Original Paper

Instructional Materials Used to Support Learners' Mastery of Writing

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Abstract

Mastery of writing is important for ones' success in life and instructional materials are used to support this mastery. The purpose of this study was to describe how instructional materials contribute to learners' mastery of writing. The research question was; "How does the type and manner of use of instructional materials support learners' mastery of writing?" This study followed a qualitative multiple case study design. Data was collected from three schools. Seven teachers and twenty one students were purposively selected from the schools to participate in the study. Data was collected using interviews, focus group discussions and documentary analysis. Findings portrayed that although participants were aware of the support other materials like textbooks and technology give to writing mastery, due to certain constraints, the most common materials used were examination past papers. We therefore recommend that the policy makers and other stakeholders provide an environment that supports the use of other types of instructional resources to support writing mastery.

Keywords

instructional materials, mastery of writing, technology

1. Introduction

Writing is one of the language skills taught and assessed worldwide (National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC), 2008, 2019). The benefits of good writing have been exalted by many theorists, researchers, and employers alike. It is good for preserving and gathering information (Tyfeci & Dujaka, 2017). It helps one articulate their thoughts, feelings, and emotions (Kamehameha Schools, 2007). It helps one to communicate with people both removed in time and space (Graham et al., 2007). In school, writing is an integral part of all subjects as students use it to demonstrate knowledge, gather,

remember and share what they have learned (Zumbrunn & Krause, 2012; Bell-Nolan, 2015). After school, employees need good writing skills to prepare a variety of written documents while for most people, participation in civic life requires one to repeatedly write (Cutler & Graham, 2008; Graham, Bollinger, Booth, D'Aoust, MacArthur, & Olinghouse, 2012). Mastery of writing enables learners to express themselves accurately and confidently, to have a sense of readers' expectations and an awareness of conventions for a particular piece of writing (Truong & Pham, 2017). This is the reason why there is a need to study the instructional materials used to support good writing skills through writing instruction.

Globally, writing instruction has undergone different changes. According to the online Education encyclopedia and Yancey (2008), written composition became a concern for American High Schools in the late 19th century. The year 1873 marked became a turning point as Harvard University started demanding that each candidate applying to study produce a composition about a literary work. The focus was on enabling each pupil to give expression to their thoughts which led to the teaching of composition that emphasized correct expression Sperling and DiPardo (2008). The next development was the 1966 Dartmouth conference where the language specialists suggested that students should be supported through the writing process. This led to the 1981 Flower and Hayes cognitive process model which studied how expert writers prepare their texts with a view of using this method to teach students the composing process. Later, new trends emerged which led to the recognition that writing is judged according to how much it reflects consideration of audience, purpose, and occasion. According to Sperling and DiPardo (2008), research on local classrooms was influenced by the social cognitive and sociocultural perspectives of Vygotsky which implied the social nature of language learning by which children grow into the intellectual life around them. This led to the study of classrooms and rhetorical contexts where writing instruction takes place. The 21st century has led to the technological revolution as researchers study how computers can provide support for writers.

According to Ssebbunga-Masembe (2001) writing instruction in Uganda began with the coming of the Christian missionaries between 1877 and 1879. As their focus was on teaching literacy to train good Christians, the missionaries only taught basic reading and writing. Ojijo (2012) explains that writing instruction during the colonialists' time focused on training basic skills of spelling, grammar, and punctuation which would not require much thought or attention. Most of the commissions that came after independence did not change much in writing instruction. However, according to the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 2004-2015, students were leaving secondary school without acquiring the skills and knowledge required for either the world of work or higher education. Thus, the history of writing and writing instruction shows that the reasons, emphasis, content and materials of writing and writing instruction have been evolving according to different societal needs.

According to The Education Pre- Primary, Primary and Post Primary Act 2008, the education system of Uganda has 5 levels: pre-primary school (3-6 years), primary level (7-13yrs), O'level known as the lower secondary school (14-17 years), A'level secondary school (18-19 years) and Tertiary education.

This research focused on lower secondary school learners that this study defined as those between twelve and fifteen years or Senior One to Senior Three. Bean and Harper (2009) argue that lower secondary school learners need more advanced literacy instruction for the increasingly complex material they face in class. Hansen and Kissel (2009) said lower secondary school learners adjust their language according to different audiences. Therefore, Ortemeier-Hooper and Enright (2011) emphasize that any understanding of lower secondary school writers must begin with the acknowledgment that identity negotiation and social interaction are significant to discussions about how teenagers respond to their writing tasks, writing instruction and educational contexts.

