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Collaboration, Discussion, and Feedback for Improving Students' (Report) Writing and Presentation: A Participatory Action Research

Rajan Kumar Kandel and Ganesh Kumar Kandel

Abstract

This study investigates how model presentation, collaboration, discussion, and peer feedback as the intervention of participatory action research (PAR) improved students' academic writing (AW) and presentation skills while dealing with a practical course 'ELT seminar and report writing'. We implemented the intervention for three months in our regular class with 30 students pursuing a Master's Degree in English Education from Tribhuvan University, Nepal. During the intervention, we used observation notes and after the intervention, we used semi-structured interviews (with 15 students) to collect data. The findings showed that the intervention significantly improved the students' AW and presentation skills. The findings also showed that students refined their writing skills by gaining insight from the model presentation, discussions, and feedback. They significantly improved their writing and presentation skills through collaborative tasks performed regularly during the study. The study suggests that model presentation, group discussion, peer and teacher feedback, and self-reflection can be effective in enhancing students' AW and presentation.

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Corresponding Author:

Rajan Kumar Kandel

Email: kdlrajan.k@gmail.com

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Introduction

Academic Writing (AW) is essential for university students, especially those studying report writing courses in English as a second language (ESL) programs. AW skills are necessary for students to succeed in their academic pursuits, including research projects, essays, and assignments. However, students struggle with AW skills as they lack vocabulary, techniques for developing cohesive writing, lack of AW culture in the classrooms, and support from organizations (Elbow, 1998; Zhang & Wang, 2023). As a result, writing becomes a tiresome and more rigorous activity than speech (Iftanti, 2016). Therefore, it is essential to develop effective strategies to enhance students' AW skills. This study aims to investigate how model presentation, collaboration, discussion, and feedback as an intervention helped students improve their AW and presentation skills during the instruction of the ELT seminar and report writing course.

ELT seminars and report writings are important parts of ESL programs in universities. ELT seminars aim to enhance students' language proficiency, critical thinking skills, and knowledge of the English language. However, due to the dependence of the mixed-ability heterogeneous students on their teachers in the Nepali context (Kandel, 2014), many ESL students find AW and presentation difficult to

begin with and complete successfully in the ELT seminar. Although the improvement of advanced writing skills is essential in today's text-oriented world (Yangın-Ekşi et al., 2022), many students may lack such skills. They struggle with the format, choice of academic vocabulary, and way of organizing ideas in writing. Instead, they take AW similar to other types of generic writings. AW is a challenging and complex writing process where students face problems in organizing and synthesizing ideas, using grammatically correct sentences, appropriate academic vocabulary, and proper citation and referencing (Islamiyah & Fajri, 2020). Therefore, it is essential to develop effective strategies to enhance students' AW skills for preparing research reports and their presentations in the ELT seminars.

PAR has been identified as an effective approach to foster a better learning environment and habit of collaborative problem-solving (Thawinwong & Sanrattana, 2022), which helps participant students develop research ideas and AW skills in various educational contexts (Dancis et al., 2023). PAR promotes research participants for collaboration and reflective practice. It is effective in encouraging active learning and engagement among students. It involves both teachers and students in a self-reflective cycle of planning, acting, observing, reflecting and then repeating the cycle successively to improve the practices (Kemmis et al., 2014).

Problem Statement

AW involves a wide range of writing that involves writing reports, papers, and articles including other varieties of research-based writing (Das, 2019; Das et al., 2022). Despite the importance of AW skills in ELT seminars, many ESL students struggle with AW which can negatively affect their performance and achievement. Research finding also indicates that students feel difficulty in many aspects of writing such as spelling, writing summary and organizing texts while developing writing skills (Zhang & Wang, 2023). The traditional approach to teaching AW, which often involves lectures and individual writing assignments, is ineffective in enhancing students' AW skills. The teaching of writing skills in the Chinese context is a challenging job because it incorporates various skills from drafting to the final essay (Chen, 2023). The findings of the study reported students' difficulties in writing since they used vague expressions, unclear main points, and simple sentence structure as a result of low vocabulary and organization knowledge.

