Learning to teach writing through a distance education programme: Experiences of Rwandan secondary school English teachers

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Background: Writing is among the most important skills, and globally it has received more emphasis in literature on language teaching than reading, speaking and listening. However, a paucity of studies is observed in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in contexts where English is being taught as an additional or foreign language, as is the case in Rwanda. Research shows that learners who can write well in different genres and for different purposes tend to do well in all curriculum subjects and subsequently beyond school education. The key challenges are the inadequacy of materials and teachers' inability to teach writing well, especially through distance education programmes.

Objectives: This study investigates the effectiveness of materials used at the University of Rwanda-College of Education's Distance Education programme to train high school teachers on writing pedagogy for English teaching.

Method: The study adopted a qualitative approach to report on the findings from textual, document analysis of distance education materials, argumentative essays and focus group discussions with 80 of 599 in-service teachers, who responded to designed and redesigned sections on writing pedagogy.

Results: The findings indicate that teachers' knowledge and skills in both writing and writing pedagogy are not addressed effectively by the materials designed. This negatively affected the quality of their own writing abilities and those of their students.

Conclusion: The article recommends reconceptualisation of distance education materials to equip in-service teachers with propositional knowledge and procedural knowledge on writing pedagogy.

Keywords: Writing pedagogy; distance education; English teachers; procedural knowledge; University of Rwanda's College of Education.

Introduction and background to writing through distance education

Globally, various studies show that writing has received more emphasis in the literature on language teaching than reading, speaking and listening (Ciobanu 2011; Dornbrack & Dixon 2014; Hedge 1993; Ralfe 2009; Shin 2006), but with relatively low priority in the field of teacher education for English as a second language (ESL) (Norman & Spencer 2005; Shin 2006; Uysal 2007). However, it remains an overlooked area of investigation in relation to pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) and L2 (second language) teachers' classroom writing, which continues to be an under-appreciated component of teachers' knowledge' (Hlas & Hildebrandt 2010:5). Ur (2004) notes that communicative writing activities are less common in teaching materials compared to those related to the other language skills.

Research in Africa also shows that limited proficiency in English is observed in different parts of Africa, not only with regard to writing skills but also other language skills. Moreover, Williams (2011) and Kamwangamalu (2000) observe that the majority of African people still experience poor proficiency in English. Such a situation was observed in Malawi and Zambia (Williams 1996, 1998), in South Africa (Makalela 2015), in Anglophone African countries as a whole (Samuels 1995) and in Rwanda (Niyibizi 2015; Samuelson & Freedman 2010; Sibomana 2016a; Williams et al. 2004), to name but a few. Apart from English-speaking countries, poor proficiency is also observed in African countries that used Portuguese as an international language (Heines 1992) and those countries that use French (Kasanga 2012). It is evident that poor proficiency in English is likely to be a common phenomenon in different parts of Africa, and probably in different parts of the world.

The situation is unlikely to be any different in the Great Lakes Region, including Rwanda. A closer look at the education system shows that, similar to other countries, Rwanda also has the pressing need to have well-qualified teachers, who are proficient in foreign languages like English. The 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, which resulted in the death of many teachers, exacerbated the already existing problem of teacher shortage in terms of numbers and quality when schools reopened in 1995. In 1999, for example, a survey found that up to 65% of secondary school teachers were underqualified (Rwanda Ministry of Education 1999). The problem of effective training of English teachers until 1994 was the result of a lack of colleges that focussed on the training of English teachers per se. Consequently, there were very few qualified teachers of English before 1994. The problem was compounded when English became the medium of instruction for all subjects at all levels of education, from 08 October 2008, when the Rwandan Government modified the then trilingual policy (Kinyarwanda, English and French as media of instruction) which was in effect in all Rwandan schools and replaced it with English as the sole medium of instruction for all subjects, from primary school up to university level (Ministry of Cabinet Affairs 2008). The implementation of the new policy commenced at the start of the 2009 academic year, where all subjects were to be taught in English, while all other languages such as French, Kinyarwanda and Kiswahili were taught as subjects (Rwanda Ministry of Education 2009).

In an endeavour to revitalise the education system, the Government of Rwanda created the Kigali Institute of Education (KIE) in 1999. This institution is now known as University of Rwanda-College of Education (UR-CE). Its primary mission was to address the shortage of qualified teaching staff at the secondary school level (Mukamusoni 2006), by offering on-campus teacher education and in-service teacher professional development through a distance education (DE) programme. This DE programme uses printed self-study materials (modules) as the main teaching and learning resource. Since its inception, the target population of this programme has included high school teachers of English.