To better understand how instructional materials contribute to learners' mastery of writing, this research was informed by Vygotsky's (1986) Sociocultural theory and the Cognitive Process theory of Flower and Hayes (1981). Vygotsky defined instruction as the utilization of opportunities created by development. Therefore, instruction is only successful if it occurs in a learner's Zone of Proximal Development which is the distance between a child's actual development as seen in what a child can do on their own and what they can achieve with the help of others. The Zone of Proximal Development as far as the learning of writing is concerned, involves the learner's interaction with their teacher and fellow students using tools in the environment. However the Sociocultural theory does not deal with the writing processes writers go through. These writing processes are dealt with in the Cognitive Process Theory. The Cognitive Process theory was established to answer the question of what guides the decisions which expert writers make as they write. According to the Cognitive Process theory, the act of writing involves three major elements which are the task environment, the writer' Long-Term Memory and the writing processes. The task environment includes the question the writer is trying to answer and the growing text. The writer's long-term memory is that part of the brain that stores information on familiar topics, audiences, and writing plans. The writing processes include planning, organizing and reviewing the text, processes which are under control of the monitor. These two theories were chosen because the first deals with writing tools but does not deal with the writing processes which this research is interested in.

Scholars have many definitions of writing. To some, writing is a meaning-making activity (McPheron, 2010). When writing, one must have indirect communication language structure, techniques and the ability to create ideas into text (Hasani, 2016). Therefore, writing mastery is based on the reader's judgment of the overall quality of composition taking into account things like ideation, organization, vocabulary, sentence structure and tone (Graham & Perin, 2007). According to Flower and Hayes (1981) theory, writing is the process of planning, translating and reviewing a growing text. Scholars like Troia (2007), Cutler and Graham (2008) and Graham et al. (2012) categorize writing into the basic writing skills and writing processes. The basic skills are spelling, grammar, punctuation and sentence organization while the writing processes are planning, organization, and revising the text. In this article, our focus was on the writing processes as indicated in the Cognitive Process theory even while recognizing the importance of the basic writing skills as according to Graham et al. (2012). Mastery of

the basic writing skills enables learners to focus on the composing processes. Researchers have varying definitions of writing instruction. This study followed Bell-Nolan (2015) and Zumbrunn and Krausse (2012)'s definition writing instruction as the situations where a teacher scaffolds learners in all the processes of writing that are planning, translating and reviewing the text.

Unfortunately, many learners do not know how to perform writing tasks. Recent research conducted in Uganda portrayed learners' poor mastery of writing skills as seen in most learners' inability to write compositions of various styles (NAPE, 2014). The major purpose of 2014 NAPE Assessment was to examine the performance of students in

English Language, Mathematics and Biology in relation to teachers' input towards realization of the S 2curriculum goals. The sample at the national level comprised 524 government and private secondary schools selected from 112 districts of Uganda. The total sample of students was 19,529. A total of 1,781 students of S 2 were interviewed from 378 of the surveyed schools. The percentage of students rated proficient were nearly a half (49.3%) for English Language. In the most recent national examinations, *The New Vision* reporters cited the results released by Uganda Certificate of Education officials. They quoted Uganda National Examinations board executive secretary lamenting about the poor performance of English.This was seen in the fact that candidates could not write coherently and were poor at speech writing (Bwambale et al., 2019). Of all these weaknesses, this research probed, how instructional materials supported learners' mastery of writing. There is, therefore, need to understand the materials used to support writing mastery among young secondary school learners.

The study was conducted in the central region of Uganda. Three secondary schools were selected. The content scope covered the teaching of writing in Uganda where we considered the writing processes and basic skills, the classroom cultures established to enable learners master writing, the processes of mastering writing by lower secondary school learners. The purpose of this study was to describe how instructional materials contribute to learners' mastery of writing. The following question guided the study: "How does the type and manner of use of instructional materials support learners' mastery of writing?"

2. Methodology

This study followed a qualitative multiple case study design. According to Creswell (2014), case study designs involve an in-depth analysis of a case or cases. Yin (2009) explains that case studies are used to investigate a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context. He further explains that there are two types of case studies: single and multiple case studies. This study followed the multiple case study design where the case was the classroom in which writing instruction takes place. We chose multiple case studies to make an in-depth analysis of how different instructional materials influenced writing instruction and mastery. The target population was teachers and learners of senior one to senior three in schools in Uganda.

Three schools in central Uganda were chosen to make an in-depth analysis of ways in which different

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classroom environments affect writing instruction. The schools were chosen basing on the following categories. School one code-named S High School was a poorly funded private school with few learners of relatively low-income status. That it was poorly funded could be seen by the fact that the whole school was housed on three single-storied buildings, most of the buildings had dirt floors and the walls were not painted. It also had few facilities for example; it had no classroom textbooks so teachers had to go to the classrooms with their own.

The second school code-named E High School was a government-aided Universal Secondary Education school implying that it catered for most of the education requirements of its population. Because learners were not paying any fees, E High School had over two thousand and five hundred students with each class having four streams of at least eighty learners each.

