

Discussing of the Implementation Process for Writing to Learn Activities

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Abstract

The study aims to discuss of the implementation process for writing to learn activities. The document review method has been used in the research containing qualitative data. Data were obtained from scientific articles, books, and presentations containing information about the general characteristics of process-oriented writing and writing to learn and analyzed using the descriptive analysis method. As a result of the reviews synthesised the findings, guidelines, and applications of the studies based on researchers' observations, experiences, intuitions, and inferences and presented them under five different headings. In this context, the implementation process of writing to learn has been discussed in five stages: preparation, exploration, application, evaluation, and sharing. In line with the stated results, it can be suggested that researchers who will use the WTL method in the future should make applications by considering the relevant steps. Thus, the direct or indirect effects of writing for learning activities on students can be increased.

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout their educational lives, students engage in writing actions such as copying what is written on the board into their notebooks, taking notes on what the teacher says, and summarizing by copying sentences from different parts of a work. As a result, although the information is processed in short-term memory, it tends to disappear over time. Therefore, new educational policies are being developed to increase the permanence of knowledge, and teachers are turning to contemporary approaches. In this context, writing to learn (WTL), which involves the student mentally in the process, unlike writing activities carried out only physically, draws attention as one of the methods used to increase permanence.

Writing can be defined as a tool that allows students to organize their knowledge and reflect on their beliefs (Mason & Boscolo, 2000). Writing is a productive skill that is formally acquired, learned later, and allows the expression of thoughts, observations, and experiences (İspir & Yıldız, 2021a). Writing, which is a complex metacognitive activity that benefits from an individual's knowledge and basic skills (Walker et al., 2005), can be expressed as a learning tool (Arnold et al., 2017). In this sense, writing plays an essential role in observing learning changes for both students and teachers (Fellows, 1994).

WTL is an educational-teaching strategy that focuses on organizing and describing ideas, considering the written product (Balgopal & Wallace, 2013), or a learning path that facilitates understanding difficult concepts (Hohenshell et al., 2004). According to İspir and Yıldız (2022), WTL is a written expression process that connects old knowledge with newly acquired knowledge, enables the formation of new thoughts, and encourages students to conduct individual research. Dalka (2019), who evaluates this process from his perspective, has described WTL, which is based on a cognitive theory, as a writing model with features such as reviewing, synthesizing, and recalling information. From these definitions, it can be said that WTL is a learning approach that ensures a better understanding of the subject content rather than improving writing skills. The literature that reveals the products of this approach shows that WTL is widely used in various disciplines, from social sciences (Dolgin, 1981; Goggin, 1985; Holbrook, 1987) to natural sciences (Clary-Lemon et al., 2019; Wright et al., 2019). Therefore, WTL activities provide the acquisition of versatile cognitive and affective skills at different teaching levels from primary school to university.

First and foremost, WTL enhances academic achievement and higher-order thinking (Caukin, 2010; Kim et al., 2021; Pooch et al., 2007). By supporting meaningful learning experiences (Gupte et al., 2021), WTL promotes the retention of knowledge (Rivard & Straw, 2000) and increases students' confidence in their writing abilities (Reaves et al., 1993). WTL positively affects students' conceptual learning (Alharbi, 2015) and problem-focused learning skills (Chappell, 2006). Furthermore, students gain self-regulation skills through WTL (Nückles et al., 2020) and exhibit positive attitudes toward writing (Reilly, 2007). Despite these advantages, sufficient time is not allocated for writing activities in Turkey. Writing is often perceived as a time-wasting activity and is generally considered a mere note-taking tool (Daşdemir et al., 2015). To address this issue and observe desired behavioral changes in individuals, WTL activities need to be systematically and strategically implemented. However, Kieft et al. (2006) have noted that it has not yet been emphasized how to use WTL activities. In this context, Kayaalp and Şimşek (2021) have listed some aspects related to the preparation and implementation process of WTL. Nevertheless, these aspects have not been detailed, and the WTL process has not been described in-depth. Therefore, this study aims to discuss the implementation process for WTL activities.

