

## **English Language Teachers' Perception of Teaching Writing in Nepali High Schools**

Madhukar Pandey<sup>7</sup>

### **Abstract**

Writing is a part of learning a language in any academic institution. As teaching writing is a process of learning this article tries to dig out the reasons why teaching writing is becoming complex and rigid in Nepali high school classrooms. In this study, for the purpose of data collection, ten Nepali high school English teachers were interviewed and they shared their experiences of teaching writing skills in their classrooms. The study found some issues that make teaching writing more complex: central- design curriculum, a lack of resources and training, and a lack of English competency of the students in the classrooms. Moreover, students' performance in grammar, word combination, and sentence composition is rather low that does not encourage students to write. Hence, teaching writing in Nepali high school classrooms is considered a complex genre.

**Keywords:** Central-Design Curriculum, Flexibility, Educators, English Writing, Proficiency

### **Introduction**

Writing is one of the best tools for expressing our human feelings and understanding. Agesta and Cahyono (2017) state that in order for the meaning to be conveyed, concepts are transformed into symbols or signs through the process of writing. Teaching writing is a complicated genre not only for Nepali school teachers; it is also a tricky issue for university educators. In Nepali academia, there is no such government-designed curriculum that focuses on writing activities. This article concentrates on: How Nepali school teachers deal with the concept of teaching writing in the classrooms?

---

<sup>7</sup> Mr Pandey teaches at Nepal Mega College, Kathmandu. Email: madhukarpandey07@gmail.com.

Whether they involve the students in teaching writing to students even though the curriculum does not directly tell them to involve students in teaching writing, how do they deliver their writing activities in the classrooms? Writing is a vital skill for students' success and it has to be taught more in class. Teachers and students can track their development by using portfolios as assessment tools. It takes time to learn to write in a second language, and both the teacher and the students seemed to appreciate the kids' accomplishments and growth (Andrei et al., 2019). Purcell et al. (2013) found that teachers also emphasize that writing can be defined in terms other than the written assignments made in a classroom environment. Many teachers in focus groups observed that students write in a variety of ways outside of the classroom in addition to the "formal" writing they perform for the class, much of it using digital tools and platforms like texting and online social networking. But most people concur that among students, "writing" still refers to textual expression done on one's own time rather than assignments they must do for school.

**Challenges of teaching writing.** In the Nepali high-school syllabus, there are no specific teaching writing courses. Although students write several letters and applications, they do not concentrate on writing. Firstly, teachers should be competent in the subject matter even when students get involved in the process of writing. Cumming (2001) argues that as people learn to write in a second language, their written texts exhibit more sophisticated, complex syntax and morphology, a greater range and specificity of vocabulary, and an improved command over conventional rhetorical forms and ways of signaling the relations of their texts to other texts. In this connection, Nepali students learn to write as a second language. As a result, writing becomes more difficult for not only the students but also the teachers. Nawas (2018) affirms that it also shows that language issues, mechanical errors, writing development issues, and cognitive issues are the students' barriers to increasing their writing skills. Lack of ideas, vocabulary, and writing structure become the students' problems in composing their writing. In addition to language proficiency, a further obstacle to learning writing in Nepali classrooms is a lack of appropriate learning resources. Teachers teach in the classrooms for scoring good marks

in the examination and so do the students. Therefore, learning to write is becoming taboo in the Nepali high-school community. Dornbrack and Dixon (2014) argue on the context of South Africa that the teaching of writing has not received the same attention dedicated to it as reading instruction, many teachers are less skilled in the teaching of writing, and time constraints and fair evaluation remain difficult topics, as is the case in many nations.

**Teachers' perception on teaching writing.** Students in the Nepali high-school classrooms are likely to avoid the writing sessions, so it might have several reasons, such as a lack of proficiency in the English language, vocabulary, and even grammar. Students aren't the only ones who don't want to do the writing sessions; teachers and school administrators are also hesitant to conduct these classes. Along with the teachers, students, and administrators, parents are not aware of conducting these even non-credit courses for their children in a more recent study, Knoch et al. (2015), focused solely on writing, discovered that students' writing did not improve because teachers gave students relatively little feedback on the linguistic components of their projects and tended to emphasize the subject content when grading assignments. According to Hapsari (2018) language features including lexicon, syntax, as well as structure and grammar, are of particular importance to students who solely study English as a topic in the classroom as they build their writing skills. As a result, teachers and students should devote a lot of time to proofreading the content and fixing any language mistakes.

