

# Qualitative Study On Remedial Teaching Of Writing Skills In Indian Engineering Colleges

**M. M. Uma Maheswari**

Ph.D., Assistant Professor, SG, Department of English and Foreign Languages,  
Faculty of Engineering and Technology, SRMIST, Kattankulathur Campus

*Abstract: This study aims to understand the pedagogical aspects of remedial teaching of writing skills to engineering college students by focusing on the strategies used by students and teachers in achieving the relearning. The paper registers qualitatively both the students and the teachers' perceptions of remedial teaching and learning. The study evidenced that a combination of inductive and deductive approach of teaching grammar and setting up of multiple goals and strategies in the remedial teaching yielded results. All the students have acknowledged that the teachers creating dispositions to learn from mistakes as helpful. The teachers have expressed that making the students aware of the impact of strategies on learning help in achieving the required modifications in their learning patterns.*

*Keywords: remedial teaching, disposition, inductive and deductive approach, learning strategies.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Global reach of English is indubitable. English fetches job, improvises career, promotes research and serves as an indelible link among people of different countries. English with its lingua franca status has got a significantly special role in India. In India the users of English are adored and the proficiency in English is one of the crucial criteria that determine the successful acquisition of knowledge in most of the schools and colleges. Employability and achieving sustained development in a career are largely determined by the proficiency in English.

The indispensable status of English is well recognized by Indian Engineering college curriculum framers and English is taught in the first year of study for 2 semesters. The primary focus of the English Syllabus is to enhance the spoken and writing skills of students. Presentation techniques are taught and the students are made to give presentations which are commented upon by the teacher.

An Indian Engineering college class room comprises a very diverse group with students of mixed proficiency levels in English. Their exposure to English varies as it is determined by their mediums of instruction and also by their boards of studies- CBSE/ISCE/STATE BOARDS. Differences in

exposure to English not only lead to difference in proficiency levels but also influence the fluency and accuracy of using it in classroom set up and in real life situations.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The diverse nature of the class leads to the mixed performances in assessments. The students who fail to achieve desired proficiency level in English are found to be struggling in academic writing of their courses in general. This explains the importance of remedial teaching and creates the demand for an effective remedial teaching of writing skills

Inclusive environments that provide challenging and early intervention can prevent academic failure and alter learning disabilities (Stegelin, 2002). The early intervention could be possible if the students' lack of proficiency is detected early. The teacher coping up a mixed class of diverse proficiency levels and the pressure of fulfilling academic demands like syllabus coverage might not be able to slow down the flow of lesson coverage for less proficient students; or the teacher might even overlook the part of the class that is not grasping the knowledge he/she is transmitting.

“The best teachers are those who think carefully about what they are going to do in their classes and who plan how they are going to organize the teaching and learning.” Jeremy Harmer - *The Practice of English Language Teaching*, 1991. The best teacher’s teaching strategy could be further stretched to include a plan for remedial teaching. The teachers should come out of the comfortably misleading belief of having achieved a wholesome reach to the entire class. He/she should check each and every student’s learning capacity and if there is a lagging or a gap in the learning should immediately execute the remedial teaching plan. The early intervention of teachers could be made possible if the conduct of formative tests is included in the academic plan. The conduct of periodical formative assessment tests before the final summative assessment would help in facilitating an effective remedial teaching.

The errors that the less proficient students make in the English writing tests include spelling and grammar mistakes, punctuation errors, disconnected sentences, distorted content, unrelated or inappropriate use of words and formats errors. These errors arise from lack of spelling and grammar knowledge, incorrect use of punctuation, lack of cohesiveness, lack of meaning in content, improper use of vocabulary, lack of or inappropriate style and lack of knowledge of formats of official documents. The teacher should identify the lapses in learning and then go for a re-teaching plan which might include teaching of basic concepts with a simpler use of terms and providing a worked out model that could be used as a scaffold in re-learning. Callum Robertson Richard Acklam, (2000), insist on establishing clear and realistic aims for the lesson, using of a variety of techniques, materials and activities to keep the students interested in the subject and finally be flexible in adapting to the students’ way of responding to the lesson planning could very well be followed in framing remedial lesson plan too.

