

# A PHENOMENOGRAPHIC STUDY ON EFL TEACHERS' CONCEPTIONS OF TEACHING WRITING

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## Abstract

Teachers' conceptions and approaches to teaching have stronger influence on students' learning orientations and learning outcomes. This research aimed at examining English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' conceptions of teaching writing by adopting qualitative research design with interpretative ontological and epistemological assertions. To this end, 16 EFL teachers working at Wollo University, Dessie Campus were involved in semi-structured interviews arranged to explore the different ways that EFL teachers understand teaching writing. The interviews transcribed verbatim and analyzed using phenomenographic data analysis scheme. As the results of the study revealed, six qualitatively different conceptions of teaching writing were identified: (1) awareness-raising, (2) equipping, (3) mimicking, (4) co-writing, (5) practicing, and (6) inspiring conceptions of teaching writing. Three dimensions of variation such as conceptions of writing, locus of teaching writing and beliefs in acquisition of writing skills were discovered to show hierarchical relationships among the categories from simplistic (surface) conceptions of teaching to sophisticated (deep) conceptions of teaching writing. Accordingly, inclusiveness and complexity of teaching conceptions increased as we moved from Category 1 to Category 6. Equipping and practicing conceptions were found to be the most frequently reported conceptions of teaching writing, but institutional and contextual factors adversely impacted the feasibility of practicing conceptions of teaching in EFL writing classes. The findings generally revealed EFL teachers' tendency to surface conceptions of teaching writing. The study have implications to depict teachers' orientation to create educational environments that foster deep conceptions and approaches to teaching and learning writing skills at Ethiopian universities.

**Keywords:** *EFL teachers' beliefs; teaching conceptions; approaches to teaching writing.*

## 1. Introduction

In any teaching context, teachers play significant role to nurture a well-functioning learning environment. Hence, a well thought out curriculum, methodology and teaching material would not serve their purpose if the classroom teacher could not orchestrate them

appropriately. Accordingly, teacher factor is considered indispensable by assuming not only the teachers' content knowledge but also their conceptions and approaches to teaching. In the 3p models of learning by Biggs and Moore (1993) as cited in Dart, et al. (2000: 263), teaching conception is considered as an element of the context of teaching that has bidirectional relationship with both student characteristics and students' approaches to learning.

Conceptions of teaching, therefore, is defined as "the belief held by teachers about their preferred ways of teaching and learning" (Chan and Elliott, 2004: 819 as quoted in Qi, 2022: 316). Teaching conceptions are also viewed as the philosophical foundations of teaching behaviors and activities in the classroom (Freeman and Richards, 1993; Aypay, 2010; Richards and Lockhart, 1994: 58). Teachers manage their professional practice on the basis of their assumptions of teaching. In line with this idea, Biggs and Tang (2007: 15) state, "how effectively we teach depends first on what we think teaching is". However, conception of teaching has been an issue of academic discussion predominantly in the field of EFL/ESL teacher-education programs (Qi, 2022: 316). Yet, teaching conceptions have considerable effects on every teacher's views of language teaching and their adoption of different language teaching approaches.

Teachers' conceptions of teaching influence their adoption of teaching strategies (Lam and Kember, 2006: 694; Kember, 1997: 255; Gao and Watkins, 2002: 61 ; Qi, 2022: 316; Xu, 2012: 1399). Researches have also shown the relationship between conceptions of teaching and approaches to teaching (Trigwell and Prosser, 1996). As teaching conceptions reflect teachers' values, worldviews, and philosophies of teaching, teachers' conceptions and beliefs indisputably influence their teaching tendencies. Teaching tendencies are reflected on teachers' pedagogical decisions and classroom practices. According to Kember and Kwan (2000), teaching tendencies can be skewed towards two contrasting approaches to teaching: content-centered and learning-centered approaches to teaching. These contrasting teaching approaches are also referred to as teacher-focused and student-focused approaches to teaching (Trigwell et.al 1974 as cited in Gibbs and Coffey 2004). Content-centered or teacher-focused teaching approach emphasizes transmission of structured set of knowledge. On the other hand, learning-centered or student-focused-teaching approach emphasizes helping students learn by facilitating learning. Especially, in Higher Learning Institutes (HLIs) where self-directed, independent and out-of class learning is promoted, teachers' conceptions of teaching play pivotal role to determine students' learning orientation and learning outcomes as well. In line with this idea, Biggs (1999: 61) states that teaching conceptions cue teachers' teaching effectiveness. Gracio, et al. (2023: 1-3) also highlight the effects of teachers' conceptions of teaching on the quality of students' learning. Despite conceptions of teaching having a range of implications to teaching quality and effectiveness, they remain implicit and relegated from scholarly communications (Putnam & Borko, 2000 as cited in Colombo and Priori, 2016). Especially in language teaching, the relegation of teachers' conceptions of teaching is claimed by Freeman and Richards (1993) as follows:

