

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## Exploring the Practices and Contextual Factors in Teaching Writing Skills in EFL Classrooms: A Case Study

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### Abstract

*This study explored four experienced teachers' practices and challenges in teaching writing in English as a foreign language (EFL) in a secondary school in Ethiopia. While a single secondary school was selected based on a convenient sampling technique, four EFL teachers were selected using a purposive sampling technique. The data were collected using classroom observations, stimulated recall interviews, and course document analysis and were analyzed thematically. The findings of the study revealed that the teachers employed a product-oriented approach with a focus on rhetorical features and patterns about different types of texts. Large class sizes, lack of students' language proficiency, lack of teachers' pedagogical competence in teaching writing, and insufficiency of instructional time to develop drafts were found to impede teachers' classroom practices in the study context. Based on the findings, it was recommended that teachers should assist students to do their writing outside the classroom ahead of each writing lesson so that they can use the lesson time for productive learning tasks. Besides, the Ministry of Education should spread systems to offer on-job training regarding up-to-date and innovative ways of teaching writing skills.*

**Keywords:** Teachers, Classroom Practice, Writing Skills, Writing, Contextual Factors

### Introduction

Although in Ethiopia, English is seen as only a foreign language, there is a tendency today that the language is being understood as an official language next to Amharic, which is the official language of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. The language is a medium of instruction at secondary and tertiary levels of education. Besides, it is a dominant language in workplace communication areas such as business, science, and technology in quite many government and nongovernment offices (Hailom, 2009). Hence, education has to be recalibrated to meet the rising needs of the work. Suwaed (2011) claimed that when we are talking about meeting the demands of the global market today, the English language teacher is believed to play the most crucial role because the English language is "the language of science, technology, and communication" (p.11).

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/erjssh.v9i2.6>

In Ethiopia, the focus of English language teaching at secondary levels is on communication and independent learning because most students who complete secondary school are expected to join colleges or universities where English continues to be a medium of instruction. For this reason, students need to have a wider range of grammatical and lexical competence to cope with future studies, and in grades 11 and 12, there is more focus on reading and writing to prepare students for higher education (MoE, 2009). In this regard, Geremew (1999) suggests that students need to display a multitude of writing skills to carry out academic writing tasks.

The textbook entitled “English for Ethiopia, Students’ Textbook” has been in use since 2003 academic year. The writing sections of the Grade 11 textbook; for example, aim to help students develop a variety of skills by both learning to write and writing to learn. The purpose of writing exercises is to enable students to see how different types of texts are written according to their purpose, audience, and content and develop their pieces by going through multiple drafts. Hence, rewriting and revision are the main integral parts of the writing activities. As indicated by Ebabu (2019), and as the present researcher (hereafter, the researcher) has tried to look into the writing activities in the Grade 11 textbook, the writing tasks are designed mainly based on the process-genre approach.

Concerning this, Thornbury (1998) emphasizes that despite the emergence of numerous second/foreign language (L2) acquisition theories and teaching methods over the years, teachers have not deviated from the more traditional grammar-oriented approaches. He claims that while teachers have never abandoned instructional approaches based on grammar, alternative approaches have not made any lasting impression on the current practice of English language teaching. Studies such as Burns (1990), Kumaravadivelu (1993), and Nunan (1987) have also suggested that although teachers may profess commitment to a particular method or approach such as Communicative Language Teaching, the principles that underlie these approaches are rarely enacted in the classroom. Classroom teaching; therefore, seems to carry on unaffected by the development on the theoretical and research front. The purpose of this study is; therefore, to investigate the practices and factors in teaching writing skills in grade 11.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Writing plays a significant role in the process of acquiring a second language. Hyland (2003) believes that performance in language development is subject to improvement in writingskills. As to Nunan (2015:77), “Writing is not only a tool for communication but also an instrument for intellectual growth and development.” In connection to this, Walsh (2010) stated that writing is a crucial language skill in higher education and workplaces because in these contexts much of the professional communications are carried out in writing.

English Language education at the secondary level, especially in grades 11 and 12, lays more focus on enabling students to use the macro skills (with more focus on reading and writing) for real communication (MoE, 2009:23). Since the majority of students in Grades 11 and 12 will be aiming for higher education where English continues to be the medium of instruction, students need to have the language competence to cope with future studies. Notwithstanding the effort made by the government to boost the level of use of English to a better state (Dawit, 2013), one of the major weaknesses Ethiopian students exhibit at different levels is writing in English (Solomon, 2001; Semagn, 2012, Ebabu, 2019).