Moreover, in Nepal, there is a single syllabus that works across the country. The Curriculum Development Center (CDC) develops a curriculum in consultation with different experts for all school students across the country. In this curriculum development process, teachers are not involved in making or designing any kind of syllabus. Whatever they receive from the CDC, they should accept it and teach accordingly. Teachers' active participation in making the syllabus is one of the crucial issues Nepali academia should look into. Even the students' feedback plays an important role while designing the syllabus. However, the government of Nepal is not likely to adopt this practice.

Prashai (2008) argues that teaching writing skills in lower secondary grades is currently plagued by a number of issues, including a lack of physical facilities, the lengthy and uninteresting nature of textbooks, ineffective supervision, students' poor English backgrounds, crowded classrooms, a lack of suitable teaching materials, students' poor participation in classroom activities, and the practice of copying the notes of more capable students when completing homework. Lack of adequate teaching materials plays another factor that limits the performance of the teachers in classrooms. Teachers must be qualified and competent in order to help students develop their reading and communication abilities in the first foreign language (Lenyai, 2011).

### **Research Methodology**

This study adopted qualitative methods for data collection from ten purposively selected secondary level English teachers from five schools in Dang District. The teachers were asked several questions about teaching writing in their classrooms. The method of setting up the questionnaire was by sharing Google Forms with the teachers. For example, how often do they teach writing? Does their school administration support them in conducting the program in writing? Is there any specific writing course/lesson in the curriculum that they have been teaching? All the respondents put their answers on the Google Drive platform. They were given twelve days to complete that Google form. When all the participants submitted the form to the researcher, he analyzed individual responses. First, all respondents' opinions are broken down individually and grouped based on the themes, and the researcher notes the points about the difficulties that occur while teaching writing in Nepali high school classrooms. Similarly, the researcher also finds out the teaching materials through the responses that are used for teaching writing.

### **Results and Discussion**

After analyzing the data, the researcher found some points: Due to the central-design curriculum, teaching writing in Nepali high schools is a complex issue; teachers do not have sufficient teaching materials, and they do not get opportunities to participate in

training in teaching writing. Similarly, the level of English of the students is very low, so they are unable to express their opinion through writing.

**Inflexibility of central-design curriculum.** High school English teachers' experiences give a panoramic view of the teacher-students situation on teaching writing skill in Nepali classrooms. Teachers, in the questionnaire, expressed their opinions straightforwardly without any hesitation. One of the participants;

*“I want to do many new practices in my classroom. However, our course does not allow us to do these activities since I have to prepare them for the examination and they need to score high, and the administration, parents, and even peers are not likely to encourage these”.*

In this research, there were ten respondents almost all of them were saying, “because of the rigid syllabus system, we are unable to apply our innovative ideas inside the classrooms”. In the central-design syllabus, teachers are always under pressure to complete their course by the due date. Teachers, in fact, teach in the classrooms not to make students competent but to complete the syllabus, so teachers are not encouraged to teach and even learn new ideas in the classrooms even if they want to give new things to the students. Maphosa and Mutopa (2012) argue that the majority of developing nations with centrally planned curricula employ a center-periphery strategy in which instructors are given the responsibility for implementing the material. Teachers, who carry out curriculum, nonetheless have the freedom to modify it to fit the circumstances they encounter in classrooms. Some respondents in the questionnaire argue about the flexibility of the courses. However, they are not clear how they have applied for the position in the classrooms. Three teachers put their opinion by saying that they are developing their course with travelogue writing, essay writing, and even story composition. However, they accept that their course is not flexible enough to create these kinds of activities in the classrooms. There is a lot of pressure on them to finish the course early so they have more time to practice and review it for the final exam. The teachers' main focus is on assisting the students in getting high marks on their final exam. As a result, the teachers use techniques

that may help their students get good exam scores (Karki, 2019). Therefore, in the survey, teachers opine that teaching writing cannot be more effective unless the syllabus is made more teacher-friendly and flexible. In this connection, Bista (2011) argues that the textbooks are developed by the Curriculum Development Center for all grade levels. English and other topic textbooks are prepared by educators and subject matter specialists in Nepal for all public-levels. Despite the fact that textbooks are routinely updated and altered, they are not suitable for Nepal's diverse population of students. For this reason, Nepali high school teachers and students encounter different complexities while teaching/learning English.

