

## Writing Skill: An Instructional Overview

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### Abstract

*Writing skill is a product of ingenuity carved through knowledge, learning, creativity and intellectual uprightness. An individual with sound writing skills is regarded high in dignity and receives elevated opportunities everywhere in competitive examinations, job opportunities, promotions and social services. Regarding the discipline of teaching and learning a language, proficiency in writing skill deserves an irrelative significance. In spite of being an unsurmountably significant skill, numerous learners and pedagogues still seem to be bewildering for specifying the actual crux of theoretical knowledge and pedagogical procedures of writing in a compact document. In order to bridge up this goal, this study attempts to open some pertinent horizons in terms of its objectives, approaches, types, components and cannons for evaluation through document analysis method, a major component of qualitative research design. Fairly a large number of document based views, ideas, opinions, definitions, approaches and guidelines have been analyzed critically. Obviously, the resources covered in the review, results and discussion section would prove to be reliable sources for the prospective learners and researchers. The study concludes that the teachers and syllabus designers have to keep themselves up-to-date with process based current approaches, methods and techniques alongside their theoretical and practical foundations. The most noteworthy insight drawn is that there are not any specific methods and techniques comprehensive enough to capture all the facets of teaching writing skill. Therefore, the teacher has to select and implement the best ones from a wide range of methods and techniques eclectically by musing on the classroom stakeholders deeply.*

**Keywords:** approach, process, product, stages, writing skill

### Introduction

Writing is one of the four fundamental skills of language alongside listening, speaking, reading and writing. Writing skill assumes the highest order on a scale of hierarchy and develops only after the former three have been learned or acquired. This is the most pertinent reason why it is globally termed as the secondary skill. As a secondary skill, it is not perceived so prominently by laymen; nevertheless educated elites and scholastic mass regard it as an emblem of knowledge, intelligence and educationally upright personality. Most of the educational systems across the world attribute advanced writing skill as a vital means and end of formal education regardless of level, discipline and mode of learning (White, 1986). On the basis of this view, it can be claimed that writing skill bears a pivotal role beyond peoples' usual comprehension.

Proficiency in writing skill is essential for every university student, teacher, researcher and freelance writer. All these jobs require advanced skills since their expertise is judged through the quality of writing. Such institutions tend to prefer how they write to what they write for information. Therefore,

writing is dealt as the skill which contributes immensely for the overall advancement of learning endeavours. Regarding this, White (1986, p. 18) writes, "Because writing is a way of learning, you can actually achieve deeper insights into any subject by writing out your thoughts." Speaking and writing, though being related skills, the proficiency level maintained in one cannot be expected to obviously translate into another on the part of any individual. Reinforcing such a claim, Hardaway and Hardaway (1978) note that people who have no difficulty in talking often freeze when they have to write and vice-versa. A teacher has to realize the crux of these realistic standpoints and pave the possible convenient ways especially for overcoming specially the writing induced problems.

Writing is frequently attributed as the most complex skill of language. This is perhaps due to some inherent difficulties bound to be faced by every novice writer. Even the highly professional writers might come across similar complexities in their initial drafts. Focusing on the very notion, Hilton and Hyder (1992, p. 7) state, "Writing requires greater precision and care than speech as it is a more formal act of producing a permanent record. When we speak, we gauge our listeners' response and instantly clarify if any points which have not been comprehended. As no such interactions take place in a piece of writing, our communication skills have to be unambiguous." At this point, they plead for clarity, conciseness, exactitude and appropriacy if effectiveness is to be maintained in writing. In the same line of ideation, Hardaway (1978, p. 9) sums up this fact as "Because writing is permanent, it should be better organized and easier to understand than the speech." Having gone through these views, undoubtedly it is revealed that writing is the most complex and more vital skill demanding for a specific treatment during the teaching and learning process.

As writing plays a pivotal role in academic activities, there should be concrete knowledge about the general concept of writing, the approaches, methods and techniques of teaching writing, types of writing, roles of teacher, canons of evaluation, etc. But, only a few documents available in the global market seem to incorporate all these components comprehensively together. Writing skill bears a significant role in each and every domain of human interest. The academic field of teaching and learning a language cannot remain unaffected from the degrees of writing proficiency. Regarding this view, Reid (1993) argues that writing skill possesses an invaluable importance for the sake of enabling students to understand how the distinct components of a language harmoniously act together. This argument indicates that students can achieve their goals of attaining overall linguistic proficiency only through a proper development of writing skill. Nevertheless, writing skill has long been standing as a poignant problem among the teachers, students, academic articles and research reports have been published on this topic, however, the students, teachers and syllabus designers fall in a state of dilemma about whether this or that way to adopt for teaching and learning the writing skill efficiently. As a professional university teacher, I myself find many students getting puzzled when they actually have to write something new even in the post-graduate level. As I go through books and articles, I often find the documents either too long, hazy and disharmonized or too scanty, insufficient and unfocused to the actual classroom procedures. Hardly, any documents available in the global sources seem to incorporate the approaches, methods and techniques of teaching writing, types of writing roles of teacher, canons of evaluation and the corresponding theoretical and empirical

backgrounds. These aspects of writing skill are underpinned as the research gaps which this proposed study intends to fulfill by presenting a comprehensive picture of knowledge in a single document.