This article draws from a larger study which investigated the role of the UR-CE's self-study materials in addressing the professional development needs of secondary school English teachers in Rwanda (Sibomana 2014). It reports on the findings from a textual analysis (Bezemer & Kress 2008; McKee 2005) of English module content, the mediation of this content or how the content is captured and represented in these materials. It also investigates the responses of selected teacher-learners of English to both the UR-CE DE materials and to a redesigned version of a section in the UR-CE DE pedagogy module. The section focusses on knowledge and skills related to writing and pedagogy on writing.

The motivation to focus on teaching writing stems from the recognition of the importance of writing skills in schools, in academic, as well as in social and professional achievements (Norman & Spencer 2005; Ralfe 2009). Leki (2001) contends that teaching learners to write well constitutes an essential part of education. Writing is at the centre of assessment, because extended writing constitutes 25% of the marks in the secondary school English national examination in Rwanda (Niyibizi et al. 2018). Hence, teaching writing is or should be one of the priority areas for teachers of English in Rwanda, and as such demands attention.

The study

This article is premised on a larger study which investigated the role of DE materials in addressing the professional development needs of high school English teachers in Rwanda (Sibomana 2014). More specifically, this article investigates the writing pedagogy as taught to secondary school English teachers who were following the UR-CE DE programme. The programme consisted of English, French and Education. The study sought to answer the following research questions:

- How do Rwandan secondary school English teachers mediate the content on teaching writing as explained through DE?
- What shortcomings do English teachers observe in the writing pedagogy module and what improvements do they suggest?
- Which approach, when considering the product-, process-genre- and integrative approaches, do they perceive to be more effective in teaching writing through DE?

Literature on writing pedagogy
Writing as a difficult skill for English as a foreign language practitioners

According to some scholars (e.g. Shin 2006; Tangpermpoon 2008), writing is the most difficult skill for developing learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) or ESL. This is because it requires a certain amount of L2 background knowledge. It can be an anxiety-generating activity and learners may not enjoy it (Tsui 1996). These are some of the factors that complicate the teaching of writing, especially in ESL and EFL classrooms (Antoniazzi 2005; Tangpermpoon 2008), and which may have contributed to the teachers' neglect of teaching writing, causing it to become the 'Cinderella' of the four language skills in the history of language teaching (Ciobanu 2011).

Evolution of writing pedagogy approaches

The history of writing pedagogy has been characterised by successive approaches to writing, each with strengths and weaknesses. Historically, when teaching writing, teachers used to focus on the final product of learners' writing activity; they focussed on the *product approach*, at the expense of what learners do to produce it, which involves *the process approach* (Tsui 1996). More recently, there has been a shift of focus to writing as a process of developing organisation as well as meaning (Richards & Smit 2011;

Tsui 1996) or 'the making of meaning out of chaos' (Zamel 1982:199). Instead of emphasising the qualities of the final product, the process approach emphasises the skills that learners can develop at the different writing stages, which may facilitate their writing. After all, as McCormick (1986, in Antoniazzi 2005) argues:

> … if the piece of writing gets better but the writer has learned nothing that will help him/her [sic] on another day on another piece, then the conference (or the exercise, or the corrections) was a waste of everyone's time. (p. 36)

In addition, the feedback and input received at the different stages of the writing process are likely to improve learners' ability to communicate (Scheckle 2009), as well as the quality of the product of writing itself (Zamel 1982). These are some of the benefits of the process approach. However, critics of the process approach argue that it is difficult to assess, does not necessarily lead to a good end product (Ivanic 2004), fails to take into account the cultural and political dimensions of writing (Peterson 2012) and views the writing process as one universal process rather than as plural processes (Breuch 2002).