Writing skills in our context too is one of the difficult skills to learn for students. Even the students of graduate and post-graduate levels find it difficult to write different kinds of academic papers such as reports, proposals, theses and other kinds of formal writing and their dissemination. Thus, there is a need to develop effective strategies to enhance students' AW skills in the ELT seminar. As PAR allows researchers to put ideas and assumptions into practice and examine their usefulness by gathering evidence (McTaggart, 1997), we identified it as an effective approach to enhancing students' AW as well as presentation skills. Despite the potential benefits of PAR in enhancing students' AW skills, there is limited research on its effectiveness in improving students' report writing skills and presentation. In this regard, this study aims to investigate the impact of the intervention on enhancing students' AW and presentation skills. It also aims to explore how different collaborative activities, model presentation, open discussions, and everyday writing and commenting as intervention helps students develop and polish their AW skills. The study aims to contribute to the literature on effective strategies for enhancing students' AW skills in ESL programs. Moreover, this study aims to investigate the impact of PAR intervention on improving students' AW as well as presentation skills.

Research Questions

The study aimed to address the following research questions:

- a) How does the use of model presentations, student collaboration, discussions, and feedback improve ESL students' AW and presentation?

- b) What are the perceptions of the ESL students regarding the effectiveness of the interventions in enhancing their writing and presentation skills in ELT seminars?

Literature Review

PAR is a collaborative and reflective approach to research that involves participants in the research process along with the researchers (MacDonald, 2012). It can be used in various educational contexts to promote students' learning engagement, qualify novice practitioners and build academic communication between teachers and students (Forshaw et al., 2023). It can be effective for enhancing research-level students' AW and presentation skills in different disciplines such as social work, education, and nursing (Sharma & Hammond, 2023). It also helps develop the 4 C's (critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity) (Saimon et al., 2023) among the research participants through interventions which ultimately foster organized writing and better presentation. PAR promotes collaborative learning activities in the classroom and helps students develop AW skills as participants and researchers work collaboratively to improve their practices (Wright, 2015) incorporating different cognitive strategies (Sethuraman & Radhakrishnan, 2020). Moreover, PAR can also help the research participants become change agents (Altares et al., 2022) based on the interventions introduced during the study.

AW is not a skill that can be mastered overnight. Several factors are responsible for making it a challenging task for students. A study (Pineteh, 2014) carried out in South Africa reported a lack of mastery of AW conventions, analysis of writing topics, research skills, and applying research knowledge in different contexts as challenges for the development of AW skills. To mitigate such challenges, collaborative tasks, lively discussion, and constant peer and teacher feedback may significantly contribute. An experimental study in the Vietnamese context revealed that collaborative activities regularly helped students improve their overall AW skills meaningfully (Hoang & Hoang, 2022). Advanced AW skill is the complex process of writing as it involves the acquisition of new vocabulary and knowledge of language structure and mechanics. Moreover, it includes the better dissemination and presentation of the information, concisely, and in a logical format to communicate the message to the intended audience (Ashcraft et al., 2020). Studies have reported that frequent sharing with the intended audience and their feedback improves speech delivery (Hager & Hilbig, 2020; Lewis & Neighbors, 2005) and helps bring change in students' presentations through improved classroom dynamics reflecting their better personal, social, and professional identities (Oleson, 2023). The collaborative learning culture helps students learn skills required for AW and presentation more effectively.

An experimental study carried out in Malaysia showed that collaborative learning activities and sharing among students helped them develop different writing components such as vocabulary, organization, grammatical accuracy, and writing mechanics to increase their writing skills (Yusuf et al., 2019). The finding of an analytical study based on the reviews of many studies shows that cooperative learning and teacher and peer feedback in the classroom supported ESL students to improve their writing skills (Selvaraj & Aziz, 2019). Similarly, the findings of action research carried out by Sapkota (2012) to improve students' writing skills through peer and teacher correction in the Nepali context showed that students improved their vocabulary skills, writing mechanics and grammaticality of sentences after intervention.