In Ethiopia, many efforts have been made to equip teachers with the knowledge, attitude, and skill of teaching the English language through a learner-centered teaching approach (Institute of International Education, 2012). One attempt that was made to build on teachers' knowledge and skills of teaching is the English Language Improvement Program established in 2002 with the support of the government of the UK. The project trained Key English Language Trainer Advisors (KELTA), Key English Language Trainers (KELT), and English Language Trainees in a cascading process for four years. However, despite the reform efforts that advocate student-centered constructivist teaching, teachers still heavily rely on more traditional pedagogies, such as lectures, drills, and practice at all levels of schooling. MOE (2009) has reported that the teacher's teaching approach has not improved even if repeated efforts have been made to address challenges. Moreover, studies conducted in Ethiopian higher education institution and schools have shown that the actual implementation of constructivist teaching principles is doubtful and do not go beyond lip services (Alemayehu, 2010; Birhanu, 2012). The problem was even more serious when it comes to teaching English Writing. Writing has generally been considered as another means to reinforce knowledge of grammar. This study aims to explore teachers' practices in teaching EFL writing as well as contextual factors in teaching writing.

## **Research Questions**

1. How do English language teachers at Fasiledes Secondary School teach EFL writing?
2. What are the contextual factors that constrain their practices while teaching writing in EFL classrooms?

## **Research Methodology**

### **Design**

To address the research objectives, a qualitative case study was employed. A qualitative case study was deemed appropriate for the study in the process of describing and understanding the complexity of classroom teaching, idiosyncrasy with a particular setting is a more important phenomenon than what is common across classrooms, and this sought the use of case study to describe and explain the phenomenon from the perspective of the participants themselves (emic perspective) rather than viewing from the outside (etic) perspective.

## **Research Approach**

In this study, the qualitative approach to research is employed because the study aims to explore the participants' subjective experiences, beliefs, and classroom practices of teaching EFL writing. The emphasis was to gain a profound understanding of teachers' beliefs and their relation to teachers' classroom behavior. Besides, the type of research questions designed for this study required the adoption of a qualitative approach. The first research objective, for instance, (What techniques do English language teachers in Fasiledes Secondary School use to teach EFL writing?) is better answered by employing the qualitative approach to research.

## **Participants**

Four teachers were involved in the study. They were taken from a single school in Gondar town, North West of Ethiopia. All of them were teaching English as a foreign language in grade 11 in the academic year 2020/21. For the sake of confidentiality, the pseudonyms Elisabeth, Tsion, Solomon, and Yohannes were used to represent the teachers.

## **Sampling Technique**

The participants were selected using purposive sampling. According to Creswell (2007), sampling in a qualitative study should be underpinned by clear criteria and rationales for these criteria. The present researcher used willingness to participate, qualification, experience, and working hours as criteria to select the participants. Due to this reason, teachers with five and above years of teaching experience, who were full-time workers, who graduated with an MA in TEFL, and who were willing and interested to take part in the study were selected for the study.

## **Data Collecting Instruments**

Three data-gathering instruments were used: classroom observation, stimulated recall interviews, and document data (some of the students' work that had been marked by the teachers). The first tool was used to develop accounts of teachers' classroom practices concerning teaching writing skills. The purpose of the stimulated-recall interview was to see the factors that impacted the teaching of writing skills. The document analysis was used to secure data about the kind and focus of feedback given by teachers for their students' writing.

## **Data Collection Procedures**

A letter of approval for undertaking the research was first obtained from the Department of English Language and Literature, University of Gondar (Ref. DELL173/02/2012). Information about the research was given to the teachers and their consent was obtained, assuring them about their anonymity and about the possibility of terminating their participation at any time they liked. The data collection started with classroom observation. Then, stimulated recall interviews were held to find out what impacted the teachers' classroom practices.

## **Data Validation**

According to Lincoln & Guba (1985), a credible study needs to show evidence of lengthy engagement in the field. Data for this study were collected for eight months. Another way of maintaining trustworthiness was using method triangulation (data were collected using observation, interview, and writing assignment analysis). Member checking was also utilized in this study as an additional way of maintaining its credibility. This was done by sharing with the case study participants the summary the researcher had comprehended about their practices and the things that negatively influenced their teaching practices from the observation of the researcher and the interview following the observation.

