

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This study aimed to examine what beliefs senior high school EFL teachers in Taiwan held towards writing instruction and their classroom practices of the beliefs. Whether beliefs and practices were consistent and the factors influencing the inconsistency were dealt with. In addition, the teachers' background experiences were examined to see if teachers with different background tended to believe and practice in a different way. To get a fuller picture of the teachers' views, the researcher adopted both quantitative and qualitative methods. In this chapter, the participants, instruments, procedures, and data analysis are presented.

3.1 Participants

The research targets were senior high school English teachers teaching in Taipei city. Five teachers there were invited for the pilot study to examine the questionnaire statements and the interview questions. In the formal study, 199 questionnaires were sent to 14 senior high school teachers in 10 Taipei districts on November 19, 2005. Each teacher was in charge of distributing and gathering the questionnaires at his or her school. By January 6, 2006, altogether 171 were collected, with a return rate of 86%. The background information of the respondents is presented in Appendix B.

Among the 171 respondents, those who were willing to participate in the follow-up interviews were selected and contacted for the follow-up interviews. Altogether, six teachers were interviewed. The interviewed teachers were pseudonymous as interviewees ID 1, ID 2, ID 3, ID 4, ID 5, and ID 6 to ensure their privacy. Among the interviewees, 2 were males and 4 were females. Their ages ranged

from 30 to 47. The period of their experience as senior high school teachers was 5 to 15 years. Three had a bachelor's degree (BA), one was a graduate student, and the other two got their MAs. As for their majors, five of them majored in English, and the other one was majoring in English teaching in graduate school. Most of them attended workshops on writing instruction in the past three years. However, only one of them was aware of and followed the guidelines for writing instruction issued by the Ministry of Education. The background information of the interviewees is also presented in Appendix B.

3.2 Instruments

Choosing suitable instruments makes this study possible. Research on teachers' beliefs and even their classroom practices in Taiwan revealed that the most frequently adopted instruments were questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations (Chang, 2003; Chang, 2004; Chang, 2005; Chen, 2005; Chiou, 2003; Chung, 2003; Hsieh, 2005; Hsieh, 2002; Kuo, 2004; Lai, S. J., 2004; Lai, Y. J., 2004; Liao, 2003; Lin, 2003; Liu, 2004; Lu, 2003; Nien, 2002; Wu, 2002). In this study, classroom observations were not conducted because of limited time. Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were chosen as the research instruments. Questionnaires were adopted to enable the researcher to gather data from a large amount of subjects by way of a limited set of questions, and thus to facilitate "comparison and statistical aggregation of the data" (Patton, 1990, p. 14). However, questionnaires have been criticized as pre-determining options and thus limiting a wide range of possibilities. As Patton (1991) suggested, "the application of questionnaires or standardized personality and attitude measures is not likely to reveal...highly contextual information" (p. 392). Therefore, a semi-structured interview was also included to get

a fuller picture of teachers' beliefs and practices in writing instruction. Through these two instruments, quantitative data and qualitative data were both gathered.

In reviewing research on teachers' beliefs, Kagan (1992) pointed out that the focuses of research on teachers' beliefs included conceptions of the field to be taught, appropriate instructional activities, goals, forms of evaluation, and the nature of student learning. Comparing the above focuses with Calderhead's (1996) opinions about the areas in which teachers held significant beliefs, the researcher included the following four dimensions in this study: (1) the goals of writing instruction, (2) the roles of the teachers, (3) the content of writing instruction, and (4) the teaching procedures in writing instruction. The four issues were included in the two instruments, questionnaires and interviews, to probe teachers' beliefs and practices respectively. The goals served as the basis for the instruction. Based on the goals, teachers played certain roles in introducing the content of the curriculum and in holding activities to guide students to learn.

3.2.1 The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was formed based on a number of studies on teachers' beliefs and practices (Chang, 2005; Hsu, 2005; Kuo, 2004; Lai, S. J., 2004; Lai, Y. J., 2004; Lockhart, 1996). Moreover, the researcher also referred to the review of literature on writing instruction. The questionnaire surveyed teachers' background information and their views on writing instruction. There are 54 items, which can be divided into four sections: (1) teachers' background information, (2) beliefs in writing instruction, (3) practices in writing instruction, and (4) difficulties encountered in writing instruction.

