A STUDY ON THE USE OF A PROCESS APPROACH TO IMPROVE WRITING AMONG APPREHENSIVE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The Process Approach to writing has been regarded as an improvement over the traditional methods of teaching writing in recent years. It has been widely implemented in many ESL classrooms in many countries in the world. Nonetheless, the effectiveness of using Process Approach to teach writing among ESL learners is not conclusive. With that reason, it is the aim of this research to investigate the use of Process Approach on ESL learners in improving their writing. The study uses the quasi-experimental research design.This study was employed on 60 Form Four students who were identified as apprehensive to writing.. Two classes were identified as homogenous after they were pretested and, on the whole, the students belonged to the same proficiency level in terms of writing proficiency. Then, they were randomly selected as experimental group and control group. The students in the experimental group were imposed with the Process Approach in their writing class. Meanwhile, the students in the control group underwent the Product Approach. Both groups were tested once again using posttest and the experimental group was given a questionnaire to get their feedback on the use of Process Approach in their learning to write. Two independent raters graded the essays. The scores taken from the pretest and posttest were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistic. Paired t-test and independent t-test were used to find the significant difference between both tests, and also between both groups respectively. The data taken from the questionnaire was tabulated descriptively by using frequency and percentage. Based on the findings of the study, it shows that students in the experimental group have outperformed students in the control group in their writing performance. Thus, it could be safely stated here that Process Approach can be a solution in improving students' writing and heightening their writing abilities in terms of content, organization, vocabulary, language use and mechanics.

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ABSTRAK

Penggunaan kaedah "Process Approach" dalam penulisan telah dianggap dapat memberi kesan yang baik dalam meningkatkan kebolehan pelajar dalam menulis karangan berbanding metod tradisional. Ianya telah dilaksanakan dengan meluas di dalam kelas-kelas di kebanyakan negara di dunia . Walaubagaimanapun, keberkesanan penggunaan kaedah tersebut tidak berapa jelas. Oleh itu, kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji samada kaedah ini dapat menolong pelajar dalam meningkatkan kebolehan mereka menulis karangan. Reka bentuk kajian ini adalah kajian eksperimental kuasi. Kajian ini menggunakan 60 pelajar Tingkatan Empat yang dikenalpasti sebagai pelajar yang bermasalah dalam menulis karangan(Apprehensive writers). Dua kelas telah dikenalpasti selepas itu pelajar-pelajar tersebut diberi ujian pra dan didapati mereka mempunyai tahap profisiensi yang sama dalam penulisan. Kelas-kelas tersebut telah dipilih secara rawak sebagai kumpulan eksperimen dan kawalan. Pelajar kumpulan eksperimen menggunakan "Process Approach" dalam kelas penulisan mereka, manakala pelajar kumpulan kawalan menggunakan kaedah tradisional(Product Approach) dalam kelas penulisan mereka. Kedua-dua kumpulan tersebut diberi ujian pasca dan kumpulan eksperimen diberi borang soalselidik untuk mendapatkan pendapat mereka mengenai penggunaan kaedah tersebut dalam penulisan mereka.Kesemua karangan tersebut disemak dan dinilai oleh dua orang pemeriksa bebas. Skor dianalisis menggunakan statistik diskriptif dan inferensi. Ujian t-bebas digunakan dalam menganalisa skor tersebut. Data yang dikutip melalui soal selidik dianalisa menggunakan kekerapan dan peratus. Dapatan analisis menunjukkan terdapat peningkatan dalam keupayaan penulisan karangan pelajar setelah mereka menjalani kaedah "Process Approach" berbanding pelajar di dalam kumpulan kawalan. Oleh itu, dapatlah disimpulkan, kaedah "Process Approach" boleh memberi satu penyelesaian dalam memperbaiki keupayaan pelajar menulis dan juga dapat meningkatkan kebolehan mereka dalam menulis karangan dari segi isi, organisasi, perbendaharaan kata, penggunaan bahasa dan mekanik.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Writing involves a very complex, delicate and enigmatic process of mind exploration. As Chafee (2005) postulates that to write is to use language thoughtfully, with a sense of inquiry and audience. Thus, when we write, we pay close attention to the words that we choose, the structure of our paragraphs, the images you create. Davies P and Pearse E (2002) also support that due to the linguistic skills, writing is the least used by many people even by most of the native language.

