Investigation of Writing Habits of Primary School Teachers*

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Abstract

Primary school holds an important place in the acquisition of writing skills. Writing attitudes and habits of teachers are influential in writing education provided by primary school teachers during this period. This study aims to examine the writing habits of primary school teachers. To this end, writing habits of teachers were investigated in terms of the use of writing skills in daily life, types of writing texts, contribution of writing to the professional life, teacher participation in classroom writing activities and digital medias where teachers write. The case study, a qualitative research method, was used in the study. Participants of the study consisted of 35 primary school teachers who worked in primary schools in Bartın (*n*= 22) and Ordu (*n*= 14). The semi-structured interview form created by taking the expert opinion was used in the research as the data collection tool. The obtained data were analyzed using descriptive analysis technique. In the study, it was found that 57% of primary school teachers did not use writing skills in their daily life or that they used writing skills occasionally, used writing skills the most in taking notes or poetry, 61% of them participated in classroom writing activities and used Word and social media to write on digital platforms.

Keywords: Primary school teacher, writing skill, writing habit

Introduction

Writing is a complex and difficult skill that requires the mastery of different types of knowledge (Flower & Hayes, 1981). That writing is a difficult skill brings some benefits with it. Knowing what to write and how to write influences the success of individuals in academic and social life positively (Bruning & Horn, 2000).

Today, writing is an indispensable skill for most people. Since writing is a valuable means of communication, learning and self-expression; those who do not have adequate writing skills can face disadvantages and limited educational and employment opportunities (Graham et al., 2012).

In the writing process, many language components such as linguistic knowledge, punctuation, spelling and vocabulary must be presented in written. Also in writing; planning, drafting, forming, editing, revising and evaluation processes are required. For this reason, more effort is needed to create meaning through writing compared to other language skills (Widosari et al., 2017).

In particular, teaching writing to students at primary school level is vitally important (Bulut, 2017). Although writing is a complex skill it can be an appealing, interesting and even inspiring activity as long as it is learned through social interaction, taking into account the characteristics of the students. Students need an effective guidance in this process (Widosari et al., 2017).

Teachers should be a model to improve the writing skills of students (Graham, 2006). However, the first thing that teachers should understand in order to improve the writing skills of their students is that what needs to be taught primarily is not teaching how to write, handwriting, spelling, punctua-tion, grammar, and similar mechanic aspects. Teachers have two important functions to guide children in writing: to show their own involvement to teach writing and to help children write on their own (Smith, 1983).

When setting a model their students in writing, teachers should pay attention to create a supportive and motivating environment (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1998), to show how writing can affect daily lives of students (Troia & Graham, 2002) to share especially what they write as drafts with students (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1998), to introduce effective writing strategies (Troia & Graham, 2002), to teach different kinds of writing (Graham, 2006) and to leave the writing responsibility from teacher to the student gradually (Graham et al., 2012). Today, digital tools have become indispensable for our lives, and accordingly the teacher's being a model in writing teaching process has been subject to change.

Writing has shifted from a pen and paper activity to technology-focused work (Peterson-Karlan, 2011). In order to maximize the writing performance of our students, there is a need for teaching practices that combine ICT [Information and Communications Technology] and cooperative writing. Students who write on a computer are more involved in peer work and share their work more easily with each other (Smedt & Keer, 2014). Despite the potential value added, ICT has not yet become an indivisible part of teaching writing (Cutler & Graham, 2008).

Cognitive research in the writing field has either traditionally focused on the educational practices teachers use to improve the composition skills of their students, or the authors' use of this skill (Pajares, Johnson, & Usher, 2007). Nowadays, it is needed to widen research on whether or not writing has turned into a habit as a skill as well as writing skills on digital

platforms.

Writing habits include the use of writing skill in everyday life (Culter & Graham, 2008), different types of writing texts (Graham, 2006) and beliefs regarding writing (Draper, Barksdale-Ladd, & Radencich, 2000). This must be taken into consideration when writing habits of the individuals are identified. Below are some research on writing habits of teacher and teacher candidates.

Writing practices of primary school teachers across the United States have been investigated. About two-thirds of the teachers who participated in the study stated that the teacher training courses they took in college did not have a significant effect on teaching them writing. They also stated that they wrote only 15 minutes a day and that their students took only 25 minutes a day to write (Gilbert & Graham, 2010). A similar result is seen in the study by Culter and Graham (2008). In their study, Draper, Barksdale-Ladd, and Radencich (2000) asked prospective teachers what they could do in the future when they become teachers in order to instill writing love and habit in their students. Majority of the prospective teachers who participated in the study failed to provide effective suggestions to promote writing love and habit.