The above literature shows that collaborative learning context, discussion, and peer and teacher feedback play a significant role in developing students writing skills. Although many studies have been carried out regarding the role of collaborative learning, discussion and feedback for improving writing in the international context, there is limited literature on how model presentation, collaborative work,

and peer and teacher feedback help students develop their AW in the context of Nepal adopting PAR design.

Methodology

In this study, we used PAR design and observation and interview methods to collect data from the class of ELT Seminar and Report Writing consisting of 30 students. We followed the interpretative research paradigm as suggested by researchers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; 2018) to explore participants' subjective experiences of improving AW and presentation skills. Through the PAR design, we explored individuals' feelings, views, experiences and ways of learning AW and presentation skills. We applied the intervention in the regular class by presenting models, having discussions with friends and teachers, and getting peer and teachers' feedback regularly for three months without control or manipulation taking ideas from MacDonald (2012). This study followed the use of qualitative interpretive modes of enquiry and data collection through observation notes and semi-structured interviews with 15 participants selected purposively based on the judgments on how to improve classroom practices (Kemmis et al., 2014).

As PAR facilitates students' engagement in their learning contexts and improves their language skills by bringing changes in usual practices (Cammarota, 2017; Cammarota & Romero, 2011), we designed the intervention that included model presentation, student collaboration, discussions, and feedback on research report writing and its presentation. To improve the writing skills of our students, we used the interventions for three months during the regular classroom instruction. The improved actions were grounded on the use of intervention for improving students' AW proficiency and presentation skills in the study as suggested by McNiff (2016).

Research Participants

The demographic characteristics of the research participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Research Participants

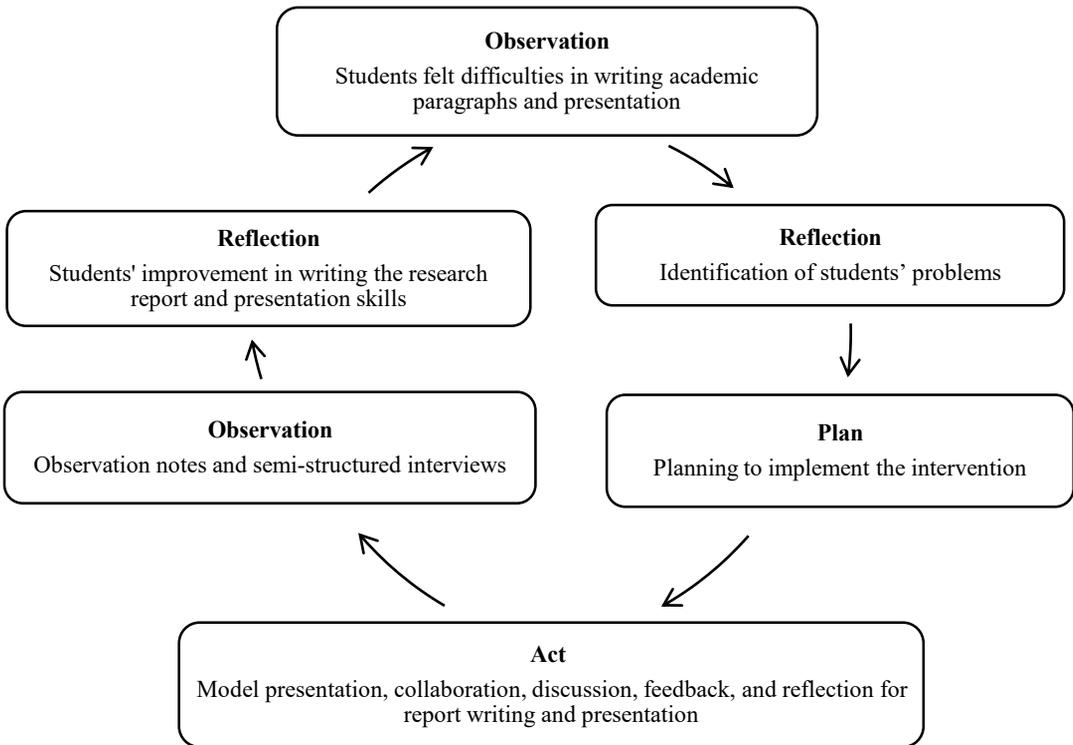
Participants	Female	Male	Total
No. of M. Ed. 4th-semester students	12	18	30
No. of Researcher teachers		2	32
Total	12	20	34

