Chapter 25: Implementing the Writing Program in Saudi Arabia: The Case of Oshairat Sudair Elementary

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Abstract: The writing process approach has been found to benefit students' writing performance. Many researchers have recommended this approach, and many programs have demonstrated its effectiveness. This proposal creates a Writing Program (WP) for elementary schools based on the writing process approach to ease students' difficulties in writing. The WP was constructed empirically using a survey and an interview. The WP will take place at Oshairat Sudair Elementary School in Saudi Arabia in the 4th quarter of 2020. The proposal writer, a teacher at the same school, and the Arabic teachers' team will be in charge of implementing the WP with students by following the implementation plan of the WP. The Impact Evaluation (IE) will be measured by the document review method, rubrics, pre- and post-assessments, surveys, door tickets, and the observation.

1 Introduction

Elementary Arabic teachers should emphasize language communication – speaking and writing. This is what our teacher handbook and instructional standards clearly state. To encourage constant practice and linguistic growth, teachers and students must not be afraid of mistakes at first. The goal is just to keep communicating (Saudi Ministry of Education [MOE], 2010). Students make more mistakes and experience more difficulty with written Arabic compared to spoken Arabic. Given the insufficient opportunities to practice standard Arabic both at home and in school, the need to improve students' writing skills looms larger, which is why action should be taken to solve the situation. Teachers must focus on written communication and teach it in a way that allows students to make mistakes and to see writing as a process.

According to Dockrella, Connelly, and Arfèc (2019), many elementary school students experience difficulties with a majority of skills involved in writing. When I ask my 4th grade students in Saudi Arabia (S.A) to write a story, some of them write while others say, "I do not know how to write" because they think they have poor skills and techniques in writing. Other teachers in my school face a similar situation. In fact, student achievement results in Oshairat Sudair Elementary consistently demonstrate that writing is the weakest area, hence the need to find a solution to ease students' writing struggles. Possible solutions include explicitly teaching students the right techniques and providing the right instructions to improve their writing. As a teacher of Arabic, I firmly believe implementing a writing program will help struggling writers in my elementary school in Saudi Arabia, which is the purpose of this action research paper.

The Saudi curriculum of Arabic language for elementary school gives students the opportunity to practice writing skills in the "Writing Communication" section. This opportunity could be in practicing the "Performance Tasks," a small project at the end of each unit including many language activities that students can practice to show their language growth. While the performance tasks might give teachers an idea on students' writing, it is not enough to assist students to be at the expected writing level in their grades. Accordingly, researching this topic could benefit curriculum designers, teachers, administrators, parents, and students in my

country. This research will determine the gap between the expectations and the current reality in writing classes for the curriculum designers to close.

To solve this problem, I propose a Writing Program (WP) based on a proven model from the United States. The National Writing Project (NWP) has a long record of effectively teaching students to write (Whitney & Friedrich, 2013). The proposed WP will be planned based on students' needs and will integrate writing practice with reading. Then, students can start with drafting and rewriting before engaging in self-, peer-, and teacher-editing. After they finish their writing, students could publish their work to the public. Administrators would be invited to see how students' writing has improved. Therefore, these steps constitute my proposed solution, which I hope will also make parents proud of their children's progress. Additionally, in my school, we have an activity hour in the middle of the school day. Sometimes we do not have a specific program to invest well. That is why I suggest using this particular time to implement the WP. In this way, we could keep running the school day as it is without overwhelming or negatively affecting the main curriculum.

Rationale

This part of the proposal identifies in the beginning the Writing Program (WP) concept, the requirements, and a summary of related history background. This rationale is based on academic and practitioner literature related to writing as well as interviews with six language teachers in Saudi Arabia and surveys of four English teachers in the United States. The rationale also reports the responses of the survey and the interview and the evidence supporting the proposed solution. The last part of the rationale summarizes the reasons for supporting the WP as a viable solution for struggling writers' problems.

Understanding the Writing Program

Definition and History

The proposed solution, the WP, is a program designed based on research that applies the instructional writing process approach. This approach can effectively improve students' writing. According to Graham and Sandmel (2011), the writing processes have been evolving for decades. One of the largest writing programs in the United States, the National Writing Project, which was founded by James Gray and his colleagues in 1974, successfully employs a process writing approach. . Beginning in the 1980s, researchers as Graves (1983) and Calkins (1983) began promoting this method for teaching writing (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006).

