

The Degree Of Use And The Variety Of Prewriting Activities Employed In UHB 1412 Class In UTM

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Abstrak : This research aims to investigate the types of prewriting activities conducted in UHB 1412 class and to what extent it has been used. The effectiveness of the prewriting activities that have been used is also being identified. Besides that, it also investigates the students' and teachers' perceptions on the importance of the prewriting activities in the writing class. A total of 100 students in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) who are taking the UHB 1412 class and four Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) lecturers who are teaching UHB 1412 class participated in this study. The research instruments used for this study were questionnaires and interview. 100 sets of questionnaires were distributed to get feedback from the students on the use of prewriting activities when they are learning writing in the UHB 1412 class. Interview sessions were conducted with four lecturers to identify the types of prewriting activities that they used in their UHB 1412 class and to what extent these activities have been used in their teaching of writing in the UHB 1412 class. It is to ensure that there is no contradiction in the data collected. Thus, giving this study greater validity. Results from the findings indicate the following: 1) All the lecturers do conduct prewriting activities when teaching writing in their UHB 1412 class. 2) The most frequent prewriting activities conducted in the classroom are brainstorming and discussion. 3) Students are aware that prewriting activities could improve their writing. 4) Lecturers find it helpful for students to improve their writing. Finally, the pedagogical implications of the findings and recommendations for the future research are being suggested.

Keyword : degree of use, the variety, prewriting activities, employed, UHB 1412

Introduction

Writing is one of the most important skills for students to acquire. Although it is essential, not all students are capable of writing due to its tedious process. Moreover, writing style differs from language to language and this makes teaching writing to English as a second language (ESL) learners quite frustrating for many lecturers.

Some students manage to write good essays but unfortunately there are also some who are at loss when it comes to putting down their ideas on paper. They cannot achieve the coherence of writing and will waste their time thinking about the title or topic given. They face difficulties in elaborating on ideas and organizing it in an effective manner. Therefore, a lecturer has to play important roles in choosing the correct approach and activity which can help students to overcome this problem. The lecturer also needs to train their students to follow steps in the process of writing based on the approach chosen in order to assist them to be more organized. There are several approaches in writing that can help students to write, namely the process approach, the genre approach, and the product approach.

Apparently, the writing skill is taught in most cases using the traditional approach which stresses on the finished product rather than the writing process. Some teachers are also unaware of the importance of prewriting activities which can guide their students to generate ideas to write.

Statement of the Problem

UHB 1412, English for Academic Communication is an elective course in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). This course is to equip students with relevant skills in English language as this will help them to function effectively in the course of their study. This course also fulfils the students' academic requirements such as in the acquisition of reading skills, note-making skills, referencing skills, library skills, speaking skills and also writing skills in English. In addition, this course is offered to UTM students in different programmes and with different levels of proficiency.

Not all students are good at writing. This is in line with Chitravelu, et. Al (2006), who state that writing is the skill that most students are least competent in and also does not give much reward. Therefore, lecturers have to find the most efficient way to teach writing in order for their students to obtain good results. The first step is during the prewriting activity. Prewriting activity is a part of the process approach which comprises brainstorming, discussion, mind mapping and so forth. It is important for students to get some ideas on what they will write. This is to avoid them from having difficulties at the beginning, as this will affect the quality of the whole writing. However, during the prewriting activity, some of the students especially the lower proficiency students might face problems in identifying the ideas that are related to the topic. Hence, they need another guide like a model or a sample of an essay for them to look at.

Due to the problem above, the researcher would like to look at the types of prewriting activities that are being used and to what extent they have been used in the UHB 1412 class.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study are:

- a) To identify the variety of prewriting activities used in the teaching of writing.
- b) To identify the degree of use of the prewriting activities in the teaching of writing.
- c) To investigate the students' perceptions on the use of prewriting activities in the learning of writing.
- d) To investigate the lecturers' perceptions on the use of prewriting activities in the teaching of writing.

Significance of the study

This study attempts to look at the degree of use and the variety of prewriting activities employed in the UHB 1412 class. It is also to help students boost their potential in writing by generating their ideas in writing and at the same time obtaining good results in writing.

Scope of the study

This study of the degree of use and the variety of prewriting activities employed in UHB 1412 class will concern only the first year students in UTM who are taking the English for Academic Communication course and lecturers in UTM who are teaching the UHB 1412 course.

Research Instrument Used

There were two research instruments used for this research which were the questionnaire and interview.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire showed how writing is being taught to the students by their lecturers. The questionnaire provided an insight into prewriting activities that are conducted during writing lesson. This questionnaire also revealed the types of prewriting activities that are commonly used by the students' lecturer. The questionnaire also sought students' opinion on the use of prewriting activity in teaching writing and the degree of use of prewriting activity in the UHB 1412 class. The

questionnaires were adapted from Jayaletchumy Andy's (1999) questionnaire on the evaluation of the effectiveness of prewriting techniques in the use of process approach to the teaching of writing in the ESL classroom.