Out of the 30 participants, we selected 15 participants (including seven female and eight male) purposively for the interview.

PAR Cycle and Intervention

To implement the new intervention, we followed the following cycle and carried out everyday teaching-learning activities to improve students' writing skills by taking ideas from Hall and Keynes (2005):

Figure 1
PAR Cycle



To interpret the cycle in Figure 1 at first, we taught students for a month conventionally through teacher-led instruction, followed by some assignments to the students as the preliminary **observation**. Although the students attended the classes, they did not involve themselves readily in writing. Even when they were (made) to write, they did not write paragraphs effectively. Mostly, they used figurative words and used many words and sentences to express a small idea. Their writings seemed messy and less academic. Their choice of vocabulary and organization of ideas were not properly maintained to meet the basic features of AW. Moreover, they were hesitant and inhibited from sharing and presenting it in class among their classmates.

As a **reflection** in the first cycle, we identified students' poor writing and presentation skills. We discussed with students: how to improve their writing and presentation. From the discussion, we agreed to practice writing and presentation differently. Many students reported that they could not write as they had less opportunity to observe models of writing and were not confident in presentation due to their rare practice.

To **plan** for further improvement, we decided to use model presentation, collaboration, group discussion, and feedback as interventions to develop their AW and presentation skills. We made plans for everyday teaching in collaboration and negotiation with the students. Everyday classroom discussion paved the way forward for planning the lesson for the next day.

We **enacted** the intervention for three months and the classroom dynamics changed. Before assigning the students to write we provided them with model papers and paragraphs. Then, they started writing their paragraphs. They discussed them with classmates before, during, and after their writing.

They discussed in groups and pairs and provided feedback on their mate's writings and presentations. As a presentation, the second author also presented a model as a regular teacher though the observation, reflection, and plan were led by the first author initially. The teacher facilitated the model presentation, discussion, and feedback sessions.

During the intervention, we also **observed** how the students began learning to write and present. We took notes on how the participant students developed writing skills and the way they presented the findings of their studies. We kept a record of each day's progress. We kept notes of each day's progress in the diary. Through everyday observation, we noticed how intervention supported students in improving their writing and presentation skills.

Through everyday classroom observation, we noticed (**reflection**) that the students improved their AW and presentation skills. Their writings seemed more academic and presented their plans (and reports) more confidently during the seminar organized internally in the class for rehearsal. Moreover, we explored the experiences of half (15) of the students through semi-structured interviews. The interview data also justified how successful the intervention was in improving students' AW and presentation skills. Based on everyday reflection we often revised our plan and continued the cycle for three months.

Methodology

Since PAR is a collaborative, iterative and often open-ended method of inquiry (Cornish et al., 2023), we used classroom observation notes and semi-structured interviews with 15 participants as a method of data collection to explore how students experience their AW skills after implementing the intervention. Although all the students got an opportunity to learn and develop AW skills through the interventions in the classroom, only half of them were interviewed.

We also used the participatory observation method taking the idea of the researchers (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018) to notice students' improvements in AW skills particularly in report writing and their presentation. We observed the writing activities of all the participants focusing on how they improved their writing and presentation. We especially observed and developed a diary of classroom activities and the strategies students used before and during the intervention. We noted every detail of the student's activities and their oral responses through collaborative and interactive ways with peer and teachers' feedback on everyday writing. We noted important points during class time and recorded them in the diary after class.

