Effectiveness of Process-writing Approach with Middle School Children in Developing Hindi Language Compositions

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Abstract

The process-writing approach provides opportunities for students to engage with the real process involved in writing. The present paper is based on a research study done with middle school children who developed compositions in Hindi language by following process-writing approach. This qualitative study involved three phases. Each phase respectively documented significant data about participant's initial writing competency, quality of engagement with process-writing, and observed changes in children's approach to writing.

INTRODUCTION

Writing is a medium of expressing our feelings, emotions and ideas. It is a process of reaching out for one's thoughts and discovering them. We write because we have a natural urge to communicate, express, and share our opinions, views, and concerns. Writing is also an important literacy component. Writing is so closely associated with schooling such that one of the objectives of schools is believed to make its students competent writers (Graham, 2019).

However, in our schools, writing is often perceived from an extremely narrow perspective. The term 'writing' is mostly equated with copying content from the blackboard. Traditional writing practices—handwriting, accurate copying exercises, and practicing spelling are popularly used for teaching writing in the classroom. The core factors of writing such as

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voice, desire to convey, and ownership are hardly emphasised in classroom assignments (Graves, 1983; Kumar, 1996). The writing pedagogy followed in classrooms grades accuracy and uniformity higher than content and self-expression.

A closer look at how writing is taught in schools will make the situation more visible. In our classrooms, essays, paragraphs, and letters are written according to pre-determined formats and frameworks. Topics selected for writing are rarely related to children's experiences and contexts. Most of the time, compositions are written on a blackboard, and students are expected to copy the same. Uniformity in writing assignments is extensively emphasised. The scope for experimentation, risk-taking, and expression in writing is often neglected. This exclusive focus on 'correctness' in writing assignments forces students to value factors such as copying, format, and mechanics in writing (Kos and Maslowski, 2001). Applebee and Langer (2011) labeled such writing assignments as 'writing without composing' because children produce compositions without getting engaged in the process of composing.

Teachers too play an extremely limited and conventional role in this scenario. They are often more concerned about the accuracy and correctness of a writing piece rather than the ideas and views expressed. In the words of Lucy M. Calkins (1986):

'It is the most natural thing in the world for the master potter to watch an apprentice at work, noticing what the student does and does not do with the lump of clay. Yet writing teachers are more apt to focus on the final products than on the processes that produce them' (p. 5l). Teachers read students' writing not as a responsive reader but as an item checker.

Further, describing our writing classrooms, Kumar (1996) highlighted that writing is such extensively prescribed in our classrooms that when children are asked to write anything, they look towards their teachers to tell them what to write as 'they do not see writing as a means to say something' (p. 54). Writing instructions in schools does not enable students to understand writing as a medium of expression. The situation needs attention as several children especially in our context depend exclusively on schools to acquire literacy (Sinha, 2010). Thus it is important to explore alternative ways to teach writing.

Process-writing Approach

Much of the research and academic work in the field of writing has begun to recognise that writers follow a process when they work. Researchers have discovered that writing is a complex process that is made up of various sub-processes that occur in varying patterns. It means that producing a writing piece is not a matter of coincidence but involves

different processes such as thinking, reviewing, reflecting, and sharing. Different researchers identified these sub-processes involved in writing in different ways. Donald Graves (1983) described the process as pre-writing, composing, and post-writing. Linda Flower and John Hayes (1981) explained that the writing process involves planning, translating, and reviewing. Tompkins (2004) defined the writing process in stages such as pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and sharing.

Process-writing is based on the philosophy that if children are to learn writing, then they must become active participants in the writing process. Children learn to write by writing (Goodman, 1989). By involving learners in all phases of writing, process-writing emphasises the creativity of the individual writer and pays attention to the development of good writing practices rather than the imitation of models (Tribble, 1996). It makes writing meaningful for students by connecting it with the purposes and interests that energise their lives (Calkins, 1986). The process of writing, as defined by Tompkins (2004), is a recursive pattern of pre-writing, drafting, revision, editing, and publishing. During the pre-writing stage, the author prepares to write. This is the time to select the topic, function, purpose, form, and audience of writing. The writing then goes to the drafting stage, to revising, to editing, and finally, to the publishing stage. The movement is not necessarily a linear one but in a manner that facilitates the development of an effective writing piece.

