objectives were

- Identify the Subject and Verb
- Form sentences with Subject and Verb (Simple present tense third person)
- Introduce the object
- Students identify the difference between SVO and L1 SOV
- Form third person present tense sentences using the SVO structure.

Data Collection

Mentors observed the lessons during the fourth week.

Collected and examined students work sheets

Examined teachers reflections

Results

Majority of the students were forming sentences correctly

Students were. enjoying the activities

Students writing showed an improvement.

Both the mentors and the teachers agreed that the first intervention was successful.

The teachers have also identified some students who did not know the alphabet

Post test to evaluate students writing will be held on the last day of the term

Third work shop for teachers will be held in September to plan the second intervention

In Kandy

Two workshops were held

Pre-test will be held on the 4th of September 2017