After the intervention, we interviewed purposively selected 15 participants at their convenient time to explore their experiences of learning academic writing and presentation and their enactment through their actions and reflection. We elicited rich data through prompts and probes when required and recorded the interview on our smartphones for transcription.

Results and Discussion

After collecting data through observation notes and interviews, we interpreted the collected information thematically taking the idea of thematic analysis of qualitative data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013, 2016; Braun et al., 2019). The data were analyzed descriptively into three themes. The result of the study is discussed under the following themes.

Discussion and Feedback for Developing Writing Confidence

The findings showed that the PAR intervention significantly improved students' AW skills. The students increased their involvement in writing work after gaining ideas of how to initiate and proceed ahead in writing reports based on discussion and feedback from peers and teachers every day. The students practised regularly, they read reading material to expose themselves to the styles and structures of AW, sought and provided feedback, and edited and revised their writings. Moreover, they persisted

and kept writing out of their comfort zone. On top of that, they celebrated their writing even when they finished a paragraph. It developed student autonomy and engaged them as claimed by Crane and O'Regan (2010) who reported that PAR encourages more involvement, ownership and participation in the work. The findings of this study also resembled their claim as PAR provided opportunities to gather information, develop relationships, and generate ideas about how to work collaboratively with the postgraduate scholars learning English as a foreign language in the Nepali context. Everyday model presentations of an academic text by the teacher and/or students, discussion on several elements of their writing, and peer and teachers' feedback for refining writing incorporating the elements and mechanics of AW significantly improved students' writing. In this regard, Ramesh, a participant, reflected on how he developed confidence in writing. He argued:

I could hardly write before gaining ideas on how to maintain different elements of academic writing from teachers and peers. I often did not know how to begin writing. It took me many days to begin writing and I wrote one sentence and pondered a lot of time and felt very hard to continue it at the beginning. The sharing of my friends' writing and discussion encouraged me to write and improve my writing. Backed up by the feedback from my teacher and my classmates, I learned many ideas and now I have started to cherish my writing.

Our observation also revealed that the students mainly faced challenges in the organization and selection of vocabulary in their report writing. In the initial phase, their writing seemed messy in terms of the selection of vocabulary, cohesion, coherence, and unity of the text. They were unaware of the citation and referencing even the proper use of punctuation and relative clauses in AW. They did not know how to maintain the transition of ideas in the paragraphs before the intervention. Exposure to the model reading texts, their friends' model, and constant collaboration and feedback on their writing provided them with ideas on how it was different from other kinds of writing. After the intervention, Sharmila shared a very interesting experience in the interview on how she developed AW skills through a collaborative effort. She said:

I thought academic writing meant simple essay-writing in newspapers. Very easy. I had no idea that academic writing requires a particular structure and choice of vocabulary. I thought I could search on Google, copy and paste, and prepare a report. Now, I know that academic writing requires in-text citation, referencing, evidence and a concise and clear flow of ideas. Exposure to the model, class discussion, and feedback we received from teachers and friends inspired us to improve our writing.

Her ideas reflected how the students perceived AW activities at first. The participants' experiences in the interview and evidence found in observation revealed that without proper instruction and collaborative effort, students were misled in AW. However, persistent collaboration and feedback on their writing provided them with ideas on how AW differs from other kinds of writing. Umesh's comments showed how collaborative work eased their AW journey. He said:

I know what academic writing is now and how we have to write academically a bit better when I work every day with my friends. Earlier, I never thought of any differences between literary writing and academic writing. I thought that if one is a better writer /he or she can write anything be this a story, novel, drama, poem, or any academic essay. Throughout these three months we we have explored the

opportunities for exposure and practice. It has enriched our confidence in writing academic texts and reports. We can now differentiate between academic and non-academic writing.