Therefore, this article attempts to carry out an in-depth study of writing skill primarily by focusing on the teaching learning issues. This study seems to be more significant as well as relevant in the recent context of English medium instruction movement in both the public and private academia. This study will obviously be able to bridge up the existing gaps by offering a comprehensive resource for both theoretical and procedural knowledge on teaching and learning the writing skill. In order to fulfill these objectives, the writer plans to analyze relevant theoretical and empirical literature under document analysis method. The insights explored through this study will be instrumental for minimizing writing related complexities being faced by teachers, students, syllabus designers and policy makers.

### **Methodology**

In order to achieve the specified goal, I employed document analysis method as one of the vital components of qualitative research approach. Document analysis is such a design which demands for the analysis of various documents related to the research issue or phenomenon. The selected documents are often studied critically for exploring needed information. Regarding this, Bowen (2009) concedes that document analysis method combs through a wide range of related literature to explore required inferences from authentically verified sources. This is a research conducted by relying on secondary sources of information with an aim of adding to the common body of knowledge. Moreover, stressing on the significance of document analysis, method, O'Leary (2014) writes that documents provide intensive data making document analysis, a useful and beneficial method for most researches. They provide background information and broad coverage of data for contextualizing the proposed research within the specified scope or field. Therefore, this research is entirely based on secondary sources obtaining information, from other researchers' books and articles. As a secondary research, this study has analysed and interpreted the documents of instructing writing skill by setting up some parameters as; objectives, approaches, types, components, roles of teacher and cannons for evaluation.

### **Reviews, Results and Discussion**

Writing as a productive skill demands the simultaneous psycho-physical (between brain and limbs) co-ordination on the part of a writer. Beyond the role of physical organs, several studies carried out in this field have pointed out that there remains a dominant decisive role of mental factor in the quality of a writing task (Rajkumar, 2013). Asserting to this view, Oxford (1990) indicate that writing is a thinking process which demands intellectual effort sustained over a significantly long period of time. Similarly, stressing on the cognitive dimension of writing skill, Zamel (1983) views it as a process through which writers explore their thoughts, ideas and knowledge with an objective of constructing meaning in the form of a graphological reflection. Here, special emphasis is placed on the contents and meaning than the formal outlook.

In the same stream of thought, Daniels (1996) opines that writing is the representation of actual oral utterances using relatively permanent graphic symbols. Similarly, Sampon (1985) introduces writing

as the process of representing spoken utterances by employing permanent visible marks (as cited in Rajkumar, 2013, p. 56). Pursuing similar view, Lado (1971) expresses that writing refers to the graphic representation of spoken language where the messages are conveyed through written medium. And, the written documents can be read back flexibly as well as recursively over extended period of time.

Stressing on the ground reality, Roger (2001) pleads for the inadequacies of any single definition on writing and claims that there is no single definition comprehensive enough to accommodate all the characteristic features (as cited in Rajkumar, 2013, p. 56). Nor can we expect anyone to incorporate such multitudes of features underlying a vast discipline within the boundary of a single definition. It reveals that the most suitable approach to understand about writing skill is resorting to the eclectic view that accepts a huge range of features in an open continuum. Due to being open, a person feels free to add, delete or modify them as per their need, interest and convenience.

### **Objectives of Writing Skill**

Writing as a complex productive skill requires a number of psycho-physical activities and their internally congruent co-ordination. In order to specify such underlying procedures, many researchers have carried out different studies from numerous positions and angles and proposed distinctly vibrant suggestions for pinpointing the objectives of writing skill. In this pretext, Rajkumar (2013) provides us with a broader framework, now fleshed in, of the abilities supposed to inculcate in a writer as given below:

- To transcribe the internally generated ideas (from cognition) or externally expressed notions (from reading and hearing) by employing conventional graphic symbols.
- To maintain a co-ordination between mental ideas generated internally or incited externally and hand-fingers with a mediation established by the nervous system.
- To express thoughts, ideas, beliefs and knowledge as per learning and intuition.
- To bring out self-reflection about personal events, experiences and lived life (autobiography).
- To organize series of ideas, information, messages and facts in a logical order (into topic, subtopics, paragraphs and units).
- To keep up spiral maturity expanding to the use of vocabulary, spelling, sentence structures, grammatical rules and organization during different levels of learning.
- To give information, entertainment, persuasion and arguments.
- To respond to literary texts through book review, report writing, critical appreciation, article writing.

(Rajkumar, 2013, p. 56)

The objectives discussed above incorporate almost all the major aspects of writing. If these objectives could be established well by students, teachers and syllabus designers, they will certainly guide them to specify the most suitable strategies and methods for academic upliftment. These objectives are equally significant in the Nepalese context of learning English as a foreign language. Basically, the language teachers would better consider these objectives and specify the best ones as per the need, level and interest of the students. Further, the specified objectives would better be told to the students as well, so that their

learning activities could be focused on the desired objectives.

