Teachers' Cognition on Process genre approach and Practice of Teaching Writing Skills in EFL Context

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to explore teachers' cognition on process genre approach and practice of teaching writing skills, and it also aimed to assess the challenges of teaching writing skills in EFL context. The study was designed by descriptive research design. The participants were Bahir Dar Institute of Technology and Agriculture and environmental sciences, Bahir Dar University English Language and Literature instructors. The samples were taken by availability sampling technique, and the data were gathered by observation, interview and questionnaire instruments. The findings showed that English language instructors had good cognition on process genre approach; the teachers believed that the blended (process genre) approach could help students to improve their writing skills. In addition, the teachers had good pedagogical and content knowledge to deliver the course content successfully. However, their practices contradicted with their cognition; the class activities were dominated by teacher's lecture and explanations, and they did not use various feedback strategies. Furthermore, students did not mostly participate in the classroom, Moreover, the data revealed that lack of students' motivation, students' language competency, students' exposure and large class sizes were the mentioned challenges in teaching writing skills in EFL context. Generally, it was understood that in Bahir Dar Institute of Technology and College of Agriculture and Environmental sciences teachers used product oriented approach, and they focused on student's end results. The researcher recommended that the teachers should use different current approaches like process, genre and process genre approach to improve students writing skills, and in service training should be given to teachers to make them aware of how to implement different approaches with a large class size.

Key terms*:* teaching writing, Cognition, Process genre approach, EFL (English as a Foreign Language)

1. Introduction

1.1 Teaching English Language in Ethiopia

Since the 1970s, the focus on learning and teaching English language has been increasing, and since then English become the language of the world population. It is the only lingua franca language in the world (Jha, 2013). Today, English is the language of globalization, international communication, trade, media, pop culture, diplomacy, tourism, migration and technology (Richard, 2008; Richards and Rogers, 2001; Crystal, 2003), and this creates motivation for learning English language.

In Ethiopia, teaching English has a long history. According to Abiy (2005), the period between 1920 and mid 1930 was the marking period for English language to gain ground in Ethiopian education; many schools used English language as their instructional language, and it also used as a means for access to education. Boersma (2008) also mentions that English has been the medium of instruction in Ethiopian universities since their inception in 1950. Besides, according to Daniel (1998), cited by Abiy (2005) during that (1920 and mid 1930) period English language had been used for diplomacy, translation, interpretation, and it was necessary to get job, to improve their living standards and to get promotion.

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Currently, English is taught as a subject in elementary, secondary and higher institutions, and it is used as a medium of instruction to lower grades to universities. The learners are supposed to use English as their academic and working language; they ought to produce documents, hold meetings, write minutes and reports, leading and organize seminars and workshops with the target language.

Mekasha (2012) expressed that English is used as a second official language in different sectors next to Amharic; it plays a great role in trade and business communication, advertisement and entertainment, administration and office communication, and some official government organize press conferences in English. This indicates that, like any other country, in Ethiopia the status and usage of the language in different situations has been increasing.

Though the language is used in different sectors, the English language proficiency of Ethiopian students is plummeting (Dawit, 2013). Negash (2011) also expressed that learners used 'broken English', just simple words like stop! no! ... with gestures, and sometimes they used translation from English to Amharic, and learning to write is difficult for learners in EFL context as a result of various reasons (Kim and Kim, 2005; Richard, 1990). Likwise, Azhar, Kiran and Khan (2016) argue that teaching writing in any foreign language is taken very complex and tedious.

Various local and international researchers have been carried out researches to improve learners writing skills. To mention, Menna and Mulu (2016) examined the effects of blended learning in developing writing skills and they found that the blended approach is effective to improve students writing skills. Tola (2007) also investigated the effectiveness of teaching writing skills in Asella teachers College. Tola added that there is a mismatch between what teaching and learning to write communicatively and what is actually done.

In addition, Dawit (2013) focused on enhancing students through the genre approach. He investigated that genre approach is effective to improve students writing skills. The learners' effectiveness on learning writing skills is highly depending on the teachers' proper utilization of approaches, appropriate methodology, assessment techniques, materials used and students and teacher's cognition towards learning writing skills.

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However, there has been any research which investigated teachers' cognition and practice of teaching writing skills in EFL context.

1.2 Teaching Writing Skills

Writing skill is seen as a fundamental aspect of communicative competence and literacy in modern societies (Behizadeh and Jr, 2011), and it is the expression of feelings, thoughts, desires and plans. It is a basic skill for second and foreign language learners, and learning to write is usually one of the most difficult tasks a foreign language student has to cope up with (Kim and Kim, 2005; Richard, 1990) and students' difficulty of learning writing skills can be minimized by tactical oriented teaching, continuous assessment and constructive corrective feedback techniques.

