

IMPLEMENTATION OF PROCESS APPROACH TO REDUCE ANXIETY IN AN EFL THAI WRITING CLASS

Wipada Prasansaph

English Department, Faculty of Education, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Thailand

E-mail: wipada.pr@ssru.ac.th

ABSTRACT

This research aimed to compare the anxiety of the Thai English teaching major undergraduates who studied writing in English before and after the implementation of the Process Approach in the teaching of a writing class. Forty third-year students at the Faculty of Education SSRU, 2017, were asked to summarize (about 150-200 words) an episode of Sherlock Homes after they had read it at home. Then, they were also asked to write an open-ended self assessment expressing how successful they felt about their writing product and how they felt about learning writing and what difficulties they encountered during the process of writing. Also they were interviewed one by one related to what they had written in the self assessment and what hidden feelings they wanted to express with the teacher researcher personally. It was revealed that most of students did not feel happy with their writing products. Then the Process Approach was introduced in the teaching of writing. After 8 weeks of the writing process through 4 simplified novels, they were asked to write an open-ended self assessment and were interviewed again. The content analysis technique was used to analyze how the students expressed. The latter descriptive data displayed the more pleasant feelings toward the writing tasks.

Keywords: Process Approach, anxiety, teaching writing, EFL class

INTRODUCTION

Owing to an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context in Thailand, Thai students do not have much opportunity to use English outside class. While English becomes increasingly important, a lot of high school graduates consider continuing their tertiary education in English-related major because this will provide more opportunity to use English in their daily life. Some examples of English-related majors are English major in the Faculty of Arts or Humanities, Business English major and Tourism Industry major in the Faculty of Management Sciences or Humanities, English teaching major in the Faculty of Education, and all the English Programs (EPs) in Thai universities. Among these university fields of study, English teaching major in the Faculty of Education is very popular due to the great demand of teachers of English nowadays. Therefore, at SSRU (the research site), there is quite a high competition to pass the entrance examination to study. The ratio of the accepted students to the applicants according to the admission statistics is around 1: 13 [1]. Though Bachelor of Education, English major, is the five-year curriculum, which is a long one (studying courses including one-year internship in school), students are willing to work hard on it because they will have the chance of being a teacher of English or working in any fields by using the knowledge of English in the future.

At the research site, Bachelor of Education, English teaching major, undergraduates need to be trained in several main areas of studies: education, English language skills, linguistics, cultural awareness, literature, and English teaching theories and practice. Among the four skills of English language skills, writing is the most challenging skill to teach due to a few reasons. There is usually no direct contact between the writer and the reader. Therefore, the writer usually does not know whether the reader understands or enjoys what s/he is written. Moreover, the writer needs to have a good knowledge of grammar, vocabulary and structure of the target language to convey the meaning of the message clearly as, unlike speaking, there is no place for negotiation. Also, writing needs a lot of thinking, imagination and organizing. In other words, the writer has to make sure the style of writing is interesting.

The teaching of writing is a challenging one compared to other the teaching of other language skills. The researcher was in charge of the course ENE3415 (Critical Reading and Writing in English), teaching the third-year English teaching major undergraduates. After assigning the students to finish a booklet of an Episode of Sherlock Homes written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the teacher researcher asked the students to write about 150-200 words to summarize the story. Also, the students were asked to write their feelings towards the writing task; how successful they felt about their writing product and what difficulties they encountered during the process of writing. The researcher then interviewed each student related to what they had written in the self assessment and what hidden feelings they wanted to express with the teacher researcher personally. It was revealed that most of students did not feel happy with their writing products. They expressed their problematic themes about writing in English such as their vocabulary limitation, appropriateness of vocabulary use, weak

grammatical background and sentence structure, and the lack of confidence in writing in English, especially when the readers did not interpret the sentences the same way the writers intended to convey. (See more detail in the RESULTS section.) Their anxiety of learning writing and producing the writing tasks were shown obviously.

According to the anxiety that the students had faced as mentioned above, the teacher researcher tried to design the writing class by using the Process Approach in teaching writing skills. The focus of the Process Approach is on the actual process of writing; it is focused on the learner and not on the teacher or the written product. Writing is defined as a process that involves a lot of planning, drafting, discussing, revising and redrafting. In this research, forty third-year students who enrolled the course ENE3415 (Critical Reading and Writing in English) participated the teaching of writing through the Process Approach in and outside the class activities in order to reduce the anxiety in writing in English.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of the research was to compare the anxiety of the Thai English teaching major undergraduates who studied writing in English before and after the implementation of the Process Approach in the teaching of a writing class.

