# Writing Instruction in Large Secondary School EFL Classes: A Qualitative Pilot Study

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**Abstract**

English language teachers in countries around the world teach large classes of 35 or more students. While many English language teaching methods since the 18th century have emphasized speaking skills, with globalization has come an increased need for L2 learners in English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts to develop writing skills. However, to date, little research has focused on understanding how writing instruction is carried out in large secondary school EFL classes. The purpose of this qualitative exploratory study was to provide an overview of writing instruction in large secondary school EFL classes. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 10 participants with experience as secondary school English language instructors in EFL contexts across continents. Data was analyzed through thematic analysis. Major findings revealed that writing instruction in large EFL secondary school classes is largely dominated by national exams. Additionally, participants indicated a lack of training for teaching writing. However, there was some indication that participants would welcome training. While study participants believed that writing is an important skill, 60 percent were not confident that their secondary school curriculums adequately prepares students for writing beyond secondary school. Implications suggest there is a need to better understand the phenomenon of writing instruction in large secondary school classes through further research. Implications further suggest a need for more training in writing instruction for secondary school teachers working in large EFL contexts.

**Keywords:** large classes, secondary school, writing instruction, second-language writing, English as a foreign language (EFL)

According to Kremer and Holla (2009), 85 percent of the world's children reside in the Global South. While large classes of 35 or more students are the reality for many secondary school English language educators in countries around the world, especially in state schools (Copland & Garton, 2018; Shamim & Kuchah, 2020), little research has examined large English language classes (Coleman, 2006), and even less research has focused specifically on writing instruction in

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large secondary school English as a foreign language[1] (EFL) classes (Lee, 2016; Matsuda & DePew, 2002; Ortega, 2009). While the large-class phenomenon is not new, recent initiatives might have exacerbated the problem (Benbow et al., 2007). Although these policies stipulate that governments provide free, basic education, in some low-income countries, governments do not have adequate funding to support these initiatives (Hillman & Jenkner, 2004). Since large classes will likely continue to be a pressing concern in many countries, it is important to find the best pedagogies for large-class instruction (Bamba, 2012; Benbow et al., 2007; Ndethiu et al., 2017). Finding the best pedagogies for writing instruction in large English language classes in EFL secondary school contexts starts with understanding writing instruction in such contexts. The purpose of this exploratory pilot study was to provide some insight into writing instruction in large, secondary school English language classes in EFL contexts Specifically, this study focused on garnering an understanding of the training, beliefs, and practices of secondary school English language teachers working in large secondary school classes in EFL contexts.

## Literature Review

Writing instruction in EFL secondary school contexts is often important in preparing students for school-leaving national examinations in addition to the writing students will need in personal, academic, and professional contexts beyond secondary school (Graham, 2019; Lee, 2010, 2018). In spite of the critical nature of writing instruction in secondary school EFL contexts, a number of scholars have pointed out that there is little research on how teachers in EFL secondary school contexts teach writing (e.g., Geng et al., 2022; Lee, 2010, 2016, 2018; Ortega, 2009), and less research has focused on understanding the nature of writing instruction in large secondary school EFL classes. Studies that have been carried out in large secondary school English language classes had other foci, such as the results of training intervention on teachers' error correction practices (Lee, 2008, 2016) and preservice English language teachers' beliefs about writing (Nguyen & Hudson, 2010). To date, there is no body of literature that provides an overarching idea of how English language teachers teach writing in large EFL secondary school classes. This study focused on understanding the nature of writing instruction in large secondary school English language classes through the domains of training, beliefs, and practices. This literature review starts with a definition of large class and then explores these domains.

1 EFL is used to signify that the instruction and learning of English takes places in a country or location that does not use English as a first or official language. This is differentiated from English as a second language (ESL). In an ESL context, the instruction of English is carried out in a context where English is the first or official language.

