
Pre-service Teachers' Writing Pedagogy in Multilingual Basic Schools

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Abstract: *Writing instruction is among the most intricate dimensions of English language teaching, especially for pre-service teachers negotiating the boundary between theory and practice. This study examines the challenges faced and strategies employed by final-year pre-service teachers teaching English Language Writing in Ghanaian basic schools. Anchored in a pragmatist paradigm and a sequential explanatory design, the study surveyed 212 pre-service teachers (Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$), followed by semi-structured interviews. The descriptive analysis of the survey and the thematic analysis of the interviews converge on two principal challenges. Most respondents cited heterogeneous proficiency (84%) and insufficient materials (79%) as persistent constraints. Conversely, task sequencing, mentor feedback, and collaborative writing emerged as consistently effective pedagogical strategies. Framed by Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory (SCT), the findings show how mediation, scaffolding, and collaborative learning enable interns to translate theoretical knowledge into responsive classroom practice. The study contributes to teacher education literature by extending SCT applications to pre-service teacher preparation in multilingual and resource-variable contexts. Strengthening structured mentorship, embedding differentiated writing instruction in teaching practice expectations, and improving resource provision to consolidate a sustainable and inclusive writing pedagogy during internships are recommended.*

Keywords: Writing pedagogy; pre-service teachers, scaffolding, feedback, mentorship; multilingual classrooms.

INTRODUCTION

Writing is not merely a mechanical act of putting words on paper; it is a deeply sociocultural endeavour, mediated by interaction, tools, and discourse conventions. In contexts where English is taught as a subject rather than a first language, writing instruction becomes especially complex. Pre-service teachers must bridge the gap between pedagogical theory and the lived realities of classrooms. Yet many struggle to

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translate coursework into practice, especially in multilingual, resource-constrained classrooms. In Ghana, Colleges of Education (CoEs) aim to prepare pre-service teachers to manage diverse classrooms, scaffold learners' writing, and employ formative assessment. However, existing field reports indicate that pre-service teachers frequently encounter difficulty translating their theoretical preparation into effective writing instruction (Adu-Yeboah, et al., 2016). The teaching practicum, though designed to bridge this theory–practice gap, often yields mixed results: student teachers report both gains in pedagogy and stress arising from school constraints (Koomson, et al., 2022). Indeed, a recent study of practicum experiences in Ghanaian basic schools found that pre-service teachers face structural, mentor-school, and resource challenges during their placements (Kwaah et al., 2022).

Moreover, internship programmes in Ghanaian Colleges often suffer from chronic underfunding, weak school–college partnerships, and limited supervision (Azuuga & Aduko, 2022). In one case study, pre-service teachers complained of lacking library resources, classroom furniture, and effective mentor support, which undermined their capacity to enact writing instruction (Azuuga & Aduko, 2022). Such constraints reiterate the concern that pedagogical knowledge acquired in college may remain largely theoretical and untested in real classrooms.

Against this backdrop, writing pedagogy emerges as a critical site for exploring the tensions between curriculum ideals and classroom actuality. Writing instruction demands not only language knowledge but high levels of scaffolding, feedback, and contextual sensitivity. It is in this space that Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory (SCT) proves particularly illuminating, highlighting how mediation, scaffolding, and collaborative dialogue support learners (and interns) in bridging the zone between current competence and potential performance (Shabani, Khatib, & Ebadi, 2010). The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) concept has been applied not only to student learning but increasingly to teacher professional development, where mentors, artifacts (e.g. rubrics, exemplars), and peer interaction mediate novices' growth (Shabani et al., 2010). Furthermore, writing researchers have used Vygotskian constructs to explicate how teacher modelling, scaffolding, and peer co-construction can enhance learners' writing (Thompson, 2017).

Yet, few studies examine how pre-service teachers themselves negotiate writing pedagogy under real classroom constraints in multilingual settings. Empirical evidence is scant on how pre-service teachers deploy scaffolding and mediation in actual writing lessons, and theoretical accounts seldom focus on the intern's perspective as a mediated agent. This study aims to fill these gaps by systematically investigating the challenges and strategies of writing instruction among Ghanaian pre-service teachers, with a focus on how mediation, scaffolding, and collaborative learning operate in their practice. The study aimed to;

1. identify the principal classroom level constraints shaping ELW during internship;
2. examine the strategies pre-service teachers deploy;
3. explain how mediation and Zone of Proximal Development processes are instantiated in multilingual, resource-variable settings.

