

STRENGTHENING TERTIARY STUDENTS' WRITING SKILLS THROUGH T.R.E.N.D. APPROACH: PRELIMINARY STUDY

Lim Seong Pek¹, Rita Wong Mee Mee, Soo Ruey Shing, Daeshela Theemas, and Na-Thinamalar Magiswary Nadarajan

Faculty of Education and Social Sciences, Universiti Selangor, Malaysia

¹E-mail: limsp@unisel.edu.my

Abstract

Writing has been subjected as a burden for the students taking Proficiency English subjects during their first two semesters studying in the university. For these students, writing a composition has been a task they would prefer not to do. As many of them are not sure how to first generate and organise their ideas, how to express themselves fluently or to be able to write grammatical correct sentences have become a problem to the English lecturers teaching the subjects. Realising the importance of writing skills among undergraduates in the tertiary education, a preliminary study was carried out on 50 undergraduates who attended a day Malaysian University English Test (MUET) seminar to examine students' writing ability through T.R.E.N.D. approach. The findings had shown significant improvement in learners' writing in term of coherency and development of ideas. As a whole, the use of T.R.E.N.D. approach had helped to improve students' writing ability in terms of not only language proficiency, but also their level of confidence.

Keywords: Writing skills, Writing Approaches, Perception & Literacy

1 INTRODUCTION

Writing is a process where learners put their ideas and thoughts in words to form sentences. Salem (2013) stated that writing as one of the four basic language skills that is given a unique importance. A good piece of writing is a valuable tool for communicating one's thoughts to others. However, most student writers are still struggling to pen their writing. Most of these writers find it difficult to organize their thoughts, edit or remove information in their writing. In addition, it is noticeable that students tend to repeat basic mistakes such as misspelling and lacking in elaboration of points which disrupted the flow of writing and automatically make it a bad writing as a whole. In contrary, the focus of most writing tasks assigned in English classroom had placed heavily on the final product rather than the process of writing the essays. In fact, most students are not able to write in English for many reasons.

One of the factors is lack of knowledge in developing and arranging content and ideas. Students might not be exposed to the writing process correctly or at all in some cases. Therefore, the students do not know how to express the ideas in writing. The situation had dampened students' writing as they could come up with brilliant thoughts, but unfortunately, were unable to incorporate those thoughts into writing. Hence, most students will end up abandoning those ideas which made the writing dull and uninteresting for readers. In returns, due to poor writing skills, the students' motivation and confidence were then hampered.

According to Gashout (2014), in writing, student writers must get used to drafting, revising, and redrafting for several time before producing a final piece. Instead, it is like an evolution

of students' first thought which will go through some process where they might imitate a model or a sample of writing, try to add or subtract more ideas into it, how the plan to incorporate those ideas in the draft, how to revise the content based on the feedback from learners peers, making suitable corrections before publishing, and lastly where learners will share the final product with the readers. By going through all these processes, the quality of the writing is hoped to be ensured, but most importantly, the standard of writing among ESL learners are at the level where it is supposed to be. Sahar and Alireza (2014) proposed that one of the teaching strategies in some classes is to assign the students to work in a writing task by using a model essay. In preparing the writing after analysing the main components of the sample text then make use of the sample text's organizational characteristics.

However, the process approach focused highly on the writing process on how writers started writing as well as how they develop their ideas. Bae (2011) stated that students are given enough time to go through the writing process along with appropriate feedback from both their teachers and peers. Therefore, they can develop their first drafts which might be unorganized and full of grammatical errors to final drafts which are better organized with fewer grammatical errors. As Hyland (2009) pointed out, some students may not trust peers' feedback, and at the same time, they are reluctant to criticize others' writing making it difficult for students to explore further. Hyland (2009) went on to criticize on process writing for merely focusing on the process, and teaching good writers' strategies cannot fully equip students as good writers.

2 OBJECTIVES

This study examined the effectiveness of T.R.E.N.D. approach in generating tertiary students' writing skills and if those processes applied affects their writing performance in term of organization, length and language used. The study in this project involved the analysis of any significance difference in students' writing performance before and after the implementation of T.R.E.N.D. approach in writing. It is also hope that this project will enlighten English lecturers to opt for strategies in helping tertiary students in preparation to write a good piece of essay during examinations. During the development of a piece, the student writer always does a certain amount of transferring and trashing of ideas. And, further, writers often try to place themselves in the shoes of their audience, the readers, in order to check the comprehensibility of their presentation from the reader's perspective.