METHOD

This study, which discusses the implementation process of WTL activities, follows a qualitative research design. Qualitative research generally obtains data from interviews, observations, and examined documents (Merriam, 2013). Within the scope of the study, the implementation stages of WTL activities have been examined in different dimensions. Therefore, the document analysis method, one of the qualitative research designs, has been used in the study. Document analysis can be described as examining any document previously created formally or informally (Sönmez & Alacapınar, 2018). Letters, diaries, maps, yearbooks, autobiographies, blogs, posters, articles, notebooks, and other social application records can each serve as data sources (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Gibson & Brown, 2009).

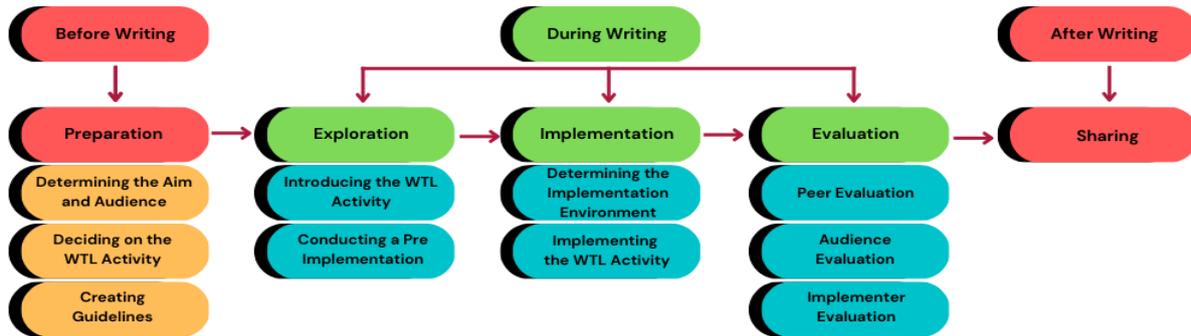
Documents, which can be used as a standalone data source or combined with interviews and observations to provide additional information (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994), have strong aspects such as enabling long-term analysis, providing sample size, and being more economical in terms of time and cost. On the other hand, the lack of a standard format, the difficulty of coding, and the potential for bias are the weak aspects of documents (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). Considering these features, the data for this study has been obtained from scientific articles, books, and presentations, and has been analyzed according to the descriptive analysis method.

FINDINGS

Considering the application steps, it can be said that WTL is a process-oriented approach (İspir & Yıldız, 2021a). It can be stated that there are some steps to be followed in this process, and these steps should be adhered to. In the literature, classifications and sub-stages of process-oriented writing have been formed in different ways. For example, Harmer (2002) explained the approach in three stages: planning, drafting, and revising. However, upon examining the literature, it is generally observed that the process approach consists of five stages. Widodo (2008) listed the relevant stages as prewriting, drafting, responding, reviewing-editing, and evaluating in this context. Alber-Morgan et al. (2007) and Smith (1999) have structured the approach as prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. On the other hand, Gezmiş-Ceyhan (2014) classified the process-oriented writing stages as prewriting, drafting, checking, revising, and final proofreading.

The mentioned stages and some studies related to WTL (Aktepe & Yıldız, 2020; Bozat & Yıldız, 2015; Günel & Hand, 2005; Günel et al., 2009a; Hand & Prain, 2002; Hand et al., 1999; Hohenshell et al., 2004; İspir & Yıldız, 2021a; 2021b; 2022; Kieft et al., 2006; Klein, 1999; Klein & Boscolo, 2016; Mason & Boscolo, 2000; Pinar & Yıldız, 2020; Reaves et al., 1993; Rivard & Straw, 2000; Tynjälä, 1998; Uzoğlu & Gürbüz, 2013; Yıldız, 2012a; 2012b; Yıldız, 2014; Yıldız, 2016; Yıldız & Büyükkasap, 2011) have been examined through their written documents. The findings, guidelines, and practices of the examined studies, along with the researchers' observations, experiences, intuitions, and inferences, have been synthesized and presented under five different headings. In this context, the WTL implementation process is generally addressed in five stages: preparation, exploration, application, evaluation, and sharing. Practitioners and researchers are expected to perform each stage sequentially in this process. The linear progression of the WTL activities, where the previous stage forms the basis for the next one, is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Stages to be Followed While Carrying Out WTL Activities