### III. BACKGROUND

The English class with a variety of students with different skills levels would indelibly be comprising students who could be classified as slow learners. These students don’t respond to teaching as the majority of the class does. These students are marked by their inability to concentrate for a prolonged period of time, compared to other students the attention span of these students is less and the objective of the text books, work books, learning materials and instructional resources couldn’t be achieved with these students. These students need a ‘simple to complex’ type instructional materials, unique pace of learning, periodical feedback and a very flexible teaching approach. Teaching style with a different approach (Friedman & Alley, 1984); and prescribing different learning styles (Gregorc & Ward, 1977) to meet learners’ preferences; collaborating class specific learning style and respectively modified teaching style (Hyman & Rosoff, 1985) rather than sticking to one general teaching-learning style will yield results

Remedial teachers need to be reminded that mere matching of learning and teaching styles would not always be leading to academic success (Hunter, 1979; Charkins,

O’Toole, Wetzel, 1985; Campbell, 1989; Battle, 1982; Lyon, 1991; Scerba, 1979).

Ample research has been made on the impact of remedial teaching on students. Language researchers are of opinion that further study is needed in the area of identifying learning styles, and modifying the teaching styles to match with the learning styles. Very little has been discussed on the experiences and perceptions of students and the teachers on the remedial teaching they have been engaging. The research paper tries to fulfill that gap.

### IV. METHOD OF RESEARCH

The samples include students of less proficient levels in English and teachers who teach them. 30 students with less proficiency levels in English were administered a questionnaire and for the purpose of conformability and dependability, 5 teachers’ perceptions on the same set of questions were also recorded.

30 students who were less proficient in English studying in the Faculty of Engineering and Technology, SRMIST, Kattankulathur have been made to reflect upon the remedial teaching practice and their relearning. The teachers who have been teaching English in the same institution for more than 10 years were also selected. Their perceptions on remedial teaching were collected for the purpose of conformability and dependability.

### V. FINDINGS

- Students’ perceptions about remedial teaching
- ✓ It is found that students require a variety in delivering the content. One method of teaching is not leading to learning by all the students of the class.
  - ✓ Forcing the students to concentrate on a lesson for prolonged period of time is not leading to learning
  - ✓ A ‘simple to complex method’ of delivering content is more productive
  - ✓ Scaffolding teaching method leads to effective learning
  - ✓ Space to commit mistakes and learn from the mistakes has always lead to learning
  - ✓ Remarks written by teachers in answer scripts are of little help in correcting the mistakes
- Teachers’ perceptions about remedial teaching
- ✓ Having multiple goals and strategies always proved to be productive
  - ✓ Task based teaching leads to learning
  - ✓ A combination of inductive and deductive approach of remedial teaching yields results
  - ✓ Sensitizing the students to the order of acquisition of four primary language skills LSRW in first language and in second language helps the students to believe in not hesitating to commit mistakes and learn from it.
  - ✓ Mere writing of remarks by teachers in answer scripts never leads to learning

## VI. DISCUSSIONS

The effective pedagogical procedures to be followed in remedial teaching as perceived by students and teachers included the following:

✓ Need of multiple goals and strategies

The mixed proficiency levels in the classroom augment the challenges for teachers in the remedial teaching of writing skills. An English teacher should have multiple goals and well conceived strategies in accordance to the varied proficiency levels of the students.

The popular myth that all students in a class respond to remedial teaching in the same way could no longer hold good. Recognizing the learning capacity of every student and fulfilling the gap in his/her learning would maximize the effectiveness of remedial teaching. Infusing remedial teaching of writing skills with the clear cut pedagogical procedures widens the scope of re- learning among students.

Looking upon remediation as simply going over the material more slowly needs a revision. A varying teaching methodology has to be applied for remedial teaching. More resources and alternative instructional strategies are to be utilized. In line with the students' best learning style, breaking information down into small learning targets and teaching small chunks at a time would always yield better results. A good remedial teaching focuses more on task based learning than on the lectures. Group activity or working with a partner or small group would set up the ideal environment for relearning.

✓ A combination of inductive and deductive approach of remedial teaching yields results. While focusing on remedial teaching of grammar, a combination of Inductive and Deductive approaches proves to be greatly effective.

✓ Sensitizing the students to the order of acquisition of four primary language skills LSRW in first language and in second language helps the teachers to create the dispositions to the students to learn from mistakes. Teachers should respect the pace of learning of the students.