The process-writing approach helps children in becoming independent thinkers and writers. It values the growth and talent of individual writers and makes them want to continue writing, as they feel good about their abilities. The process oriented perspective is highly meaningful for teaching writing to children, as it gives enough space for children's personal experiences and concerns. Students have rich lives, and teachers can use it effectively as a valuable resource to teach writing (Calkins, 1986).

OBJECTIVES

The present study was undertaken with the following objectives:

1. To establish the present status of middle school students writing in the Hindi language.

2. To establish the relevance of process-writing with middle school students.

3. To help improve the writing of middle school students in a specific area, that is, composition writing in the Hindi language.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative study was taken up to explore the process-writing approach with middle-school students for developing Hindi

language compositions. As the nature of research required meeting and working with children on regular basis, hence it was decided to conduct the research study in a tuition center rather than a formal school. A tuition center located in New Delhi was selected for the same. All middle school children studying in the tuition center were selected as participants. A total number of eight children participated in the study. The study was divided into three phases which are as follows:

Phase I: Understanding the initial level of students' writing and their concept of writing

In this phase, the focus was on collecting data related to the prevailing notions, ideas, and beliefs of the students about writing, including how they were introduced to writing tasks in school and what they considered writing. The required data were collected from the following sources:

1. Writing interview #1— It was conducted to know what students think about writing, good writers, and other related concepts.

2. School writing samples— Compositions written in students' school Hindi language notebooks were collected and analysed to understand the nature of school writing.

3. Initial writing samples— These are the compositions in the Hindi language written by students without any help from my side.

The data from different sources presented a holistic picture of students' initial beliefs about writing. Further, the collected data also highlighted students' initial competency in writing.

Phase II: Developing students' writing through process-writing

Students developed compositions in the Hindi language by following different stages of process-writing. Detailed observation notes of students' participation in process-writing sessions were maintained. A portfolio record file containing all the writing drafts, from pre-writing to editing, was maintained for every student individually.

The work done in different stages is briefly outlined:

1. Pre-writing— It involved the selection of a topic and gathering information about the topic. It also included making decisions about the prospective audience, purpose, and form of the writing.

2. Drafting— Ideas gathered in the pre-writing stage were transformed and organised into the first draft. Children wrote and refined their compositions through a series of drafts.

3. Revising— The final draft was shared in a peer conference. Feedback focused on the content of the writing and was provided to the writer. Addition, deletion, or

organisation of the content was done by the writer on their own as per the received suggestions.

4. Editing— The entire focus of this stage was on correcting spellings and other mechanics. An editing checklist was provided to assist students in proofreading their work. The checklist included points focused exclusively on the format of writing such as the use of punctuation marks and identifying incorrectly spelled words.

5. Publishing— A magazine was published by compiling different writing pieces developed by students.

Phase III: Changes in students' quality of work and their views about writing

For finding changes (if any) in the students' attitudes and beliefs; the second round of developing writings through process-writing was taken up. This time the focus was on noticing the changes in the way a student selected a new topic, gathered ideas, and approached writing. Detailed observation notes were taken and portfolio records were maintained. Other data sources used in this phase were:

1. Writing interview #2 (similar to writing interview #1)

2. Comparison between first and second rounds of process-writing sessions on a pre-decided basis.

3. Comparison between initial writing samples (written in phase I) with the final writings (compiled in a magazine) on a pre-decided basis.