## **Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed thematically. The data analysis went through the following procedures: transcription → coding → developing themes. In the process, the smallest units of information were first identified and then assigned codes. Once they were assigned codes, they were analyzed to discover patterns or categories between the codes. This was done in two ways: horizontally (i.e. by analyzing the codes of all the participants for a particular question); and vertically (i.e. by comparing the codes of a single participant's data corpus). Elisabeth's answer to Q2 in the interview guide would be used as an example to show the process of data analysis. The question was: What techniques did your teacher employ to teach you writing that time? The example given below shows how Elisabeth's responses to this question were first broken down into codes (1–9), and then compared and reduced to higher-level groupings or categories (given in brackets).

1. Writing letters (learning technique)
2. Receiving feedback from friends (learning technique)
3. Teaching discourse types (the focus of instruction)
4. Both in Amharic & in English (medium of instruction)
5. Using spatial order (teaching technique)
6. Using chronological order (teaching technique)
7. Writing on a given topic (teaching technique)
8. Giving assignment (teaching technique)
9. Instructed to write a descriptive essay (teaching technique)

What became clear after analyzing this question was the need to differentiate between techniques employed by the teacher (e.g. writing topics were chosen by the teacher) and those learning techniques opted for by the learner (e.g. codes 1 & 2). Also, it was necessary to separate techniques that were helpful in the learning process from those that were of little advantage to the learner. In the given example, asking students to write on given topics was believed to have a negative as well as a positive influence. The use of L1 in the EFL class was also argumentative.

Once all the data were coded and categorized, they were organized into higher-level groupings, and themes. Thus, the categories shown in the example above informed the theme of "learning experience as a learner."

## **Ethical Consideration**

As an important point in case study research, ethical considerations were taken into account. I first explained to them the aims of the study, the procedure for data collection, and how the researcher wanted them to assist. When they expressed they needed time to think about it, the researcher gave them a consent form in English and requested them to let me know their decisions. Only those teachers who voluntarily agreed to take part in the study were selected for participation.

## **Findings and Discussion**

The purpose of the study was to explore EFL teachers' teaching practices and contextual factors concerning writing instruction. Therefore, the researcher relied on interviews, observations, and document analysis to present the findings. The researcher reports the participants' teaching practices and contextual factors that affected the teaching of writing.

## Teachers' Practices in Teaching EFL Writing

The classroom observations indicated that the teachers' classroom practices seemed to target the development of rhetorical organization and grammatical usage with a small practice on linguistic skills. In all observed classes, teachers were seen to have controlled the teaching-learning process, spending most of the time explaining the structure of the given discourse, its linguistic features, and how its ideas were organized. The lessons were mainly teacher-fronted, where the teachers were the initiators and input providers of classroom interaction.

Elisabeth; for example, spent the first 22 minutes in her second lesson explaining the layout and functional language used in writing formal and informal letters. The following extract shows what happened before the students were presented with a sample informal letter in that class.

*The teacher wrote the topic of the lesson on the board: Informal letters  
The teacher revised the previous lesson.*

*T: Last time we have seen two types of formal letters: business letters and job application letters, but now we focus on informal letters and practice different types of letter-writing techniques. Students, first we need to remember and identify about rules of all letters. The teacher took out her notebook and explained the 'rules' of all letters.*

*What are the rules for all letters?*

*Please, give some of the rules of all letters. If you want to write a letter, it is too important that your handwriting is? Uh?*

*Ss: said something in chorus, but was not audible.*

*T: clear and neat, very good. The writer's address is written in the top right-hand corner. And leave a space between the address and the date. And the other rule is to spell out the month in a full sentence.*

*... (the explanation continued in this way) until she instructed students to write a sample informal letter at the 20th minute of the lesson. She also left notes on the board for students to copy while she was talking about the structure of the new lesson (informal letter). The teacher's explanation continued for another 10 minutes because most of the students were not ready to write and some were even reluctant to try at all. Then, Elisabeth read to her students a sample informal letter and once more wanted her students to notice the structure of an informal letter.*

Besides, the teachers were observed to follow a routine pattern of instruction that was common among them. Yohannes, for example, always went through the same actions when he came into the classroom for writing lessons (i.e. get the board wiped → greet the class → revise the previous lesson briefly → write the topic on the board → direct students' attention to the focus of the lesson (e.g. "We are going to look at narrative" (LO.4) → explained rhetorical organization and features of a narrative (e.g. "Narrative is a form of writing that tells a story. So, writers use either a first-person perspective or a third-person perspective, and they use narrative style and chronological order, a point of view, and other strategies to tell their thoughts.) → left short notes on the board while explaining → briefly summarized the lesson → he set homework ("for your homework, write a story. It may be personal, or it may be someone else's; you can choose whatever you like. Your assignment

is for tomorrow. It will be presented. You are going to write a story with 250-300 words.”) Tsion also conducted lessons more or less in a similar fashion.