Another comparatively recent approach is the *genre approach* (Hyland 2007; Kim 2006). This approach has its origins in a critique of the process approach, pointing out that the latter does not deal sufficiently with the linguistic knowledge that learners require to write texts with particular generic features, for example, a set of instructions or a narrative (Kim 2006; Ralfe 2009). The proponents of the genre approach argue that the process approach is not sufficiently concerned with the knowledge and skills required to develop and process ideas during the planning and drafting stages. They also argue that it has a very restricted view of writing, as it presumes that writing proficiency develops only through the repetition of the same writing procedures irrespective of the nature of the texts (the genre) being written (Kim 2006). For them, the form of a text will be determined by its social function and context, and therefore, the practical processes of writing are only a small part of the writing event (Ivanic 2004). However, the genre approach is also not without its shortcomings. For example, Ivanic (2004) points out that the approach overlooks accuracy and content in favour of 'appropriacy' (which she views as controversial) for specified purposes in the specified social contexts.

The above three approaches (product, process and genre) are sometimes considered different and separate, and this confirms that:

> … a good piece of writing which achieves its purpose is the successful product of a process, and part of that process will have been an introduction to the appropriate genre. Thus, all three approaches should be taken into consideration. (Ralfe 2009:156)

Currently, scholars in the field of writing pedagogy advocate an *integrated approach* combining the reciprocal strengths of each of the three writing approaches (Tangpermpoon 2008).

Effectiveness of using an integrated approach in teaching writing

Teachers need a certain level of knowledge about writing to effectively apply the different approaches discussed above. It should be noted that, while second, additional or foreign language teachers should be able to use the language proficiently (Hlas & Hildebrandt 2010), the in-service teachers enrolled in the UR-CE DE programme are still in the process of learning and mastering English skills, including reading and writing pedagogy. Referring specifically to writing, Hlas and Hildebrandt (2010) argue that teachers need to be precise in their writing, because most of their written texts are meant for learners. In other words, teachers need both propositional knowledge and procedural knowledge (Bertram 2011; Carr 1995; Wagner 2002) related to writing and writing pedagogy. They also need theoretical knowledge on how to write and how to teach writing on the one hand, and practical abilities to write and teach writing effectively on the other (Muller 2012). In addition, the pedagogy used in (language) teacher education needs to be effective and enjoyable as, among other factors, the ability to teach writing effectively depends on teachers' own writing experiences as learners (Dornbrack & Dixon 2014; Pardo 2006). Hence, various scholars tend to view the integrative approach as more effective than other individual approaches.

Methodology and analytical framework

This article adopted a qualitative design, focussing on writing pedagogy as taught to a cohort of secondary school teachers. Qualitative design was dictated by the fact that document analysis was used as the main source of data, based on the content which was selected from one module (Module 7) that focusses on writing pedagogy to empower teachers with knowledge and skills to teach writing. This module was one of the UR-CE DE materials for 559 teachers who followed the programme combining French, English and Education. The mediation of the content was selected on the specific section page of the selected module. Textual analysis, according to McKee (2005), focusses on an understanding of likely interpretations of texts by people who consume them, leading to implications of such interpretations. This article focussed on a section in the pedagogy module (Module 7) that is aimed at developing UR-CE DE.

A sample of 80 in-service English teachers participated in the study covering the document analysis, argumentative essays and focus group discussions. They were selected from all the four provincial centres in Rwanda, among the cohort of 599 teachers who followed the UR-CE DE programme in 2010–2013. Their performance, which was based on both high and low achieving categories, was taken as a basis for selection. Hence, 20 in-service teachers (10 with the highest marks and 10 with the lowest marks in the pedagogy module (Module 7) were selected in each province, making a total of 80 participating teachers. Hence, eight focus group discussions

were organised in total. There were two focus groups in each of the four provinces, with each group consisting of 10 students. They were selected using a purposive sampling technique (Maxwell 1997; Tongco 2007) based on their performance in assignments and examinations. This number seems relatively small compared to 599 in-service teachers who were studying the French–English–Education combination, but it would have been difficult to work with a larger number for document analysis, argumentative essay and focus group discussions.

The textual or document analysis was conducted in two phases. The first phase consisted of the English teachers' critical analysis of the selected section on writing pedagogy in Module 7. They pointed to limitations which may have negative pedagogical implications in teaching writing.