According to Bacha (2002), writing contributes to the development of learners' cognitive skills, in attaining the required strategies in the learning process such as analysis, synthesis and inference. To get the required skills and to improve students writing proficiency, it is recommended that both students and teachers should employ different teaching strategies and approaches.

1.2.1 Approaches of Teaching Writing Skills

1.2.1.1 Product oriented approach

Product approach has been started with idea of drills words, phrases and sentences. Writing instruction in this approach was characterized by an approach that focused on linguistic and rhetoric form, and teachers focused on product of students writing work (Raimes, 1991). Raimes added that in this approach "writing took the form of sentence drills, substitutions, transformations and completions. Besides, learners focused on studying model texts and duplicating the model texts. Teachers judged and evaluated students paper in holistic approach and give feedback on surface level (Zamel, 1985).

Badger and White (2000: 154) also discussed that "product based approach sees writing as mainly concerned with the knowledge about the structure of language, and writing development as mainly the result of the imitation of input, in the form of texts provided by the teacher." According to Yan (2005), cited in Raimes (1983) the normal procedure is to assign a piece of writing, collect it, and then return it for further revision with the errors either corrected or marked for the students to do the correction.

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The primarily focus of the product approach is grammatical correctness, syntactical structure and imitating models, and it has been criticized by various practitioners.

1.2.1.2 Process Oriented Approach

According to this approach, students focus on process not on form and structure, and they are able to generate ideas for writing, thinking for purpose and audience and discover new ideas and get constructive feedback (Atkinson, 2003; Abbas, 2016).

Furthermore, Atkinson (2003) mentions that in this approach writing became highly cognitive, individualist and largely a social process. The process approach has a major impact on understanding the nature of writing and the way writing is taught (Hyland, 2003). This approach

emphasizes the importance of recursive procedure of pre-writing, drafting, evaluation and revising (Rusinovci, 2015).

However, focusing on process also did not make students competent learners in different context. According to Grossmann (2009) process approach neglects the linguistic elements of the written language. Badger and White (2000) also argue that the drawbacks of process approaches are often regard all writing as being produced by the same set of processes.

1.2.1.3 Genre Approach

Genre approach is another approach of teaching writing skills. Yan (2005) explains that in the 1980s this approach became popular along with the notion that students or writers could benefit from studying different types of written texts. As Yan (2005) cited in Cope and Kalantzis (1993) the genre approach to writing consists of three phases: the target genre is modeled for the students; a text is jointly constructed by the teacher and students.

The approach acknowledges that writing takes place in a social situation and reflects a particular purpose and that learning can happen consciously through imitation and analysis which facilitates explicit instruction (Badger and White, 2000). They add that genre based approach emphasizes the importance of exploring the social and cultural context of language use on a piece of writing.

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1.2.1.4 Process Genre Approach

However, using one teaching writing approach rigidly did not satisfy researchers and practitioners; so, they proposed other blended approach called process-genre approach. According to Kim and Kim (2005) in this approach writing is viewed as involving knowledge about language, context and purpose in which writing happens and skills in using language.

Badger and White (2000) explain that in the writing classroom, teachers need to replicate the situation as closely as possible and then provide sufficient support for learning to identify the purpose of other aspect of social context. So, this approach allows students to study the relationship between purpose and form of a particular genre as they use the process pre writing, drafting, revision and editing.

 Currently, various researchers explain that process genre approach help to improve learners writing development and scores. Gupitasari (2013) investigated that process genre approach improves students writing scores; Assaggaf (2016) also mentioned that students have positive view

about process genre approach and students who used this approach comprehend project reports, know how to write project and improve their writing abilities in general, and Kim and Kim (2005) also investigated that balancing process and genre approach helps learners to improve students writing skills.

Therefore, the above researchers and other related literatures show that process genre approach is the effective teaching writing approach to involve students in learning process and to familiarize students in social and cultural context in which the language is used.

1.3. Challenges of Teaching Writing Skills

Students who learn in EFL context have faced variety of challenges; these make difficult to students and teachers. According Jahin and Idrees (2012) writing seems difficult for both native and non-native learners. In EFL context as English is learnt as the foreign language and there is no practical use of it, writing skill becomes most challenging task to the learners. Students' challenge in learning writing skills is related with the linguistic, the cultural differences between the target language and the native language, and the teaching contexts; the time given for teaching and exposure are also limited. As a result, students do not practice much in and outside the classroom.

