

# **Analysis of the Attitudes of Classroom Teacher Candidates towards Written Expression with Respect to Several Variables**

By

**Metin Elkatmış**

Department of Elementary School, Education Faculty, University of Kırıkkale, Kırıkkale/Turkey

## **Abstract**

*In today's world, the writing skill is seen as the strongest tool in the repository of the modern individual. It is aimed to develop this skill in individuals through written expression courses, which is a kind of application area of language education. This study was conducted with the aim of demonstrating the attitudes of classroom teacher candidates towards the Written Expression course and the writing skill. It was designed as a descriptive field study. To this end, an attitude scale consisting of 23 questions was developed and administered. The findings obtained were analyzed using the SPSS software. According to the research findings, the attitudes of classroom teacher candidates towards the Written Expression course and writing skill are neither positive nor negative.*

**Key words:** *Language, written expression, classroom teacher candidate, attitude.*

## **1. Introduction**

Language education is principally based on four main language skills: reading, listening, speaking and writing. Writing constitutes the final skill area in this cycle. In this respect, it is a complex, long and difficult process that involves all acquisitions within the field of language skills. Therefore, all stages and kinds of education include the writing skill in order to enable the individual to use her emotions and thoughts effectively.

Regardless of sweeping technological advancements, writing is the most effective and influential one among communication tools. Writing is the memory of humanity; it has an important function in finding, detecting, enriching and conveying information and thought (Özdemir, 1994). For this reason, it is of crucial significance for an individual.

The act of writing corresponds in educational institutions to composition or written expression. Accordingly, writing is "the expression of speaking through various symbols" (Özbay, 2006). It is defined in the Turkish Dictionary (2005) as, "the written or verbal study aimed at enabling students to effectively and properly convey their feelings and thoughts". According to Oğuzkan (2001), it is "integrating our feelings and ideas about a subject with the ideas in our cultural repertoire pertaining to that subject." Göğüş (1998), on the other hand, defines it as "the way of conveying feelings and thoughts in the form of writing", whereas Kavcar, Oğuzkan and Aksoy (2004) identify it as "expressing feelings, thoughts, opinions and imaginations in the form of writing in an organized, clear, lively and salient manner". These definitions confirm that the issue is handled in two dimensions, the first of which is the opinion that connects it to organizing and forming meant by the word "composition" that was adopted from French. The second one, on the other hand, is the approach of defining it as the direct equivalent of the act of writing.

First steps regarding the written expression skill start with elementary education. The most important acquisitions of this period are learning how to write and forming sentences, paragraphs and finally composition texts. Writing is seen as, along with academic success, one of the essential skills that help an individual become successful in her life outside the school. (Temizkan and Sallabaş 2009; Sever, 1994). Therefore, classroom teachers, who play determinative roles in individuals' lives, need to have high levels of language proficiency. According to Şişman (1999), the language skill is one of the essential

characteristics of a good teacher. A great deal of acquisitions of elementary school students regarding language pertain to modelling and imitation. Given the fact that students at this period imitate mostly their classroom teachers and desire to be, look, speak and write like them, classroom teachers should be very sensitive and conscious about using the language.

Not only do classroom teachers convey theoretical knowledge in language education, but they also endow students with consciousness about and love of language. For this, the teacher must first possess this consciousness and love. The classroom teacher plays a great role in creating positive or negative attitudes in students towards a course, a skill or a subject. Today, many researchers argue that the affective factors of care, attitude, value, tendency, motivation and anxiety directly influence the learning process (Bloom, 1979; Senemoğlu 1987). Like in all other fields of education, the number of studies carried out to determine the role played by affective factors in language learning is rising. These factors are considered to be the main factors in language learning and it is suggested to take into consideration these factors if a student struggles in writing (Karasakaloğlu and Saracaloğlu, 2009; Harris, Schmidt and Graham, 1997). Positive attitude towards learning increases the level of learning, while a negative one might drive the same process to failure. Therefore, classroom teachers should have positive attitudes towards courses related to writing and writing skills. Along with the knowledge they acquire during their university education, their attitudes, values and judgements are reflected positively or negatively on their students. For this reason, determining teacher candidates' attitudes that directly influence their behaviours is of great importance considering students they will train.

Written expression, or writing, is not a skill that can be acquired by mere learning; instead, it is more of an act of expression and skill. It is observed that there exist important studies on the teaching methods and strategies of this act and the mistakes made during its execution. However, there exists a limited number of studies that directly relate to our subject in Turkey. In this sense, the conclusion that Bağcı (2007) draws in the study aimed at determining Turkish language teachers candidates' attitudes towards Written Expression courses is as follows: while the candidates' attitudes are mostly positive, they complain about their inadequacies in written expression skills and they believe that they will have difficulty on this issue in their professional lives. Karasakaloğlu and Saracaloğlu (2009) investigated the relationship between attitudes of Classroom Teaching students towards courses related to the Turkish language, their academic self-perceptions and their achievements in these courses. The research findings generally suggested that there exist positive significant correlations between candidates' average success in Turkish-related courses, their attitudes towards Turkish and academic self-perceptions. In another study, teacher candidates' attitudes towards reading and writing were examined. It was determined that the participant students have less positive attitudes towards writing than towards reading (Temizkan and Sallabaş, 2009).

