

When less is more: a group of first year undergraduate Malaysian students' experiences of the essay revision process

Abstract

The teaching of English as a second language (ESL) in Malaysia has undergone many changes. Different ways of looking at and employing pedagogical approaches in Malaysian ESL classrooms have been considered and attempted; some of these have not only altered but also challenged traditional approaches in the classroom. However, writing, seen by many Malaysian students as the most difficult of the four, has often been neglected. ESL teachers cannot be entirely blamed for this minimal emphasis on composition writing. Factors, which work against both the teachers and students, include the time factor, which inevitably compels teachers to focus on a product-based rather than process-based writing. Although there is an extensive body of research on process-oriented first language writing, little attention has been given to second language classroom practice. Therefore, researchers who examine ESL writers in Malaysian universities are required to determine whether the process-oriented approach to teaching writing can be used effectively with ESL students so that the gap between the actual level of English language proficiency amongst Malaysian university students, especially writing skills, and the level of competence required for learning at tertiary levels can be bridged relatively quickly. This paper reports the finding of one of the research activities looking at the contribution of a teaching intervention based on the process centered approach; i.e. the types of revision changes employed by this group of students in developing the drafts. Revising is the process of making sure that the writing says what the writer wants it to say.