*Conceptions of language teaching and the work of language teachers which shape the multiple activities in the field of second language instruction are generally tacit and often go unquestioned.*

Even if conceptions of language teaching appear to be implicit and "unquestioned", they are inevitable parts of the teaching and learning process because teachers cannot work

without some kind of teaching assumptions. Yet, teachers may not always be conscious of their own conceptions of teaching (Gow and Kember 1993 as cited in Biggs and Tang 2007: 15; Farrell 2016 as cited Kariminzadeh and Langaroudi, 2019: 157). No matter how teachers appear to be unaware of the theoretical assumptions of their teaching, they cannot work as a teacher without having conceptions of teaching. That is why, Peikoff (1991: 1) states “...man by his nature as a conceptual being, cannot function at all without some form of philosophy to serve as his guide.”

As researches and teaching experiences proven, teaching writing in EFL context is complex, challenging and problematic (Kong, 2018: 285; Nezakatgoo, 2011: 231; Kalra, Sundrarajun & Komintarachat, 2017: 293; Pouyan, Heydarpour & Aghajanzadeh, 2016: 124). One of the reasons for the complexity of teaching EFL writing is lack of adequate information about “teachers’ knowledge base of writing” (Lee, 2010 as cited in Kong, 2018: 285). The other attribute for the complexity of teaching EFL writing is teachers’ lack of sufficient knowledge on how students write in languages other than their mother tongue (Khanalizadeh and Allami, 2012: 334). Additionally, teaching EFL writing requires “high competence in language” and expertise level knowledge “to respond to students’ writing” (Ferris, 2007 as cited in Uddin, 2014: 64). He further argues that in the absence of any professional development program that synchronizes teachers’ conceptions of teaching, the teachers’ personal experiences as a learner and their intuition play active role to determine their teaching approaches. Accordingly, understanding EFL teachers’ conceptions of and approaches to teaching writing in Ethiopian HLLs is expected to give clear insight about the nature of teachers’ beliefs and their current classroom practices.

As far as the researchers’ knowledge is concerned, no previous study examine EFL teachers’ conceptions of teaching writing using phenomenographic data collection and analysis scheme. Accordingly, this study is designed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the different ways that EFL teachers understand teaching writing skills?
2. How the different categories of descriptions are related one another hierarchically?
3. What is the general tendency of EFL teachers’ conceptions and approaches to teaching writing in an outcome space?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Conceptions of Teaching EFL Writing

Conceptions of teaching is defined as “the belief held by teachers about their preferred ways of teaching and learning” (Chan and Elliott, 2004, p.819 as quoted in Qi, 2022, 316). Accordingly, teaching conceptions are the philosophical foundations of teaching behaviors and activities in the classroom (Freeman and Richards 1993; Aypay, 2010; Richards and Lockhart, 1994 p.58). Teachers manage their professional practice on the basis of their assumptions of teaching. In line with this idea, Biggs and Tang (2007, p.15) state, “how effectively we teach depends first on what we think teaching is”. However, conceptions of teaching has been an issue of academic discussion predominantly in the field of EFL/ESL teacher-education programs (Qi, 2022, p.316). Yet, teaching conceptions have considerable effects on every teacher’s views of language teaching and their adoption of different language teaching approaches.

In 1990's the emergence of constructivism as a philosophical movement instigated two contrasting conceptions of teaching and learning: traditional and constructivist (Westwood, 2004, pp.20-22; 2008, pp.3-5). Changes in general education also have effects on changes in EFL/ESL methodologies. As a result, two contrasting perspectives of language teaching started to appear in ESL pedagogy: product-oriented and process-oriented view of language (Smith 1996 as cited in Qi, 2022, p.316). He made further illustrations of the theoretical models. The theoretical basis of product-oriented teaching model views language as an entity to be learned, and the teaching and learning of language skills emphasized mastering discrete language items. On the other hand, in process-oriented view, language is considered as an activity to be used in different communication contexts. Thus, the focus of teaching and learning is considered to be communication and meaning rather than accuracy and form.