In contributions to knowledge, the study extends the application of SCT into the domain of teacher preparation in multilingual, under-resourced contexts, showing how pre-service teachers are not passive receivers but active negotiators of mediation. It also provides empirical, context-rich data on how scaffolding, feedback, and collaborative writing are enacted in Ghana's basic school classrooms. Also, it recommends practice-oriented strategies for CoEs, mentors, and policy actors to strengthen the bridge between writing theory and classroom enactment. By focusing on pre-service teachers' voices and classroom realities, this paper contributes to both theory and practice in writing pedagogy and teacher education.

Theoretical and Empirical Literature Review

Theoretical Perspectives on Writing Pedagogy

The teaching and learning of writing have long been conceptualised through cognitive and process-based lenses, focusing on individual mental operations (Flower & Hayes, 1981). However, from a socio-cultural standpoint, writing is a mediated, socially situated activity shaped by interaction, tools, and cultural norms (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Vygotsky argued that higher psychological functions develop first on a social plane before becoming internalised through mediation. Applied to writing pedagogy, this suggests that both novice writers and novice teachers construct knowledge through dialogue, modelling, and scaffolded participation (Daniels, 2017). SCT posits that learning occurs within the ZPD, the distance between what a learner can do independently and what can be achieved with guidance (Vygotsky, 1978). In the context of pre-service teachers, the ZPD manifests through mentorship, peer collaboration, and engagement with cultural artifacts such as lesson plans, exemplars, and rubrics (Johnson, 2009). These mediational means enable pre-service teachers to appropriate disciplinary practices and pedagogical reasoning as they transition from college to school settings (Mercer & Littleton, 2007).

Scaffolding is central to Vygotsky's framework and has been extended in writing research to describe the interactive support provided by teachers or peers (Wood et al., 1976; Hyland, 2003). Effective scaffolding involves diagnosing learners' needs, structuring tasks, and gradually transferring responsibility to the learner. In writing classrooms, scaffolding may include teacher think-alouds, modelling text structure, co-constructing drafts, and feedback loops (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005). For pre-service teachers, mentorship represents a critical form of scaffolding. Mentors' verbal mediation, observation feedback, and co-planning sessions constitute the practical enactment of the ZPD. As Shabani et al. (2010) note, teacher professional development itself can be viewed as a socio-cultural process in which mediation and scaffolding shape teacher cognition. Collaborative writing tasks further extend this notion: learners jointly negotiate meaning, take on complementary roles, and internalise pragmatic and structural conventions (Storch, 2013). These dynamics mirror the collaborative relationships between interns, mentors, and peers, where knowledge of writing instruction is socially constructed rather than transmitted.

Writing Pedagogy and Teacher Preparation

Research on writing instruction has evolved from product to process centred and genre-based models. In English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts, genre pedagogy

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development UK (Hyland, 2007) and process writing (Badger & White, 2000) have influenced teacher education curricula. Yet, as Graham and Perin (2007) argue, effective writing pedagogy requires not only strategic knowledge of process stages but also explicit instruction in text organisation, feedback mechanisms, and motivational scaffolds. In Ghana, writing pedagogy within CoEs remains largely theoretical, emphasising lesson planning and grammar instruction rather than modelling authentic writing processes (Adu-Yeboah et al., 2016). Teacher trainees often lack opportunities to practise feedback strategies or differentiated instruction before internship. Studies in comparable African contexts reveal similar challenges. In Nigeria, for instance, Adedoyin (2021) found that pre-service teachers perceived their writing methodology courses as overly theoretical, with minimal exposure to classroom realities. In South Africa, Pretorius and Ribbens (2020) observed that pre-service teachers struggled to mediate multilingual learners' writing development due to limited mentor guidance.

Consequently, many beginning teachers enter classrooms without robust pedagogical skills for teaching writing, especially in multilingual, resource-poor settings like Ghana. According to Wyatt and Onwuegbuzie (2022), this gap highlights the need for teacher-education models that integrate practice-based mentoring, reflective observation, and context-responsive scaffolding. The Ghanaian context, therefore, provides a fertile site to examine how pre-service teachers negotiate writing instruction through socio-cultural mediation. While process and genre pedagogies structure classroom activities, SCT explains how learners and pre-service teachers appropriate these practices through mediated participation.

