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Examining the Basic Level Students' Writing Proficiency

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the basic level of students' writing proficiency and credibility in Nepali context. Most of the school teachers do not seem to be aware of the importance of students' writing in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes at the age of six or seven, even if it is prescribed in the syllabus. The monitoring system has not been effectively implemented. Teachers have not been updated through regular training. Nor are they strictly rewarded or punished for their performances. Currently, basic-level student writing is an emerging task. Several scholars have worked on children's literature, but there is not sufficient research on children's basic writing. The study's findings show that basic-level teachers mostly do not sincerely teach writing skills. Many of them are insufficiently aware of such skills themselves. Both language and literature can be enhanced through better writing skills. Writing skills are mandatory so that the literature genre can be enhanced. The writing skills promote both creative and research writing simultaneously. So, basic-level student's writing skills have to be strengthened. Teaching writing skills is not as interesting as teaching fairy tales, fairy books, fables and Harry Potter kind of books. The study proposes that educators make students' writing practice mandatory from class one. This paper employs the explanatory survey and document analysis methods.

INTRODUCTION

The Curriculum Development Center (CDC), Tribhuvan University, Nepal, has prescribed the basic writing course but the implementation side is weak. There is no provision of time-to-time teachers' training and prize and punishment. There is less availability of trained teachers. The teachers superficially teach writing in basic schools because they are not timely updated nor is there a strict monitoring system. Despite a good budget "teachers have not been sent to any training by the school for ten years" (Gurung, 2023). This is the real scenario of several schools in Nepal. Teachers have not updated themselves for a long time. On the other hand, the number of arrogant, attitude problem pampered students is increasing. It is because the schools just think of admitting an expected size of students. Consequently, they cannot bring out the output as expected. The students later face numerous problems in upper levels. As a result, the products (students) become defective. The very defective products go to the market and subsequently ruin the entire socioeconomic environment. Most teachers either at the primary or higher level complete the courses without asking students for writing practices. Teaching writing to the basic-level students is simply teaching them writing creatively about their real experiences. They can write about what they see at home, in the garden, on the way home and at school. By learning writing skills, they can learn to share their ideas with the masses through their simple stories or poems or essays. Despite the importance of children's writing, there is insufficient research work in Nepal.

This paper explores writing as a creative practice but not as a practice of writing answers to questions in exams.

The basic level teachers have to exercise their students in descriptive writing. They have to, "give basic personal information in writing" to the students (Curriculum Development Center, 2019). It is necessary first to teach them how to make sensible sentences or to teach them how to "use capital letters, full stops and question marks correctly" (CDC, 2019). This is the basic knowledge of writing. Then only they can be taught about writing a letter, short paragraph, or simple story or essay. Gradually, they pick up the simple writing methods and formats. For this, close reading is a must. Without close reading, writing is impossible. The teachers have to ask the students to take the ideas from picture books, paintings and simple journal articles. Children's writing simply tells a story of the cartoons they see, paintings they do, games they play, food they eat, dresses they wear and people they come in contact with. Teaching students about writing means making them habituated in writing skills. So, writing is a good exercise for teasing their mind. It can make them highly imaginative, creative, argumentative, farsighted and visionary. Gurung (2023) argues, "writing is a good exercise of the mind that it can make him/her farsighted and visionary, too". In the beginning phase, their writing is neither a poem nor any other form of literature, but just a group of words and sentences haphazardly written on a white sheet of paper based on their day-to-day activities. This is a kind of mini-creative writing. The very mini-creative writing turns to academic writing later because "writing is about creating" (Crook, 2016). Therefore, habituating the children in writing practice helps them be creative. This is how the basic level teachers have to enhance the student's writing skills as prescribed in

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the syllabus. However, it is not fully academic which is practiced at the university level. Teaching writing skills at the basic level for the children of six years or seven is not given importance in Nepal. Writing means simple children-level basic creative writing. It is mandatory but the teachers do not strictly follow this writing pedagogy because teaching writing is uninteresting. Nor is there a strict monitoring system. The purpose of this study is to analyze how to promote the basic level students' creative writing skills. Beyer (2021) shares, "relatively little research exists addressing the broad theme of social justice as a literary theme in children's and young adult writing". So, this paper attempts to address the overall problems of children's writing skills of basic level students. To enhance the student's argument power, writing is mandatory.