In the second phase, the authors redesigned the section that was analysed based on the findings from the participating teachers' feedback from phase one. The redesign was informed by what DE scholars consider as aspects of good self-instructional materials, which also helped in addressing the shortcomings identified in phase one section in Module 7. These aspects of good self-instructional materials include four components, namely: (1) anticipatory and constructive feedback to learners on their learning progress (Kintsch 2009; Lockwood 1998; Moll 2003); (2) activities that engage learners in active learning (Lockwood 1998; Phillips 2007, Rowntree 1992); (3) a conversational/interactive style (Abedi & Badragheh 2011; Mishra & Gaba 2001; Richards 1995); and (4) a 'teaching through questioning' strategy (Duron, Limbach & Waugh 2006). It is to be clarified that feedback here refers to comments and observations made by designers of DE materials on learners' work such as assignment and other learning activities, as well as on learners' progress. Feedback is recognised as 'an assistance mechanism, a key factor for successful learning, offering support to the learning process' (Ypsilandis 2012:169).

In line with good self-instructional materials, examples of DE materials that have received recognition for their quality were used to inform the redesign of a section of the UR-CE Module 7 that focusses on the teaching of writing. Such quality reference DE materials are (1) *Theory and Practice of English Language Teaching*, (2) *Language, Literacy and Communication* and (3) *Language in Learning and Teaching (LILT)*. All these three materials have won awards in recognition of their high quality and effectiveness as distance teacher education materials, as highlighted in Reed (2010). In this regard, in 2000, *Theory and Practice of English Language Teaching* won the inaugural NADEOSA (National Association of Distance Education Organisations of South Africa) award for excellence. *The Language, Literacy and Communication* won the 2004 NADEOSA award for excellence while *LILT* has been highly commended by the NADEOSA awards committee (Reed 2010).

Regarding the writing pedagogy approach, the authors redesigned the section by adopting an integrated approach and took the DE in-service teachers through the process of producing a good argumentative essay for practical activity. After the redesign, the section was given to a group of 80 participating teachers to study as learning material. The 80 teachers were then interviewed in focus groups of 10 each. They critically reflected on both the section in the UR-CE pedagogy module and the redesigned section, based on their experiences with the UR-CE DE materials, and how they helped them in teaching writing in their own classes. They were given argumentative essays in the redesigned section as well. It should be noted that UR-CE DE in-service teachers are equipped with general teaching skills and knowledge (KIE 2009), but with limited proficiency in English like many other Rwandan university students (Kagwesage 2012; Niyibizi, Makalela & Mwepu 2015; Niyibizi et al. 2018; Sibomana 2016b) despite being teachers of language subjects.

Their reflections on textual analysis, argumentative essay and focus group discussions were transcribed and, for those participants who chose to respond in Kinyarwanda or French, their responses were translated into English. The analytical framework was guided by aspects of quality DE materials on writing skills development and writing pedagogy, as drawn from quality materials mentioned above. Such analysis was also supplemented by descriptive and interpretive approaches (Elliot & Timulak 2005) for the participants' responses.

Research findings

The findings from the textual analysis of the UR-CE DE materials, the redesigned section and the focus group discussions with 80 in-service English teachers present new insights into the development of their pedagogical knowledge to teach writing.

Findings on the section on writing pedagogy in University of Rwanda-College of Education's distance education module 7

Textual analysis established that the writing pedagogy section in Module 7 provides in-service teachers with general information about writing, such as what writing is, the techniques for teaching writing and difficulties in writing; however, general reference to writing pedagogy is very limited.

For instance, the selected section on writing pedagogy in Module 7 includes texts entitled 'Techniques for teaching writing skills', 'difficulties in writing' and 'functional writing', which are reproduced in Table 1.

The textual analysis of this section revealed that, despite its suggestive title of techniques for teaching writing skills, the section provides very little practical guidance on how to teach writing, as it does not give teachers advice on teaching methods or approaches. Rather, it only lists activities in which learners could be involved in the development of their writing, without any indication of how teachers should initiate these.

Bearing in mind that the section is designed for in-service teachers who do not have a pedagogic background (KIE

TABLE 1: Section on writing pedagogy.