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Learners related like motivation and proficiency are also other challenges of teaching writing skills in EFL context. According to Younes and Albalawi (2015) students' failure in writing skills includes lack motivation, lack of writing feedback, lack of target language proficiency, lack of vocabulary and the interference of L1 in to L2 and psychological variables such as anxiety.

In Ethiopia, even if students learn writing skills starting from elementary, they struggle to improve the skills. It seems that lack of students' motivation, lack of pedagogical knowledge, lack of instructional materials and students' exposures hamper learners to improve their skills.

1.4.   Teachers Cognition and Teaching Writing Skills

In recent years, the issues of language teachers' cognition have attracted the attention of an increasing number of researchers (Yigtoglu, 2011). Studies in teacher cognition include knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, personal theories (Freeman, 2002; Woods, 1996 and Borg, 2003).

They indicate that teachers know, think and believe influences their practices in English language classroom.

Furthermore, writing approach the teachers use, teaching materials, assessment, teaching methods/classroom teaching and assessment are based on teachers' cognition. As Suwaed (2011) cited Freeman (2002:6) teacher's cognition plays an important role in their teaching practice. Besides, writing teachers' beliefs and practices can be influenced by their learning, living and teaching experiences

According D'Elisa (2015) cited in Hardre' and Hennessey (2013) factors influencing motivation (attribution theory, self-efficacy theory, expectancy value theory, self-theories, achievement goal theory and self-determination theory) linked to teacher beliefs and perceptions. As a result, this was intended to achieve the following research objectives.

- ✓ Investigate the teachers' cognition of process genre approach in Bahir Dar Institute of Technology and College of Agricultural and Environmental science, Bahir Dar University.
- ✓ Explore the practice of instructors in using process genre approach in Bahir Dar Institute of Technology and College of Agricultural and Environmental science, Bahir Dar University.
- ✓ Identify the major challenges in teaching writing skills by process genre approach in the institute and in the college.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

This study aimed to investigate teacher's cognition on process genre approach of teaching writing skills. The research was conducted at Bahir Dar Institute of Technology and college of Agriculture and environmental sciences, Bahir Dar University, and it was employed both qualitative and quantitative data. The research looked in to whether or not teachers' practice process genre approach in teaching writing skills in EFL context and it also assessed the challenges countered in applying the approach. Therefore, descriptive research design was employed.

2.2. Sampling and Participant of the Study

The participants of the study were Basic writing skills course instructors at Bahir Dar Institute of Technology and college of Agriculture and Environmental sciences, Bahir Dar University, in 2016/017 academic year. In the institute and college, there are 12 English Language and Literature

instructors including the researcher. As a result, 11 instructors participated and the institute and the college were chosen by availability sampling and proximity reasons.

2.3 Data Gathering Instruments

The instruments used for this study were observation, interview and questionnaire. The researcher prepared eight observation checklist items and nine (9) interview items to gather the data. In the observation and interview instruments, teachers believes, their practices, feedback strategies, class size, challenges and teachers teaching experiences were addressed.

Furthermore, 25 questionnaire items were administered to 11 instructors. Among those items, 12 items were focused on teachers' cognition and 13 items were addressed the practice of teaching writing skills in the college and in the institute. The first 12 items were developed on a five Likert point (strongly agree, agree undecided, disagree and strongly disagree), and the second 13 items were also developed on a five Likert scale point (always, usually, sometimes, rarely and never).

For the research discussion purpose, the questionnaire items SPSS result over 3 and more are perceived, respondents have positive cognition, and the questionnaire was adopted from Al-Azani (2015), and the teaching material was also assessed based on (Badger and white, 2000; Kim and Kim, 2005) ideas.

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2.4 Data Collection and analyzed Procedures

Observations were made with four instructors, and interview was performed with two instructors using a recorder. The observation was conducted with open ended checklist. It was conducted for an hour and 20 minutes in each class. Before the interviews were conducted, the researcher and the teachers had short discussions about process genre approach and how teachers could apply it.

The items were focused on post observation such as how did they address teaching writing approach and their class room practice, challenges faced while they applied process genre approach and their understanding on process genre approach. Furthermore, the questionnaire validity was also checked by three PhD candidates, and they revised and administered to the instructors. Finally, the data obtained from observation, interviews and questionnaire were analyzed thematically.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1 Teachers' Qualification and experiences

Teachers who delivered basic writing skills course have second degree in Teaching English as a foreign Language and three of them are PhD candidates in the field of teaching English language as a foreign language. The teachers have 9-16 years of teaching English language in foreign language context.

Besides, all participants (teachers) have been teaching this course for average of 8 years in secondary schools and in higher institutions. As a result, it has been seen that teachers have ample teaching experiences and that could not influence their teaching practices.