The third school code-named K High School was an international school that attracted learners of high social-economic status. It was categorized as international because it attracts students from all over the world and because learners were free to choose whether to study the Uganda Syllabus or Cambridge one. K High School had three hundred learners with each class having two streams.

Seven teachers who teach English language writing from Senior One to Senior Three classes were chosen. The teachers were purposefully selected basing on their willingness to participate in the study, the classes they teach, and if they teach writing and the number of years they had taught. Learners in the selected classes were observed as writing instruction was going on. These became passive participants in the study in the sense that, observing the writing instruction in the classroom involved observing how instructional materials were used in writing lessons. With the help of teachers, we purposefully selected a group of seven learners in each school who were willing to participate in focus group discussions. Learners were chosen to provide information on the nature of instructional materials that they used to support their writing mastery.

A variety of methods of data collection were used for triangulation purposes. The methods used were lesson observations, use of interviews, focus group discussions and documentary analysis. We observed forty writing instruction lessons from senior one to senior three using a nonparticipant observation method. Our goal was to observe the nature of instructional materials used to support writing mastery. Teachers were interviewed using the flexible interview process. That is, though there were interview guides already prepared, much of the questions developed as the interviews were conducted. Teachers were interviewed on their writing instruction methodology and the materials they used to support writing learning. Learners participated in focus group discussions on the nature of their writing and the kinds of materials that supported their writing. Four focus group discussions were conducted. As qualitative research relies on obtaining the consent of the gatekeepers when dealing with minors, these focus group discussions were the ones allowed by teachers. We studied tteachers' Schemes of Work, lesson notes and Records of Work and textbooks to see if the writing content and methodology in teachers' documents matched with those they had talked about in the interviews. We also studied learners' notebooks to see the nature of writing they had in their books.

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This research ensured validity through collecting data from various sources and through having some of the participants study the research report. Yin (2009, p. 40) defines case study reliability as demonstrating that the operations of the study can be repeated with the same results. In this research, reliability was ensured by giving details about the schools where we collected data from and describing the different classes where we observed writing instruction taking place.

The researchers obtained permission from the relevant Head teachers. We then sought for teachers who were teaching senior one to senior three and were willing to participate in the study. After this, we then proceeded to interview the teachers, analyze their records and observe their lessons. The teachers chose the places where interviews were conducted and times of interviews. All the interviews were recorded with teachers' permission. The teachers in the study chose the learners who participated in the focus group discussions. With the teachers' permission, the researchers interviewed learners using focus group interviews and looked at their notebooks.

During data analysis, the researchers first read through all the transcripts and then color-coded the data according to the different research emerging themes, The researchers then wrote comments in the margins concerning key thoughts to use as they read through the data. Documents from teachers were studied to find out the writing content they had prepared to teach, how they were planning to teach or they used to teach Documentary data from teachers provided evidence for planned writing content, materials, and activities. Learners' books were studied during writing lessons to observe the materials that supported their writing mastery. Data from observation guides were recorded in the form of extensive notes on classroom and school environments, interaction in the classroom. These were later color-coded and categorized according to emerging ideas and themes. Then the data were further categorized according to the different emerging themes and were used to verify data from interviews and documents.

We maintained ethics by seeking clearance from the university's authorities before conducting the research. Teachers were informed of the purpose of the research and why and how they had been chosen to participate in it (Punch 2012). They were assured of the confidentiality of the information and that the research would use pseudo names for all participants. All lesson observations took place with the teachers' consent. All teachers who participated in the study signed consent forms allowing the researchers to view their documents and lessons. All interview transcriptions were shared with the teachers interested to ensure that we had captured correct information. Because teachers were temporary guardians of the learners, their permission was sought before carrying out learners' interviews. Participants were assured that the data will only be used for this research and it will be safely stored from misuse.

3. Results

In this section, we present, analyze and interpret data on the research question which was, 'How does the type and manner of use of instructional materials support students' mastery of writing? We

considered the instructional materials that support writing mastery as all the aids that enabled learners to write better. Data in this section is presented according to the following sub-sections: "the use of print material" and "the use of technology".

3.1 The Use of Print Material

We considered print material to refer to all texts which enabled either the teachers to plan, teach writing and those which were used by learners to improve their writing. Print materials were the most common kind of instructional materials mentioned by both teachers and learners during interviews. Emerging data obtained showed that the most common types of print materials that supported writing instruction and mastery were "textbooks" and "past examination papers".

3.1.1 Textbooks

We looked at a textbook as a book that is used by teachers in writing instruction by providing standardized writing content and information. When asked on how they prepare writing instruction lessons, all teachers said they used textbooks during writing instruction for example:

KT02: I also have textbooks that I use so l look through them and compare the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB) books together with the Cambridge books. Of course, some things are different in format. So, I keep comparing and see. Which one suits which curriculum and which one can we borrow and add here, things like that. For UNEB classes, we use English in Use. We also have Integrated English. We have Practical English and there is MK English. For Cambridge, we have Global English and Key Stage 3 English workbooks.

