

The Effects of Aligning Teachers' Instructional Practices with Students' Preferred Methods on the Improvement of Writing Skills

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the impact of aligning teachers' instructional practices with students' preferred methods on improving students' writing skills. The study utilized a mixed method approach, including a descriptive case study and quasi experimental designs. The case study was used to identify experimental students' preferences for writing instructional methods and feedback provision styles, using questionnaires and interviews as survey tools. Then, the study identified students' preferences through a descriptive study and implemented an intervention to assess the impact of aligning teachers' writing instruction with students' preferred methods and styles, using a quasi-experimental research design to improve students' writing skills. Data obtained from experiment and questionnaires were analyzed using quantitative methods. That is, questionnaires and the results of experiments was coded and filled in to SPSS version 23. Then, different statistical analysis such as frequency, percentage, T test, Person R was applied to SPSS data. The result of statistical analysis was presented in the tables and graphs. A pre-test was administered to both groups, requiring students to write three different paragraphs. The result of the independent-Samples T-Test for the pre-test data demonstrated no significant differences between the two groups in terms of paragraph structure, quality, and language ($df = 92$, t -value, p -value $> .05$), indicating comparable writing performance at the outset. The t -value and p -values for the groups in the post test were -3.883 and $.000$. This shows that there is significant difference between the control and experimental groups with regard to the structure of their paragraph writings ($df = 92$, t -value $< p$ -value $> .05$). Structure difference is 12.98 which show the effect size is strong. The experimental group significantly improved paragraph writing performance, demonstrating improvements in structure, quality, and language, and demonstrating substantial gains in writing skills after the intervention. The study reveals that students who learned paragraph writing through a process approach, based on their instructional preferences, performed better than those who followed traditional methods, emphasizing the importance of adapting teaching materials.

Keywords: Writing Skills, Instructional Methods, Process Approach, Quasi-Experimental Design, Student Preferences, and Paragraph Writing

Introduction

The global significance of the English language has led to the development of various specialized areas such as English for Academic Purposes (EAP), English for Science and Technology (EST), Business English, and more. Hossain (2013) observes that students in schools, colleges, and universities often formally study EAP to meet academic demands.

Writing, a crucial skill for academic success, serves as a primary means for students to express their understanding and is used for assignments, reports, and research papers. As Coffin (2003) explains, writing lies at the core of teaching and learning in higher education, catering to various academic objectives and contexts. In today's globalized world, writing skills are essential, ranging from mastering specific disciplines to advancing career prospects (Hyland, 2003). However, writing remains one of the most challenging skills to develop, impacting students' academic success when not mastered (Tan, 2011).

Writing is fundamentally a communication process wherein authors convey their ideas through structured words, sentences, and paragraphs (Zekarias, 2019). For Zekarias (2019), writing is coherent arrangement of words, sentences and paragraphs structured according to a system of rules. It involves sub-skills like grammar, organization, and punctuation and requires conscious effort and extensive practice to master (Ghufron, 2017). According to Ghufron (2017), writing is not innate that comes naturally; rather it can be learned and be improved through a lot of hard work and practice. Zinsser (2016) emphasizes that effective writing depends on both content and form, which are inseparable in clear communication. When we talk about how writing is developed as Ghufron (2017) reports, it is a learned skill not inborn. To develop it, learners need appropriate practice. To practice and improve the skill, writing lessons and feedback provision styles should base on the learners preferences (Aridah et al., 2017). Writing instruction is therefore structured as a process, including stages like brainstorming, drafting, revising, and editing (Diab, 2005). Despite this, Ur (2008) notes that many Ethiopian students overlook these stages, often skipping critical steps like planning and revising.

Ethiopian university students are tasked with numerous academic writing activities necessary for their academic and future professional success. Yet, research indicates widespread deficiencies in their writing skills. Kassahun (2015) and Abebe (2017) report that students often fail to produce texts of the required quality, partly due to ineffective instructional methods and limited emphasis on the writing process. Moreover, Mulu (2019) and Hika (2017) reveal that many students enter university with weak writing skills, a problem exacerbated by teachers' reliance on non-communicative grammar instruction.

The effectiveness of writing instruction can be influenced by whether teaching methods align with students' preferences. Rambe (2019) and Agustrianita et al. (2019) argue that mismatches between teaching styles and students' learning preferences can hinder progress, while alignment can foster better outcomes and positive attitudes. In Ethiopian EFL classrooms, teachers' feedback styles may not align with what students find most helpful, reducing feedback effectiveness (Diab, 2005).

