

English Writing Education in Türkiye

Institutional Description

This study aims to provide a contextualized account of how English writing education is delivered at Turkish higher education institutions. Tertiary-level English writing education in Türkiye is typically given in two main sites: the English Language Teaching (ELT) Department and the School of Foreign Languages (SoFL). In the former being a teacher education program, students study four years to become English teachers and take writing skills courses in the first and second semesters of their freshman year. What first-year ELT students learn in these writing courses is informed by the National Council of Higher Education, which presents the curricular framework, outlining the subjects to be taught. Meanwhile, how these subjects will be taught is instructors' decision to make, where pedagogical choices come into play. Unlike the former, SoFL offers English language classes for all students enrolled at Turkish higher education institutions. While is mandatory for some students to attend the English preparatory program before being placed into their majors, students can also voluntarily attend the English program to improve their English language skills for better career opportunities.

Key Theorists/Approaches

Process Approach: It was early 1980s when process-turn in L1 composition studies started to enter L2 writing scholarship and it has been gradually recognized within the discourses of language and writing instruction since then. In his historical review tracing the adoption of process approaches within the field of ESL/EFL writing education, **Susser (1994)** outlined the two tenets of process writing pedagogies as awareness and intervention. The former concerned students' understanding of writing as, naturally, a process and the latter their engagement in various writing procedures.

Genre Approach(es): Genre became recognized as a powerful approach to writing and inspired various theoretical frameworks including Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS) (**Miller, 1984**), English for Specific Purposes (ESP) (**Swales, 1990**), and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (**Halliday, 1978**). While these three pedagogical origins differ in their theoretical underpinnings, they all suggest teaching writing in genre-based practices.

Glossary

ELT Department: English Language Teaching Department that offers undergraduate teacher-education programs that prepare prospective English language teachers for K–12 contexts.

SoFL: School of Foreign Languages, an academic unit at most universities in Türkiye that serves university-wide language education needs (rather than training language teachers)

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Each writing pedagogy provides a theory of teaching and learning informed by a particular set of writing principles and knowledge. The distinction between writing theory and writing pedagogy can be confusing, in part because the difference is not simply that one is theoretical and one practical. Writing theory deals with text production, circulation, and reception, while writing pedagogy explains the teaching and learning of writing. Pedagogy draws attention to the underlying philosophies, theories, and goals of teaching practices.

(Tate et al., 2014, pp. 3-4)

Introduction

A decade ago, Tate et al. (2014) published the second edition of their collection *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*, which gained recognition as a crucial resource for understanding the theoretical frameworks informing L1 writing education. While various theories have been formulated since the 1980s to enhance teachers' understanding of L2 writing and learning (Hyland, 2008), these have largely built on L1 composition theories and pedagogies documented in Tate et al. (2014). Although "the field of L2 writing still lacks a unified understanding of how L2 learners learn to write" (Nguyen, 2019, p. 1059), the growing body of literature has fortified our knowledge about the most effective practices in teaching writing to language learners. And yet, ongoing developments within and beyond the field over the past few years have made it essential to investigate how writing is being taught in current EFL settings. What are the contemporary practices in EFL writing instruction? What challenges are faced in the teaching process? To address these questions, I draw on a mixed-method analysis of survey and interview data collected from EFL writing instructors across several higher education institutions in Türkiye.

L2 Writing Pedagogies & Research

Over the past few decades, a range of pedagogical approaches has informed the teaching of writing in ESL/EFL contexts. Among the most prominent are the product approach, which views writing as a controlled mechanical act that draws on mastery of linguistic knowledge (Pincas, 1982); process approach, which focuses on the principles of awareness and intervention (Susser, 1994); and genre approach, which situates writing in social contexts (Hyland, 2007). Additionally, technology's impact on text production and dissemination has given rise to the notion of multiliteracies and multimodal composition pedagogy (New London Group, 1996), which has expanded writing beyond the alphabetic to include multiple modes of meaning making. Another influential framework has been critical pedagogy, which is grounded in Freire's (1970) banking model of education and operates within L2 writing instruction around agency, identity, and power, positioning L2 writers as critical thinkers and active participants in constructing knowledge (Yang, 2020). Unlike other L2 writing pedagogies that have traced L1 composition traditions, corpus-based approaches originated in applied linguistics (Sinclair, 1991) and the study of systematically collected real language data has become a part of L2 literacies education, offering access to rich sources of authentic texts that L2 learners can probe for

understanding how language is used in real life contexts. In more recent scholarship, translingual approach (Canagarajah, 2012) has emerged from the rapid growth of globalization and linguistic diversity, encouraging more inclusive and socially situated understandings of language use and writing.