Teaching writing skills to the basic level students is an exciting job for the English language teacher. "Writing for children is wonderful, emotionally satisfying, exciting, and sometimes overwhelming" (Crook n.d.). Whatever the class work they assign their students, they entertain it without question because they are the real learning angels. Teaching writing to basic-level students is teaching them how to compose and arrange ideas into a meaningful sentence and a paragraph, and how to combine ideas and details or claim and reason coherently. The writing exercise helps them enhance their writing skills and argument power simultaneously. First, the children learn listening and reading then they go to productive skills of speaking and writing. Crook (2016) clarifies, "Children's writing has gained prestige. The success of the Harry Potter books created a huge swell of confidence among writers of children's books". This is all about children's literature, whereas there are a few writers on children's writing. Children's writing skill encourages the basic level students in writing activities which enhance their argument power. Like another productive skill speaking, Baral (2022) claims that "writing is a process of composing and arranging ideas". The basic level students have to learn composing and arranging ideas. However, basic-level students are not well-habituated for such activities. Writing course is mundanity. Most teachers do not entertain teaching writing courses even at the university level. The teachers have to exercise the students to compose and arrange the ideas as they have diversified ideas. Writing helps them arrange their diversified ideas into a new idea. The study focuses on these research questions: Why are writing skills necessary in EFL classes at a basic level? How does writing skill enhance the student's argument power?

The basic level students have to practice at least the basic knowledge of technical research writing like the topic or title, topic sentence or thesis sentence, abstract, introduction, transition words, coherence and cohesion, paragraphs, reviews, main discussion part, conclusion and references or works cited. If the teachers introduce this theoretical part of writing at the basic level, it will be easier for them at the university level. Karki (2019) pinpoints, "learning to write accurately is a complicated activity". Teaching writing is more complicated than

learning to write. In the basic level syllabus, writing has been prescribed but teachers do not effectively teach it because students do not entertain it the way they do other subjects. The children in the lower class may easily understand these technical terms if the teacher introduces them. Writing is a tough and challenging job, as it is like, "Jump at the sun" (Bauman, 2007). The basic level teachers claim that they train their students in writing practice but they do not provide them necessary feedback sufficiently. So, teaching writing skills to basic-level students is not easily as manageable and comprehensible as teaching Harry Potter stories. Only then writing tasks can become easier for them at higher levels. The foundation must be stronger. According to the trend in Nepal, most students learn writing skills only at the university level.

In Europe, in the Renaissance period, "writing skills were taught at six or seven after reading skills had been acquired, and again this was exactly the age when poorer families might withdraw their children from schooling to enlarge their income" (Hiscock, 2015). British people used to learn writing skills after they had acquired the reading skills at the age of six or seven. They were aware about the importance of learning skills.

After reading, children can write the answers to the given questions easily. Writing answers to the questions in the exam papers or summarizing the textbooks is not creative writing, not academic writing. Writing has certain rules which suggest organizing the ideas with details. Certain formats must be tackled without fail. The students start learning writing when they have to write term papers and thesis papers at the university level. Most students show very little knowledge about writing. This is because they have not learnt writing at the basic levels sincerely. Until and unless the base or foundation is strong, the structure will not be strong. Teaching writing must be well exercised at the basic level. The basic level teachers have to honestly teach the students the writing skills. The teacher's role is always at a higher level (the researcher's observation) because "[e]very day parents place their trust in us that we are going to guide, support, and educate their children in a way that lifts them up and helps them become better people" (Ron, 2021). This is how the parents leave their children in charge of a teacher. No doubt, writing helps one become a better person. In addition, the parents want to make good successors and they invest a great deal in this. They say, "We must educate our children to be hopeful individuals. So they may prepare for this life with bravery and hope. They can then be useful individuals for the Ummah" (Zaino, 2020). Teaching writing means not only teaching writing, it means teaching children, the basic level students, to be hopeful and brave individuals, who can handle the tough situation. Then they can be responsible for their fellow beings, society, community, culture, religion and even god.