Therefore, it is undeniable that writing is not an easy task to do for many Malaysian students even though teaching writing has been a part of formal education in our country. The students spend almost 11 years learning English on how to write, yet it has been considered the most daunting task to do. Chaffee (2005) clearly states that writers and teachers of writing have long recognized the intricate relationships between the extraordinary human processes of thought and language.

In many Malaysian school scenarios, many ESL teachers face the kind of students that need to be pushed to write. Or else they receive blank papers. To hide their frustrations, they tend to abandon the writing part by giving other simple exercises like drilling exercises. Thus, very often students are not given time to write rather than opportunities that would provide interaction, models and direct teaching that would encourage students to write better. Therefore, students may perceive writing as the hardest thing to do. In short, this problem could be related to the way of teaching is basically product approach and focuses on the written product or the end product rather

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than the process of learning of the students. This problem is also identified by Siti Hamin Stapa(1998) who highlights that due to the product approach that many students feel frustrated of doing the task of writing.

Recent research on the writing process has taught writing teachers that both teaching to write and learning to write are done much more effectively if we concentrate on the writing process rather than the written product. According to Brown (2001) over the past few decades of research on teaching writing to second language learners views that the process of writing requires an entirely different set of competencies and is fundamentally different from speaking skill and one major theme in pedagogical research on writing is the nature of the composing process of writing. Written products are often the result of thinking, drafting, and revising procedures that require specialized skills, skills that not every speaker develops naturally.

Hedge (2003) advocates that systematic research on writing has affected the change in our knowledge about ways to teach students to write effectively and without fear. Much attention has been given on the process of what the students do when they write rather than the written product itself.

In light of this, how can writing be defined? Writing can be best be defined as the process of planning, selecting, arranging and developing ideas in effective way of discourse.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Writing is a system for interpersonal communication using visible signs or graphic symbols. We can find writing in various kind of medium like in advertisement, newspaper, billboard, and letters. It is very important that everyone must know how to

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write so they can communicate easily via internet which has become the most popular gadget, and the source of information and knowledge of the 21st century.

Different from listening and speaking which we can acquire easily at home, writing is not easily be taught as we need formal way of learning as to develop our writing skill successfully. Due to that, school is the most important place for students to learn the skill. As teachers, therefore, we need to equip ourselves with suitable approaches or methods for our students on teaching writing effectively.

It is important to know the various stages in the development of writing skills so that we can employ in teaching of writing. Therefore, in teaching writing, there are special consideration to be taken into account which includes the organizing of sentences into paragraphs, how paragraphs are joined together, and the general organization of ideas into coherent piece of discourse (Harmer J, 2004).

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1.2.1 Teaching Writing in Malaysian schools

English is taught as second language in all Malaysian primary and secondary schools in line with its status as a second language. The aim of English Language Instruction in Malaysian schools is to enable the learners to communicate effectively and efficiently in English social and professional situations. They should be able to use English for different purposes, for example, ask for information, understand instructions, read textbooks or manuals and write reports. This means they need to learn to listen and understand, read and understand, speak and write accurately, fluently and appropriately (Pusat Perkembangan Kurikulum, 2002).

Hence, students are taught English language to enable them to use the language in everyday life, to further their studies and for work purposes. With globalization, all Malaysians will need to be fluent in English as a medium for communication with people from other countries (Pusat Perkembangan Kurikulum, 2002).

The English language syllabus aims to extend students English proficiency in order to meet their needs for English everyday life, for knowledge acquisition and for future workplace. Thus, it is important for students to be able to speak and write in English. With that, the use of English in ICT is also included in order to help students to access knowledge on the internet and to network with people both locally and overseas. Therefore, the importance of learning to write is to prepare our students for new millennium of 21st century.

