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## CHALLENGES OF TEACHING AND LEARNING WRITING SKILLS IN NEPALESE ENGLISH CLASSES

*Bhim Lal Bhandari*

*Butwal Multiple Campus, Rupandehi, TU, Nepal  
Corresponding author: [blbhandari2024@gmail.com](mailto:blbhandari2024@gmail.com)*

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### ABSTRACT

Writing is one of the important language skills that most language learners want to acquire to write effectively in different contexts. It is to be mastered in learning English as a foreign language as it is a challenging task and the mastery of the English language. This article aims to explore the English language teachers' and students' challenges with teaching and learning writing skills in Nepali English classes of Nepal. To achieve the objective of the study, I used a survey research design. I selected eighty respondents (twenty teachers and sixty students) randomly from ten public schools in Rupandehi, Nepal. Two sets of closed-ended questionnaires with 24 items were used as a major technique to collect data about teaching and learning writing in terms of problems. The findings of the study showed that the majority of school students faced challenges in learning writing skills due to a lack of vocabulary, difficulties with syntax, unethical spelling and punctuation, lack of exposure and motivation, an adverse family environment, and incompetence in arranging phrases and paragraphs. Similarly, the majority of the teachers faced challenges in motivating the students, and preparing suitable activities for different writing tasks in the class. The results of this study can aid in understanding the difficulties that teachers and students have while teaching and learning writing skills.

**Keywords:** cohesive and coherent, motivation, teaching and learning writing, writing anxiety

### INTRODUCTION

Teaching writing is a process that enables learners to effectively communicate ideas, emotions, and feelings on paper. It includes the ideas,

unity of paragraphs, sentence pattern, grammar, correct punctuation, vocabulary, spelling, and capitalization. One of the biggest issues English teachers and learners in most schools nowadays confront is improving their learners' writing skills. However, writing has always been a significant challenge in learning English language, particularly in secondary schools that involves concentration and thinking to organize concepts rationally, analytically, and artistically in a purposeful way (Selvaraj & Aziz, 2019). Writing is a tool for expressing ideas, emotions, and experiences which is not a natural activity (Nunan, 1989). The language is taught to common people so they can converse. ESL students should be urged to communicate their thoughts, feelings, and experiences in the meanwhile. Asmuti (2002) pointed out that having a writing aptitude enables authors to structure their ideas and elaborate them. While learning a language, pupils must increase their vocabulary, idioms, and understanding of grammatical construction.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

First, I provide some literature on writing that examines numerous writing-related research in this part as well as teaching writing in general at home and abroad.

### Significance of writing skills

Writing is an essential skill that helps students throughout their lives. Students' confidence may rise if it is introduced and practised in schools with fun activities, and long-term, they may develop a passion for writing. For secondary-level learners, writing skills are essential right away to carry on learning in all academic disciplines, including communication and expressiveness. Writing assignments encourage the enhancement of general academic growth through critical thinking. Students may learn about themselves and solve their real-life issues via diaries and personal narrative writing. Writing helps learners develop socially and links them to the world around them so that they are aware of many things. Learning to write in a second language takes time, and both the instructor and the pupils seemed to value the students' achievements and development (Andrei *et al.*, 2019). Students must consider the readers and the purpose while writing. Students learn from one another by comparing their writing to that of their friends. The most crucial skill that students must learn in an academic setting is writing (Fareed *et al.*, 2016; Tseng, 2019).

As students go through their academic careers, they must be literate in computers along with their academic literacy. Although the two skills are

complementary, some computer programmes, such as spelling and grammar checkers, may prevent users from refining their writing skills. Students must learn that they must apply their knowledge rather than rely on computers, which can make mistakes as well. As information technology advances, authors are in high demand to provide content for digital media.

### **Writing strategies**

Teaching writing is to help students learn and communicate regularly. Many researches have been carried out to gain a better knowledge of how to teach writing to language learners. Students may utilize many writing approaches at the same time. Some instructional writing methods include pre-writing, writing warm-ups, cooperative writing, using sentence starters, and guided writing. All writing approaches cannot be taught at the same time since they may have different informative goals. Using a range of instructional methods can help students improve their English writing abilities. When the students exhibit interest and become active participants in their learning, the learning procedure will be on track. Adopting diverse writing styles will also inspire them to think imaginatively.

