RESEARCH ARTICLE

TO WHAT EXTEND DO WRITING INSTRUCTORS APPLY THE PROCESS APPROACH AT TERTIARY LEVEL? A SURVEY

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ABSTRACT

Writing instruction is a great concern at all levels .The process approach to writing is believed to address the lacunae in writing pedagogy. But, the notion of process approach to writing still remains at epistemological level and not at the application level. Similarly, the integration of multimedia materials for teaching writing is much spoken and written about at the theoretical level, but not practiced pedagogically. The first part of the study justifies the efficacy of process approach. The second part aims to identify the methods and materials adopted by writing instructors at tertiary level. A survey was conducted at 31 engineering colleges in and around Chennai to find out the existing practices in writing instruction. Previous studies in the area of writing pedagogy reveals that a study of this kind is not carried out before. There is conclusive evidence on the value of process approach in an ESL context. Previous studies claim that instructors at writing classrooms in an L2 situation adopt process approach. But the results of the study indicated that product oriented approach is still predominant in the Indian ESL classrooms. The study also showed that teachers resort to traditional materials such as blackboard and textbooks for teaching writing. Based on the findings of the survey the pitfalls in writing practices are identified and appropriate recommendations given. A paradigm shift from product to process oriented approach will foster writing skills. At the same time integrating multimedia tools during the stages of process approach will enhance the writing outcomes.

Key words: L2 writing; Process approach; Instructional materials; Multimedia.

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INTRODUCTION

Yanghee observes that there is a heavy emphasis on grammatical form and an overemphasis on final product in Korean universities. (1) The situation is same in the Indian context as well. According to Pratt, the issue of course content and materials needs to be addressed. He remarks, the Internet is an information-rich, easily accessed data source, but its potential to facilitate intellectual development needs to be harnessed. (3)Although there are multifarious in writing instruction, there are two major issues. They are use of inappropriate i) methods and ii) materials. This study makes an effort to identify the methods and materials adopted by teachers in the Indian Universities. To identify these issues a questionnaire was administered to Language instructors in and around Chennai. The objective of the Teacher's questionnaire is to elicit their views on the

approaches, methods and the materials used in the teaching of writing. It is assumed that process approach to writing is widely practiced at universities in ESL context. There is substantial evidence to justify the efficacy of process approach to writing instruction. Adopting a process approach will foster better writing skills. The study attempts to address the following research questions. They are

I.   Is process approach an efficacious approach to writing instruction at tertiary level?

II. Do teachers at tertiary level use appropriate methods and materials for teaching writing?

Evidence on efficacy of process approach.

There is enough empirical evidence to prove the efficacy of process approach. Munice observes that Process writing is often used as the methodology of choice on writing courses in EFL countries.(1) Atkinson notion of process approach is that it has sound conceptual basis. According to him, process approach is coherent and heuristic. Graham and Perin in their comprehensive report on effective Strategies to Improve Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High Schools sate that Process Writing Approach interweaves a number of writing instructional activities in a workshop environment that stresses extended writing opportunities, writing for authentic audiences, personalized instruction, and cycles of writing.(30)

According to (Parr 2013) Writing is a complex activity and there is no consensus on an appropriate teaching strategy in the research literature on writing. Over time, different approaches have been introduced in the language classroom, however it is the process approach that emerged in the 1970s that has had the most positive impact (Macarthur *et al* 277). Tribble defines process approach as an approach to the teaching of writing which stresses the creativity of the individual writer, and which pays attention to the development of good writing practices rather than the imitation of models' (160).Process approach is 'learning how to learn' through inquiry rather than through memorizing of knowledge(Tickoo 430). The aim of the process writing

approach, as described by Hedge is to help learners to gain greater control over the cognitive strategies involved in composing. This means that the principles of process approach will enable the learners to write freely without any inhibitions. Hyland feels that "the process approach to writing emphasizes the writer as an independent producer of texts and gives a clear framework on what the teachers should do to help learners perform a writing task" (10). Nunan (1991) makes a striking comparison between product and process approaches. He remarks that, in the "product-oriented approach "the teachers focus on the "end result" or the written paper of the students. In the classroom of the product-oriented writing, students are engaged in such activities as "imitating, copying and transforming models of correct language." Students are believed to have to start at a small unit of grammar and sentence writing in order to be successful at the paragraph level. While in the "process approach," he points out that the teachers focus more on such "various classroom activities" as idea gathering, group work, and conferencing which are presumably important elements that a writer has to go through when writing (68).