Findings

Phase wise findings of the study are shared below:

Phase I: Understanding the initial level of students' writing and their concept of writing

The data collected in this phase highlighted six significant findings. Firstly, both in the school writing sample and initial writing samples, middle school children used conventional topics such as Swatantrata Diwas (Independence Day) and Gantantra Diwas (Republic Day), *Delhi ke darshniye sthal* (Places to visit in Delhi). Secondly, the writer's voice was not evident in any writing sample. Thirdly, the language used in the school writing sample and initial writing attempts displayed the use of artificial language. Fourthly, in the writing interview, all children displayed conventional views about writing. They equated writing with handwriting and copying exercises. The areas such as beautiful handwriting, perfect grammar, correct spellings, and neat work dominated students' responses across different questions related to qualities of a good writer, their self-image as a writer, and the areas in which they would like to improve their writing. Next, all of the children confirmed the

dominance of conventional writing pedagogy in their classroom. The use of guidebooks was accepted by all. Lastly, the analysis of school writing samples highlighted restricted feedback by teachers. Comments such as *'Galti sudharo'* (correct your error) or *'Paanch baar likho'* (write five times) or *'Lekhan sudharo'* (improve your handwriting) were only provided as feedback in their Hindi language notebooks.

Phase II: Developing Students' Writing through Process-writing

After understanding the initial level of students' writing and their concept of writing, the process-writing session was started with middle school children. They were encouraged to write about their lives. Children were given opportunities to make decisions and write freely about their selected topic in the Hindi language. Compositions were developed through the various steps of the process-writing approach.

Pre-writing and Preparing Draft #1 — Middle school children were asked to select topics related to their lives, gather ideas, and develop Draft #1. Initially, resistance was experienced from the students' side as they were more concerned about marks and formats. They requested to take conventional topics and copy from guide books rather than writing on their own. However, with constant persistence, they agreed to select a topic related to their lives and write Draft #1 in the Hindi language.

Developing Writing Draft #2 — An informal discussion was done with all the students individually about their Draft # 1. Few questions were asked to students which made them elaborate more on their topics. The discussions made students realise important information which they could add to their compositions.

Developing Writing Draft #3 — A noticeable change was observed in the attitude of the students. They shared their ideas more openly as they knew that there is no 'right' or 'wrong'. Most of the students came up with several new ideas and information which they wanted to include in Draft # 3.

Participating in Peer-conference — In peer conference, students read aloud their Draft # 3 in a group and noted various suggestions provided by others. Some of the major suggestions provided during the conference were related to incorrect information, excessive repetition, elaboration of ideas, and improper sentence structure.

Developing Writing Draft #4 — Before writing Draft # 4, students evaluated the different suggestions provided by their friends, that is, which suggestions are relevant and which aren't. Based on their decision, they prepared Draft # 4. A remarkable positive change was observed.

Children were taking most of the decisions themselves. The following quotes are taken from a discussion with students after peer conference:

- *"Mein dekh raha hoon ki kaun—sa sujhaav mujhe sach muchh theek lagta hai. Jaise yeh birthday wala mujhe theek nahin lag raha. Mujhe nahin lagta iski zaroorat hai. Mera topic gurjeet ki khasiyat ke barey mein hai aur woh mera dost kyon hai? Birthday ka kya kaam isme?"* (I am judging which suggestion is really good. For example, I think this suggestion about a birthday is not correct. I don't think it is required. My topic is about Gurjeet's specialties and, why he is my friend. Information about a birthday is not required).

- *"Mujhe lagtaa hai kee isse pehle wala kagaz maine dhang se nahin likha tha. Isme mein koshish kar rahi hoon kee sabki batayee baatein bhi aani chahiye".* (I think I have not written the earlier draft properly. In this draft I am trying to include all the suggestions provided by others).

Revising and Preparing Writing Draft # 5— A gap of four days was given before this session deliberately. It was done to enable students to revise their work with a fresh perspective. A revision checklist was provided to the children. The checklist included items such as: Have I explained my points clearly? Does my composition have a clear beginning? And are my ideas properly represented? Students used the checklist effectively and discovered gaps in their work. Based on the identified gaps, students prepared Draft # 5.

Editing and Preparing the Final Copy— After the revision checklist, an editing checklist was provided to students to check their draft # 5. The editing checklist included items focused on checking spellings and punctuation marks. Using the editing checklist, students edited their Draft # 5. After proofreading, a final copy was prepared by students for publishing. All compositions written by students were collected and published in a magazine.