Empirical Studies on Writing Pedagogy Challenges

Empirical research across diverse settings identifies recurrent challenges in writing instruction: heterogeneous learner proficiency, limited time, inadequate materials, and insufficient assessment literacy (Graham, Harris, & Santangelo, 2015). In sub-Saharan Africa, these constraints are compounded by large class sizes and inconsistent language policies (Opoku-Amankwa, 2018). Ghanaian studies corroborate these findings. Kwaah et al. (2022) documented that student teachers faced severe shortages of textbooks, absence of mentor feedback, and pressure to prepare pupils for examinations rather than process writing. Similarly, Azuuga and Aduko (2022) reported that pre-service teachers found it difficult to differentiate writing tasks due to large class sizes and varying linguistic backgrounds. At a broader level, research underscores the need for mentor-mediated feedback. Graham and Harris (2018) emphasised that formative feedback is among the most powerful factors influencing writing achievement, yet its implementation is constrained by workload and limited assessment training. In Ghanaian basic schools, feedback is often summative, focusing on grammar accuracy rather than content development (Agyeman & Opoku, 2020). For pre-service teachers, who are still mastering the art of feedback, this presents an additional pedagogical challenge.

Several studies demonstrate that socio-cultural mediation enhances writing instruction. For example, Ruan and Lee (2020) found that scaffolded peer review significantly improved learners' writing quality in ESL contexts. Hyland and Tse (2017) reported that teacher modelling and metadiscourse instruction increased student awareness of textual organisation. In pre-service contexts, Wu and Zhang (2021) observed that mentorship and reflective dialogue enabled novice teachers to connect theory with classroom realities. In

Africa, Adofu and Baah (2021) explored how Ghanaian pre-service teachers used collaborative group writing as a means of peer mediation. Their findings indicated that shared task ownership and feedback exchanges fostered confidence and creativity despite resource limitations. Such evidence suggests that writing pedagogy, when grounded in socio-cultural principles, can thrive even in challenging environments through peer and mentor collaboration.

Building on these theoretical and empirical insights, the current study situates Ghanaian pre-service teachers' experiences within the socio-cultural paradigm. While prior research documents general practicum challenges, few investigations focus explicitly on the pedagogical processes of writing instruction and the mediational resources pre-service teachers deploy. This study therefore contributes by linking pre-service teachers' lived experiences with the theoretical constructs of mediation, scaffolding, and the ZPD. It also responds to recent calls for contextually grounded evidence from developing countries to diversify the global discourse on writing pedagogy (Graham, 2019).

3. Methodology

This study adopted a pragmatist paradigm and employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design. The design first quantified pre-service teachers' experiences through a structured survey, followed by qualitative interviews to interpret the patterns revealed by the data. Here, the quantitative phase established general trends, and the qualitative phase deepened the understanding of pre-service teachers' challenges and strategies in teaching writing. The study was conducted with pre-service teachers of three public CoEs across three regions: Greater Accra Region, Volta Region and Central Region. These colleges were selected purposively because they are all mixed-gender, represent diverse geographical zones and linguistic ecologies across southern Ghana. Each college had disengaged from formal affiliation with the University of Education, Winneba, which gave them distinctive autonomy in internship supervision.

The population comprised 345 final-year upper primary specialism pre-service (Volta, 95; Central 102; Greater Accra 148). 212 pre-service teachers were selected by simple random sampling for the survey; 12 were purposively sampled for the interviews based on willingness of participation. The inclusion criteria required that participants had completed at least six weeks of internship teaching ELW, were responsible for planning and delivering writing lessons independently, and had access to mentor support in their placement schools.