Techniques for teaching writing skills	Difficulties in writing	Functional writing
When teaching writing skills, you should encourage integration of the basic language skills. The four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing should not be treated in total isolation of each other even when the writing skill is the main focus. You can involve learners in the following activities (cf Raimes 1986): (1) Composing: This is essay writing, and it can be in the form of narrative, argument, discussion, description and exposition. (2) Functional writing: Examples of these are letters (formal and informal), minutes, reports, recipes, dialogues and memoranda. (3) Presenting information in different forms or from different angles. (4) Dictation to improve spelling, use of punctuation marks and capitalisation and also to sharpen listening skills. (5) Rewriting a given text using one's own words (paraphrasing). (6) Taking and making notes from spoken and written sources. (7) Summary writing. (8) Writing dialogue. (9) Using a short narrative to write a similar story (Module 7, p.113).	Some learners experience difficulties in understanding what is expected in continuous writing. Hence, they need help with the choice, planning and arrangement of content, which we refer to as *content organisation.* Let the learners know that a good writer plans and organises before they start writing. Learners may have ideas, but if those ideas are presented in a jumbled way, thereby causing incoherence, they may pose difficulties of comprehension to the reader (Module 7, p.110, emphasis in the original).	It goes without saying that you need to develop both learners' grammatical and organisational skills. You can help them by presenting them with examples of the type of the genre you want them to read or learn to write. If you want them to write official letters or minutes, you can 'have them study real examples to discover facts about construction, and specific language use, which is common in that genre' (Harmer 2001:259). (Module 7, p. 112).

Source: University of Rwanda-College of Education's Module 7, pages 110, 112 and 113

2009), this section on writing pedagogy is likely to be of very little help to them. Similarly, in the text about difficulties in writing, the shortcoming is that these in-service teachers are not given any examples of how to assist their learners to organise their ideas. This explains that 'procedural knowledge' (Carr 1995; Muller 2012) or 'knowledge-how' is backgrounded and sometimes ignored.

From the analysis on functional writing, the textual analysis revealed that the module designers do not provide clear guidance to teachers on how to help their learners to undertake the tasks. It is unlikely that the instructions in the above paragraph will enable the teachers to teach their learners as to how to write functional texts or to develop grammatical and organisational skills.

Hence, from this analysis, we contend that presenting learners with an example of a text does not provide sufficient guidance for the learners to be able to write a text in the same genre. Rather, teachers need genre-specific knowledge and skills in order to present and discuss model texts in such a way that their learners can also produce texts similar to these. We also claim that this section on writing pedagogy is likely to be of very little help to teachers. The teachers' responses to questions about the UR-CE materials seem to support this claim, as illustrated in the excerpts from focus group discussions.

Teachers' responses to the section on writing in the University of Rwanda-College of Education's distance education materials

Before elaborating on the participants' responses, it is important to note that UR-CE DE in-service teachers have limited experience with writing and the teaching of writing. Indeed, research has indicated that Rwandan university students, in general, have limited exposure to writing in English, thus resulting in poor English writing skills (Glatthaar 2014; Mutwarasibo 2013; Sibomana 2014), and Rwandan in-service teachers, in particular, share the same experience (Niyibizi 2015; Sibomana 2016). This implies that even the in-service teachers, who were studying for the diploma, are still at a disadvantage. Therefore, they indicated that they had high expectations regarding writing and writing pedagogy from the UR-CE DE materials. However, they indicated that these expectations were not fully met in

Module 7. Rather, their responses expressed disappointment regarding the section on writing pedagogy, as is evident in the following excerpts:

'My opinion on this section on teaching writing at high school is that the content is purely theoretical … I haven't seen any example that can inspire a teacher [*in teaching writing*]. It implies that expecting changes in our teaching habits as a result of reading these modules is an illusion.' (Teacher 3, male, senior 2)

'Reading these modules will not have a considerable change on our teaching habits especially because no practical examples were provided.' (Teacher 1, female, senior 1)

'As an in-service teacher, I have gone to university to study how to teach writing to other people. But when I arrived there, the module shows me the types of writing, but on how to teach writing in the classroom there is little. That is a very big problem. You can read and finish the whole UR-CE pedagogy module without understanding how to write an essay or how to teach it.' (Teacher 10, male, senior 2)

Some participants indicated that, in addition to not helping them develop their knowledge and skills for teaching writing, the section does not address their own writing knowledge and skills. Teacher 6 expressed this as follows:

'In this module, there is nothing you can consider that can help you in teaching writing, because here they are telling us in the introduction in few words what writing is, only that, and types of writing and objectives. But they are not telling us how can you start when you want to write an essay, what can you do?' (Teacher 6, female, Senior)

These remarks suggest that the section neither helps participants to develop their writing skills nor does it indicate to them as to how to proceed in helping learners to develop writing skills. Their responses imply that the designers of Module 7 left or omitted critical information on writing pedagogy practices.