1. PREPARATION

DETERMINING THE PURPOSE AND AUDIENCE OF THE WRITING ACTIVITY

Since the author's message is closely related to the writing purpose, it should be determined beforehand. In this direction, writing activities can be carried out either to inform someone else about the subject being processed or to reinforce the subject and ensure permanent learning. Moreover, the time of the activity's use in the course process can shape the purpose of writing. Writing activities can be used at the beginning of the lesson to measure students' readiness or reveal their prior knowledge. On the other hand, writing activities can reinforce the subject during the lesson and review the information at the end of the lesson. In addition, the purpose of writing can be shaped according to the audience. In this context, individual elements such as the student's family, friends, and teachers, and mass elements such as newspapers and magazines can constitute the audience for the writing activity. Furthermore, writing activities can be prepared for a lower peer level to use more instructive language and provide detailed explanations. This can enable students to engage in more cognitive activities compared to writing activities prepared for other audiences.

DECIDING ON THE WRITING-TO-LEARN ACTIVITY

After identifying a problematic situation that mentally disturbs the researcher, it is considered which WTL activity could be beneficial in addressing the identified situation. In this direction, factors such as the problem to be solved, the subject or course for which the application will be made, the grade level of the study group, socioeconomic conditions, and reading and writing skills can be considered in the decision-making stage. Suppose the problem situation that disturbs the researcher and is believed to be resolved is aimed at determining perception and perspective. In that case, the use of journals can be recommended among WTL activities. If the unit to be studied includes situations that the student encounters in daily life, descriptive WTL activities such as letters, summaries, and stories can be used. If the unit in which the activity will be conducted includes abstract concepts, visual-based WTL activities such as posters, banners, and brochures can be used. Similarly, in cases of inadequate reading and writing skills or deficiencies in the mother tongue, WTL activities with a predominance of elements such as shapes, pictures, and graphics can be preferred. In addition, the use of WTL activities requiring higher-level mental skills, such as articles and compositions, in primary school may cause difficulties, so these activities can be carried out at higher levels. Also, limited internet access in rural areas and the financial requirements of some WTL activities, such as posters, may lead to the selection of plain text-based writing types. Besides research, teachers can determine the writing type by considering students' interests alongside the mentioned decision-making factors.

CREATING INSTRUCTIONS

To conduct a planned and systematic application in line with the decided WTL activity, a set of instructions related to the study should be prepared. When creating instructions, the study's application steps should be considered. These instructions can be conveyed to students and teachers orally or in writing. However, researchers believe that presenting the instructions in writing is more

beneficial. An appropriate environment should be created for participants to ask questions about the instruction items. Furthermore, sufficient time should be allocated to ensure participants receive answers to all their questions. When creating instructions, information regarding the writing type (which WTL activity will be used), audience (who the activity will be written/prepared for), course, and unit (the subject context in which the activity will be carried out) should be clearly stated in the introductory paragraph. Subsequently, other rules to be followed during the process should be written in bullet points after the introductory paragraph. These points include information about the general preparation time, environment, format, content, and evaluation criteria of the activity. Sample instructions are provided in the literature for students and teachers (see İspir, 2021c; İspir & Yıldız, 2022).

2. EXPLORATION

INTRODUCING THE WRITING TO LEARN ACTIVITY

An activity example prepared by the researcher or others, suitable for the previously agreed-upon writing type, is introduced to the study group. The introduction process continues with explanations about the basic features of the writing activity.