Habits and literacy skills of teachers influence their views on literacy teaching and how they administer literacy education (Benevides & Peterson, 2010; Fang, 2006). There is no way to help teachers regard themselves as authors if it does not interest children. For this reason, the first responsibility of teachers is to demonstrate to the students that writing is interesting, possible and valuable. However, if the teacher does not think writing is interesting, possible and valuable, there is no way to help children write (Smith, 1983).

Literacy experts specify that primarily teachers should have the writing habit in order to enhance the writing skills of students (Draper, Barksdale-Ladd & Radencich, 2000). Some researchers (Bowie, 1996; Decker, 1986) argue that teachers who are unsure of their writing skills conduct less writing activities with their students and that they are less involved into these activities. For this reason, writing habits of teachers, especially primary school teachers who play a key role in helping students gain writing love and habit, should be investigated.

The aim of this study was to examine the writing habits of primary school teachers. In order to achieve this aim the following questions were addressed:

1. To what extent do primary school teachers use their writing skills outside their work life?
2. What are the types of writing texts that classroom teachers write?
3. What are the contributions of writing skills of primary school teachers to their profession?
4. How is the participation of primary school teachers in classroom writing activities?
5. On which digital media or programs do primary school teachers write?

Method

Research model

The model of the research is a case study which is one of the qualitative research designs. Case study method enables a researcher to closely examine the data within a specific context. Case studies, in their true essence, explore and investigate contemporary real-life phenomenon

through detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions, and their relationships (Zainal, 2007). The case to be selected as the research subject may be a person, a student, an administrator, a program, or a group such as a class, school, community (Creswell, 2011). In the case study design, it is aimed to investigate the case deeply in its own flow and in its real environment and to describe it in a comprehensive way (Yin, 1994). In the present study, since the writing habits of the primary school were studied in depth by the data obtained through the interview administered in the study, they were investigated in the case study design. Yin (1994) divides types of case studies into three as descriptive, exploratory and explanatory. The present study is a descriptive case study because writing habits of primary school teachers are described according to various variables.

Participants

35 primary school teachers working in primary schools in Bartın (n= 22) and Ordu (n= 14) make up the study group of the study. The study group was determined by the homogeneous sampling method, one of the purposeful sampling methods. Purposeful sampling allows for in-depth research by selecting cases rich in information based on the aim of the study. It is preferred when it is aimed to study one or more special cases satisfying certain criteria or having certain characteristics (Büyüköztürk et al., 2013). Descriptive data on the demographic characteristics (gender, seniority, level of education) of the teachers included in the study group are presented in the table below.

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics regarding the study group*

Gender	f	%
Female	19	54
Male	16	46
Working Years in the Profession		
1-5 years	5	14
5-10 years	9	26
10-15 years	11	32
15-20 years	6	17
20 years and above	4	11
Level of Education		
Bachelor's	30	86
Master's	5	14

When Table 1 is examined, it is seen that 54% (f= 19) of the primary school teachers in the study group are female and 46% (f= 16) are male. In addition, teachers in the study group consist of the teachers (32%) who have maximum 10-15 years service period. The table reveals that a significant majority (86%) of the primary school teachers have a bachelor's degree, while the ratio of teachers with master's degrees is 14%.

Data collection tool and data collection process

Semi-structured interview form was used as the data collection tool in the research. It was determined that the most suitable data collection technique that could be used to find answers to specified research questions was the interview technique. This is because interview techniques are highly effective in obtaining information about experiences, attitudes, opinions, complaints, emotions and beliefs of the individuals (Yıldırım & Şimşek 2011). The interview form was prepared based on the relevant literature (Culter & Graham, 2008; Draper, Barksdale-Ladd & Radencich, 2000; Graham, 2006). The questions on the

interview form are:

1. Do you use your writing skills in everyday life other than work?
2. What type of things do you write? Please explain why you write such kinds of things.
3. What are the contributions of writing to the teaching profession? Please explain.
4. Do you participate in classroom writing activities? How?
5. What digital media or programs do you write on? Why? You can specify one or more.

