LEARNERS' DIFFICULTIES AND TEACHER INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES IN ESSAY WRITING IN CAMEROONIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

This paper examines the challenges Cameroonian secondary students face in writing essays and the teaching methods educators use to help them overcome these hurdles. Essay writing is a key part of the curriculum in Cameroonian secondary schools, serving as a crucial stepping stone to success in exams like the GCE and Baccalaureate. Yet many students still struggle to produce effective written work, resulting in consistently low performance. Drawing on Process Writing Theory, Socio-cultural Theory, and Pedagogical Content Knowledge, this study employs a mixed-method research approach. The quantitative data pinpoint common issues students face, including generating ideas, organising their thoughts, using language effectively, and revising their work. Meanwhile, the qualitative data examines the teaching strategies and classroom practices educators implement. The findings indicate that students grapple with challenges such as interference from their first language or French, Pidgin English, idea generation, organisation, grammatical accuracy, and revision skills. On the teaching side, the qualitative results show that educators use a variety of strategies, including modelling, guided practice, peer collaboration, and feedback. However, these methods are often limited by factors like large class sizes, restricted instructional time, insufficient training in writing pedagogy, and a heavy focus on exam-oriented curricula. This study adds valuable insights to the field of writing instruction by highlighting the connection between students' difficulties and teachers' responses in Cameroonian secondary schools and emphasising the need for practical improvements in teacher education and professional development.

Keywords:

Learner Difficulties, Essay Writing, Teacher Instructional Practices, Writing Pedagogy, Secondary School, Cameroon.

Résumé

Cet article examine les difficultés auxquelles les élèves du secondaire au Cameroun sont confrontés dans la rédaction de dissertations ainsi que les méthodes pédagogiques utilisées par les enseignants pour les aider à surmonter ces obstacles. La rédaction constitue un élément essentiel du programme scolaire dans l'enseignement secondaire camerounais et représente une étape déterminante pour la réussite aux examens tels que le GCE et le Baccalauréat. Pourtant, de nombreux élèves éprouvent encore des difficultés à produire des écrits efficaces, ce qui entraîne des performances globalement faibles. S'appuyant sur la théorie du processus d'écriture, la théorie socioculturelle et le modèle des connaissances pédagogiques du contenu (Pedagogical Content Knowledge), cette étude adopte une approche méthodologique mixte. Les données quantitatives identifient les principales difficultés rencontrées par les apprenants, notamment la génération d'idées, l'organisation des pensées, l'utilisation appropriée de la langue et la révision des productions écrites. Parallèlement, les données qualitatives analysent les stratégies d'enseignement et les pratiques pédagogiques mises en œuvre en classe. Les résultats révèlent que les élèves sont confrontés à divers défis, tels que les interférences liées à la langue maternelle, au français ou au pidgin english, la difficulté à générer des idées, les problèmes d'organisation, l'inexactitude grammaticale et des compétences limitées en révision. Du côté des enseignants, les résultats qualitatifs montrent l'utilisation de diverses stratégies pédagogiques, notamment le modelage, la pratique guidée, la collaboration entre pairs et la rétroaction. Toutefois, ces méthodes sont souvent limitées par des facteurs tels que des effectifs pléthoriques, un temps d'enseignement restreint, une formation insuffisante en didactique de l'écriture et une forte orientation vers les examens. Cette étude apporte une contribution significative au domaine de l'enseignement de l'écriture en mettant en évidence le lien entre les difficultés des apprenants et les réponses pédagogiques des enseignants dans les établissements secondaires camerounais, tout en soulignant la nécessité d'améliorations concrètes dans la formation initiale et continue des enseignants.

Mots-clés : *Difficultés des apprenants, rédaction, dissertation, pratiques pédagogiques des enseignants, didactique de l'écriture, enseignement secondaire, Cameroun.*

Introduction

In Cameroon's diverse linguistic landscape, English and French are the main languages of instruction. Writing essays is a fundamental part of academic life, yet it often causes significant stress and challenges for students at all levels (Viktoria Kochubei, 2021). It's a crucial aspect of secondary education and a vital way for learners to showcase their academic knowledge, critical thinking skills, and language proficiency (Graham & Perin, 2007; Hyland, 2019). Mastering essay writing is essential, as it plays a key role in English-language assessments during national exams.