Phase III: Changes in Students' Quality of Work and Views about Writing

Findings of this phase are reported based on major themes identified in the compositions developed in the first and second rounds of process-writing. Along with this, a comparison is made between the two rounds of process-writing (Phase II and Phase III), and between the two writings (initial writing attempts and compositions developed in process-writing sessions). Findings of each category are discussed below:

1. **Topic:** Personal life experiences and interests appeared as the basis for topic selection. Students were selected to write on topics that are related to their lives. The major themes selected by students were friends, pet animals, games,

and special incidences. Topics chosen by students were related to their lives and surroundings such as *'Meri Pyari Kali Bhains'* (My lovely black buffalo – pet animal), *'Pitthugram'* (A game), *'Vishwa Cup Ka Bukhar'* (Fever of World Cup), *'Filmon Ka Jaadu'* (The magic of movies), and *'Pariksha Ki Pareshani'* (Problems of examination). Thus, the topics selected were more realistic and closer to students' life.

2. **Writer's Voice:** The essence of the writer's voice was present in all the compositions developed by students. After reading the work, one gets the feel of the writer's ideas, views, and perspective. As all the compositions were written with a clear sense of audience and purpose, that's why reading them becomes an interesting experience. Following examples are taken from the compositions written by students:

   • (While telling about their best friend) *'Usko ghar mein sab chun-chun kehte hain aur school mein uska naam hai Gurjeet, lekin mein usse pyar se K. P. kehta hoon.'* (At home everybody calls him Chun – Chun and in school, his name is Gurjeet, but I call him K. P., with love).

   • *'Maine apni bhains ke saath photo bhi khichvayi hein. Jab hum apne naye ghar mein jayenge, tab bhi hum isse bechenge nahin.'* (I have got a photograph clicked with my buffalo. When we will shift to our new house, then also, we will not sell it).

3. **Language:** The language used in these compositions was very simple, clear, and related to students. It expressed what the child wanted to say. Artificial vocabulary was not used by students in their compositions. Artificial vocabulary refers to complex vocabulary which appears distant from the children, for instance, sanskritised vocabulary found in guide books.

4. **Views about Writing:** A remarkable change was observed in the views about writing expressed by students. They described writing as a medium of self-expression, sharing one's ideas and communicating views. The students focused on the importance of topic selection and ideas expressed in the content as the pre-requisite for writing good pieces. An improvement was also noticed in students' views about themselves as good writers. Some examples from writing interview # 2 are quoted below to show the changes observed in the views of students:

   • *"Likhna hota hai – apne khyal, dil ki baat, jo hum mehsoos karte hem ya sabko batana chahate hai, usse kagaz par likhna."* (Writing is expressing your thoughts, your heart's

voice, which we feel or want to tell others, on a paper.)

- (While discussing areas of improvement) *"Mein kuch baton ke bare mein jyaada hi bata deti hoon jabki topic ke hisaab se to usski zaroorat tak nahin hoti. Mujhe yeh faisala karna aana chahiye kee mujhe kis par dhyaan dena hein kis par nahin"* (I tell about certain issues excessively; while, according to the topic, it is not even required. I must learn to make decisions about which issues should be focused and should not).

- *"Achaa likhne ke liye usse iss cheez ki koshish karni chahiye kee jo usse padhe , usse bhi* *woh hi lage jo usko laga. Aisa tabhi hoga jab woh apne vishya ke bare mein janega."* (For writing well, one must try to make the reader experience the same feeling which they have felt. It can happen only when the writer knows about their topic well).

5. **Comparative Tables:** Changes were observed in terms of students' participation and attitude towards writing. The observed changes are documented in a comparative Table for better clarity. Table 1 highlights a comparison between two rounds of process-writing and Table 2 highlights comparison between initial writing attempts and process-writing sessions.