Two primary instruments were employed: a structured questionnaire and a semi-structured interview guide. The structured questionnaire, adapted from prior validated tools in teacher education research (Graham et al, 2015; Adu-Yeboah et al., 2016), included five thematic sections namely demographic information, perceived challenges in teaching writing, pedagogical strategies used, mentorship and mediation, and outcomes and self-efficacy. The items were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). The instrument was validated by three language-education experts and piloted with 78 final year upper primary specialism pre-service teachers in University of Education, Winneba's, Basic Education Department, yielding a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82, indicating high internal consistency. The interview guide, designed for the second phase, contained six thematic sections exploring

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development UK teaching contexts, lesson planning and task design, instructional challenges, feedback and assessment practices, mentor mediation, and reflective experiences. Interviews lasted between 20 and 45 minutes, were audio-recorded with consent, and later transcribed verbatim. The guide ensured flexibility, allowing participants to elaborate freely while maintaining thematic focus (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

SPSS (v. 26) was used for descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and percentages). The goal was to summarise general trends in the pre-service teachers' perceived challenges and strategies. Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2019) six-phase framework of familiarisation, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and writing up. Coding was both inductive and deductive, guided by Vygotsky's constructs of mediation, scaffolding, and the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Triangulation between quantitative and qualitative data strengthened interpretive validity (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Participants were informed of the study's objectives, confidentiality protocols, and their right to withdraw at any time. Written consent was obtained before data collection. Pseudonyms were used in transcripts to protect anonymity. Care was taken to ensure voluntary participation, non-coercion, and cultural sensitivity, especially when working in rural school contexts (BERA, 2018).

Instrument validity was established through expert review and pilot testing, while reliability was confirmed statistically. In the qualitative phase, credibility was enhanced through member checking. Dependability was ensured by maintaining an audit trail of data collection and coding decisions, and transferability was supported through rich contextual descriptions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Reflexivity was maintained through researcher journaling to minimise interpretive bias (Cohen et al., 2018).

Findings and Analysis

The findings are organised according to three major themes derived from the integration of the quantitative and qualitative phases. These are;

1. Complexities of writing pedagogy in diverse classrooms,
2. Strategies for scaffolding and mediation, and
3. Mentorship, reflection, and professional identity formation.

Each theme includes sub-themes, quantitative indicators, and qualitative evidence drawn from the sample. Each theme also draws on both descriptive statistics from the questionnaire and rich qualitative excerpts from the semi-structured interviews. Pseudonyms (e.g., *P1*, *P2*, *P3*...) are used to ensure anonymity.

Classroom Diversity and Material Constraints

Quantitative analysis revealed that 84% of pre-service teachers agreed that wide variations in learner proficiency complicated lesson planning, and 79% cited insufficient teaching materials as a persistent challenge. 67% reported that large class sizes impeded feedback provision, and 71% noted difficulties managing mixed linguistic backgrounds. With the qualitative data, the following interconnected sub-themes emerged;

1. Heterogeneous learner proficiency and linguistic diversity
2. Limited instructional resources
3. Assessment workload and time constraints

Heterogeneous Learner Proficiency and Linguistic Diversity

Pre-service teachers consistently described the challenge of addressing mixed-ability and multilingual classrooms where English often functioned as a second language. This echoes findings by Opoku-Amankwa (2018) and Agyeman and Opoku (2020) on Ghana's multilingual instructional settings. Excerpts of respondents' responses are presented as follows;

'Some pupils could write coherent paragraphs, but others struggled with simple sentences. It felt like teaching three different classes at once.' - P4

'Learners switched from English to Dangme during activities. I sometimes mixed both languages to keep them engaged.' - P7

'The syllabus expected narrative writing, but some pupils didn't even understand what a paragraph was. I had to start from scratch.' - P2

'Because English isn't their first language, most pupils think in Ewe before writing. Their sentences often reflect that translation.' - P5

'Even within one class, some pupils write fluently while others stare blankly. I used pictures and oral discussions to help weaker ones.' - P3

'It's difficult balancing fluency and accuracy when the class speaks multiple languages. Sometimes, explanations took most of the period.' - P1

'I had pupils who came from private schools and others who never wrote essays before. Bridging that gap was exhausting.' - P9

'During peer writing, the stronger pupils often dominated. I had to pair them strategically to prevent discouragement.' - P6

'Learners' dialect interference was noticeable as in "He comed yesterday" was common, and correcting each took time.' - P8

These narratives highlight the sociolinguistic mediation pre-service teachers perform to negotiate meaning across multiple languages while maintaining English writing competence.