## What is a large English language class?

In many EFL contexts, secondary school English language classes in state schools are large. There is no exact definition of a large class as the concept varies according to country and context (Coleman, 2006; Hess, 2001; Shamim et al., 2007). In a North American context, a class of 20 might be considered large (Hess, 2001). In the Global South, however, it is not uncommon for English language teachers to have 150 or more students (Locastro, 2001). Some scholars have suggested definitive numbers at which a class can be considered large. According to Benbow et al. (2007), a class becomes large at a 40:1 student-teacher ratio. Renaud et al. (2007) suggest that a large class has 50-80 students. Ur (2012) believes a large class is determined by the individual teacher's perceptions of class size along with the availability of tools and resources or lack thereof. Asodike and Onyeike (2015) assert that the concept of large class relates to educational policy – a large class is one that exceeds the recommended student-teacher ratio of the given country. For this study, I define large class as one with 35 or more students.

## Training

### *Training on L2 writing pedagogy*

According to previous literature, training in L2 writing pedagogy is minimal or non-existent in EFL contexts. For instance, all English language teachers in Jordan in Al-Jarrah and Al-Ahmad's (2013) study involving 26 K-12 instructors reported that they had not received any formal training for writing instruction. Studies on university course offerings for English language instructors indicate a lack of availability of training in writing instruction. In an analysis of university courses in Brazil, Arhana and Oliviera (2020) found that only one offered a course on L2 writing pedagogy, but only to MA and PhD students. One writing course was offered at the undergraduate level, but this was a writing course rather than an L2 writing pedagogy course. Similarly, in an informal review of course offerings for master's programs for English language teachers in Hong Kong, Lee (2010) found that three out of the ten programs offered courses in L2 writing pedagogy; however, these courses were only offered as electives. These studies suggest that in many EFL contexts, training in L2 writing pedagogy for secondary school teachers has been largely ignored. The current study seeks to gain an understanding of EFL secondary school teachers of large classes experience with L2 writing pedagogy training.

## Beliefs

### *Beliefs about the importance of developing writing skills in English*

Previous literature on writing in EFL contexts has shown that writing may not be valued as highly as other language skills in EFL contexts. For instance, in

a study of 41 K-12 English language teachers in Romania, the majority (66 percent) indicated a belief that speaking is the most important skill to teach (Ene & Mitrea, 2013). In a study of 32 primary and secondary school English language teachers in Thailand, Saenkhum (2020) found that teachers prioritized speaking skills and gave writing the least amount of attention. Similarly, when asked to rank and order the importance of language skills, participants in Ene and Hryniuk's (2018) study placed speaking first and writing last. Jashari and Fohkar's (2019) survey study of 85 K-12 English language teachers in Slovenia revealed that while they felt writing is important, it was the skill they spent the least amount of time on. Since beliefs about the importance of writing impact how much attention teachers devote to writing instruction (De Smedt et al., 2016; Hsiang & Graham, 2016; Troia & Graham, 2016), it is important to understand the beliefs that secondary school EFL teachers of large classes have about teaching writing in their classes. This study sought to gain an understanding of the beliefs of EFL teachers of large classes regarding the importance of writing instruction in addition to understanding whether these teachers believe that the writing required in their current curriculum prepares students for the writing needed beyond secondary school.

**Practices**

Writing instruction in secondary school EFL classes is often largely determined by writing tasks on national exams (Casanave, 2009; Ene & Hryniuk, 2018; Khoja et al., 2018; Reichelt, 2020) and their evaluation criteria. Thus, many practices of writing instruction in EFL secondary school contexts, including general approaches to instruction, selection of assignments, and feedback practices are geared toward exam preparation. For both teachers and students, the goal of writing in EFL secondary school classes is primarily aimed at obtaining good scores on the national exam (Abdel Latif & Al Haridy, 2018; Al Amin & Greenwood, 2018; Chabaan, 2018; Darwish, 2016; Khoja et al, 2018; Rajab, 2013) rather than developing writing skills. The focus on exams scores is understandable given that scores on national exams determine a student's future, and teacher and institutional success are often measured by exams scores.