Despite its significance, many secondary school students face hurdles when crafting coherent, well-structured essays. Although previous research has identified challenges relating to language skills, structural issues, and psychological barriers particularly in multilingual settings that emphasise the final product over the writing process itself (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Hillocks, 1986) there remains a lack of comprehensive investigation into the specific difficulties faced by

Cameroonian secondary learners and the pedagogical strategies adopted by teachers to address these issues. This gap underlines the need to examine both student obstacles and instructional practices within this context.

Therefore, this study aims to explicitly address this gap by investigating the challenges students encounter in essay writing and the corresponding instructional responses of teachers in Cameroonian secondary schools. Process-oriented approaches view writing as a cyclical activity that includes planning, drafting, revising, and editing, with feedback and reflection being crucial for writing development (Murray, 1972; Graham, 2018). However, how well these approaches are put into practice often hinges on teachers' pedagogical knowledge and beliefs, as well as the constraints of their classrooms. Teachers play a key role in helping students develop their writing skills through methods such as modelling, guided practice, peer collaboration, and feedback (Harris, 2018; Hyland, 2002; Graham & Harris, 2019). Teaching essay writing requires specialised pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) that goes beyond general language teaching (Shulman, 1986, 1987), yet many teachers feel unprepared due to limited training in writing pedagogy during their pre-service education (Graham et al., 2015; Borg, 2015). Additionally, factors like class size, available instructional time, and curriculum demands further influence classroom practices.

In Cameroon, there is a noticeable lack of empirical research that simultaneously examines the specific challenges learners face in essay writing and the instructional responses teachers adopt. This gap is particularly significant given that effective writing instruction depends on understanding both learner difficulties and pedagogical practices in context. Without such evidence, efforts to improve curriculum design, teacher preparation, and professional development risk being misaligned with students' and educators' actual needs. Addressing this research void is therefore essential for developing informed, context-sensitive interventions to enhance writing outcomes. Accordingly, this paper aims to investigate the obstacles learners encounter and the instructional strategies teachers employ, drawing on a mixed-methods approach to provide a comprehensive view of essay writing education in Cameroonian secondary schools.

Understanding Writing and Writing Instructions.

Writing is often seen as a complex blend of cognitive and linguistic tasks that require students to brainstorm ideas, organise their thoughts, plan, draft, revise, edit, and convey their messages clearly (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Graham, 2018). Many secondary school students struggle to develop ideas, maintain coherence, master grammar, expand their vocabulary, and revise their work (Graham & Perin, 2007; Hillocks, 1986). Process-oriented approaches emphasise the importance of engaging learners at every stage and of using feedback and revision to enhance writing quality (Murray, 1972; Graham, 2018). However, research consistently indicates that instructions focused solely on the final product often overlook these essential processes, limiting students' chances to cultivate effective writing strategies (Hillocks, 1986; Graham & Perin, 2007).

Sociocultural Perspective in Writing

From a socio-cultural standpoint, writing development thrives on social interactions and guided instruction (Vygotsky, 1978). Engaging in classroom discussions, collaborating with peers, practising under guidance, and receiving scaffolding all help learners grow within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Mercer, 2000). While classroom interactions can aid in the internalisation of writing strategies, factors such as class size and time constraints can hinder their effectiveness (Hyland, 2019).

Teacher Knowledge and Writing Pedagogy

Shulman's (1986, 1987) concept of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) underscores the importance of teachers' ability to transform their understanding of subject matter into effective writing instruction tailored to learners' needs. This theoretical perspective is central to the current study, as it directly informs the investigation of how teachers' knowledge and practices shape essay-writing pedagogy in Cameroonian secondary schools. In line with PCK, effective writing pedagogy at the secondary level requires teachers to integrate their knowledge of writing processes, learner challenges, assessment, and instructional strategies (Borg, 2006; Grossman, 1990). However, existing gaps in teacher preparation, as highlighted by Graham et al. (2015), pose barriers to the adoption of process-oriented approaches central to this research, thereby reinforcing the importance of linking theoretical frameworks to the aims of this study.