The first section, containing 7 items, from items 1 to 7, elicited information about teachers' background information, including demographic background (items 1

and 2), year(s) of teaching in senior high school (item 3), educational background (items 4 and 5), workshop attending experience (item 6), and knowledge about the curriculum guidelines (item 7). These items were in the form of multiple choices. This section was beneficial to further comparison of teachers' beliefs and practices (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1

The Framework of the Questionnaire—Section One

Category	Subcategory	Items
background information	demographic background	1-2
	year(s) of teaching in senior high school	3
	educational background	4-5
	workshop attending experience	6
	knowledge about the curriculum guidelines	7

In section two, there were 24 items, items B1 to B24. Five-point Likert-type scale was used for teachers to indicate their agreement or disagreement on statements B1 to B23, with choices ranging from *strongly disagree*, *disagree*, *no comments*, *agree*, to *strongly agree*. Item B24 required the teachers to rank their rating priority. The statements in this section were to gather information about the teachers' beliefs in writing instruction. The four subcategories in this section were (1) the goals of writing instruction, (2) the teachers' roles in general, (3) the content of writing instruction, and (4) the teaching procedures in writing instruction (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2

The Framework of the Questionnaire—Section Two

Category	Subcategory	Items
(1) goals of writing instruction	to get ready for the entrance exams: B1	B1-B3
	to be familiar with English textual patterns: B2	
	to express in English: B3	
(2) teachers' roles in general	facilitators	B4

(3) content of writing instruction	mechanics: B5	B5-B16
	structure: B6-B8	
	paragraph development: B9-B11	
	modes of writing: B12	
	grammar/pattern practice: B13	
	translation practice: B14	
(4) teaching procedures in writing instruction	model sentences: B15	B17-B24
	outline: B16	
	free writing: B17	
	group discussion: B18	
	peer evaluation: B19	
	self-evaluation: B20	
	grammar correction: B21	
	revision: B22	
presentation: B23		
rating scale: B24		

In section three, there were 22 items, items P1 to P22. Five-point Likert-type scale was also used from item P1 to item P21. Teachers were asked to indicate how frequently they acted the way as explained by the statement items. The choices ranged from *never*, *seldom*, *sometimes*, *often*, to *always*. Item P22 required the teachers to rank their rating priority. This section was the approximate counterpart of section two. The difference was that it was to collect information about the teachers' practices in their writing instruction. The subcategories were (1) the teachers' roles in general, (2) the content of writing instruction, and (3) the teaching procedures in writing instruction (Table 3.3).

Table 3.3

The Framework of the Questionnaire—Section Three

Category	Subcategory	Items
(1) teachers' roles in general	facilitators	P1
(2) content of writing instruction	mechanics: P2 structure: P3-P5	P2-P13

	paragraph development: P6-P8	
	modes of writing: P9	
	grammar/pattern practice: P10	
	translation practice: P11	
	model sentences: P12	
	outline: P13	
	free writing: P14	
	group discussion: P15	
(3) teaching	peer evaluation: P16	
procedures in writing	self-evaluation: P17	P14-P22
instruction	grammar correction: P18-P19	
	revision: P20	
	presentation: P21	
	rating scale: P22	

The fourth and final section had one open-ended-question item. It was designed to encourage teachers to voice the difficulties they encountered in writing instruction. The following sources of difficulties were included: (1) curriculum, (2) students' motivation and proficiency level, (3) material selection, compilation and teaching preparation, and (4) difficulties teachers faced when grading students' composition.

The questionnaires sent to the teachers were in Chinese since Chinese is the teachers' native language in which they can express more clearly (see Appendix C). For reference, an English version is included in this study so that speakers of other languages would have access to the content of the questionnaire (see Appendix D).

3.2.2 The Semi-structured Interview

The questions generated in the semi-structured interview were formed based on the reviewed literature on teachers' beliefs and practices (Hsu, 2005; Kuo, 2004; Lai, S. J., 2004; Lai, Y. J., 2004; Lockhart, 1996). The thirteen sets of questions in the interview protocol elicited more detailed information about the teachers' beliefs and practices in writing instruction. They served as reference in the interviews and were

modified here and there depending on the development of each interview. The topics of the interview questions were goals of writing instruction, roles teachers played, content of instruction, teaching procedures, and difficulties encountered in writing instruction. Here are the main focuses of the questions. Question 1 was about the goals of writing instruction. Question 2 was about the roles teachers played. Questions 3 and 4 investigated the content of writing instruction. Questions 5 to 10 asked about the teaching procedures. Questions 11 and 12 were related to difficulties encountered. In addition, question 13 gave interviewees freedom to comment on writing instruction. The following are the 13 sets of questions (Table 3.4).

