

Integrating Adapted Approaches of Writing Instructions with Alternative Assessment to Improve Academic Writing Ability

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Abstract

This study aims to find whether the adapted approaches of writing instructions and alternative assessment could improve the students' academic writing ability. This classroom-based action research was initiated from the observation and reflection of the researchers as English academic writing instructors in tertiary education. It was observed that students had difficulties improving their academic writing ability. The preliminary investigations revealed that the problem was caused by the dependence on a single approach of instruction and summative assessment. Adapting the strengths of different approaches of writing instructions: the product approach, process approach, genre approach and process-genre approach, the intervention was designed. Alternative forms of assessment were integrated in the pedagogy for their potentials in promoting learning. Through the steps of plan, act, observe, and reflect of action research, data on benefits and shortcomings of the intervention were analyzed and used in reshaping the instructions. Results from the statistical analysis of the discrepancy between the pre-test and post-test revealed that the intervention significantly improved the students' academic writing ability. Besides, the findings from multiple sources also showed that the students developed positive opinion towards this pedagogical approach. Finally, this study offers informed knowledge on factors to consider in using the adapted approaches of writing instructions.

Keywords: academic writing, action research, alternative assessment, EFL writing, writing instructions

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Introduction

Writing is a complex activity that involves multiple steps to complete the tasks. It is one of the most difficult skills for learners to master, particularly in English as a foreign language (EFL) context (Myles, 2002; Watskins, 2004). For the learners, the importance of writing goes beyond a mode of communication. It serves as a means of acquiring knowledge. Writing poses a great challenge to EFL students at the tertiary level in which students need to possess the knowledge of academic English convention and its rules to perform in disciplines of study. In the assessment system, students are assessed through their ability to display their knowledge of those disciplines through their writing (Ivanic & Lea 2006.) However, it is arduous for students to write up academic texts. The problem is even more critical for students of English as a non-native language as addressed by Paltridge (2004).

As instructors of EFL academic writing in the tertiary education, we found that students had problems in effectively producing academic texts. Acutely aware of it, we started this study by problematizing the situation through a preliminary investigation. By interviewing teachers and students in the academic English course and a document study, the problem was confirmed. These baseline data suggested that the factors responsible were mainly the dependency of a single instructional approach and the summative assessment system that lacked power to develop students' writing ability.

In this research context, the product approach of writing instructions had been the sole method in the teaching and learning of academic writing. It involved teachers exposing the students to the model texts that displayed the structure and linguistic knowledge for the students to imitate. Nevertheless, critics argue that this approach limits the opportunities for students to compose a text on their own. The exercises on different topics, moreover, do not focus on students' continuous improvement in academic writing ability. Such problem was confirmed by literature. Raimes (1983), as cited in Ho (2006), addresses that letting the learners imitate the model texts can inhibit them the misconception of writing.

As for assessment, the major method was summative in form of formal tests to determine whether the students had met the objective of the course. According to Brown and Abeywickrama (2010), this assessment type provides conclusive information about the students' learning without suggesting the ways for them to improve.

Problem statement

Since the context of this study was an international university using English as the medium of instructions, the students needed to be competent in academic English writing. Lacking the ability to effectively write English academic texts could negatively impact them such as poor grades and delayed graduation. This, therefore, called our attention to find a more effective instructional approach and assessment methods to improve the situation. Then, this action research project was initiated.

From reviews of literature, each approach of writing instructions has its own strengths and limitations. Moreover, research suggests that one approach's strength can complement the other's limitation. We therefore decided to adapt the strengths of each approach into the

instructions of academic writing. For its formative power to learning, alternative assessment was integrated to the pedagogical process. According to Hyland (2007), assessment is an essential aspect of the teaching-learning process and central to students' progress towards having more control of their writing development.

We adopted action research as the research paradigm because the study took place in the actual classroom and action research was suitable for capturing the authentic teaching and learning process for improvement of practice. Burns (2010) and Hyland (2016) define action research as a systematic and progressive method of enquiry powerful in helping researchers identify problematic situation and bring about changes to improve the practices. The data from the insiders' perspectives on the students' problem in learning to write academic texts, with a careful reflection, could help identify what works and what does not work in the classroom (Abraham, 2015). Furthermore, the systematic observation and reflection could provide valuable information to understand and improve the practice as part of professional development (Nunan & Bailey, 2009).