CONDUCTING A PRELIMINARY APPLICATION

The study group can carry out a preliminary application by specifying to whom they will write/prepare the writing activity. After the pilot application, necessary and appropriate corrections can be made on a few selected examples from those who want to share their work. This way, the study group can make fewer mistakes while performing subsequent activities.

3. IMPLEMENTATION

DETERMINING THE APPLICATION ENVIRONMENT FOR THE WRITING TO LEARN ACTIVITY

The environment where the activities will be performed is decided considering the chosen study group, the agreed-upon WTL activity, and the unit. This environment can be a classroom or a home. It is more appropriate to carry out WTL activities like diaries, letters, and posters at home since individuals can use their skills and intelligence more effectively in a home environment. Moreover, conducting activities at home can be suggested to reduce the effects of problems arising from time and readiness in a classroom environment. This way, students can feel more comfortable, enabling them to think, research, and inquire about topics they feel are insufficient. However, if the WTL activity is planned to be carried out in small groups, it can be preferred to be held in a classroom environment. Small heterogeneous groups can be formed in this case, considering students' gender, academic achievement, communication, and entrepreneurship. Homogeneous groups may limit diverse thinking, and large groups may pose the risk of not involving all members in the activities.

CARRYING OUT THE WRITING TO LEARN ACTIVITY

After the relevant topic is covered, the student or group members who will perform the WTL activity complete their work using their words, sentences, and thoughts. Subsequently, the prepared WTL activity is carefully reviewed from start to finish by the writer themselves to fix any detected deficiencies and errors. The completed activity is then set aside to be reviewed later, creating an opportunity for a more objective evaluation. In this context, students can be asked to write about the purpose of the topic they covered, what information they learned, which parts they enjoyed the most during the lesson, what kind of relationships they established between the topic covered and their daily lives, and the aspects they did not understand.

4. EVALUATION

Individuals preparing the WTL activities should be encouraged to carry out the activity themselves. Control can be ensured by randomly selecting some individuals when the activities are collected and asking them to provide explanations about their prepared activities.

PEER EVALUATION

The activities prepared by the class carrying out the study can be submitted to another class or group for evaluation. Also, WTL activities can be given to a different person within the same study group for evaluation, without the author's name being visible. Peers can be asked to evaluate whether the activity they read provides sufficient information about the topic, and whether it is clear and understandable.

RECIPIENT EVALUATION

The WTL activity can be given to the intended recipient to evaluate whether it is sufficiently understandable. For example, the activities prepared by pre-service teachers enrolled in an undergraduate program addressing high school students can be read by their recipients and evaluated accordingly.

IMPLEMENTER EVALUATION

The researcher or teacher can conduct an evaluation based on a rubric they have prepared or criteria they have determined. One of the ready-made rubrics teachers can use for this purpose is the evaluation rubric prepared by researchers referencing Hand and Prain's (2002) basic components of the WTL process (purpose, topic, recipient, writing type, writing style). The evaluation rubric for prepared WTL activities is presented in İspir and Yıldız's (2022) study.

4. SHARING

Selected WTL activities that meet the determined criteria can be shared on classroom and school bulletin boards. Similarly, sharing can be done on digital platforms belonging to the educational institution. Additionally, the student can present their prepared activity verbally to their peers and teacher. Therefore, deciding on a suitable platform for sharing can ensure the realization of purpose-oriented writing or make the writing process more meaningful.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Contrary to some claims, learning and writing are distinguishable skills. Therefore, many learning examples may not originate from writing, and writing activities may not always result in learning (Bangert-Drowns et al., 2004). Writing for the purpose of learning involves a long process that occurs through instruction, practice, and feedback (Akerson & Young, 2005). Consequently, considering the comprehensive structure of lessons, students' age levels, and writing types, some aspects must be considered during the implementation and preparation process of writing activities (İspir & Yıldız, 2022). Activities conducted with these considerations contribute to the development of various sensory, cognitive, social, and psychomotor skills and learning.