The effects of conceptions of teaching on the nature of instructional decisions as well as actual teaching practices have been established in the literature even though the issue still invites more empirical research. In general, the works of Kember and Kwan (2000), Lam and Kember (2006), and Gibbs and Coffey (2004) have shown the effects of teachers' conceptions of teaching on the nature of teaching and learning practices. Similarly, researchers in English Language Teaching (ELT) have also shown the effects of conceptions of teaching on instructional practices and assessment schemes in language teaching in general and teaching writing in particular (Tagle, et.al, 2017, P.188; Xu, 2012, 1397 ; Mc Carthey, 1992; Borg, 2001, P.187 )

## **2.2 Approaches to Teaching EFL Writing**

Teachers' conceptions of teaching influence their adoption of teaching strategies (Lam and Kember, 2006, p.694; Kember, 1997, p.255; Gao and Watkins, 2002, p.61 ; Qi, 2022, p.316; Xu, 2012, p.1399). Researches have also shown the relationship between conceptions of teaching and approaches to teaching (Trigwell and Prosser, 1996). As teaching conceptions reflect teachers' values, worldviews, and philosophies of teaching, teachers' conceptions and beliefs indisputably influence their teaching tendencies. Teaching tendencies are reflected on teachers' pedagogical decisions and classroom practices. According to Kember and Kwan (2000), teaching tendencies can be skewed towards two contrasting approaches to teaching: content-centered and learning-centered approaches to teaching. These contrasting teaching approaches are also referred to as teacher-focused and student-focused approaches to teaching (Trigwell et.al 1974 as cited in Gibbs and Coffey 2004). Content-centered or teacher-focused teaching approach emphasizes transmission of structured set of knowledge. On the other hand, learning-centered or student-focused-teaching approach emphasizes helping students learn by facilitating learning.

The two general assumptions of language teaching and learning are also reflected on the approaches to teaching EFL writing: product-oriented and process-oriented teaching approach. However, methodological limitations of each approach and the intention to have blended approaches to teaching writing resulted in the integration of two additional alternative approaches to teaching writing, genre-approach and process-genre approach to teaching writing ( Bedgar and White, 2000, p.157). On the basis of the objectives of the research, reviews of the two contrasting approaches, namely the product-oriented approach and the process-oriented approach, were made.

The basic characteristics of product- oriented and process- oriented approaches of teaching writing have been presented on the basis of the reviews made by Bedgar and White (2000); Klimova (2013); Ouidani and Baghdadi (2022). Accordingly, product- oriented approach is a text based and traditional approach that emphasizes teaching discrete linguistic skill. Language form is given attention rather than the content. Authoritative texts are also presented to students in order to imitate or adapt the linguistic forms. According to Pincas (1982b as cited in Bedgar and White, 2000, p.153) product based approach emphasized linguistic knowledge such as appropriate use of vocabulary, syntax and cohesive devices. On the other hand, process – based approach, which most of the teachers claimed to employ in their classroom, incorporates lots of the features of constructivist conceptions of teaching (Graham and Harris, 1994, p. 275). Process based writing focuses on the stages of the writing process such as planning, writing, revising and editing. The students learn writing in their effort to meet a certain communication goal. Accordingly, writing activities give due attention to collaborative-group writing, peer editing, drafting and rewriting, and teacher-student conferencing.

### **3. Research Method**

#### **3.1 Design of the Study**

This research employed a qualitative research design, specifically emphasizing the phenomenographic data analysis framework. This methodological choice aimed to deeply investigate the varying ways EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers understand and approach the task of teaching writing.

The qualitative research design was chosen to allow for a comprehensive exploration of the participants' subjective experiences and perceptions. This approach enabled the researchers to capture the nuanced and complex nature of teaching writing in EFL contexts. Qualitative methods are particularly effective in education research for uncovering the underlying beliefs, attitudes, and practices of educators, which are often deeply embedded in their professional identities and instructional approaches.

Phenomenography, as a specific data analysis framework within the qualitative paradigm, focuses on mapping the different ways individuals experience, conceptualize, perceive, and understand various phenomena. In this study, phenomenography was employed to identify and categorize the distinct ways EFL teachers conceive of teaching writing. This framework is adept at revealing the qualitative differences in conceptions, thereby providing a structured means to understand the diversity in teaching practices and beliefs. By using phenomenography, the study aimed to highlight the range of conceptions held by EFL teachers regarding writing instruction. This approach facilitated the identification of commonalities and differences in teaching practices, offering a detailed account of the various strategies and pedagogical approaches used by teachers. The insights gained from this analysis are expected to contribute significantly to the field of language education by informing teacher training programs, curriculum development, and policy-making.

#### **3.2 Participants**

The participants of the study were 21 EFL teachers (7 MA holders, 6 MA plus doctoral courses, and 3 PhD holders) having the experiences of teaching writing to undergraduates at Wollo University. From all the 21 teachers, 16 were chosen purposively for in-depth

interview because Trigwell (2000 as cited in Khan, 2014: 39) recommended 15 to 20 participants as a bench-mark for samples in phenomenographic studies.