(Teacher's Interview 5 K High School)

All teachers mentioned textbooks as some of the type of materials used in writing instruction. KT02 talked about using various textbooks during writing instruction. Data from the interviews and field notes showed that most teachers used the textbooks during lesson preparation for example; KT02 also talked of comparing different textbooks for the different curriculum to get the best material writing material and ways of presenting it for her learners. Though some teachers in E High School talked of consulting different books before teaching, we observed most teachers referring to the textbook; "*Functional Writing Made Easy*" by Ngobi before teaching functional writing in class. In their schemes of work, teachers indicated that they used the textbook; "*Progressive English series*" to teach writing though, in practice we did not observe them use this textbook. This showed a discrepancy between the instructional materials teachers claimed to use, teachers and what they planned for and the materials they used. The fact that they did not use it in class to teach writing points to a discrepancy between the prescribed content and actual content given to learners. Never the less, textbooks were used to support writing instruction by acting as a source of writing content. The outcome was that learners obtained writing content that was approved by the different curriculum bodies and which was perceived to be relevant to their lives.

Despite the fact that all teachers mentioned textbooks as valuable instructional material, in practice some teachers felt that textbooks were not good enough for writing instruction hence referring to other

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sources. As ET01 said:

Textbooks are not very much reliable because some textbooks may not be very current. There is also a variation in the way some of these documents are put in the textbooks because the authors of especially functional writing differ a lot. We need the intervention of the National Curriculum Development Center to make sure that we have identical sources.

(Teacher's Interview 2 E High School)

ET01 said textbooks as a writing instructional material faced many challenges: many textbooks were not current and there are many ways of writing functional documents like letters yet the examining body wanted learners to write in a specific way. The fact that there are many ways of writing functional documents posed a challenge to teachers who were not sure of which format the examining body would consider in evaluating learners.This fact also reduced the effectiveness of textbooks a tool to support writing instruction. By teachers not having a specific textbook to follow during writing instruction, they became disgruntled hence hindering effective writing instruction. Secondly, the fact that the textbooks showed different formats of writing documents hindered writing mastery as both learners and teachers did not know which format to master.

The fact that teachers mainly used these books for lesson preparation meant that students were not aware of any books on writing as Student 1 said when asked on any challenge he had with writing:

We should get books on writing.

(Focus Group Discussion 2 S.2)

Student 1 said they should get books on writing which portrays the fact that some learners were not aware of any writing texts they could use as guides in their writing. He used the plural pronoun "we" implying that he was not the only learner who was not aware of relevant textbooks but was speaking for his fellow students. Student 1 was studying at K High School a school that attracts learners from high social-economic status which further shows that the problem was not the lack of finances to buy the books. It was because teachers did not show the learners the books with writing content. Learners' lack of awareness about textbooks that support writing mastery implies that learners could not practice the skill using relevant guides which has the outcome of hindering writing mastery.

3.1.2 Examination Papers

Another form of print material commonly used was "examination past papers". In most interviews, teachers kept on referring to past paper examination questions, formats, and examples. When asked how they teach writing, some teachers talked of the use of past paper questions and answers as their source of writing content as seen from the data below:

ST01: Actually, I can't be more specific but what I know is that we look at things that are more likely to be examined. Sometimes I use compositions that have been written before, and then I read them out for the learners to give them a picture of what I expect them to do write about.

(Teachers' interview 1 S High School)

ST01 said that when selecting content for her classes, she chose topics that she expected to come in the

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examinations. She continued to say that when selecting examples of the lessons, she chose examples from compositions that were written before and read them out to the learners so that they could emulate what they had heard. She calls the emulation, "getting an idea". From her words about her source of content and examples, she emphasized that she mainly obtained her content from the examinable material. This meant that ST01 only taught her learners the content required to meet the immediate need which was to pass examinations. In ST01's case, writing mastery was seen in the ability to satisfy the examiners as seen in the expression, "what I expect them to write about". When ST01 talked of reading for her learners some sample examination stories to get an idea of what to write, she implied that by reading for learners' sample stories, learners would learn how to generate ideas, organize them and translate the ideas. The act of "reading for students" well-written work made learning passive and tested the learners listening abilities and not writing. By their not being involved in analyzing the written text, the learners' mastery of writing was limited.

Another teacher, *KT02*, said:

KT02: I also have textbooks that I use so l look through them and compare the UNEB books together with the Cambridge books. If you have written a letter and you don't have a date, you lose marks for it. You have not indicated what you are writing about; is it an application letter, a condolence letter, if it is not indicated, you lose marks for it. If it is a formal letter and your name is written in capital letters. Yes, when I am teaching composition writing, they know we are writing for marks.