Recently, the teaching of writing has moved away from a concentration on written product to an emphasis on the process of writing. Thus, writers ask themselves: How do I write this? How do I get started? In this approach, students are trained to generate ideas for writing, think of the purpose and audience, and write multiple drafts in order to present written products that communicate their own ideas. Teachers who use this approach give students time to tray ideas and feedback on the content of what they write in their drafts. As such, writing becomes a process of discovery for the students as they discover new ideas and new language forms to express them. A writing process approach requires that teachers give students greater responsibility for, and ownership of, their own learning. Students make decisions about genre and choice of topics, and collaborate as they write (Raimes 10).

There is a need for examining the effectiveness of implementing the process approach especially at secondary and tertiary levels as the learners in this stage will be willing to indulge in a range of tasks which are collaborative in nature. Braaksma, Rijlaarsdam et.al confirm this view. They say that, process writing refers to a broad range of strategies that include pre writing activities such as defining audience, using a variety of resources, planning the writing as well as drafting and revising. These activities collectively referred to as process oriented instruction approach writing as problem solving (1).Research findings from most studies on the effectiveness of the process approach espouse that it is in general an effective approach in helping students improve their writing skills and attitudes towards writing at the tertiary, secondary and primary school levels (Cheung 1999, Cheung and Chan 1994).Based on the above studies it is clear that process oriented approach is an effective method for teaching writing. Therefore, the first research question is answered positively. Despite its efficiency is it

practiced at tertiary level? To address the second research question a survey method was followed.

Methodology

Information gathering survey design was followed. There were three components for this study as suggested by presser et al. They are i) sampling stage, ii) implementation stage and iii) analysis stage. (44). Fifty engineering colleges were chosen for this purpose. Finally 38 samples were shortlisted as they fully responded to all the questions.12 samples were non responsive and partially responsive. The respondents were precontacted and informed consent was obtained from them.

Methods adopted by writing instructors at tertiary level:

The first part of the questionnaire intends to identify the methods followed by the teachers in the writing classroom. The questionnaire was based on the principles of product and process approach. A three point scale was used to analyze the data. They are briefly given in the table below. This section had ten questions.

Table 1: Methods followed by teachers for teaching writing

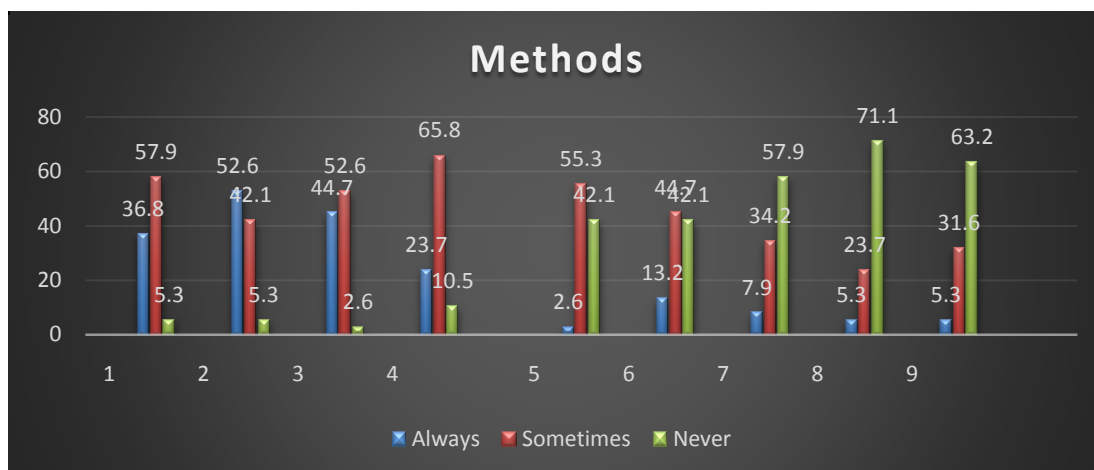| S.No	Methods adopted by teachers	Always	Some times	Never	Mean	STD
1	I have discussions and brainstorming sessions before writing tasks	2 (5.3)	22 (57.9)	14 (36.8)	2.31	0.57
2	I used samples related to the teaching component before the writing tasks	20 (52.6)	16 (42.1)	2 (5.3)	2.47	0.60
3	I give them sample sentence structures	17 (44.7)	20 (52.6)	1 (2.6)	2.42	0.55
4	I give them vocabulary lists related to the writing tasks	9 (23.7)	25 (65.8)	4 (10.5)	2.13	0.57
5	I monitor my students during the writing stage and give them feedback.	1 (2.6)	21 (55.3%)	16 (42.1)	2.39	0.54
6	I encourage group work and collaboration during the writing phase	5 (13.2)	17 (44.7)	16 (42.1)	2.28	0.69
7	I make the students write more than one draft	3 (7.9)	13 (34.2)	22 (57.9)	2.26	0.60
8	I encourage them to peer edit.	2 (5.3)	9 (23.7)	27 (71.1)	2.18	0.51
9	I encourage them to revise their work	2 (5.3)	12 (31.6)	24 (63.2)	2.26	0.55