In general, it is observed that teacher candidates do not have problems in terms of attitude and success about writing and written expression courses. However, the situation seems rather different in practice. Studies demonstrated that teacher candidates' exam papers and assignment reports do not present a pleasant picture (Babacan, 2003; Bağcı, 2007; Temizkan, 2008; Öksüz, 2009; Akbayır, 2010; Elkatmış and Toptaş, 2013). The acquisition of the writing skill requires a long process. Formal education or short-term courses might endow a person with correct and clear writing skills. The further is possible only if the individual works regularly and continuously under a discipline, which then requires the person to love it. Thus, it is necessary to measure teacher candidates' attitudes that define their motivations in all branches. This study follows this requirement. Accordingly, in the study, teacher candidates' attitudes towards written expression courses and the writing skill will be determined along with the impacts of several variables. Answers to the following questions were sought to this general aim:

Do the attitudes of the participant classroom teacher candidates towards the Written Expression course and the writing skill differ with respect to; (1) gender (2) type of education (3) family income level (4) father's education (5) mother's education (6) writing free compositions in free time (7) keeping a diary?

## 2. Methodology

This study was designed in the form of a descriptive field research. Descriptive studies basically aim to find answers to “what is it?” and “what was it?”. Through such studies, it is attempted to demonstrate “what” events, institutions, groups, objects and various areas “are”, and the relationship between incidents is explained by considering the connections between existing situations and previous conditions (Balci, 1995; Kaptan, 1989).

### Universe and Sample

The universe of the research consisted of Classroom Teaching students who attended to Kirikkale University Faculty of Education in the Fall Term of the 2012-2013 Academic Year. From this universe, first-year teacher candidates were defined as the sample. In the research, a total of 193 first-year students (92 regular and 101 evening education students) participated. Of these students, 158 were females and 35 were males.

### Data Collection Instrument

The development works of the scale used in this research consisted of several steps. First, the relevant literature was reviewed thoroughly by the researcher. As a result of this extensive literature review, the scale was formed. In order to finalize the Likert-type attitude scale, a pilot study was conducted after taking opinions from 30 classroom teachers. After the pilot study, the questionnaire was administered to the students.

### Findings about the Validity and Reliability of the Scale

It was decided to perform factor analysis in order to test the scale’s validity. Firstly, KMO and Barlett’s tests were performed to see whether the scale is suitable for a factor analysis or not. For such an analysis, the result of the KMO test should be at least .50 and Barlett’s test of sphericity should be statistically significant (Jeong, 2004). In this study, KMO test result was found to be .81 and Barlett’s test was found to be statistically significant ( $P < 0.01$ ), and thus factor analysis was conducted.

As a result of the factor analysis, after eliminating those items that did not belong to any factor or that fell below the threshold value of .45 (Items 1, 2, 6, 10, 13, 21, 22, 23, 31), the scale was considered with 23 items and the factor common variance was observed to be between .43 and .78. When the scree plot about the factor analysis and the factor loading rotated after principal components analysis were reviewed, it was concluded that the scale had five factors in this study. In total, the scale’s factor dimensions explain 58,20% of the entire scale. Thus, it was concluded that the scale has a high validity. For the scale’s reliability, Cronbach’s Alpha coefficients were calculated and the Cronbach’s Alpha value for the entire scale was found to be .833; suggests that the scale is reliable.

### Analysis of Findings

Before proceeding to analyze the data collected, the scales were given a sequence number. Evaluations were carried out on 193 items. In the analysis of the data, the positive items in the scale were given points as follows: “Strongly Disagree” 1, “Disagree” 2, “Neutral” 3, “Agree” 4, and “Strongly Agree” 5. The minimum possible score is 23, while the highest is 115. After the analyses, the findings obtained for the problem sentence were evaluated based on the following intervals: 1.00-1.79 Strongly Disagree, 1.80-2.49 Disagree, 2.50-3.39 Neutral, 3.40-4.19 Agree, 4.20-5.00 Strongly Agree. Findings related to the sub-problems were analyzed through Mann-Whitney U test, Kruskal Wallis test and independent t-test.