1. Teacher greeted the students and cleaned the blackboard.
2. She, then, briefly reminded the students of the previous lesson.
3. She, then, introduced the present lesson by focusing students’ attention on the issue at hand

(“Today, we are going to discuss the writing part, on page 150, narrative writing.”)

4. And then, she gave a detailed explanation of what a narrative story is all about (“Ok, narrative means a description of events in the past,” said the teacher and wrote the definition of narrative on the blackboard. “We can describe events in the past by using simple past, past perfect, past continuous, and present perfect.” ...”).

5. After 16 minutes of talk, she instructed students to write a story on topics of their preferences. (So, now, think about your story; take out a sheet of paper and begin writing your first draft. Follow these instructions.” She wanted to see her students write the first draft. She walked around the classroom to see if students were on the right track and to assist students in their writing. While she was walking around, she noticed that only a very few students were trying to do the writing. And this was worrisome to the teacher. The teacher came to the researcher with her notebook and explained why students did not start writing until that time. She said that she had given adequate information about narrative writing to her students even before that class, but students were not responsible to improve their writing.

In this kind of didactic lecture format, the students were generally inactive, and unenthusiastic and remained seated at their desks throughout the lesson, with little or no interaction among them. Throughout my observations, the researcher saw only one instance of group work, and it was in Tsion’s first lesson. The teaching of writing in these classes was characterized by knowledge transmission, and because most of the class time was spent on teacher talk, the teachers usually instruct students to write on topics and bring their papers back the next day for feedback. In other words, the product-oriented approach was practiced in the classroom. The following table shows the summary of their observed practices.

Teacher	Lesson	Task Description
Elisabeth	1	Teacher-fronted explanation about paragraph development followed by individual guided writing using a cluster of ideas given by the teacher.
	2	Teacher-whole discussion about writing conventions and features of an informal letter followed by a prompt individual writing work.
	3	Teacher-whole discussion on organizational features of an argumentative essay. With the help of their teacher, students completed a model outline plan by reading a model text and were given a home taken assignment to write an article of a similar kind.
	4	Teacher gave detailed explanation about elements of a narrative/fiction using the notes in her notebook. Teacher instructed students to write the first draft of their story and check their papers using the checklist in the textbook.
	5	Revision on the previous lesson using one student's writing as a basis to explain the different elements of a narrative essay.
Tsion	1	Individual guided writing using a cluster of ideas given by the teacher followed by loud reading in front of the class.
	2	Teacher-whole discussion about writing conventions and features of an informal letter followed by individual class work, loud reading and teacher oral comments.
	3	Teacher-whole class discussion on organizational features of an argumentative essay. With the help of their teacher, students completed a model outline plan from reading a model text and wrote an article on another topic in the book. This was followed by peer feedback.
	4	Teacher gave detailed explanation about elements of a narrative/fiction using the notes in her notebook. Teacher instructed students to write a short narrative on topics of their preference but to discuss their topics in pairs before starting to write.
	5	Paper presentation which included peer feedback and teacher's oral comments on students' homework.
Solomon	1	Teacher's explanation about stages of writing followed by a model text produced by the teacher.
	2	Teacher-whole class discussion about writing conventions and features of an informal letter followed by individual class work, loud reading and teacher oral comments.
	3	Discussion of organizational features of argumentative essay based on a model text and completing an outline plan of the given model text. Following this, teacher set an assignment.
	4	Detailed explanation about elements of a narrative/fiction with the help of a model text followed by an assignment.
	5	Paper presentation (reading aloud in front of the class) on students' assignment followed by teacher oral feedback.
Yohannes	1	Teacher's explanation about stages of writing followed by a model text produced by the teacher.
	2	Teacher-whole discussion about writing conventions and features of an informal letter followed by home taken assignment.
	3	Discussion of organizational features of argumentative essay based on a model text and completing an outline plan of the given model text. Following this, teacher set an assignment.
	4	Detailed explanation about elements of a narrative/fiction with the help of a model text followed by an assignment.
	5	Paper presentation (reading aloud in front of the class) on students' assignment followed by teacher oral feedback.

