

Using Writing Process in Teaching Composition Skills: an Action Research

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the efficiency of the writing process approach in improving written expression (composition) skills of 5th grade students in primary education. The research was designed as an action research.

The study was conducted through the 2007-2008 education year, the spring term in a primary school in a Turkish course with 5th grade students. In the study the writing process approach was implemented. The data of the study were collected through "video records", "reflective diaries", "teacher diaries", "composition tests", and "balanced literacy control forms" via quantitative and qualitative data collection tools. The analysis of the data was split into two phases: the analysis during data collection and the analysis after data collection. In the analysis of quantitative data, the "SPSS for windows" package program was used. In the analysis of qualitative data a descriptive method was used.

The findings obtained from quantitative data in improving the written expression skills showed that students improved. However, qualitative data did not support this result. While students showed improvement in the "outer structure" dimension of written expression, in the "inner structure" and in language and expression dimension of written expression, this improvement was observed as limited compared to "outer structure" dimension.

Results from the qualitative data revealed that during the improvement of written expression skills the teaching writing process through balanced literacy components in an interactive teaching environment makes progress in these skills.

It was observed that the usage of balanced literacy components in written expression affected the students' class participation positively. Moreover, it was seen that the interactive teaching environment helped students in improving intellectual skills.

1. Introduction

One of the most adopted teaching models to develop writing skills in the balanced literacy approach is the writing process method (Zampardo, 2008). The writing process method is a teaching method which stresses writing both narrative and expository genres, were examined by several studies (Marchisan ve Alber, 2001). The writing process is a road map through which students' thoughts and actions are monitored from the beginning of writing to the production of work (Tomkins, 2004). This map offers students a structure about writing (Reimer, 2001). The writing process is a 5 staged hierarchical process based on the idea of how real authors write. This process is a resource utilized to teach students how to write.

Improved writing is an ability which is learned through repetition, the same as developed reading. While in this process, students also develop problem solving abilities via different strategies. Teachers'

awareness of the writing process will be helpful in teaching appropriate strategies and improving the students' writing abilities in education environments (Kapka and Oberman, 2001).

During the writing process a stage may be skipped but can be returned to later. There are 5 stages of the writing process (Tomkins, 2004).

- **Prewriting:** Prewriting is a planning stage for writing. Planning is an important step of the writing process; it allows the writers to organize their writing before they even begin. Teachers might help students who have a difficulty in determining a topic using various strategies such as, graphical editing, free writing, and associative writing (Kapka ve Oberman, 2001).
- **Drafting:** In the draft stage, students are expected to put the arrangement they did in the planning stage on to paper. In this stage, spelling rules for the written text are ignored. The students primarily try to create the content (Marchisan ve Alber, 2001).
- **Revising:** This stage consists of the students' review of the written draft, sharing the draft text with a writing group that was formed in the classroom, and rearranging the content according to feedback from friends in the writing group. In this stage, the students might expand the text with new ideas or remove the parts that they think unnecessary. Revising is a difficult stage for students. (Kapka ve Oberman, 2001).
- **Editing:** Up until this stage the focus is on the content. In this stage spelling rules and punctuation, which are called the mechanical aspect of writing, are checked. Before sharing what they have written with others, the students review the draft for the last time and make corrections for readability. An editing checklist might be prepared illustrating the spelling errors. The students might benefit from this list for their learning in the future. Different evaluation materials might be used in teaching students about the 3rd and 4th stages. While it is possible to develop evaluation material together with students, existing evaluation materials might also be used.
- **Publishing:** This is the last stage of the writing process. In this stage, the students share the text they have written with the readers they determined in the prewriting stage. What is important here is that teacher makes writing meaningful for student. It is stated that sharing what has been written is a good way for students both to recognize writing as an effective communication tool and motivate them to write (Lehr, 1995).

It is important for students to learn the writing process. Because the writing process is a tool used to enable students to efficiently express their feelings, thoughts and knowledge. The more students learn how to use this process efficiently, the more they can express themselves efficiently. (Tomkins, 2004). However, studies conducted in Turkey at the elementary level share the view that young students are incompetent at writing skills and teachers are not able to use the writing process efficiently. (Asici and Mataraci, 1998; Babacan, 2003).

This study aims at describing the instructional applications of the writing process which is one of the models utilized in the balanced literacy approach to develop writing abilities.

1.1. Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to investigate the efficiency of the writing process in improving written expression (composition) skills of 5th grade students in primary education. The following two research questions were addressed:

1. How does the instruction applied, according to the writing process, effect the students' written expression (composition) abilities?
2. How are the components applied during the application process of the writing process approach?