## 3. Findings

### Findings Related to the Problem Sentence

Mean score of the attitudes of the teacher candidates towards the Written Expression course and writing skill is 3,35; which falls within the “Neutral” interval. Then, it is safe to argue that the teacher candidates’ attitudes towards the Written Expression course and the writing skill are neither positive nor negative.

**Findings Related to the First Sub-Problem Sentence****Table 1: Independent t-test results demonstrating the attitudes of classroom teacher candidates towards the Written Expression Course and the writing skill with respect to the variable of gender**

Gender	n	$\bar{x}$	s	t	p
Female	156	3,38	,55	1,722	,087
Male	34	3,19	,66		

P&gt;0.05

The attitudes of classroom teacher candidates towards the Written Expression course and the writing skill do not differ significantly with respect to their genders ( $t_{(188)}=1.722$ ,  $p>0.05$ ).

**Findings Related to the Second Sub-Problem Sentence****Table 2: Independent t-test results demonstrating the attitudes of classroom teacher candidates towards the Written Expression Course and the writing skill with respect to the variable of type of education**

Type of Education	n	$\bar{x}$	s	t	p
Regular	90	3,42	,56	1,564	,120
Evening	100	3,29	,59		

P&gt;0.05

The attitudes of classroom teacher candidates ( $t_{(188)}=1.564$ ,  $p>0.05$ ) towards the Written Expression course and the writing skill do not differ significantly with respect to type of education they are enrolled.

**Findings Related to the Third Sub-Problem Sentence****Table 3: Kruskal Wallis analysis results demonstrating the attitudes of classroom teacher candidates towards the Written Expression Course and the writing skill with respect to the variable of monthly income**

Sequence	Income Level	n	Sequence Mean	sd	X <sup>2</sup>	p
1	600 TL or less	18	98,28	4	5,389	,250
2	601-1200 TL	81	103,94			
3	1201-1800 TL	66	91,76			
4	1801-2400 TL	20	73,85			
5	2401 and more	6	102,50			

P&gt;0.05

The attitudes of teacher candidates ( $X^2_{(4)}=5.389$ ,  $p>0.05$ ) towards the Written Expression course and the writing skill do not differ significantly with respect to their monthly income.

**Findings Related to the Fourth Sub-Problem Sentence****Table 5: Kruskal Wallis analysis results demonstrating the attitudes of classroom teacher candidates towards the Written Expression Course and the writing skill with respect to the variable of the father's education**

Sequence	Education	n	Sequence Mean	sd	X <sup>2</sup>	p
1	Elementary School	97	98,89	4	3,798	,434
2	High School	56	96,10			
3	Associate Degree	14	107,89			
4	University	24	79,21			
5	Post-Graduate	1	143,00			

P&gt;0.05

The attitudes of teacher candidates ( $X^2_{(4)}=3.798$ ,  $p>0.05$ ) towards the Written Expression course and the writing skill do not differ significantly with respect to their father's education.

**Findings Related to the Fifth Sub-Problem Sentence**

**Table 6: Kruskal Wallis analysis results demonstrating the attitudes of classroom teacher candidates towards the Written Expression Course and the writing skill with respect to the variable of the mother's education**

Sequence	Education	n	Sequence Mean	sd	X <sup>2</sup>	p
1	Elementary School	144	96,32			
2	High School	37	90,58			
3	University	5	72,75	3	1,038	,792
4	Post-Graduate	2	96,32			

P>0.05

The attitudes of teacher candidates ( $X^2_{(3)}=1.038$ ,  $p>0.05$ ) towards the Written Expression course and the writing skill do not differ significantly with respect to their mother's education.

**Findings Related to the Sixth Sub-Problem Sentence**

**Table 7: Kruskal Wallis analysis results demonstrating the attitudes of classroom teacher candidates towards the Written Expression Course and the writing skill with respect to the variable whether they write compositions in their free time**

Sequence	Frequency	n	Sequence Mean	sd	X <sup>2</sup>	p	Source of Difference (M-W U)
1	Everyday	6	101,42				
2	Once a week	26	124,81				
3	Once in 15 days	23	97,78	4	10,967	,027*	2-4
4	Once a month	68	98,49				2-5
5	I do not	69	83,01				

\*P<0.05

The attitudes of classroom teacher candidates ( $X^2_{(4)}=10.967$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) towards the Written Expression course and the writing skill differ with respect to the variable whether they write composition in their free time. To detect the source of difference, the Mann Whitney U test was performed and it was found that the difference is between those who write composition once a week, and those who do it once a month and those who never do it. In other words, it was found that the attitudes of those who write composition once a week are more positive than those of teacher candidates who write once a month and who do not.