Table 1
Comparison between the Two Rounds of Process-writing Sessions

S.No.	Basis	Round I	Round II	
		Before Peer Conference	**After Peer Conference**	
1.	Topic selection	Maximum time was spent convincing the students that their experiences are worth sharing.	—	Topics selected by students on their own (related to their life experiences).
2.	Gathering ideas	Only brainstorming was used.	—	Brainstorming, discussion, referring to written documents, and television programs were used.

3.	Focus	Mechanics, spellings, length, and formats were used.	More on content, that is, their ideas and feelings.	Ideas, personal feelings, and reflections were focused.
4.	Need for adult-confirmation	Highly required. Students were not able to make decisions on their own.	Not required.	Not required. Confidence in their abilities started developing.
5.	Interaction with other students	Not present. The ideas of competition, cheating, and marks were restricting their interaction.	Started developing. The focus was on helping each other to improve.	Free and open interaction was visible. A friendly outlook was present.
6.	Importance of experience	Students considered their experiences useless and were completely unsure about their importance	Started considering their experiences as significant	Started considering their experience as worth writing about. A desire to share and write about their experiences was noticed
7.	Ownership of writing piece	Not observed	Developing	Maximum
8.	Ability to consider the reader's perspective	Not present	Developing	Completely present
9.	Level of participation	Limited participation. Students were quite hesitant about sharing their ideas	Increased	Maximum
10.	Self-image as a writer	Most of them considered themselves bad writers. The level of confidence was low.	Improvements were observed. Students' confidence levels started increasing.	Highly improved. Students became quite confident about their image as god writers.

Table 2
**Comparison between Initial Writing Pieces (Phase I) and Compositions
Developed in Process-writing Sessions (Phase II and Phase III)**

S.No.	Basis	Initial Writing Pieces	Compositions Developed
1.	Writer's voice	Completely absent. The desire to share or express was not present.	Present. It tells you what the writer wants to say.
2.	Purpose	Only to give information about certain topics.	To share personal ideas, feelings, and experiences with others.
3.	Language	The highly artificial language was used	The language that is related to a child's life and reflects his/her true the feeling was used.
4.	Content	Appears as an informational text. Some information written in it was even incorrect since it was based only on rote memorisation.	The content was enriched with the personal experiences of the writer.
5.	Originality of ideas	Completely absent. Writers have just written the content memorised from guidebooks	Completely original ideas and interpretations of the writer were present.
6.	Reading experience	Tedious. The content does not establish any link between the reader and the writer.	Highly interesting for readers. It takes into account the reader's perspective.

OVERVIEW

The findings of Phase I suggested that students' initial understanding of writing was quite limited. They equated writing only with copying exercises in their notebooks. Initial writing attempts of students appeared mainly as informational text with a clear absence of the writer's voice. Topics selected for writing were highly conventional and the content was overloaded with artificial vocabulary. The responses provided by students in writing interview # 1 indicated that in classrooms, writing is approached merely as a mechanical skill with no scope for personal expression.

This limited perspective about writing created some problems in the first round of process-writing sessions (Phase II). In the beginning, students focused more on mechanics, spelling, and handwriting; rather than on content and ideas they wanted to share. Issues such as cheating, marks, and competition restricted the interaction within the writing group. However, as the writing session

proceeded, students started taking interest in writing about their own life experiences. The interaction between students improved significantly and the development of a friendly outlook was observed.

The second round of the process-writing sessions (Phase III) reflected clear changes in the attitude, priorities, and approach of students toward writing. Content, ideas, and personal experiences occupied a more important position as compared to other technical aspects. The need for adult confirmation reduced significantly with marked improvement in students' confidence level and self-image as a writer. Students displayed the ability to consider readers' perspectives and developed a sense of ownership of their writings. The data indicated a remarkable difference between the initial writing attempts and the writings developed in the process-writing sessions in terms of the writer's voice, purpose, language, content, originality of ideas, and reading experience. The compositions written in the process-writing sessions appeared better as compared to initial writing attempts, thus, suggesting the significance of the process-writing perspective in making the writing experience meaningful for students.