### 3.3 Data Collection Process

An appropriate way of collecting data about "peoples' conceptions of a given phenomenon" is using open-ended interview" with some probing questions (Larsson and Holmstrom, 2007: 56). Interview questions were partly modeled from related works such as Kong (2018). The interviews focused on letting teachers narrate their perceptions, beliefs, and practices of teaching writing to undergraduates. The interview sessions lasted a total about 272 minutes, and an average interview session lasted for about 17 minutes. During data collection, the researchers employed systematic probing into the participants' experiences in two ways. The first one was being neutral while participants' narrated their teaching experiences. The second one was asking follow-up questions that initiated participants to speak more about their experiences. The aforementioned interviewing strategies were recommended by Sin (2010: 314) in order to improve the validity of phenomenographic studies. Moreover, as Larsson and Holmstrom (2007) suggested, there were attempts to tune interviews only with the interviewees' lived-experiences, not assumed ones. Additionally, the participants were interviewed at convenient time and venue after establishing friendly relationships and making clear the objectives of the research.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

The data analysis was done in accordance of the seven steps of phenomenographic data analysis framework of Sjöström & Dahlgren (2002 as cited in Khan 2014: 38-39).

1. **Familiarization:** reading and rereading of the transcripts in order to get insights about the nature and the range of teachers' responses.
2. **Compilation:** emphasizing in-depth reading of responses in order to look for patterns of similarities and differences. The data as a whole have been compiled to one data sheet in order to make the analysis easy and manageable.
3. **Condensation:** data condensation was done by reducing irrelevant, redundant and unrelated elements of the transcription.
4. **Preliminary grouping:** excerpts that communicate an essence related with a certain assumptions of teaching were identified and grouped together. The categorization was made on the basis of the essence of the excerpts as a coding scheme, so the essence can be observed from a single line up to extended narration of teaching experiences.
5. **Preliminary comparison of categories:** the preliminary categories of descriptions merged and renovated during the preliminary comparison of categories.
6. **Naming Categories:** naming and renaming of categories followed through constant comparison and renovation of the emerged categories of descriptions.
7. **Outcome space:** similarities and differences of categories were sought in order to show the hierarchical relationship of categories in the outcome space, and structural and referential relationships were discovered. The frequency distribution of the teachers' responses were also identified and revealed in the outcome space. However, the spiral nature of the analysis scheme and the difficulty to move from one step to the other linearly should be taken in to account.

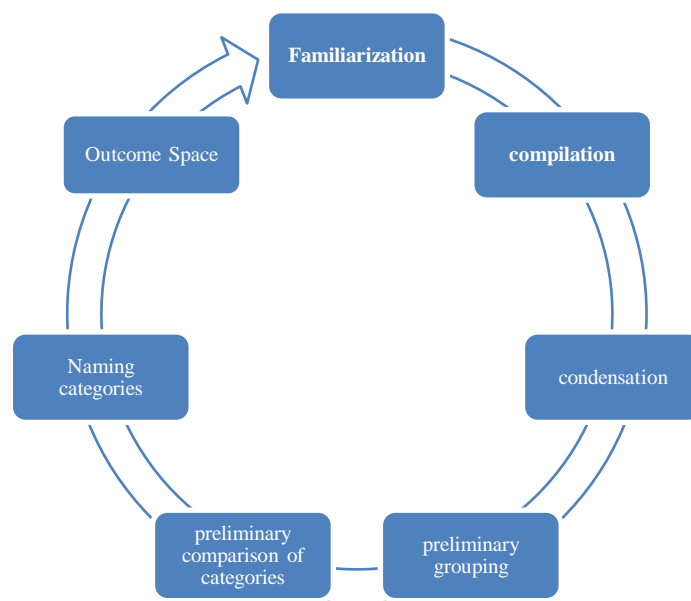


Figure 2. Spiral and Cyclic Nature of the Seven Steps of Phenomenographic Data Analysis

### 3.5 Rigor and Trustworthiness

A phenomenographic study needs establishing rigor and trustworthiness (Khan, 2014: 39; Entwistle, 1997: 127). As phenomenographic studies claim non-dualistic ontological and epistemological assertions, it is mandatory to delineate the researchers' role in the data collection and analysis processes. Merriam (2002: 5) states that "the researcher is the primary instrument" in qualitative research, and the researcher should identify and control the adverse effects of researcher bias and subjectivity in order to enhance the rigor and trustworthiness of the research. Accordingly, researchers have employed different strategies to limit the adverse effects of bias during data collection and analysis process. As recommended by Entwistle (1997: 132), researchers refrained from misdirecting and leading respondents to react in a certain way. In the case of very general and unclear responses, researchers requested further clarification and additional explanations.