### **Approaches to Teaching Writing**

Writing is sometimes defined as a motor-mechanical skill by comparing it with the physical skills like swimming, dancing and riding a bicycle (Lado, 1964). However, reality behind learning writing skill and other physical skills is not exactly the same as claimed here (Harmer, 2008). There have been several studies carried out along the diachronic development of language teaching curricula. Often approaches and methods of language teaching are succinctly influenced by the contemporary linguistic as well as psychological theories. A set of approaches had been prevalent during the vogue of behaviouristic psychology and structural linguistics before the 1960s. But, then onwards, there started a domineering movement of cognitive psychology and functional linguistics whose reflections are clearly visible in the recent pedagogy of language and linguistics (Brown, 1994). Being one of the major components of linguistic pedagogy, writing cannot remain unaffected from these psychological and linguistic movements, nor could it remain in the past. In this backdrop, Rajkumar (2013) has proposed a number of approaches for teaching writing skill, though all of them may not be perceived to bear equal degree of gravity for teaching writing skill. They are:

**Controlled-to-free approach.** This approach is based on the assumption that learners must be taught to write something in the order of simple to complex principle. There the teacher is advised to provide certain key sentences composed in distinct structures. The students do copying at first and gradually they are led to more and more complex tasks and finally reach at the stage of composing a whole paragraph. The higher the control, the lesser are the mistakes and errors committed. Having got the level of maturity uplifted, students may be involved in writing compositions freely (Rajkumar, 2013).

This approach entails that writing should be taught craft fully in the controlled framework at first to the early grade students and gradually led to free writing activities proportionately with their level of maturity. The basic tenet of this approach seems to be practical as well as scientific.

**The free writing approach.** This approach of writing lays special emphasis on being able to construct free compositions. Here, the learners are suggested to focus on fluent expression of contents rather than clinging to strict grammaticality, mechanics and linguistic accuracy (Rajkumar, 2013). Instead, these shaded aspects do not seem so serious to impair the conveyance of communicative messages. Further, they are supposed automatically getting to improvement in the succeeding phases of writing practice. Here, what is more pertinent are the contents which carry up almost whole of the expected meaning. Due to its focus on fluency more than accuracy and mechanics, this approach can also be termed as speed-up approach.

This approach of writing focuses on fluent writing for meaning rather than on the grammatical accuracy and structural mechanics. It implicitly guides for paying less attention to grammar and technicalities if the teachers intend to speed up writing skill. But, actual practices at schools and colleges are frequently seen that teachers use red marks in students' minor mistakes throughout the pages and unknowingly impede over their fluency in writing.

**The paragraph pattern approach.** This approach basically stresses on organization instead of maintaining grammatical accuracy and content fluency. Here, the learners are expected to unscramble sentences out of scrambled words. Similarly, disordered sentences are to be arranged properly to compose a paragraph. Likewise, haphazardly provided paragraphs have to be properly arranged to compose a fully sensible essay or text. Somewhere, they are suggested to supply the best title as well (Rajkumar, 2013).

The basic construct functioning behind this approach of writing is that individual learners have their idiosyncratic preferences and practices to perceive a phenomenon in question. Anything that comes as an output from an individual is and should be accredited as idiosyncrasy, the natural process for creativity and innovation. But, actual practices seem such that many teachers fully ignore the organizational features even at higher levels of teaching writing.

**The communicative approach.** This approach of writing lays special emphasis on the communicative goal of writing. As a matter of fact, writing is the graphic representation of spoken language and it is fundamentally geared to various forms of communication. For this reason, the writer should be filled with a keen feeling of actual communication by keeping the prospective readers abreast in mind. Here, the writer has to formulate a complete mind mapping of the concerned factors like readers, topic, purpose, context, message, possible obstacles and expected impressions in the targeted audience. By and large, information gap activities involving pair work, group work, role play, dramatization, jigsaw writing etc. should be utilized for strengthening their communicative writing (Rajkumar, 2013).

This approach stresses on the various communicative abilities through writing. For example, students may write letter, memorandum, e-mail, SMS, report, etc. for conveying certain messages. The writers are supposed to consider the factors like topic, context, audience, possible noises, etc. and write the text. These communicative purposes can only be achieved through communicative activities like group work, pair work, role play, information gap activities in writing. The teachers have to realize the essence of such activities and involve the students in concerned related tasks.

**The product approach.** The product approach to teaching writing skill primarily focuses on the finished product. Here, the learners do not strive for getting through the various consecutive processes during their learning endeavor. Regarding this, Nunan (1999) writes that this approach lays heavier emphasis on the final product which is expected to be a coherent, error-free text where the students have to copy and transform the models provided by the textbooks or teachers. As per the implication of this approach, the students are expected to make an optimum modeling for practice with the help of all the resources that are recommended or supplied to them. Such carefully devised resources or materials would be available for them in the form of substitution tables, gap filling exercises, paragraph/essay models and outlines, tips for parallel writing, etc. Conversely, the contents (what aspects) and organisations (how aspects) are almost neglected or slightly touched despite their immense role for a complete writing (Tickoo, 2007).