Writing Instruction and Teacher Education

Writing instruction and teacher education are closely linked concepts that play a significant role in shaping how students develop their essay-writing skills in secondary schools, especially in ESL/EFL settings like Cameroon. Writing instruction encompasses classroom practices and teaching methods that help teachers enhance students' writing abilities. On the other hand, teacher education refers to the professional training and ongoing development that empower teachers to implement these practices effectively (Hyland, 2003; Richards, 2015). Effective writing instruction is generally viewed as process-oriented and genre-based, encompassing stages such as planning, drafting, revising, and providing feedback, along with the explicit teaching of essay conventions (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Hyland, 2007). Unfortunately, in many secondary schools in Cameroon, the focus tends to be on the final product and exam results, which restrict student interaction and revision opportunities (Tambo, 2012; Ndzi, 2019). Additionally, challenges such as overcrowded classrooms and limited resources make it essential to prioritise professional development to enhance essay-writing instruction.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in an integrated theoretical framework that draws on Process Writing Theory, Sociocultural Theory, and Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK). These complementary perspectives provide a multidimensional understanding of essay writing as both a cognitive activity and a socially mediated instructional process. Together, they offer a coherent lens for examining learners' writing difficulties, teachers' instructional practices, and the classroom conditions that shape writing development in Cameroonian secondary schools.

Process Writing Theory conceptualises writing not as a single, linear product but as a recursive and developmental process involving planning, drafting, revising, and editing (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Murray, 1972). From this perspective, effective writing emerges through cycles of reflection, reorganisation of ideas, and continuous refinement of meaning. This theory is particularly useful for identifying where learners encounter breakdowns in the writing process. For instance, students may struggle to generate ideas during the planning stage, organise arguments coherently while drafting, or critically evaluate and improve their texts during revision. By foregrounding the stages of writing, Process Theory enables this study to diagnose specific areas of difficulty rather than viewing poor performance merely as a lack of ability or effort. It also underscores the need for instructional practices that support writing as a gradual and guided process rather than a one-time task.

While Process Theory highlights the cognitive dimensions of writing, Sociocultural Theory broadens the lens by emphasising the social and interactive nature of learning. Rooted in Vygotsky's (1978) notion that knowledge is constructed through social interaction, this perspective views writing development as mediated by dialogue, collaboration, and scaffolding within the learner's Zone of Proximal Development. Instructional practices such as modelling, guided practice, peer collaboration, and formative feedback are therefore seen not as supplementary activities but as central mechanisms through which learners internalise writing skills (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). In the context of Cameroonian classrooms—often characterised by linguistic diversity and varying levels of learner preparedness—Sociocultural Theory provides a valuable explanation of how supportive teacher–student and peer interactions can mitigate writing challenges. It also helps explain how contextual realities, including classroom size, time constraints, and resource availability, may either facilitate or hinder meaningful engagement in the writing process.

Complementing these two perspectives is the concept of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK), which focuses on the teacher's professional competence in transforming subject matter into teachable and learnable forms. Shulman (1986, 1987) defines PCK as the blending of content knowledge, pedagogy, and contextual understanding that enables teachers to make informed instructional decisions. In the teaching of essay writing, PCK shapes how teachers design tasks, explain writing conventions, diagnose learners' errors, provide feedback, and select appropriate strategies to address students' needs. Borg's (2006) work further highlights how teachers' beliefs, experiences, and contextual constraints influence their classroom practices. Within this study, PCK provides a lens for analysing why teachers adopt particular instructional approaches and how their training and working conditions affect the quality of writing instruction.

Taken together, these three theoretical perspectives form a coherent and complementary framework. Process Writing Theory explains the cognitive stages where learners experience difficulties; Sociocultural Theory illuminates the social and interactive supports necessary for writing development; and Pedagogical Content Knowledge clarifies the role of teachers' expertise in mediating instruction within specific classroom contexts. Their integration allows the study to move beyond a narrow focus on either learner deficits or teacher practices alone, instead offering a holistic understanding of how cognitive, social, and pedagogical factors intersect to shape

essay-writing outcomes. By weaving these theoretical strands together, the framework provides both explanatory and analytical guidance for the study's mixed-methods design, informing the identification of learners' challenges, the examination of instructional strategies, and the interpretation of findings within the realities of Cameroonian secondary education.