Teaching children is always more interesting than teaching intermediate-level students. Children's learning is real learning. Their concentration and motivation are very high. Teachers' satisfaction level from teaching students

at a basic level is also high. So, the teacher has to create an atmosphere of teaching writing skills to the basic-level students. It can surely be effective and result-oriented. Song (2013) contextualizes, “the roles once played in American culture and society by the children of Jewish immigrants to the United States are passed to the children of Asian immigrants”. The roles played by children of Jewish immigrants pass to Asian fast because of their high pick-up power.

Another objective of this research is to enhance the children’s writing culture and argument power at basic levels. Whatever the cultural or educational activities the children perform pass immediately to other children of otherwise cultural backgrounds. Teaching children’s writing skills to the basic level students is structure-based. However, the university level is the content base. If they had practiced structure base at the basic level sincerely, they would not have faced innumerable problems at the university level. Their teachers did not sincerely teach them writing at the basic or college level. This is like running without learning to walk. The majority of the students have almost similar problems in writing at the university level. Therefore, primary teachers (basic level) have to entice students to enhance their writing literacy. Crook (2016) clarifies that “children who read early and enjoy it are more likely to incorporate reading into their lives and sustain a lifelong interest in books”. So, teaching writing means teaching reading because writing is the output of reading. To establish a writing culture, a reading culture is necessary. The more one teases his/her mind the more s/he may come up with a new idea. The basic level students actively participate in such productive skills if the teachers initiate it. This paper might be encouraging to imitate the European culture of exercising children’s writing skills at the age of six or seven in Nepal, too. Establishing a writing culture in Nepal is still in infantile stage. So, the government mechanism must monitor the implementation applying the effective strategies and policies.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was carried out with the qualitative method that relied on document analysis and explanatory survey methods. Mostly, the researcher used keywords like writing skills, children’s writing, and children’s literature to examine basic-level students’ writing proficiency. We talked to the primary teachers about this agenda and incorporated their experiences into the study. We also talked to the other high school teachers, college or university teachers and master’s degree fourth-semester students about their basic-level experiences. This paper aims to examine the overall existing teaching trends of writing skills at the basic level. The researcher collected the data and information from books, journals and websites that are related to this research on children’s writing proficiency. And they are analyzed and interpreted accordingly. Bauman suggests “use brain teasers-systematic ways of stimulating and exploring

regions of your mind to find out what ideas lurk there subconsciously” (2007). Writing stimulates and explores the subconscious part of the mind, the superego.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This paper focuses on examining the basic level student’s writing proficiency and enhancing their argument power. So, these students feel better when they reach the master level. Teaching writing skills to children of six or seven in class one or two is a challenging job. It is never easy even at master’s level. The teachers have to apply the simplest methods. For instance, using the placard of topic sentences by one student and reasons to support by another student. It can be useful. Then carrying a placard of explanation and analysis by other students in a row can make other students understand how to write a short paragraph. Similarly, teachers can dramatize like this: writing is a father and he has 11 sons: title, topic sentence or thesis sentence, abstract, introduction, transition words, coherence and cohesion, paragraphs, reviews, main discussion part, conclusion and references or works cited respectively. This is how to make the writing class interesting. Curtin (2023) suggests that “teachers play a key role in encouraging children and young adults to come to see literature as an inquiry into life and integral to understanding themselves and their world”. The children apply most of their learning in their life and what they have learnt in childhood. Writing is investigating and researching something in a new field. The children comprehend through reading, listening, observing and visualizing simple texts like picture books. Then, they write what they have comprehended. In a sense, writing is a teaching and learning activity. There is a difference between speech and writing. Speech is temporary and cannot remain in the audience’s minds forever, whereas writing is permanent. The impact of writing is long-lasting. Once the basic level students start practicing writing they enjoy it if their teachers give them positive feedback despite their poor writing. Then they will tackle the writing activities at the higher levels.

It is one of the good strategies for tempting children to write out of anything they know. Armstrong (2006) states, “a series of interpretations of stories composed by children between the ages of 5 and 16, children from different cultures alike in their commitment to storytelling” encourages students to promote their writing proficiency and argument power. The curiosity of basic level students is high and curious learners can grasp the knowledge faster. If the teachers encourage the students, they will pick up actively. But the problem is that they do not follow the strategy of syllabus strictly though Bohora (2024), Nepali teacher of basic school, shares her experiences that “she does the writing course every Friday in her school especially, in class III. She said that there are subject-wise teachers at basic levels.” Similarly, Gurung (2024) another teacher of English shared her experiences that she does the writing course according to the syllabus. She does it two times or three a week.