**General approaches to writing instruction**

In the literature on writing in secondary school EFL contexts, general approaches to writing instruction are typically described as traditional, which is equated with the product approach, or new, which refers to the process approach. While definitions of traditional methods of writing instruction in EFL contexts might vary according to instructor and context, for the purpose of this paper, traditional writing instruction is understood as product-oriented with no attention to multiple drafts and a focus on accuracy of micro-level features of language (e.g.,

grammar, punctuation, and spelling). Several recent studies (e.g., Abdel Latif & Al Haridy, 2018 [Egypt]; Al-Jarrah & Al-Ahmad, 2013 [Jordan]; Cando-Guanoluisa et al., 2017 [Ecuador]; Darwish, 2016 [Egypt]; Ene & Hryniuk, 2018 [China, Mexico, and Poland]; Lee, 2008 [Hong Kong]; Rajab, 2013 [Syria]) have shown that secondary school teachers in EFL contexts generally teach writing through a product approach.

### Memorization and reproduction of texts

In EFL secondary school contexts, writing task types generally mirror writing tasks on national exams (Abdel Latif & Haridy, 2018; Al-Jarrah & Al-Ahmad, 2013; Al Amin & Greenwood, 2018). In some EFL contexts, writing instruction focuses on memorization. Al Amin and Greenwood (2018) reported that in Bangladesh, national exams can be prepared for through memorization of model compositions and other writing tasks, such as dialogues. Similarly, Darwish (2016) stated that it is common for students in Egyptian secondary schools to memorize main parts of essays for later use on exams. Likewise, Khoja et al. (2018) reported that writing in Syrian secondary schools is often taught through sample compositions that students can memorize and later reproduce on exams. In some EFL contexts, accuracy of micro-level features (often grammar) is the main criteria for evaluation, and reproduction of memorized texts may not be considered problematic, but expected.

## Methods

To gain insight into the phenomenon of writing instruction in large secondary school EFL classes, the study was guided by the following research question: What is the state of writing in large classes at the secondary school level in EFL contexts? The following sub-questions underpinned the main research question: (a) What training specifically focused on writing instruction have EFL secondary school teachers of large classes had? (b) What beliefs do secondary school EFL teachers of large classes have about teaching writing? (c) What instructional practices do EFL teachers of large secondary school classes engage in when carrying out writing instruction? Before collecting data, I obtained approval from my home institution's Institutional Review Board.

### Research design

This qualitative study followed an exploratory design. Exploratory research is appropriate when there is little data on a topic, and the aim of the research is to gain a broad understanding of the topic (Gozdziak & Chantavanich, 2022; Swedberg, 2020). To date, little research has been carried out to understand how secondary school English language teachers teach writing in large English language classes. An exploratory design was suitable for this pilot study because it allowed the researcher to explore the research topic, gather preliminary data,

and gain insights to guide future research.

**Research context / Research site**

The research context for this study was a shared context of instruction carried out in large secondary school English language classes (of 35 or more students per class) in state schools in EFL contexts. The research was not "site-specific (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 104), as the participants were located in different countries and data collection took place virtually.

**Participants**

***Participant eligibility***

To be eligible for this study, participants were required to have experience teaching English in a K-12 state school in a country outside BANA (Britian, Australia, North America, and Australia) within the last five years. Participants had to have experience teaching classes of 35 or more students in one class and were required to teach or have taught writing as a stand-alone class or as part of an English language class. Participants were not required to be professionally engaged as teachers at the time of the interview.

***Participant recruitment***

A number of researchers (e.g., Cresswell & Cresswell, 2022; Cresswell & Poth, 2018; Marshall et al., 2022; Negrin et al., 2022) have pointed out the importance of recruiting research participants who fit the needs of the given study. Participants were recruited from my professional network and a social media site. Recruitment from one's professional network is valid when the specific characteristics, experiences, and expertise of relevant participants meet the needs of the particular study. Recruitment from one's network is particularly beneficial in small-scale pilot studies when cost-effectiveness and feedback time are relevant considerations for the feasibility of a study (Joseph et al., 2016). My professional network was appropriate for recruitment because I have worked in several EFL contexts and have contact with many EFL professionals through my professional and academic activities.

Recruitment was announced on a social media post on a site for professional development for English language teachers from June 18 to June 21, 2021. Interested participants contacted me through email. I explained the study and provided potential participants with an IRB approved consent form. The first ten potential research participants who contacted me and met eligibility requirements were invited to take part in the study. Potential participants who signed the consent form and agreed to the study were contacted for an interview.

Participants received no compensation for taking part in the study and pseudonyms are used in this article to protect their identities.