Findings on the redesigned section

The redesigning of the section was informed by the findings from textual analysis and by recent research on writing pedagogy, particularly the integrative approach to teaching writing (Clarence-Fincham et al. 2002; Ralfe 2009). Adopting an integrative approach, the redesigned section added information on writing stages, such as choosing a topic, pre-writing, drafting, revising, proofreading and publishing.

Practical examples were provided by taking the participants through the process of writing a coherent, cohesive and logical argumentative essay.

To model the writing process, the section used a topic that is relevant to the participating in-service teachers' context because, as Peterson (2012) suggests, writing should not be separated from the social context in which the act of writing takes place. Thus, for example, the topic *It is better to study in a boarding school than in a day school* is topical and context-relevant because the Government of Rwanda is currently phasing out the boarding school system in order to use the money saved to build more day schools and increase access to free basic education. Therefore, teachers are likely to identify with the topic, which is in line with the sociocultural approach to language teacher education. According to this approach, the content of a teacher education programme and related mediation should be linked to the contexts in which the teachers work (Freeman & Johnson 1998; Johnson 2006; Johnson & Golombek 2011; Perumal 2012, 2013). The illustrative example in the process of writing, which was modelled for participating, focussed on clustering, as one of the strategies for gathering ideas. It was a practical example of the main parts of an essay (introduction, body and conclusion), which starts with clustering, as one of the stages of the writing process that begins with a key word or central idea placed in the centre of the page (or the blackboard) around which learners write down all their ideas associated with the topic, using individual words or short phrases (Ralfe 2009). Figure 1 illustrates how this process appears in the redesigned section.

This diagram shows that clustering is different from a list because the words or phrases are in a pattern which shows connections between the ideas. Clustering can take the form of a diagram or a mind map (Ralfe 2009). It draws from a process t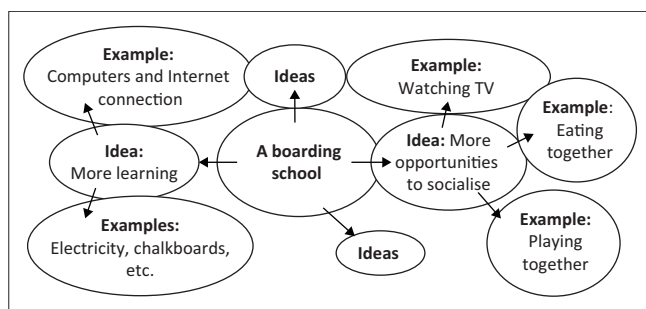heory of composition which focusses on writing as a process with a series of recurring stages rather than a product (Murray 2003).

This integrative approach is in line with what is advocated in the literature on teaching writing; before we know how to teach writing, we must first understand how we write (Zamel 1982), because teachers who do not have any understanding of what good writing looks like are often ill-equipped to teach it (Tulley 2013). In fact, teachers who cannot write well may have poorly developed ideas of what writing processes are (Uysal 2007). Hence, such teachers may not understand problems involved in writing (Pardo 2006).

Furthermore, the section adopted a teaching through questioning approach (Duron, Limbach & Waugh 2006; Ur 2014), which consisted of asking the participating teachers to carry out practical activities at each stage in the process of writing an essay, providing feedback and building on it (feedback) to present subsequent content. Table 2 includes the redesigned section, where the questioning approach was applied to the mediation of clustering.

By including the practical activity, the redesigned section aimed both to provide the participating teachers with a model of an argumentative essay and to help them to produce their own essays and have practical tips on how to teach it. Thereafter, they were interviewed on such practices. We argue that comparing the redesigned section with the one provided by Module 7 designers offered them a platform to reflect on their knowledge and skills regarding writing and teaching writing.

Findings on teachers' responses to the redesigned section

The data from the interviews with the eight teachers indicated that they responded as 'satisfied customers' (Reed 2005) regarding the value of the redesigned section in helping them to become effective writers and to teach writing effectively. They all indicated that the section took them through the writing process, leading to a well-written argumentative text (product) and indicated to them (through practical examples) how to teach writing. For instance, teachers indicated that:

'The section prepares the reader to be a teacher in such a way that even the learner who will be taught by this teacher will say, "I have learned something".' (Teacher 21, male, senior 4)

FIGURE 1: An example of a cluster in the redesigned section.

TABLE 2: Redesigned section on writing pedagogy, with examples on feedback and clustering process.