Writing is the most difficult and complex language skill, requiring writers to possess a thorough command of capitalization, conventions, syntax, vocabulary, and punctuation, as well as their cohesive and coherent linkage in making sentences, texts, and discourses (Jusun & Yunus, 2018). It is the graphic representation of human wishes, feelings, emotions, ideas, and intents. Many individuals can talk easily but struggle to write well since learning to write in a second or foreign language is difficult. Writing, according to Sokolik (2003), is both a process and a result. The act of gathering ideas is referred to as the process and the procedures we follow while producing a piece of writing are referred to as the result. Students are often afraid of writing tasks as writing is a productive skill; it requires high demands to do it. English is utilized as a lingua franca across the world by individuals of many cultures, ethnicities, and social backgrounds (Dewi, 2015).

Afrin's (2016) study in Bangladesh revealed that the writing problems of non-English major students were their grammatical deficiencies, lack of practice, lack of enthusiasm, and their educational background. The capacity to properly teach writing in secondary schools is one of the most critical skills for English teachers. English teachers find it difficult to teach writing in English, and students view writing as a "frightening activity,"

even though it is a mandatory subject in Nepal from basic education to the undergraduate level (Paudel & Joshi, 2017). So, it is an important part of English teaching. Teaching writing has been provided to pupils throughout their early childhood when they first learn how to make letters correctly.

Many implications might have a significant impact on pupils' academic achievement if they have a weak writing foundation. Writing is essential for improving academic achievement as well as social and emotional growth. Furthermore, in today's competitive environment, it is one of the abilities required to blossom. Students' incapacity to write properly may risk their future work prospects. As a result, this issue must be addressed efficiently. However, due to the difficulties encountered by the learners, teaching writing has become tough due to their lack of vocabulary, poor grammar and spelling, a lack of preparation and exposure to writing-related books and reading resources.

Learners find it challenging to participate in writing projects due to a lack of acceptable teaching techniques, accessing tools, and inappropriate themes. Pablo and Lasaten (2018) discovered that 227 students struggle with a lack of variety in materials and ideas, a lack of connectives in the organization, inappropriate terminology, word choice, bad sentence patterns in language usage, and pronouns. Because of the difficulties that students face when writing, the quality of their essays ranges from poor to fair. Students' issues have made it problematic for instructors to teach writing skills. Teachers confront challenges while teaching writing skills, including the inability to excite their learners, their varying abilities, challenging materials, and time limits. A teacher must require more time to write instructions to help students improve their writing skills.

Writing is one of the productive language skills and it is a complex activity (Ling, 2016). Writing exercises should be undertaken with pupils from the start of school so that they can produce good work in the future. It is regarded as one of the most important academic disciplines for secondary school students. Fareed *et al.*, (2016) discovered that 30 ESL (English as a Second Language) undergraduates lacked language competence (grammar, syntax, and vocabulary), experienced writing anxiety, had hazy thoughts, were too reliant on L1, lacked structural structure, excluded relied on L1, and had the knowledge of poor structural organization. They also ruled out numerous potential sources of the problems such as a lack of reading habits and training on writing skills. Singh *et al.*, (2017) used content analysis to analyse 144 students' papers. Subject-verb agreement and tenses

were shown to be two prevalent writing faults. Because the pupils were overgeneralized, they mixed up the tenses and struggled with complicated sentence construction. This problem was caused by students' incorrect use of subject-verb agreement. Similar research found that university-level students also made these errors due to a lack of competence in English.

Similarly, Ibnian (2017) has discovered that students exhibited a variety of writing problems, including morphology, syntax, usage mistakes, mechanical flaws, punctuations, capitalization (spellings, tenses), prepositions, and connectors. The lack of clear assessment techniques and marking systems, as well as time limits, all contributed to EFL (English as a foreign language) students' writing difficulties. They found it difficult to participate in writing projects due to a lack of acceptable teaching techniques, consulting tools, and inappropriate themes. The study by Habibi *et al.*, (2018) on 70 students indicated that they have problems with seven aspects of writing: poor organization/illogical sequencing, word choice, grammatical faults, spelling, concept confusion, punctuation, and capitalization. Girls were found to struggle with grammatical issues whereas boys struggle with word choice.