Limited Instructional Resources

Limited access to textbooks, model essays, and technological tools constrained teaching. Over 74% of survey respondents agreed that material scarcity negatively affected their ability to scaffold lessons. These were emphasised by the following excerpts from the interview;

‘We had only one writing textbook shared among three classes. I improvised with hand-drawn charts and examples.’ - P5

‘I downloaded essays on my phone, but since there was no projector, I read them aloud to the class.’ - P1

‘The school had no library. I asked pupils to bring old notebooks to use as examples.’ - P4

‘I used my mentor’s old lesson notes because there were no digital resources. It limited creativity.’ - P3

‘Sometimes I photocopied materials using my own money, but I couldn’t sustain it every week.’ - P7

‘The school had electricity but no computers. Writing was entirely paper-based.’ - P2

‘I relied on oral discussion instead of typed examples since we had no printer or projector.’ - P8

‘Lack of visual aids made abstract writing concepts hard for learners to grasp.’ - P9

Pre-service teachers’ reliance on improvised tools supports Hyland’s (2003) view that writing instruction in low-resource contexts often depends on teacher adaptability rather than institutional provision.

Assessment Workload and Time Constraints

Time pressure and excessive marking emerged as significant sub-themes, with 69% of pre-service teachers reporting that grading essays consumed excessive time and reduced opportunities for feedback. Excerpts from the interview are presented.

‘After marking 45 essays, I barely had energy to plan the next lesson. Feedback became general rather than individual.’ - P3

‘We were told to assess writing weekly, but with large classes, it was impossible to keep up so I prioritised group writing to reduce marking load.’ - P8

‘Marking took my weekends. Sometimes I only highlighted errors without explanation because of fatigue.’ - P5

‘I gave oral feedback in class to save time but missed deeper discussions.’ -P2

‘It’s not the marking itself but that pupils repeat the same errors. Without time to re-teach, progress stalls.’ - P4

‘Deadlines and schedules limited our reflection. We just taught, marked, and moved on.’ - P7

‘I understood feedback’s importance, but practical constraints made it unrealistic to individualise.’ - P1

These experiences resonate with Graham and Harris’s (2018) assertion that teacher workload and time poverty are major obstacles to formative assessment and sustained writing improvement.

Scaffolding, Collaboration and Feedback

While challenges were evident, pre-service teachers displayed notable creativity in mediating instruction through scaffolding, collaborative writing, and task sequencing. Quantitatively, over 82% reported using scaffolding techniques, and 77% engaged learners in peer writing. The following sub-themes emerged from the interview;

1. Task sequencing and process-based scaffolding
2. Collaborative and peer-assisted writing
3. Feedback and guided mediation

Task Sequencing and Process-Based Scaffolding

Pre-service teachers structured lessons in incremental stages including pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing as supported by Hyland (2007) and Hammond and Gibbons (2005). The interview presented the following excerpts;

‘I used brainstorming with pictures before writing. Learners listed ideas together before starting paragraphs.’ - P2

‘We did shared writing where I wrote sentences on the board from pupils’ suggestions.’ - P5

‘I divided essay writing into three days: planning, drafting, and final editing. Each lesson focused on just one aspect to reduce overload.’ - P3

‘I modelled paragraph writing by “thinking aloud” to show transitions.’ - P7

‘Pre-writing discussions helped even weaker pupils to generate ideas. Also, I broke essay tasks into small chunks and worked each stage to keep morale high.’ - P4

‘I used sentence starters to scaffold learners who struggled with openings. Sometimes, instead of one big essay, I gave short daily writing prompts. It built stamina.’ - P8

These incremental scaffolds align with Wood, Bruner, and Ross’s (1976) view that graduated assistance promotes learner independence through structured support.

Collaborative and Peer-Assisted Writing

Collaborative writing emerged as a strong mediational strategy. Learners co-authored texts, critiqued each other’s work, and shared responsibility for revision, as presented in the following excerpts;

‘Each group wrote one paragraph; later, we joined them into a full essay. Everyone saw how their part mattered.’ - P7

‘Peer writing encouraged weaker pupils to participate. They learned vocabulary from their mates.’ - P1

‘Group work helped manage large classes and made learning interactive. Pairs, in pair work, edited each other’s writing using checklists I provided.’ - P4

‘Collaborative writing gave pupils courage. They stopped fearing grammar mistakes.’ - P5

‘Peer review sessions helped identify common errors faster than individual marking and stronger pupils mentored weaker ones. It created a mini community of writers.’ - P8

‘During group reflection, pupils discussed why certain sentences worked better than others.’ - P3

These practices echo findings by Storch (2013) and Ruan and Lee (2020). They also illustrate social mediation in action, where learning is co-constructed through dialogue, supporting Vygotsky’s (1978) premise that meaning is jointly built within social contexts.