Statement of the Problem

Essay writing occupies a central place in the teaching and assessment of English language learning in Cameroonian secondary schools. It is not only a core classroom activity but also a decisive component of high-stakes examinations such as the General Certificate of Education (GCE) and the Baccalaureate, where students' academic progression largely depends on their ability to express ideas clearly, coherently, and critically in written form. In principle, years of schooling should equip learners with the necessary skills to plan, organize, draft, and revise meaningful essays. In practice, however, many students continue to experience persistent difficulties in writing, resulting in weak compositions, low examination scores, and limited confidence in their communicative abilities.

Classroom observations and examination reports consistently reveal that a significant number of learners struggle to generate ideas, structure arguments logically, use appropriate vocabulary and grammar, and revise their work effectively. These challenges are often compounded by contextual realities such as multilingual interference from mother tongue, French, or Pidgin English, limited exposure to rich reading materials, and inadequate opportunities for guided writing practice. As a result, essay writing becomes a source of frustration rather than a tool for learning and self-expression.

At the same time, teachers are expected to address these challenges and support learners toward improved writing performance. Yet many teachers operate under difficult conditions characterized by overcrowded classrooms, limited instructional time, scarce teaching resources, and insufficient professional preparation specifically focused on writing pedagogy. Consequently, instructional practices may rely heavily on traditional, examination-oriented, and teacher-centred approaches that emphasise rote learning and product evaluation rather than the writing process itself. Such approaches may not adequately address the diverse and complex needs of learners.

Although both learners' difficulties and teachers' instructional practices are widely acknowledged within schools, there remains limited empirical research that systematically examines how these two dimensions interact within the Cameroonian secondary school context. In other words, it is not clearly understood how the challenges students face in essay writing relate to the strategies teachers employ, or whether current pedagogical practices effectively respond to learners' needs. Without this understanding, efforts to improve writing outcomes may remain fragmented or ineffective.

This gap in knowledge therefore necessitates an in-depth investigation into the nature of learners' difficulties in essay writing and the instructional practices adopted by teachers, with the aim of identifying areas for pedagogical improvement and informing teacher training, curriculum development, and classroom practice in Cameroonian secondary schools.

Research Questions

What difficulties do secondary school learners in Cameroon experience in Essay Writing?
What instructional Practices do teachers use to address learners' essay-writing difficulties?
What challenges do teachers encounter in implementing effective essay-writing instruction?
How can insights from learners' writing difficulties and teachers' instructional practices inform writing pedagogy and teacher education in Cameroon?

Methodology

Research Design

Research methodologically is designed to capture the complexity of the writing process in the Cameroonian context. A mixed-methods research design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) was utilised to examine learner difficulties and teacher instructional Practices. The quantitative component examines student essay scripts to quantify the frequency of writing difficulties, while the qualitative component investigates teacher perspectives on Pedagogical constraints, thereby enabling triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data.

Participants and Sampling.

A population of 180 terminalee students from the francophone subsystem of education, balanced by gender, alongside 9 teachers of Anglais who were directly responsible for teaching essay writing, were targeted for this study. Three public bilingual secondary schools were purposively selected. The schools are located in the Adamawa, North, and Far North regions of Cameroon. The schools selected for this study are: Lycée Bilingue de Maroua (Far North Region), Lycée Bilingue de Ngong (North Region) and Lycée Bilingue de Malang (Adamawa Region). The choice was influenced by the fact that students of this terminalee level participate in the Baccalauréat examination, which assesses essay writing.
Nine teachers with at least 5 years of experience teaching Anglais who have navigated the transition to the Competence-Based Approach were considered.