Table 3.4

The Interview Questions

Issue	Question
Goals	1. How well do you think senior high school graduates (your students) should be able to write in English?
Roles	2. What roles do you think you play in the writing instruction process?
Content	3. Do you use any English writing textbooks? What are their strengths? How do you use them? In addition to the textbooks, do you use other material to teach English writing? How do you use them?
	4. How do you teach English composition in different stages, that is, in students' freshman year, junior year and senior year? Are you satisfied with your teaching strategies? If not, how do you think you should teach?
Teaching Procedures	5. Would you please describe the process in which students write a composition, including pre-writing, while-writing, post-writing stages? In addition, would you please describe a period of writing instruction?
	6. Do you offer students chances to brainstorm in groups?
	7. How do you evaluate students' composition? What are the elements that you pay most attention to?
	8. Do you encourage students to do peer review? Do you

	encourage them to self-evaluate their composition?
	9. Do you require your students to rewrite their works after your evaluation (or classmates' or their own evaluation)? How do they usually rewrite?
	10. Do you give students chances to present their works? In what ways?
Encountered Difficulties	11. What are the difficulties you encounter when you teach English writing? (Please think about the difficulties in the following dimensions: curriculum, students' proficiency level and motivation, material selection, compilation, and teaching preparation, and composition evaluation.)
	12. What are the common problems of your students' English compositions?
Other Issues	13. Are there other opinions regarding English writing instruction that you would like to express?

The interviews with all the teachers were held in Chinese (see Appendix E). An English version of the interview questions is attached so that speakers of other languages would have access to these questions (see Appendix F).

3.3 Procedures

A pilot study was conducted in order to examine the items in the questionnaire as well as the questions in the interview. The two instruments were sent to five experienced senior high school English teachers in Taipei for comments. They filled out the questionnaires and checked if there were any unclear or improper items. Also, they looked at the interview questions and saw if they understood what the researcher intended to ask. Based on the suggestion, the researcher further modified the items and questions.

In the formal study, the questionnaires were distributed to 199 English teachers in 14 senior high schools in Taipei city. At the end of the questionnaires, participants were asked whether they could take part in the follow-up interviews. Those who were

willing left their personal information on the questionnaires. After collecting them, the researcher analyzed the data generated. Then, six volunteers were selected and contacted to confirm the appropriate time for formal interviews. During the interviews, the purpose of this study, the questions included, and the data analysis procedure were explained to the interviewees. All the interviews were audio-taped with the interviewees' consent and transcribed for data analysis. Their identification was coded to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

3.4 Data Analysis

There are two sets of data generated from this study. One is from the questionnaire, and the other is from the semi-structured interview.

3.4.1 The Quantitative Data from the Questionnaire

The teachers' background information was entered and the frequency in each option was counted for further comparison. The options of the items probing teachers' beliefs and practices were scored based on a five-point Likert-type attitude scale. As for teachers' responses to the beliefs part, *strongly disagree* was scored 1, *disagree* was scored 2, *no comments* was scored 3, *agree* was scored 4, and *strongly agree* was scored 5. As for teachers' responses to the practices part, *never* was scored 1, *seldom* was scored 2, *sometimes* was scored 3, *usually* was scored 4, and *always* was scored 5. All the scores were computerized using SAS statistical program.

As for the first research question, the researcher looked at what beliefs teachers held as well as their classroom practices of their beliefs. Items B1 to B24 and items P1 to P22 were analyzed to see the central tendency of each statement. The researcher computed the mean scores (M) of each item to see teachers' agreement level on the

statements of beliefs and frequency level on the statements of practices. In addition to the mean scores, standard deviation (SD) was also computed to see if there was high or low agreement among the participants. Besides, the frequency and percentage of each statement were counted to help analyze the results.

Concerning the first part of the second research question, the level of consistency between teachers' beliefs and practices revealed in the first research question was compared and contrasted. Regarding the second part of the second research question about the possible reasons for the inconsistency, the only open-ended question was analyzed.

Moreover, when it comes to the third research question, one-way ANOVA tests were carried out to see if significant differences existed between teachers of different background, including their gender, age, year(s) of teaching in senior high school, educational background, workshop attending experience, and knowledge about the guidelines. When a factor was found to influence teachers' beliefs at a significant level ($p < .05$), post-hoc Scheffe was conducted to see which groups of teachers contributed to the differences in opinions.

3.4.2 The Qualitative Data from the Semi-structured Interview

Before the researcher analyzed the data, the interviewees' opinions recorded were transcribed and translated into English. As Chen (2005) mentioned, the procedures for analyzing qualitative data generally included four steps: "coding, categorization, description, and interpretation" (pp. 47-48). Therefore, first of all, coding was used to reduce redundant data and generate meaning units. The data were put into manageable fragments and the relationship between the meaning units was identified. Second, categorization played the role of building a system of the coding

categories. The meaningful units were grouped into different categories based on the similar concepts. Third, description was used to present and structure what the interviewees said in a logical way. Fourth, interpretation was used to offer explanations, make inferences, and draw conclusions. The results gathered were utilized to support and explain the results from the questionnaires, which helped answer the research questions.