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Fig .1 Methods adopted by teachers for teaching writing.

The blue bars represent always, red represents sometimes and green represents never. The analysis of every question is discussed below.

Question 1

Do you have discussions and brainstorming sessions before the writing tasks?

Based on the mean and standard deviation frequency was identified. Only 5.3 percent of the teachers always had discussion and brainstorming sessions with their students sometimes. However, 57.9 percent of the teachers had brainstorming sessions and discussions sometimes. 36.8 percentage of them never had discussion and brainstorming. The response percentage indicates the fact that ample time is not invested in prewriting stages.

Question 2

Do you give your learners samples related to the writing tasks?

Around 52% of the teachers have responded that they used samples for writing always and 42% of the teachers used samples sometimes. The teachers who never used it are only 5%.It is quite evident that relatively high percentage of the teachers prefer to use models.

Question 3

Do you give them sample structures related to the teaching item?

44% of the teachers preferred to give sample structures to their students always and 42 percent practiced it sometimes. Only one percent of the teachers never used sample structures. It could be inferred that an overwhelming majority of

them preferred to give sample structures during writing tasks.

Question 4

Do you give them vocabulary list related to the teaching item?

23.7% of the teachers always prefer to give a vocabulary list related to the writing task.65.8% of teachers prefer to give vocabulary list some times. Only 10% of the teachers never practiced it. Based on the responses from questions two, three and four it could be inferred that teachers at tertiary level use product oriented approaches.

Question 5

Do you monitor your students during the writing stage and give them feedback.

Only one percent of the teachers have stated that they always monitor their students and give feedback to them during the writing stage. However, 55% of the teachers have stated that they use feedback sometimes. 42% of the teachers have indicated that they do not give feedback during the writing stages. It is clear from the responses that most of the teachers do not prefer to give feedback to their learner during the writing stages.

Question-6

Do you encourage group work and collaboration during the writing phase?

In case of group work and collaboration only 13.2 percent of the teachers have used it on a regular basis.44.7% of the teachers have practised it sometimes.42.1 % of the teachers have never used feedback. Based on the responses it can be assumed that only very few teachers at tertiary level prefer group work and collaborative activities.

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Question-7

Do you make your students write more than one draft?

A significantly low percentage of teachers i.e. 7.9% of teachers always preferred to make their students write more than one draft. A moderate 34.2% of the teachers encouraged it sometimes and 57.9 % of the teachers never practised it. It is quite clear from the analysis that most of the teachers do not encourage their students to write more than one draft.

Question 8.

Do you encourage your students to peer edit?

Only 5.3 % of the teachers always encouraged their students to peer edit their drafts. 23.7% of the teachers encouraged peer editing sometimes and a majority of them 71.1% of them never allowed the students to peer edit. It is quite clear that peer editing is not encouraged in the classrooms.

Question 9.

Do you encourage the students to revise their work?

In case of revision of drafts only 5.3% of the teachers encouraged their students to revise their drafts always.31.6% of the teachers encouraged their students sometimes. A

significantly high percent of teachers i.e. 63.2% of the teachers never practiced it. From the analysis of methods it is evident that teachers predominantly adopted product-oriented approaches. Process oriented strategies were not adopted by most of the teachers at the tertiary level. They also did not prefer constructivist or collaborative learning activities. The responses for questions one to four indicated that the teachers at tertiary level used product oriented approaches to teaching writing. On the other hand questions five to nine clearly indicated that teachers at tertiary level do not prefer process oriented strategies. It is clear that teachers at the tertiary level resort to inappropriate methods for teaching writing. The next part of the questionnaire was related to the use of teaching aids in the writing classrooms.