## Data collection

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews from June 10-July 11, 2021. The researcher had a set of predetermined questions (See Appendix A) but was free to digress beyond the prepared questions to clarify responses or probe more deeply to participant responses (Perry, 2017). Interviews were conducted via Zoom with a mobile recorder application as a backup. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. Transcriptions of the interviews were edited for accuracy prior to analysis.

**Table 1. Study Participants**

| | Pseudonym | Country | Teaching Status | Average Number of Students in a Class |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Antero | The Philippines | Former primary school (sixth grade) teacher | Approximately 40 students |
| 2 | Asif | Pakistan | Former middle school and former high school teacher | Approximately 50-60 students |
| 3 | El Sami | Morocco | High school teacher | Approximately 40 students |
| 4 | Reham | Pakistan | Middle school and high school teacher | Approximately 35-40 students |
| 5 | Nancy | Israel | Former high school teacher | Approximately 35-40 students |
| 6 | Majda | Morocco | High school teacher | Approximately 48 |
| 7 | Hari | Nepal | Former middle school and high school teacher | Approximately 35-50 students |
| 8 | Adama | Côte d'Ivoire | High school teacher | 70 – 100 students |
| 9 | Fatima | Bangladesh | High school teacher | Approximately 40-45 students |
| 10 | Saatvik | India | Former middle school and high school teacher | Approximately 35-40 students |

## Data Analysis

I analyzed the data through thematic analysis, which focuses on deriving and detailing themes from the data, both explicit and implicitly occurring (Van Manen, 2018). Braun and Clark (2022) have defined thematic analysis as "a method for developing, analyzing, and interpreting patterns across a qualitative data set, which involves systematic process of data coding to develop themes" (p. 4).

The first step in the data analysis process was to edit the transcripts with the voice recordings for accuracy. After editing the transcripts, I did an initial review of the corpus to get a general understanding of the data. I then conducted a

selective reading approach, identifying recurrent themes and salient responses that aligned with the research questions (Hancock et al., 2021; Van Manen, 2018), highlighting relevant sections and responses. This was in iterative process in which I read and reread participants' transcripts several times to ensure that selected excerpts related to the research questions. This process is referred to by Miles et al. (2020) as data condensation, which is "the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and/or transforming the data that appear in the full corpus (body) of written-up field notes, interview transcripts, documents, and other empirical materials" (p. 8). I then used the condensed data set to develop initial codes. I highlighted key concepts and ideas (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Codes were then developed from relevant text extracts. From codes, I developed themes. Each theme represented groups of codes with similar meanings (Braun & Clark, 2022). For a sample of a theme, codes, and text extracts, see Appendix B.

## Results

### Training

#### *Limited training on writing pedagogy*

For all study participants, the training they had received on L2 writing pedagogy was minimal or non-existent. Nine participants said that they had not received any pre-service training in L2 writing pedagogy. Adama in Côte d'Ivoire, the one participant who indicated he had received pre-service training, mentioned the genres of formal and informal letters and newspaper articles, but did not mention anything else about pre-service training. Six participants had taken part in some sort of in-service training. However, none of the in-service training mentioned was systematically provided by a particular institution or agency nor required for all teachers in any given context. Among the participants who had received some in-service training, two participants, Adama in Côte d'Ivoire and Majda in Morocco, mentioned receiving some training on L2 writing pedagogy from their advisors. Other mentions of in-service training related to voluntary participation. Two participants took part in trainings provided to select teachers in their region. Three participants had attended sessions provided by organizations outside their home institution, such as the British Council and local English teaching associations.

#### *A need for training*

Although not asked, some participants mentioned that teachers in their contexts need more training related to writing. Four participants pointed out that teachers themselves need more opportunities to develop writing skills in English. Hari in Nepal said that he did not learn some basic aspects of writing until he was in a graduate program: "When I started a master's level in Kathmandu University, my

tutor taught something about writing essays, paragraph like that – main ideas, statement, and supporting details." Three participants mentioned that teachers need more training in L2 writing pedagogy. Saatvik in India said: "Teachers must be provided sufficient exposure in writing when they are in teacher training colleges or professional colleges, but it's just not happening like that." Nancy in Israel pointed out that the main issue in her context was the lack of clear expectations for writing: "I think the change needs to come first of all from the Education Ministry where they need to provide professional development courses to inform teachers of the requirements for writing to make it very clear to everyone, and not only that, but I think every couple of years, there needs to be some sort of professional development training for teachers in the field."