2. Methodology

The study was designed as an action research. Action research claims to provide improvements in quality of life of others through critical reflection and inquiry (e.g., Johnson, 2002; Mills, 2003).

2.1. Setting and Participants

The study took place over the course of one spring semester (between February and June) in a primary school during the 2007-2008 school year in a large city in Turkey.

The study participants were a researcher, one elementary school teacher and her fifth grade students. They all voluntarily participated in the study and their parents signed consent letters. Pseudonyms were used instead of real names for the students and teacher in the study.

2.2. Data Collecting Techniques

In order to triangulate the findings of this study, several data collection techniques were implemented.

These can be seen on Table1 , and Table 2.

Research Questions	Data Collecting Technique 1	Data Collecting Technique 2	Data Collecting Technique 3	Data Collecting Technique 4	Data Collecting Technique 5
How does the instruction applied, according to the writing process, affect the students’ written expression (composition) abilities?	Composition tests (pre-post test)	Writing samples			
How are the components applied during the application process of the writing process approach?		Video records	Balanced literacy control form	Reflective diary	Classrom teacher diary

Table 1.. Research Questions and Data Collecting Techniques

Table 2. Data Sources

<u>Researcher</u>	<u>Students</u>	<u>Classroom Teacher</u>	<u>Trustworthiness Committee</u>
Reflective diary	Video records	Teacher diary	
Video records	Writing samples		Balanced literacy control form
	Composition tests (pre-post test)		

2.3. The Weekly Study Procedures

The weekly data study procedure can be seen on Figure 1.