3.2 Teachers Cognition on Process Genre Approach

Teachers' level of cognition on process genre approach was investigated by questionnaires.

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Teachers cognition on process genre approach	11	3.50	4.08	3.8106	.20443

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Table (1) Teachers' cognition on process genre approach

The above table (1) showed that teachers accepted the process genre approach and they believed that the blended (process genre approach) help students to improve their writing skills. The teachers' cognation had 3.8 mean score which is high, and this indicates teachers believe and appreciate on the significance of process genre approach. Moreover, teachers appreciated its importance to improve academic writing skills and motivation.

Furthermore, they also supported the above ideas during the interview. Teachers mentioned that students' lack of language competency in writing skills is as a result of in appropriate teaching approach. They said that students have not good writing skills, and their skills are below their level and expectations. All most all teachers argued that students' lack of writing skills competency could be improved by using process as well as genre approach

However, the actual practice of teacher was different from what they perceived; they implemented product approach, and they sometimes applied process approach. In general, it is find out that English language teachers have good cognition on process genre approach, and they believed the application of the blended approach could help to enhance students writing skills.

3.3 Practice of Teaching Writing Skills in EFL Classes.

The other main focus of this research was investigating the practice of EFL teachers towards process genre approach.

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I teach vocabularies that students may use in their assigned writing	11	1	4	2.73	.786
I teach students different types genres or texts	11	3	4	3.55	.522
I ask students to make a pre writing plan	11	3	5	4.00	.447
I ask students to use the skills they have learnt to produce similar text	11	3	4	3.82	.405
I edit students writing to show common mistakes	11	3	5	4.09	.701
I ask students to highlight the important ideas of the essay	11	3	5	3.55	.688
I give students exercise to organize ideas of scrambled events of a story	11	3	4	3.55	.522
I create cultural context while I teach writing skills	11	3	4	3.27	.467
I create professional context to engage students while I teach writing	11	3	4	3.36	.505
I emphasize in giving oral feedback to students writing	11	2	4	3.36	.924
Students like to get feedback from their peers	11	2	5	3.45	.820
I give students free writing	11	3	4	3.45	.522
I ask students to proof read the final draft of their peers	11	1	4	2.91	1.300

Table 2. Practice of teaching writing skills

The above table 2 revealed that most teachers with the mean score value (4.09) mentioned teachers edited students written works to show their common mistakes. Specifically, 54.5% of respondents mentioned that they usually edited pieces of writing with students to show common mistakes, and 27.3% of respondents also mentioned that they always edited students work. Moreover, the teachers asked their students to make a pre writing plan. This activity or practice had a mean score of 4.00. These indicate teachers frequently directed them to follow process of writing while they develop their paragraph and essay, and teachers also asked their students to produce similar text which had a mean value 3.82.

In addition, teachers also taught writing skills by creating professional context, and they mostly used oral feedback strategies. The activities had 3.36 mean. Particularly, 63.6% of respondents mentioned that they usually emphasize in giving oral feedback, and 27.3% respondents mention they rarely emphasized giving oral feedback. Whereas 63.6% of respondents mentioned that they created professional context while delivering writing skills and 36.4% respondents mentioned that they usually created the professional context. Generally, as it has been observed in the above table, the teachers seemed practiced product approach; the practices which have a large mean values are activities categorized in to practice of product approach.

The class room observation also proved similar practice that teachers dominantly used product approach. In particular, Abebe (given name) gave notes and explanations, and he gave little time to students to practice. The students copied model paragraphs and direct them to produce similar paragraph. Besides, he spent his time by giving lectures and dictations. This teacher believed the theoretical aspects of concepts (for example, what paragraph is and principles of good paragraph construction etc.) has similar significant with that of practice.

Furthermore, the teacher was observed that he spent his hours by lecturing what 'emphasis, types of emphasis and paragraph (it was the topic of the lesson). In addition, he gave orally one example to show how writers emphasize ideas while they write paragraph. So, in his classroom presentation, dictation, reading and writing notes on the board were emphasized

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The other issue was the teacher relied his full class and time on basic writing skills teaching module which was prepared by the university. Since, the module organized through product way, the contents are approached from simple to complex and specific to general (sentence, paragraph then essay), but the teacher did not give further explanations out of the given material. The material did not give chance to the teacher and students to practice more and bring some genres which are significant to students' profession.

Likewise, Kebede (given name) also gave notes and explanations about 'essay, types of essay, thesis statement and principles of essay writing'. In his presentation, he gave less time for students to develop their own essay writing. This teacher gave some minutes to students to write introductory paragraph and picked three students to read their sample. He also depended on the module which is the common practices of Ethiopian EFL teachers.

