



Methods in Improving Students Writing in Thungkhar Primary School in Thrimshing, Trashigang

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Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analysed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

This study intended to seek methods for improving students' writing in Thungkhar Primary School in Thrimshing, Trashigang. The study used a qualitative approach to collect data from a sample of Thungkhar Primary School in Thrimshing. Qualitative data were collected through interviews and observation from the teachers and students. The findings indicated that methods in improving students' writing benefited learners. The most significant teaching method to writing practiced or implemented was the process approach which is recommended by the national curriculum. One of the interesting findings of this research is that students in my schools preferred writing to speaking as they struggle with speaking. Similar to the other study highlights, the study found that both teaching and learning writing are complex. It is imperative that there is room for improvement with suitable interventions in teaching and learning writing through a series of professional development programs.

Keywords: *Professional development programs; students writing; learning writing; teaching.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is a convention which enables an individual to express and communicate. Lhadon and Wangmo [1] claim that "writing is one of the ultimate ways through which students get to discover, build ideas and express numerous forms of knowledge" in the affirmation that "writing is a complex activity" (Cheung, 2016, pg. 1) but teaching writing is enormously complex.

Writing serves as a vital means of expression and communication. Various teaching approaches to writing have been explored, such as the product, process, and genre-based approaches. In Bhutanese schools, the curriculum aligns with the process approach, which emphasizes the writing process itself. However, the effectiveness of these approaches depends on factors like teachers' knowledge and students' English proficiency. Collaborative writing activities and recognizing learners' home languages are recommended for effective development. Lack of writing experience can also impact the writing process [2,3]. Given the linguistic diversity of Bhutanese students, understanding how these teaching approaches support their writing development is crucial for improving writing skills in Bhutanese schools. However, the effectiveness of approaches to writing is found to be dependent on various factors [4-6]. According to Ngubane et al. (2020) the "effectiveness of any teaching writing pedagogy depends on the teachers' knowledge and understanding of writing and approaches to writing".

This research aimed to enhance students' writing skills at Thungkhar Primary School in Thrimshing Drungkhag, Trashigang. It employed a qualitative approach, gathering data through interviews and observations with teachers and students. The study's results illuminated effective writing teaching methods. An intriguing finding is that students at remote schools like Thungkhar Primary prefer writing over speaking due to speaking challenges. This research confirmed the complexity of both teaching and learning writing. It underscored the need for targeted interventions and professional development programs to improve writing skills, which can have a positive impact on performance in all subjects.

2. BACKGROUND

Writing is a fundamental skill that enables individuals to express themselves and

communicate effectively. In the context of Bhutan, as in many other countries, the development of strong writing skills is considered crucial for academic success and personal growth. This research project seeks to investigate into the approaches used in improving students' writing abilities in primary schools like Thungkhar Primary School located in the remote Thrimshing Drungkhag (sub-division) of Bhutan. The study adopted a qualitative research approach to gather data from a particular primary school which is Thungkhar Primary School.

2.1 Writing as a Complex Activity

Writing is a multifaceted activity that involves the generation and expression of ideas, knowledge, and thoughts. Lhadon and Wangmo [1] emphasize that writing plays a pivotal role in helping students explore and articulate various forms of knowledge. However, it is widely acknowledged that writing is a complex endeavour, and teaching it presents significant challenges. As Cheung (2016) aptly states, "Writing is a complex activity."

2.2 Approaches to Teaching Writing

In the realm of teaching writing, various pedagogical approaches have been explored. Ngubane et al. (2020) categorize three prominent approaches: the product approach, the process approach, and the genre-based approach. Of these, the process approach is prevalent in Bhutanese schools, aligning with the national curriculum's recommendations. Similar approaches are also found in studies conducted by Curry et al. (2003), where they support the development of academic writing skills in university students.

2.3 Factors Influencing Writing Effectiveness

The effectiveness of these writing approaches is contingent on several factors. Ngubane et al. (2020) emphasize that the teachers' knowledge and understanding of writing, as well as students' proficiency in English, play pivotal roles in the success of writing pedagogies. Klimova (2014) corroborates this by advocating for instructional methods that incorporate collaborative writing activities within the learners' Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and recognize learners' home languages to enhance

writing development. Klimova also highlights the impact of limited experience in writing.

2.4 Contextual Challenges

Teaching writing in Bhutan presents unique challenges due to the linguistic diversity of students, most of whom come from backgrounds other than English. These challenges have implications for the development of students' writing skills. Therefore, it is imperative to investigate how teaching approaches to writing can effectively support the acquisition of writing skills among students.

It is crucial to determine how teaching methods for writing contribute to the development of writing skills in learners. Teaching approaches or methods to support writing appear to be a challenge as students come from various linguistic backgrounds other than English. The study of these findings helped identify the types of methods and factors that might be affecting the development of writing skills in learners at Thungkhar Primary School.

