

## Enhancing Writing Proficiency and Reducing Writing Anxiety through the Integration of R.K. Laxman's Cartoons

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### Abstract

Teaching and learning materials are essential to fostering students' academic success. To improve writing skills, a challenging area often overlooked in classrooms, educators must explore creative strategies and incorporate innovative resources into lesson planning. This study introduces the use of R.K. Laxman's cartoons engage graduate students in writing exercises to make the process more enjoyable and stress-free. The selected cartoon illustrations served as tools to enhance creativity and promote effective writing practices. Writing anxiety often hinders students' ability to effectively express their ideas. This study addressed these challenges by leveraging cartoons to create a more engaging and less intimidating learning environment. This approach helps students build confidence, while improving their writing proficiency. This study employs a product-and-process approach; emphasizing structured activities that integrate the R.K. Laxman's cartoons encourage creativity and foster gradual improvements. This method enabled students to refine their writing skills while reducing the stress associated with the process. These findings indicate that using the R.K. Laxman's cartoons in writing exercises significantly enhanced engagement, reduced writing anxiety, and improved students' overall writing abilities. These structured, creative exercises encourage critical thinking and promote positive attitudes toward writing. The results underscore the effectiveness of integrating visual resources such as cartoons into academic writing instruction.

**Keywords:** R.K. Laxman's Cartoons, Teaching Materials, Writing Anxiety, Writing Skills.

### Introduction

Writing skills, classified as productive skills, demand considerable focus and attention in organising thoughts and information, owing to their convergent nature. In academic contexts, writing skills are crucial for conveying ideas and opinions on various subjects through essays, articles, theses, and conference papers. Students often struggle with effective writing skills and strategies, leading to more failures than success in their written work. Developing proficient writing abilities and producing high-quality academic content are gradual processes that require English learners to invest significant effort and practice consistently (1). Generally, writing skills are considered a cognitive process encompassing the generation of ideas, the contemplation of how to express them, and their organisation into coherent sentences and paragraphs that readers can easily comprehend. Writing requires students to compose words independently (2). The goal of English Language Teaching is to enhance communicative abilities encompassing four

fundamental skills: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. Writing, in particular, is considered one of the most challenging skills for students to master, as it demands intense cognitive effort and extensive reading to generate ideas, select appropriate vocabulary, and construct well-organised sentences (3). Writing skills stand out among the four because they require students to focus on proper language usage. Students in the class environment can engage in writing exercises by drawing from their thoughts or consulting various resources such as dictionaries and grammar books. This underscores that writing is not merely about conveying ideas but also involves the complex task of selecting suitable vocabulary and employing appropriate sentence structures. Through effective writing, students can logically present and articulate their ideas and opinions on a given topic. Despite being a crucial and productive skill, academic writing poses significant challenges for non-native English speakers, particularly at the tertiary level. In particular,

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graduate students whose first language is not English face even greater difficulties in achieving competency in academic writing in an English-language context. Many research findings have indicated that graduate students encounter several challenges in their academic writing. These include difficulties in determining what to write about, articulating ideas in written form, organising thoughts in a logical sequence, and establishing connections between different concepts (4). This research examines the enhancement of writing abilities and reduction of writing-related anxiety among graduate students. The research findings revealed that postgraduates often struggled with writing, particularly in terms of vocabulary and sentence-level precision. Notably, scholarly writing poses a significant challenge to these students when composing theses or dissertations. Students from varied cultural and educational backgrounds frequently find it challenging to meet postgraduate writing standards (5). Postgraduate students, including those pursuing doctoral and master's degrees, face writing difficulties and anxiety. Research has shown that writing anxiety is prevalent among post-graduate students. This study revealed that the primary factors contributing to writing anxiety among postgraduates were inadequate English writing skills, apprehension about negative feedback, and time pressure (6). In a student's teaching and learning phase, academic writing serves various purposes in educational settings, including classroom assignments, theses, and scholarly journal publications. Recognising the challenges faced by postgraduate students, it is crucial to incorporate writing activities that bolster their skills. As students grapple with writing tasks, identifying and implementing solutions to assist them would prove beneficial for both students and support systems within their institutions (7). Writing anxiety is defined as a condition in which the act of writing is avoided by individuals who acquire only a small percentage of writing skills, influenced by their potential to be evaluated. Students' confidence is reduced by writing anxiety, and they become less motivated because writing is considered a challenging task by many students, with not all of them managing to overcome this difficulty. Specifically, writing anxiety is regarded as a significant concern for ESL and EFL students; hence, students' motivation is reduced, and their

writing and speaking are affected. This condition is worsened when writing in a second language is required rather than in their first language, making writing anxiety more frustrating due to anxiety (8). Writing proficiency often induces anxiety in the student population, with undergraduates being particularly susceptible to elevated stress levels concerning their writing abilities. This heightened apprehension may consequently lead to unsatisfactory written output. However, EFL students with high anxiety levels avoided writing in their target language. In such cases, EFL students may strive to refrain from participating in English writing activities. Such students believe that it is better to refrain from being involved in writing because it gives a negative impression on their writing abilities. In addition, students with high anxiety about writing who do not enjoy writing may avoid situations that demand writing (9). Second Language Writing Anxiety (SLWA) is typically characterised as a tendency to avoid writing tasks and situations that individuals perceive as potentially requiring some form of written expression coupled with the possibility of evaluating their writing. This general aversion to writing is commonly recognized as a key aspect of writing skills in second-language contexts. The studies showed that primary school learners' writing anxiety and participants' writing anxiety in their L1 were significantly lower than their writing anxiety in their L2. The study further found that ESL/EFL learners suffered from higher levels of anxiety in writing than native learners, which harmed their academic performance and showed difficulty levels among students (10). Studies have shown that students commonly experience an inability to organise ideas and manage basic writing mechanics, leading to difficulty in expressing coherent thoughts in written form. This difficulty was compounded by sufficient knowledge of writing conventions and various writing genres (11). Many students experience that they are naturally unskilled in writing skills, which often results in constant grading and a lack of supportive feedback, fostering a sense of inevitable writing failure (12). Some students view writing skills as skills only suited for naturally gifted individuals, which can lead to self-doubt and fear of failure. Students often struggle to find topics or generate ideas, feel uncreative, and apprehensive about writing tasks (13). Writing