Table 1: A Composite summary of teachers' observed writing instructions



## **Findings of Analysis of Writing Exercises**

The writing sections of the Grade 11 English textbook aim to help students develop a variety of skills by both learning to write and writing to learn. Students are required to learn to write for different purposes and to use the appropriate register and style. These include writing descriptive, narrative, discursive, and expository texts. They are also taught to take notes and summarize texts in their own words.

Based on the organization of the learning material, students should first have awareness of the linguistic and rhetorical features of the type of writing at hand. For this reason, the textbook presents students with brief information about the target genre and the situation they are in to produce the texts. This gives linguistic input to the students so that they will be able to produce their texts pertaining to the purpose and audience the writing task demands. In addition to this, each writing task is linked to the listening, reading, speaking, or grammar lessons students have taken part in before the writing classes. This provides learners with key content, grammar, and vocabulary as well as a model of the kind of text that they are expected to produce. In other words, the input they have received in advance also helps them in getting familiarized themselves with the features of the kind of writing they are going to produce including its register and style.

Once they have this input, the students are required to do their writing by going through the different steps of writing, which they are believed to be familiar with from earlier grades. The curriculum recommends that the teachers spend some time discussing each step in the process of writing. Students are often encouraged to read model texts, work in pairs and give feedback to each other. Let us have a look at the following description.

*In the Writing sections, a variety of skills are developed. Students learn to write for different purposes and to use the appropriate register and style. Exercises aim to develop a range of writing including descriptive, narrative, discursive, and expository texts. Students are also taught to take notes and summarize texts in their own words. They are taught to write paragraphs using topic sentences and support sentences. In addition, punctuation forms are an important component of this section, and students are encouraged to punctuate their writing correctly. They are also encouraged to revise and edit their work. Suggestions are given to guide students through the writing process from planning a first, rough draft to producing a final, 'polished' piece of writing. (Teacher Guide for Grade 11, p.viii)*

From this description, we learn that the purpose of writing exercises was to enable students to see how different types of texts are written according to their purpose, audience, and content and to develop their pieces by going through multiple drafts. Hence, rewriting and revision are the main integral parts of the writing activities.

## **Findings from Stimulated Recall Interviews**

The data obtained from the stimulated recall interview indicated that many contextual factors constrained the participant teachers' classroom practices. In this section, the social, psychological, and environmental realities of the school and the classroom that shaped the participants' teaching practices will be looked at. These factors could be grouped into teacher-related, student-related, and institution-related ones.

## **i) Student-related Factors**

### **Lack of Students' Language Competency as a Barrier**

All of the teachers reported that the students' low-level proficiency was one of the major problems that hindered them from teaching in an ideal way. Teachers were highly dissatisfied with their students' writing performance. They often stated that their students were unable to express themselves in writing mainly because they lack knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. Elisabeth explained that teaching writing was very challenging because students had passed from one grade level to another without having the prerequisite language competency for the grade level. During a stimulated recall interview on her lesson regarding writing a magazine article, the researcher asked her what she thought students should be able to learn to improve their writing. She replied that her students needed to learn a lot of things as their language knowledge and skills were below the threshold level.

*Students should know a lot of things. Our students reached this grade level without acquiring the prerequisite knowledge and skill for grade 11. In other words, they are baseless. They do not spell and pronounce words correctly; they cannot write from dictation. Even, they have problems with copying from the blackboard. (Elisabeth: SRI, 3)*

Tsion also complained that the students in her school were very weak in English. This, according to the teacher, hindered the teaching of writing skills because students became unmotivated to learn when asked to perform activities beyond their ability.

*One of the problems with teaching writing is that students are not to the label to learn prescribed content. This again causes a lack of interest to attend classes. When some students attempt to write, we find it difficult to decipher their message. They cannot express themselves. Others may not have a problem with content, but they make a lot of grammatical errors. (SSI 2)*

Tsion attributes her students' poor performance in writing to a shortage of linguistic knowledge and a lack of ideas to express themselves. While some of the students were not able to substantiate their writing with complete and pertinent ideas, others used ungrammatical language, the major problem being with the use of tenses, vocabulary, and punctuation (as explained in section 5.5)

Solomon views the students' problem with writing from two dimensions. In some cases, students had the idea in mind but were not able to put their ideas in black and white. It might be because of a lack of vocabulary and grammar. In other cases, students were able to generate sufficient ideas but were not able to maintain coherence and unity in the development of their ideas, making them very difficult to comprehend.