A preliminary application was carried out in using the interview form. Other than the teachers who participated in the study, questions in the form were asked to five primary school teachers and the understandability and the answerability of the questions were checked.

The research data were obtained by the researcher via interview form prepared in writing upon explaining the aim of the study and that confidentiality is reserved and participation is on voluntary basis.

Data analysis

The data obtained in the study were analyzed using the MAXQDA qualitative analysis program. The creation of codes and categories in MAXQDA is controlled by the user, who can create codes before, during or after the material is analyzed. The codes are presented in a hierarchical, tree-like, structure that allows several levels of codes to be indexed (Oliveira et al., 2015). The descriptive analysis technique was utilized in the analysis of the data with the MAXQDA program. This analysis technique was employed because writing habits of teachers were described according to the themes prepared previously within this scope. The data were organized taking into consideration the questions on the interview form prepared within scope of the themes based on the conceptual framework. These themes are as follows; use of writing skills in daily life, types of texts written by teachers, contribution of the writing skills, participation of classroom writing activities, writing in digital media. The basic points in the statements in the interview form were examined taking into account the frequency and percentage values. Care has been taken to protect the context within the meaning units and individual units were double-coded if they contained information about more than one category. After separating interviews into sections, the units of meaning were grouped into categories. In addition, direct quotations were taken from the interviews and interpreted. Codes (T1, T2, T3,…T22) were used when the opinions of the teachers were provided.

Validity and reliability

The data collection tool used in the research was prepared based on the relevant literature review (Culter & Graham, 2008; Graham, 2006; Draper, Barksdale-Ladd & Radencich, 2000. It was also presented to the expert opinion and shaped by being tested in trial interviews. Three expert opinions were consulted for the questions in the interview form. In line with the expert opinions, the form was finally established. In addition, the obtained data were coded by two different experts and an inter-coder reliability analysis was performed. In this process, Inter-Coder Reliability = [Agreement / (Agreement + Disagreement)] X 100 formula (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was utilized and the inter-coder reliability percentage was calculated as 88%. In addition, direct quotations from the participant comments were included. Finally, the research report was examined by independent experts for confirmation and the compatibility between the data and findings and interpretations was revealed.

Findings

The data obtained in the research were analyzed through the questions in the interview form within the conceptual framework. The research findings are presented in the tables according to the order of the interview questions.

Use of writing skill in daily life

The data regarding the use of writing skills by primary school teachers other than their profession are presented in Table 2:

Table 2. *The use of writing skills by primary school teachers in daily life*

	f	%	Participants
I use it	15	43	T1, T3, T5, T7, T9, T13, T16, T17, T18, T19, T20, T29, T30, T32, T33
I occasionally use it	16	46	T2, T6, T8, T10, T11, T12, T14, T15, T21, T22, T23, T25, T26, T27, T34, T35
I don't use it	4	11	T4, T24, T28, T31

When Table 2 is examined, it is seen that 43% of the teachers use the writing skill in daily life, 46% use it occasionally and 11% do not use it. This indicates that more than half (57%) of the teachers who participated in the study do not use writing skills other than their professions or use them occasionally. The views of some of the teachers are as follows;

> *"I use writing skills in everyday life. While filling out a class folder, writing a message, doing helping a child do their homework, taking notes … " (T1)*

> *"I use the writing skills in the classroom when I apply the dictation method in writing activities, when I express my thoughts on social media, when I comment and when I do activities with the students." (T13)*

> *"I love writing. Sometimes I feel like writing, I get a paper and pen, I would like to write what crosses my mind. Sometimes this happens to be a child's story, sometimes it's a situation worth experiencing. " (T33)*

An example of the opinions of those who used it occasionally;

> *"I use it when I need it, I do not use it very often." (T27)*

An example of the opinions of those who say they do not use it;

> *"I don't use it. Because, in my life, unfortunately I work on something other than my job."(T28)*

Types of texts written by teachers and their reasons

Within the scope of the research, it was aimed to identify types of texts written by primary school teachers and why they preferred these types of writing texts. The results obtained from the analysis are presented in Figure 1:

When Figure 1 is examined, it can be seen that primary school teachers wrote the most while taking notes (27%), writing poems (23%) and writing daily things (11%). The less common types preferred by teachers are stories (8%), free writings (6%), tales (4%), memories (4%) and opinion writings (4%). This indicates that the teachers do not write much in the types that require high-level thinking processes (opinion writing, etc.). 13% of the teachers stated that they write routine writings (writing on the class board, writing on the computer, etc.) that do bear literary type characteristics. Since some teachers stated a few types of
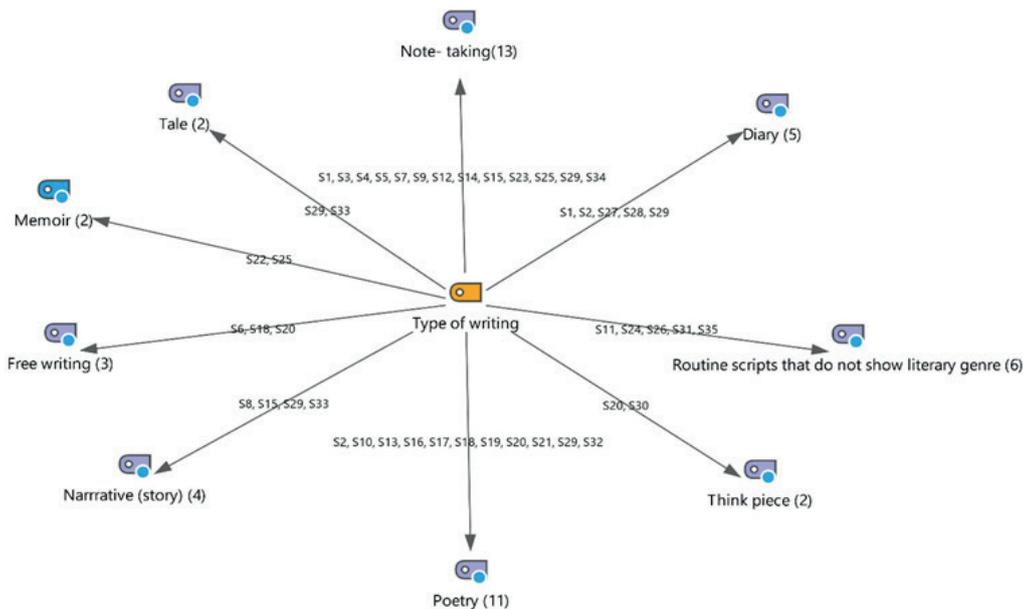
Figure 1. Types of Things Written by Primary School Teachers

texts in their views, the frequency of the types obtained as a result of the analysis was found to be higher than the number of interviewed primary school teachers. The views of some of the teachers are as follows;

"I rather write short stories to help my students" (T8)

"I like to write poems. I think that poems are a good way to reflect instant feelings. "(T10)

"I usually write memoirs. Because it becomes easier and fluent to describe and remember the memories. Memoirs are not boring. They are short writings and quickly affect the person reading them. "(T22)

"I write diaries. I can express myself better. I prefer it because of a more comfortable language and naturalness. "(T28)

One of the teachers stated that they did not write in different types;

"I use writing skills as little as possible to save time." (T35)

The contribution of the Writing Skill to Teaching Profession

In the scope of the research, the contribution of the writing skills of primary school teachers to the profession of was examined. The findings are presented in Figure 2.