The implementation process of WTL activities generally consists of five stages: preparation, exploration, application, evaluation, and sharing. In the preparation stage, it is important to determine the purpose and the corresponding audience. In this context, it is stated that writing activities can be used to eliminate students' misconceptions and motivate them at the beginning of a topic, obtain in-depth information during the topic, and evaluate at the end of the topic (İspir & Yıldız, 2021b). WTL activities can be prepared for very narrow audiences, such as family, friends, and teachers, or for very broad audiences, such as newspapers and magazines (Emig, 1977). Writing activities can be conducted for younger audiences, requiring detailed explanations and more instructive language (Koçak & Seven, 2016). This is because thinking about how to express a topic to younger audiences and adjusting to their level of understanding leads students to engage in various cognitive activities (Yıldız, 2016). Similarly, Günel et al. (2009b) have shown that WTL activities prepared for peers and younger students are more meaningful than those written for teachers and parents.

After identifying the problem the researcher wants to resolve, a decision should be made on which WTL activity to use to address the identified situation. Inevitably, there is a need to detail what type of writing can enhance learning (Tynjälä, 1998). In this context, factors such as class level, socioeconomic status, literacy skills, interests, and the subject or topic of the application should be considered during the decision-making stage. Kayaalp and Şimşek (2021) also argue that there should be a relationship between the topic and the type of activity when developing WTL activities. Based on the selected WTL activity, a guideline should be prepared to encourage the student to write and carry out a systematic and planned application (Firek, 2006). Simply providing a blank page and expecting a student to write about a topic may not result in learning.

During the exploration stage, an activity example prepared by the researcher or others should be used to introduce the WTL activity to students. Then, specifying to whom the students will prepare their writing activity and conducting a pilot study is considered important. This is thought to minimize or eliminate problems that may be encountered during the main application. Thus, observations and participant opinions obtained from the pilot application can be considered to identify the missing and difficult-to-understand parts of the instructional material (Uzun & Alev, 2013).

Next, during the application stage, a decision should be made on the environment in which the WTL activities will be conducted. If the WTL activity is planned to be carried out in small groups, conducting it in a classroom setting may be preferable. However, due to limitations such as curriculum requirements and the need for prior knowledge, it may be more appropriate for individually prepared activities to be done at home. This is because when the student carrying out the WTL activity is alone, they can effectively use their cognitive skills without needing anyone to explain things (Yıldız, 2016). This way, WTL activities can lead to more meaningful outcomes for both teachers and students (Kayaalp & Şimşek, 2021).

After completing the application, all prepared activities should be presented for peer, audience, or practitioner evaluation. Peers or audience members can be asked to assess whether the activity they read provided sufficient information about the topic and if it was clear and understandable. Additionally, the researcher or teacher can conduct an evaluation based on a rubric they have prepared or criteria they have determined. Thus, providing detailed feedback to students can be seen as an essential component of WTL (Fry & Villagomez, 2012). In this regard, it can be said that students who receive meaningful feedback on the corrections made to their WTL activities gain a better understanding of the writing process (Baker et al., 2008). The evaluated WTL activities can be displayed on classroom and school bulletin boards or shared on institution-owned digital platforms. Additionally, students can present their prepared activities verbally to their classmates and teachers. İspir and Yıldız (2021a) also support this idea by suggesting that WTL activities can be displayed on classroom bulletin boards and shared with other students. In line with the stated results, it can be suggested that researchers who will use the WTL method in the future should make applications by considering the relevant steps. Thus, the direct or indirect effects of WTL activities on students can be increased.

ETHICS

All the rules in the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Guideline were complied with, and none of the "Actions Contrary to Scientific Research and Publication Ethics" in the second part of the guideline were applied.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

The authors contributed equally to the study.

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