*When students write, they include irrelevant ideas. They stuff in ideas that are not related and pertinent to the topic. The other problem is being unable to express their ideas in writing. They have the idea, but they cannot put their ideas in black and white. It may be because of a deficiency of knowledge of vocabulary or language structure. This implies that they have to be given many pieces of training.*

## **Lack of Students' Interest Influencing Teachers' Writing Instruction**

Teachers were asked what mainly affected their teaching practices or their decisions concerning the teaching of writing. Lack of students' interest to learn to write seemed to be highly affecting their decisions and practices. Often, teachers expressed that their students were resistant to carrying out writing activities given by their teachers. Tsion, for instance, felt that the most serious problem in teaching writing is students' lack of interest followed by a shortage of linguistic knowledge.

*The most serious problem with my students is a lack of interest followed by a lack of basic knowledge of language form. There is always a great deal of resistance from students when you start teaching writing. Let alone writing, they are even reluctant to attend grammar lessons. It requires a great deal of effort from the teachers to make them believe that writing can be enjoyable and rewarding.*

The students' resistance to doing writing tasks was observed in most of the teachers' lessons. For example, in Yohannes's fourth lesson on narrative writing, students were instructed to write an essay with not more than five paragraphs and bring their papers to class for the following class. However, only a handful of students did their assignments. Their teacher explained that this was because the students did not have enough time to complete their tasks. He said that if students had had three or four days to do their home-taken assignment, almost all of them could have been able to do their assignment. However, this statement seemed to contradict his claim that the students would be voluntary to do their assignment mainly when they were told that it would be evaluated (given marks).

*To do their homework, students needed three days, four days, or even a week. That day, it was the second class, and I think the students were not ready to present. Before that, they were given an assignment. Since I gave grades for their papers, all of them did their assignment. And, it took me a week to mark their papers. All of the students did write because they were told it would be marked. If you tell them to submit it after three or four days, they will be ready.*

Elisabeth explained that there was always a great deal of resistance from the students whenever they are asked to do writing activities. She added that students dislike writing above all language skills, and this may be because of their poor language competency. Solomon expressed that he had over 20 years of teaching experience, and during his teaching career, he noticed that the students' interest to learn had decreased from time to time. There is a deep dislike cultivated over the years towards education that it requires a great deal of effort from the teachers to inspire students to attend lessons actively and responsibly.

### **1. Teacher Related Factors**

#### **Lack of Theoretical Orientation as a Barrier**

Another contextual factor that has been identified as having a significant influence on teaching writing is teachers' vague understanding of pedagogical approaches to the teaching of writing and what it takes to teach writing. In the semi-structured interview,

teachers were asked to explain the difference between a process-oriented approach and a product-oriented approach.

From their responses, it was possible to understand that they had shallow knowledge about the underlying assumptions of the different writing approaches and what makes one approach different from the other. For instance, Yohannes took into account the writing setting as a point of difference for the product and process approaches to the teaching of writing. For him, the process approach refers to the writing students perform in the classroom, and the product approach to the one done outside the classroom in the absence of their teachers' support. He said that the product approach gives students a chance to spend a lot of time writing their pieces, whereas the process approach is very limited in terms of time as it is practiced in the classroom. It seemed that his conceptualization of a process and product approach was not shaped by a theoretical foundation of writing approaches.

In another instance, Elisabeth classified writing approaches into three: process approach, accuracy-oriented approach, and fluency-oriented approach. She perceived that while the process approach helps writers to test and rediscover ideas by paying attention to the process as well as the product of the writing activity, accuracy-oriented, and fluency-oriented approaches help them to write accurately and fluently respectively. This indicates that there is inconsistency in her views about the product and process approaches to the teaching of writing.

Tsion viewed the process approach as a technique used to learn to write gradually, not at a time. She seemed to see the process approach from the point of view of the different specific skills that total to give power to the writer to be an efficient writer as time passes by. Concerning the product approach, like Elisabeth, Tsion thought that with a product approach, students learn to write without their teachers' support, and it is about fluency. She added that teachers who adopt the product approach simply instruct students to write without assessment for errors.