In teaching writing, the use of process approach is recommended in the English Specification that students should be guided through the planning, drafting, editing and the final writing of the composition (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2003). Nonetheless, the teaching of product method is not totally rejected because it has been traditionally taught and become widely known to be one of the applicable methods among teachers due to certain circumstances. However, the introduction of process approach to teachers in school is as another alternative to be used to combat some writing problems. Thus, the writing process is given a great focus here. The importance of writing process is one way to develop the students thinking skill. As mentioned in the English specification, in providing opportunities to sharpen students' thinking, it is important that activities and exercises presented in the classroom be meaningful, challenging and thought-provoking. Students also need to be exposed to a variety of

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contexts, situations and language use. They need to be exposed to various types of activities in the teaching.

1.3 STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROBLEMS

Generally, many Form Four students face a little bit 'shock' when they are introduced to the kind of writing that needs them to write longer. In contrast, when they were in Lower secondary school, they were not asked to write long essays. The most they have to write is about 100 words in their writing part. Whereas, in Upper form, they have to write more than 100 words. The researcher has come across the scenario through out her years as an English teacher.

Throughout her years of teaching, the researcher identified several problems which relate to the teaching of writing in classroom: First, many students exhibit their strong apprehension about writing which often interferes with their ability to write effectively. Second, the students have difficulty in generating ideas as they have limited linguistic skills that enable them to write. These students need 'support' to write or some would consider writing as a very cold and difficult task to do. To get them to start, these students need to be engaged in activities that require them to actively generate ideas. Reid, J (1993) postulates that idea generation and organization of ideas are important and thus, the pre-writing strategies allow students to generate ideas and arrange them into sequence. This leads to the next problem that is the students do not have the right learning strategy that can help them in generating ideas before starting to write. Therefore, the end product was not very satisfying, and does not show the improvement in the students' writing ability. As a result, writing seemed the hardest task for them to

do. Another reason is also due to the interference of the first language which influences the students' language style once they start to write. The language structure in Malay and English is different and this results the problems of organizing ideas and paragraphing. Last but not least, another common problem is that the lesson in the classroom is basically drilling exercises which are examination oriented that many students feel writing is not an interesting task to do. Because of these problems, students tend to feel apprehensive to writing and they may not be able to produce a good piece of writing. This is approved by Siti Hamin (1998) who finds out in her study that writing apprehension hinders students from starting to write.

Due to apprehension in writing, students' writing ability will greatly contribute much on their performance in SPM as in Paper 1 English (1119) SPM Examination Paper requires them to write. They need to write 2 sections – Section A (Directed Writing) and Section B (Continuous Writing). This paper carries 80 marks out from the total 160 marks (the total marks of Paper 1 and Paper 2). Hence, the students' ability to write will definitely affect their performance in SPM. As these students have difficulty to generate ideas, arrange the ideas, construct correct sentences and thus unable to produce a good written essay. It is even worst if they feel writing requires them to write grammatical correct sentences which make them fear of writing.

The fear of writing and inability to generate ideas may due to the defect of the product approach which hinders students to write well as this product approach emphasizes on the product only and not on the processes of writing. The traditional approach to the teaching of writing focuses on the product, in other words, the production of neat, grammatically correct pieces of writing (Mahon and Yau, 1992).

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There is little or no opportunity for the students to add any thoughts or ideas of their own (Raimes, 1983). It focuses more on teacher-centred learning as the end product is more important than the students' learning process. Students are not given the opportunity to find their own weakness or strength in their writing. The main thing is the students need to come up with the end written product. They have no chance of collaborative learning through peer checking or peer comment. Learning to write seems to be an isolated and silent activity as students have to write on their own without any interaction in classroom.