This approach of teaching writing seems to be lagging behind to recognize the fact-how to write well is an arduous and strugglesome process. Referring to some of the drawbacks of product based approach of teaching writing, Murray (1980) states that modeling is the heart of this approach and consequently

their heavier involvement in modeling tasks prevents them from fostering, spontaneity reasoning and creativity. Following the same stream of arguments, Escholz points out that the product based approach encourages the learners to follow one and the same plan in different settings, apply the same guidelines regardless of content diversities thereby inhibiting the writers rather than empowering or liberating them. He further adds that selected model are presented integratedly with the practice exercises so as to ensure better efficiency in writing through the modeling of style, vocabulary organization and structure (as cited in Saeidi & Sahebkhair, 2011, p. 3). This approach is widely used in formal education perhaps by reason of being time saving approach. Moreover, this approach is easier to implement in the class. It doesn't demand much professionalism and training in the part of teacher, as well.

**The process approach.** As signalled by the title of this approach, it focuses on the internal procedures in reverse to the product approach. The fundamental tenet of this approach is that good writing should be logical, creative, recursive experimental and open-ended. Most of these activities are executed in the classroom as a laboratory. The cognitive role is set to premium than the affective and kinesthetic skills on the part of the learners (Rajkumar, 2003). Perhaps by asserting to the various procedural and psychological facets of the process approach, many educators seem to be backing up this with their own arguments in the recent days. Regarding the basic procedural patterns of teaching writing under this approach, Tickoo (2007, p. 64) instructs to choose and understand the topic, gather information, organize thoughts, compose, content, collect feedback, do revision and finally publish the finished product.

In the same line of ideation, Hadfield and Hadfield (2011, p. 120) illustrate process writing by dividing the activities into several steps; as to:

- Brainstorm ideas about what to write.
- Choose ideas and group them under suitable headings.
- Order the ideas and plan the structures as introduction, arguments for, arguments against, conclusion.
- Write notes to expand each idea later on.
- Write a first rough version of the draft.
- Get it checked by other learners for feedback.
- Edit it (by reading further resources, rewriting and correcting).

(Hadfield & Hadfield, 2011, p. 120)

Similarly Tribble (1996, as cited in Harmer, 2008, p. 323) mentions the stages of writing process as: drafting, reviewing, redrafting, rewriting and getting published. These stages are passed through in a recursive way by looping backwards and moving forwards or criss-cross in appropriate contexts.

Likewise, Tickoo (2007, p. 64) mentions that writing is best viewed as a three stage process.

### **Stage 1: Pre-writing**

This is the preparatory phase of writing process. Here, the writers are involved in the selection of topic, contemplation on related ideas, gathering information, judging their appropriacy, and preparing a mental framework of the possible construction. Generally, an experienced writer proceeds through all or

some of the following steps under this stage.

- Reading some relevant documents like essay, article, story, charts, figures, reports, etc. for collecting basic level information on the topic.
- Discussing about the topic/question with a peer or in a group.
- Brainstorming about the topic either individually or in pairs or groups and collecting as many ideas as they come to mind.
- Searching ideas from additional sources of knowledge to gather new facts and interpretations.
- Drawing help from teacher's clues and guidance.

(Tickoo, 2007, p. 64)

### **Stage 2: Writing Different Drafts**

At this stage of writing process, first, the writer prepares different drafts one after another by joining, modifying and reforming the ideas and information collected in the first stage. Most often this stage appears to be hazy and frustrating because of being bewildered on what to include in which order and what not in the alternate. As the writing process moves ahead concretely, only then the ideas get to look like focused composition. Yet, the written text may not look more than a rough first draft (Tickoo, 2007, p. 64).

### **Stage 3: Revising and Editing for Publication**

As the writer pursues a number of drafts and their serial editing, the writing gradually starts gaining clarity and unity. The most prominent thing at this stage is that he should be ready to add, remove, change and reconstruct the drafts. Not only the correction of words, structures and syntax, he should be ready to do resetting, rearranging and replacement of a whole chunk of the text. It is a stage of intensive editing where deeper and careful proofreading appears as an essential component. To a greater extent, nowadays, technological tools like computer may assist in editing with the help of scientifically devised software applications (Tickoo, 2007, pp. 64-65).

The process approach of writing is founded on the assumption that nothing can be gained as an end unless people adopt the suitable means. For this, this approach exerts heavier emphasis on the underlying processes and strategies adopted by teachers and learners. The processes proposed by different scholars and writers seem to be similar in general though they look different in particular terminologies. These processes seem substantially similar. Most of the writers and methodologists are found to have divided writing into three to five stage procedures including almost the same writing activities in those steps. Among others, the three stage processes proposed by Tickoo seem to be highly inclusive. Elsewhere, the same three stages are found to have been termed as 'pre→while→post' for teaching other skills and aspects as well. These divisions are really helpful for pedagogical practices providing that they are executed properly. The teachers and syllabus designers have to bear these stages into mind and devise their contents by fragmenting them to suit at each of these stages.