Steps

Vanderbyl (2012) identified the process approach as a process for writing that includes five steps: prewriting, drafting, revision, editing, and publication. Jones (2006) summarized these stages in a table based on the suggestions of numerous researchers (e.g., Pennington ,1996; Silva, 1987; Susser, 1994).

Table 1: General Stages of the Process Approach.

Stages of the Process Approach

Prewriting	"Emerging thoughts are generated through talking, drawing, brainstorming, reading, note-taking, free-associating, and questions in order to generate ideas and find topics."
Drafting	"This is a rough, exploratory piece of writing in which ideas are organized and written up into a coherent draft; this stage of writing should not be evaluated but supported. Topics and concepts are generated through "quick-writes;" free writing; graphic organizers; journals; and learning logs."
Revision	"This includes looking at the work through a different perspective – through another reader, a peer-response group, and oneself by rereading and considering other people's questions and comments."
Editing	"Students have teacher conferencing sessions, and/or form peer editing groups in which they do proof reading; spell checking; sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, and vocabulary corrections; and modifying and rearranging ideas."
Publishing	"In this stage, students share their final versions of writing with others."

Writing Program: Benefits

Research Basis

The Writing Program uses a writing process approach, which has been found to benefit students' writing performance. Many researchers have recommended this approach, and many programs have demonstrated its effectiveness. The National

Writing Project (NWP), described earlier, reaches over 6 million students each year (NWP, n.d.). Many studies have indicated the positive impact of the NWP on teacher practice and student writing. For example, in 16 independent studies on Writing Project sites, "researchers found that students of NWP teachers outperformed their non-NWP counterparts in 103 of 112 contrasts" (NWP, n.d., para. 5).

An additional benefit of the writing process approach is flexibility. Researchers recommend the use of a variety of evidence-based practices, such as inquiry learning and sentence combination (Hillocks, 1986) as part of the process writing approach (Nagin, 2006). This variety means that the program can be adapted. Indeed, the NWP does not require or endorse any specific curriculum or strategy. Specific strategies used by NWP-influenced teachers vary depending on the local site and develop over time (Whitney & Friedrich, 2013). For this reason, the process writing approach is suitable for adaptation to different contexts, such as Saudi Arabia.

In Saudi Arabia, the traditional approach to writing is for students to simply complete the assignment randomly, without following a process. Al-Nasser and AlRodhan (2007) compared this traditional process to a five-step approach, following the steps described above, and reported a positive impact on the quality of writing produced by 8th grade students. However, those researchers applied the writing processes approach to the middle and high school only. On the contrary, many researchers in the United States have successfully applied the same approach with elementary students.

A large meta-analysis by Graham and Perrin (2007) synthesized the results of previous studies about writing. They recommended that it is powerful to teach strategies for planning, revising, and editing compositions particularly if the students are struggling writers. The common elements of what was successful in the workshop

[Writer's workshop in the Writing Program] were the use of teams, peers' feedback, and collaborative authorship (Hattie, 2009). Similar to Graham and Perin (2007), Philippokos stated that the application of the writing process approach has many positive outcomes. For instance, when the writers become readers, their awareness increases, and they can anticipate the audience's reaction.

The Interviews and Surveys

T eachers can use a number of ways to implement the writing process approach more effectively. With keeping in mind students' age and diversity, teachers' methods could change to cater to students' attributes and abilities. For instance, at the brainstorming stage, generally middle and high school students can use graphic organizers and outline templates without problems. However, elementary students are not ready yet to be able to use graphic organizers for brainstorming or for making organized outlines of their writing. One of my survey responders, a 4th grade teacher, successfully used the orally sharing with a partner strategy for brainstorming after a minute of thinking silently. She thought this strategy would be more convenient for her students to ensure their engagement. The overall responses from the survey I conducted resisted that the teacher in charge is the one who could decide how to implement the writing process approach in his or her class according to their students' situations.

The teachers surveyed mentioned several additional benefits of the WP. They described successful experiences using the writing process approach strategy to teach students how to write. They also found the five stages of the writing process useful, even with struggling writers.