Bhutan Council for School Examinations and Assessment (BCSEA, 2022) pointed out that students have been struggling with new assessment criteria that require them to achieve passing marks in both written examinations and continuous assessments.

Therefore, this study investigated the ways in which teaching methods for writing support grade four, five, and six students at Thungkhar Primary School in gaining writing skills.

2.5 Purposes

2.5.1 Understanding the complexity of writing

The research aimed to delve into the complexity of writing as an activity. It acknowledged that writing is not a simple skill to acquire and seeks to explore the challenges and intricacies associated with it.

2.5.2 Exploring teaching approaches

The research sought to examine various teaching approaches to writing, including the process approach, and their alignment with the Bhutanese curriculum. It aimed to understand how different pedagogical methods influence students' writing development.

2.5.3 Factors affecting writing effectiveness

The study intended to identify and highlight the factors that influence the effectiveness of teaching methods for writing. It emphasized the role of teachers' knowledge, students' English proficiency, and the impact of limited writing experience on the writing process.

2.5.4 Contextual challenges in thungkhar PS

Given the linguistic diversity of students, the research acknowledges the unique challenges faced in teaching writing. It aimed to investigate how these challenges affect the development of writing skills and explore strategies to overcome them.

2.5.5 Improving writing skills

The primary purpose of the research is to enhance students' writing skills at Thungkhar Primary School. It seeks to provide insights into effective teaching.

Methods that can support grade four, five, and six students in gaining proficiency in writing.

Therefore, the research served to deepen our understanding of writing as a complex activity, examine teaching approaches, identify factors affecting writing effectiveness, address contextual challenges, and ultimately improve students' writing skills in Thungkhar Primary School. It has practical implications for both teachers and students and can contribute to enhancing the quality of education in Bhutan.

2.6 Research Question

This research study would be guided by overarching research questions supported by sub-questions.

2.6.1 Overarching question

Methods in improving students' writing in Thungkhar Primary School in Thrimshing Drungkhag, Trashigang.

What teaching methods and strategies can be effectively implemented to improve students' writing skills at Thungkhar Primary School?

2.6.2 Sub questions

1. What are the current teaching methods and strategies being used to teach writing at Thungkhar Primary School?

2. What are the specific contextual challenges faced by both teachers and students?
3. What steps can be taken to overcome them for the improvement of students' writing skills?

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of existing literature on writing and writing methods in a global context, firstly, this presents the theoretical background of writing, followed by the importance of writing in English and finally the writing methods.

3.1 Theoretical Background

The writing is considered as transcribed speech traditionally. It was often assumed that the gaining of spoken proficiency had to take precedence over the learning of written language and that students would be able to write once they 'mastered' spoken language and orthographic conventions.

Another view of writing is that writing is 'decontextualized' (Ellis, 1994: 188) because it assumes that written communication never takes place in the presence of the writer and the reader.

According to Grabe and Kaplan [7] and Matsuda (1997) writing is "far from decontextualized because every writing task is situated in a rhetorical context, involving complex interrelationships among various elements of writing; the writer, the reader, the text and reality". As for Canale and Swain (1980) writing is "a manifestation of, as well as the process of manifesting, sociolinguistic, strategic and grammatical competencies mediated by the use of orthographic systems" (cited in Silva & Matsudo, [2], pp.252).

Moreover, writing is also defined as a social process by Candlin and Hyland (1999, pp. 107, as cited in Phung, 2004). They stated "Writing is therefore an engagement in a social process, where the production of texts reflects methodologies, arguments and rhetorical strategies constructed to engage colleagues and persuade them of the claims that are made". However, writing, in language teachers' opinions, is "a language skill which is difficult to acquire" (Tribble, 1996, pp.3). It "normally requires some form of instruction" and "is not a skill that is readily picked up by exposure" (Tribble, 1996, pp. 11). Besides, writing is also "a process that

occurs over a period of time, particularly if we take into account the sometimes-extended periods of thinking that precede creating an initial draft" (Harris, 1993, as cited in Phung, 2004).

As it is evident from daily practice, the classroom has its own purpose and structure and is not simply a reflection of the outside world. In this sense, teachers and educators can think of writing activities both from the 'instrumental' perspective of what is useful for external purposes and also in terms of their educational function and the reality of the classroom itself. (P.34)

3.2 Writing Method

The related literature abounds in methods that are found to have been most important. The effective writing methods are the product method, the grammar-based method, the process method, the genre-based method and the social-constructionist method.