**The genre approach.** Different writers may have different needs and purposes behind writing. Versatile pedagogues and writers suggest that it is worthwhile to look at writing under broad categories as per the domain it is written for (Tickoo, 2007). Obviously, the writers pay due regards to the basic



parameters while writing for a particular text type or genre. For example, prose and poetry are the two broad genres of literature where the language organization and physical outlook of a poem never resembles with that of a prose, say a drama. Similarly, the genre of advertisement is written in a different style and rhetoric than that of students' essays. Therefore, the teacher has to identify the defining features of the language used in each genre and provide the students with the knowledge of these features. Having been familiar with the genre specific features, the students in due course would certainly be able to assess how far those genre specific features have been obeyed and incorporated in their writing. In this way, this approach enables the writers to address the presumptions and expectations of the readers belonging to a particular genre. Hence, it can be inferred that communicative features, organizational structures, linguistic features and vocabulary selection are essential components for the formation of a genre, consequently to genre based writing as well (Rajkumar, 2013).

We know that the term genre refers to a specific field or branch of knowledge within a subject. Obviously, writing is distinct for different genres. Specialized skills in different genres cannot be achieved by any writer at the same time. Therefore, the teachers require preparing procedures, parameters and contents of necessary genres and carrying out teaching learning activities in the well-focused forms. This approach seems more useful for higher order professionalism in every field which demands for written documents.

### **Types of Writing**

Writing as the higher order productive skill does include various types according to modes of writing. These types of writing can also be termed as a process of purposive writing. Such writings are highly reflective to topic, purpose, time, audience, context, genre, etc. Smalzer (2014) and Tickoo (2007) mention the following six major types of writing.

**Descriptive writing.** This type of writing describes some object, people, events, processes, institutions, arguments, etc. The writers usually produce such types of essays as per their lived experiences. There is no room left for personal intuitions or prejudices in this type of writing (Smalzer, 2014, p. 45).

**Narrative writing.** As hinted by the topic itself, this type of writing narrates or reports about the chosen topic. The more congruing topics for this could be stories, autobiographies, science fiction, events and issues of the distant or recent past, etc. The writer tries to keep up with the chronological order in the entire copy of writing. It should be organized in the natural essence so as to provide a real-like feeling while going through it (Smalzer, 2014, p. 45).

**Expository writing.** This type of writing strives to expose a subject/issue out for audiences' information. Generally, a topic of novelty, curiosity and wonder is selected and ample information are provided to quench the thirst of knowledge and curiosity for the readers. The overall exposition whatever is made in the writing should possess a tone of brilliance capable enough to hold the audience into convenient faith (Tickoo, 2007, p. 67).

**Argumentative writing.** This type of writing is full of opinions and argumentation on the given topic. By and large, some conflicting or argumentative topics are supposed to be more appropriate for this

type of writing. For example, which one is the first of egg and hen? What is mightier-pen or sword? Should the provision of death penalty brought into action?, etc. The basic tenet behind argumentative writing is to convince the readers with the strength of arguments, logics and retained stance. Howsoever, the logics and proofs set forth may not bear global validity (Tickoo, 2007, p. 67).

**Reflective writing.** This type of writing is basically personal in nature. The individual writer mostly takes up bygone events, issues or experiences and carries out redemption on the pros and cons deeply. Such a writing illustrates the present position of the writer either confirming to or confronting against the subject compared to the past views and standpoints. Regardless of the audiences' assertion and dissertation, there must be the reflection of writer's originality in writing. Some of the more appropriate topics could be like:

- I did better by not joining the army.
- Why could the mystery of royal massacre not be solved?

(Tickoo, 2007, p. 67)

**Persuasive writing.** The root objective of this type of writing is to exert a forceful pressure on the part of the readers. Here, the writer pursues such techniques that the readers are forcibly drawn to believe in what have been said by the writer. Basically, this type of writing comprises the topics related to political thought, advertisements, institutional brochures, legal documentation, diplomatic dialogues, etc. (Tickoo, 2007). A powerful persuasive writing possesses the capability of changing the preoccupied minds of the audience and leading them to assert on what the writer has just expressed in the text (Tickoo, 2007, p. 67).

These above discussed types of writing prove that there are different types of writing such as descriptive, narrative, persuasive, expository, paraorthographic, etc. All these types bear specified significance in distinct genres and topics. It is an accepted truth that the same type of writing does not seem to be suitable to different topics, genres and subjects. For instance, scientific report is written in descriptive style while accident report in narrative tone. Nevertheless, it would be fairly difficult to draw a demarcation line between or among the types of writing. This is because could be more possibilities of internal overlapping among them (Smalzer, 2014). Often the matter of selecting a particular type of writing is highly conditioned by the writer's personal interest, topic, audience and context. Therefore, the teacher has to acknowledge all these logical arguments and instruct the students accordingly. He has to suggest them to adopt one or another type of writing by being responsive to the immediate context. Still, the early grade writers with low writing proficiency would better be hinted by the teacher unless they become sure for which type to pursue. Ironically, the textbooks and teachers of Nepal seem to be dormant regarding these types of writing up to the school level.