The Saudi teachers interviewed for this proposal also recognized the potential benefits of the writing process approach. Although the writing process is not required by the Ministry of Education, some experienced teachers interviewed already teach brainstorming and outlining. They were not familiar with peer-review but after explanation they thought this stage would be beneficial.

With respect to responses reported by interviewees, , the interviewees were not quite familiar with the five stages of writing. Some of them teach brainstorming and outlining as one stage of planning or warming up for drafting. Students can have feedback for their drafts from their teachers after self-reviewing. They ask for explanations of the peer-review stage and how to apply this stage in the writing process. These answers lead to the thought of teachers needing professional development before implementation of this proposed writing program.

Writing Program: Limitations

There are a few aspects of the writing process over which researchers disagree. One of these is the peer review stage, an important stage in the writing process based on collaboration and instructional approaches. Some researchers think that peer-review has positive outcomes on students' awareness. For instance, the role switch between the writer and the reader through peer-reviewing could increase the students' awareness of their audience's reaction. One of the interviewees stated this as a possible positive outcome of peer review. Philippokos (2017) also found that during the peer-review stage in writing processes, the writers switch the roles and become readers for their peers' papers.

On the other hand, some researchers disagree with this idea because they think students may not value their peers' comments as valuable [teachers'] comments. Another reason for this disagreement is that students may not be able to identify the problems in their peers' papers because of their lack of experience. Moreover, students may not value their peers' comments as much as their teachers' comments. Besides, students may not always be able to identify problems in their peers' papers according to their knowledge level (Philippokos, 2017).

From the interviews I conducted on this topic, it was made clear that Saudi teachers may think the writing process strategy would not apply to elementary students because they are not ready yet. The teachers interviewed believed that applying this strategy needs specific language skills such as influence in spelling, grammar structure, and rich vocabulary.

When a teacher teaches her or his students to give valuable feedback by modeling the process, they will learn by the time. Modeling is a necessary stage of effective instruction because it helps students to conceptualize and apply new skills and strategies (Methe & Hintze, 2003; Regan & Berkeley, 2012; Rupley, Blair, & Nichols, 2009)). Regan and Berkeley (2012) noted that if students clearly understand and accurately employ the steps of a cognitive strategy students are better prepared for guided and independent practice. That means that when a comprehension breakdown occurs, the students would need reteaching and more modeling.

In light of these limitations, the challenges that might face the implementation Plan (IP) of the WP should be addressed. These challenges could be the time, or students ignoring to their peers' comments as Philippokos (2017) noted in his research. These challenges could be addressed. For instance, rescheduling the core schedule to implement the WP without overwhelming by using the activity hour effectively. Also, training student to give valuable feedback to their peers before asking them to applied peer-review stage in the writing process. Briefly, when some challenges appear while implementation, the benefits of the WP could be useful to provide solutions.

Findings from Interviews and Surveys

Two important themes emerged in the interview. First, some teachers agreed that "we need to teach our students how to write." From my experience as an Arabic teacher in elementary school, teachers lack a writing process strategy, or any strategy based on instructional writing processes approach. Whether in middle or in high schools, teachers in KSA use similar writing process strategies except peer-reviewing, which is introduced in 8th grade. Two interviewees asked for clarification for the peer-review stage because they seemed to be unfamiliar with this stage. After the clarification, they thought peer-review could benefit their students' awareness as readers. Obviously, research stresses the potential for implementing a WP in Saudi Arabia, and many teacher interviewees also recognize the needs.

The Implementation Plan (IP) of the Writing Program (WP)

This table addresses the implementation plan (IP) of the WP. The main target of the WP is to improve students' writing in elementary schools by

creating a writing program to work with the core curriculum using the writing process approach. There are six sub-targets for the main target, and each target has several actions to do. The first column is the action item, which records the step(s) needed to happen. Each action has a completion date and the necessary resources to be completed. To clarify who will be in charge, the lead column introduces the person or the people who will implement the step. Evaluation, which is the last column, briefly explains how the success of the step will be measured.

Table 2: The Implementation Plan.