LITERATURE AND THEORY

Anxiety in language learning

Language learners usually express anxiety, apprehension and nervousness when learning a new language. Language anxiety can originate from learners' own sense of 'self', their self-related cognitions, language learning difficulties, differences in learners' and target language cultures, differences in social status of the speakers and interlocutors, and from the fear of losing self-identity. [2] Anxiety, not only appeared in the spoken language communication, is also occurred when foreign language learners are asked to write in the target language in the classroom. Bailey (1995) links anxiety with competitiveness and argues that if we can discover its various causes we will be in better position to reduce it. [3] According to the pre-investigation of the writing class, students clearly showed their concern about writing, mostly due to the linguistic, vocabulary background, and the competition among other classmates' writing products. Acknowledging this concern, the teacher researcher tried to change the teaching writing activities in order to reduce the students' anxiety in writing in English. The Process Approach was introduced in this research.

The Process Approach

The Process Approach of the teaching of writing is based on the following principles:

Writing is a process that involves a lot of planning, drafting, discussing, revising and re-drafting. In other words, students should be helped to realize that:

What they first write on the paper is not the finished product, but only a draft.

Students may have to write many drafts when they gather feedback (suggestions, comments and recommendations) from their classmates or teacher.

These are the features of the Process Approach.

Students do not hand in their first draft (or first piece of writing) to the teacher for marking.

Students are not expected to finish their writing within a certain length of time.

The teacher is not the only one giving comments and suggestions on a piece of writing. The students' classmates will also be giving comments and suggestions on their writing.

The stages of the Process Approach include the following: [4]

1. Pre-writing: The objective of this stage is to encourage your students to think carefully of what they want to write before they start the actual writing. The teacher invites the class to discuss the topic that is given for the written assignment. Students interact with their peers to get more ideas on the given topic.
2. Writing the first draft: The students start writing their first draft in school or at home.
3. Giving help on content of topic: Let the students check the content of their writing with the content checklist. The teacher should prepare the content checklist which includes the following questions.
 - ✓ Does your writing make sense?
 - ✓ Have you left anything out?

- ✓ Did you write in paragraphs?
 - ✓ Did you pay attention to the organization of your writing?
 - ✓ Consider the word use. Can you think of more interesting words?
 - ✓ Have you included enough ideas and information?
 - ✓ Do you think your readers can understand what you have written?
4. Training revision skills for content: The teacher selects one sample of the students' first draft to show on the screen. Without knowing the writer of the piece, the students are asked to point out the weakness in the sample first draft and provide suggestions for improvement with the teacher's help and guidance. In this stage, the teacher tells the students not to focus their attention on grammar, spelling and punctuation.
 5. Peer editing for content: After the students are trained to make comments or give suggestions on the written work, they are divided into groups of four and take turns (one at a time) to read out their first draft to the other members of the group. Using the Content Checklist, the other students in the group give suggestions on how to improve the draft that has been read out. The teacher move among the groups to give help and guidance when necessary.
 6. Writing of second draft and teacher-student conferencing: The students will be writing their second draft in class or at home. While the students are writing the second draft, the teacher may start teacher-student conferencing by making suggestions on how the draft can be improved.
 7. Going to the Language Checklist: The teacher should prepare the Language Checklist to teach the whole class. The Language Checklist should include the rules of the areas of language (grammar item, structure, spelling or punctuation) that the teacher wishes to focus on with a few examples of them.
 8. Training of revision skills for language: Select one sample of the second draft to the class to look for mistakes. This time the class will focus on the language accuracy. The teacher encourages the students to make suggestions for improvement of the selected second draft.
 9. Peer editing of the second draft: The students are sitting groups and discuss about each member's second draft. The teacher is moving around to give help when necessary. However, the teacher should remind the students that they should not correct any student's work without getting the student writer's permission.
 10. Writing of the final draft: The students make improvements on their second drafts based on the suggestions and comments provided by the classmates and the teacher.