3.3 The Product Methods

These writing forms are subsumed under this approach as they are concerned with the correct use of language structures. These forms of writing could not be expected to develop learners' composing abilities beyond the sentence level [2]. This will be included Grammar-based method, The proponent also emphasizes that grammar in a writing course overshadows the nature of writing as a communication skill where grammar is one of many resources that writers resort to in order to enrich their communicative intent. In fact, "grammar operates at a linguistic level below that of the basic unit of writing; the paragraph where the emphasis will primarily be on textually; the relationship between sentences, rather than grammatically; and the well-forkedness of the sentences" (Xu, 1991, p. 36). Process Method, Prewriting, Drafting, Revising, Editing, and publishing all these methods will be used for writing [8-10].

Therefore, Peha (2010) suggests some common writing problems being solved by the process of these methods. Apart from the product and process approaches to teaching writing, the genre-based method has also gained popularity as another approach to develop learners' writing skills" (Ngubane et al., 2020, pg.3). Developed from Martin's (1993) Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) model of language, the genre-

based approach places greater emphasis on the social context in which writing is produced.

4. METHODOLOGY

The main aim of this study was to investigate and explore ways to use teaching process methods to improve students' writing. The purpose of selecting this method was to explain the basic lived experience of Thungkhar Primary School's teachers teaching writing in upper primary grades.

The study intended to investigate practical applications used by teachers in improving students' writing, and the benefits and problems of the process of teaching writing methods.

This methodology section will present the paradigm, methods, design and the research site to carry out the research. In addition, this section will also discuss the techniques and tools to be used in the study. The data collection methods and analysis procedures covered research validity, reliability and ethical issues.

The research topic chosen by this researcher is suited to choose social constructivism paradigm as the researcher is required to contact and deal with the lived experience of the participants in the society. Creswell [8] is of the view that "individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop the subjective meaning of their experiences-meanings directed towards certain objects or things". Creswell [8] pointed out that, "Constructivist researchers often address the processes of interaction among individuals. They also focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work" (p. 8). The researcher is confident that this paradigm will immensely guide to carry out the research for the chosen topic in a better way.

4.1 Research Site

The research site was carried out in Thungkhar Primary School. The school is located away from Trashigang, the district headquarters, which takes about five hours by road. The researcher enjoyed the luxury of time and ample opportunity for face-to-face interaction with the participants because of the location of the school. The researcher enjoyed the hands-on experience in the research field in person with the participants. Creswell [8] states that "the researcher often goes to the site of the participants to conduct the

research. It is the study that describes the meaning for several individuals their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon" (p. 57).

Since the purpose of this research was to investigate and explore how teaching methods to writing help students in their writing, especially in primary school under Thrimshing Geog, Trashigang, the chosen research site of the school greatly suited the study in all aspects.

The researcher randomly selected four students and one teacher from each section of grades four to six to participate in the interviews. Two females and two males were selected for the data collection. The students and teachers from each section were selected based on their mixed attitudes and abilities which allowed the investigator to foster further insights into findings and promote precision for interpretation. The researcher confidently selected twelve participants for authentic and appropriate data gathering for the research study.

Polkinghorne (1989, as cited in Creswell, [8]) recommends that researchers interview 5 to 25 individuals to develop the possibilities of experiences.

4.2 Data collection tools

Data collection tools were not only critical but needed to be designed mindfully in any research study. In qualitative research, researchers generally use four types of data collection tools. They are interviews namely structured, semi-structured and unstructured; observation. These four tools were used. Data Analysis, Interpretation and Discussion were also used.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Data Analysis

It presents the findings on methods for improving students' writing in Thungkhar Primary School, Thrimshing, Trashigang. Firstly, the raw findings are presented under "Data Analysis" using the transcribed data collected from the participants who were transcribed verbatim. Then, it follows discussion and interpretations of the findings which are supported by studies from the local and international contexts on similar issues. The data for this study was generated through semi-structured interviews and observation. The data thus collected were transcribed verbatim. Then,

the verbatims were coded using colour coding. The entire analysis was done through thematic analysis (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006) and pattern matching (Yin, 2014). As a result of the thematic analysis the emerging themes were drawn as (i) Benefits of learning writing; (ii) Teaching approaches of writing practised; (iii) Learners' style of learning writing; (iv) writing as choice over spoken; and (v) Teaching and learning writing is challenging. The sub-themes under each of the overarching themes are also presented.

6. DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

The discussion and interpretation are thematically addressed to add value to the research outcome.

The findings indicated the benefits of learning writing in three ways. They are in (i) expressing feelings, (ii) development of handwriting and (iii) improvement of spelling. This is likely to be true. However, the findings negligibly indicate how the teaching approach to writing has actually supported learners in acquiring writing skills. For example, Lhadon and Wangmo ([1], as cited in Tshering, 2016 & Zangpo, 2005) discussed that writing skills as a result of teaching approaches to writing are coherence, focus and organization of thoughts and ideas, and lexical and grammatical structure. In this study, although teacher participants are of the view that writing develops critical thinking it couldn't be aligned to students' responses.