## Beliefs

### *The importance of developing writing skills in English*

When asked about beliefs regarding the importance of developing writing skills in English, nine participants indicated that it is very important; one participant regarded it as necessary. The most frequently mentioned reason was job-related. Five participants mentioned that writing is important for getting a job following secondary school and the writing needed in chosen careers. Saatvik in India stressed the importance of basic writing skills for high school graduates: "Whenever they want to apply any job application, and whenever they want to communicate with others, minimum writing skills are very important." Four participants mentioned that developing writing skills in secondary school is important for higher education. Three participants predicated the importance of good writing skills to outside perceptions with the explanation that writing reflects one's intellect. Despite teachers' beliefs about the importance of writing instruction, in secondary schools, writing might not be given much attention. Of her context, Fatima in Bangladesh explained: "So, you see, the writing is so important to communicate everything – to know and to learn, but these writings … though is very important, but it is the one most neglected skills … no one, no, no, neither teacher neither nor the curriculum designer … they can never give up a space on these particulars."

### *Student preparedness for writing beyond secondary school*

When asked whether their secondary school curriculum prepared students for the writing needed beyond secondary school, three participants felt that it did not. Nancy in Israel and Fatima in Bangladesh, who had both recently left secondary education for positions in higher education, mentioned that lack of preparedness was evidenced in their current students' writing. Nancy said: "When our students – those who are coming to study to be English teachers – … we give them an argument – that task exactly like they did in high school,

and most of them, really, really do terribly on it. There's no structure there. No division, no, no thesis statement, no topic sentences." As a result of the lack of development of writing skills in secondary school, Fatima lamented that some students were not getting opportunities to study abroad because they were not getting high enough scores on the reading and writing sections of standardized exams, such as TOEFL and IELTS.

Three participants were somewhat confident about students' preparedness for writing beyond secondary school. El Sami from Morocco believes that the issue is not the curriculum, but the methods teachers use to teach writing. Majda in Morocco and Adama in Côte d'Ivoire believe the curriculum may not be the most important factor in student preparedness for writing and indicated that student achievement is the responsibility of both teachers and students. Four participants felt that writing instruction in their secondary school curriculum was adequate. For Hari in Nepal, the curriculum is good; the problem is that teachers are not well trained in writing.

## Practices

### *Assignments*

When asked about the writing assignments they give their students, seven participants said that writing assignments are aimed at helping students prepare for the national exam. Hari in Nepal explained: "They [the assignments] are mostly exam-oriented, and they [the students] have to complete the course that way." The types of assignments participants most frequently mentioned were essays (6 participants) and letters (5 participants), followed by paragraphs (4 participants), stories (4 participants), dialogues (4 participants), and emails (3 participants). Nancy in Israel explained that in her context there is only one writing task in English on the national exam: an argumentative essay of approximately 150 words that students spend three years preparing for in high school. Nancy believes that while a single writing task for the national exam helps students get good scores, this limited focus does not provide students sufficient practice for the variety of genres needed beyond secondary school.

### *Writing instruction based on memorization*

Four participants mentioned that writing instruction in their contexts was based primarily on memorization and reproduction. Reham in Pakistan explained what this instruction might look like: "Teacher will orally dictate them [the students] any essay; now, it's the students' responsibility to learn it by heart and reproduce it whenever there is a test of that essay." Reham explained the factors that created and sustained a system of memorization: "You know, teachers are not trained. Students are not given the space to think out of the box – examination hurdle … and your limitation of textbook." Reham further explained that in the evaluation