Action item	Completion date	Resources	Lead	Evaluation
Target 1: Build an understanding and support for the WP among stakeholders				
A. Developing materials to make the case for the WP	Mid-September 2020 (first two weeks of school year)	Khbrat action plan PowerPoint with explanation of key terms Knowledge of audience members' expectations and background	Proposal writer	Review with an expert.
B. Explain WP to the principal	Mid-September 2020 (first two weeks of school year)	Khbrat action plan Implementation Plan (IP) of the action plan	Proposal writer, the principal	Principal's feedback, permission to implement the WP at the school.
C. Explain WP to the supervisors	Mid-September 2020 (first two weeks of school year)	Khbrat action plan IP of the action plan	Proposal writer, the supervisor	Supervisor's feedback, permission to implement the WP at the school.

D. Obtain permission to implement the WP. Ask for four Activity Hour periods per week. - Make sure that I am not scheduled to teach anything else during the activity hour	Mid-September 2020 (first two weeks of school year)	Letter requesting permission (Clear workload expectations) Proposal writer's schedule	The principal and then supervisor approve	Receiving the permission letter, new schedule for proposal writer.
E. Formal request for permission to collect data	Mid-September 2020 (first two weeks of school year)	Letter of support from my principal A concept map (brief summary of my proposal)	Ministry of Education's Office for Planning and Development, parents	Accepting or rejecting my request

Target 2: Conduct pre-assessment of student writing skills – 1st week of school

A. Collect a writing sample at the start of the year (pre-assessment), using the 5 steps of the writing process	Mid-September 2020 (1st week of school year)	Pre-assessment Answer sheets, Rubric Grades report	Proposal writer	Students' writing samples
B. Score the writing sample with a rubric	Mid-September 2020 (1st week of school year)	Grade-level writing rubric	Proposal writer	Rubric results

C. Analyze writing data to identify the needs and what parts of the writing process need more practice/focus	Mid-September 2020 (2nd 3rd week of school year)	Grade-level writing rubric Analyzing method	Proposal writer, an expert in writing instruction	Analyzing results
Target 3: Implement WP during activity hour with my students (4th – 6th grades, Arabic language)				
A. Plan the WP: write a unit/lesson plan for each week	1st - 3rd week of October 2020	Examples of lesson plans collected from immersion. Planning time and translation.	Proposal writer	A unit/lesson plan including schedules
B. Communicate the WP: share lesson plans with principal	4th week of October 2020	The WP lessons plan & schedules	Proposal writer, the principal	Principal's approval
C. Implement daily plans in Activity Hour. Assuming principal permission, 4th grade WP meets two days per week and 5th and 6th grade combined WP meets two days per week.	November-December 2020	The WP daily plans	Proposal writer, the 4th – 6th graders	Attendance for the WP class

D. Create a portfolio for each student to collect every draft	November-December 2020	Portfolio to each student	Proposal writer, the 4th – 6th graders	Students' portfolios
E. Share student writing with parents	The end of December 2020	Samples of students writing, invitations for the parents which will be written by students, event plan	Proposal writer, the principal, the 4th – 6th graders	Attendance for the event, satisfaction survey
Target 4: Evaluate the results of the pilot WP				

A. Use student portfolios as artifacts to show writing improvement	January 2021	Students' portfolios, rubric to measure the writing process	Proposal writer	Analysis of students' writing (using document review)
B. Have students write a post-assessment and assess with same rubric as the preassessment	January 2021	Postassessment The same rubric	Proposal writer	Post-assessment results
C. Collect feedback from students about the WP	January 2021	Sticky notes, door tickets	Proposal writer, the 4th – 6th graders	Students' responses
D. Compare pre- and post-assessment data	February 2021	Pre-assessment & Post-assessment results, Analyzing method	Proposal writer, an expert in writing	Analysis of assessment results
E. Tailor program based on evaluation results	February 2021	Evaluation results & lesson plans	Proposal writer	Revised lesson plans

Target 5: Explain the program to other Arabic teachers				
A. Present the experience of implementing the WP and the results of the WP (school presentation during teacher meeting)	March 2021	Khbrat action plan presentation including the evaluation results, students' writing samples, pictures of published samples, and responses of parent's survey	Proposal writer,	Teacher's attendance records
B. Invite supervisor to the presentation in the school	March 2021	Invitation letter to the supervisor	Proposal writer	The attendance to the teachers meeting
C. Invite teachers to observe writing during Activity Hour	March 2021	Invitation message in the teachers' group at the WhatsApp	Proposal writer	The attendance to the WP class at the activity hour
D. Follow up with observers to answer questions, address concerns, provide support	March 2021	Teachers' meeting after teachers' observation to answer their questions, to address concerns, and to provide support	Proposal writer, teachers' who observes the WP class	The attendance for the teachers' meeting
E. Create online website with PD resources about the WP & opportunity for dialogue	April 2021	The WP website, PD resources, creates a direct hotline to contact the proposal writers for any questions.	Proposal writer	Publishing the website and spread the link in teachers' community
Target 6: Expand the WP schoolwide				