Research Objective

The objective of the study was to see the effectiveness of the adapted approaches of writing instructions designed based on the principles of different approaches: the product approach, process approach, genre, and process-genre approach, and the selected alternative forms of assessment as an integral part.

Research Questions

After defining the objective, research questions of this study were formulated as follows:

1. To what extent can the adapted writing approaches and alternative assessment improve students' academic writing ability?
2. What are students' opinions towards using the adapted writing approaches and alternative assessment in improving their writing skill?
3. How can students' academic writing ability be improved through adapted writing approaches and alternative assessment?

Literature review

Academic Writing

Academic writing refers to the composition of texts that include the common rhetorical forms in the context of written academic discourses, the convention of texts and set of rules in a discipline, writer's self presentation, how texts are read, and how one text influences the subsequent texts (Paltridge, 2004; Spack, 1988, as cited in Weigle, 2002).

Approaches of writing instructions

In response to the increased awareness of the importance of writing skills, different approaches have emerged and been employed in the writing instructions over the past decades. The followings are the major approaches used in writing classrooms with their strengths and weakness.

1. Product approach

Product approach is the traditional approach that trains students to imitate the model to produce the final product that is coherent and error-free centralizing the appropriate use of linguistic knowledge (Nunan, 1999). Writing development is imitation of input (Badger & White, 2000).

However, critics argue that such approach constrains the originality of writing and prevent learners' creativity (Pasand & Haghi, 2013) Imitation of models can encourage the learners to use the same plan regardless of the text type. It results in simply a mindless copying of texts (Silva 1993, as cited in Adeyemi 2012).

2. Process approach

Process approach emphasizes the importance of developing students' ability to use different skills to plan, identify issues, analyze, and implement possible solutions (Hyland, 2003). Moreover, it promotes the nature of writing that is cyclical and recursive (Hayes & Flowers, 1980). The role of the teacher in this approach is to provide assistance to the students in all the steps of writing.

Nonetheless, the lack of models is a major drawback because they can partly help learners reduce the burden of formulating the content for the text (Pasand & Haghi, 2013). Furthermore, the process approach does not emphasize the fact that writing is contextually and culturally specific and students may not share the same knowledge background and it still bounds students to the constraint of syntactic structures and vocabulary (Hyland, 2007).

3. Genre approach

According to Hyland (2003), the genre approach views writing as purposeful and responsive to a particular context. According to Tribble (2009), writing is socially oriented with the focus on the interaction between the text and readers. A writing instruction that adopts the genre approach, therefore, deals mainly with analyzing the rhetorical structure and linguistic features of each genre convention.

Concerns over adopting the genre approach to classroom instructions were expressed by Dias and Pare, 2000, as cited in Hyland (2007). They address that writing cannot be learnt in the inauthentic context of the classroom because it is always related to the goals and occasions. Moreover, Raimes 1991, as in Hyland (2003), questions the reproduction of the target discourse adhered by genre approach as restricting the creativity of learners.

4. Process-genre approach

Process-genre approach involves the language skills, content knowledge, and writing process from the process approach and emphasizes the communicative purposes as the essence of the genre approach (Flowerdew, 1993; Nordin & Mohammad, 2006). Then, students would go through the process of planning, drafting, revising, and editing to ensure that the text reaches its communicative purposes.

Concerns over the practicality of process-genre, on the other hand, include the lack of emphasis on revising and editing (Yan, 2005). Also, the development of writing varies between individual learners, requiring much effort from the teacher to effectively facilitate the learning

(Badger & White, 2000). Additionally, different genres require different knowledge and skills while teachers may have limited knowledge about particular genres.

Alternative assessment in writing

The traditional writing assessment concerns the summative information regarding the achievement of students based on the predetermined criteria. It is mostly in form of testing to evaluate what the students have learned, represented by grades (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010). Nevertheless, this assessment is heavily criticized that it neither considers nor proposes measures to foster learning and does not have the immediate impact on it (Sadler, 1989). Therefore, a grade, as a representation of summative evaluation on students' achievement, is actually counterproductive for learning.

Realizing such weaknesses of the traditional forms of assessment and to meet the current instructions of writing that emphasize the process of writing, researchers such as Cheng, Rogers, and Hu, 2004 as cited in Çakir, (2013) have explored alternative ways of assessing students' language development that are more open, collaborative, and authentic with formative power to provide information that helps empower students' linguistic competence and skills (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010).