There are a number of national studies which show gaps and confirm the low standard of most university students' and secondary school students' writing skills for example, Kassahun (2015) identifies that most students at secondary school level do not produce written texts which meet the required standard. As to this work, one of the reasons is the less attention given to the process approach in the teaching materials. This implies that in their approach to teaching writing, writing teachers could not help their students to practice writing independently due to the limitations in the teaching materials. Furthermore, Abebe (2017) reports in his study that most Grade Twelve students are unable to write a single meaningful sentence let alone large texts like paragraphs or essays. Similarly, Mulu (2019) and Hika (2017) state that most students who join Addis Ababa University hardly produce paragraphs or essays which meet the required standard. Students fail to produce paragraphs and essays of a good command for different reasons. Elbashir (2023), for example, argues that the major cause for the low achievement of students in their writing is the failure of implementers/teachers to employ the process approach in their writing classes. Mulu (2019) states reasons for poor performance in writing as teachers' failure to teach grammar communicatively so that learners develop confidence in their writing.

The National studies reveal low writing standards among university and secondary school students due to lack of process approach in teaching materials, teachers' failure to apply effective strategies, and lack of proper guidance and motivation. Drawing from over two decades of teaching experience, the researcher observed persistent writing deficiencies among Ethiopian students. These gaps may be due to teaching methods that do not align with students' preferences, hindering their ability to learn effectively. Therefore, this study aims to identify students' preferred writing and feedback methods and examine whether aligning instructional practices with these preferences could enhance writing outcomes.

2. Research Design and Methodology

2.1 Setting of the Study

This study was conducted at Ambo University, located in Ethiopia, selected due to the researcher's extensive experience teaching at this institution for over eleven years. The researcher's long-term engagement with students at Ambo University provided valuable insights into the common challenges that students face, particularly in the area of writing. Over the years, the researcher observed consistent issues with students' writing skills, especially in the context of academic writing. These persistent problems in writing, coupled with the researcher's familiarity with the student body, made Ambo University an ideal setting for this study.

2.2 Design of the Study

The study utilized a mixed method approach, including a descriptive case study and quasi experimental designs. The case study was used to identify experimental students' preferences for writing instructional methods and feedback provision styles, using questionnaires and interviews as survey tools. Then, the study identified students' preferences through a descriptive study and implemented an intervention to assess the impact of aligning teaching writing instruction with students' preferred styles, using a quasi-experimental research design to improve their writing skills.

2.3 Sample and Sampling Techniques

The participants in this study consisted of ninety-two first-year students enrolled in the "Communicative English Skills II" course at Ambo University during the 2022 academic year. The sample was selected purposively from a pool of 20 sections of first-year social science students, based on the researcher's observations of widespread writing challenges among first-year students. A purposive sampling technique was employed because the researcher was familiar with the students' writing difficulties, which helped identify a relevant and representative sample for the study.

The researcher was assigned to teach two sections, Section 14 and Section 21, each comprising 46 students. Since a quasi-experimental design allows for non-randomized groups, Section 14 was designated as the control group, and Section 21 as the experimental

group. This group assignment was based on the researcher's teaching schedule and the established practice of using intact groups in quasi-experimental studies.

2.4 Data Collection Instruments

Three instruments were used to collect data in this study, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of students' preferences and writing performance: questionnaire, interview and tests.

- **Questionnaire:** A questionnaire was developed and administered to both the experimental and control groups. The purpose of the questionnaire was to assess students' preferences on teaching methods for writing and feedback provision styles. The students rated the extent to which they preferred various instructional approaches, which helped identify their methodological preferences.
- **Interview:** In addition to the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were conducted with students from both groups. Semi-structured interviews were chosen for their flexibility, allowing participants to explore topics in depth. Interviews provide a more in-depth understanding of complex issues compared to questionnaires, making them a valuable tool for exploring students' preferences. In this regard, Denscombe (2010) emphasizes that semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer to probe deeper and clarify responses, making them ideal for gathering rich qualitative data. The results from both the interviews and questionnaires were triangulated to gain a thorough understanding of students' preferred writing methodologies.
- **Pre-test and Post-test:** To assess writing proficiency before and after the intervention, both groups were asked to write three paragraphs on different topics. These writing samples were evaluated using Alderson et al.'s (1995) analytic scale, which considers various writing features such as content, organization, cohesion, vocabulary, grammar, mechanics, and spelling which were categorized into three major areas- structure, quality and language. The pre-test established the baseline level of writing ability for both groups, while the post-test measured any improvements following the instructional intervention.