(Teachers' interview 6 K High School)

KT02 said that in preparing to teach writing and in writing instruction, she followed the examination guidelines and then went on to show how different examining bodies put different restrictions on the kind of writing considered appropriate for the learners. KT02 went on to say that there were different books for different examining bodies and the book whose content she chose to teach the learners depended on the final examination the learners were going to sit. This implies that they choose textbooks, not according to the quality of writing content therein but according to examinations they expected their learners to sit. The act of giving learners different information was likely to confuse them if the learners tried to discuss their knowledge with each other. Remember, young secondary school learners love interacting with each other and achieving acceptance among their peers. One of the ways of doing this is by discussing the information they have. Thus teaching learners only what was examinable had the possibility of confusing the learners which would hinder their mastery of writing. In this case, the examination papers and related books or reading material supported writing instruction and learning by providing learners and teachers with the content to be taught and the yardstick for evaluating the learners' mastery of writing.

The problem with considering excelling in the kind of writing required in UNEB English language examination as a sign of being an expert writer had its weaknesses as seen from the interview extract below:

ET01: The UNEB style is very different from what we have on the internet for example and even UNEB

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keeps on shifting goalposts. One year, you hear that they have agreed on this, another year they disagree and the other...and yet the learners need things that are going to help them when they are out there. When they go out there, they encounter different things and yet in school, we are teaching different things.

(Teachers' Interview 2 E High School)

Though some teachers in the interviews said they used examination past papers as guidelines for preparing writing content and examples, they were quick to point out the weakness of following such a learning material. The teacher in the interview extract above point out different weaknesses. That the examining body (UNEB) kept on changing the way it evaluated its learners making it difficult to follow any specific instructional material coming from that body. This implied that though teachers taught writing and some learners' evinced writing mastery by excelling in examinations on writing instruction, learners were likely to face challenges of having learned writing content they were not likely to use in later years. Thus using examination material to support writing instruction enabled learners to master writing to a small degree.

Much as different teachers said they referred to examination materials when preparing content and examples for writing instruction, none of them indicated this in their writing instruction documents. In their lesson plans and Schemes of Work, teachers in different schools indicated different texts, for example, teachers in E High School all indicated *Progressive English* by Bamwoyeraki, Nakangu, and Ocwinyo while teachers in K High School indicated *Head Start*, *English in Use*, *Cambridge Global English* among others. In the interviews, teachers said it was because their schools and the National Curriculum Development Centre expected them to follow certain texts. Therefore, in their Schemes of Work, teachers indicated the official texts as expected by their head teachers and the national bodies but in practice, their teaching was examination-oriented.

The contradiction between the responses obtained in interviews and what we studied from their documents prompted us to find out whether in actual practice, they taught according to their lesson plans or according to the responses they gave in the interviews. The results were of varying degrees. The lessons we observed in S High School were examination-oriented in the sense that ST01 kept referring to past examination papers though she did not expose her learners to any of them. For example, when teaching how to write dialogue, she told them that UNEB had brought a question on a dialogue in 2013. In the lesson development phase, she read out the specific question and possible dialogue. Then she told her learners to go and write one of their own. This showed that though the learners did not interact with any specific examination material, it influenced writing instruction since ST01's used past papers to provide a much-needed sample question and answer. Therefore, examination past papers supported writing mastery by providing sources of writing content and yardsticks for evaluating students writing.

Another lesson we observed in K High School was a special one in that KT02 had invited an "examiner" (in Ugandan schools learners sit for special summative examinations' which are centrally

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marked. Teachers from different schools go to a central point for training in marking according to UNEB standards and are referred to as "examiners") to interact with the senior four candidates on how they had performed in a previous test which this examiner had marked. The examiner began by giving learners their scripts and then went on to discuss each question that had appeared in the test by showing them the right answer. The examiner kept on rebuking them for using American style of paragraphing, using informal English in writing and short forms among others. The examiner kept on telling learners that her format of writing or the UNEB format was the right one. The examination past papers supported writing instruction by being used to evaluate what kind of writing was 'correct' and how much of the learners' writing fitted within the "correct" version. The expert examiner acted as a more knowledgeable other according to Vygotsky and scaffolded learners' writing using the examination papers by showing learners what was expected of them if they were to pass their final examinations. We have quoted the word "correct" because, in reality, the teacher and examiners' frame of reference in determining what was correct was the examination past paper requirement. However, both the teacher and the examiner did not explain to the learners that there are many writing styles. Some of the errors they critiqued their learners for, like the use of American English and the use of informal language are right when writing in different contexts and for different audiences. Past paper examinations had the outcome of supporting mastery of British Standard English and the variety required by UNEB.

3.2 Use of Technology

The second kind of material which supported either writing instruction or learning was "Use of Technology" Use of technology was divided into electronic hardware and software programs.