Context of the study

This study was conducted over the period of four months at an international university in Bangkok, Thailand. The course of investigation was a compulsory foundation English course that focused on advanced academic English with 4 academic writing genres.

1. Writing to respond to a reading passage and opinion writing

The objective was to train the students to show their comprehension in a reading prompt and express their opinion towards the information in the passage in written form.

2. Data interpretation

The objective of this genre was to train students to observe and discuss the key graphical information in textual form.

3. Short report

The students were given a reading passage related to a current social issue to compose a report as well as propose logical, practical, and relevant recommendations.

4. Argumentative essay

The students were to express their logical thinking to persuade the readers to agree with their position on a given debatable topic by making sound arguments, evaluating conflicting views, and refuting them in a logical and pragmatic manner.

Participants in the study

The participants in this study were 32 students from different disciplines enrolled in this advanced academic writing course. They were drawn through convenient sampling method. Additionally, they were a mixture of students who had taken this course but were unsuccessful and

students who had taken it for the first time. Their representativeness helped the study focus on the identified problems and generated the knowledge that answers the research questions.

Methodology

The research methodology was mixed-methods. We adopted this method of inquiry as it provided a complete understanding of the research problems than using a single approach (Cresswell, 2014). With multiple data sources and a systematic analysis, the process of data triangulation was utilized. The rich data gained from different instruments could provide conclusive, valid information that could surpass the issue of generalization.

Action research model

The action research model in this study was adapted from the action research cycle model of Kemmis and McTaggart (1998) displayed in Figure 1.

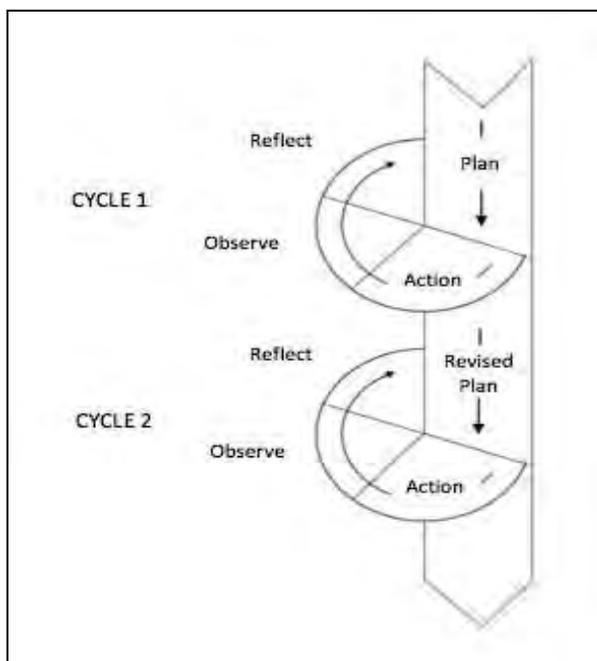


Figure 1. Action Research Cycle Model (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1998)

The intervention in this study was designed and applied in the sequences of action research cycle: plan, act, observe, and reflect. There were 2 research cycles in each genre, totaling 8 research cycles in the entire study. When one research cycle was completed, the data from observation and reflection, together with the insights from the students, were analyzed and interpreted and used as the baseline for the next research cycle.

Step 1: Plan

The intervention was planned with the adaptation of different approaches of writing instructions in the teaching and learning of academic writing. It involved the use of model texts (product approach), identification of communicative context of the text (genre approach), collaboratively constructed model texts by the class, with the teacher's guidance (genre and

process-genre approaches), and multiple-draft writing (process approach). Furthermore, alternative assessment methods namely peer evaluation, teacher constructive feedback, student reflective journal, teacher journal, and writing portfolio were embedded in the instructions.

Step 2: Act

In this step, the intervention was implemented in the actual teaching and learning. Parallel with this was the observation of the outcomes of the implementation.

Step 3: Observe

Concurrent with teaching, the participants' reaction and the effects of the intervention were observed in this step. In so doing, we used an observation note to record any phenomena that emerged. The observation was then transformed into a teacher journal. This method provided us opportunities to gather real-time data that naturally occurred in the real social situation to reflect deeply on the practice.