anxiety often stems from poor writing skills and limited language proficiency, which hinders students' ability to fully express their ideas. This limitation fuels self-criticism and lowers confidence, as students fear making mistakes and worry about being perceived as unsuccessful (14). English language learning is difficult when teaching students in the classroom. Students, even at present, have difficulty writing clear and meaningful sentences. Writing skills that require appropriate vocabulary, correct sentence usage, and syntax structures. Currently, language and communication across cultures and societies are considered important (15). Language serves as the primary means of communication, enabling the exchange of thoughts and ideas in human interaction. In particular, English is widely used and valued for both personal and professional communication, making it a global lingua franca. This widespread adoption of English supports its role in daily life and cross-cultural exchanges worldwide. Writing skills are not innate, as they require significant learning and direct instruction. Writing, as a system of expression, is often more effective in socially cognitive communication than in speaking. It is regarded as a significant academic achievement that relies on skills such as mechanics, structure, conventions, linguistics, and cognitive abilities. Writing transcends time and place, but writers must use formal elements to accurately communicate their intended meanings. Misuse of these elements can lead to frustration among writers (16). Students often experience writing anxiety when tasked with academic writing, and this anxiety is widely acknowledged by researchers, teachers, and students as a significant barrier to learning a second language (17). Second-language anxiety refers to feelings of tension and apprehension specific to second-language activities including speaking, listening, and writing. It often arises in situations where individuals may either avoid or feel apprehensive about writing, especially when it involves evaluation (18). Writing anxiety is highly context-dependent, tends to be self-limiting, and is relatively noticeable. More importantly, this can often be overcome through logical instructions and guidance. However, what causes students to experience anxiety in writing arouses their negative feelings of anxiety and tension. The results showed that the students lacked motivation

to write, lacked good writing skills, and had different writing tasks regardless of anxiety and tension. The survey instrument was developed to address various factors contributing to writing anxiety, including inadequate writing skills, expectations of flawless work, time constraints, high volume of writing tasks, and challenges related to language proficiency. Writing anxiety generally encompasses a range of apprehensive and negative feelings among students about their writing skills while learning a foreign language. Scholars agree that anxiety is closely linked to foreign language proficiency. Research indicates that students who experience language anxiety often study harder, yet their learning achievements may not reflect the effort they invest. Writing anxiety is the persistent feeling of not being ready to write or not being good enough to write academically. Anxiety in writing refers to a wide variety of apprehensive and negative thoughts. Studies have noted that writing anxiety does not describe psychological attributes; students are likely to experience anxiety in particular contexts because of their negative or difficult writing experiences. Students with writing anxiety may experience higher anxiety when asked to write, which has also been observed previously (19). Writing skills present a complex challenge for students, particularly those at the tertiary level, who encounter various obstacles throughout their writing process. Tertiary students report that vocabulary and grammar are among the primary difficulties they face in developing writing skills, and are often tied to their linguistic competence. Additionally, students' approach to writing is seen as another influential factor that significantly affects their writing process and output. The writing strategies used by EFL students had a significant impact on their writing performance. Educators have applied a variety of writing strategies across different areas: 1. direct strategies, which include memory, cognitive, and compensation techniques; and 2. indirect strategies, which encompass metacognitive, affective, and social approaches (20). Major factors affecting undergraduate students' writing skills. The study revealed that most students struggled with linguistic proficiency, writing anxiety, lack of ideas, and difficulties organising their writing structures (21). This study examined the anxiety and challenges faced by students concerning their

writing skills and how to overcome them. A significant proportion of undergraduates, particularly those from rural areas, had non-English-speaking backgrounds and lacked sufficient oral proficiency to conduct their studies in English. Consequently, these students experience stress when pursuing their higher education in English. Several studies have examined the pedagogical benefits of incorporating cartoons as authentic instructional tools in ESL/EFL classrooms. Cartoons attract students' attention and tend to be involved in their writing skills. Cartoons serve as an effective instructional tool in classrooms, helping develop students' writing skills by capturing their attention with visuals and presenting information in a relaxed, low-stress environment. Conversely, studies have shown that cartoons have a positive influence on students' learning, revealing that students with substantial exposure to cartoons engage more effectively in various discussions. These students also demonstrated greater self-confidence, largely due to the low-stress environment in which interpreting cartoons foster in the classroom. Cartoon-based activities can be implemented using individuals, small groups, or larger classes (22).