She performs the writing class/exercise.” In addition, Singh (2020) claims, “Writing skills in compulsory English occupy 40% weightage in the class XI syllabus” of the old course in Nepal. Most teachers seem to escape writing in the class according to students. They focus on grammar and literature portion. There is no provision for separate writing lab classes. However, this paper attempted to enhance the writing skills of both the teachers and students. The basic level teachers frequently have to rehearse the students in writing activities. This enhances their writing skills. The writing process helps generate new ideas. If the children are habituated from this level, they may become good philosophers, thinkers and scholarly visionary figures. The scholarly thinker gives birth to a good planner and a worker, too. A visionary person or good planner is always a hot cake in the global market. Writing has not been taken from this perspective yet in Nepal.

The author’s real genius is a nature-gifted thing or a god-gifted one. Everyone cannot become a prolific writer but writing nurtures a person’s skill. The aim of this paper is not to make every child a prolific writer but to make them able to enhance their writing proficiency. Therefore, basic-level teachers have to train their students in writing strictly. Curtin (2023) states, “I love writing for children and adolescents because they are so receptive”. The receptive power in childhood is unquestionable and teaching at this level is about a hundred per cent result-oriented. A lot of ideas get paralyzed in student’s minds. Writing practice activates their minds to boost their writing proficiency. Moreover, Curtin (2023) explores, “Roche’s 2015 text *Developing Children’s Critical Thinking through Picture Books* provides a wonderful resource for engaging learners in critical thinking and book talk activities using picture books”. Some may think that children cannot think critically. It is over-generalization. They can think critically; why not? The picture book enhances the children’s writing skills. Curtin further (2023) argues that “Margaret’s picture books are not easy reads, but deeply complex tales and texts about the feelings and emotions of human experience”. The children can comprehend even the deeply complex tales and texts about the feelings and emotions of human experiences. Teaching children’s writing to the students through picture books is the best method. Therefore, every picture book is a good material for enhancing teaching children’s writing proficiency and their argument power. Takiuchi (2017) points out, “the majority of the small number of class studies of British children’s literature is largely concerned with representations of class in classic middle-class books or about eighteenth- or nineteenth-century children’s literature”. The children’s writing is a representation of a particular class or group or maybe a gyre. Its implication is beyond common people’s expectations and understanding. This aspect seems to be ignored in Nepal. Bohora (2024) claims that she teaches writing to the students of class 2 or 3 on a simple subject: their school, pets, flowers or so, on Fridays. Still, the

children’s writing issue is a matter of great concern.

Teaching children writing is a challenging task but it is interesting, too. Because children’s sensitivity is maybe a hundred times higher than feminine sensibility, a teenage girl’s sensitivity. Sensitive and curious learners can learn faster than the rest. The primary teachers are the real teachers who can shape the students’ minds. And if children know the names of great writers of the world they learn that writing promotes one’s life career. If teachers start “figuring out what children like and what they see as important in their lives” (Buccieri, 2022), they enjoy doing writing work. This is the way to enhance the children. They may think that flying a fighter plane is important. Some boy students may think that firing a gun or driving a sports bike can be their interesting subject for writing. If they are interested in it, they can write something on it. They can handle writing as an easy activity like a child does walking. The child repeatedly falls on the ground while trying to walk. Later, he can walk and run as well. This happens in every step of human life grammar or spelling mistakes are to be ignored while teaching writing either at the basic level or higher level. The teachers promote the children:

This writing is for you first and foremost. Don’t worry about grammar or spelling. Don’t worry about what anyone else might think or whether it is well-written kind or fair. Set a timer for ten minutes keep your hand moving, and “free-write” in response to a specific prompt. (Siegel-Acevedo, 2021)

This is the way a basic level teacher can teach the writing process by encouraging students. Writing is not different from a kind of hide-and-seek game. In the beginning phase of writing, everyone gets confused and nervous, too, because s/he does not know what to write and how to write. Gradually, the grammar and spelling as well as contents get sorted and automatized in the students’ mind once they start to write freely. Everything gets corrected. The beginner writers or the students fear of grammar and spelling but that is not a big deal as the above block quotation points out. By setting a timer, the students can start to write out of whatever comes to their mind without caring handwriting and other graphic signs. First, they can train their minds in writing fluently. This very fluency enhances the writing proficiency later. The student does not have to care whether it is a well-written document or not. Writing freely can foster the student’s mind in writing skills.