Step 4: Reflect

In this step, we reflected on the practice to evaluate the effects of the action in order to understand the issues that emerged during the intervention. Also, the students had the opportunities to reflect their learning in the student reflective journals. The two journals provided rich descriptive data from the insiders' views to identify the aspects of the intervention that worked effectively or ineffectively in improving the students' learning of academic writing. The information derived from the reflection, consequently, provided baseline data in the planning of the next research cycle.

Figure 2 below displays the action research cycle model designed for this study, representing 2 out of 4 genres taught.

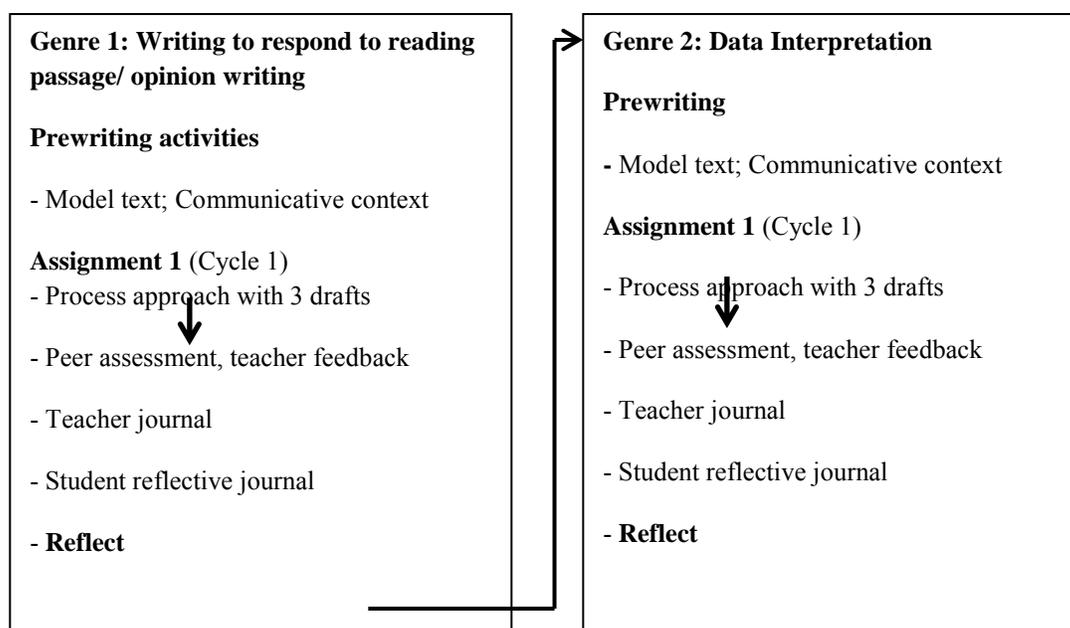


Figure 2. Action research cycle model for this study (partial)

Research instruments

For the quantitative data, the pre- and post-intervention test scores were compared to address the extent that the impact that intervention had on the improvement in the students' academic writing ability. The test content and rubric, validated by experts, reflected the language convention of academic genres taught in the course and the grading criteria.

Another quantitative instrument was the 5-points Likert scale questionnaire asking the students to state their level of agreement to the statements regarding their opinion towards the pedagogical methods. The items were validated by three experts, using item-objective congruence (IOC). The areas of investigation included: 1) the overall impression towards the course, 2) the usefulness of teaching and learning methods, and 3) opinion towards the alternative assessment methods used.

For the qualitative inquiries, data were collected from the teacher journal and student reflective journals. Finally, follow-up semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the students' opinions towards specific aspects of the study.

Data Analysis***Quantitative data analysis***

The data from quantitative inquiries were analyzed with the Statistics Package for the Social Science (SPSS) application. Inferential statistics of paired sample *t*-test was used for the pre- and post-test scores. For the questionnaire responses, descriptive statistics namely the mean (\bar{x}) and standard deviation were used.

Qualitative data analysis

The data obtained from the student reflective journals and teacher journal were analyzed using data reduction and meaning condensation technique (Nunan & Bailey, 2009). Then, we used the process of coding by going through the journal entries to find repeated patterns and keywords that signified similar meanings. After codes were assigned, themes were drawn.