## Methodology

The foundational idea of Dual Coding Theory (DCT) is that learning improves when both verbal and non-verbal (imagery) representations are activated. This theory posits that visual representations help reinforce mental imagery associated with words, facilitating better memory retention and comprehension, and, importantly, alleviating anxiety by making abstract tasks more concrete. Using R.K. Laxman's teaching tool provides concrete, visual stimuli that align with the DCT's emphasis on pairing verbal content with imagery to support memory and understanding. By integrating these cartoons into writing exercises, students are encouraged to interpret visual cues that can activate nonverbal cognitive pathways and enhance their engagement in writing tasks. This dual-activation approach helps them form mental images tied to their writing, making writing easier ideas creatively and effectively while reducing apprehension around writing. This theory framework also suggests that by building these associative networks between

cartoon images and words, students can use the familiarity and humour of cartoons to connect with the content material more comfortably. The dual-coding theory setup is particularly useful for reducing writing anxiety, as it shifts focus away from purely verbal tasks when students are in groups, making writing less intimidating and more accessible to graduate students working on advanced writing skills (23). In general, there are two main approaches to developing language skills: process- and product-oriented methodologies. The process approach focuses on incremental improvement, with learners beginning with basic exercises and gradually enhancing their abilities through ongoing systematically acquired structured practices (24). This method posits that linguistic competence can be cultivated through sustained engagement and repetition (25). Central to this philosophy is the notion of "Use it or Lose it", which emphasizes that consistent application is crucial for building confidence and achieving proficiency in language use. In contrast, the product-oriented approach emphasises results and often neglects intermediate learning stages (26). This method may involve students interacting with comprehensible material slightly above their current proficiency level, followed by reading exercises and answering questions (27). Composing written work is an incredibly intricate mental process that requires the author to simultaneously manage various elements including sentence construction, grammar, formatting, word choice, orthography, punctuation, and handwriting. Moreover, writers must consider coherence and cohesion when constructing paragraphs and longer texts. A product-oriented approach to writing instruction is emphasised for its focus on the outcome of the composition process. When this method is adopted, the primary concern is ensuring that the finished piece is comprehensible, grammatically sound, and adheres to conventions regarding main ideas, supporting details, and other structural aspects. The outcomes of language acquisition are emphasised in the product approach, with a focus on measurable results such as the ability to construct grammatically correct sentences (28). This method shares similarities with behaviourist theories and often involves the repetition, drilling, and reinforcement of proper language forms. It

prioritises linguistic knowledge and aims to achieve specific outcomes such as accurate pronunciation, grammar usage, or appropriate vocabulary selection through repeated practice and immediate correction (29). This process-oriented approach underscores the significance of writing proficiency for ESL learners, and emphasises the importance of effective English communication. The typical obstacles that students face when developing their writing skills, which can impede their advancement, were investigated. Recognizing these challenges and implementing effective teaching and learning techniques was considered crucial. Various practical instructional methods aligned with a process-oriented philosophy were suggested. These techniques were designed to strengthen students' writing skills by focusing on the writing process itself rather than just the final product. Experiments demonstrating the effectiveness of the process-based approach in improving writing competence were included in the findings (30). The teaching materials used by educators in every classroom must engage and motivate the teaching-learning process. It must be structured in such a way that it helps students reinforce and enhance their language skills (31). For students to succeed academically, instructors must adopt cutting-edge and creative methods of employing course materials and activities. The primary goal of this study was to illustrate the pedagogies used in language instruction. Despite employing a standard teaching approach based on cartoon interpretations, the classrooms were livelier and more engaging. English language instruction techniques, particularly writing (32). Language Teaching is a step-by-step process in which it has to be taught and trained in a creative way rather than monotonous way of teaching the students. Specifically, language teaching materials in language classrooms play a vital role in facilitating effective learning among students. Teaching materials play a major role in enhancing different aspects of language acquisition in the classroom. In language teaching, every teacher should engage in professional practice with openness to change, expand, and adapt their methods to align with new content forms. This approach also calls for the development of diverse types of knowledge and the re-evaluation of social norms regarding what it means to be both a teacher and a learner (33). In

the teaching and learning phases, newspapers play a significant role in education and young reader programs. The use of newspapers in the classroom incorporates students' abilities to write in innovative and creative contexts. Newspapers and magazines are good sources of information, which is why magazines are more colourful and interesting, with selective and restricted topics that satisfy readers. Newspapers provide in-depth knowledge on various issues, specifically in the field of education. It is easily accessible and affordable for students and provides an ample number of innovative insights into writing on certain topics. Similarly, magazines and newspapers feature cartoons comprising images, narratives, and captions. These elements inspire readers to generate novel ideas and inventive concepts, prompting them to record their thoughts. Newspapers are authentic sources of text that expose students to real language learning, and encourage them to practice and promote reading and writing skills. Studies explain that reading a newspaper aloud improves students' phonemic skills and awareness and enriches fluency and vocabulary skills (34). On the other hand, newspapers and cartoons in magazines are useful for acquiring study skills such as brainstorming, taking notes, summarising essential information relevant to students' subjects, and organising ideas according to their topic (35). Through these magazine cartoons, students gathered and learned different structures and vocabularies that could be implemented in their writing skills. Teaching educators in classrooms, and many educators have incorporated the use of cartoons in newspapers rather than other teaching aids. Indeed, it encourages the development of writing activities that use cartoons as effective tools to enhance and develop students' writing skills. Cartoons that are captioned and non-captioned make students think about the pictures' descriptions and illustrations. This makes a significant contribution to students writing on new, innovative topics. Writing skills are generally considered crucial for all students. This is an important and productive skill. However, this remains a challenging skill, particularly for most tertiary-level students. Use of cartoons as writing tools to live written words. As authentic materials, cartoons are considered effective tools to assist language and teaching, mainly in EFL contexts, as they clarify abstract concepts and add

humour to a topic (36). To develop writing skills among students, a detailed objective was framed, and the materials used for writing skills practice were divided into five components (37).