A. Continue the WP with grades 4th –6th	September 2021	Schedule to allow the WP Colleagues who interested in the WP	Teaching the WP with grades 4th – 6th
B. Start the WP with grades 1st – 3rd	September 2021	Following the implement ation steps of the WP for the 4th – 6th grades	Starting the WP classes to 1st – 3rd grades' students

Evaluation Plan

I am planning to follow a number of evaluation steps to ensure a successful implementation of my proposed program. Students' attendance records to the WP classes, submission of assignments, and the amount and quality of writing produced by students will demonstrate their engagement and progress. I, the proposal writer, can also observe how they understand and use the writing process and interact with each other or share feedback. An observer (e.g., a colleague or me) will use an observation checklist and take notes on students' engagement and progress monthly. I can then use the reflection data as evidence leading to key insights into my students' readiness to go to the next step in the implementation plan. Besides, during the observation, I can know whether my students are interested in the WP or not. If so, I have to make sure they understand that the grades do not matter in this WP, and I want them to learn to enjoy writing what they want. Also, in order to ensure that students enjoy the WP, I will use students' surveys, exit tickets, and oral feedback for younger students.

To measure the improvement in students' writing skills, I will follow up with students' portfolios and collect evidence of their writing before and after the WP. Then, I will conduct a document review by using rubrics to measure the writing quality and use of the writing process. The quantitative data will come from the rubric scores of the pre- and post-assessments, and three analyses will be conducted. First, I will see what percent of students improved their writing (i.e., had a higher score on the post-assessment than the pre-assessment). Second, I will measure their improvement in writing (i.e., how much the scores increased). Finally, I will examine the change in scores on the different components of the rubric, to see if some writing skills improved more than others. Qualitative data will also be derived from a record of students' writing during the WP. I will analyze the students' ability to incorporate the feedback they receive from me (the teacher) and their peers in their subsequent drafts, thereby indicating the level of their progress. I can use this data as feedback for students in individual conferences about their writing progress, and communication with parents and teachers.

At the end of the WP, I will invite the parents to celebrate their children's accomplishments in writing. I am planning to ask my students to write invitations to their parents encouraging them to attend the event. I will count how many parents attend. I will present a presentation

about the WP, then I will share samples of students' writing before and after the WP intervention. After the presentation, I will send them a survey to assess the level of their satisfaction with their students' progress in writing. They will be invited to share any questions, concerns, or recommendations, which I will use as evidence, this time using external evaluators' stance (the parents'). Based on all the evidence gathered from implementing the WP with my students, my colleagues will be kindly invited and asked to experiment the same project, this time with their own students whom I am not teaching.

Arabic teachers are always welcome to observe my WP classes. That is what I will share in the teacher's meeting, so they can feel free to observe the classes. I will ask them to give feedback and to ask questions during the post-observation session.

To measure my colleagues' engagement in this observation, I will keep records of how many colleagues visit my class and what kind of feedback they share afterwards. I will track how many colleagues agree to implement the WP. Later, when they begin to implement the WP, I will observe them to support them. I will use an observation checklist to see if they are implementing the writing process steps. To allow these observations, I will need to plan my schedule with the principal. All teachers implementing the WP will post their lesson plans to the shared website of the WP and I can conduct a document analysis to see whether teachers are using all the steps of the writing process. In the teachers' meeting, we will discuss implementation progress as a team to ensure that all the school students are involved in the same track. Finally,

I will ask all teachers to implement the WP to assess their students' writing both quantitatively and qualitatively, using the procedures described above. This will allow me to analyze whether student writing has improved schoolwide.

Conclusion

After implementing the writing program (WP), I hope my 4th grade student who initially did not know how to write a story, will now be able to change her mind and realize that writing is a skill that can be built. Later, all Oshairt Sudair Elementary students can celebrate the improvement of the writing quality thanks to the many benefits and potential of the writing program.

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