Variable	Summary of feedback
Explain how you can help your pupils brainstorm ideas to argue for or against the following statement: 'It is better to study in a boarding school than in a day school'.	You can ask pupils to draw a vertical line down the middle of a piece of paper and to write the words 'A boarding school' as a heading for the left-hand column and 'A day school' for the column on the right. Ask them to write everything that they can think of about 'A boarding school' and about 'A day school' in the respective columns. They should just write without worrying too much about the relevance of their ideas or the correctness of the language they use. Some of their ideas are likely to include the following: • **A boarding school:** Eating and sleeping at school, more opportunities and time to study and socialise with other pupils, appropriate learning facilities (computers, electricity, etc.), serious regulations and supervision by school staff, separation from the family, expensive. • **A day school:** Daily walk to and from school, less time to study and socialise with other pupils, more time with one's family, less supervision, doing home chores after school, study on one's own after school.
Subsequent teaching	Now, ask pupils to re-examine the ideas that they have written to check whether they are relevant to the topic. Only relevant ideas should be kept and used in writing the essay. Then they should classify (arrange) the ideas on each type of school into two categories (advantages and disadvantages), putting each idea into the category to which it belongs. This will help them in the drafting phase. Normally, pupils should list more ideas in favour of the position that they wish to support. For instance, if they wish to argue that studying in a boarding school is better than studying in a day school, they should have more advantages and fewer disadvantages for a boarding school than for a day school.

'As a teacher, if I get this document, and I go and enter the class with this document, it is enough. With this section, I can teach writing effectively.' (Teacher 7, female, senior 2)

Another teacher expressed his appreciation of the redesigned section in the following words:

'I was really surprised when I saw this section. I thought that if we had seen this section before, we would have been devoting more time to teaching writing … If we were not on school holidays, I would immediately prepare a lesson on writing because I realised that … in fact, I would like to ask you for a copy of this section so that we can use it because we have found the modules not helpful regarding teaching writing … If it were possible, this section should be incorporated in the modules for future UR-CE DE intakes.' (Teacher 38, male, senior 1)

These comments suggest that the participants found something important in the redesigned section, something that responded positively to their needs with regard to their own writing knowledge and skills, and to teaching learners how to write.

In contrast to what they said about the section in the UR-CE Module 7, the participants indicated that the redesigned section is practical and shows how the different parts of an essay are written, how they are linked together and how to write and teach writing step by step. While writing pedagogy scholars (e.g. Sheridan 2009; Turner 2007) are critical of this linear approach to writing, we suggest that it is a way to start, especially with EFL teachers whose knowledge of English is limited. Moreover, Hedge (1993) indicates that the process approach is not necessarily linear but a recursive activity in which the writer moves backwards and forwards between drafting and revising, with stages of re-planning in between.

The teachers also pointed out that the redesigned section provides practical and relevant examples to illustrate the methodological steps, techniques and stages of teaching writing from the beginning to the end and encourages reflection on what one reads. Some participants expressed their views as follows:

'In the redesigned section, the teacher has a role in the teaching/ learning process, but s/he is also mindful about the role of the learner and the difficulties this one may face in finding answers for the questions.' (Teacher 12, male, senior 3)

'It avoids confusions by providing a step by step procedure of conducting a writing lesson ... it also gives detailed examples, uses diagrammes and a model of a lesson plan to illustrate the process of teaching writing.' (Teacher 5, female, senior 2)

As the remarks of Teacher 5 imply, the redesigned section addressed some confusions and misunderstandings that they had about teaching writing. In commenting on the lessons learnt from the redesigned section, Teacher 44 indicated that he learnt that writing, in all its stages, should not be taught in one period (which is different from what he used to do) and that learners need to have a say in choosing topics to write about. Teacher 15 said that after reading the redesigned section, he realised that teaching writing is not as difficult as

he imagined. He felt that he needed to stop focussing on grammar and start teaching writing more often in his class. Teacher 38 learnt how to choose a topic, both for his learners and for himself. Teacher 7 learnt that good writing needs to be planned and written in stages. These views suggest that the participants preferred the redesigned section to the section on writing pedagogy in Module 7.

However, some participants were critical about the lack of theoretical information on how to approach the learning/ teaching activities in the redesigned section. The lack of this information may have been a reason why some participating teachers used the activities for assessment rather than learning purposes. For instance, Teachers 1 and 18 pointed out that they read the entire redesigned section first (without answering the activity questions) and answered the questions later without re-reading the content to see how much they had learnt. By approaching the activities in this way, these teachers missed some important points, because the presentation of content in this section builds on activities and related answers and feedback. In other words, the learner needs to complete the activities to (better) understand subsequent content.