When Figure 2 is examined, it is seen primary school teachers stated that their writing skills contributed the most to the profession regarding communication (34%) and being a role model to students (34%). They also said that writing skills were helpful in terms of punctuation and spelling (10%), development of thought and imagination (8%), permanence of knowledge (3%), reading and comprehension (3%) and self-confidence (3%). Two of the teachers stated that writing would have no contribution to their profession.
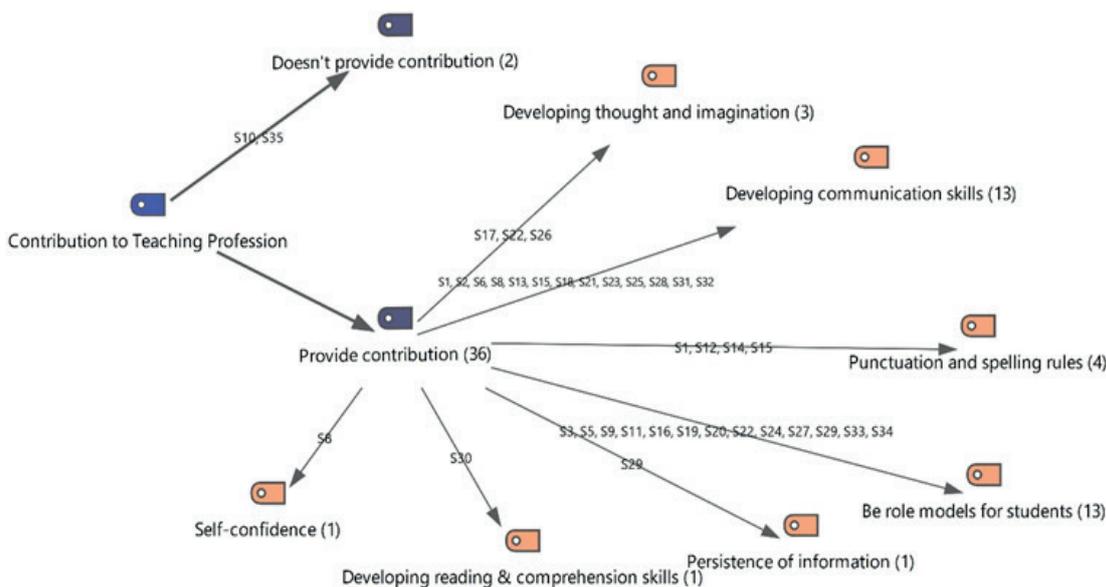

Figure 2. The Contribution of Writing Skills of Primary School Teachers to the Teaching Profession
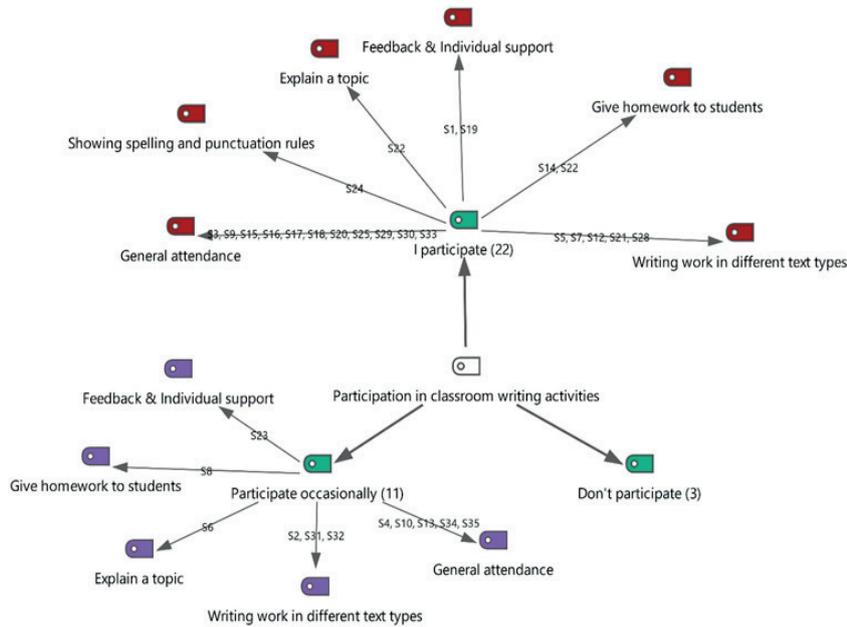
Figure 3. The Participation of Primary School Teachers in In-Class Writing Activities

The views of some of the teachers are as follows:

> *"Teachers should pay attention to the writing beauty, the content beauty, and the richness of expression, as they will set an example to every student. This will ensure that the students show a positive development. "(T5)*
> *"I think writing actually increases communication skills of a person. I also think it will contribute to the professional development. "(T23)*
>
> *"Concerning teaching, I think that writing will provide contribution. Because I think that a teacher who does not like to write cannot raise a student who likes to write. I make sure my knowledge becomes permanent by writing. I read the things I write frequently, and I increase the permanence of my knowledge. "(T29)*
>
> *"As I write, I pay attention to spelling and punctuation rules. For this reason, I think writing provides contribution. "(T12)*

One of the teachers stated as follows that writing did not contribute:

> *"I do not think it will make a direct contribution. I think that people from every professional group can use it as a tool. "(T10)*

Participation of primary school teachers in classroom writing activities

Within the scope of the research, the participation of primary school teachers in classroom writing activities was examined. The obtained data are shown in Figure 3:

When Figure 3 is examined, the participation of primary school teachers who participated in the research in classroom writing activities is as: I participate (61%), I occasionally participate (31%) and I do not participate (8%). This shows that more than half of teachers participate in writing activities. Participation of the informants into classroom writing activities and occasional participation are divided into sub-units. These sub-units are writing exercises in different types of texts, assigning students homework, feedback and individual support, explaining a subject, demonstration of spelling and punctuation rules, and

general participation. When opinions of teachers were examined, opinions of those who did not indicate how they participated in classroom writing activities were evaluated in the general participation category.