For the follow-up interviews, seven students were purposively selected based on their comments in the journal entries that we found worth investigating further in depth. Each participant was interviewed privately in an approximately 30-minute session. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Then, the transcription was coded and themes on different aspects were drawn.

Implementation of action research cycles

Conducting action research required attention, close observation, and careful reflection on the outcomes of the action, enabling the researchers to become adaptive and reflective. This section presents the major insights gained from implementing the adapted writing approaches in each research cycle and the way they contributed to the adjustment of the plan of the sequential cycle to achieve better results.

Adjustment in instructional methods

At the beginning of the study, the instruction was lecture-based in order to introduce the concept and ideas as well as language elements of the genre. However, feedback from the students in their journals suggested that the long lecture was uninteresting, making them lose attention. Then, we adjusted the instructional method to reciprocating shorter lectures and exercises. Other instructional materials such a video clip was also added.

It was also observed that, while the initial plan was to instill learning autonomy to the students, they were highly dependent on the teacher. We assumed that it was a result of the teacher-centered culture that the students were familiar with. Such dependency stemmed in the students' passiveness and reticence in the teacher-led prewriting discussion. Observing the fact, the plan for the prewriting activities was adjusted to include more collaborative learning such as group discussion, which yielded a satisfying result.

Adaptation of different writing approaches with alternative assessment

In the first research cycles, the students had struggled adjusting themselves to process writing with multiple drafts. Evidence showed that most text revision was merely corrections of grammar without substantial change on the content. We rationalized that it was due to the lack of clear understanding of the revision process. Thoroughly reflecting on this problem, we made attempts to improve the situation by directing the teacher feedback to addressing points of improvement and offering revision strategies. The students gradually understood the revising process and improved the subsequent drafts as a result.

For the use of model texts, derived from the product approach, it was apparent that the students imitated the language feature and styles from them, making their texts looked almost identical. We adjusted the plan to involve the students in collaboratively constructing the model texts in which they contributed the ideas and the teacher providing assistance with the language. Consequently, the collaboratively constructed models were the main source of linguistic input and display of writing process while the role of the model texts diminished to presenting the structure and format of the text. Other adjustments of the plan included establishing the text's communicative context, following the principle of the genre approach, to assist the students in producing texts with clear directions. Additionally, supplementary authentic texts were employed to exhibit more language features and writing styles.

Peer evaluation was the assessment method that required several continuous adjustments. In the first cycles, the peer evaluation process was apparently not effective. Although some training was provided, the outcomes were not of satisfaction. The suggestions were mostly on superficial level. From the reflections, the factors responsible for the ineffectiveness were 1) the fear of offending the writers whom they were not familiar with and 2) the prescriptive nature of the checklist. Correspondingly, the method of assigning the evaluator was changed from random to letting the students choose their own evaluator to reduce the issue of personal distance. Besides, oral feedback was added alongside the checklist for them to discuss their texts in details. The situation had improved and the students could harvest more from this assessment method.

Results and discussion

Research question 1- To what extent can the adapted approaches of writing instructions and alternative assessment improve the students' academic writing ability?

The statistical analysis on the discrepancy between the pre-intervention and post-intervention writing tests offered empirical evidence to answer research question 1. In marking both tests, the students' answers were rated by two experience academic writing teachers. Inter-rater reliability using Pearson correlation showed that there was no significant difference between the scorings of the two raters. Then, the mean scores of the tests were analyzed with paired sample *t*-test with the significance value of 95 percent confidence ($P \leq 0.05$).

Table 1 *Difference between the means of the pre and post-test scores*

		Paired Sample Test						
		Paired Differences					t	Sig.(2-tailed)
		Mean difference	SD.	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference			
Score	Post-test – Pre-test	10.53906	9.85031	1.74131	Lower 6.98765	Upper 14.09048	6.052	.001***

*** $P < .001$, $N=32$

From table 1, it can be seen that the *t* value is 6.052 and the significance value is 0.001, which is less than the predetermined level of confidence of 0.05 ($0.001 \leq 0.05$). Hence, it is appropriate to conclude that the adapted approaches of writing instructions and alternative assessment could significantly improve students' academic writing ability. The finding was consistent with previous studies by Ming (2006) and Cheng (2008), which showed that students who are instructed with other approaches in writing instructions significantly outperformed those who were taught with the traditional product approach. These studies, nevertheless, employed only one instructional approach of writing instructions such as the process and process-genre to compare with the product approach. This study, on the other hand, integrated the strengths that each approach offers and investigated the impact on the development of writing ability.