Writing, structuring, and developing a paragraph were practiced.

Descriptive and process-based paragraphs were written and analysed.

Comparisons and Contrast Paragraphs were developed and examined.

An opinion-based paragraph was constructed and expressed.

The problem and solution paragraphs are formulated and discussed.

Most R.K. Laxman's cartoons were created for The Times of India (ToI), well-known daily news. In Indian publications, cartoons and editorials usually collaborate well. In addition to enhancing the editorial, Laxman contributed a stand-alone cartoon of the average person in the lower right corner of the front page of The Enquirer, which quickly gained national attention. The thematic relevance of choosing the R.K. Cartoons were chosen as they align with key themes such as socio-political issues, bureaucracy, or everyday struggles, making them meaningful for analysis. Intricacy and depth-complex cartoons that require deeper interpretation can be valuable in assessing critical thinking and analytical skills among students. The historical importance of R.K. Laxman's Cartoons depicting significant historical or political events may provide a context for discussions on societal evolution and governance. Cultural and social impact relevance from R.K. Laxman's cartoon is the influence of the cartoon on public opinion or its role in shaping discourse should be a factor in selection. The visual and artistic representation of Laxman's cartoon is the use of symbolism, caricature, and artistic style may affect how effectively the cartoon conveys its message. Apart from R. K. Laxman's comic, another cartoon generated a comparable, if not identical, reaction from the general public. However, these are typically used in commercial applications. On the first page, Laxman was credited as the first Indian cartoonist to be given the honour of having an independent cartoon. The practice of including two cartoons in news dailies—one for the editorial and one for the front page—became standard in all newspapers, regardless of the language in which they were published. Regardless of whether they

were drawn or printed in print, all R.K. Laxman's cartoons can be divided into two groups: those with the "unsaid" common guy and those without. 'You said it' cartoons featuring the average person reveal that the character has never said a word. Thus, my decision is R. K. Laxman, being a celebrity Indian cartoonist and the protagonist, but Shankar Pillai of The Hindustan Times deserves pioneering credit among cartoonists who are truly Indian. Several cartoonists have established themselves in the Indian cartoon scene, with Laxman ruling the scene centuries later (38). Thus, cartoons significantly alleviated students' anxiety about writing skills by providing a relaxed and innovative learning environment. The humorous and enjoyable nature of cartoon films helps students stimulate interest and attention, and makes them feel more comfortable and less pressured during the writing process. By using cartoons as a teaching aid to keep students anxious, they are motivated to participate actively, which increases their confidence in their writing abilities. The use of cartoons can enhance students' abilities to craft narrative texts by facilitating effective idea generation. Incorporating cartoons into the learning process can stimulate and inspire students to write, create innovative lesson structures, boost engagement, and increase their focus. Research findings indicate that when cartoons are employed, students exhibit improvements in various aspects of writing, including lexical range, appropriate use of capital letters and correct spelling, grammatically sound sentence construction, and development of cohesive paragraphs (39). As instructional tools, cartoons can enhance comprehension, boost attentiveness, and inspire students to develop their English writing ability. They assist learners in structuring their compositions by offering a methodical storyline that facilitates the grasp and creation of narratives. For students experiencing anxiety while completing written assignments or projects, incorporating cartoons into the learning environment can foster a positive atmosphere, heighten engagement, and enhance participation. Furthermore, the study explains that cartoons aid in improving writing skills by effectively facilitating idea generation and organisation (40). The same concept in the present study concentrates on R.K. Laxman's cartoons were selected to develop students' writing skills, and the

selection of cartoons was focused on themes that would resonate with graduate students and evoke thoughtful responses. There are a few selected illustrations from the R. K. Laxman's cartoon scaffolds writing skills and improves students' active and positive involvement in writing skills to overcome their anxiety. The specific cartoons were chosen based on their relevance to universal themes, such as patriotism, social values, and education, which naturally lend them to reflective and analytical writing. Each selected cartoon used in the exercises was carefully framed and evaluated for its potential to stimulate discussion and interpretation elements that are essential for reducing writing anxiety and encouraging expressive thought. The integration process involved introducing cartoons as a visual prompt at the beginning of each writing activity, noting students' immediate impressions and discussing potential interpretations in groups, as well as individual crafting of written responses in the form of writing a paragraph, story completion, character monologue, writing prompts, dialogue writing scripts, caption writing that reflects their analysis, and creative interpretation of cartoons. By focusing on these activities around the R.K. Laxman's cartoon is yet an insightful depiction of everyday situations, and students can comfortably transition into writing without the typical pressures, gradually developing narrative and

analytical skills in a supportive and engaging environment.

## Results

The writing skills development activities are as follows: First, the activities are categorised in order to overcome writing anxiety by writing a paragraph. Writing helps students develop narrative competence and the ability to understand, interpret, and narrate stories. This enhances competence, which is critical for personal and academic development. Engaging students in writing activities encourages deeper learning to explore their perspectives (41). Regarding the educational background of students, incorporating story writing helps them overcome writing anxiety by focusing on creative output rather than academic pressure. Students experience more involvement and enjoyment, and are less intimidated while engaging in creative writing activities (42). It is one of the fundamental skills that help students organise their thoughts and express their ideas concisely and clearly. This activity makes students engage in writing a paragraph as an effective way to develop their academic writing abilities, which they inculcate by enhancing their critical thinking, observation, and interpretation skills. This activity aims to guide students in constructing well-organized paragraphs that effectively communicate their ideas.