✓ Feedback in remedial teaching

Remedial teaching starts as a follow-up to the poor performance in formative assessments. It is taken as a step to fill the gap in the learning and to prompt the less proficient students to achieve desired proficiency. Remedial teaching becomes complete only if it is supported with periodical feedback.

✓ Strategies and re-learning

Students should be made to understand that the problems they face in learning and using English could be related to their learning strategies and a modification in the strategies will lead to productive learning.

✓ Methods that yielded negligibly minimal remedial outcomes as perceived by both students and teachers

- A. Circling of mistakes in red ink – indication of spelling and grammatical errors
- B. Remarks like insisting on meeting the teacher or writing of correct spelling or grammatical form in Answer scripts – written feedback
- C. Conversation on the mistakes and ways of avoiding it – oral feedback

✓ Methods that yielded appreciably good remedial outcomes as perceived by both students and teachers  
A, B, C accompanied by D, E and F

D. Creating awareness on the order of acquisition of four primary language skills LSRW in first language and in second language

E. Ascertaining that committing mistakes in language learning is quite normal and acceptable

F. Giving them individualistic attention to correction of specific errors (spelling/grammatical/presentation) backed up by a general understanding of language forms and context. For instance an error in tenses is dealt by teaching about verbs and parts of speech.

## VII. CONCLUSION

An English class in an Indian Engineering College has students of mixed proficiency levels and 'one class-one method' of teaching will not lead to learning. The writing proficiency acquisition could be achieved even among students of lower proficiency by noting the gap at the early stage through periodical tests and by adopting a multiple strategies and goals method.

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APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE – I (Administered to students)

NAME:

YEAR/BRANCH:

COLLEGE:

Place a TICK MARK over the correct answer

1. I have fear and anxiety in using English  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree-  
agree – strongly agree
2. Awareness on order of acquisition of four primary  
language skills is helpful in learning English with greater  
confidence.  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree-  
agree – strongly agree
3. Awareness on relationship between Listening/Speaking  
and Reading/Writing helped in enhancing speaking and  
writing skills  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree-  
agree – strongly agree
4. The goals an English teacher should set while engaging in  
remedial teaching  
A. To treat entire set of students as a one whole unit  
B. To follow the same teaching methodology  
C. To revise teaching methodology by infusing new  
strategies in to it  
D. To have different goals and different strategies to  
match the students learning capacities  
E. To create dispositions to learn from mistakes  
F. Combinations I would prefer to have from the above  
options: \_\_\_\_\_
5. My English teacher in college is successful in making me  
relearn  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree- agree  
– strongly agree
6. If no, the Teacher's failure is caused greatly by  
A. teacher's poor planning and execution  
B. students' non-cooperation and lack of interest  
C- Both A&B
7. I ignore the circling or underlining in red ink in my  
answer scripts  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree-  
agree – strongly agree
8. Remarks in answer scripts have led to correction of errors.  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree-  
agree – strongly agree
9. The teacher giving oral feedback on mistakes and ways of  
avoiding it helped in the correction of mistakes.  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree-  
agree – strongly agree
10. While learning grammar, I gain better understanding with  
the method of moving from specific to general.  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree-  
agree – strongly agree
11. Scaffolding learning which included, a worked out  
example and guided instruction helped in relearning  
writing tasks like transcoding, essay writing and note  
making

- disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree-  
agree – strongly agree
12. Teacher's talk on committing mistakes as acceptable and  
natural was motivating.  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree-  
agree – strongly agree
13. I failed to learn because of inadequacies in my learning  
strategies  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree-  
agree – strongly agree
14. The correction of learning strategies plays a crucial role in  
remedial learning  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree-  
agree – strongly agree
15. It's the teacher's responsibility to make the students be  
aware of the relationship between the correction of  
learning strategies and relearning  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree-  
agree – strongly agree
16. A common remedial lesson plan can't be used to all less  
proficient students  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree-  
agree – strongly agree
17. The teacher should frame the remedial lesson plan in line  
with the student's learning speed and retention capacity  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree-  
agree – strongly agree
18. Conduct of Small formative tests after teaching each  
concept helps in monitoring the progress in remedial  
teaching  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree-  
agree – strongly agree
19. The outcome of small formative tests should not be  
interpreted in terms of marks. They are to be taken as a  
checking of the level of relearning the concept.  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree-  
agree – strongly agree
20. Sharing of the learning experiences as a group makes the  
students aware that it is common to face difficulties in  
learning  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree-  
agree – strongly agree
21. Acknowledging the presence of difficulties in learning  
relieve the students from the stress of delayed learning  
and motivate them to try till learning gets complete  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree-  
agree – strongly agree
22. Summative assessment is important in remedial teaching  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree-  
agree – strongly agree
23. Summative assessment serves as a tool for checking the  
effectiveness of remedial teaching  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree-  
agree – strongly agree
24. Interpretation of summative assessment results is useful in  
providing an insight into teaching and learning process of  
remedial teaching  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree-  
agree – strongly agree
25. Your comments on remedial sessions

QUESTIONNAIRE – II (With few modifications  
Questionnaire –I has been administered to teachers with more than 10 years of teaching experience)

1. Less proficient students have fear and anxiety in using English  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree- agree – strongly agree
  2. Creating an awareness on order of acquisition of four primary language skills is helpful in learning English with greater confidence.  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree- agree – strongly agree
  3. Creating an awareness on relationship between Listening/Speaking and Reading/Writing help in enhancing speaking and writing skills  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree- agree – strongly agree
  4. The goals an English teacher should set while engaging in remedial teaching
    - A. To treat entire set of students as a one whole unit
    - B. To follow the same teaching methodology
    - C. To revise teaching methodology by infusing new strategies in to it
    - D. To have different goals and different strategies to match the students learning capacities
    - E. To create dispositions to learn from mistakes
    - F. Combinations I would prefer to have from the above options:\_\_\_\_\_
  5. An English teacher could be successful in making the students relearn  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree- agree – strongly agree
  6. If no, the Teacher's failure is caused greatly by
    - A. teacher's poor planning and execution
    - B. students' non-cooperation and lack of interest
    - C- Both A&B
  7. Students ignore the circling or underlining in red ink in their answer scripts  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree- agree – strongly agree
  8. Remarks in answer scripts have led to correction of errors.  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree- agree – strongly agree
  9. Oral feedback on mistakes and ways of avoiding it help in the correction of mistakes.  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree- agree – strongly agree
  10. While learning grammar, students gain better understanding with the method of moving from specific to general.  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree- agree – strongly agree
  11. Scaffolding learning which included, a worked out example and guided instruction helped in relearning writing tasks like transcoding, essay writing and note making  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree- agree – strongly agree
  12. Teacher's talk on committing mistakes as acceptable and natural was motivating.  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree- agree – strongly agree
  13. Students fail to learn because of inadequacies in their learning strategies  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree- agree – strongly agree
  14. The correction of learning strategies plays a crucial role in remedial learning  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree- agree – strongly agree
  15. It's the teacher's responsibility to make the students be aware of the relationship between the correction of learning strategies and relearning  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree- agree – strongly agree
  16. A common remedial lesson plan can't be used to all less proficient students  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree- agree – strongly agree
  17. remedial lesson plan should be framed in line with the student's learning speed and retention capacity  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree- agree – strongly agree
  18. Conduct of Small formative tests after teaching each concept helps in monitoring the progress in remedial teaching  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree- agree – strongly agree
  19. The outcome of small formative tests should not be interpreted in terms of marks. They are to be taken as a checking of the level of relearning the concept.  
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  20. Sharing of the learning experiences as a group makes the students aware that it is common to face difficulties in learning  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree- agree – strongly agree
  21. Acknowledging the presence of difficulties in learning relieve the students from the stress of delayed learning and motivate them to try till learning gets complete  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree- agree – strongly agree
  22. Summative assessment is important in remedial teaching  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree- agree – strongly agree
  23. Summative assessment serves as a tool for checking the effectiveness of remedial teaching  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree- agree – strongly agree
  24. Interpretation of summative assessment results is useful in providing an insight into teaching and learning process of remedial teaching  
disagree – strongly disagree- neither agree nor disagree- agree – strongly agree
- Your comments on remedial sessions