In addition, previous studies on alternative assessment focus on its impact in an idiosyncratic view rather than as part of the writing process. Some examples of those studies are by Cheng and Warren 2005, as cited in Matsuno (2009), on peer assessment, Lee (2008a), on teacher feedback, and Hashemi and Mirzaei (2015) on student journal. This study, on the contrary, integrated the alternative assessment methods as part of the instructions.

Research question 2- what are the students' opinions towards using the adapted writing approaches and alternative assessment in improving their writing skill?

In answering this research question, the quantitative data from the post-intervention questionnaire were analyzed. In addition, the analysis and coding to the qualitative instruments provided information that helped triangulate the data.

The overall impression towards the course

From the analysis of questionnaire responses using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation), the students had positive attitude towards the course. They claimed that the instructional approaches helped them develop their writing and made them become better writers ($\bar{x}=4.28$). The students could learn to overcome their weaknesses in writing. In line with that, findings from qualitative instruments indicated that the students also developed confidence in their writing.

“After writing and rewriting, I knew better about what was wrong and what I did well. It made me write with more confidence.” (CT)

Besides, the students argued that they could transfer the knowledge of writing academic text to the studies of their respected disciplines.

“This course taught me many things about how I should write and all the assignments which I have done are very useful for my future.” (MP)

The students' claim reflected the fact that they had met the objectives of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in using academic language convention to display their academic competency in the learning of other disciplines (Paltridge, 2004; Ivanic & Lea, 2006).

The usefulness of the adapted approaches of writing instructions

Findings from both quantitative and qualitative inquiries revealed that the students developed positive attitudes towards the pedagogical techniques in this study.

1. Writing with multiple-draft technique

The students strongly agreed that multiple-draft writing was helpful in improving their works ($\bar{x}=4.75$). They also stated that multiple-draft writing enabled them to learn to revise both the local and global aspects of their texts. Eventually, they could perceive much improvement between the drafts ($\bar{x}= 4.84$). This finding was supported by the qualitative data as displayed in the excerpt.

“ Writing with multiple drafts give me different ideas in each draft. I can improve both the grammar and content in each draft.” (PA)

The students also implied that they used metacognitive strategies to regulate learning through planning, evaluating, and monitoring their writing progress (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). In the view of second language acquisition (SLA) theory, this process refers to the strategy of Monitoring (Krashen, 1981, as cited in Ellis, 1997) to correct their mistakes using the knowledge learnt. Additionally, they expressed that they felt the sense of achievement when they completed the final draft.

“I had more confidence in the third draft because I carefully thought about how to make it better. I was really proud of it because I gathered all of the feedback and put it into that draft.” (TT)

The finding is supported by Özdemir and Aydin (2015) who claim that process writing can help the students feel that they have achieved the purpose of writing.

2. Setting communicative context for writing

The communicative context in the instructions included identifying the objective and target audience of the text as a prewriting activity. The students strongly agreed that knowing the objective and readers helped them construct the text more effectively with clear directions.

“After I know my target audience, I know how to revise to reach them and meet the objective of writing.” (PL)

The findings were similar to the study on the effectiveness of promoting communicative context in writing by Li (2016), which finds that identifying the purposes of texts and awareness of audience enhance students’ comprehension of how to compose the texts.

3. The use of the two types of models: The model texts and the collaboratively constructed models

The students stated that each type of model texts was valuable in its own rights. The model texts were useful in displaying the structure and format of particular text types. They made the students realize what they were expected to write.

“I use to the model in the textbook to see the structure. It is better to know the basic pattern.” (TT)

The findings were consistent with literature and previous studies. The model texts served the purposes of exposing the students to the structure, features, and convention of the text (Nunan, 1999; Saeidi & Sahebkhair, 2011, as cited in Pasand & Haghi, 2013), consequently enabling them to produce texts that display the language convention of particular genres as part of product approach.

On the other hand, the students stated that they preferred the collaboratively constructed models because it helped them understand the process of writing. Furthermore, they could understand the language convention clearly with the teacher’s assistance.