In a similar manner, the reader has also been considered a writer in that the reader's mind races ahead to anticipate not only the message, but also the structure and presentational style of a piece; words are thought of as well as ideas, in ways in which they might appear (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1982; Flower & Hayes, 1980 in Roselmina & James, 2000). With the introduction of T.R.E.N.D. approach, thus, a reader's text can be compared with an author's text, and revised when needed. This sense of writing as reading provides a sense of personal engagement to the reading experience.

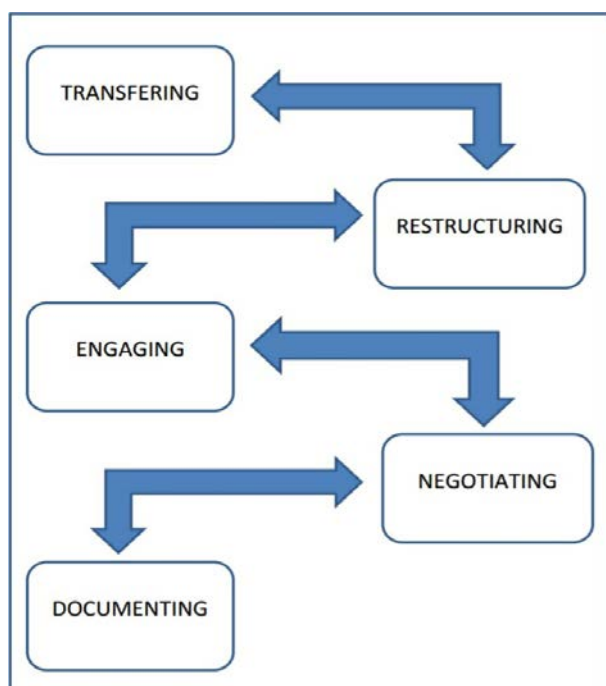


Figure 1: The Process of T.R.E.N.D. Approach to writing skills

As writing has been subjected as a burden for the students taking Proficiency English subjects during their first two semesters studying in the university. For these students, writing a composition has been a task they would prefer not to do. As many of them are not sure how to first generate and

organise their ideas, how to express themselves fluently or to be able to write grammatical correct sentences have become a problem to the English lecturers teaching the subjects. Students at different levels generally confine their revisions to local problems at the word and sentence level (McCutchen, Francis, Kerr, 1997, Ferris, 1995, Polio, Fleck, Leder, 1998 in Mohd Sahandri & Saifuddin, 2009). They added that one of the reasons why students go to edit their writing in terms of grammar and mechanics routs in the way teachers score the essays. Realising the importance of writing skills among undergraduates in the tertiary education, this study is to carry out to improve students' writing ability through T.R.E.N.D. approach.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on second language writing has always been a controversial one. Many researchers had conducted studies on the effectiveness of process writing approach in teaching of writing skills. Many, too, had agreed that the process writing approach has an upper hand in getting students to write better as to compare to the product approach. According to Caudery (1995), the process approach has always been controversial in term for practical reasons. It was added that the process teaching often requires more in the way of input from teachers and students as well as the degree organizational problems. Horowitz (1986 in Caudery, 1995), on the other hand, stated that there has been debate over whether the focus of the teaching is always appropriate for the students concerned by preparing them for language examinations. He added that there is an obvious conflict between the extended composing processes encouraged by the process approach and the single-draft writing usually necessary in an examination.

According to Zamel (1982), writing process is made up of a few steps before the writers ends up with the finished product. Since writers do not seem to know beforehand what it is they will say writing is a process through which meaning is created. This suggests composition instruction that recognizes the importance of generating, formulating, and refining one's ideas. It implies that revision should become the main component of this instruction that writing teachers should intervene throughout the process, and that students should learn to view their writing as someone else's reading. The process involves much more than studying a particular grammar, analyzing and imitating rhetorical models, or outlining what it is one plan to say. The process involves not only the act of writing itself, but prewriting and rewriting, all of which are interdependent.

A study conducted by Khuwaileh and Al-Shoumali (2000) showed that the lack of cohesion and coherence in students' written texts is caused by the lack of logical connectors of sequence, consequence, contrast, addition and illustration. Another problem identified in the texts written by the students is a lack of appropriate logical linking of ideas. This showed that the students had problems in organizing ideas in their writing. The organization of ideas into

paragraphs was not clear in their writing. Several main ideas were found in one paragraph written by some of the students. Gambell (1991) conducted a study on university education students' self-perceptions of writing at the University of Saskatchewan. The sample consisted of forty eight elementary education preservice teachers in their second (mostly) or third year who were writing in English as their first language. The results of the study provides information on common problems encountered by students, such as the inability to narrow down the topic, inability to organize the structure of their writing and difficulty in deciding relevant information to be used in their writing.