Use of teaching aids in writing classes

The second part of the student questionnaire aims to investigate the teaching materials used by the teachers in the writing classrooms. The objective is to find the extent to which the teachers used multimedia materials in their writing classes. There are three questions in this segment that are based on a three point scale. The results are tabulated below.

Table-2: Materials used for teaching writing.

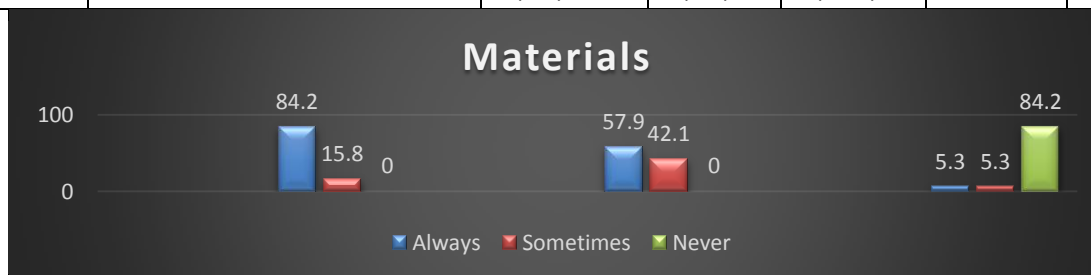| S.No	Materials used	Always	Some times	Never	Mean	STD
1	I use chalk board for teaching writing	32 (84.2)	6 (15.8)	0 (0.0)	2.15	0.36
2	I use course books for teaching writing	22 (57.9)	16 (42.1)	0 (0.0)	2.42	0.50
3	I use multimedia resources	2 (5.3)	2 (5.3)	32 (84.2)	2.05	0.56

Fig 2 Materials used by teachers for teaching writing.

The blue bars indicates the use of chalkboards, the red ones represent the use of course books and the green ones the use of multimedia resources. An overwhelming majority of the teachers i.e. 84.2% have stated that they always use chalk boards in the class for teaching

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writing.16.2 % of the teachers have stated that they sometimes use chalk boards .Apparently none of the teachers have stated that they don't use the chalk board. It is quite clear from the analysis that chalk boards are mostly preferred for teaching writing. The second question was related to the use of course books for teaching writing.57.9% of the teachers have stated that they always use course books for teaching writing.42.1 % of the teachers have said that they sometimes use course books for teaching writing. None of the teachers have said that they never use course books. It can be assumed that text books and chalk boards are the teaching aids that teachers rely on for teaching writing. The last question was related to the use of multimedia resources such as videos audios and visuals in writing classrooms. Only 5.3 % of the teachers have stated they always use multimedia aids in the writing classes. Similarly, 5.3% of teachers have stated that they sometimes use multimedia aids Majority of the teachers i.e.84% of them have stated that they never use multimedia aids in the writing classes. It is understood that most of the teachers did not prefer to use technology in writing classes despite its availability. It could be concluded that the reason for the poor writing skills is not only because of the inappropriate methods but also because of the uninspiring materials used**.**

Recommendations

Content generation and scaffolding activities at the prewriting stage will lead to better writing outcomes. Multimedia input in the form of visuals, audio and video clips would trigger not only the cognitive but also the affective filters. The writing instructors should be willing to embrace technology and apply it during writing instruction. Pedagogy should support technology and not the other way. The instructors should have a clear understanding of student's strengths and limitations during the writing process. More attention should be given to students who require extra support. Collaborative groups should be formed judiciously and should have a right mix of students based on proficiency level. There should be ideal pacing of tasks. The students should be exposed to authentic materials related to the genre taught. They should be provided guidance during the writing process and not necessarily at the end. The feedback needs to be specific. Since individual feedback is time consuming feedback could be given to groups based on their performance. They should also be provided guided help for structuring and for applying the conventions such as grammar, punctuation and vocabulary. Guided peer editing should be encouraged and rubric for evaluation need to be given.

Conclusion

Effective strategies for initiating, regulating and evaluating is necessary to foster writing skills. Knowledge of the learner, theoretical knowledge, use of technology and pedagogical expertise are prerequisites for effective writing instruction. Instructional approaches may change according to the genre taught. Although process approach cannot be applied for all genres it nevertheless, provides a good matrix for writing instruction at tertiary level.

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