It reflected how exposure to AW, teachers' and peers' comments and ideas helped students develop their AW significantly. It resonates with the findings of a Vietnamese quasi-experimental study (Tran & Pham, 2023) which reported that peer feedback has a significant influence on improving students' writing abilities. The students demonstrated an improvement in their ability to organize their ideas, use appropriate language, and provide proper citations and references in their seminar reports.

Collaboration to Improve AW and Presentation Skills

Data collected during the study revealed that collaborative work among the students not only offered what and how aspects of writing but also improved the quality of students' writing. The classroom observation and reflection discovered that the students' engagement in the seminar activities in the collaborative learning environment facilitated their learning process. They did not only learn skills of better AW but also learned to present more confidently and interactively among their classmates. Similar to the findings of a survey study (Tatzl et al., 2012) in Austria and an experimental study (Li & Mak, 2022) in Canada which reported learners' appreciation for collaborative projects in AW, this study also showed students' appreciation in collaborative learning as it helped them improve their language, content matters as well as presentation skills. Ideas expressed by Sadhana in the interview also reflected how she improved her writing and presentation skills through collaborative efforts. She claimed:

I got a chance to see the writings and observe the presentations of my friends. I got an opportunity to compare my work with my friends. Sometimes, we discussed and I corrected ourselves before getting teachers' feedback. I revised my writing and, in this way, my writing improved. I also learned to present better. Now, I can present more confidently what I have written.

Such collaborations helped them to complement and complete the task in time, and improve the quality of their paper too. The intervention also provided them with opportunities to polish their writing and presentation skills. Like the findings of Li and Mak (2022) who reported that collaborative writing instruction supports students to improve their writing skills significantly, the students in this study also made substantial progress on their report writing skills. They developed confidence in writing and presenting their reports well after gaining feedback from teachers and friends. Regarding how participants experienced collaborative work, the ideas shared by Mukesh are interesting. He shared:

I could not write even a few sentences for many days. I read the articles and theses too. But reading also didn't provide me expected insight. But when I started working with friends, discussing writing, and sharing each other writing, I gradually learned academic writing. My writing improved after sharing and revising my writing many times after getting comments from friends and teachers. For the presentation, I learned to prepare and be confident of what and how to share the documented ideas.

His comments pictured the improvement of writing quality while being involved in collaborative tasks. Similarly, the study (Das et al., 2022) in the American context also reported collaborative writing as an integral part of professional and academic work and it supports colleagues commenting on what, where, when, and how aspects of writing and editing their writings too. In this

study too, students learned and helped their friends' by receiving and giving feedback on different aspects of writing. The students also noticed improvement in their writing and presentation tasks.

Report Preparation and Presentation

The findings showed that model presentations of writing every day, discussions over the writing of students, and constructive feedback from the teacher and colleagues helped students learn basic skills of AW such as the use of academic vocabulary, writing mechanics, and organization and ways of presentation. A finding of a survey study (Malpique et al., 2023) in Australia showed that emphasis on teaching basic skills of writing and process activities in writing such as planning, revising and editing helps students improve their writing skills meaningfully. In this study also, students shared that they engaged in the process of writing after working in collaborative activities. Participants expressed that the choice of vocabulary, organization of ideas and how to begin and complete writing as challenges of writing were significantly resolved through the practice, discussion, and constructive feedback of the teacher and colleagues. Their experiences of learning writing after observing others and making model presentations of their writing reflected how collaborative writing and model presentation eased and improved their AW skill and helped them prepare and present the final report. To illustrate, Dipika shared:

I learnt how to begin, proceed and complete writing after I observed others' writings and also presented mine. When friends provided feedback, I changed my writing, I knew how to write abstract, background, objective, methodology etc. from model presentation. As a result, I have produced the report in this form and prepared well for the presentation in the final workshop.