### **The Components (Subskills) of Writing**

Writing, as one of the four major skills, incorporates a number of subskills. The theory of segregated learning of language ascribes most for part to whole learning. Obviously, there are quite a lot of merits of this approach to learning. With regard to teaching writing skill, Sobana (2003, as cited in Rajkumar, 2013, p. 58) mentions the following subskills to be considered while writing something in

general.

- Mechanics: handwriting, spelling and punctuation
- Organization: topic, introduction, body paragraphs, coherence, cohesion, textual conclusion
- Syntax: sentence structures, sentence boundaries, style of sentence construction, sentential arrangements, etc.
- Grammar: word class appropriation, rules of subject-verb agreement, use of correct tense, gender, case, appropriate use of article, preposition and conjunctions
- Content: choice of vocabulary, relevance, originality, clarity, logicity, sufficiency
- Writing process: brainstorming, noting down ideative points, drafting, editing, revising and preparing the final copy for publication.

Having been established as a well-developed skill of language, writing has been able to assume the status of a separate discipline of knowledge. So, it consists of a large number of different major and minor components which are also known as subskills of writing. The components like mechanics, grammar, syntax, organization, etc. mentioned here are very important properties of writing skill. Therefore, the teachers have to instill the knowledge about each of them and instruct the suitable techniques for bringing them into actual use while writing. However, the teachers would better introduce these components stepwise, so far integratedly, without letting them feel burdened of learning. But conversely most of the English teachers of Nepal (probably elsewhere also) do not seem to have familiarized the students with such components especially at school level. The reason behind it still remains as a question for study.

### **Guiding Stages for Writing Development**

As the teacher involves the students in writing activities, the teachers are suggested to consider the following three sequential stages to get along for achieving the expected goals. These stages have been proposed by Tickoo (2007) and Hadfield and Hadfield (2008) as the crux of several theoretical as well as pragmatic research findings. These stages can also be termed as the master stages in general perspective. Regarding this pretext, Tickoo (2007, p. 78) offers a list of them as:

#### **Stage I: Controlled Practice (CP)**

This is the initial stage for writing development. The students who are taking immatured steps in learning to write are supposed to be highly benefitted from controlled activities. At this point, there will be fewer chances for getting to write wrong answers. The teacher provides them with the carefully chosen subject matters to bind them into the expected right track followed by encouragement and necessary control. Students can be involved in a wide range of activities as illustrated below.

- Copying: It is simply for habit formation. Here, the teacher writes some basic words and sentences on the board which they have to without any modifications.
- Dictation: This stage is mainly for keeping a proper co-ordination between ears and fingers. Simple words, phrases and sentences are dictated by the teacher which the students have to put down in their notebook.
- Transforming sentences: These activities are conducted mainly for strengthening their

- grammatical and operational knowledge like negation, passivization, narration, affirmation, etc.
- Combining words and sentences: This is a bit higher order activity in the scale of complexity. Here, the students are suggested to combine a few scrambled words to form sentences or simple sentences to construct compound and complex sentences.
  - Constructing sentences: This is the activity applied to provide them a little experience of taking personal decisions freely. Here, the teacher provides them some sets of scattered words by combining which they need to prepare sensible sentences.
  - Unscrambling sentences: This is the process of ordering scrambled sentences together so as to construct a logically ordered meaningful paragraph.
  - Dicto composition: This is such an activity that either the teacher dictates a text or plays an audio cassette which the students have to list and write about the provided text in their exercise book by capturing everything as far as possible.
  - Cloze passage: This is a specialized sort of completion task. Here, the teacher provides them a text with deleted words on a regular interval of every  $n^{\text{th}}$  ( $5^{\text{th}}$ ,  $6^{\text{th}}$  or  $7^{\text{th}}$ ) word. The learners have to identify the most appropriate words and supply them in properly to make the cloze passage complete. (Tickoo, 2007)

### **Stage II: Directed Practice (DP)**

This is a step higher stage than the controlled practice. The fundamental notion behind maintaining such a gradual ladder of teaching writing is leading them to higher degree of independence. However, it should be so tactful that the learners should not get frustrated with the designed tasks. This sort of self-assurance can be fostered in students by selecting and designing the activities in the practically scientific manner. Further, the teacher needs to provide adequate guidance at necessary steps. Some of the most suitable directed activities could be as given below.

- Pictures and prompts: The teacher presents a set of related pictures on a theme serially suitable enough to construct an eventful occasion or story. Thereafter, the learners are asked to write the message conveyed by the pictures. The teacher would design varying scores to each of the students by analyzing their level of creativity and ingenuity.
- Questioning as prompts: Here, the teacher provides them some guiding questions which the students have to answer and submit to the teacher. But, the degree of complexity should be of moderate level allowing them to write something best or better.
- Listen and write: Here, the teacher involves them in a listening task. After listening to the story or description, the students, first of all, have to take notes and later on develop them into a complete texts or stories.
- Composing with outlines: This is such an activity that the students have to develop the provided outlines into a complete written text. If necessary, the teacher does assist them at difficult points.
- Writing summary: This is also a purely creative activity where the students need to write a summary to one third of the original text. In reality, more experienced writers possess the skill of expressing

long texts into precisely reduced form than that of the initial practitioners.