**Figure 1: Sample of a Vintage Cartoon (43)**

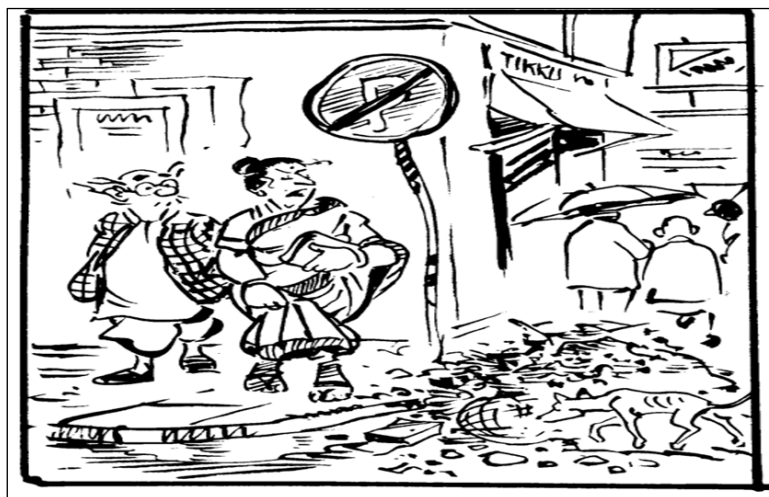
It encourages students to focus on a single topic, develop supporting details, improve academic writing clarity and creative expression of thoughts, strengthen language proficiency, and use transitions to create a coherent and cohesive piece of academic writing. The following R. K. Laxman's

cartoon provides a message of patriotism and nationalism.

In Figure 1, the students analyse the historical political cartoons and write descriptive and analytical paragraphs. This illustration which gives a picture depicts the powerful image of a goddess

figure riding a lion, symbolising rising nationalist sentiment in India. The students with these keywords from cartoons and jolt point to patriotic notions by having the clue of a goddess with multiple arms and holding various weapons and banners, possibly representing the different forces uniting colonial oppression. Working in groups or individually describes a sense of empowerment and determination among Indian nationalists aiming to rally the public behind the cause of independence. Through this activity, students can help them to critically engage with historical sources and develop their academic writing and analytical skills. This activity can also be conducted by breaking their ideas into smaller steps so that students can focus on expressing their ideas clearly and learning to write critically and confidently without anxiety. Second, story-completion activities allow students to focus on developing characters, plots, and innovative conclusions. In addition, students can express their creativity while enhancing their writing and analytical skills (44). This approach encourages students to engage deeply in the creative process while minimizing their anxiety regarding blank pages. Additionally, it can serve as a low-pressure exercise to reduce

writing anxiety as students can build off an existing narrative rather than start from scratch. From Figure 2, given R. K. Laxman's cartoon, students building on the visual prompts are given a creative and structured foundation for completing a story, which reduces their writing anxiety and pressure to come up with creative ideas from the cartoon. The graduate students' classrooms should be encouraged to observe the details in the cartoon given above to note the characters, their expressions, settings, and situations. Students with cartoons imagined the story of what happened next and were able to picturize the events that led up to the cartoon scene. This will make students write in their own free space for creative and innovative writing which will bring them out of their writing anxiety. Finally, the students emphasised that there was no right or incorrect description of writing their stories. The instructor aims to simply complete the story according to their known level of using appropriate vocabulary, sentence patterns, and writing structures on the cartoon illustration which will improve students' academic writing and encourage them to write creatively with no anxiety in writing skills (45).



**Figure 2:** True, the strike was over a long time ago but this has always been here even before the strike!  
(46)

Third, the character monologue activity is unique and provides deep insights into one character's mind. This allows students to focus on internal dialogue rather than on dialogue or interactions with other characters. This helps students to reveal emotions, motivations, and perspectives that may not be apparent in the narrative. Monologues are essential for giving characters depth by exposing

their private thoughts in a way that dialogue with others cannot achieve. This activity offers students an opportunity to explore the full range of emotions that a character experiences at a particular moment. Students can express confusion, fear, enthusiasm, anxiety, and other emotions without needing to explain them through action or external events. Monologues and



emotions serve as driving forces that provide character depth and authenticity (47). In Figure 2, students are introduced to character monologues delivered by a single character in the expression of their thoughts and feelings. Character monologues allow students to focus on a specific character's perspective, which narrows their track and makes it less overwhelming. The writing character monologue format provides creative freedom, helping students focus on internal thoughts rather than worrying about plot structures or the grammatical part of writing. Students observe how the characters react to their surroundings in the cartoon illustration. Character monologues are another activity which helps students create empathy by allowing the audience to understand the character's perspective on a personal level. Through these monologues, the audience experiences a heightened connection with the character's journey (48). The teacher in the classroom explains the students' Monologue and Character monologue to the students in the classroom for their better understanding; a monologue is a speech delivered by a single character, which is the expression of their thoughts and feelings (49). A Monologue is "a speech, usually long, by a single speaker, either addressing other characters or speaking to oneself". From Figure 2, we can see that R. K. Laxman's cartoon illustration is given to the students to prompt them to read and think about the characters in the cartoon figure. To help students understand more easily, teachers initiated them by asking the following questions to motivate them:

Why do women look seriously and hold bags?

What will be thinking about them in the cartoons?

Why are men walking perplexed by women?

Are people frustrated by the state of the roads?

How do people feel about the damaged road, the 'No Parking' sign, or the stray dog?

For example, from Figure 2, students can write a character monologue from the perspective of a woman.