of writing, students are rewarded for imitation: "Most of the time it happens that students who are creative writers are graded just like other students who only know how to reproduce." Fatima in Bangladesh explained that having students memorize helped streamline writing instruction in a large class: "Because of the large class, so, fortunately or unfortunately, you can say that I'm following the traditional system of teaching. … I just asked my students, that this is your syllabus. You have to write a paragraph for ten marks; you have to write an essay for ten marks; you have to write a letter for ten marks … so just memorize those things and apply your memorizing on your answer script, and I will give you a wholistic, overall mark." Similarly, when asked why he thought there was a lot of copying of writing, Hari in Nepal explained that copying, in part, was a way for teachers to survive teaching writing in large classes "because large number of students create the problem, and teacher cannot pay attention to all the students and by teaching five, six periods and checking homeworks, and that's why teacher also has to choose the shortcut way." Saatvik in India explained that national exams in his context are no longer memory-based. Saatvik explained that a movement away from memory-based national exams was part of a recent curriculum reform that had taken place within the last five years in his region.

## Discussion and Implications

### Beliefs and practices

In line with previous literature (e.g., Casanave, 2009; Ene & Hryniuk, 2018; Khoja et al., 2018; Reichelt, 2020), participants in this study indicated that practices for writing instruction were largely dominated by national exams. Also, as with previous studies (Abdel Latif & Haridy, 2018; Al Amin & Greenwood, 2018; Darwish, 2016: Khoja et al., 2018), some participants described systems of writing instruction based on memorization. Although writing as memorization was mentioned by 40 percent of participants in this study, it is possible that other participants also work in such systems but did not provide this information since they were not directly asked about writing as memorization. Saatvik in India mentioned that a change from memory-based exams in his region had only taken place within the last five years; other districts in his country might still follow memory-based exam systems. Nonetheless, the reform in Saatvik's context is encouraging because it demonstrates that movement away from memory-based exams is possible.

Overall, study participants indicated a belief that writing is an important skill. In spite of this belief, three participants felt that their school's curriculum does not prepare students for the writing needed beyond secondary school, and three participants were only somewhat confident of their curriculum's capacity to adequately prepare students. In some EFL contexts, a lack of preparedness

might relate to the limited number of genres practiced in secondary school. In other contexts, memorization might be the problem. In systems that reward memorization and reproduction, students are unlikely to be prepared for writing beyond secondary school (Chabaan, 2010; Khoja et al., 2018). When faced with writing tasks in professional or academic contexts, these students might find it difficult to respond since their previous writing instruction focused on writing as memorization for a test score (Chabaan, 2010; Khoja et al., 2018). Such memorization methodology can have harmful effects. Khoja et al. (2018) pointed out that undergraduate students at a university in Syria viewed grammar as the main focus of writing and did not know how to apply writing strategies. Sadi and Othman's (2012) study revealed that undergraduate students in an Iranian university sometimes submitted writing assignments with chunks of previously memorized texts from secondary school.

**The need to reconsider assessment practices**

Although this study did not focus on evaluation of writing on national exams, there was some indication in this study that teachers assess students on the ability to memorize and reproduce writing. In EFL contexts, criteria for writing on national exams often has a washback effect to writing instruction as memorization (Al Amin & Greenwood, 2018; Khoja et al., 2018; Abdel Latif & Haridy, 2018). In contexts where assessment of written work on exams is only focused on micro-level features and memorized content is rewarded, there is a clear need for reform of assessment practices on national exams. As long as students are rewarded for memorization and reproduction of written texts, teachers will continue to teach writing as memorization. Several researchers (Abdel Latif & Haridy, 2018; Darwish, 2016; Al Amin & Greenwood, 2018) have noted that teachers do not adopt curricular changes when they do not align with exam expectations. Abdel Latif and Haridy and Darwish found that in Egypt a shift from the product to the process approach in a recent edition of the secondary school English language textbook did not change teachers' instructional practices because assessment on exams did not change. Of course, there is a need not only for reconceptualization of assessment of writing on exams but also assessment training for examiners as well as teachers and teacher trainers.

**Training**

As with previous studies (Al-Jarrah & Al-Ahmad, 2013; Arhana & Oliviera, 2020; Lee, 2010), teachers in this study had received little to no training on L2 writing pedagogy. The minimal training participants did mention was generally carried out on a voluntary basis sought by the participants themselves. Training in and of itself may not be enough. Short-term training with no follow-up

that is not provided for all teachers in an institution might have little effect (Darwish, 2016). On a positive note, teachers in this study generally believe that writing is an important skill to develop, and as with previous studies (e.g., Ene & Mitrea, 2013; Ene & Hryniuk, 2018; Henderson-Lee & Pandey, 2020; Jashari & Fohkar, 2019), several teachers in this study indicated a need for more training in writing, for both L2 writing pedagogy and teachers' own writing development.