“Creating the models together helped a lot because it’s our own language. And we can learn when the teacher rewrote our sentences and we could learn to adapt it to our writing.” (MP)

This was supported by Wette (2015) who conducted an investigation on the use of collaboratively constructed model in the instruction of writing. The results show that practitioners

of this method find a number of benefits including opportunities to provide support and response immediately to contributions from the students.

4. Provision of authentic texts

Authentic texts were provided to tackle to problem of students having limited knowledge of language features. From the journal entries, the students found this material useful. They asserted that the authentic texts were interesting and could equip them with more variety of language such as vocabulary and expressions.

'The samples help us see how the writers express their ideas under the same topic with ours. I can use the words and style as a model for my work.' (BT)

Scrutinizing their texts, the use of the newly learnt features was found. For example, in the first draft, a student started the paragraph with *'There are several disadvantages of e-cigarettes.'* After seeing the authentic text, it was revised to *'A wide range of studies has shown the dangers from vaping e-cigarettes.'*

The impact of authentic texts on students' writing was relevant to Losada, Insuastry, and Osario (2016). The researchers state that the students who receive the instructions that incorporate the use of authentic texts distinctly outperform those who were taught with non-authentic materials. Besides, the positive impact on the students' motivation was in line with Peacock (1997).

Opinion towards alternative assessment

1. Teacher Feedback

The finding reveals that teacher feedback was most vital to writing development for the students. It assisted them in identifying mistakes, showing them ways to improve their texts through suggested revision strategies, and helping them gain confidence, especially when praises were given.

'The teacher didn't only correct the mistake but he told to switch the focus to another point. The suggestions are very important in generating new ideas.' (BN)

'I have never been proud of my writing until I saw your comment "this is beyond my expectation".' (PA)

The finding was relevant to Hedgecock and Lefkowitz (1992) whose study suggests that, with multiple-draft technique, students find teacher feedback helpful in improving their writing, especially when it addresses individual students' needs (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Consequently, teacher feedback has pivotal roles in student motivation (Lee, 2008b).

2. Peer evaluation

Receiving peer evaluation was relatively ineffective in the students' opinion. From the questionnaire responses, the means in this area were low, from 3.14 to 3.38. The findings from qualitative inquiries point to the same direction. The students contended that the feedback they

received were not helpful in improving their texts since it lacked substantive suggestions for revision.

'For I think the feedback that I got was not that useful for me. The person who gave me the feedback wrote only a few sentences.' (CT)

Such ineffectiveness is documented in a study by Meihai and Razmjoo (2016). The writers stated that students were unable to offer effective evaluation to their peers due to the lack of assessment knowledge.

The students also questioned the qualification of their peers in evaluating their texts.

'I don't know if I can trust my classmates because they are also learning like me.' (BW)

This claim resonated the studies by Kaufman and Schunn (2011) and Smith et al. (2002). Their findings indicate that students have doubts in the expertise of their peers and believe that their peer evaluators are unqualified to assess their works.

However, the students admitted that the peer evaluation system had benefited them as evaluators. Being the evaluators provided them ample opportunities to see good examples of language use ($\bar{x}=4.47$) and ideas applicable to their own text ($\bar{x}=4.50$). The students mentioned the same benefits in their journals, adding that their peers' texts influenced them to improve their works.

'I really like how my friend gives her opinion. It makes me have more ideas to improve my work.' (AS)

This discovery was relevant to a study by Lundstorm and Baker (2009) that divides the students into 2 groups: the provider of feedback and the receivers of feedback. The findings from the analysis of the pre-test and post-test writing scores showed that the providers obtained more gains than the receiver. Henceforth, it is sufficient to say that, in this study, the peer review method was more beneficial for the students as evaluators of their peers' works.

3. Student reflective journal

From the analysis, the merit from student reflective journal was that it served as a communication channel between the students and teacher. The students expressed their concerns, made requests, and gave suggestions to me on several issues. This helped me adjust the lessons to accommodate those needs.

'I expressed my thoughts in the journal. Because when I wrote my journal, the teacher always gave me some feedback.' (MP)

This follows the idea proposed by Hashemi and Merzaei (2015) that journal writing establishes the relationship between the teacher and the class and could help in preparing lessons or special care for students to overcome their problems in learning.