According to Nawas (2018), linguistic challenges, mechanical faults, writing development concerns, and cognitive issues are the students' difficulties in improving their writing skills. Lack of ideas, vocabulary, and writing organization create issues for pupils when writing.

Vasquez and Pilgrim's (2018) study indicated that teachers were found unprepared due to a lack of professional development on the issue at hand. The teachers are plainly "more confident and successful" in teaching their learners when they feel more prepared (Shreve, 2005). The study has shown that teachers face problems in teaching writing due to not being able to communicate with students and parents, lack of appropriate materials, and a lack of accurate information about exactly what academic content their students already know and what they need to learn. Later, Karki (2019) has explored the techniques and problems of teaching writing to secondary-level students in Sunsari, Nepal. This research shows overcrowded classes, low competence learners, course completion pressure, a lack of practical training for instructors, and limited classroom resources, including ICT as the major problems of teaching writing.

Pandey's study (2022) in Dang, Nepal discovered many difficulties that made teaching writing more difficult: centralized curriculum design, a lack of resources and training, and a lack of English proficiency among

students in classrooms. Furthermore, students' performance in grammar, word combination, and sentence building is relatively poor, which discourages pupils from writing. As a result, teaching writing in Nepali high school classrooms is seen as a challenging genre.

To my knowledge, the previous researchers examined either teachers' or students' challenges while teaching and learning writing skills. This type of study has not been carried out yet in Rupandehi district, Nepal. Therefore, I examine the challenges that both teachers and students face while teaching and learning writing skills. This study is different from the previously reviewed ones as the context, and challenges to be examined are different. This study will be valuable in understanding the school-level challenges of teaching and learning writing skill and determining whether or not the same challenges persist in this context. The objective of this research study was to examine teachers' and students' challenges in teaching and learning writing skills.

### **Research Question**

The study had answered the following research question.

What challenges do secondary-level teachers and students face in teaching and learning writing skills in English?

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This was a survey research design in which I used primary sources of data. Quantitative research uses descriptive statistics to describe the obtained information. The quantitative study is numerical, results-oriented, and accurately depicts the true value which is frequently beyond the scope of the researcher's observation. According to Nunan (2003), this process is trustworthy because it is invasive and well-organized, unbiased and outcome-oriented, and assumes the existence of 'facts' that are somehow external to and independent of the researcher.

This research study consisted of 80 respondents (60 students and 20 English teachers) from ten public schools in Rupandehi so, this is a survey research. I provided two sets of close-ended questionnaires to the respondents to collect primary information about the challenges that they face in teaching and learning writing skills. I evaluated the quantitative data based on the participants' responses. The acquired data were analysed and assessed using numerical tools. As a result, this study falls within this category.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the results of the closed-ended questionnaire provided to respondents are presented. The results are presented and discussed below in two categories of the challenges with writing. The researcher delivers the findings and information gathered through the data-gathering tool, as well as its analysis, discussion, and interpretation. He used tables to demonstrate the results.

### Students' challenges in learning writing skills

Each learner may encounter unique challenges when learning to write as they are exceptional in their learning. These issues will prevent them from progressing toward producing a decent piece of writing. The following table shows the challenges faced by the students in writing skills.

Table 1 shows students' challenges in learning writing skills. In this context, 60% of teachers strongly agreed 33.33% agreed, 3.3% strongly disagreed and 6.67% disagreed that they feel difficulty in writing due to poor vocabulary. Similarly, 58.33% of teachers strongly agreed 30% agreed, 5% strongly disagreed and 6.67% disagreed they have trouble with grammar. Likewise, 13.33% of teachers strongly agreed 16.67% agreed, 43.33% strongly disagreed and 26.67% disagreed that they were not physically and mentally ready to complete writing tasks. Similarly, 16.67% of teachers strongly agreed and 58.33% agreed, 8.33% strongly disagreed and 16.67% disagreed that they lack exposure to different materials for writing. Likewise, 60% of teachers strongly agreed and 16.67% agreed, 6.67% strongly disagreed and 16.67% disagreed that they do not enjoy writing assignments. Also, 58.33% of teachers strongly agreed and 41.67% agreed 5% strongly disagreed and 3.33% disagreed that their poor spelling and punctuation ability hinder them in learning writing skills. In the same way, 58.33% of teachers strongly agreed and 33.33% agreed 6.67% strongly disagreed, 1.67% disagreed that they have no internet access in the class to get resources in writing. Moreover, 16.67% of teachers strongly agreed and 33.33% agreed 20% strongly disagreed and 30% disagreed that their home environment is not favourable for learning writing. Besides, 30% of teachers strongly agreed and 33.33% agreed, 11.67% strongly disagreed and 25% disagreed that writing tasks given in the textbooks are not interesting. Additionally, 51.67% of teachers strongly agreed and 33.33% agreed, 5% strongly disagreed 10% disagreed that they feel difficulty in organizing sentences and paragraphs. Furthermore, 40% of teachers strongly agreed