Feedback and Guided Mediation

Respondents used varied feedback approaches, such as oral, written, and peer-based to mediate writing improvement as presented as follows;

‘I used green pens for comments, black for corrections. Pupils said it made feedback less scary.’ - P3

‘I gave whole-class feedback by writing sample errors on the board. My mentor showed me how to give feedback focused on ideas, not only grammar.’ - P8

‘I used oral feedback during revision time as it was immediate and interactive.’ - P4

‘We analysed anonymous samples to discuss strengths and weaknesses together.’ - P5

‘Peer feedback helped pupils realise their mistakes through discussion. This ensured that feedback became dialogue. I asked pupils to explain why they wrote something before correcting them.’ - P1

‘I used feedback rubrics so pupils could self-assess next time.’ - P2

‘My mentor encouraged positive feedback where I start with what worked before what didn’t.’ - P9

These excerpts echo Graham and Harris’s (2018) claim that formative, dialogic feedback builds agency and self-efficacy in writing instruction.

Mentorship and Reflective Professional Growth

Mentorship and reflective practice were central to how pre-service teachers made sense of their teaching experiences. Survey data showed that 74% found mentor guidance crucial, and 69% noted peer reflection enhanced professional growth. Two sub-themes emerged from the interview as follows;

1. Mentorship as dialogic mediation
2. Reflection and professional identity development

Mentorship as Dialogic Mediation

Mentors were viewed as mediators who guided interns through feedback and modelling rather than directives, consistent with Johnson's (2009) conception of sociocultural mentoring as exemplified by the following excerpts;

'My mentor didn't just correct me but she explained why. It made me think about my choices.' - P2

'He modelled writing lessons for me. I watched him change my approach completely.' - P6

'When I struggled, my mentor shared his notes and even co-taught one lesson with me. She guided, not dictated. That made me more confident and reflective.' - P5

'Mentor feedback came as questions, not orders as in, "Why did you group them this way?" It made me think critically.' - P9

'We co-marked essays once. I learned to see writing through a teacher's eyes.' - P1

'He encouraged me to experiment with my lesson structure. That trust helped me grow.' - P3

'My mentor was like a colleague, not a supervisor. We discussed challenges openly.' - P7

'After feedback, he always asked how I felt about my teaching. That reflection changed how I plan now.' - P4

Mentorship as dialogic mediation thus empowered pre-service teachers to internalise pedagogical principles through guided interaction, a process mirrored in Vygotsky's ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978).

Reflection and Professional Identity Development

Reflection allowed pre-service teachers to reconstruct their understanding of writing pedagogy, shifting from compliance to self-agency as presented in the following excerpts;

'I wrote reflections daily on what succeeded or failed. Over time, I noticed patterns and adjusted.' - P4

‘We had a WhatsApp group where interns shared lesson reflections. It became a support system.’ – P9

‘Reflecting helped me see that I was not a failure but a learner improving every week. Through reflection, I realised feedback is not just correction but it is communication also.’ - P3

‘Writing reflections became therapy for the stress of teaching large classes.’ - P8

‘Reflecting after each lesson helped me notice small learner progress I would have missed. It also helped me integrate theory into actual lessons.’ - P1

‘I now see teaching as continuous learning and reflection built my confidence as a professional.’ - P2

These insights align with Mercer and Littleton (2007) and Wyatt and Onwuegbuzie (2022), who argue that reflective dialogue fosters teacher identity as a developmental construct mediated by social interaction and self-assessment.

The analysis reveals that pre-service teachers’ experiences are shaped by the interplay of contextual challenges (heterogeneity, resource scarcity, workload) and mediational supports (scaffolding, collaboration, mentorship, reflection). Quantitative results established prevalent trends, while qualitative data provided depth and human context. The findings collectively affirm that writing pedagogy is a socially mediated process, where pre-service teachers’ growth depends on the quality of mentorship, peer interaction, and reflective practice (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978).