*"This road is always like this. No matter how many times I complain, no one listens to it. How do they expect us to live this way? My feet ache from dodging all of the debris, and the rain makes it worse. I swear. If it were not for a meeting today, I would not even have been out here. But, no, I have to go- they count on me. However, what if I had tripped this broken*

*pavement? They probably said this was a fault. Just like everything else."*

This is one way of reacting to and expressing thoughts as character monologues from each cartoon, which enhances and improves students' interpretations and encourages their creativity. Through this implementation of the activity in classrooms, students will be allowed to focus on their perceptions of specific characters. It provides students with creative freedom and helps them focus on internal thoughts rather than worry about plot structures or grammar. From the perspective of cartoon characters, students can connect more intensively, which boosts their engagement and reduces the anxiety and pressure of their academic writing. Therefore, the monologue writing activity helps the students to help the students develop their voice and imagination while reducing the anxiety often associated with academic writing tasks. Another interesting activity is writing prompt activities, which are an interesting and innovative pedagogical tool used to inspire creativity and help students initiate the writing process. This activity among students in the classroom brings about a warm-up start and activates their interest in writing skills. This can be a question, sentence, image, or scenario designed to spark thought and provide a fundamental principle for students to begin crafting a response relevant to their topic. Writing prompts serve as an entry point for writing, giving students direction and focus while offering a means to express their thoughts. It also allows students to overcome their initial inertia, which is often associated with a blank page (50). Visual aids such as cartoon illustrations are particularly effective for students' imagination and engagement in the classroom (51). Writing prompts provide students with a clear direction for bringing up their ideas and reducing the overwhelming amount of time required to start a writing task. Through cartoon images and illustrations, students can practice narrative writing, develop characters, or express their opinions on social issues, thereby helping them overcome writing anxiety and develop their voices (52). Figure 2 Explaining students with a variety of writing prompts based on Laxman's cartoons. The teacher in the classroom structured the activity for the students by displaying the cartoon and having a brief discussion of the given cartoon illustration. First, we introduced the

activity to the students and briefly explained its purpose and how they practiced writing to encourage and spark their creativity and overcome their anxiety. Second, they displayed the cartoon image on the projector, encouraging them to closely observe the image and interpret its depiction. The observational questions were as follows.

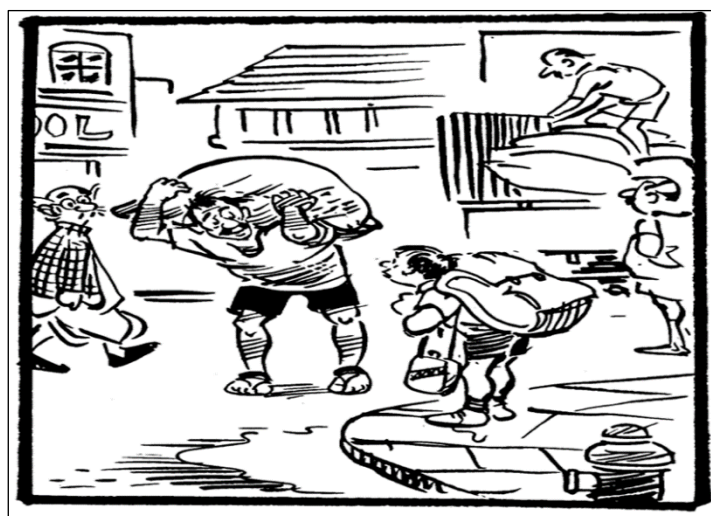
What do you see in your cartoons?

Who is the character? What are the expressions, actions, or surroundings that tell you?

What is the story of this image?

After giving the instructions and discussing them with the students, the teacher presents writing prompts related to the cartoon images on a free-writing basis so that the students focus on getting their ideas out rather than worrying about perfection. Motivating students to write continuously without worrying about grammar or punctuation. This helps break down the anxiety associated with writing skills. This activity allowed the students to work individually during the writing process, fostering their independence and

confidence in their writing skills. Finally, their writing prompts were evaluated by sharing their work with their partners, teams, or small groups. This allows them to gain constructive feedback and build confidence, focusing on the strengths of each student's work and creating a positive and supportive atmosphere. Writing prompts activities that boost prompt activities can also train students to write about specific topics and creative tasks. It helps students who struggle with writing difficulty and anxiety, and writing prompts pave the way for reducing the cognitive activity associated with generating ideas. R. K. Laxman's cartoon prompts provide students with a comfortable starting point which encourages the free expression of ideas and thoughts. Students incorporating writing prompts into their classroom activities can help mitigate writing anxiety, foster creativity, and ultimately build confidence in their writing skills. Writing prompts offer a bridge from anxiety to accomplishment, and writing tasks to rewarding endeavours.



**Figure 3:** Of course, I too went to school. Where do you think I learnt to carry it like this (46)

Dialogue writing is another activity which provides an alternative way to approach writing that is less overwhelming. By focusing on short exchanges between characters, students can break down the writing process into smaller portions, which will be more manageable. One way to alleviate writing is to shift from high-stakes writing tasks to lower-stakes activities such as dialogue writing, which allows students to engage with the material without feeling the burden of perfect writing (53). Dialogue writing fosters creativity among students in the classroom, encourages risk-taking, and

promotes the use of everyday language to avoid the fear of making academic mistakes. Dialogue writing is encouraged to allow students to experiment with voice and tone, which helps build confidence in their writing abilities (54). As shown in Figure 3, with the instructor's guidance, students will practice writing dialogues based on visual cues from the R.K. Laxman's cartoons enhance students' creativity, improve their writing fluency, and overcome writing anxiety. Explaining the purpose and elements of dialogue writing, such as how to use dialogue tags and how to make

conversations flow naturally between characters. After explaining the cartoon images and themes, students began to imagine the characters in the scene. This visual stimulus reduces the cognitive load of generating ideas from scratch, helping students to focus solely on dialogue. Based on the cartoon in Figure 3, where the laborers are seen carrying heavy sacks while a person walks carrying a heavy sack on their back, another one does the same nearby, while a well-dressed schoolboy carries books with a heavy school bag. Making the students sit in small groups and instructing them to write dialogue for the characters, reflecting on the conversation between the labourer and the schoolboy. An example of a character's dialogue writing script is as follows:

School boy: "Ugh, I can barely move! These books weigh a ton. I wish I did not have so much homework every day."