Reliability in phenomenographic researches can be checked in two ways: inter-coder reliability check and dialogic reliability check (Akerlind, 2005 as cited in Khan, 2014: 40). In this study, dialogic reliability check was preferred because the data analysis scheme necessitates seven iterative and cyclic steps. Accordingly, one researcher worked as a maker and the other researcher as a checker of the analysis, especially during the classification of emerging categorization. However, the data analysis was done collaboratively to avoid bias.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Results

#### 4.1.1 EFL Teachers' Conceptions of Teaching Writing

Based on the phenomenographic analysis of the teachers' interviews, six categories about teachers' conceptions of teaching writing were identified: (1) awareness-raising (2) equipping (3) mimicking (4) co-writing (5) practicing, and (6) inspiring conceptions of teaching writing.

### Category 1: Awareness- raising Conceptions of Teaching Writing

The first category was teaching that focused on raising students' awareness of the writing process. The prime role of the teacher was conceived of as helping students know more about how to write. The teacher seemed to inform the students about the complex features of learning to write. Thus, teaching focuses on letting students acquire knowledge about how to do the writing.

T9: "That is one mechanism ,and most of the time I simply theoretize them that means at least to address the concept what it means what does a certain content related to writing is. Still it is theoretical"

T2: I always let them know that they should bring some kind of thought which can be used to enrich their writing. But allowing them or letting them walk through that kind of ...the thing that I am telling you is taught through some kind of theoretical not on practice on practical basis. It is because like I said the situation, in which we are in, does not allow us. All I have to do is raise their awareness." T2

	Category 1	Category 2	Category 3	Category 4	Category 5	Category 6
<b>Categories</b>						
<b>Key features</b>	<b>Awareness - Raising</b>	<b>Equipping</b>	<b>Mimicking</b>	<b>Co-writing</b>	<b>Practicing</b>	<b>Inspiring</b>
<b>Conceptions of writing</b>	Cognitive (domain level: knowledge)	Linguistic and Cognitive (domain level: comprehension)	Linguistic and Cognitive (domain level: Application)	Linguistic, cognitive (domain level: analysis & synthesis) and Social	Linguistics, cognitive (domain level: analysis & synthesis), social	Linguistic, Cognitive (domain level: evaluation) social
<b>Locus of teaching Writing</b>	How to do writing, theoretical issues of writing, no direct writing	Explicit teaching of writing conventions and controlled activities	Imitating models and guided and controlled writings	Communication, conveying meaning, practice group writing	Communication, conveying meaning, practice writing in class	Strategies and self-awareness; Out-of-class practice
<b>Beliefs in acquisition of writing skills</b>	Increasing knowledge about writing	Increasing knowledge of rules and patterns	Imitating model writings	Sharing experiences and knowledge	Practicing writing on individual basis	Learning by independent and self-regulated practice

Table 2. Variations in the categories of descriptions of conceptions of teaching writing

### Category 2: Equipping conceptions of teaching writing

The second category was equipping learners with fundamental writing skills and knowledge such as rules, conventions and patterns. Accordingly, teachers appeared to emphasize the rules of the language, such as grammar, mechanics, spelling, and sentence patterns. Moreover, the teacher emphasizes teaching structure of sentences, paragraphs and essays. The teacher focuses on teaching the patterns of development or organization



of a piece of writing, such as introducing controlling ideas, organizing supporting details, transitions, and conclusions.

*T3: "So, most of the time, I taught this writing skill and also I am teaching writing still now that mean basically within the grammar contents. That mean you know grammar is the rule ; it governs the language, and most of the time the formal language must be focused with what the rule based."*

*T2: "as you know like the course we take the course we give has something to do with mechanics. I taught basics so basics requires preliminary things like dealing with the mechanics first"*

### **Category 3: Mimicking Conceptions of Teaching Writing**

The third category of description was mimicking or modeling exemplary writings chosen by the teacher. Teachers believed that students could easily learn writing skills by imitating model writings. Students are supposed to copy structures, organizations, approaches, and diction. Mimicking is different from equipping because it mimics students engagement in some kind of writing. The teacher may have a role in dragging the students' attention to the feature(s) that the teacher wants to pay attention to.

*T4: "There after I give them samples. The samples mostly I may write them on the board and we discuss. Which one of this sentence is topic sentence, which one is supporting and which one is a concluding sentence? We repeatedly do not only one sample but many samples. Then I encourage my students produce the same way."*

*T15: "I give them input and sometimes though they have been given all these opportunities all these things you can find some students unable to in writing naïve naïve in writing you know what I do is I give them model sample paragraphs sample sentences so that they can produce"*

### **Category 4: Co -writing conceptions of teaching writing**

Teachers with co-writing or collaborative conceptions of teaching writing conceive that students learn writing by way of sharing ideas, experiences, and resources. Teachers employ different levels and patterns of interaction to meet different teaching objectives. Sometimes teachers use collaboration only at the prewriting stage to give students the opportunity to exchange ideas that enrich their subsequent individual writing. At other times, students work in groups to get feedback from peers, and work in groups to select one and revise it in groups for final assessment. There are also occasions where students work in groups from selecting a topic to proof- reading.

