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Lessons Learned from a National Survey on Writing Instruction for Students with Visual Impairments

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Paper should be cited as:

Shanahan Bazis, P., Savaiano, M., Hebert, M., Rodgers, D.B., & Koziol, N.A (2022). Lessons learned from a national survey on writing instruction for students with visual impairment. *Visual Impairment and Deafblind Education Quarterly*, 67 (2), 65-71.

<http://dvi.uberflip.com/i/1465739-vidbe-q-67-2-spring-2022/0>

Publication/Completion Date—(if *In Press*, enter year accepted or completed)

Spring 2022

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DOI or URL to published work (if available) <http://dvi.uberflip.com/i/1465739-vidbe-q-67-2-spring-2022/0>

The research reported here was supported by the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, through award R324A190183 to the University of Nebraska. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent the views of the Institute or the U.S. Department of Education. Funding was provided by Institute of Education Sciences (Grant No. R324A190183).

Lessons Learned from a National Survey on Writing Instruction for Students with Visual Impairment

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The writing needs of students with visual impairment (VI) are often expected to be different from their classmates without VI. There may be differences in how students with VI plan or draft their writing, and some teachers of students with visual impairments (TSVIs) indicated that students with multiple disabilities are non-writers (Savaiano & Hebert, 2019).

In a recent study, only 50% of surveyed TSVIs in Nebraska reported receiving adequate training to teach writing. However, 100% of the teachers agreed that all writing purposes are appropriate for students with VI (i.e., for fun, for daily living, to show knowledge; Hebert & Savaiano, 2021). One limitation of this study is the small sample size ($n = 24$). Additionally, the focus of the study was limited to one state, Nebraska, with a small population.

The purpose of this study was to build on the Nebraska study by conducting a national survey of TSVIs. The survey included questions about teacher preparation, beliefs about their role in supporting writing, the modes they report using with students, and the proportion of writing practices they use with different groups of students.

Method

We first had to estimate the number of TSVIs in the nation to be able to estimate our response rate. See Savaiano et al. (in press) for our procedures. We communicated with a contact in every state (two states were not able to

participate). After collecting the information from each state, we estimated the number of TSVIs in the United States to be between 4,705 and 5,015.

Survey Instrument

The survey included 100 questions covering 1) TSVI caseload, 2) general adaptations and accommodations for writing, 3) preparation to teach writing, 4) preparation to teach students with VI, 5) beliefs/expectations about the writing of students with VI, 6) collaboration with general education teachers. We planned for the survey to take 15-20 minutes to complete.

Results

We sent the survey to TSVIs in 48 of the 50 states using each state's preferred mode (i.e., listservs, individual TSVI emails, or Facebook groups). We received a total of 457 completed responses. TSVIs' caseloads ranged from 1 to 76, with an average of 17 students.

Research Question 1: Preparation to Teach Writing

When asked about their preparation during college, after college, and in professional development, teachers indicated minimal to adequate preparation using a scale of 1 to 4 (1-none, 2-minimal, 3-adequate, 4-extensive). The results are presented in Table 1. This finding is worth taking note, but not surprising because this is a trend across all teachers of writing.

Table 1***Preparation to Teach Writing***

	None (1)	Minimal (2)	Adequate (3)	Extensive (4)
Formal training during college	12%	42%	37%	8%
Formal training after college (e.g., professional development)	18%	47%	30%	5%
Completed on their own	9%	32%	48%	11%