Labourer: "You think that is heavy, my boy? Try to carry this sack of rice all day."

Schoolboy: "I know, I know. but I have to carry this bag for hours. And it's not just the weight, its maths, science, history! And it never ends".

Labourer: At least you have the opportunity to learn and grow. I had no opportunity to study in school. All I have learned is how to work hard".

Schoolboy: I have never thought of it that way. However, it is hard to focus on studying... I need a break.

Labourer: "You think I do not want a break? Different weights are applied. But trust me, the weight you carry today could give you a future without sacks like this".

Schoolboy: "I guess you are correct. Perhaps, these books are not so bad."

Labourer: "And maybe one day, you will carry knowledge instead of heavy bags. That's a burden worth carrying".

After writing the character dialogue, the students can discuss how the two characters live different lives and, in general, what they have in common. Students can even present the conversations they have drafted and performed in the classroom as labourers and schoolboys from the cartoon image. This classroom activity encourages students to incorporate emotions and body language that reflect the character's experiences, helping to reduce writing anxiety and boost their confidence in their writing skills. The final writing activity is caption writing, a creative and concise form of

writing that involves crafting short, descriptive, or thought-provoking texts accompanied by images. It provides innovative additional meaning, humour, and commentary on images. In essence, captions function as mini-stories or summaries, helping viewers to interpret an image's message or content. Writing activities can mitigate writing anxiety by providing students with manageable skills. Caption writing offers a low-pressure environment in which students can express their thoughts and ideas briefly without the need for long-form essays, thereby reducing their anxiety. By focusing on creativity and expression, rather than perfection, students gradually build confidence in their writing skills. Specifically, caption writing brings out a valuable creative sense among students in the classroom, helping them develop essential writing skills including creativity, good observation skills, brevity in writing skills, and confidence. As shown in Figure 3, the teacher introduced the caption writing activity to the students and explained the purpose of the activity across various contexts. Through R. K. Laxman's cartoon illustration, each student concisely wrote a caption, powerful enough to capture the theme, message, or humor in the cartoon image. Examples of cartoons are as follows.

"Different bags, same struggle".

"Heavy books for a bright future, heavy sack for survival".

"Carrying dreams or burdens- both heavy in their way".

"When your homework weighs as much as a day's work".

After discussing with the students and writing the captions by the students, sharing their ideas on writing in the classroom and discussing the different approaches and interpretations will increase their confidence in writing without anxiety among graduate students. This activity will also help students practice concise and impactful writing while encouraging them to think critically about the cartoons' social or emotional themes.

## Discussion

The present study indicates that using R.K. Laxman's cartoons in writing exercises boost engagement among graduate students, reducing their writing anxiety, and significantly improving their writing skills. Structured activities encourage

students to approach writing with greater confidence, supporting both critical thinking and creative expression. Overall, these results highlight the effectiveness of using R.K. Laxman's cartoons as tools used to enhance writing skills in an academic context. The integration of R.K. Laxman's cartoons in writing instruction has demonstrated significant benefits in enhancing students' writing proficiency, while simultaneously reducing writing anxiety. By engaging with visual satire, students not only improve their linguistic skills, but also improve their critical thinking and creativity. The following key observations highlight the effectiveness of this approach.

### **Enhanced Engagement and Creativity**

Traditional writing exercises often fail to capture student interests, leading to disengagement and mechanical writing. However, the use of cartoons introduces an element of humour and relatability, which makes the writing process more interactive and enjoyable. The humour and satire in Laxman's cartoons captured students' interest, making writing feel less like an academic task and more like an enjoyable exercise.

For example, when students were asked to craft narratives inspired by cartoons, they demonstrated increased creativity and originality in their compositions.

### **Improved Organization and Coherence**

Many students struggle to logically structure their ideas in writing. Cartoons provide a visual framework that helps learners develop a more coherent approach to organising their thoughts. Analysing the sequence of events and the underlying message in the cartoons helped students structure their writing more effectively.

For instance, when interpreting a cartoon depicting a chaotic traffic scene, students naturally organised their descriptive paragraphs by setting the context, detailing the scene, and concluding with insight or commentary. This process reinforced the logical flow and coherence in their writing.

### **Reduction in Writing Anxiety**

Writing anxiety is a common challenge among students, often resulting in their reluctance to express their thoughts. Visual prompts such as cartoons serve as effective icebreakers, alleviating the pressure to produce error-free writing. Humorous and often exaggerated nature of the R.K. Laxman's cartoons creates a relaxed

atmosphere, reducing the fear of making mistakes. Many students, particularly those struggling with the writer's block, found it easier to begin writing when responding to a visual prompt than a traditional essay topic.

In one instance, students hesitant to express political opinions in writing felt more comfortable articulating their thoughts when analysing a satirical cartoon.