The more a student plays with his/her mind the more s/he may generate a new idea. The basic level teachers have to make the students link their simple feelings to events—on the page. It might be their desire to go to the toilet or prick the other students near them with a pencil or so. Such writing practice accelerates the student’s mind gradually. Later, s/he can become “a person to tell a complete, complex, coherent story, with a beginning, middle, and end” (Siegel-Acevedo, 2021). Though writing demands coherence and cohesion, children’s writing may not be so initially. The teachers have to encourage them

in whatever they write. Poetry and rhyme can be effective media through which children's writing can be performed and fostered. Curtin (2023) states:

Writing a poem in response to a piece of art can all open wide the children's innate creative responses. Poetry is all around us when we start enjoying language. In song lyrics and prayer, in nursery rhymes and picture books, in advertising and on the back of shampoo bottles. (82) Poetry is everywhere and everyone either child or young or old can easily understand it because it is short and sweet. The children perceive different skills that they need in their practical life. Similarly, "early skills that are related to reading and writing typically start developing long before children enter school" (August & Shanahan, 2008). This does not mean that the students learn everything in school. Schooling is nurturing; it helps promote their skills of writing and other skills, too. Teaching the students writing enriches their vocabulary and grammar simultaneously. August and Shanahan (2008) claim that "the acquisition of proficient writing skills entails good spelling skills, metacognitive skills such as audience awareness, and familiarity with and opportunities to practice writing different text genres" (47). Spelling confusion is a never-ending process. Spelling and grammar confusion never decelerate the writing process. Writing is totally different genre.

Some university students are in panic while writing their theses. This is because they did not take care of such things in their childhood or their teachers did not make them aware of it. What every writing warrior has to think is that continuous writing habit sorts out errors gradually. In the digital age, computers also help correct spelling. Teaching students to write means teaching them to enhance their language proficiency, language skills, and "Literacy skills are defined as pre-reading skills, such as concepts of print and alphabetic knowledge; word-level skills, including decoding, word reading, pseudoword reading, and spelling; and text-level skills, including fluency, reading comprehension, and writing skills" (August & Shanahan, 2008). The basic level teachers ought to train their students in reading comprehension. For this, they have to enhance their pre-reading skills, word-level skills such as vocabulary, and text-level skills that are comprehensive knowledge. This is the basic knowledge for the students so that they can argue effectively and logically. Takiuchi (2017) suggests that there is "a diverse range of children's texts – literature, film and multimedia" (iii) through which teaching writing can be performed. Thus, primary teachers must have a good command of literacy skills. Their initiation is mandatory to promote the children's writing skills to their students.

Writing means creative writing, writing a story, novel, poetry, essay or play which gradually enhances the student's analytical, logical, critical or argumentative power. All four literary genres might not be effective for enhancing children's writing. A simple story or poetry might be an effective teaching instrumental tool to train the students in writing activities. Poetry is a shorter form

than other genres. It can be of even four lines or five. The basic level students can easily compose a short poem and a fairy tale like "The Selfish Giant" or a story or a fable. Through poetry and fairy stories, we can make them know writing activity is a good work of art. For this, we can give the example of Harry Potter. The poem is like a beautiful melodious song that entertains (heals) the composer, singer and audience. There are several children's poems which entertain the audiences. This is one of the ways about how to promote the children's writing skills to the students.