Discussion

The responses to the two sets of materials suggest that the teachers interviewed, who are working in an EFL teaching context and who have limited experience of writing in English, lack some of the writing knowledge and skills needed both to produce well-written texts and to teach their learners to do the same. Findings from focus group discussions indicated that almost all 80 participating teachers responded positively to materials that offered explicit (step-by-step) guidelines for their own writing development and for teaching writing to secondary school learners, together with explanations for the guidelines suggested. This finding supports the argument forwarded by Uysal (2007) that when teachers of writing are provided with a writing course in which they practise writing themselves, their practices may change. Indeed, 'teachers who have not experienced meaningful writing projects themselves may not appreciate the writing problems their students face' (Kennedy 1998, in Uysal 2007:2) and may have few resources to draw on in their teaching (Leki 2001). Thus, foreign language teachers' basic writing skills, which serve as a foundation for the development of writing pedagogy, should not be taken for granted. Courses which are aimed at developing teachers' own writing skills and knowledge are as important as those aimed at developing their ability to teach writing to their learners.

The participants' responses also suggest that these teachers prefer materials or approaches that actively engage them in activities that are aimed at helping them to learn, especially when the knowledge and skills being developed are directly applicable to classroom tasks such as teaching writing. Active and practical learning activities are particularly important in teacher education programmes if trainers of teachers want to

adopt active and learner-centred teaching approaches in their classes, given that teachers tend to teach by replicating the practices of their own teacher training classrooms (Freeman & Johnson 1998; Lortie 1975; Murdoch 1994; Singh & Harris 2010).

Furthermore, the responses suggest that these teachers value materials that show understanding of the context in which they operate. This finding is in line with the sociocultural approach to language teacher education, which has been referred to earlier. If such attention to context is absent from teacher education programmes, there is a risk of producing teachers who may know what to teach but who, according to Johnson and Golombek (2011:2), do not have 'the essential procedural knowledge to confront the realities of the classroom'. This may lead to their knowledge and skills being 'disconnected in any substantive way from the practical goal-directed activities of actual teaching' (Johnson & Golombek 2011:2). Therefore, context-based learning activities and integrative approaches in teacher education programmes are important because they are likely to help teachers to enact culturally and contextually the responsive writing pedagogies (Pardo 2006). University of Rwanda-College of Education distance education materials, like the section copied from Module 7, do not contain such activities and this constitutes one of their weaknesses.

Conclusion

The findings discussed in this article indicate that a distance teacher education programme may fall short of some of its targeted goals. The three research questions that were posed for this study: (1) How do Rwandan secondary school English teachers mediate the content on teaching writing as explained through DE?; (2) What shortcomings do English teachers observe in the writing pedagogy module and what improvements do they suggest?; (3) Which approach, when considering the product-, process- genre- and integrative approaches, do they perceive to be more effective in teaching writing through DE? were answered, as revealed in the findings from the document analysis, textual analysis, argumentative essays and focus group discussions with the participating teachers. The striking finding is the kind of mismatch between the writing goals stated in the module and the pedagogical practices in learning how to teach writing. For instance, despite UR-CE's stated intention of helping its students 'to improve their general knowledge as well as their academic and professional education' (KIE 2009:1), the analysis of the materials, the responses of selected teachers to these materials and the pedagogically oriented redesigned section suggest that this goal has not been met. It appears that the existing material, specifically Module 7 on English writing pedagogy, does not empower these teachers to become effective writers and teachers of writing. Indeed, some of the participants indicated that their DE materials do not provide them with writing experience. We argue that failure to meet the goal of enabling English teachers to become effective writers and teachers of writing is a cause for concern given the central role of writing in national

examinations in English and in most other subjects. We suggest that the UR-CE DE materials be reconceptualised so that a revised version combines propositional knowledge with procedural knowledge (Fantl 2012; Meadows 2013). We also suggest that these two types of knowledge be more carefully mediated to both teachers and the designers of DE materials and that the revised version be aligned to the demands of the school curriculum and the national examination. This article reports on a case at the Rwandan university, but designers of distance learning materials for English teachers in contexts other than Rwanda may find it helpful to use the findings reported in this article to inform a review and redesign of their materials.

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