3.2.1 Use of Electronic Hardware

Electronic hardware referred to the physical objects that learners and teachers used during the writing process to aid their writing. Findings portrayed that most participants recognized the importance of using technology in writing instruction and learning. According to participants, the kinds commonly used were computers, telephones, and projectors while others only desired to use them. When asked about materials that they use to support their writing during the focus group discussions, learners in K High School said:

Student 2: A gadget that can access the internet.

Student 3: I can use a laptop to write.

<p style="text-align:center">*(Focus Group Discussion 3 S.3)*</p>

In the above extracts, all the learners mentioned that during the writing processes, they used various computers to write. The kinds of computers mentioned in the extracts were laptops and phones while Student 2 recognized that there were different kinds of internet sources.This is seen when Student 2 he said any gadget that can access the internet. In those extracts, computers supported writing mastery in two ways. In Student 3's case, it enabled him to translate any ideas he had the meaning that he used it as a translating tool. However, by saying 'I can use' Rodney indicated possible use of laptops to write meaning he did not normally use them. In this case, learners used technology to support the writing

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processes of generating ideas and translating them. Yet from the Cognitive Process theory, there is more to writing than generating ideas and translating them. Writing also involves editing the work, a step that computers can support. The fact that learners did not mention this shows that they did not know that they could use technology to support other writing processes implying that technology provided limited support for writing mastery.

Some of the learners in E High School lamented on the fact that they were not taught how to use computers and didn't have easy access to those in the school as seen below:

Student 4: They don't teach us how to write using computers.

Student 5: We are not taught how to write using a computer.

Learners in the extract above indicated their desire to learn how to write using computers but were denied that chance. The fact that both *Student 4* and *Student 5* said they were not taught how to use computers is further evidence that they were not taught how to write using computers. Learners' complaints about their school's failure to teach them how to write using technology prompted us to find out why. Through collecting field notes about E High School, we found out that it is a fully government-aided school aimed at providing mass education to many young secondary school learners at a reduced cost. This implied that as learners pay little money for their education, the school had many learners coming from low-income status families. By taking on the education burden of such students, the government could not afford to provide the learners with the best education facilities which included enough computers and computer teachers for all classes. We also observed that none of the classes in E High School and S High School had electrical sockets which could support the use of technology in case the teachers wanted to use them. Thus, though learners in E High School recognized that the use of computers could support their writing, the fact that they were not taught how to use computers limited their mastery of the use of technology in writing.

However, though learners recognized the value of using technology in supporting writing, only teachers in K High School used them in either writing preparation or instruction. During our interaction with teachers as they prepared their lessons, we observed that all teachers in K had laptops and some rooms had projectors installed. When teaching writing, some teachers would project already prepared work, for example, KT02 said:

I have a projector so we start from the basics. For composition writing at the beginning, I write a sample introduction myself. I type it and project it for the children to see. So, when I start teaching them, I keep referring to what I write so they see for the introduction you can write like this.

(Teachers' Interview 6, K High School)

When teaching her learners how to write resignation letters, we observed KT02 introduce the lesson by writing the title "Resignation Letters" on the whiteboard. She connected her laptop to the projector and then showed her learners a sample resignation letter she had typed earlier. She asked Rodney to keep on pointing at the different features of the resignation letter as she explained why it appeared that way, for example, the presence of two addresses among others. In this case, the electronic hardware supported

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writing instruction by being used to display already prepared writing content. This was done as the writing content was already prepared typed earlier on the computer. All the teacher had to do was to project an already typed writing piece and then she would discuss it with her learners. In this case, technology in the form the computer and projector supported the writing instruction processes of showing models of writing content which the class discussed thus mastering writing.

Much as some learners talked of using laptops to write, we only saw one learner write using one in the classroom. This was because teachers expected learners to compose their work using pen and book which they later collected for marking thus requiring students to write their work as opposed to typing the work on the computer. Another possible reason was that information and communication technologies are expensive to buy and maintain thus only a few learners could afford them. The learner who typed all her work regardless of the lesson turned out to be a daughter of an influential person K High School. K High School by the nature of the facilities offered could only admit students coming from families of high social-economic status. This meant that this particular learner could afford a computer and the parent could ensure that teachers accepted typed work. Therefore, in K High School, technology supported writing mastery by enabling some learners to translate their work.

3.2.2 Use of Software

Much software can support writing instruction and learning. Of the participants who claimed to use information and communication technologies to support writing, the majority used search engines like Google. Computer software supported learners' searching for writing information as seen in the focus group discussion extracts:

Student 6: Me as a student in the boarding section, I find difficulties like if they have told us to write a biography, someone, I cannot get access to the internet, so I get maybe a day scholar, he goes, searches about that person and then I get something to write.