4. Writing portfolio

The students mentioned that portfolio was useful for them in displaying the improvement of their writing performance and it was also used in preparation for exams. The most important aspect of the portfolio was that it helped the students learn about their weaknesses and find ways to overcome them.

'I kept looking at the red marks in my portfolio to remind myself "mistakes, mistakes, don't do it, don't do it." (MK)

This finding was consistent with the study by Ghoorchaei, Tavakoli, and Ansari (2010). The researchers find that students in the experimental group using the portfolio assessment have improved more significantly in their writing ability than the controlled group without the portfolio.

Research question 3- how can students' academic writing ability be improved

The answer to this research question involves the roles of different parties and mechanisms in the pedagogy, which could be implemented in an actual teaching and learning of academic writing.

1. The roles of the teacher

Reflecting the practice, we find that our roles as teachers go beyond imparting knowledge to students. In fact, they are constantly moving on the continuum of the provider of knowledge and facilitator of learning. Those roles included being the manager of the class, facilitator, assessor, and evaluator (Archana & Rani, 2016). Other responsibilities include analyzing the students' linguistic needs and engaging them in the learning process (Tudor, 1993). Additionally, we became a reflective practitioner who considered strategies to respond to the needs of the students and find ways to improve the practice (Lee, 2008b; Thompson & Pascal, 2012). Another important role was to establish rapport the students. As Žunić-Rizvić and Dubravac (2017) asserted, positive relations between teachers and students are essential for the success in language learning.

2. The roles of the students

Students have many roles to play in the teaching and learning process. They cover being planners, writers, evaluators of peers' works, editors, and critical thinkers. They should be trained to become autonomous learners with the responsibility of making all decisions about their own learning process (Benson, 2006 and Holec, 1981, as cited in Alonazi, 2017).

A way to help students become autonomous is practicing metacognitive writing strategies. As advised by Wang (2017), successful students adopted planning, monitoring, evaluating, and cognitive control in their writing process. Students then should take the opportunity offered by multiple-draft writing to apply metacognitive skills to their text progression (Wu, 2004, as cited in Lv & Chen 2010).

3. The roles of the materials

As discussed, authentic texts are of value to the development of academic writing since they can constitute a wider body of knowledge, both linguistic and topical to the students. They should therefore be included as a learning material. A caution is that the readability of the texts should match with the students' current ability. If there is a mismatch between the two, the result can be counterproductive. Learning from authentic texts will become an unpleasant experience for the students.

4. The roles of assessment

The alternative assessment methods used in this study had proven to have strong formative power to the development of the students' academic writing ability. It is then highly advised that these forms of assessment for learning be included in the pedagogy. However, a careful planning is needed. For example, the teacher feedback should address both the local and global levels. Moreover, praise and encouragement are as important as constructive criticism.

While peer evaluation process was problematic, a silver lining was that the students could benefit from evaluating their peers' texts. Thus, this form of assessment should be retained. Improvement in the practice can be achieved with provision of training to students on giving effective evaluation and feedback. As suggested by Saito (2008), trainings on peer evaluation can help students gain assessment literacy, develop their critical ideas, and understand how their peer and other readers respond to their writing.

Limitations and suggestions for further studies

This action research had some limitations. Since it was situated in a real classroom, the students had to work under strict timeframe to cover all the contents prescribed by the syllabus. This might have impacted the students in developing their skills with full potentials. Also, as the students were familiar with traditional instructions, they took some times to adjust to the new way of learning that was centralized on them. Next, with the large class size, going through all of the students' texts to provide detailed feedback was a herculean task for the teachers.

While the findings suggested that using the adapted approach of writing instructions could significantly improve the students' academic writing ability, there are rooms for further studies. Future research can apply this adapted model of writing instructions with other genres. Next, future studies on the efficacy of alternative assessment in writing should consider including other methods such as writing conference and self-evaluation. Also, a collaborative action research project by multiple practitioners can provide a wider perspective on the efficacy of this model of writing instructions.

Conclusion

Having the opportunity to conduct this action research improved us professionally both as teachers of academic writing and researchers. At the same time, it helped us learn to investigate, inquire, collect, analyze and interpret data systematically, and reflect on the teaching in order to generate information to improve the practice. Most importantly, it contributed to the student's academic writing ability. Hence, it is highly recommended that teachers of writing and other English Language Teaching (ELT)-related fields take up action research to investigate the issues they feel worth investigating.

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