*T5: "I let students involve in group task at the prewriting stage"*

*T7: "if you have got a large class, you do not expect to see everyone to evaluate them as a group normally group assignments in the classroom just to follow these processes there is a limit of time. They come up with this written material. It does not matter whether it is good or bad. What they have to do is follow the procedures and see that writing it takes time."*

### **Category 5: Practicing Conceptions of Teaching Writing**

Teachers with practicing conceptions of teaching writing believe that writing should be taught by giving individuals the opportunity to write and rewrite. These teachers

emphasize practicing writing and rewriting to meet communication goals and to convey meanings. Practicing conceptions of teaching writing has many similarities to the co-writing conceptions of teaching writing. However, they are distinct in terms of the level of writing opportunities provided on an individual basis. Accordingly, teachers who favored practicing conceptions of teaching writing conceived that learners would benefit more from opportunities to practice writing on an individual basis.

*T9: " And it also needs frequent practice like it is a very challenging skill in order to acquaint or be acquainted with the rules"*

*T13: "writing needs daily activity you have to write a paragraph a sentence every day. If you come in such a ways it is possible improve the writing skills but when you see the actual or the real event what is happening now in not just doing in such a way. "*

#### **Category 6: Inspiring Conceptions of Teaching Writing**

Teachers' with inspiring conceptions of teaching writing believe that students learn writing when they get the inspiration to get involved in independent and out-of class writing. Teachers appear to focus on familiarizing students with tasks and activities that enhance writing habits even outside the confines of the classroom context. Accordingly, teachers appear to promote holistic view of student learning and development since they believed that the time-bound courses could not bring the desired change on students' skills and knowledge.

*T16: " I inspire my students especially when I teach paragraph writing because in paragraph writing in essay writing... when I teach them I tried to make highly to inspire...I invite students to bring something to read in the classroom or to read by themselves to exercise how can you describe something I give for them especially titles I give to them how can you describe your ex friends I inspire just I make them to be inspired ."*

*T6: "In my view teaching writing in this very short time is very difficult. One thing that I personally prefer is taking writing outside the classroom. There are different scenarios' that we can use. For example, using the technology like the google docs, social medias"*

#### **4.1.2 Relationships among the Categories**

The six categories have structural and referential components that clearly showed the hierarchical relationships among the categories. (Refer to: Table 3). Three features that showed the referential components of the categories were discovered by comparing and contrasting distinctiveness of the categories. Accordingly, conceptions of writing, locus of teaching writing, and beliefs in acquisition of writing skills have shown the distinctiveness of the six categories.

First, the conceptions of writing or the knowledge bases of writing reflect three distinct bases of knowledge: cognitive, linguistic, and social (Kong, 2018). Category 1 focused on the cognitive aspects of writing. However, the cognitive domain seemed to be restricted on "knowledge" level. Categories 2 and 3 appeared to focus on both the cognitive and linguistic aspects of writing, but they were different in the cognitive domains. The former focuses on "comprehension" but the later emphasizes "application. Categories 4, 5, and 6 encompass the cognitive, linguistic, and social aspects of writing.

Second, the locus of teaching writing is another feature that shows distinctions among the categories. Consequently, Category 1 specifically appeared to emphasize letting

students learn how to do writing in theory. Category 2, on the other hand, focuses on letting students know the basics of writing by explicit teaching of writing conventions and patterns. Category 3 emphasizes imitating models and performing guided and controlled writing activities. Category 4 and 5 emphasized communication, conveying meaning and in-class practice. However, Category 4 seemed to highlight group -writing and Category 5 appeared to adhere to individual writing. Category 6, the most sophisticated conception, focuses on teaching strategies such as self-awareness, out-of-class practice, and making students independent writers.

Third, beliefs about the acquisition of writing skills show teachers' preferred ways of teaching writing. Teachers in Category 1 believed that students benefited from knowledge of how to write. Teachers in Categories 2 and 3 also believed that explicit teaching and imitating rules and patterns helped students learn writing. On the other hand, teachers in Categories 4, 5 and 6 believed that sharing experiences, writing on an individual basis, and self-directed engagement in writing helped students learn writing skills properly.