## **School Related Factors**

### **Large Class Size**

Another key factor that influenced the four teachers' practices in the writing classes was the class size and the physical set-up of classrooms. All of the teachers reported that the huge number of students in each classroom prevented them from giving the necessary support to their students. For example, Solomon stated that it was hard for him to give feedback to 70 to 80 students and that he opted to give model answers to his students. The challenge of large class sizes was a big concern to Elisabeth and Yohannes as well. Elisabeth explained that because of the large class size it was not possible for her to give feedback to each student and that her role was limited to giving lectures for most of the class time.

### **Minimal Instructional Time as a Barrier**

Another structural and systemic constraint that influenced teachers' beliefs and teaching practices in teaching writing was the inadequacy of the allocated time allocated to teach writing. Even though the teachers felt that the process approach was a good model for teaching writing, they expressed that they did not have time to fully apply it in the class-

room. The teachers often complained that the time allocated for this language skill was so meager that it was not possible to achieve course objectives. With a maximum of one and half hours every three or four weeks, they said, it was really difficult to pursue the course of process approach or integrated approaches like the process-genre approach. For example, in her first lesson about paragraph writing, Elisabeth wished to use a model text as an aid to enhance the process of learning to write a paragraph, but she explained to the researcher that she did not use a model text for that lesson fearing that they would run out of time before the students start writing if she had set time for reading through a model text.

*... I had the model text but I did not make use of it. The time was too short. It was only a forty-minute lesson. It was meant for two periods. That caused me a burden. If I had enough time, I could use the model text. (SRI, 1)*

When she was asked why she could not conduct two or more consecutive classes if it had not been possible to finish off the lesson in one period, she replied:

*That was possible but we do not have time to cover the syllabus. We started class late this year, so we have to run as fast as we could to cover the book. We teach reading, speaking listening, grammar, vocabulary, etc., and if we have to set extra time for writing lessons, we might not be able to finish what is in the syllabus. (SRI, 1)*

In a stimulated recall interview following lesson 1, Yohannes explained that because there was so little time, he could hardly get his students to write in the classroom. In another instance, he expressed his regret that he was not able to assist more than ten students just because of time constraints.

*For any writing class, we plan to explain the topic to the students, get them to practice writing, and give feedback on their papers. It takes a lot of time to accomplish all these things. It is very time-consuming and extremely tiresome to give feedback to over eighty students. In addition, students take a lot of time for the prewriting activities, and the lesson becomes over before they write their first draft.*

In summary, teachers in the study school recognize the important role writing played in language learning; nevertheless, they were not seen to have spent as much time as they would spend teaching reading much less time teaching writing skills when compared to other language skills.

In general, classroom practices depicted that they focused on language form and rhetorical organization, not on the process of writing. The writing lessons involved detailed explanations about grammar and rhetorical features of various texts followed by instructions for instant writing.

External and internal factors influenced the teaching of writing in the selected school. Based on the participants' responses from the stimulated-recall interview, it was possible to find out that the students' lack of time, large class size, lack of students' language proficiency, interests, and willingness to write seemed to be the most influential factors behind the teachers' decisions regarding the type of activities they used in the classroom.

## **Discussion of Findings**

To help guide the discussion, it is better to return to the research questions that the study sought to answer.

### **Q1. How do English language teachers at Fasiledes Secondary School teach EFL writing?**

The findings of the study showed that although there were some variations among the participants, they all pursued the same routine: directing students' attention to the focus of the lesson → explaining the rhetorical organization and features of a text type → leaving short notes on the board while explaining → winding the lesson → setting homework (telling students to write an essay on a topic) → collecting papers for feedback. It was observed offering explicit knowledge of text features was seen to be more important than employing the sub-processes of writing and engaging students in the actual writing. Although the prescribed approach to teaching writing is the process-genre approach, teachers resort to the product approach by focusing on the transmission of knowledge of text features.

The teachers' teaching approach in this study was similar to the teaching approach described in research studies of EFL writing teachers in China (You, 2004; Yang et al. 2006; Lee, 2008) and other Arab universities (Ezza, 2010). Chinese instructors focus on teaching students to write traditional three- to five-paragraph essays with the format of an introduction- body-conclusion (You, 2004); the focus of instruction is the written product, with students usually writing only one draft on a certain topic (Yang et al., 2006). In many Arab universities, writing teaching assumes a bottom-up approach, emphasizing the sentence and its constituents at the expense of the skills needed to write coherent paragraphs (Ezza, 2010; Khanalizadeh and Allami, 2012).