DISCUSSION

This section interprets the findings within the framework of Vygotsky’s SCT, emphasising the concepts of mediation, scaffolding, and the ZPD. The discussion also situates the results within broader research on ELW pedagogy, teacher preparation, and mentorship in multilingual contexts.

Writing Pedagogy as a Mediated and Contextualised Practice

The findings reaffirm that writing pedagogy among Ghanaian pre-service teachers is profoundly mediated by social, material, and institutional contexts. Pre-service teachers’ experiences across the three colleges demonstrated that challenges such as heterogeneous learner proficiency, linguistic diversity, and resource constraints shaped their instructional decisions and self-efficacy. This mirrors Lantolf and Thorne’s (2006) argument that learning and teaching are always embedded in cultural tools and social relations rather than internal mental processes alone.

The variation in classroom conditions illustrates how context influences the enactment of theory. As in Hyland’s (2003, 2007) process-writing model, effective writing instruction depends on access to materials, exemplars, and iterative feedback cycles. Yet the pre-service teachers’ realities often curtailed those

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development UK cycles, forcing them to rely on oral mediation, peer collaboration, and improvisation. This pattern aligns with prior studies in sub-Saharan contexts showing that theoretical training in writing pedagogy often collides with the material constraints of basic schools (Adu-Yeboah et al., 2016; Pretorius & Ribbens, 2020). The pre-service teachers' resourcefulness in using mobile phones to download essays, or using board-based modelling reflects what Daniels (2008) calls *adaptive mediation*, where teachers creatively reconfigure tools to sustain pedagogical goals under constraints.

Scaffolding, Collaboration, and Learning within the Zone of Proximal Development

The study also illustrates how pre-service teachers drew upon scaffolding and collaboration to mediate learner engagement and overcome linguistic and cognitive barriers. The use of brainstorming, guided writing, and sequencing reflected intentional scaffolding that gradually transferred responsibility to learners. Such practices correspond closely with Wood et al.'s (1976) concept of graduated assistance, and confirm the process-oriented view of writing as a recursive and supported activity. Peer writing and feedback emerged as especially powerful mediational tools. As reported in Storch (2013) and Ruan and Lee (2020), collaborative writing fosters negotiation of meaning, shared authorship, and mutual regulation. Within the ZPD framework, these peer interactions allowed pupils to operate beyond their individual competence levels by leveraging the collective zone of understanding (Vygotsky, 1978).

From the pre-service teachers' perspective, collaboration also mediated their own professional learning. In peer reflection groups and WhatsApp platforms, pre-service teachers co-constructed strategies for classroom management and feedback provision. This suggests that the ZPD was not limited to pupil learning but extended to teacher learning, validating Johnson's (2009) argument that sociocultural perspectives conceptualise teacher education as a process of co-participation in professional discourse.

Mentorship as a Mediational Space for Teacher Development

Mentorship was found to be the most significant mediating factor in bridging theory and practice. Through guided co-teaching, reflective questioning, and shared lesson planning, mentors enacted what Rogoff (1995) calls guided participation, a social process through which novices internalise professional practices. Mentors' reflective questions ('Why did you group them this way?') encouraged pre-service teachers to critically re-evaluate pedagogical choices, which transforms supervision from evaluative oversight to cognitive apprenticeship. This aligns with Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of legitimate peripheral participation, where novices progressively acquire community practices through supported participation. These findings reveal that mentorship in teacher education is both evaluative and developmental. They also highlight the Ghanaian context, where when supervision resources are limited, mentors become the primary mediators between institutional theory and classroom practice echoing Wu and Zhang's (2021) conclusion that co-constructive mentoring enhances both novice agency and pedagogical sophistication.