According to Ackerman, "You don't need to be a prolific writer, or a professional writer, to benefit from writing activity. "All you need is a piece of paper, a pen, and the motivation to write" (Ackerman, 2017). This author suggests that it is not only a prolific writer or a professional writer who can write. Anyone can, and students also can write coherently and logically. But what s/he needs is his/her willpower, commitment and effort, and just a pen and a white sheet of paper and text to be contextualized. If s/he has all these things, s/he can write whatever s/he likes. This is how writing proficiency gets enhanced. Klein (2016) argues, "Of course, that fantasy and science fiction have been a part of children's literature since its inception, from the Grimms' fairy tales and Andrew Lang's fairy books". It might be a story "Hansel and Gretel." For the practice of children's writing, poetry, rhyme, picture books, animal stories, fairy tales or fairy books are appropriate raw materials. Before writing, they have to comprehend the information or messages from these interesting materials. They easily grab these texts and when their teachers ask them to write they can do it. To promote writing skills, the teachers can practice it in the classroom by creating peer groups. The peer groups accelerate the writing activities effectively. This is another most effective method of practicing children's writing. Bidari (2019) suggests:

Students get into pairs and ask their partners what color and shapes they like and make a note of the answers. After one student finishes writing the letters, they switch, and the other student interviews the first student. The interview questions consist of what color they like. By creating the situation of likes and dislikes of their friends, they can promote their argument. The students can discuss with each other as peer learning is an effective method of teaching and learning.

CONCLUSION

The study was carried out to examine the children's writing proficiency of students and to enhance their argumentative power at the basic level. Teaching children writing to the basic level students has not been effective even if the syllabus prescribes this. European countries practice this skill after the children acquire reading skills at six or seven years of age. Even at high school and college levels, teachers do not prioritize teaching writing because it is tough, dry, boring and uninteresting. Teaching children literature has been popular but teaching children

writing is still in the infantile stage. This paper focuses on teaching children writing skills to the students at a basic level that helps them be logical and argumentative to generate new ideas. The writing practice makes student's minds highly imaginative and creative. There is a high chance of making them philosophical, scholarly and visionary. Visionary people are salable all over the world. How can literature be enhanced if they have not been enhanced in writing skills at basic levels? Teaching writing to basic-level students might be challenging, but it is not bothering them. Children are more curious and interesting than university students. Performing writing activities as the classroom activities are results-oriented. Most teachers at the basic level are not well trained and seem to escape children's writing. As children's literature is the base of literature, children's writing is the base of language proficiency which is academic writing. This will make student's writing proficiency easier at the university level. The study focuses on children's writing as the base of adult literature and adult writing.

Every student's writing disseminates certain messages to their peer group and the masses. Generally, children's writing is promoted through simple texts like cartoons, rhymes, or as mentioned above. For example, animal story books are popular materials for teaching children writing. The students can compose a poem and write some simple stories. One of the most important strategies is publishing students' creative writing like poems, and stories in the annual journal can encourage them. Skilled writers are skilled thinkers and philosophers who can contribute not only to the language and literature but also to the sustainable development of the entire nation. This strategy might work in enhancing the student's writing skills. The teachers have to implant these things in the students' minds. The students may take that writing as a therapy, healer, refresher and circuit breaker (electric fuse) of human tension. And writing helps students enhance personality development and be a good exposure.

Effective writing can transform or change society as writing is a therapy for healing trauma. Several writers are working on children's literature but nominal scholars are working on children's writing. One remarkable problem of putting writing skills under a shadow is because of an increasing number of pampered, attitude problems and arrogant students in the classes. The education policy is not to shout, beat or even touch the students. This fuels this problem. One can write a research paper on pampered students in the class. Therefore, this paper might be at least one piece of brick in building the staircase of the children's writing campaign. Writing proficiency is the base of literature and literature is the herald of every good work. So, teaching children writing to the basic level students is a must. The basic level teachers are the inspirers, motivators and mentors who have to use the task-based approach to make the writing activities effective. It is based on a ninety-nine per cent inspiration and one per cent perspiration. The students' base level of writing is not satisfactory even at universities. The

provision of a strict monitoring system and prize and punishment for the implementation may help a great deal. Therefore, enhancing children's writing means enhancing the children's literature, enhancing the children's literature means enhancing the overall literature and enhancing the overall literature means enhancing the sustainable development of the entire nation, as literature always makes society aware of several human errors and lapses. Objectives of the syllabus have not been met not only at the basic schools but also at higher levels for which all the stakeholders are equally responsible. Some may think that it is good to teach female to teach the world. Yes, feminine sensibility is unquestionable, teenage feminine sensibility is more than this but children sensibility is incomparable to these two. The output of sensitive learners is beyond expectation. Therefore, teach children, educate children, you will guide the whole world. Good Writing!!!

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