Data Collection Instruments

Quantitative data for students were collected through their essay scripts. Students were asked to write a 250-word essay on three essay types: Narrative, Expository, and Argumentative. The scripts were scored using a rubric adapted from the MINISEC standards, focusing on five key domains:

- Relevance to the situations (Task fulfilment)
- Organisation and Coherence (Paragraphing, Linkers).
- Vocabulary/Diction (L1/French/Pidgin interference).
- Grammatical accuracy
- Mechanical accuracy (spelling/Punctuation).

Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews and questionnaires from teachers. These questionnaires and interviews provided insights into challenges, feedback in large classes and the impact of L1/French/Pidgin English on formal writing.

Data Analysis Procedures.

For the quantitative data collected, the scripts were analysed using descriptive statistics. For qualitative data, teachers' interviews and questionnaires were transcribed and analysed using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). "Open Coding" was used to identify recurring themes, including a lack of time, large class sizes, exam pressure, and students' lack of interest in essay writing. These themes were used to explain the low scores in specific areas of the quantitative rubric.

Ethical Considerations

Permission was obtained from the school authorities. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that the anonymity of both students and teachers was maintained.

Findings and Discussion.

This section presents the study's results, correlating quantitative findings from students' scripts with qualitative insights from teacher interviews and questionnaires.

Table 1 : Quantitative Results on Narrative Essay.

The table below summarises the performance of 180 students across the five main domains of the analytical rubric.

Rubric Category	Score	Percentage
Relevance	100	55.5
Organization	46	25.5
Vocabulary	56	31.6
Grammar	65	36.1
Mechanics	86	47.7

The quantitative analysis of the topic "How I spent my Christmas holiday" highlights the challenges students face during the writing process. The data shows a concerning 25% in organisation, the lowest score. This suggests that, while students grasped the real-life context, they struggled to structure their thoughts logically. They managed to write clear introductions but struggled with paragraph organisation and coherence. In terms of relevance, they scored 55%. This ties closely to grammar and vocabulary, which scored 36.1% and 31.6%, respectively, indicating a lack of linguistic competence. Students often used incorrect tenses and sentence structures, repeated words, and showed interference from their first language, whether it be Pidgin or French. Lastly, mechanics scored 47.7%, reflecting frequent spelling mistakes and issues with punctuation and capitalisation.

Table 2 : Quantitative Results on Expository Essay.

Rubric Category	Score	Percentage
Relevance	115	63.8
Organization	40	22.2
Vocabulary	60	33.3
Grammar	53	29.4
Mechanics	90	50

The quantitative evaluation of students' scripts on the topic "What do you consider to be the major causes of road accidents in Cameroon?" shows that 63% of participants understood the task, but only 22.2% could generate and present ideas logically. Many students struggled to express their thoughts clearly and to vary their language. This resulted in numerous run-on sentences, agreement errors, and punctuation errors. The scores reflect this, with grammar and vocabulary expression at 35% and 31%, respectively, while organisation received the lowest score of 22.2%. Mechanics, which includes spelling and punctuation, scored 50%.

Table 3: Students' Quantitative Results on Argumentative Essay

Rubric Category	Score	Percentage
Relevance	96	53.3
Organization	35	19.4
Vocabulary	40	22.2
Grammar	45	25
Mechanics	63	35

The quantitative evaluation of students' performance on the topic "Life in the village is better than life in the city. Do you agree?" consistently shows very low scores in organisation, vocabulary, and grammar. The reported success rates in grammar were 19.4%, 22.2%, and 25%, respectively. Participants faced challenges in organising and generating ideas, in constructing well-structured, logically argued points, and in varying their language. There was also noticeable interference from their first language, whether French or Pidgin, as well as problems with sentence construction.

With regards to mechanics, only 35% of participants were able to spell accurately, punctuate and use capitalisation correctly. In a nutshell, participants found argumentative essays more difficult than narrative and expository essays.