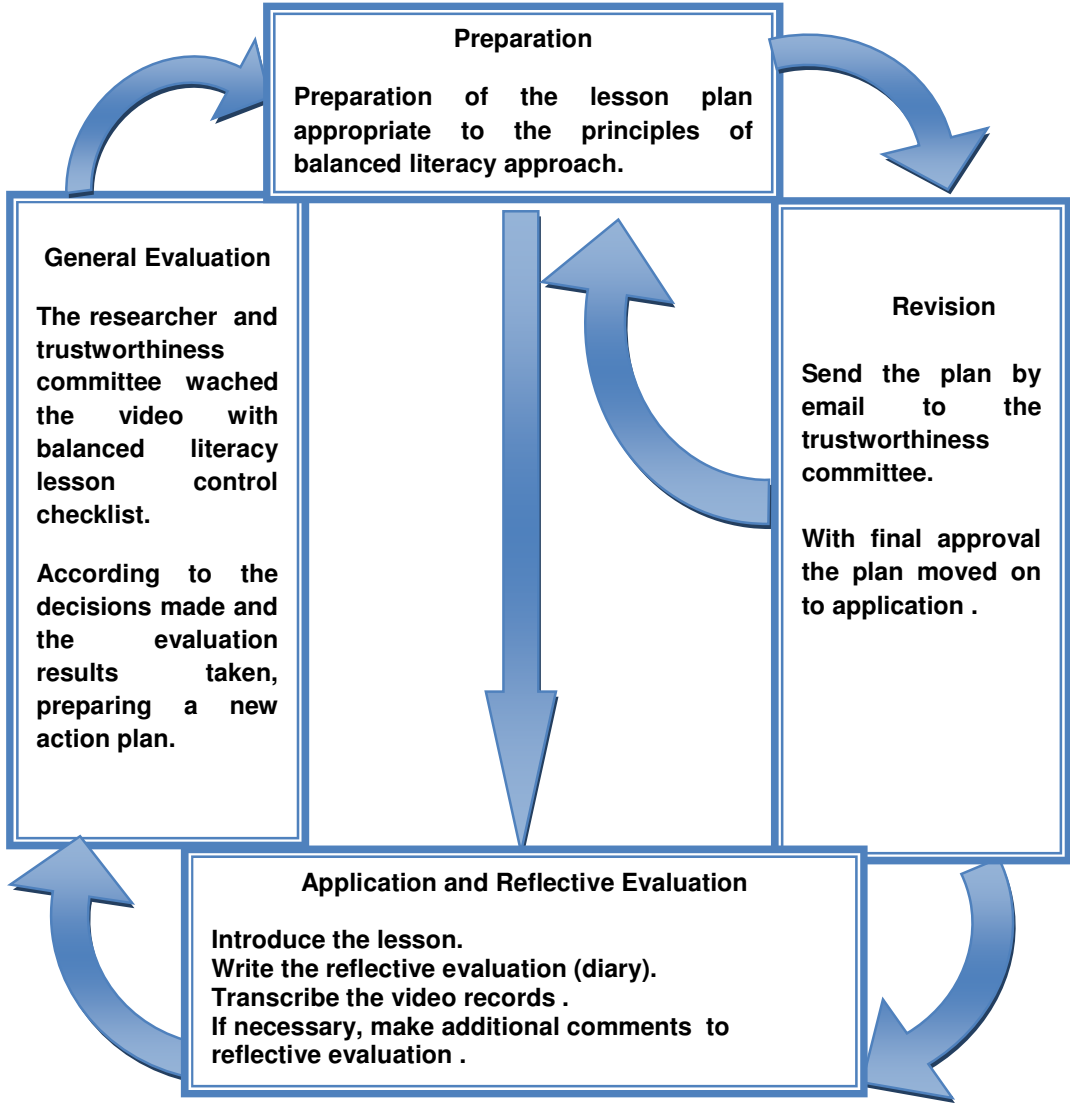


Figure 1. The Weekly Study Procedures

2.4. Validity and Reliability

These strategies were used in order to provide validity and reliability of the study:

- For the preparation of the action plans, the views of the trustworthiness committee were taken into consideration. They usually came together weekly. In order to identify the requirements and to collect believable and reliable data, sufficient time was spent in the research environment.
- There were no comments on the qualitative data. However, direct references to the data were selected to explain the qualitative data.
- Presenting the results gathered from the data of this study and other literature an attempt was made to present all of the findings as a whole.

2.5.Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis: In the analysis of quantitative data, the average and the standard deviation of the grades of the students who participated in the research were given a "pre and post test". The analysis of quantitative data and the average and the standard deviation of the grades were calculated. In the statistical analysis used in the research, the level of significance was accepted to be 0.05.

Qualitative Analysis: The qualitative data analysis in this study included collecting the data, organizing the data, coding the data, identifying themes, and interpreting (Miles ve Huberman, 1994; Yıldırım ve Şimşek 2006; Creswell, 2008). (Miles ve Huberman, 1994; Yıldırım ve Şimşek 2006; Creswell, 2008).