One of the respondents argues in the questionnaire that the inflexibility of the curriculum makes students rigid and less creative since the course is limited. Due to the fixed and rigid curriculum, students cannot apply their creative ideas to learning. Therefore, not only are the teachers facing problems because of the central-design curriculum, but also the students are losing creativity, enthusiasm, and proactiveness towards study. Another respondent writes: students only focus on completing the courses, so they are not taught to focus on the skills. Likewise, students are used to pre-designed knowledge so that they do not need to go for new findings. Students become docile and inactive in the classes because they are not ready for the new knowledge. In this connection, Rimal (2018) states that in Nepal, experts are being given more authority and responsibility for developing curricula. The teachers' role is, however, minimized in all phases of the curriculum development process, including design, development, implementation, and feedback. The process of developing curricula should be seen as one that satisfies social demands, enhances student learning outcomes, and advances general knowledge. However, there is no presence of any stakeholders in designing the course and curriculum. Since the Nepalese curriculum is not all-inclusive, it does not encourage creativity, innovative ideas, or the right kind of interest in writing from students.

**Lacking sufficient teaching/learning materials.** One of the respondents writes in her reply that I know some modern teaching techniques that I want to apply in my

classrooms, but I cannot practice these trends and techniques due to a lack of teaching materials. Most of the people who filled out the questionnaire said that their schools do not have materials that improve the quality of teaching or administrators who have the right attitude to help teaching and learning. Another respondent mentioned that "many students come to the schools barefoot, so how can we imagine our schools having sufficient teaching materials? This is one of the bitter realities that teachers, even though they are ready to work, cannot make the session highly effective. Not only are teachers deprived of the required materials but also of necessary recourses: the library, the internet, books, pens, and pencils. A revolution in how we approach teaching and learning is necessary for the efficient use of technology. Restructuring universities and schools, or altering the way educational institutions are planned, managed, and organized, is necessary as part of that transformation (Sife et al., 2007). Training keeps teachers updated on the course and it also gives new insight into the teaching strategies. Likewise, one of the respondents writes that one of the problems with our education is that teachers don't get regular training.

Besides students, another major stakeholder is students in the Nepali high schools, who have to struggle with the scarcity of books, pens, and pencils. In addition to lacking basic needs, due to the pathetic economic situation of their parents, they are compelled to think about their survival. The majority of community school students come up with these circumstances. Many respondents write that "my students never get a set of books on time," which is why teaching writing in Nepali classrooms is challenging.

**Students' low English proficiency.** The majority of the respondents argue in the questionnaire that the English proficiency of their students is quite low, so students do not show their interest in developing their writing skills. Due to the low English level, students cannot write, read, and grasp the meaning of sentences. Parajuli (2016) states that the level of Nepali high school students is very low, so that students do not grasp the essence of the teaching in the classrooms. As there are two types of teaching administration in Nepal, comparatively, community schools' students are less competent than private school students. Students in the classrooms come up even with basic knowledge of the English

language. Therefore, the level of the English language remains low. Although some of my students attempt to write in English, they fail to express the meaning that they intend to deliver, as one of the respondents expresses in the answer to the questionnaire Kumarappan (2015) writes that while learning to write, they need to develop proper vocabulary, syntax, and grammar. The use of language learning strategies has received greater attention from educators and researchers than teaching strategies. Additionally, these researchers have discovered that a variety of elements, such as English proficiency level, learning situations, learner characteristics, educational background, culture, and experiences, have a role in how language learning strategies are used.

Learning new words gives a new avenue for new learners. In the course of learning to write, students should, first of all, learn the words so that they can express their concepts through writing. The majority of respondents in the questionnaire commented that one of the barriers in teaching writing is insufficient words. Those who are good at connecting words can compose a variety of sentences. Therefore, learning to write means acquiring new words. Camilleri and Botting (2013) argue that measures of vocabulary, particularly receptive vocabulary, are commonly used as indications of language aptitude and academic success in educational, therapeutic, and research contexts. They frequently form a component of the battery of tests used to diagnose language disorders and impairments. Besides collecting words, grammar is another component that one should know for writing. One of the respondents writes in the questionnaire: Due to their poor English background, my students cannot compose grammatically correct sentences. Therefore, grammar is another vital aspect that a writer should know about.