Bae (2011) presented on how process writing has become an essential way to improve students' writing abilities. He investigated on how to provide feedback on students' writing and how to use portfolios in the process writing classrooms. According to Bae (2011), giving feedback is not a simple issue, but requires teachers to decide many things such as when and how to respond to students' writing in advance.

However, Lima (2015) contrasted the effectiveness in using process writing approach in teaching writing skills. Lima (2015) added that process writing approach focused mainly on the process which does not give students the sense of an audience. The reader in this approach was said of not having access to the process through which the final product was created. Therefore, dismissing the product was not in accordance with a teacher's objective which was to equip students with the tools to help them achieve and succeed in contexts other than the classroom.

Hence, this study was carried out in introducing T.R.E.N.D. approach to writing at the level of the higher institution. The ability to generate well organise and coherent essays is expected. Most of the course work assessments and examinations are in the form of essay writing. Therefore, effective writing skills are essential to students studying in higher education in which peers play an important role in providing effective feedback.

4 RESEARCH PROCEDURES

The research was conducted at one of the local university in Malaysia. This research site was chosen with an intention to examine the effectiveness of using T.R.E.N.D. approach to strengthen students' writing skills in term of organisation, length and language used. In this preliminary study, a total number of 50 respondents from various programmes who had registered for Malaysian University English Test (MUET) had been selected for the study. This study comprised of a total of seven male and 43 female respondents who participated in a day MUET workshop. In the beginning of the study, all the respondents were given a topic to write in within a time provided. The respondents were not allowed to discuss and were told to write in the way of which they had been taught in the past. The sample essays were then collected.

The respondents were then been explained and guided on how the process of T.R.E.N.D. approach could be applied. During this process, the respondents were firstly told to transfer all ideas into a mind-map as in the transferring stage. Through this stage, respondents were guided on how to build the introduction and thesis statement for their respective essay. In the restructuring stage, the respondents were to build elaboration and to provide examples to the points transferred earlier. From this, the respondents were able to see the required structures for a complete piece of writing. Once completed, the respondents exchanged their essay to be read by their peer. Lima (2015) stressed the importance of having peers to engage into the process as immediate readers. This was supported by Lee, Bopry, and Hedberg (2006) stating that the peer response stage can stimulate students to work in groups which help to provide students with a mental model of readers in order to clarify any incongruity between their ideas and the audience perception of their thoughts. In negotiating stage, the respondents responded to the readers' views by adding and trashing information from the first draft. Finally, during documenting stage, the respondents rewrote the essay in a presentable way before submission.

The final essays were collected and both essays were rated by a rater to determine the effect of T.R.E.N.D. approach in generating tertiary students' writing skills and if those processes applied affects their writing performance in term of organisation, length and language used. The findings of this study were presented as follow. This study is hoped to provide a significant pedagogical implications for lecturers lecturing English language to plan and guide students to write effectively. Furthermore, it is expected that this study will shed light on the feasibility of incorporating T.R.E.N.D approach in teaching writing activities during Proficiency English lessons. This will then help to improve students' writing ability before signing up for Malaysian University English Test (MUET).

5 DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

All the 50 papers from the respondents were scored independently by the rater to show the effects of T.R.E.N.D. approach (treatment) in strengthening students' writing skills. In this section, the data was analysed based on overall, content and language scores. A set of hypotheses was set to show changes to the study in term of content (ideas and length) and language.

Alternative Hypothesis (Ha)

There is a significant difference between the development of content and language in students' writing performance.

Null Hypothesis (H0)

There is no significant difference between the development of content and language in students' writing performance.

5.1 ANALYSIS OF OVERALL SCORES

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics on Overall Scores

Paired Samples Statistics					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	PreTestOV	15.80	50	5.451	.771
	PostTestOV	25.80	50	5.817	.823

Table 2: Paired Sample Test for Overall Scores

Paired Samples Test									
		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
				Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	PreTestOV - PostTestOV	-10.000	7.140	1.010	-12.029	-7.971	-9.903	49	.000

Based on Table 2 above, the results showed that there was a significant difference between the mean scores -10.00. The PreTestOV mean score in Table 1 was 15.80 with the standard deviation of 5.451 and the PostTestOV score recorded an improvement of 25.80 and standard deviation of 5.817. From Table 2, the t-value had showed significant difference of -9.903 when p-value was set at the level of .05. Therefore, null hypothesis was rejected and alternative hypothesis was accepted where there was a significant difference in students' writing performance in term of overall scores.