and 45% agreed, 10% strongly disagreed and 5% disagreed that they do not feel confident while writing.

**Table 1**

*Students' challenges in learning writing skills*

S.N.	Statements	SA %	A %	SD %	D %
1	I feel difficulty in writing due to poor vocabulary	36 (60%)	20 (33.33%)	2 (3.33%)	4 (6.67%)
2	I have trouble with grammar	35 (58.33%)	18 (30%)	3 (5%)	4 (6.67%)
3	I am not physically and mentally ready to complete writing tasks	8 (13.33%)	10 (16.67%)	26 (43.33%)	16 (26.67%)
4	I have lack of exposure to different materials for writing	10 (16.67%)	35 (58.33%)	5 (8.33)	10 (16.67%)
5	I do not enjoy writing assignment	36 (60%)	10 (16.67%)	4 (6.67%)	10 (16.67%)
6	My poor spelling and punctuation ability hinder me from learning writing skill	35 (58.33%)	20 (33.33%)	3 (5%)	2 (3.33%)
7	We have no internet access in the class to get resources	35 (58.33%)	20 (33.33%)	4 (6.67%)	1 (1.67%)
8	My home environment is not favourable for learning writing	10 (16.67%)	20 (33.33%)	12 (20%)	18 (30%)
9	Writing tasks given in the textbooks are not interesting	18 (30%)	20 (33.33%)	7 (11.67%)	15 (25%)
10	I find it difficult to organize sentences and paragraphs	31 (51.67%)	20 (33.33%)	3 (5%)	6 (10%)
11	I revise my writing tasks to correct the text.	24 (40%)	27 (45%)	6 (10%)	3 (5%)
12	I do not feel confident while writing	27 (45%)	24 (40)	3 (5%)	6 (10%)

The results indicate that the majority of student respondents strongly agreed that they had challenges in writing due to poor vocabulary, disinterested writing assignments; lack of exposure to different materials



for writing, their poor spelling and punctuation ability that hindered them in learning writing skills. Moreover, the majority of them had no internet access in the class to get resources in writing and they had challenges in organizing sentences and paragraphs. Similarly, they agreed that they had lack of exposure to different materials for writing skills.

### Teachers' challenges in teaching writing skills

Teaching writing at the secondary level has always been difficult for teachers. The issues will render the teachers' instruction useless. The instructors confront the following challenges.

**Table 2**

*Teachers' challenges in teaching writing skills*

S.N.	Statements	SA %	A %	SD %	D %
1	I have a hard time motivating the students	10 (50%)	8 (40%)	0	2 (10%)
2	Students get little guidance and support from their parents at home	12 (60%)	4 (20%)	2 (10%)	2 (10%)
3	Being a novice teacher, I lack professional experience	12 (60%)	4 (20%)	3 (15%)	1 (5%)
4	I find it difficult to prepare appropriate activities for different writing tasks in the class	13 (65%)	2 (10%)	2 (10%)	3 (15%)
5	My students are not interested in learning writing skills	11 (55%)	4 (20%)	3 (15%)	2 (10%)
6	I do not get the opportunity to participate in training sessions	11 (55%)	6 (30%)	0	3 (15%)
7	I cannot make them work in pairs/groups on the assigned writing tasks	14 (70%)	5 (25%)	0	1 (5%)
8	I have to provide them with ready-made writing tasks.	13 (65%)	6 (30%)	0	1 (5%)
9	I rarely involve the students in peer correction	18 (90%)	2 (10%)	0	0
10	I cannot address mixed-ability learners by giving both easy and difficult writing tasks	12 (60%)	8 (40%)	0	0
11	I cannot manage classroom time and class work as well as learning materials as a facilitator.	8 (40%)	11 (55%)	1 (5%)	0
12	It is difficult to give common feedback on students' writing errors	6 (30%)	12 (60%)	0	2 (10%)