Generally, teacher's practice of teaching writing skills is influenced by their way of learning experience and lack of commitment. Teachers also gave less attention to students writing skill development.

Alemu and Fekadu (these are also given name) have applied a mixed approach to some extent. Even if the teachers gave sample paragraphs or models, they tried to involve students in the lesson. Besides, they tried to give examples and illustrations which are related to students' profession. They also practiced different feedback strategies, like self-feedback, peer feedback and teacher feedback strategies and students' written work was passed through in to various writing process.

Generally, most teachers did not practice as they perceived, and the module did not offer sufficient activity to teach writing skills and cannot provide different genres that help to develop students' writing skills. Activities and texts are approached without giving much emphasis to students' background, social context and students' level of language competency, and teachers' practice of teaching writing skills are influenced by their way of learning experience. Teachers also gave less attention to students writing skills development. The basic feedback approaches (self-feedback, peer feedback) were not observed.

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At last, according to the data, writing instructions in Bahir Dar institute of technology, writing classrooms is still very much product oriented, and teachers taught writing through conventional approach and learners focused on studying model text and duplicating the model paragraphs and essays. According to Yan (2005:19) "the product approach has received much criticism because it ignores the actual process used by students, or any writers to produce a piece of writing, and the approach requires constant error correction and that affects students' motivation and self-esteem."

3.4. Challenges of Teaching Writing skills in EFL classes

The researcher was also interested to analyze the main challenges which hamper teaching writing skills in foreign language context by process genre approach. As it was learnt from the observation and interview, the first challenge was teachers' experiences; Even if teachers supported and accepted the significance of the blended approach, they are influenced by the way they have been

learnt while they were students. Many researchers argued that teachers' practices are influenced by their perceptions, experiences, and beliefs. So, teachers' practices were influenced by their experience of learning and teaching writing skills; they practiced as the way they have been taught.

The other challenge was the teaching materials. The teachers used basic writing skill module which was prepared by Bahir Dar University for the purpose of common course teaching material. Although the material allowed teachers to choose other contents, the teachers were not committed to bring various aspect of writing to the classroom from other sources. In addition, the contents are vast to cover within the allowed time (one semester), and the material lacks comprehensive inputs to be used as the only teaching material in the institute and in the college.

The further observed challenge was students' exposure and lack of appropriate feedback strategies. The teachers' believed that it is impossible to give feedback for 65 students and cover the contents of the module. The teachers neither used self nor did peer feedback and they did not practice frequently teachers' feedback. These make difficult to students to improve the writing skills in the process genre approach. Furthermore, students do not have the exposure to practice the target language outside classroom. So, they focus on passing to examinations and they study for the exam purpose. As Yan (2005) mentions, for many students the only reason to practice writing is to pass examination or to grade in the class. As a result, lack of exposure is also the challenge of students in EFL context.

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In addition, lack of students' motivation was the other challenge. As it has been mentioned above, many students who took the Basic writing skills as the common course were not motivated to attend classes, to engage in group work activities, to participate actively in the class room and to use writing skills in different situations. Students' lack of language competency is also another challenge of teaching writing skills. While they wrote paragraphs and essays, students faced lack of language competency, and these did not inspire them to engage and participate in writing class.

Finally, large class size was the other major problem of teaching writing skills in foreign language context. Even if the university legislation and the Ethiopian harmonized academic policy legislation (Ministry of Education, 2013) recommended that all language courses should have 40-60 students in each class, some of the institute of technology teachers have been teaching 65 and

above students in a class room. As they mentioned, this may have hampered teachers to apply the process genre approach.

4. **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The findings of this research indicated that teachers had good content and pedagogical knowledge. Though they had good cognition on process genre approach, they did not practice well in the EFL classes. As a result, the teachers frequently practiced product oriented approach, and they relied on oral and unfocused feedback strategies.

Teachers have been challenged by many factors to apply the process genre approach in their classrooms. The main challenges of teaching writing skills are lack of motivation, lack of exposure, vast contents and large class size.

As Kim and Kim (2005) recommended in EFL contexts, where exposure to English language use and practice is extremely limited, more effective approach to writing should be applied to writing instruction. To do this, the researcher suggests that using a blended approach is the good approach to improve learners' language proficiency and writing skills, so the teachers should apply the blended (process genre) approach in their classroom. Furthermore, continuous professional development and appraisal training is needed to motivate teachers to apply new concept/paradigms of teaching writing skills. As well as EFL teachers should use various motivational strategies to motivate their students.

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