5.2 ANALYSIS OF CONTENT SCORES

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics on Content Scores

Paired Samples Statistics					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	PreTestCon	8.24	50	2.796	.395
	PostTestCon	13.82	50	2.994	.423

Table 4: Paired Sample Test for Content Scores

Paired Samples Test									
		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	PreTestCon-PostTestCon	-5.580	3.892	.550	-6.686	-4.474	-10.138	49	.000

Table 4 above, there was a significant difference between the mean scores of -5.580. The PreTestCon mean score in Table 3 was 8.24 with a standard deviation of 2.796 and the PostTestCon mean score recorded 13.83 with a standard deviation of 2.994. From Table 4, the t-value had showed significant difference of -10.138 when p-value was set at the level of .05. Therefore, null hypothesis was rejected and alternative hypothesis was accepted where there was a significant difference in students' writing performance in term of content.

5.3 ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE SCORES

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics on Language Scores

Paired Samples Statistics					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	PreTestLg	7.54	50	2.764	.391
	PostTestLg	12.18	50	2.775	.392

Table 6: Paired Sample Test for Language Scores

Paired Samples Test									
		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	PreTestLg - PostTestLg	-4.640	3.403	.481	-5.607	-3.673	-9.641	49	.000

The results in Table 6 showed that there was a significant difference between the mean scores -4.640. As stated in Table 5, the PreTestLg mean score was 7.54 as compared to PostTestLg mean score of 12.18. The standard deviation for PreTestLg was 2.764 while PostTestLg with only 2.775. From Table 6, the t-value had showed significant difference of -9.641 when p-value was set at the level of .05. Therefore, null hypothesis was rejected and alternative hypothesis was accepted where there was a significant difference in students' writing performance in term of language use.

6 CONCLUSION

The fact that the writing problems exist even after the students have received several years of essay writing instruction in secondary school is definitely cause for concern. The current emphasis on structure, mechanics and linguistic knowledge in the teaching of writing sidelines the importance of teaching writing as a process and ignores the social nature of writing. This study is expected to provide insight into whether T.R.E.N.D. approach could strengthen students' writing ability. Based on the data tabulated above, it was found that there was a significant difference between the treatment and respondents' writing performance. The used of T.R.E.N.D. approach had proven to be an effective strategy in helping tertiary students in developing ideas for writing in English language classroom. With this study, lecturers lecturing English proficiency courses in tertiary institution could apply T.R.E.N.D. approach to teaching of writing in strengthening the students' writing ability. This provides lecturers an alternative to the process approach as it was noted that not all the stages in the approach acted to be suitable developing students' writing skills.

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The four factors that determine the students to practice entrepreneurship or running a business or a student entrepreneur has a component that consists of several different variables. But there is one factor that does not have a component so that the decisive factor in entrepreneurship students are only three factors.

Table 2. Factors, Variable or Component, Eiegenvalue dan Variance

Factors	Variables Component	Correlation	Eigenvalue	Variance
Factor 1	Having Ability to manage Time (X21)	0.740	7.576	39.876
	Having Ability to manage Human Resource (X20)	0.718		
	Positive Attitude (X11)	0.718		
	Self confidence (X9)	0.708		
	Having information (X19)	0.705		
	Resoluteness (X8)	0.699		
	Having the risk control (X6)	0.694		
	Future orientation (X23)	0.686		
	Having leadership skill (X22)	0.684		
	Positive thought“always able to” (X10)	0.682		
	Brave to go out from confort Zona (X7)	0.671		
	The ability to manage (X3)	0.593		
	Having networking (X18)	0.569		
	Having knowledge (X16)	0.557		
	Having specific ability (X17)	0.554		
	Individual behavior in working (X12)	0.545		
Faktor 2	The ability to have inovation (X2)	0.639	2.646	13.926
	The ability to sell (X4)	0.573		
Faktor 3	The ability to know the opportunity (X1)	0.637	1.780	9.369

There were 19 variables that can be the first factor consist of 16 component. It can be referred to as the entrepreneurial spirit (X1). While the second factor consists of two components which can be stated as factor of innovation and marketing ability (X2). The third factor is only one component can be referred to as a factor predicting ability (X3).

Entrepreneurial Model and Entrepreneurship Culture Development

This section describes about the model student entrepreneurs who have run as long as they take a course in entrepreneurship and already four semesters as student. The model of entrepreneurial students can be seen from the type of product, how to make the products, how to sell, target consumers, promotions, place of selling and distribution channel. While the entrepreneurial culture is a common practice in entrepreneurship as seen from the student's response. The response of students to the entrepreneurial culture can show the prevailing custom at the time they did the practice of entrepreneurship. If they respond well or agree to entrepreneurial culture, it mean that the common practice in entrepreneurship for students is important or necessary. Thus the development of an entrepreneurial culture can be done if the student is already feeling the importance and necessity of making the practice of entrepreneurship on campus as they pursue and