- Answering questionnaires: In order to conduct this activity, the students are provided with a set of questions which demand short, simple and familiar information in response. For example:

What's your name?

Where do you live?

What does your father do?

Why are you coming to school?

Such questions would delimit the areas to move within. The students cannot cross the designed limits of knowledge and activities.

- Writing with model: This is such a practice that the students are provided with a model exercise orally or in written form. Having gone through the model, the students have to write another similar text without direct copying. The teacher frequently instructs them at needy steps to keep them within the specified periphery.
- Writing compositional parts: Here the students have to write different parts of a composition such as that of an essay. If so some students have to write introductory paragraphs, some have to write body paragraphs and some others will have to write conclusions after reading the presented introduction and body paragraphs. At last, all those parts are organized back properly allowing them to produce several distinct sets of composition on the given topic(s). Finally, the students will be suggested to read and compare what they have prepared with that of the other friends or groups. (Tickoo, 2007)

### **Stage III: Free Writing (FR)**

It is the third stage of writing development where the students are gradually led from controlled free to completely free writing endeavours. In the outset of this level of writing, the teacher may provide them with topic, key words or phrases, slight oral instructions, reference sources to unbolt impediments, etc. Having developed an expected level of maturity and confidence, the students are left fully independent for writing on any kind of topics that are demanded by the context. During this time, there are not any sort of restrictions in the choice of vocabulary, structures and styles. They feel a complete freedom about how to convey meaning on a topic to the target groups. Hence, this is the highest order ability expected to develop in an academician or professional writer.

These three stages discussed above are based on a broader framework. The controlled practice, directed practice and free writing have been arranged sequentially. Each of the three broad stages incorporates distinct sets of activities under them. The first stage involves basic level activities to form a foundation. The teacher's role is involving them in controlled activities. Such activities should be chosen after selection and gradation as per the learners' need, level and interest. The second stage 'directed practice' includes such activities that they have to do the provided tasks independently by remaining under the teacher's close supervision. It includes a bit higher order activities than the former stage. The third stage is free writing stage where the teacher's role seems to be only that of a distant supervisor and manager. All

the activities are initiated, conducted and refined by the students themselves. Yet, attaining this level of proficiency requires elongated practice taken up in a tireless manner. The optimum level of success in free writing can be reached only by passing through constant revision, rewriting, taking readers' feedback and self judgement of the text's impact upon the targeted readers.

In this way, these stages guide the teachers for selecting the contents and involving the students into appropriate activities for writing development. The students of school and undergraduate levels need to be involved in the first two stage practices while the graduate and post graduate level students can directly be involved in the third stage i.e. free writing activities on the basis of their level of maturity. These stages seem to have a scientific order of teaching principles from simple activities to complex ones. Therefore, every teacher requires to execute these stages into practice regardless of the nature and types of topics or contents for teaching writing skill. If these stages are implemented appropriately, they may lessen the effects of other conflicts like, product vs. process, communicative vs. structural, teacher oriented vs. students oriented, etc.

### **Characteristics of a Good Writing**

Writing is a creative and conscious outflow of ideas through mental ingenuity of a person. All the people involved in writing cannot attest themselves as a proficient writer in the forefront of competitive arena. In order to bridge up this requirement, a writer needs to incorporate the following qualities in a piece of writing. (Rajkumar, 2013):

- **Illustration:** The writer has to elucidate the meaning, dimensions and purpose of the topic to make the writing highly informative.
- **Order:** A piece of writing cannot be precisely excellent unless the dimensions raised are genuinely ordered. If the issues raised in intersentential or interparagraphic level are abrupt, it spoils the overall semanticity of the text. Therefore, every piece of writing under a specific topic must have genuine orders leading to translate logical meaning in the readers.
- **Relevance:** A well written text must contain only such materials which are directly related to the title.
- **Simplicity:** A good writer always maintains simplicity in his writing. Unnecessary verbosity and bombastic language would merely result in confusion in the readers.
- **Completeness:** Anything stated or issue raised in writing must be complete for meaning within itself. If some prominent points or ideas are missed out, it would certainly impair the smooth delivery of meaning. For this, the writers have to pay a special attention to maintain comprehensiveness in their written works.
- **Accuracy:** Any ideas that the writer writes should be based on facts, truths and reality trustworthy to the readers. There should not be anything put down on the basis of fantasy or personal whim.

As the teachers and other concerned authorities involve in evaluating some written texts, they try to assess all these qualities. The professional writers can be highly benefitted by paying due regards to the above mentioned characteristics. Although some of the referred qualities lack in a piece of writing,

it could be tolerable to some extent provided that the expected meaning is transmitted to the targeted readers. Modern methodologists tend to place heavier emphasis on meaning than on other components. Still, many of the teachers trained in traditional framework of structural linguistics seem to be emphasizing on structural accuracy and mechanics more than meaning conveyance.

### **The Roles of a Teacher**

A teacher is supposed to be the key source of all the teaching learning activities. It is the teacher who decides about how to initiate, proliferate and translate the academic activities into resultative conclusion. Regarding the role of teacher in writing development, Harmer (2008) specifically recommends the following three major roles beside the other usual roles assigned to an ideal teacher.