**Table 3. Referential and Structural Components of the Categories of Description**

<i>Referential component</i>	<i>Structural component</i>		<i>Level of complexity</i>
	<i>Surface conceptions</i>	<i>Deep Conceptions</i>	
<b>Awareness-raising</b>	<b>Category 1</b>		Simplistic , teaching about writing ( teaching does not involve direct writing)
<b>1 &amp; equipping</b>	<b>Category 2</b>		Somewhat complex than category 1; teaching rules and patterns , doing controlled writings
<b>2 and mimicking</b>	<b>Category 3</b>		Complex and developed than category 2 ; writing by imitating models
<b>3 and co-writing</b>		<b>Category 4</b>	Complex and developed than category 3; writing in group using writing procedures
<b>4 and practicing</b>		<b>Category 5</b>	Complex and developed than category 4; gives writing opportunity on individuals basis
<b>5 and inspiring</b>		<b>Category 6</b>	The most sophisticated

The structural relationships of the categories show the degree of complexity and inclusiveness of the six categories. Accordingly, the six categories were categorized into two structural components: surface conceptions and deep conceptions of teaching writing. Three categories of description (Categories 1, 2, and 3) were classified as surface conceptions of teaching writing because they focused on transmitting knowledge and imitating rules and patterns from the works of others. On the other hand, the remaining three categories of description (Categories 4, 5, and 6) were considered as deep conceptions of teaching writing because they focused on helping students' learn by interacting one another, engaging in consistent practice and developing strategic and independent thinking skills.

#### **4.1.3 Distribution of Categories in the Outcome Space**

The participants conceptions of teaching tended writing tended to reflect more than one category of descriptions. To demarcate the most frequently mentioned category and the other supplementary categories, two distinct symbols ("√" and "Δ") were employed. These symbols have been used in a phenomenographic study by Chen, et al. (2021). The symbol "√

“ is used to show a teacher identified with the given category of description, and the symbol “Δ”, on the other hand , is used to refer to the most frequently mentioned category ( Refer to Table 4).

As the results in the outcome space revealed, the most frequently reported conception of teaching writing by most of the participant teachers was Category 2 (equipping conceptions of teaching writing) (n=7). The second most frequently reported conception of teaching writing was Category 5 (Practicing conceptions of teaching writing). However , practicing conception appeared to be less feasible due to different contextual constraints such as large class size, students' background, students' interest and motivation, resources, time given for writing, teachers' work load, the design of teaching materials and assessment scheme prompted by the department. Additionally, Category 6 (inspiring conceptions of teaching writing) is the most sophisticated of all the teaching conceptions that accommodate the features of all recognized teaching conceptions. This appeared to be consistent with the philosophical and methodological orientations of teaching in HLIs. However, only two teachers (n=2) were identified as having inspiring conceptions of teaching writing. From these results we can deduce that EFL teachers foster surface approaches to teaching writing.

**Table 4: Teachers' Conception of Teaching writing Frequency Distribution**

Teachers	Category 1	Category 2	Category 3	Category 4	Category 5	Category 6
T1	(0)	Δv (4)	(0)	v (1)	(0)	v (1)
T2	v (3)	Δv (4)	(0)	(0)	v (1)	(0)
T3	(0)	Δv (4)	(0)	(0)	v (2)	(0)
T4	v (2)	Δv (5)	v (1)	v (1)	v (5)	(0)
T5	v (1)	v (1)	v (2)	v (1)	Δv (3)	(0)
T6	(0)	v (1)	v (2)	(0)	v (2)	Δv (2)
T7	v (1)	v (2)	Δv (4)	v (4)	v (4)	(0)
T8	v (1)	v (2)	v (1)	(0)	Δv (7)	(0)
T9	v (5)	v (3)	v (3)	v (5)	Δv (3)	v (1)
T10	v (2)	v (2)	v (2)	(0)	Δv (4)	(0)
T11	v (4)	Δv (6)	v (3)	(0)	v (4)	(0)
T12	v (1)	Δv (7)	(0)	v (1)	v (6)	v (1)
T13	v (2)	v (1)	(0)	v (3)	v (3)	Δv (4)
T14	(0)	v (2)	(0)	(0)	Δv (7)	(0)
T15	v (2)	v (1)	v (2)	Δv (8)	v (3)	(0)
T16	(0)	Δv (4)	(0)	(0)	v (2)	v (1)
Total	Δ= 0 (25) v= 11	Δ = 7 (49) v=16	Δ=1 (20) v=9	Δ= 1 (24) v= 8	Δ =5 (56) v= 15	Δ= 2 (10) v=6

## 4.2 Discussion

The study aimed at examining the different ways that EFL teachers understand teaching writing in the context of Ethiopian HLIs. As the findings revealed, six categories of descriptions were identified: awareness-raising, equipping, mimicking, co-writing, practicing and inspiring conceptions of teaching writing. No previous study has come up with these six categories of descriptions. However, the essence of the majority of the individual categories can be revealed in the literature about theories and the approaches to teaching in general and teaching writing in particular. The ideas of the teaching approaches have discretely been found in the works of (Entwistle, 2000: 5; Hyland's, 2003: 12; Nunan, 1991: 86-87; Bedgar

and White, 2000; Klimova, 2013; Ouidani and Baghdadi 2022 Graham and Harris, 1994 as cited in Bekele, 2011: 39).