Given the findings of this study, I propose the following suggestions for carrying out training on L2 writing instruction for teachers of large secondary school EFL classes. While it is understood that reform on national exams might be needed in some contexts and that training and reform need to be coordinated, my suggestions in this paper relate only to training since it is one of the main foci of the study.

**A two-dimensional model for training.** To improve theoretical and pedagogic knowledge and skills in writing instruction, I suggest that effective training would incorporate both knowledge-enriched input and bottom-up processes. In this model, training starts with knowledge-enriched input and then progresses to bottom-up processes.

**Knowledge-enriched training.** Teachers in contexts with little or no training in the teaching of writing might learn to teach writing through what Lortie (1975) has termed *apprenticeship of observation*, which essentially means that teachers develop their knowledge and practice of teaching through teaching along with prior experiences in and knowledge about the context within which they work. When teachers rely on apprenticeship of observation as the main driver of their pedagogical practices, they tend to implement pedagogy without critical reflection or a full understanding of the theories, approaches, techniques, and tools available to them and knowledge of research-based practices (Lee, 2020).

Knowledge-enriched training provides teachers' input on theories, techniques, and tools along with evidence-based practices. Training in writing pedagogies that moves teachers from traditional methods to other methods might require some adjustment in perception on the part of the trainees. For instance, Lee's (2020) study on the feedback literacy development of two graduate students and in-service English language teachers revealed that these teachers began to question their beliefs about conventional feedback practices following training. Teachers should not be expected to apply input from training uncritically. However, without any training input, teachers lack the opportunity to develop appropriate pedagogies for writing instruction in large secondary school EFL classes.

**Bottom-up training.** In addition to knowledge-enriched input, training needs to incorporate bottom-up processes that seek and honor the input of local teachers in developing appropriate instruction for writing (Kuchah, 2013; Shamim & Coleman, 2018; Shamin & Kuchah, 2020). Bottom-up processes would allow instructors the opportunity to share ideas on how to best implement knowledge-enriched input and would, furthermore, provide a space for teachers to share practical strategies and techniques they already carry out in their practice.

### Guiding pedagogy

Although writing pedagogies in EFL contexts have generally been described as product or process, relevant pedagogies for writing instruction in large classes might lie outside the boundaries of a dualistic perspective of product and process approaches. While "so-called Western methods of English language teaching (communicative, task-based, student-centered, process-oriented) cannot be applied wholesale to EFL contexts where traditions of large, teacher-fronted, exam-oriented classes persist" (Casanave, 2009, p. 262), wholesale rejection might also be flawed. All methods need to be examined critically for their appropriateness in any context (Casanave, 2009). As several scholars in EFL contexts (e.g., Al-Jarrah and Al-Ahmad, 2013; Darwish 2016; Khoja et al., 2018) have pointed out, with some modification, imported models of writing instruction (e.g., the process approach) can be applicable in large-class situations. For instance, when Tsui and Ng (2010) found that exam scores dropped following the adoption of the process approach in their context, they created a hybrid approach that implemented product writing for less-intensive writing tasks and a process approach for more intensive ones. Some aspects of teaching practices associated with process pedagogy, such as student-teacher conferences and multiple drafts might be unrealistic in some large-class settings (Casanave, 2009), but other aspects, such as pre-writing before drafting and peer-editing might be suitable.