METHODOLOGY

Forty third-year students who enrolled the course ENE3415 (Critical Reading and Writing in English) were asked to summarize (about 150-200 words) an episode of Sherlock Homes after they had read it at home. Then, they were also asked to write an open-ended self assessment expressing how successful they felt about their writing product and how they felt about learning writing and what difficulties they encountered during the process of writing. Also the researcher interviewed each student related to what they had written in the self assessment and what hidden feelings they wanted to express with the teacher researcher personally. It was revealed that most of students did not feel happy with their writing products. The writing task caused anxiety. The researcher then introduced the teaching of writing through the Process Approach in and outside the class activities in order to reduce the anxiety in writing in English. The Process Approach in this research includes 10 stages: pre-writing, writing the first draft, giving help on content of topic, training revision skills for content, peer editing for content, writing of second draft and teacher-student conferencing, going to the Language Checklist, training of revision skills for language, peer editing of the second draft, and writing of the final draft. After the students studied through four reading texts (the simplified version of the novels), namely, Sherlock Homes, Romeo and Juliet, Moby Dick, and Treasure Island in 8 weeks, they went through the process of writing according to The Process Approach. Then, they were asked to write an open-ended self assessment again. The content analysis technique was used to analyze how the students expressed.

RESULTS

Using the open-ended self assessments and the interviews before and after implementing the Process approach in the teaching of writing in English, the results can be divided into two parts.

Part One: The descriptive data from forty third-year English major undergraduates (both from the open-ended self assessment and the interview) displayed the problematic themes in performing writing tasks in English as follows.

1. The vocabulary limitation

2. The confusion in vocabulary use
3. The lack of translation skills
4. The lack of analytical skills
5. Poor grammatical background
6. The Thai (native language) structure interference
7. The lack of confidence in writing correct sentence
8. The fear of the less score in writing in English
9. The insecure use of the written language (Not sure whether their written language is comprehensible to the readers)
10. The time constraint in writing causes a great pressure in writing.

Part Two: The descriptive data from forty third-year English major undergraduates (both from the open-ended self assessment and the interview) displayed the more pleasant feelings toward the writing tasks as follows.

1. Do not have to worry about the vocabulary use in the first draft.
2. Do not have worry about the grammatical errors in the first draft.
3. There will be other eyes and brains helping and editing the written text in terms of content and grammar, both in the first and the second draft.
4. The writing task may not be a perfect (error-free) product, but it is certainly from the careful process of writing. The writer feels proud of the final product because it comes from the careful and thoughtful process.
5. Learning from others, the classmates and the teacher, helps build up more confidence in writing.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

The affective feature like anxiety in language learning is a very important issue to be considered. When students feel unhappy, less confident, nervous and anxious about communicating, they seem insecure to produce the language. Essien (2018) stated that studying English should not necessarily focus on syntactic accuracy or proficiency in grammar usage. Instead, it should be giving opportunities to students to use as much English as they can in real life contexts, rather than solely focus on accuracy as in traditional teaching. [5] The Process Approach, which focuses on the ‘process’ rather than the ‘product’ can help reduce the anxiety in language producing. With the careful process through planning, drafting, editing and revising, the students feel better, safer, and more secure in using the language. When students would feel less worried about making mistakes, they would have positive attitude in producing tasks in the foreign language.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere thanks to Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University for the invaluable help throughout this research. Without the great contribution from the institute, the research would not have been possible.

REFERENCES

- [1] <http://acad.ssrु.ac.th/academic/RC.aspx>
- [2] <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042811021744>
- [3] Bailey, K.M. (1983). ‘Competitiveness and anxiety in adult second language learning: looking at and through the diary studies’ in *Classroom Oriented Research in Second Language Acquisition*, H.W. Seliger and M.H.Long (eds.) Rowley: Newsberry House Publishers. pp. 67-103.
- [4] SEAMEO Regional Language Centre (1995). —A Distance Education TEFL Programme: Module Five The Teaching of Writing, *SEAMEO - Canada Programme of Cooperation in Human Resource Development*, First Edition, Singapore, Pp.43-50.
- [5] Essien, A.M. (2018). The Effects of Project-Based Learning on Students’ English Language Ability. Retrieved on February 17, 2019 from [http://www.ijbts-journal.com/images/main_1366796758/66\)%20VI18-1142_Full%20Paper-Abigail%20Melad%20Essien.pdf](http://www.ijbts-journal.com/images/main_1366796758/66)%20VI18-1142_Full%20Paper-Abigail%20Melad%20Essien.pdf).