Examining the hierarchical relationships among categories was the second research question. The six categories of descriptions have shown peculiarities in three aspects of teaching writing: conceptions of writing, locus of teaching writing, and beliefs in acquisition of writing skills. The structural relationships of the categories showed two contrasting conceptions of teaching: surface conceptions and deep conceptions of teaching writing. This result was found to be consistent with the literature about conceptions and approaches to teaching in general. Accordingly, the findings appeared to be parallel with traditional and constructivist conceptions of teaching by Qi (2022), content-centered and learning-centered approaches by (Kember and Kwan, 2000) and teacher-focused and student-focused approaches to teaching (Trigwell et.al 1974 as cited in Gibbs and Coffey 2004).

Categories identified are not found mutually exclusive, so individuals can have a range of logically connected and hierarchical teaching conceptions. To that end, categories have become increasingly student-oriented, self-directed, holistic and learning-oriented as we move up from category 1 to category 6. In addition, the level of students' engagement in direct writing has increased, so the most sophisticated conceptions of teaching have given more freedom to students to develop independent, self-regulated, strategy-based orientations to learn writing. In line with this, Ramsden (1992: 81), stated that deep approaches are encouraged by "teaching and assessment methods that foster active and long-term engagement with learning tasks".

The third research question aimed at examining the tendency of EFL teachers' conceptions and approaches to teaching writing in the outcome space. As the results revealed, most of the teachers have equipping conceptions of teaching writing. The teaching approach appeared to emphasize language rules and conventions. Similarly, Kong's (2017, 2018) findings revealed that Chinese EFL teachers conceived writing as a linguistic activity, but they appeared to disregard the social and communicative aspects of writing. On the other hand, category 5, practicing conceptions of teaching writing, was found the second most frequently revealed conceptions of teaching. It was also found to be part of the teaching conception of almost every teacher. The results appeared to be paradoxical, but the possibility of having multiple conceptions of teaching at a time (Armin and Siregar, 2021; Gao and Watkins, 2002: 74) and the possibility of misalignment of beliefs and actual practices could be possible attributes of the paradoxical results. The disparity and tension between EFL teachers' conceptions (beliefs) of teaching writing and their actual practices have also been reported by different researchers such as (Habtamu, 2018; Milketo, 2012; Uddin, 2014).

Generally, category 1, awareness-raising, and category 3, mimicking conceptions of teaching writing were found to be part of the teaching conceptions of the majority of the participants. On the contrary, category 6, inspiring conceptions of teaching writing, was found to be less familiar among the participants. Practicing conceptions also appeared to be less feasible due to contextual constraints in the teaching context. Co-writing conceptions of teaching was also considered as a way to make teaching writing in large classes manageable. From all the aforementioned dynamics, we can deduce EFL teachers' tendency to foster surface and product-oriented approaches to teaching writing. The findings appeared to reveal the pressing influence of traditional conception of teaching on teachers' conceptions and approaches to teaching writing. In line with this idea, Biggs and Tang (2007: 17) state,

“the view university teaching as transmitting information is so widely accepted” and “teaching rooms and media are specifically designed for one-way -delivery.”

## 5. Conclusions

Six categories of descriptions about EFL teachers conceptions of teaching writing were identified, and the categories appeared to have hierarchical relationships from simplistic to sophisticated conceptions of teaching writing. Accordingly, Categories 1, 2, and 3 (awareness-raising, equipping, and mimicking conceptions respectively) were considered surface approaches to teaching writing. Categories 4, 5, and 6 (co-writing, practicing, and inspiring conceptions) were considered deep approaches to teaching writing. An increase in the category levels revealed an increase in the students' engagement in strategic, self-regulated, and out-of-class learning and practice. Accordingly, Category 6, inspiring conception, is the most sophisticated conception that shows all the aforementioned features of deep approaches to teaching. However, inspiring conception of teaching writing is among the least revealed conceptions of teaching writing in the outcome space. Practicing conception and co-writing conception were also frequently observed in the majority of teachers' conceptions of teaching writing, but most teachers clearly demarcated their beliefs and actual practices. Thus, the findings revealed that teachers tended to use surface conceptions of teaching writing.

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