The views of some of the teachers are as follows;

> *"I usually participate into classroom writing activities. I walk through the classroom and examine what students write and give feedback. " (T19)*
>
> *"In general, I write on the class board if I intend to assign something to the students or to explain a topic at the beginning of the lesson" (T22)*
>
> *"Yes, I participate. My participation in writing activities is more interesting-arising. "(T9)*
>
> *"In order to improve the writing habits of the students, I administer different kinds of writing activities. From time to time, I participate into the activities with them. "(T31)*

Opinion of one of the teachers who do not participate into classroom writing activities is as follows;

> *"Because my hand-writing is ugly, I usually do good writing activities by projecting them on the board from the computer. For this reason, I do not participate in many classroom writing activities. "(T11)*

When the view of this teacher is evaluated, it is possible to conclude that the teacher presents writings materials that he/she created by using digital tools instead of writing them on the class board or the teacher folders. Today, many teachers manage the writing process this way (Purcell, Buchanan, & Friedrich, 2013).

Use of digital media by primary school teachers to write

Within the scope of the research, the tendency of primary school teachers to write on digital media was examined. The data obtained from this interview are given in Figure 4:

When Figure 4 is examined, it is seen that primary school teachers write the most on Word (35%) and social media (28%) as digital media. They also write articles on Excel (16%) and messaging programs (12%). Teachers stated
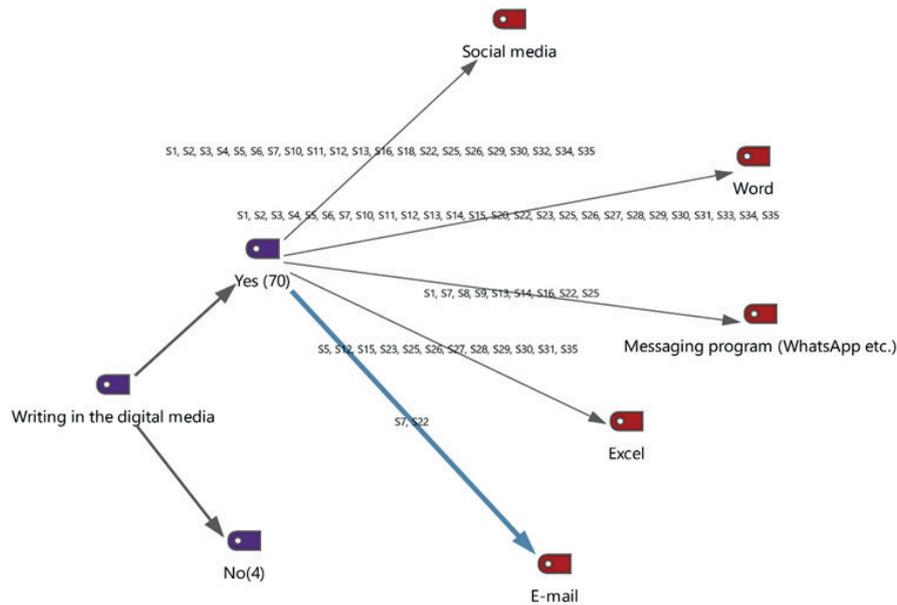
Figure 4. Use of Digital Media by Primary School Teachers to Write

that they wrote the least via e-mail (3%). Six percent of informants said they did not write on any digital media. Writing in digital media is not just writing on Word and social media. Teachers should use the writing skills in these settings for educational purposes.