Reflection and the Construction of Professional Identity

Reflective practice emerged as the central mechanism through which pre-service teachers integrated theoretical concepts with lived experience. Regular journaling, group debriefs, and online reflection

enabled pre-service teachers to identify recurring challenges and track incremental improvement. Reflection thus acted as an intrapersonal mediation tool, allowing pre-service teachers to appropriate theoretical constructs like scaffolding and formative feedback into their personalised teaching experiences. This finding is consistent with Schön's (1983) conception of the reflective practitioner, and with Wyatt and Onwuegbuzie's (2022) observation that reflection transforms teaching from routine performance into conscious, adaptive inquiry. For many pre-service teachers, reflection also served an emotional function where it mitigated feelings of inadequacy and stress, enabling resilience. In this sense, reflective mediation did not only enhance cognition but also stabilised professional identity.

Furthermore, reflective dialogue among peers blurred the line between individual and collective professional learning. As pre-service teachers shared reflections digitally and in college seminars, they constructed a shared narrative of what it means to teach writing in Ghanaian classrooms. This collective sense-making process aligns with sociocultural theories of identity, where professional selves are negotiated through participation in communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Re-Examining Writing Pedagogy in Pre-Service Teacher Education

The findings collectively suggest that writing pedagogy in pre-service teacher education cannot be adequately understood as the transfer of methods from college to classroom. Instead, it should be re-theorised as a mediated practice, evolving through dynamic interaction among learners, mentors, tools, and institutional contexts. In Vygotskian terms, the teaching intern functions as both mediator (supporting learners' writing development) and mediated subject (learning teaching through guidance and reflection). This duality underscores the complexity of internship learning, an ongoing negotiation between external support and emerging autonomy (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014). The implications for curriculum design are profound. CoEs should move beyond transmissive models of writing pedagogy to experiential, mentorship-rich frameworks where pre-service teachers engage in dialogic inquiry and co-construction of teaching knowledge. Embedding structured reflection logs, peer co-observation, and mentor feedback workshops would enhance this process, ensuring that writing instruction becomes a collaborative, developmental endeavour rather than an isolated task.

This study extends socio-cultural perspectives on teacher education by demonstrating that writing pedagogy is both socially and contextually mediated. Pre-service teachers in Ghanaian classrooms navigate between institutional expectations and practical realities through creative scaffolding, peer collaboration, and reflective mentorship. Their growth as writing teachers occurs within a dynamic ecology of tools, discourse, and relationships. By illuminating how mediation and reflection shape teacher learning in under-resourced multilingual contexts, the study contributes to the redefinition of pre-service writing pedagogy as a dialogic, adaptive, and context-sensitive practice.

Implication for Research and Practice

The study highlights that pre-service teachers' capacity to deliver effective writing instruction depends heavily on access to mediational tools, supportive mentorship, and reflective opportunities. For pedagogy, embedding scaffolding-based writing pedagogy in teacher education curricula, institutionalising reflective

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practice as a core assessment tool, promoting peer and collaborative learning models are recommended. For institutional and policy recommendations it is recommended to strengthen mentor preparation and support systems, improve resource allocation and infrastructure, and adopt policy frameworks for writing pedagogy development.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the challenges and strategies associated with teaching ELW among pre-service teachers during internship in Ghanaian basic schools. The findings revealed that writing instruction is a complex, contextually mediated practice shaped by resource limitations, learner diversity, and evolving teacher identity. Yet, within these constraints, pre-service teachers demonstrated remarkable adaptability, employing scaffolding, peer collaboration, and reflection to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Drawing on Vygotsky's socio-cultural lens, the study underscores that teacher learning occurs through interaction, dialogue, and mediation. Mentorship and reflective practice functioned as crucial bridges connecting pedagogical theory to classroom enactment, transforming novice teachers into self-aware practitioners capable of navigating complex teaching realities. Ultimately, the study calls for a reimagining of writing pedagogy in teacher education, from a transmissive model to a collaborative, reflective, and contextually grounded enterprise. Empowering pre-service teachers with the tools, spaces, and support systems to engage in mediated practice will not only improve writing outcomes in Ghanaian classrooms but also cultivate a generation of adaptive, critical, and resilient educators.

Future Research

Future research should build upon this foundation through longitudinal and intervention studies tracking pre-service teachers' progression into full-time teachers. There is also scope for more mixed-method intervention studies assessing how scaffolded writing programmes influence learners' literacy outcomes when taught by pre-service teachers versus in-service teachers. By linking socio-cultural theory with assessment data, researchers could provide stronger empirical evidence for the policy reforms recommended here.

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