Table 2 displays the challenges that teachers faced while teaching writing skills. In this regard, 50% of teachers strongly agreed and 40%

agreed. Similarly, none of them strongly disagreed and 10% of respondents disagreed that they were having a hard time motivating the students. Likewise, 60% strongly agreed, 20% agreed, similarly, 10% of them strongly disagreed and 10% disagreed that they got little guidance and support from their parents at home. In the same way, 60% strongly agreed, 20% agreed, 15% of them strongly disagreed and 5% disagreed that being novice teachers, they lack professional experience. Also, 65% strongly agreed, 10% agreed, similarly, 10% of respondents strongly disagreed and 15% disagreed that teachers feel difficult to prepare appropriate activities for different writing tasks in the class. Moreover, 55% strongly agreed, 20% agreed, 15% of them strongly disagreed, and 10% disagreed that students were not interested in learning writing skills. Besides, 55% strongly agreed 30% agreed, none of them strongly disagreed, and 15% disagreed that teachers did not get the opportunity to participate in training sessions. Similarly, 70% strongly agreed, 25% agreed, none of them strongly disagreed, and 5% disagreed that they could not make them work in pairs/groups on the assigned writing tasks. Likewise, 65% strongly agreed, 30% agreed, none of them strongly disagreed, and 5% disagreed that they had to provide them with ready-made writing tasks. Moreover, 90% strongly agreed, 10% agreed, and none of them strongly disagreed and disagreed that they rarely involved the students in peer correction. Additionally, 60% strongly agreed, 40% agreed, and none of them strongly disagreed and disagreed that they could not address mixed-ability learners by giving both easy and difficult writing tasks. In the same way, 40% strongly agreed, 55% agreed, 5% strongly disagreed and none of them disagreed that they could not manage classroom time and class work as well as learning materials as a facilitator. Finally, 30% strongly agreed, 60% agreed, none of them strongly disagreed and 10% of them disagreed that it was difficult to give common feedback to students' writing errors.

The majority of the teacher respondents strongly agreed that they had a hard time motivating the students, they got little guidance and support from their parents at home. Being novice teachers, they had lack of professional experience, and they had challenges preparing appropriate activities for different writing tasks for the mixed-ability learners in the class, Besides, they did not get the opportunity to participate in training sessions. The teachers could not make their students work in pairs/groups on the assigned writing tasks as they were not interested in learning writing

skills. They had to provide them with ready-made writing tasks and they could rarely involve the students in peer correction.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The objective of this study was to investigate the challenges that both students and teachers have when learning and teaching writing skills. The findings of the study show that the majority of secondary-level school students strongly agreed that they faced challenges learning writing skills due to the lack of vocabulary, trouble with grammar, poor spelling and punctuation, lack of readiness, lack of exposure and motivation, lack of confidence and internet access in the class, unfavourable home environment, and their inability in organizing sentences and paragraphs. As a result, it is difficult for English teachers to teach them writing skills. Similarly, the majority of the teachers faced challenges in teaching writing skills as they had a hard time motivating the students. Likewise, less support to the students from their parents at home, lack of professional experience, and inability to prepare appropriate activities for different writing tasks for the mixed-ability students in the class were other problems. Besides, they got fewer opportunities to participate in training sessions to boost their teaching skills. Due to students' disinterest, they could not make them work in pairs/groups on the assigned writing tasks so, they were compelled to provide them with ready-made writing tasks.

The findings of this study can support identifying learners' and teachers' challenges in teaching and learning writing skills at the secondary level. It also puts forward some challenges from the teaching-learning perspectives, which can resolve the difficulties related to teaching and learning writing skills. Teachers and students will certainly have some takeaways from this study. It is hoped that this study will minimize the challenges encountered by teachers and students in teaching and learning writing skills and inspire them to solve their difficulties. Since it has several limitations, more extensive research can be done with a larger sample size to investigate teachers' and students' writing-related challenges in future.

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