           (Focus Group Discussion 4 S.2)

Student 6 said he could not access the internet in school when expected to write a biography of someone so he would send a friend to go and research after which he would get something to write about. In his answer, James indicates that the only way to get information on any writing topic is to search the net, that there is no internet at school and that therefore he has to send someone to research him. *Student 6*'s answer portrays one who believes in the internet as containing good search engines, implying that the different software programs online supported his writing by providing the much-needed writing content. The fact that he implies the absence of the internet at school was validated by the fact that we did not observe any person in the school using the internet both in class and during my interaction with various participants within the school. The fact that *Student 6* got a day scholar to search for the writing information for him implies that James recognized that computers were accessible out of school and that the learner he sent knew how to use them. This confirms the fact that young secondary school learners are social beings who like using technology and know there is software that can provide relevant information for writing. *Student 6*'s answer portrays the fact that the

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use of the internet supports learners' mastery of generating ideas.

Teachers in K High School also used the internet to search for writing content as seen in the interview extract below:

KT01: There is a system called Rachel. It has material on many things. Sometimes you go there, you pick a story. You bring to your class. Let's copy this beautiful story and they see how to conclude a story and they see how people develop their stories.

(Teachers' interview 5 K High School)

Data from the interview extract above shows that KT01 K High School relied on the internet as a source of writing content. KT01 talked about computer software called 'Rachel' which was customized to suit their particular school. As a result, it could only be accessed within the school confines and if one had the password. During the interview, KT01 not only talked about the software but also showed us the site and some of the materials therein. In the extract above, KT01 talked about picking some stories from the site for her learners to copy and learn how to write. Here, we see the belief expressed in KT01's statement 'they see how to end a story and how people develop their stories'. This shows that KT01 drew attention to the coherence aspects of the story and making them transcribe it thus enabling them to master coherence in narrative writing. In this case, the system called 'Rachel' supported writing instruction by providing already selected and graded writing content for educational purposes.

4. Discussion

This study dealt with the use of instructional materials to support learners' mastery of writing. There were two main kinds of materials used: print materials and electronic materials.

Data portrayed that the most common materials mentioned by teachers were **textbooks**. This was not surprising as the textbook is considered the basic instructional material second only to the blackboard. In fact, according to Clark and Heyking (2018), from the outset, the school curriculum was defined by textbooks while Sajitha et al. (2018) argue that the basic instructional materials in any class are textbooks. Data from field notes showed that teachers used textbooks to obtain writing content and formats which they eventually gave to their learners. This use of textbooks is supported by data from Clark and Heyking (2018) and Tin (2013) who all also found out that textbooks were seen as a source of knowledge/writing content for teachers. Findings also showed that teachers did not trust any particular textbook as seen in the fact that when teaching, most teachers consulted more than one textbook. This mistrust of particular textbooks existed because of many reasons chief of which that in Uganda there are two education bodies which directly influence the teaching and learning in schools: The National Curriculum Development Center (NCDC) and Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB) and that no textbook has all the content that is examined. This coupled with the fact that there are many varieties of written English in the books found on the market means that teachers feel the need to select writing material from different sources.

Data portrayed that learners were not aware of any textbooks that can be used to teach writing. This was because, in all the writing lessons that I observed, the teachers did not scaffold learners using textbooks. Instead, the lessons were used for demonstrating writing content, providing models for learners to discuss with their teachers and for learners to write. It was also because whenever teachers talked of ways learners can improve their writing, they told the learners to read novels and not textbooks. Teachers used textbooks out of class therefore learners never got to see their value in classroom writing. This finding is supported by Moulton (1997) who studied the available literature on textbook use in South Africa and the United States and concluded that it is difficult to see the value of textbooks use unless one observes the teachers. Therefore, textbooks supported writing instruction by providing writing content and format which teachers eventually provided to learners on the media. However, there were many challenges with the use of textbooks which limits their efficacy as a material that supports writing instruction and mastery.

Examination past papers supported writing instruction by acting as a source of writing content and as a yardstick for evaluating learners. Data portrayed that teachers were more concerned with the content that frequently appeared in the tests rather than preparing learners for the kinds of writing they need after school. This is because teachers' and learners' abilities are measured by the results of the tests and not by what they can do. The issue of teachers being more concerned with testable items is supported by research. You (2004) presented an observational report of a typical college English curriculum for non-majors in China, with a focus on its writing component. You (2004) found out that most teachers were more concerned with teaching learners test-taking skills. Ballard and Bates (2008) studied the relationship between classroom instruction and standardized test content and the effects this has on students, parents, and teachers. Seventeen fourth grade students, fourteen parents of fourth graders, and fifteen elementary teachers completed surveys. They found that all teachers believed that teaching to the test is sometimes necessary because the fact that the test scores are published as public information creates competition within and among schools, school districts, and states within the nation. These reasons also apply in the Ugandan context where whenever UNEB results are released, schools are ranked according to performance. Since writing is the main medium through which most subjects are tested, the findings explain why teachers focus on teaching writing to the test. These findings also expound on the fact that much as the focus of this study was writing instruction in the classroom, what takes place in the classroom is also affected by factors beyond the classroom that a classroom researcher cannot ignore as Ortemeier-Hooper and Enright (2011) said, secondary school writing is situated at the center of two major vantage points: identity negotiation/social interaction and educational policies or curricular.