Discussion

Writing is highly undervalued in our school system by both teachers and students. Unfortunately, writing is equated to mechanical skills, which can be mastered merely by practicing handwriting, memorising spellings, and using proper formats. We must realise that learning to write does not mean 'mugging up' grammatical patterns but involves expression, voice, and ownership.

The present research was undertaken to study the effectiveness of process-writing with middle school children in developing Hindi language compositions. The study was conducted in a tuition center with middle-school children studying in different government schools. This study was divided into three phases namely, the understanding initial level of students' writing and their concepts of writing (Phase I), developing writing through process-writing (Phase II), and changes in students' quality of work and views about writing (Phase III). Different sources of data were used to gather the required information. Findings obtained from the research suggest significant improvement in the quality of writing pieces and students' views about writing. The compositions developed in the process–writing sessions were better than initial writing pieces in several aspects such as writer's voice, originality of ideas, and richness of content. Similarly, a major improvement was noticed in the initial views of students about writing, which was extremely limited and conventional. These findings will raise certain important questions in our minds such as; why school writing samples were suffering from so

many limitations? To understand the reasons behind this question, we need to analyse the stages through which a writing piece passes in a traditional classroom. For better clarification, a simultaneous comparison is done with the work done in different stages of process-writing in Table 3.

Table 3
Comparison between Traditional Writing Classroom and Process-writing Session

S. No.	Stages	Traditional Classrooms	Process-writing Session
1.	Pre-writing (a) Choosing a topic	Topics are given by the teacher, as specified in the syllabus.	The topic is chosen by the children themselves.
	(b) Considering the audience	No scope is provided. Children produce writing only to satisfy the teacher's requirement	The child considers the audience and writes accordingly.
	(c) Considering the form	Decided by the teacher.	The teacher allows children to write in any form selected by them.
	(d) Gathering ideas	No scope is provided. Content is written on the blackboard by the teacher and children are expected to copy the same.	A child gathers ideas through various sources (newspapers, interviewing).
2.	Drafting	The first draft is the final draft. Children are supposed to write in the first attempt correctly. The entire emphasis is on mechanics and neat work.	Children put their ideas and experiences on a rough draft. The entire emphasis is on content.
3.	Revising	No revising stage writing pieces straightly presented to the teacher for correction.	A rough draft is read and shared with others. Ideas and suggestions are provided to the writer.
4.	Editing		The children are supposed to proofread their writing piece themselves and correct all errors.
5.	Sharing	No sharing as all the children have written the same thing.	The children shares their writing piece with other classmates. All children can read each other's work.

This comparison Table clearly shows the reason behind several limitations found in the school writing sample. For example: the absence of a writer's voice. Obviously, how can a child's voice get reflected in their writing piece when, in reality, they just copy the content written by the teacher on the blackboard. It is believed that good writing is a product of good thinking. But, in our context, 'thinking' and 'expressing' are not considered the job of students. All decisions (from topic, content, language to length) are taken exclusively by the teacher. Students are only expected to 'copy' the work 'correctly'.

Krishna Kumar (1996), considered the desire to convey and a sense of audience as the two important aspects of writing. Unfortunately, our excessive focus on mechanics never let our students experience these two aspects. It is a problematic issue that requires serious consideration. As Peter Elbow (1981) explained that focusing entirely on mechanics makes writing 'dead' because it does not allow students' natural voice to come through. This is something that we are practicing consciously in our classrooms. We are continuously making our students' writing dead and lifeless by focusing entirely on mechanics. Personal emotions and feelings are kept miles away from the boundaries of a formal classroom. As a result, we found school writing samples have everything such as standardised vocabulary, plenty of information, conventional topics, and well formed sentences; except one— the writer.

CONCLUSION

Process-writing approach has special relevance in our Indian context where writing is losing its true significance due to traditional pedagogic practices. Its importance increases more if we consider the multi-cultural context of our country, where teachers find it extremely difficult to provide space for every child's desire to share about their own culture. As there is no particular 'accepted' answer or topic, that's why students can write about the things which are important to them. It helps students to share the richness of their social and cultural backgrounds. Thus, it adds to students' interests, motivation and strength by making writing an enjoyable experience for them.

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