Consequently, in order to overcome the fear of writing, the curriculum specification of Malaysian Secondary school for teaching writing recommends the application of Process Approach in teaching writing as it might give some ways or solutions to writing problems in schools (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2003). Not to say that product approach is not workable at all but to some extent the use of process approach might be helpful in tackling some problems in students' writing. Process Approach considers the writers' thought, experience and prior knowledge before the actual writing begins. Writers move recursively through a series of stages as the process writing includes prewriting, writing, revising, editing and rewriting. This is proven by Janet Emig who found out in her findings that writers do not produce text in the straightforward linear sequence as in the traditional paradigm (Celcia-Murcia, 2001).

Even many research findings from studies in the use of process approach in ESL writing show that the approach can help students to improve their writing skills and attitudes towards writing (Goldstein and Carr 1996, Mahon and Yau 1992, Jacob and Talshir, 1998, Belinda Ho, 2006).

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However, the effectiveness of using the process approach to teach writing is still inconclusive. There has been very little research done on the process approach in the second language environment especially in Malaysian context. It is the purpose of this study to find out whether the process approach is applicable in her study or vice verse.

With regard to the matter, the researcher attempts to find out whether the use of process approach can improve ESL students' writing particularly among apprehensive students. These students are selected as they do not show their good performance in their writing paper during their mid-term examination recently. It is also one way to provide awareness to these students writing is not simply focusing the end product but it is more than that. The student writers will be put in a long 'process' where they become aware of the purpose of the writing and the need to communicate meaning.

1.4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The research will be based on a framework illustrated in the following figure:

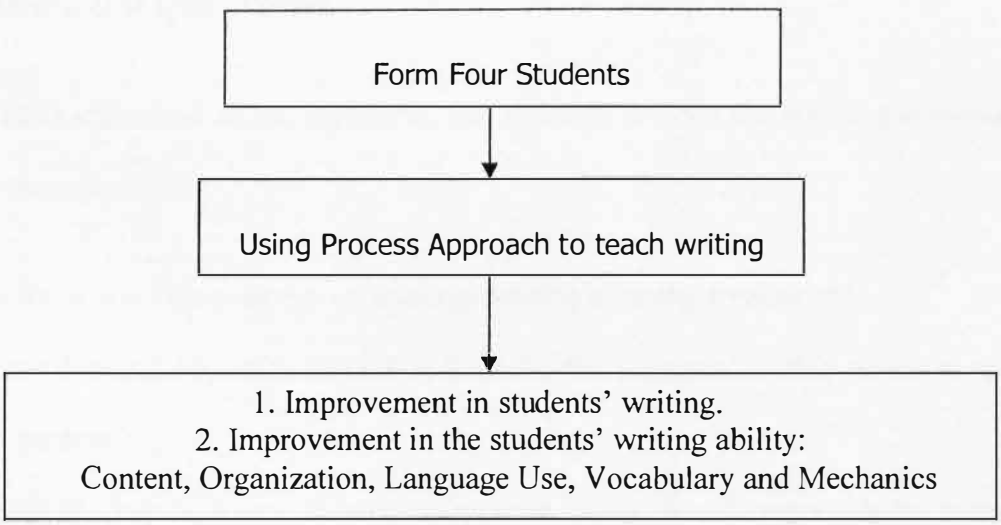

Figure 1.1: Conceptual Framework

1.5 AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is to investigate the use of Process Approach in teaching writing whether students are able to produce a better developed written product and improve their writing ability.

1.6 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Specifically, the objectives of this study are:

1. To find out whether there is an improvement in students' writing after undergoing the Process Approach.
2. To investigate if students are able to improve their writing ability in terms of a) content b) organization c) vocabulary d) language use e) mechanics.
3. To find out the students' perception towards the use of process approach in improving their writing.

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1.7 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the statement of the problems, this research intends to provide the following research questions:

1. Is there any improvement in students' writing after the treatment?
2. Does Process Approach to writing improve the students' writing ability in terms of content?
3. Does Process Approach to writing improve the students' writing ability in terms of organization?