The students were also observed providing comments taking their writings as an example. The model presentation and collaboration helped students in their thinking process of writing. They got the opportunity to refine their writing after a model presentation and constructive feedback. In this regard, Storch (2013) claimed that collaborative writing helped students in the thinking process of word choice, writing organization, and cohesiveness of the text along with the opportunity for revision and evaluation of the text. Such collaborative ventures motivated hesitant students to complete their writing tasks and made them risk-takers. The ideas shared by Niraj in the interview reflected how important collaborative writing and model presentation were to help produce their final report and improve presentation skills. He said:

I learned what kind of words I have to use, and how to organize them and write academic papers after looking at my friends' presentations of writing. My presentation also helped me revise my writing. While writing alone, I could not write for a long time. I could not think how ideas are organized and what kinds of writing are required in different units of academic writing. Now, we have prepared our reports and gone through some of our friends' reports. We have also rehearsed presenting or reporting in front of others.

Niraj's comments clearly showed that frequent writing collaboration, negotiation and model presentation supported students to think, generate ideas, write, revise and prepare good AW papers. It also provided them with a platform for the rehearsal of the presentation of the research reports. As students engaged much in discussion and observation of their written tasks and presentation, we found teachers' place as facilitators rather than someone who dictated students' writings and interrupted their writing fluency. Classroom observation and students' comments in the interview revealed that the

intervention was significant as it helped them improve their AW skills, prepare better academic reports and present their research reports confidently.

Conclusion and Implications

In conclusion, this study demonstrates the effectiveness of collaborative work, discussion, and peer and teacher feedback followed by model presentation either by the teacher or by fellow students to enhance students' AW skills and better presentation in an ELT seminar. The students can improve their AW if they gain opportunities to present and get feedback regularly from their teachers and friends. The study further revealed that working together and sharing AW among friends and rigorous discussion about different components of AWs have great impacts on their AW improvement. Collaborative work regularly can support students to refine the structure and content of their writing as well as provide opportunities to improve their presentation skills and build confidence in writing and disseminating the ideas explored in their studies. Constructive feedback from colleagues and teachers and self-reflection increase students' writing motivation. It helps them improve the quality of their writing taking a little support from teachers as facilitators.

The study suggests that the intervention used in the seminar, including model presentation, student collaboration, discussions, feedback, and revision on research and AW, can be applied in other educational contexts to enhance students' AW skills. The study recommends teachers and students adopt student-centred cooperative learning enhanced by peer feedback and teacher facilitation in teaching and learning writing skills in general and AW in particular. Student autonomy and self-preparedness of learners result in better learning than teacher-led authoritative teaching. Course designers and policymakers should develop curricula accordingly to meet the learning objectives.

Although this study has advocated an avenue in teaching and learning, it possesses some limitations in its methodology and its scope. The study was carried out under a regular class which the authors shared for a semester in Surkhet district. It consisted of 30 students and 15 students were interviewed. Moreover, it was limited to teaching (academic) report writing and its presentation using classroom observation notes and semi-structured interviews as tools for data collection under PAR design. It implies that the study can be used in other such classes consisting of a large number of students and in many classes. In addition, studies can be carried out in teaching other language skills and aspects. Studies can also be carried out using other research tools such as questionnaires, test items, conversational analysis, reflective diaries, retrospections and other designs except PAR. However, the study is significant since it has opened up the discussion of using student-led activities with teacher facilitation in the field of teaching language skills and research writing despite its limitations in the scope and methodology.

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Mr. Rajan Kumar Kandel, M. Phil. in English Education, is a Lecturer of English Education at Tribhuvan University. He is the Head of Department, Department of English Education, Surkhet Multiple Campus where he also teaches Research Methodology for Language Education, English Language Teaching Methods, and Linguistics for graduate and postgraduate students. Many articles have been published to his credit in different journals. He is a Life Member of NELTA and former Chairperson of NELTA Surkhet. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-4704-2491>

Mr. Ganesh Kumar Kandel is a faculty at Surkhet Multiple Campus, Surkhet. Mr. Kandel has obtained the degree of M.Phil in English Education from Nepal Open University. He has a keen interest in the field of research and ELT. He is a Life Member of NELTA and an executive member of NELTA Surkhet. He has published many research articles in different journals and authored school-level textbooks.