Qualitative findings

The insights from questionnaires and semi-structured interviews indicate that teachers use various strategies, including modelling essay structures, guiding practice, and encouraging peer collaboration and feedback. However, they also pointed out significant challenges, including large class sizes, limited instructional time, curricula focused on exams, and a noticeable lack of student interest. One teacher shared, "With 95 students in my Terminale class, I can only give one essay assignment. If I assign more, I won't be able to cover everything in my syllabus." This situation sheds light on the ongoing issues with students' performance in organisation and grammar. Without consistent feedback, students struggle to correct their writing habits. Additionally, teachers highlighted linguistic challenges, as students often juggle between three or four languages. They think in French, then switch to Pidgin English or their native languages. For instance, when they write phrases like "I go to the fete" or "The route don gatter," they are translating directly from a structure that makes sense in their minds but doesn't quite fit in English.

The study's findings also indicate that learners' difficulties with essay writing are partly due to interference from their first languages, particularly Pidgin English and French. This linguistic background affects their writing in various ways; for example, grammar and sentence-structure issues often arise from direct translation from their first languages or from Pidgin into English. Many students tend to form sentences based on the patterns of their home language, Pidgin, which can lead to mistakes in tense, word order, and agreement. This observation aligns with Ngefac's analysis of language use in Cameroon, which emphasises the significant role of multilingual practices in shaping English communication, both spoken and written. Ngefac argues that Cameroonian English is influenced by ongoing interactions with indigenous languages such as Pidgin and French, leading speakers to blend linguistic structures from these languages in their everyday communication.

The linguistic environment sheds light on why many learners tend to incorporate structures from Pidgin English, French, or local languages into their formal English writing. When considering the first research question, these findings can be interpreted through key theoretical frameworks underpinning the study. As posited by Flower and Hayes (1981) in the Process Writing Theory, writing requires the integration of planning, organising, and revising, which are complex cognitive processes. The struggle learners face in generating and developing ideas, coupled with the prevalence of brief, poorly developed essays, reflects a lack of systematic engagement with these foundational stages of writing. In line with Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978), such difficulties may be exacerbated by a lack of guided instruction and scaffolding within learners' Zones of Proximal Development, limiting opportunities to internalise effective planning and ideation strategies.

The disjointed structure of many essays, evident in weak introductions, poorly structured paragraphs, and abrupt conclusions, can be interpreted as a consequence of limited explicit instruction in text organisation, as Hyland (2003) emphasises. From a pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) perspective (Shulman, 1986), if teachers do not possess or enact strategies that make organisational principles explicit, students are less likely to develop the schemata necessary for coherence and clarity. Furthermore, widespread issues with grammar and vocabulary, such as tense errors and repetition, align with Silva's (1993) observation that second-language writers must balance the demands of content development with linguistic accuracy. In multilingual educational contexts such as Cameroon, these linguistic challenges are magnified, corroborating the relevance of integrating both process and sociocultural dimensions into instructional practices. The frequency of mechanical errors, including spelling and punctuation, signals a lack of emphasis on revision and editing, highlighting the continued tendency to prioritise product-oriented approaches over process-driven pedagogy. Graham and Perin (2007) demonstrate that student writing outcomes improve when drafting and revising are integral to instruction, reinforcing the need to align classroom practices more closely with theoretical insights from Process Writing Theory and PCK to address the complex, multifaceted difficulties that Cameroonian students face.

Regarding the second research question, the results indicate that teachers often lean towards product-oriented teaching methods, primarily focusing on correcting mistakes in final essays. Unfortunately, students don't get much help with planning, drafting, or revising their writing. Badger and White (2000) suggest that effective writing instruction should blend process and genre approaches to help students grasp how writing evolves.

Moreover, teacher feedback tends to focus on grammar and spelling, often overlooking content and organisation. Hattie and Timperley (2007) emphasise that effective feedback should help learners improve their performance rather than simply pointing out errors. When feedback is limited to corrections, students miss out on valuable support for improving the quality of their writing. Lastly, teachers seldom provide clear guidance on essay structure and genre differences, which adds to students' confusion about various essay types. This aligns with Hyland's (2004) findings that genre instruction is vital for developing academic writing skills.

As for the third research question, the findings show that teachers face significant hurdles due to large class sizes, making it tough for them to give individual attention, track writing progress, and provide thorough feedback. The limited instructional time also forces them to focus on exam content instead of practice and revision activities. Additionally, challenges arise from the influence of the mother tongue, Pidgin English, and French, as well as students' limited language backgrounds. Finally, a lack of teaching materials and inadequate training in writing pedagogy pose further obstacles. Some schools are short on textbooks, guides, and instructional resources, and the limited professional training specifically aimed at teaching writing makes it hard for teachers to implement process-based writing instruction effectively.