## Conclusion

This study has offered a glimpse into teaching writing in large secondary school EFL classes. Major findings have shown that writing instruction in large EFL secondary school classes is generally focused on preparing students for national exams. Furthermore, this study revealed that most secondary school EFL teachers have received little to no explicit training on L2 writing pedagogy though there is some indication that they would like to receive more explicit training on writing and teaching writing. Additionally, the majority of participants in the study were not sure that the writing instruction enforced by their secondary school curriculums adequately prepares students for writing beyond secondary school. In spite of the importance of writing in preparing students for the

writing needed in academic, personal, and professional contexts beyond secondary school, writing instruction in large EFL secondary school classes has received little attention in the research literature to date. More research is needed to understand how writing is carried out in large EFL secondary school classes. Studies that include more EFL instructor participants across more contexts would provide stronger evidence. Additionally, observation data can provide information on how EFL instructors teach writing that might not be evident from self-reports. Observational data could also potentially provide good examples of writing instruction in large classes that could later be used for training purposes. Furthermore, bottom-up research that incorporates EFL secondary school teachers of large classes own ideas, beliefs, techniques, and strategies on teaching in large classes needs to be conducted. Since large classes in EFL contexts will likely persist, it is important to have a better understanding of writing instruction in EFL secondary school contexts in order to develop effective pedagogies.

## Limitations of the study

This study sought to find out about the teaching of writing in large classes through self-reports, which may not entirely represent study participants' realities. Although this study was originally designed to investigate writing instruction in K-12 contexts, only one participant (a sixth-grade teacher) recruited for this study was working in a primary school setting. Other participants were secondary school teachers or had recently worked as secondary school teachers. Through this study, I decided to focus only on secondary school instructors in subsequent studies, rather than the K-12 population, since writing instruction might be given more attention in secondary school contexts than primary school contexts.

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**Appendix A: Interview Questions**

1. Tell me about the school your work in and the classes you teach.
2. How many students are in a typical class that you teach? If you teach multiple classes, please describe them.
3. How does the number of students impact what you can teach?
4. Does class size have an impact on your ability to teach writing? What is the impact?
5. Do you feel prepared to teach large classes? Why or why not?
6. What kind of training focused specifically on writing instruction have you received? / Do you feel prepared to teach writing? Why or why not?
7. What sorts of writing activities or genres do your students do (can include any kind of writing that happens in the classroom—worksheets, diaries, writing words or sentences, paragraphs, essays, copying notes into a notebook, stories, etc.)
8. How does the writing in the English language curriculum in your school prepare your students for future writing needs?
9. How important do you think it is for students to develop writing skills in English?
10. What challenges do you face in teaching writing in English lessons?
11. How do you meet these challenges?
12. What else would you like me to understand about teaching writing in a large class?

**Appendix B: Sample Coding Document**
**Theme: Systems of Writing Instruction Based on Memorization**

Codes 1: Memorization because of lack of training for teaching writing
Code 2: Memorization because of large classes
Code 3: Assessments value memorized texts
Code 4: Moving away from memorization-based learning

| Participant | Code(s) | Excerpts from Interviews |
|---|---|---|
| Reham | **1, 3** | "You know teachers are not trained. Students are not given the space to think out of the box--examination hurdle […] and your limitation of textbook—this is the thing, you know from the primary section, even from primary level, this is going to middle level and then going to secondary and college level as well."<br><br>"They're actually… they're actually highly appreciated if they reproduce whatever they have learned."<br>"…usually, we go for memorization, for rote learning for certain typical standards which are set writing. For instance, teacher will orally dictate them any essay; now, it's students' responsibility to learn it by heart and reproduce whenever there is test of that essay." |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Fatima | **2, 3** | "…because of the large class, so, fortunately or unfortunately, you can say that I'm following the traditional system of teaching. What is that? […] I just asked my students, that this is your syllabus. You have to write a paragraph for ten marks; you have to write an essay for ten marks; you have to write a letter for ten marks. …so just memorize those, those things and apply you're memorizing on your answer script, and I will give you a wholistic, overall mark."<br><br>So, whenever you can memorize something and put those memorization on this script, and then I will get A plus."<br><br>"…so in a large class particularly, I could not apply all my learnings—all my ideas, because of the large class." |
| Hari | **2** | "…because large number of students create the problem, and teacher cannot pay attention to all the students and by teaching five, six periods and checking homeworks, and that's why teacher also has to choose the shortcut way |
| Saatvik | **4** | "the final examination—the final exam is text independent… they have to apply whatever they have to display their knowledge in the germination to produce their knowledge in the form of writing, journal writing, and reading comprehension."<br><br>"At my state is that one of the progress in the changing the examination in the reforms in the examination of the last five years." |