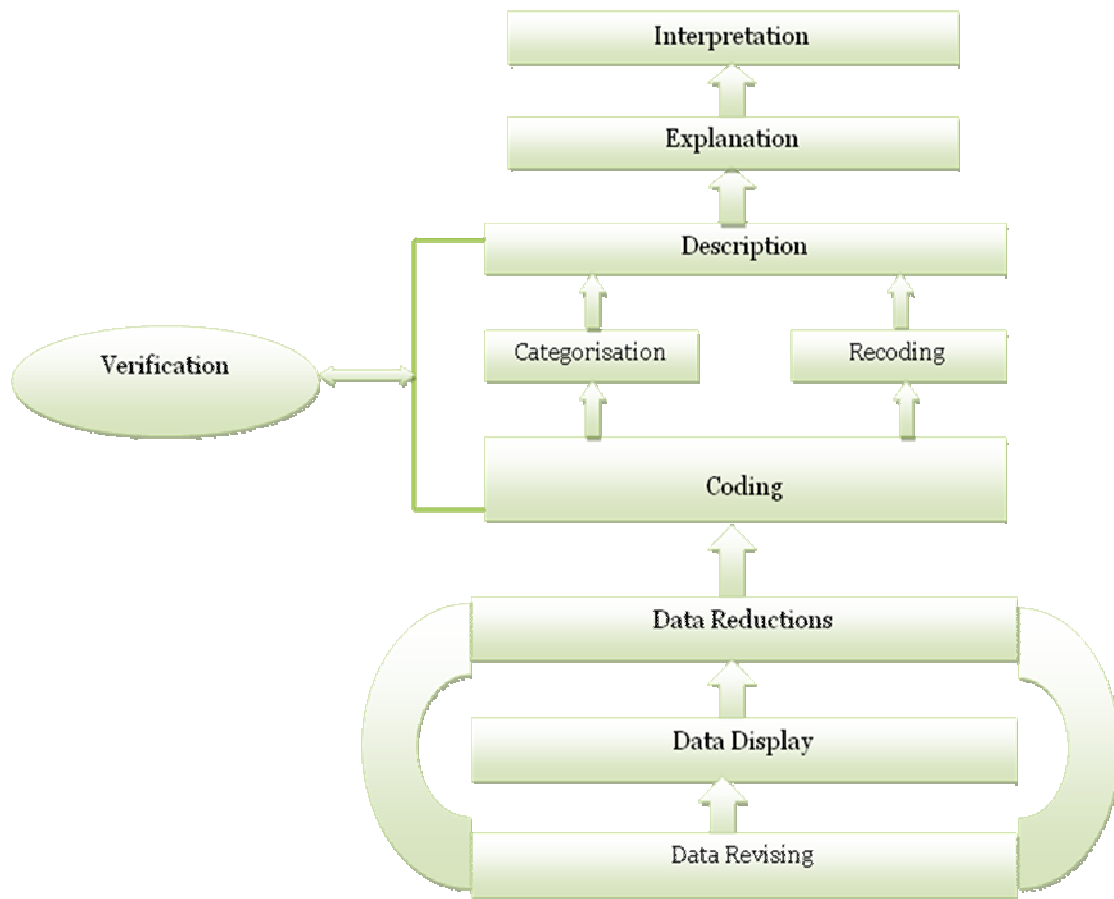


Figure.2 Analysis of qualitative data

3. Conclusion

- The writing process model has improved the development of the students' writing abilities with positive results. Thus, it was identified that there is a meaningful difference in favor of the post test according to the evaluation of the pre and post tests for narrative and expository writing prepared to see students' progress in writing abilities. Those results showed that using the writing process model in 5th grade Turkish Language lessons was effective in developing the students' narrative and expository writing.

- In the study, education started with direct instruction and went on with indirect instruction. The research findings show that it is effective to conduct teaching through stages from direct instruction to indirect instruction.
- It was understood from the results related to the direct instruction of the writing process that it is effective to introduce the evaluation tools in the direct instruction of the writing process stages in terms of students' realizing what they are expected to do. In addition to this, the explanation of the writing process stages and modeling for these stages, contributed greatly to the students' using the writing process effectively.
- It was observed that indirect instruction enabled students to think more and contributed to their being models for each other.
- It was observed that reinforcing students who benefited from writing strategies in the teaching process, made other students eager to use the strategies as well.
- It was observed that students were able to use different graphical editing in preparation for the writing process.
- It was observed according to the writing evaluation tool that the students progressed in mostly outer structure dimension and the least progress occurred in the inner structure dimension.
- While evaluating their compositions, it was observed that students had difficulty using the writing evaluation tool utilized in the editing stage of the writing process while using it to evaluate their compositions. They needed more educational support in this stage.
- The sharing stage of the writing process was effective in motivating students to write.
- Students needed more time and practice to use the writing process effectively.

4. Discussion

It is stated in literature review that writing according to particular criterions, repetitive writing activities and teachers' modeling will contribute great to students' learning the writing process. There exist other studies supporting these findings. "It was understood from the results related to the direct instruction of writing the process that it is effective to introduce the evaluation tools in the direct instruction of the writing process stages in terms of students' realizing what they are expected to do. In addition to this, explanation of the writing process stages and modeling for these stages contributed students' using the writing process effectively." The study by Kapka and Oberman (2001) showed that modeling to students to write in different genres and different writing knowledge and abilities was effective to develop students' writing abilities. In their study, Kowalewski, Murphy and Starns, (2002) found out that when a teacher gave enough time to students to write, he/she became a model for the writing process, he/she used the well-written samples in the writing process and he/she made writing the aim, students' writing abilities developed.

Students need practice to become competent at writing abilities. Therefore, enough time should be given to students to internalize the writing process. Students need both free writing and structured writing activities to write fluently. (Buhrke and others, 2002). The results of the study conducted observing teachers' teaching writing by Bridge, Compton-Hall and Cantrel (1997) shows that the more students are allowed time to write, the more their writing abilities develop. Those research findings in literature overlap with the finding of this study "Students need more time and practice to use the writing process effectively.

It was observed according to the results of the writing evaluation scale that students progressed in mostly exterior structure dimension and the least progress occurred in inferior structure dimension. The finding of the study designed to demonstrate the 5th grade students' writing errors by Alkan (2007) "students resolve the errors in outer structure dimension faster than the other dimensions" supports this finding.

It was observed that students needed more instructional support in the revising stage of the writing process. In the study by Yoder (2005), students expressed that talking in the writing and especially the revising stage was effective in an interview, is similar to the finding of this study.

In light of the findings of this study, the following might be suggested: In developing the writing abilities, it is necessary to search each stage of the writing process model in detail and to inform teachers about teaching the writing process in service activities.

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