- **Motivator:** In fact, teacher is a generic motivator by profession. Learning to write is almost impossible without receiving constant motivation from the teacher. Basically, the teacher offers motivational activities to students for generating ideas, pursuing necessary tasks, remaining active, searching required sources, fulfilling noticeable gaps, etc. Only then, the students' diversified range of capabilities can be involved in achieving expected level of writing proficiency.
- **Resource person:** As a matter of fact, students are hardly ever skillful in writing activities. Further, they lack most of the basic resources required to equip themselves for strengthening their writing skill. In such a context, as is the existing scenario of Nepalese schools, the teacher has to assume the role of an all-round resource person. As such, his roles are providing self-assurance, assessing their progress and achievements, offering guidance and counseling, dealing with their problems tactfully, providing them with virtual as well as physical resources, acting as a participating monitor, etc. In a nutshell, the teacher has to carry out the role of an unfading resource person to handle all the ends, means and manners.
- **Feedback provider:** The teacher is such a person that he has to employ both formative and summative evaluations in the class. Process oriented writing approach, being the cry of the day, especially focuses on formative steps required on the part of the teacher. Consequently, the teacher has to provide corrections and feedbacks from time to time in the most positive and inciting manner. The written works have to be moderated by using different techniques so as to render intended feedbacks to the students. Nevertheless, the feedbacks should not distract or divert them away from writing endeavor, as a factor of inhibition and distortion.

The aforementioned three are the major roles expected from a teacher though there might be many other roles mentioned in the literature of applied linguistics. Obviously, it is the teacher who has the responsibility of developing and controlling the quality of students' writing. Many stakeholders of formal education do not seem to have been aware of these roles in the context of Nepal. Therefore, the English teachers need to be professionally trained and experienced to translate these stated roles into actual practice.

### **Factors to be Considered for Teaching Writing**

It is a commonly accepted truth that the teachers, students and syllabus designers do have a great inquisitiveness regarding the basic factors to be considered for the teaching and learning of writing skill.

For this, Harmer (2008, p. 326) suggests time, environment, motivation, knowledge strategies, technology and assessment as the key aspects worthy of consideration while teaching writing. However, many teachers seem to be indifferent towards paying due considerations to each these factors in balanced ways. This could be a major reason for why our students perceive writing as the most complex skill.

### **Cannons for Evaluating Students' Writing**

Evaluation is an unceasing process just like gaining education. A good teacher has to employ some key cannons for evaluating their written texts. Despite of having no common consensus on how to evaluate a written text, most of the teachers and professional writers attempt to seek answers to the following queries as suggested by Grahm (2008):

- Have all the related ideas been precisely presented and fully developed in the text?
- Have all the contents been organized in logical progression?
- Are the wordings and structuring sufficient enough to convey the literal meaning?
- Have the structures been varied enough to maintain fluency, tone and desired rhetoric?
- Does the text bear a fair degree of vigour to exert expected outcomes?
- Is the text free of spelling and punctuational errors?
- Is the written text eligible and attractive?

The cannons for evaluating a written piece of work discussed above provide a broad guideline for the teachers. They may prepare a rating scale with categories like very good, good, satisfactory, poor and very poor. These criteria help to detect an overall picture of qualities maintained in a written text. Beside these criteria, the worth of someone's writing is being broadly judged by personal impression of the teachers and other freelance/professional examiners.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

This study explored some theoretical as well as pedagogical contents through document analysis method on writing skill from instructional point of views. The main objective was facilitating the teachers, students and syllabus designers by overcoming the pedagogical hurdles which arise by reason of insufficient verified theoretical and procedural literature. This study, though being a small scale, is expected to become significant on the move of adding to the immense body of ELT literature. As a widely perceived complex skill everything in writing must be expressed by using vocabulary, grammar, structure and organization unlike spoken skill, the first productive skill of language. Therefore, this study was conducted by dividing the issue/question into six major topical themes as objectives, approaches, types, components, roles of teacher and cannons for evaluation. At a broader level, this study explored that writing has the objective of translating mental reflections into graphic symbols meaningfully. For this, gradually designed process based approaches and methods are a must. Regarding the types of writing, which type to choose is a matter determined by several immediate factors. So the teachers need to make the learners aware and skilled with all the stated types. With regard to components, writing skill incorporates content, grammar mechanics and organization which are worthy of consideration in all sorts of writing. As with teacher's roles, every teacher should not lag behind from assuming the roles of a motivator, resource person and



feedback provider at the minimum level. Finally for evaluation, it was concluded that the teacher has to set up some evaluation schemes mainly on communicative orientation and evaluate the written texts with due considerations to level-wise objectives, use of vocabulary, conveyance of meaning and structural accuracy. As it was a small scale knowledge oriented theoretical study, several limitations of time, labour, resources and procedural aptness were competing alongside. Some large and small scale researches are still necessary ahead especially in Nepalese context for pedagogical proliferation of this crucial language skill. Nevertheless, this study would act as an epitome to arouse a keen curiosity and awareness towards the vast realm of EFL pedagogy.

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