## **Conclusion**

By analyzing the respondents' opinions, the researcher came to the conclusion that teaching writing in Nepali classrooms is the toughest task for all stakeholders: teachers, students, and school administrators. Although Nepali high school teachers want to make their classes more interactive and dynamic, they are unable to do so due to a variety of constraints. Moreover, in Nepali classrooms, the central-design syllabus is one of the major

reasons that has made teaching writing more complex and rigid. Due to the central-design syllabus, neither students nor teachers can go outside the four walls of the books, so teaching writing never became an intensive part of Nepali classrooms.

In addition to the syllabus, lack of teaching materials and necessary teachers' training are some of the major problems that Nepali English teachers and students encounter. For the additional writing courses, students do not have books and materials, and the teachers do not have access to the library, teaching materials, or even prescribed textbooks. For this reason, teaching writing in Nepali high school classroom is difficult and even complex. Besides, Students' level of English matters a lot for developing the writing skills. Although concentration on English language skills is high in Nepali academia, level of English of the high school students is critically low. Along with grammar students are weak in syntax and word combination.

### References:

- Agesta, S., & Cahyono, B. Y. (2017). Effect of process-genre approach on the Indonesian EFL writing achievement across personality. *International Journal of English Language and Linguistics Research*, 5(3), 39-48.
- Andrei, E., Ellerbe, M., & Kidd, B. (2019). "What am I going to do?" A veteran teacher's journey of teaching writing to newcomer English language learners. *TESOL Journal*, 10(2), e00413.
- Bista, K. (2011). Teaching English as a Foreign/Second Language in Nepal: Past and Present. *Online Submission*, 11(32), 1-9.
- Camilleri, B., & Botting, N. (2013). Beyond static assessment of children's receptive vocabulary: the dynamic assessment of word learning (DAWL). *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders*, 48(5), 565-581.
- Cumming, A. (2001). Learning to write in a second language: Two decades of research. *International journal of English studies*, 1(2), 1-23.
- Dornbrack, J., & Dixon, K. (2014). Towards a more explicit writing pedagogy: The complexity of teaching argumentative writing. *Reading & Writing-Journal of the Reading Association of South Africa*, 5(1), 1-8.
- Gautam, P. (2019). Writing skill: An instructional overview. *Journal of NELTA Gandaki*, 2, 74-90.

- Hapsari, E. W., & Sukavatee, P. (2018). Second language writing instruction: A recent practice in Indonesia. *Journal of Linguistic and English Teaching*, 3(1), 24-48.
- Iftanti, E. (2016). Improving students' writing skills through writing journal articles. *IAIN Tulungagung Research Collections*, 8(1), 1-22.
- Karki, T. (2019). Writing instruction in secondary schools: Unraveling practices and challenges. *Journal of NELTA Gandaki*, 1, 108-118.
- Knoch, U., May, L., Macqueen, S. S., Pill, J., & Storch, N. (2016). Transitioning from university to the workplace: Stakeholder perceptions of academic and professional writing demands.
- Kunasaraphan, K. (2015). English learning strategy and proficiency level of the first-year students. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 197, 1853-1858.
- Maphosa, C., & Mutopa, S. (2012). Teachers' awareness of their role in planning and implementing school-based curriculum innovation. *The anthropologist*, 14(2), 99-106.
- Nawas, A. (2018). Contextual teaching and learning (ctl) approach through react strategies on improving the students' critical thinking in writing.
- Lenyai, E. (2011). First Additional Language Teaching in the Foundation Phase of Schools in Disadvantaged Areas. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 1(1), 68-81.
- Prashain, K. P. (2008). *Problems faced by English teachers in teaching writing skill* (Doctoral dissertation, Faculty of English Education).
- Purcell, K., Buchanan, J., & Friedrich, L. (2013). The impact of digital tools on student writing and how writing is taught in schools. *Washington, DC: Pew Research Center*, 16.
- Sife, A., Lwoga, E., & Sanga, C. (2007). New technologies for teaching and learning: Challenges for higher learning institutions in developing countries. *International journal of education and development using ICT*, 3(2), 57-67.
- Timsina, L. N. (2021). Challenges of Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Nepal. *Researcher: A Research Journal of Culture and Society*, 5(1), 68-82.