### **Development of Critical Thinking Skills**

Writing is not merely about linguistic accuracy; it is also a tool for intellectual engagement. Cartoons, especially those depicting socio-political issues, encourage students to critically analyse situations and formulate well-reasoned arguments. The sociopolitical themes in Laxman's cartoons encouraged students to engage in deeper analysis and critical reflection. For example, when presented with a cartoon satirising government inefficiency, students not only described the visual elements but also explored real-world implications, leading to well-structured problem-solution essays. This exercise cultivates their ability to evaluate and respond thoughtfully to contemporary issues.

### **Versatility in Writing Styles**

One of the key advantages of using cartoons in writing instruction is their adaptability to various writing genres. Whether descriptive, argumentative, or comparative, a single cartoon can serve multiple purposes. Diverse themes and tones of the R.K. Laxman's cartoons allowed the students to experiment with multiple writing styles. A single cartoon could serve as a prompt for a descriptive paragraph, opinion-based essay, or comparative analysis. For instance, a cartoon illustrating generational differences prompted students to write contrasting viewpoints, strengthening their ability to effectively construct comparison and contrast paragraphs.

### **Further Scope of the Study**

#### **Integration with Digital Media**

Future research can explore how to integrate the R.K. Laxman's cartoons, with digital storytelling platforms or AI-based writing assistants can further enhance writing engagement and creativity.

#### **Application in Multilingual Classrooms**

Studies can examine how cartoon-based writing instruction benefits students from diverse

linguistic backgrounds, particularly those learning English as a Second Language.

#### **Longitudinal Impact on Writing Proficiency**

Further research could assess the long-term effects of using cartoons in writing instruction by tracking students' improvement over extended periods.

#### **Comparative Studies with Other Visual Stimuli**

Future research can compare the effectiveness of cartoons with other visual prompts, such as infographics, political caricatures, or memes, in fostering writing skills.

#### **Impact on Different Age Groups and Academic Levels**

Further studies should investigate the effectiveness of cartoon-based writing instruction in primary, secondary, and higher education settings to determine its adaptability across different learning levels.

### **Conclusion**

R.K. Laxman's classroom cartoons provide a creative and effective way of fostering writing skills. These classroom activities could mitigate graduate students' writing anxiety. The humour and relatability of these cartoons engage students by offering a stress-free writing environment. The students practiced the above-mentioned activities, where they could express their thoughts and emotions through captions or dialogue writing. The cartoons used in these writing exercises were carefully selected based on their thematic relevance and the potential to evoke relatable classroom-based scenarios. R.K. Laxman's cartoons, which are known for their humorous and insightful social commentary, were chosen to prompt student engagement and emotional responses. Each cartoon was integrated into structured activities that guided the students through interpretation, observation, and creative expression. For example, students are encouraged to craft dialogues and captions that reflect their interpretations, thus allowing them to explore diverse perspectives in a supportive environment. These illustrations, paired with tailored writing prompts, helped students ease the practice of writing by drawing on humour and empathy, thus reducing their apprehension and creating a productive low-pressure environment for skill development. Using R.K. Laxman's cartoon illustrations and the activities framed for students to mitigate writing anxiety through various

activities that emphasise interpretation and empathy, such as those built around Laxman's work, allow students to develop observation and analytical skills, giving them confidence in their writing abilities to strengthen their academic writing skills. Other activities such as character monologues, historical writing, and story completion further enhance students' ability to interpret visual cues, build narratives, and develop empathy from different perspectives.

Writing prompts, another writing activity for students in the classroom based on R.K. Laxman's cartoon illustrations allowed students to gradually improve their writing skills and confidence, while reducing the stress commonly associated with writing tasks. Overall, these creative activities not only foster academic writing development but also create a supportive classroom environment in which students feel encouraged to express themselves freely without any anxiety about writing skills in the classroom. The recommendation and suggestive guidelines for this article are that cartoons represent one of the most effective and innovative instructional techniques for developing writing skills with significant potential to help graduate students improve their academic writing. Traditionally used with younger learners, these methods can now be successfully adapted to higher education to enhance writing abilities and alleviate writing anxiety.

The following are the key recommendations and guidelines for graduate students and instructors:

#### **Strengthening the Conceptual Understanding of Writing**

Cartoons help to simplify complex ideas, making them easier to grasp. Using visual aids, students can better comprehend abstract concepts by connecting them to concrete images.

#### **Promoting Independent and Intellectual Learning**

Cartoon illustrations in classrooms, particularly in graduate programs, are beneficial for students to manage demanding schedules and intricate content.

#### **Reducing Cognitive Pressure**

This eases mental strain and facilitates engagement in writing concepts.

#### **Encouraging Teamwork**

Assigning cartoon-based activities fosters collaboration and interactive learning among graduate students.

### Boosting Creativity and Enhancing Communication Skills

This method encourages graduate students to think creatively and develop effective communication.

### Building Confidence and Reducing Writing Anxiety

Group activities involving cartoon illustrations helped students build confidence in their academic writing, while alleviating writing-related stress and anxiety.

### Abbreviations

DCT: Dual Coding Theory, EFL: English as a Foreign Language, ESL: English as a Second Language, SLWA: Second Language Writing Anxiety, TOI: Times of India.

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Both the authors contributed equally to this work.

### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest regarding its publication.

### Ethics Approval

This paper is purely descriptive and does not involve data collection from human participants or interventions that require formal consent. It centres on pedagogical methods written from the perspective of teacher-guiding classroom activities aimed at helping students overcome writing anxiety in real-time classroom environments.

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