The other materials that supported writing mastery were **technology**. In this study, we categorized the technology into two: the **use of electronic hardware** and the **use of software**. We observed technology in one of the three schools. In the schools where we observed no technology being used in writing instruction and mastery, We observed that even the classrooms had no facilities that support the use of

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technology which explains why the teachers did not bother with preparing lessons or teaching lessons that involve the use of technology. As we argued in the methodology section and the previous paragraph, these schools had little finances and hence they could not afford to have electronic hardware in all the classrooms. Electronic hardware and computers are expensive to use and maintain. According to (Markon, 2013), Tin (2013) and Glazer (2018) barriers to technology usage include the availability of resources and regular electricity, the time required to set them up and problems with equipment. Learners in one of these schools, that is E High School, said the school had computers but these were only used to teach learners of higher classes. This was because the school was government-aided. According to the Revised Education Sector Strategic Plan of Uganda (2007-2015), the government of Uganda aided some schools intending to provide basic education to as many children as possible. This means that the government provided their schools with only basic learning materials of which, according to Sagitha et al. (2018), technology is not one of them. The second implication to the government plan was that the school had large classes and since technology hardware is expensive to purchase and maintain, the school could not afford to make the technology hardware accessible to all learners.

In K High School, data from interviews and field notes portrayed that all the teachers had personal computers. According to one teacher, this was compulsory as they had much use for them. Data from classroom observation also portrayed that all the classrooms had whiteboards, electrical sockets, extension cables and access to projectors. On top of all that, there was electricity in the school all the time we were there. In short, the fact that K High School attracted learners of high social-economic status implied that the school had both the supporting infrastructure in their physical environments and the hardware to support the teaching of writing using technology. According to Sajitha et al. (2018), these are the biggest constraints to the use of technology in Sub-Saharan Africa. The presence of electronic hardware in this school supported the preparation of writing content and projection of writing content for the whole class while writing instruction was going on thus ensuring its mastery. However, much as the school and the learners had access to technology, we only observed one learner write with it. Through our interaction with teachers in between lessons as we were collecting field notes, we found out that many learners had personal computers but the school policy did not allow them to use them in class. The fact that learners had computers but they did not use them points to an argument raised by Ortemeier-Hooper and Enright (2011) that writing instruction and mastery is affected by factors beyond the classroom like school policies which restricted students' access to their personal computers during class time. Yet the data from interviews with learners and the literature portrays that the use of electronic hardware has a lot of advantages, chief of which is motivating learners to become engaged in the lessons which lead to writing mastery.

In terms of **software**, data portrayed that the participants who used electronic software for writing instruction and learning used the search engines and the typing software. This use of computers is supported by other researchers like Hurston (2017), Sanctis (2017) as the use of the internet to search

for information will enable participants to access a lot of information which makes the writing process of generating ideas easier. The use of search engines has its challenges as participants may know how to use it. This challenge is supported by the literature. For example, in Glazer's (2018) study on the relationship between teacher's professional development and the use of technology, the teachers mentioned one of the challenges they had with the use of technology is lack of knowledge on how to use it. This data was also supported by Sajitha et al. (2018) who argued that technology has the potential to improve learning outcomes where learning software is used at the children's learning pace and knowledge level and where teachers are trained in technologies and pedagogies using technologies. Yet there is more to computer use than just searching for content and typing content. Ebner (2017) conducted a literature review to examine studies on using technology with writing instruction, how technology impacts students learning experiences and how the impact can be connected to the function of Google apps for education and Google tools. He searched online databases and chose articles that mainly focused on writing through the use of technology and involved learners higher than elementary schools. Ebner found out that Google apps supported individualized instruction through "share", they motivated learners, helped them in revision and practice writing through blogging. Yet in the schools where we collected data, even where technology was used, it was barely used. Therefore, findings portrayed that there was little use of electronic software but where it was used, it supported the writing processes of generation and translation of ideas. Through this discussion, we have shown that technology was under-utilized in writing instruction and mastery due to various reasons.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Data on use of instructional materials has portrayed that most of the classes studied used the traditional resources to support writing instruction. Research also shows that participants know of the existence of other resources like technology but due to so many constraints like time, teacher's beliefs, availability of the resources and the examination-oriented nature of teaching, many materials were not used effectively. We therefore recommend that the policy makers and other stakeholders provide an environment that supports the use of other types of instructional resources to support writing mastery.

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