Insights into the challenges learners face in writing, along with teachers' instructional methods, offer valuable guidance for enhancing writing education and teacher training in Cameroon. These

findings highlight learners' needs and the instructional gaps that must be addressed to boost essay-writing success. To start, when promoting process-oriented writing instruction, we need to shift our focus from the end product alone to the entire writing process. This means helping learners develop their ideas and organise them effectively. Writing instruction should guide students through essential stages such as brainstorming, drafting, revising, and editing. Teacher training programs should emphasise teaching writing as a process rather than just preparing students for final exams.

Moreover, to enhance feedback and assessment practices, teacher education programs should equip teachers to provide well-rounded feedback that covers ideas, organisation, clarity, and language accuracy. Additionally, it's important to recognise the influence of local languages, Pidgin English, English, and French, which underscores the need for writing pedagogy in Cameroon to embrace its multilingual context. Teacher training should focus on strategies that help students transition from informal spoken varieties to formal academic English. Continuous professional development programs can also support teachers in learning modern writing pedagogy, including process writing, genre-based instruction, and effective feedback techniques. Lastly, providing teachers with instructional resources such as teaching materials, writing guides, and scaffolding tools tailored for large classes is crucial.

In summary, the study indicates that enhancing essay writing in Cameroon requires a dual approach: strengthening classroom writing pedagogy and improving teacher education programs to ensure that teachers are well-prepared to meet learners' linguistic and instructional needs in multilingual classrooms. The results of this study highlight some crucial policy recommendations for enhancing writing instruction in secondary schools across Cameroon. To start, educational authorities should focus on strengthening writing instruction in the secondary school curriculum by prioritising process-based approaches across various writing genres. Additionally, teacher education programs and in-service training should include specialised training in writing pedagogy, equipping teachers with effective strategies tailored for multilingual classrooms. Lastly, implementing policies that aim to reduce oversized class sizes and ensure access to adequate instructional materials will empower teachers to offer meaningful support and feedback in writing.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine the difficulties learners encounter in essay writing and the instructional practices teachers employ in Cameroonian secondary schools, with the goal of identifying the factors that constrain effective writing instruction and students' academic success. The findings reveal that essay writing remains a persistent challenge for many learners. Students frequently struggle to generate and develop ideas, organise their thoughts coherently, apply grammatical rules accurately, use appropriate vocabulary, and manage the mechanical aspects of writing. These difficulties are further compounded by linguistic interference arising from their first language, French, and Pidgin English, reflecting the complex multilingual realities of the Cameroonian classroom.

Beyond learner-related challenges, the study also highlights the significant role of instructional practices in shaping writing outcomes. In many classrooms, writing instruction tends to prioritise the correction of final products rather than sustained guidance through the stages of the writing process. As a result, learners often receive limited opportunities for planning, drafting, revising, and receiving formative feedback—practices that are essential for meaningful improvement. Structural constraints such as large class sizes, limited instructional time, scarce teaching resources, and insufficient specialised training in writing pedagogy further restrict teachers' capacity to provide individualised and process-oriented support.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the difficulties observed in students' writing cannot be attributed solely to learner deficits but must be understood within a broader instructional and contextual framework. Writing development is shaped by the dynamic interaction between learners' skills, teachers' pedagogical knowledge, and the conditions under which teaching and learning occur. Therefore, improving essay-writing performance requires more than increased practice or stricter evaluation; it calls for a fundamental rethinking of how writing is taught.

The study concludes that strengthening writing pedagogy through targeted teacher preparation, continuous professional development, and supportive educational policies is essential. Emphasising process-based instruction, scaffolding strategies, collaborative learning, and constructive feedback can create more responsive and effective classrooms. By addressing both learner needs and instructional realities, Cameroonian secondary schools can foster greater confidence, competence, and success in students' writing, ultimately enhancing their overall academic achievement.

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