### **Q2. What are the contextual factors that constrain their practices while teaching writing in EFL classrooms?**

Several factors were identified to have affected the teachers' classroom practices in the context of the study. These include large class sizes, the inadequacy of instructional time, students' lack of language competence, lack of students' motivation and willingness to write, and lack of teachers' expertise to teach writing. Even though teachers may have wanted to fully adopt the process approach, their feeling that this approach needs a lot of time to implement it may have led them to teach differently. A second major influence comes from learners' lack of motivation to write was a central theme that was evidenced in the data. Based on the participants' reports, the students' interests and willingness to write seemed the most influential factor behind the teachers' decisions regarding the type of activities to use in the classroom. Indeed, it is hard to get students to improve their writing if they do not have personal goals to develop their writing skills. Leki (2001) notes that everyday difficulties of teaching EFL writing can include coping with large class sizes and time constraints and dealing with teachers' lack of experience teaching L2 writing. According to Harmer (2004), one of the problems of a process approach is that it takes a lot of time. On the other hand, Nunan (2015) recommends that teachers can devote class time to productive learning tasks by allowing them to write outside class after acquainting students with the content, grammar, vocabulary, and model of the kind of text they are to write ahead of the writing class. The teachers' failure to implement the process-genre approach in this study may be attributed to teachers' unfamiliarity with the different writing approaches. The data from stimulated recall interviews showed that

often teachers' decisions were not informed by a well-defined research base that would provide solid principles for practice. This finding proves Blease & Condy's (2015) study, which revealed that South African students' poor performance in writing has been mostly connected to teachers' lack of knowledge of effective writing approaches to encourage students to plan, draft, reflect and revise. Dornbrack & Atwood (2019) also confirmed that many teachers in EFL classrooms have a limited understanding of the writing approaches and as such, they use inappropriate writing strategies in their classrooms.

## **Conclusion**

Teachers' classroom practice involved a routine pattern of detailed explanations about rhetorical features of various types of texts followed by instructions to get students to write straight away or do writing assignments in situations where there was little time to do their writing.

The success or failure of teaching writing depends on many factors. First, it depends on the teachers' knowledge and understanding of the concept of writing and the approaches to teaching it. In this study, the teachers seemed to have no understanding of the process-genre approach they were expected to implement in their classrooms. Secondly, minimal instructional time and large class sizes affect teachers' teaching styles. Even though teachers may have wanted to fully adopt the process approach, their feeling that this approach needs a lot of time to implement it may have led them to teach differently. Additionally, learners' lack of motivation to write was a central theme that was evidenced in the data. Based on the participants' reports, the students' interests and willingness to write seemed the most influential factor behind the teachers' decisions regarding the type of activities to use in the classroom. Indeed, it is hard to get students to improve their writing if they do not have personal goals to develop their writing skills.

## **Implications**

Based on the findings of the study, the following implications were drawn.

By adopting project-based learning (Sarwar, 2001), it is possible to alleviate the problem of large class sizes and time constraints. Project-based learning is a voluntary collaborative or individual educational process initiated by a teacher to provide EFL learners with a context for meaningful use of the target language outside the classroom. The focal aims are to give them opportunities to become fluent and confident in using English by utilizing and expanding their existing language repertoire through projects.

Besides, the ministry of education needs to establish a professional development program that is more meaningful, sustainable, and effective in bringing about quality change in teachers' practice. Teacher education programs ought to consider updating English language teachers with contemporary and innovative pedagogical practices and philosophical underpinnings.

Teachers should also assist students to do their writing outside the classroom ahead of each writing lesson so that they can use the writing lesson time for productive learning tasks.

## **Acknowledgment**

I, the present researcher, am highly indebted to my advisors, Dr. Birhanu Simegn and Dr. Nuru Razik Maru for their guidance and invaluable comments from the onset to the completion of my dissertation project. I also would like to thank my colleagues and friends for reading, commenting on, and correcting the preliminary drafts of this study. Finally, my special thanks and heartfelt gratitude go to the teachers and students of Fasiledes Preparatory School who have participated in the data collection processes of the study.



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