**Findings Related to the Seventh Sub-Problem Sentence**

**Table 8: Independent t-test results demonstrating the attitudes of classroom teacher candidates towards the Written Expression Course and the writing skill with respect to the variable whether they note down passages or poems from books**

Keeping Diary	n	$\bar{x}$	s	t	p
Yes	122	3,46	,56		
No	68	3,19	,57	3,219	,002*

\*P<0.05

The attitudes of classroom teachers ( $t_{(188)}=3.219$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) towards the Written Expression course and the writing skill differ with respect to the variable of keeping diary. Attitudes of diary keepers are more positive than those of others.

#### 4. Conclusion and Suggestions

According to the research findings, the attitudes of classroom teacher candidates towards the Written Expression course and the writing skill fall within the “Neutral” interval, which might give rise to the interpretation that they do not have clear opinions towards the course and the skill. Writing is a field that requires ideas, thoughts and an aesthetic understanding. Acquisition of all these undoubtedly require a process of accumulation. It can be argued that the participants did not consider them having all these characteristics. Besides, this result might have stemmed from the common opinion that writing requires a special talent from birth and one can become a good writer only if she is gifted with this talent. In the literature, similarly, this point could not be solved clearly. While those writers who have been “trained from the cradle” argue that a person should have special preparedness (King, 2007), pedagogues believe that writing can be taught through a formal process like all other skills (Sevinçgöl, 1989; Sarıca and Gündüz, 1997; Öner, 2005; Binyazar and Özdemir, 2006; Karasoy et al., 2008; Akbayır, 2010; Karasevda, 2010).

The following findings were obtained with respect to the factors that had been thought have impact on classroom teacher candidates attitudes: students’ genders, types of education they attend, monthly incomes of their families and parents’ education levels are not significant factors influencing their attitudes towards the course and the skill.

With respect to the variable of gender, a significant difference was found in the favour of female students in the study conducted by Karasakoloğlu and Saracaloğlu (2009). Gardner and Lambert (1972; as quoted in, Karasakoloğlu and Saracaloğlu, 2009) also found that female students have more positive attitudes towards language. It could then be argued that the findings of the current study do not overlap with those of the two listed above.

Teacher candidates’ attitudes do not differ with respect to the type education they attend. This finding is in parallel with that of the study conducted by Karasakoloğlu and Saracaloğlu (2009). Therefore, it is safe to conclude that teacher candidates’ attitudes towards the Written Expression course and the writing skill are independent from type of education.

Other variables addressed in the research are families’ monthly income and parents’ education levels. There is an opinion that children of parents who have higher income and higher degrees are more likely to be successful in their studies. However, this opinion contradicts with the findings of the current study as well as with those of the study conducted by Öksüz (2009) on Turkish language skills of classroom teaching students. According to Öksüz, a text written by a student coming from a lower socioeconomic background is much better than a text written by student coming from higher standards. Then, we could conclude that teacher candidates’ attitudes towards the Written Expression course and the writing skill are independent from their families’ income levels and parents’ academic degrees.

Yet another finding of the research is that teacher candidates’ attitudes differ with respect to whether they write essays in their free time or not. The difference was found to be between those who write once a week, those who write once a month and those who do not write. In other words, it was determined that the attitudes of those who write essays once a week towards the course and the skill are more positive than the attitudes of those who write once a month and those who never write.

Another important finding is that teacher candidates’ attitudes also differ with respect to the variable of keeping a diary and noting down phrases or poems from books. In other words, attitudes of candidates who keep diaries and writes down certain phrases and poems are more positive. Many prominent thinkers such as Emerson, who identifies himself as the smartest American and Presidential Candidate Adlai Stevenson (Muallimoğlu, 1998) point to the role of noting down important phrases from books they read in their accumulation of knowledge. In this respect, reading merely is not enough for having knowledge

and ideas. Notes taken from pieces read increase one's knowledge, ideas and eventually writing skill. One who reads according to a plan and who notes down important points on a certain issue can express her opinions when asked to write them, without feeling any anxiety. This point is even more important for teachers, whose job is to share and convey information. It is necessary for most people to take notes in order to benefit from a text continuously. Otherwise, what is learned will not be permanent. Therefore, it is of critical importance for teacher candidates to read in such a conscious manner for the students they will train.

These findings suggest that primarily those professors who teach the Written Expression course in universities should take measures in order to endow teacher candidates with positive attitudes towards this course and the writing skill. In these courses, students should be trained in such a way that they begin to see writing as a job, entertainment and even an important component of self-improvement. This will pave the way for future generations who do not shy away from writing.

Classroom teacher candidates should be given the opportunities and resources to form habits of keeping diaries and noting down the phrases or poems they like. It could be stated that such activities have important positive influences on the writing skill.

In this research, the attitudes of classroom teacher candidates towards the Written Expression course and the writing skill were investigated. Larger scale studies should be carried out in different grade levels in order to determine the factors influencing the formation of positive and negative attitudes.

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