2.5 Provision of Training and Materials

The primary objective of this study was to examine whether aligning instructional practices with students' preferred teaching methods could improve their writing skills. To achieve this, the researcher adopted materials and a teaching approach that reflected students' methodological preferences. Based on the findings from the questionnaire and interviews, the experimental group received two months of training focused on the process approach to writing. This approach emphasizes prewriting activities, where students plan, gather information, organize, draft, revise, and edit their writing under the guidance of the instructor.

The experimental group participated in writing activities designed to foster active engagement with the writing process. These students were encouraged to choose writing topics of personal interest, plan their work, draft, revise for content, and edit for language use. Peer and trainer feedback was provided throughout the process, helping students refine their writing. In contrast, the control group received traditional instruction, following the standard course manual, without specific focus on the students' preferred methods or additional feedback.

2.6 Methods of Data Analysis

Data obtained from experiment and questionnaires were analyzed using quantitative methods. That is, questionnaires and the results of experiments was coded and filled in to SPSS version 25. Then, different statistical analysis such as frequency, percentage and T test was applied to SPSS data. The result of statistical analysis was presented in the tables.

The result of the experiment, the difference between pretest (before training) and posttest (after thorough training followed by written texts and feedbacks to improve their written texts) were calculated to see if it is significant or not using t test. This finding was triangulated with the qualitative data from semi-structured interview and document analysis which were analyzed and presented in paragraphs. Then, the overall findings obtained were cross-checked to come to the conclusions.

2.7 Procedures of Data Collection

To assess the impact of the intervention on students' writing skills, students in both groups were asked to write three different texts before and after the training sessions. The pre-test writing samples were analyzed to ensure that both groups were at similar levels of writing proficiency before the intervention. The texts were evaluated based on Alderson et al.'s (1995) analytic scale, with three raters marking the samples to ensure reliability. A correlation test was conducted to check the consistency among the raters.

Then quasi experiment is carried out. After the pre-test, the experimental group was taught using their preferred writing methods, which were identified through the descriptive study. This group participated in regular writing activities, incorporating feedback from the trainer and peers to improve their drafts. The control group followed the standard course material without the specific alignment of teaching methods to students' preferences.

Following the two-month training period, both groups were asked to submit three written texts, which were again marked using the same analytic scale. The writing scores were then compared to evaluate whether the experimental group showed significant improvements in writing performance compared to the control group. The final analysis aimed to determine if teaching writing according to students' preferences led to improved writing outcomes.

3. Results

This section presents the findings of the study, which examined the effects of aligning teaching methods with students' preferences on the improvement of their writing performance, particularly in paragraph writing. The study assessed the effects of a process-oriented approach to writing on students' skills in structure, quality, and language usage, comparing pre-test and post-test results from the control and experimental groups.

3.1. The Effects of Aligning Teaching Methods with Students' Preferences

The effectiveness of different teaching methods on students' writing performance can have a profound impact on their development, especially in writing skills such as structure, quality, and language. In this study, the methods employed in teaching paragraph writing, particularly the process approach, were aligned with students' preferred learning styles. Prior to the intervention, the existing classroom practices did not incorporate students' preferences for

instructional methods or feedback styles, as shown through questionnaires and interviews conducted with the learners.

The experimental group was taught using the process approach to writing, which includes stages like brainstorming, drafting, revising, and finalizing a draft. This approach was chosen based on students' expressed preference for it, aiming to improve their writing skills.

3.1.1 Students' Performance on the Pre-Test

The pre-test results for both the control and experimental groups are summarized in Table 1, which presents the independent-samples t-test results for the students' writing skills. The table compares the groups based on three aspects of writing: structure, quality, and language. The t-test results show that there were no significant differences between the two groups in any of these aspects. Table 1 shows Independent-Samples T-test Results of both Group Students Writing Skills in the Pre-test

Table 1: *The Students Pre-Test SPSS Results*

	Control			Experimental			Df	T	P	Significance
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD		value	value	
Structure	47	41.67	1.456	47	40.8	1.2745	92	.476	.635	Not Significant
Quality	47	43.1	1.567	47	41.2	1.876	92	.596	.553	Not Significant
language	47	43.01	1.4196	47	42.02	1.7978	92	.463	.645	Not Significant