[A Review of the Literature on the Pedagogical Approaches that Inform EFL Writing Instruction in Türkiye]

Methods

A review of the literature outlines various pedagogical frameworks that inform instructional practices in the teaching of EFL writing. However, there is little research that documents pedagogies situated within specific contexts (Naghdi-pour (2016) for example, examined English writing instructional approaches in Iran). The purpose of this study is therefore to conduct a contextualized empirical inquiry into English writing education in Türkiye, the results of which can offer implications for writing instruction and research in similar EFL contexts. The following questions inform the methodological framework of this study:

1. Which pedagogical approaches do EFL instructors adopt in teaching writing at Turkish higher education institutions?
2. What challenges do they face in teaching writing?

Research Context

Tertiary-level English writing education in Türkiye is typically given in two main academic units: English Language Teaching (ELT) Department and the School of Foreign Languages (SoFL). In the former being a teacher education program, students study four years to become English teachers and take writing skills courses in the first and second semesters of their freshman year. What first-year ELT students learn in these writing courses is informed by the Council of Higher Education. For instance, they study “paragraph forms and structure; technical features of a paragraph; paragraph analysis; creating a paragraph outline; producing texts through description, comparison, discussion, and narration; writing summaries, interpretations, short stories, review essays (on a book and/or film), formal/informal letters" (The Council of Higher Education, n.d., p. 4) in Fall, and “reading for writing, writing to be read; raising awareness about activities to be done before, during, and after writing; rewriting through elaboration; reviewing one's own writing; self-assessment of written work; peer evaluation; writing compositions and assignment reports" (The Council of Higher Education, n.d., p. 6) in Spring. The Council of Higher Education presents the curricular framework, outlining the subjects to be taught, while how these subjects will be taught is instructors’ decision to make, where pedagogical choices come into play.

There is an SoFL at most universities in Türkiye which is the other site where students can receive English writing education. Unlike the ELT Department that houses future generations of English teachers, SoFL offers English language classes for all students enrolled at the university. It is mandatory for some students to attend the English preparatory program before being placed into their majors. These students can be exempt from the program on condition that they submit official evidence of English language proficiency (e.g., TOEFL, IELTS, etc.) or pass the proficiency exam managed by the SoFL. Some students may voluntarily attend the English program to improve their English language skills for better career opportunities. The Council of Higher Education frames the structure of SoFLs, informing the lesson hours, types of evidence to be accepted for exemption, and leaves the doors open for curricular decisions such as which lessons to give, which textbooks to use, and which pedagogies to practice. While SoFLs are pedagogically autonomous units in terms of operations, most SoFL English programs commonly focus on teaching English grammar and four skills including listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Survey

To describe English writing education in Türkiye, I have been collecting data in two stages, the first of which is a mixed-method researcher-developed survey. Following the IRB approval, I created and distributed an anonymous survey using an online survey tool, Qualtrics. To recruit participants, I posted a flyer on social media (LinkedIn, Instagram, WhatsApp) and applied snowball sampling, asking participants to share the survey link with their colleagues and academic circles. To be eligible, participants were required to have taught EFL writing at Turkish higher education institutions within the last five years.

Interviews

The interview constitutes the second stage of this study. At the end of the survey, an optional question invites respondents to include their contact information should they be willing to participate in a follow-up interview. To ensure anonymity of the survey data, this question directs respondents to a separate page within the survey platform, allowing the collected information to be stored in a separate spreadsheet from the survey data. Consequently, there is no connection between survey responses and contact details.

Results

Preliminary findings reveal that English writing education in Turkish higher education draws heavily on process-oriented SFL-genre pedagogies. The instructional focus is on the teaching of traditional essay writing, reflecting pedagogical practices in other EFL contexts (Huang & Zhang, 2020; Naghdipour, 2016). The main challenges that instructors face in teaching writing include but are not limited to: students' lack of motivation to write, students' lack of grammatical competence, inadequate teaching materials, etc. Implications to move from SFL to RGS genre pedagogies in EFL writing education will be drawn in support of developing EFL students' writing skills.