Note. $n = 457$

Research Question 2: TSVI's Beliefs about Writing Instruction

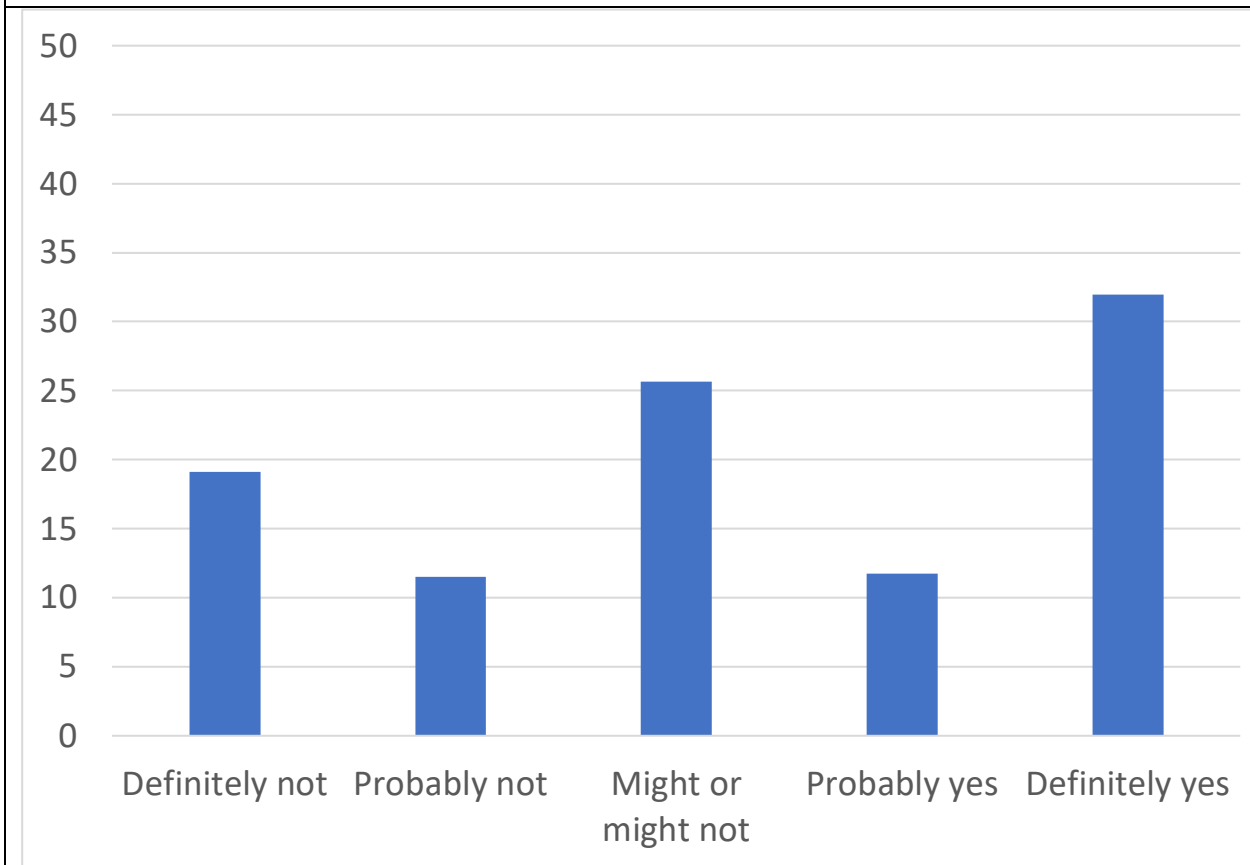
When asked about their beliefs about responsibility for teaching writing, teachers responded on a five-point scale (1-definitely not, 2-probably not, 3-might or might not, 4-probably yes, 5-definitely yes). Teachers were divided on whether teaching writing was their responsibility (e.g., 18% reported 'definitely not'; 32% reported 'definitely yes'). See Figure 1.

Research Question 3: Writing Modes and Practices Used

When asked about the writing activities used with their students, TSVIs identified writing activities in three different categories: Writing skills (e.g., keyboarding, spelling, sentence writing, braille instruction), functional writing

(e.g., how to answer questions, label, write lists), and higher-level writing (e.g., persuasive writing, summary writing).

Figure 1
Is writing instruction (other than instruction in Braille) part of your responsibilities as a TSVI?



Research Question 4: Do TSVI beliefs predict functional writing practices used?

We used logistic regression to predict teachers' functional writing practices by their beliefs about writing. Results suggested that teachers with higher self-efficacy included writing practices more often with all types of students (i.e., totally blind, low vision, deafblind, or multiple disabilities). In addition, if teachers who believed writing instruction was their responsibility who valued collaboration were both more likely to use more functional writing practices with all students except students who are deafblind. Years of teaching experience, beliefs about the value of teaching writing, and preparation to teach writing were not significant predictors of how many functional writing practices teachers used.

Conclusions

Whether or not writing instruction is the responsibility of the TSVI is an issue that needs to be further explored. If our goal is to improve writing instruction for students with VI, it appears that improving TSVI's self-efficacy for teaching writing may be beneficial. Although preparation was not predictive of functional writing activities, this may be because teachers had only moderate amount of preparation overall. Finally, we need to explore ways to increase the amount of writing for students with deafblindness or multiple disabilities. Results related to other writing practices will be shared in future manuscripts.

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