Table 1 shows that pre-test results were comparable between groups, with no significant differences in writing structure, quality, or language. In the case of structure of paragraphs, the mean score for the control group (41.67) is slightly higher than that of the experimental group (40.8), with standard deviations of 1.456 and 1.2745, respectively. The t-value of 0.476 and p-value of 0.635 indicate that there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups in terms of paragraph structure ($t(92) = 0.476, p = 0.635 > 0.05$). For the quality of writing, the control group scored a mean of 43.1, while the experimental group scored 41.2. The standard deviations for these scores are 1.567 and 1.876, respectively. The t-value of 0.596 and p-value of 0.553 further suggest that there is no significant difference between the two groups in the quality of their paragraph writings ($t(92) = 0.596, p = 0.553 > 0.05$).

Regarding language use, the control group had a mean score of 43.01, and the experimental group had a mean of 42.02. The standard deviations for the groups were 1.4196 and 1.7978, respectively. The t-value of 0.463 and p-value of 0.645 reveal no significant difference between the two groups in terms of language use ($t(92) = 0.463$, $p = 0.645 > 0.05$). In conclusion, the pre-test results show that there were no significant differences between the control and experimental groups in terms of the structure, quality, or language of their paragraph writings. Both groups started the study with similar levels of writing ability in these areas. These findings suggest that any subsequent differences in writing performance could be attributed to the effects of the intervention and not to pre-existing differences between the groups.

3.1.2 Independent-Samples T-test Results of Both Group Students' Writing Skills in the Pre- and Post-tests

Table 2 presents the results of an independent-samples T-test comparing the writing performance of the control and experimental groups in both the pre-test and post-test. The objective is to assess the impact of the instructional methods on students' writing skills over the course of the study.

Table 2: *Average Results of Pre-Test and Post-Test Performance*

Average Results	Students' Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Results of the Pre-Test	Control	47	43.04	13.595	1.983
	Experimental	47	40.91	17.071	2.490
Results of the Post Test	Control	47	45.13	14.454	2.180
	Experimental	47	57.83	16.863	2.460

As indicated in Table 2, the average mean score of the control group was 43.04, with a standard deviation of 13.595 and a standard error of 1.983 in the pre-test. For the experimental group, the average mean score was slightly lower at 40.91, with a higher standard deviation of 17.071 and a standard error of 2.490. The calculated T-test value for the

pre-test performance was not statistically significant, suggesting that both groups had comparable writing skills at the beginning of the study. The differences between the groups, as indicated by the p-value (>0.05), were not significant.

Following the instructional intervention, the post-test results showed a notable difference between the two groups. The average mean score for the control group increased to 45.13, with a standard deviation of 14.454 and a standard error of 2.180. The experimental group, on the other hand, demonstrated a much larger improvement, with an average mean score of 57.83, a standard deviation of 16.863, and a standard error of 2.460. The significant difference in the post-test results indicates that the experimental group, which received training aligned with their preferred writing methods, outperformed the control group. The larger mean score for the experimental group and the calculated T-test results suggest that the treatment had a positive impact on the students' writing skills, as indicated by the statistically significant results (p-value < 0.05). These results suggest that aligning instructional practices with students' preferred writing methods can have a substantial positive effect on their writing performance, especially in terms of structure, quality, and language use.

3.1.3 Independent-Samples Test Results of the Two Groups

Table 3 presents the independent-samples test results comparing the pre-test and post-test performance of the control and experimental groups. The analysis focuses on the mean differences between the two groups and evaluates whether these differences are statistically significant.

Table 3: *Independent Samples Test Results of the Two Groups*

Interventions	Groups	Mean	Mean difference	Std. Error difference	T-value	P-value	Sig (2tailed)
Result of the pre-test	Control	43.04					Not Significant
	Experimental	40.91	2.128	3.183	.668	.506	
Result of post test	Control	45.13					Significant
	Experimental	57.83	-12.681	3.240	-3.914	.000	

Table 3 reveals that the mean score for the control group was 43.04, while the experimental group scored slightly lower at 40.91 in the pre-test. The mean difference between the groups was 2.128, with a standard error difference of 3.183. The T-test value of 0.668 and a P-value of 0.506 indicate that there is no statistically significant difference between the control and experimental groups' pre-test performance. This suggests that both groups were similar in terms of writing skills before the intervention. On the other hand, In the post-test, a significant difference between the groups is observed. The control group's mean score increased to 45.13, while the experimental group's mean score rose sharply to 57.83. The mean difference between the groups is 12.681, with a standard error difference of 3.240. The T-value of -3.914 and the P-value of 0.000 reveal a statistically significant difference, with the experimental group outperforming the control group.