These approaches are the grammar-based approach; product-based approach and process approach (Ngubane et al., 2020) as discussed in the literature review. However, the most significant approach practised as the data has shown is the process approach. This is likely due to relevancy as it is prescribed by the curriculum. The significance of the practice of the process approach is also highlighted in studies by (Ngubane et al., (2020).

The study indicated that learners learn writing through regular practice and continuous constructive feedback. Regular practice builds the confidence of the learners while continuous constructive feedback helps learners improve writing quality and structure.

This research has shown that learners prefer writing to speaking to express their feelings. This is likely to be true as the learners are based in

remote schools where there is a limited avenue to practice listening and speaking skills. As a result, despite limited words, spelling and grammar errors, they prefer to express themselves through writing. Moreover, this would be of advantage for the teachers to teach writing and enable the development of strong writing skills in children in remote schools.

This research has shown that both teaching and learning are complex. This aligns with Cheung (2016) who confirms writing as a complex activity. As data indicated, the student participants were of the view that spelling and structuring are more challenging. This is in line with the findings of Lhadon and Wangmo (2022, as cited in Tshering, 2016 & Zangpo, 2005) who found that most students lack qualities of good writing essay and they exhibit extreme weakness in coherence, focus and organization of thoughts and ideas, lexical and grammatical errors.

7. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research project titled "Methods in Improving Students Writing in Thungkhar Primary School in Thrimshing Dungkhag, Trashigang aims to address the complexities of teaching and learning writing in a remote and linguistically diverse setting. It emphasizes the importance of effective teaching approaches in nurturing students' writing skills and highlights the challenges faced by both teachers and students. The study's significance informs in its potential to educators, policymakers, and stakeholders about the most effective methods for teaching writing, as well as the barriers hindering students' progress. By investigating the complexities of writing, exploring various teaching approaches, identifying factors influencing writing effectiveness, and addressing contextual challenges, this research seeks to contribute to the improvement of education in Bhutan and beyond. Ultimately, it underscores the need for targeted interventions and professional development programs to enhance students' writing skills, thereby benefiting their overall academic performance.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends future researchers look at why students in remote schools prefer writing over speaking. This research has prospected the possible cause but it could not be ascertained in detail. Therefore, future researcher has a good

opportunity to explore in this issue which would further enable the relevant stakeholders for policy interventions and development in teaching and learning in writing in remote schools. Due to lack of research experience, it has impacted systematic data analysis. The samples are limited. It should have covered more schools in Thrimshing Drungkhag. However, due to limited time, it could not be covered. As a result, it has impacted in gathering of quality data for quality data triangulation.

9. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

This research would be significant in understanding the effectiveness of teaching methods that help students in writing. As a result, teachers would be able to determine and choose the most effective methods to enable students to write successfully. Similarly, it is beneficial to identify the barriers that students face when acquiring writing skills, despite suitable methods being adopted by teachers for teaching writing. Additionally, the study informed relevant stakeholders regarding teaching methods for writing to support learners in the best possible ways. This study presents the research intents by discussing background information on writing and its methods. The research purpose was stated by discussing the current scenarios and problems in writing experienced by learners. The research questions were carefully framed to gain a deeper understanding and depth of knowledge, which assisted during interviews and data collection. Therefore, future researchers will have a good opportunity to explore this issue further, enabling relevant stakeholders to implement policy interventions and promote development in teaching and learning writing in remote schools. This study presents the findings on how teaching methods for writing can support the acquisition of writing skills in remote schools like Thungkhar Primary School.

ETHICAL APPROVAL AND CONSENT

Abiding by the rule of 'what to do and what not to do' makes a researcher ethical. It is the professional code of conduct. Ethics in research, as Bogdan and Biklen (1998), research ethics "are the principles of right and wrong that a particular group accepts at a particular time" (p. 42).

Transparency of the purpose of the study was maintained. It would be clearly understood by the participants and there would not be any ambiguity in the process. I observed all the ethics of a good researcher. I wrote and got

written permission from all the members involved in my research, and a consent form was developed for the interviewee and asked to fill up before the interview. As a novice researcher, I tried my best not to have any kind of preconceptions and partiality. Besides, the secrecy of the participants should be maintained and their roles in the research and the incidents in the research should always remain confidential. The other important ethical issue that researchers should be mindful of is that findings shall not be made untrue. Discussion on research ethics could be summarized in the words of Creswell (2003) "The researcher must develop an informed consent from the participants to sign before they engage in the research" (p. 64).

They need to have ethical considerations during pre-data collection, during data collection and post-data collection.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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