Views of some of the teachers are as follows;

> I use word for homework, exam etc... On social media, I use my Facebook account actively. (T5)

> "I use it to prepare a homework on Word, to prepare a table in Excel. I write on Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp to share my feelings and thoughts. "(T25)

> "Digitally, I write things on Word and social media. I communicate with parents and my friends through social media. I make use of Word while working on things related to my profession. "(T27)

One of the teachers who did not write on any digital media stated that:

> "I do not like writing on digital media much. I usually write on paper because I am used to."(T19)

Results and Discussion

More than half (57%) of the primary school teachers who participated in the study do not use their writing skills in their daily lives or use it occasionally. Erdogan (2017) stated in his research that primary school teachers did not allocate enough time to write in their daily lives. Similar results can be seen in studies by Gilbert and Graham (2010) and Culter and Graham (2008). In the study by Levin (1993), it was found that of the 67 teacher candidates, 42 (63%) had negative feelings about writing and wrote things only when necessary. The results of the present study and the results of these referenced studies show similarity. Primary school education is of utmost importance in the acquisition and development of writing skills. In particular, primary school teachers need to use their writing skills effectively to set a model their students.
It is seen that the primary school teachers who participated in the study write the most in the form of taking notes (27%), poems (23%) and diaries (11%). Primary school teachers write the least tales, memoirs and opinion

articles. Whiteman (2010) notes that the use of a single writing style is against the writing habits of each of us. Individuals write different types and standards of things based on their writing habits. Cutler and Graham (2008) examined the writing skills of 174 primary school teachers at the national level in terms of various variables. The research found that the most common writing activities of teachers include writing stories, letters, diaries and poetry. In another study, Gilbert and Graham (2010) state that primary school teachers rarely use different writing types to persuade or inform. When these studies are compared with the results of the present research, it is seen that the teachers show similarity with regard to poetry and diary writing. Students must learn each and every one of these skills so that they can choose the most appropriate type for their writing task (Zumbrunn, 2010). Serra (2014) states that the memoir and diary writing of students are suitable for the characteristics of young children. It is more interesting for students to write their own experiences and life. Teachers should encourage students to write based upon their own lives during the writing education process. In addition, teachers should be able to write informative texts such as articles and opinion essays that require high-level thinking processes and introduce writing processes of these texts to their students.

When the opinions of primary school teachers regarding the contribution of their writing habits to their profession are examined; it is seen they reported that writing habits contributed in terms of communication (34%) and role modeling for students (34%). They also said that writing skills contributed to the demonstration and improvement of spelling and punctuation rules, enhancing thinking and imagination, achieving permanence of knowledge, reading and comprehension, and self-confidence. Writing skill is a communication skill (Graham et al., 2012). For this reason, the development of writing will bring along the development of communication skills. Also, a teacher with good writing skills will be a good model for their students (Graham, 2006).

61% of teachers participate in class writing activities. These participation situations are writing exercises in different types of texts, assigning homework to students, providing feedback and individual support, explaining a

topic, showing spelling and punctuation rules, and general participation. Teachers should participate in classroom writing activities and introduce different types of texts to their students and model how they will write. Moreover, feedback is one of the most important components of the writing process (Paulus, 1999; Ruegg, 2015). Teachers generally fail to provide enough feedback to their students with the concern of keeping up with the syllabus. However, providing feedback to the students within the writing process will help students identify and correct their mistakes in writing. Furthermore, today, the widespread use of digital tools also affects the participation of primary school teachers in classroom writing activities (Purcell, Buchanan, & Friedrich, 2013).

When the use of digital media by primary school teachers to write is examined, it was seen that they wrote on Word and social media most. They use their digital writing skills the least to write emails. Today, the widespread use of digital tools in various areas renders it compulsory to use these tools in the educational process. For this reason, teachers need to be equipped with advanced writing skills on different digital environments and programs. The use of writing skills only on Office programs or social media environments does not meet the requirements of the technology age. Teachers should create diverse blogs on digital media, share their writings and present web-based writing applications to their students. Additionally, strategy teaching and collaborative writing processes must be integrated with ICT (Smedt & Keer, 2014).

In this study, writing habits of teachers were investigated within the scope the use of writing skills by primary school teachers in daily life, types of things they write, contributions of writing to writing professions, participation of primary school teachers in classroom activities, and writing skills on digital environments. This research is limited only to the views of primary school teachers. When a general evaluation is made in this context, it can be said that primary school teachers do not have adequate writing habits. In order to obtain comparable results, quantitative and qualitative studies must be carried out in the field. In the further studies, teacher candidates or teachers of different branches can be sampled, and the effect of demographics on writing habits such as age, gender, and education level can be statistically reported as well. In addition, applied studies aiming to improve the writing habits of the teachers can be conducted.

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