This significant improvement in the experimental group can be attributed to the instructional method used. The experimental group received training based on the process approach to teaching writing, which was identified as their preferred method through questionnaires and interviews. The process approach involves stages such as planning, prewriting (developing topic sentences, gathering information, and organizing ideas), drafting, revising, editing, and producing the final draft.

The training, which covered two months, emphasized these stages and incorporated continuous feedback based on students' preferences. This approach led to a notable improvement in the students' writing skills, as evidenced by the significant difference in the post-test results ($df = 92$, $t\text{-value} < p\text{-value} < 0.05$). These findings suggest that the process approach to writing instruction, aligned with students' preferences, significantly improved their writing skills. The control group, which did not receive the same tailored instruction, showed a more modest improvement in comparison.

4. Discussions

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the alignment of teachers' instructional practices with Ambo University first-year students' preferred methods for improving their writing skills. This section discusses the results in light of the research question and provides an interpretation of the findings.

The results from the pre-test indicated that there was no statistically significant difference in paragraph writing performance between the experimental and control groups. The control group had a mean score of 43.04, while the experimental group scored 40.91. These results suggest that, prior to the intervention, both groups had similar levels of writing proficiency. This finding aligns with the premise that, before the intervention, neither group had any marked advantage in terms of writing skills, indicating that the students were initially at similar levels. In contrast, the post-test results revealed a statistically significant difference in the writing performance between the two groups, with the experimental group outperforming the control group. The experimental group's mean score increased substantially to 57.83, while the control group's mean score was 45.13. The statistical analysis indicated that the improvement in the experimental group was significant ($p = 0.000$), suggesting that the treatment—based on the students' preferred teaching methodology—had a positive impact on their writing skills.

This significant improvement in the experimental group can be attributed to the use of the process approach to teaching writing, which was identified as the students' preferred method through a questionnaire and interviews. The process approach, which emphasizes stages such as prewriting (developing a topic sentence, gathering information, and organizing ideas), drafting, revising, and finalizing the text, allowed students the freedom to choose their own topics and engage in collaborative work. The feedback and support provided during the writing process helped students develop their writing skills more effectively.

The findings of this study resonate with the research of Selvaraj and Aziz (2019) who argue that writing is best understood when broken down into prewriting, writing, and post-writing stages. According to Coffin (2003), the process writing approach has been regarded as the most authentic method for teaching writing since the 1980s. This approach encourages students to focus on the stages of writing, rather than just the end product, fostering fluency before accuracy. Mekonnen (2021) highlights that university-level writing instructors often emphasize fluency over accuracy, enabling students to generate ideas and express their thoughts freely before refining their work. This aligns with the findings of the present study, where the experimental group benefited from a more fluid and iterative approach to writing.

Hussein (2022) also suggests that students' poor writing skills can be attributed to several factors, such as lack of time for practice, negative instructor attitudes, and inappropriate teaching methods. This study confirms that teaching in alignment with students' preferences,

particularly when incorporating process writing techniques, enhances writing performance and addresses some of these challenges.

The results underscore the importance of aligning teaching methodologies with students' preferences. The success of the experimental group in the post-test reflects how a carefully tailored methodology, in this case, the process approach, can significantly improve students' writing skills. By providing students the opportunity to choose topics that interest them, work collaboratively, and engage in a structured yet flexible writing process, teachers can foster both fluency and accuracy in writing. As noted by Hyland (2003), teachers should not only focus on the product of writing but also help students develop strategies and raise their meta-cognitive awareness of the writing process. This approach enables students to organize their thoughts, refine their drafts, and focus on the purpose of their writing. Teachers who emphasize fluency first, as opposed to focusing solely on grammatical accuracy, can better support students in developing their writing skills.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this study demonstrate that aligning instructional practices with students' preferred teaching methods, such as the process approach to writing, leads to significant improvements in students' writing skills. The experimental group, which was taught using this approach, showed a substantial increase in writing performance compared to the control group, which did not receive the same instructional support. These results emphasize the importance of adopting student-centered teaching methods to foster writing fluency and accuracy, and suggest that writing instruction at the university level should be more flexible and responsive to students' learning preferences. By incorporating students' preferred methodologies into the teaching process, teachers can enhance the writing abilities of students, ultimately contributing to more effective learning outcomes.

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