Interview

The interview was an instrument to look at the prewriting activities that are used by the lecturers when they teach writing. The lecturers' structured interview questions were adapted from Johnny Lee Kean Ghee's (1999) interview question on the extent and types of prewriting activities used in the teaching of composition writing.

Respondents of the Study

The respondents for this study comprise both UTM lecturers and students.

Students : About 100 students were selected for this study. They were first year students in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) who were taking the subject English for Academic Communication, UHB 1412. They were from different background and have different levels of English language proficiency.

Lecturers : The lecturers selected for this study were lecturers in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) who were teaching the subject English of Academic Communication, UHB 1412. Four lecturers were interviewed for this purpose.

Research Question No. 1: What are the different types of prewriting activities used in the teaching of writing?

Table 1: Students' view on the types of prewriting activities that their UHB 1412 lecturer use in the UHB 1412.

Prewriting Activities	Percentage
Discussion	47%
Brainstorming	41%
Mind Map	39%
Give Sample	26%
Say It Aloud	24%
Freewriting	23%
Give Passage	20%
Others	4%

From the analysis of the students' questionnaire, Table 1 shows that 47% of the students said that their UHB 1412 lecturers use discussion as their main prewriting activity in the classroom. This is followed by 41% of them who stated that their lecturer use brainstorming. 39% of the students agreed that their lecturer also use mind map as the prewriting activity before they start to write essay. While 23% of the students indicated that their lecturer uses freewriting in their writing class. The other 26% mentioned that their lecturer gave them a sample of essay before they start to write. In addition to that, there are also 24% of the respondents who said that their UHB 1412 lecturer asked them to say it aloud on what they thought about the topic given and 20% of them agreed that their lecturer also provides them a passage for them to read before they can write their essay. While 4% of the students said that their lecturer uses other methods of prewriting activity such as through song lyrics, movies and debate.

Lecturers' Interview

Four lecturers were interviewed for this study. Two lecturers have one and a half years of experience in teaching the UHB 1412 course while one has only one year of experience and the other one has ten years of experience in teaching the course. Lecturer's experience was taken into consideration in order to compare the types of prewriting activities that they used in the classroom. It is because prewriting activities that the lecturers conducted is the crucial part of the writing process and it is the main part whereby during the prewriting activity, students will organize information, communicate the meaning and generate their ideas before they start to write (White and Arndt, 1991).

Table 2: Lecturers' Most Frequently Used Prewriting Activities

Prewriting Activity	Number of respondents
Brainstorming	4
Discussion	4
Mind Map	4
Movies	3
Music	3
Search sample from Internet	2
Debate	1
Drawing	1
Listing	1
Give sample	1

Table 2 shows the most frequently used prewriting activities based on the lecturer's responses. Four lecturers stated the reason for their most frequently used prewriting activities are based on the students' proficiency. All four lecturers claimed that the most frequently used prewriting activities are brainstorming, discussion and mind map. This is also similar with the finding in the study by Johnny Lee Kean Ghee (1999) that stated the most frequently used prewriting activity is brainstorming in which 89% of the respondents choose brainstorming due to the practicality of the activity for large class enrolments. At the brainstorming session, they also asked students to discuss the topic to get as much information related with the topic given. This is because it will help to stimulate the students' ideas before they start to write. This is in line with Chitravelu et. al (2006) who state that during the brainstorming activity, students should actively participate by giving their opinion and idea as much as possible. All of them also choose discussion as the main activity of the prewriting activity. When the students brainstorm their ideas, the lecturer will ask them to discuss on the topic before they produce the mind map. All of the lecturers also agreed that they use mind map as their main prewriting activities. However, three of the lecturers who teach not more than one and half years use other prewriting activities such as through music and movies. They said they are not relying on the textbook because they believe that the lecturer should be more creative to attract students to learn in the writing class. Through movies that are related to the writing topic, they said it can help students in writing because the students are required to predict, justify and express their ideas on the certain topic. Two of the lecturers asked their students to search a sample of essay from the internet themselves instead of giving their students a sample of essay in the classroom. One respondent did a debating, drawing, listing session and gave a sample in the writing class.

Research Question No. 2: What is the degree of usage of the prewriting activities used in UHB 1412 writing class?

Lecturers' Interview

Table 3: Lecturer's comments on the degree of usage of prewriting activities in UHB 1412 class

Lecturer	Response
Lecturer 1	<i>"As much as possible. To avoid them feel sleepy."</i>
Lecturer 2	<i>"Always but depends on the students' level of proficiency."</i>
Lecturer 3	<i>"Often"</i>
Lecturer 4	<i>"Most of the time."</i>

59% of the students agreed that their lecturer did use prewriting activities in the UHB 1412 class. 41% of them disagreed that their lecturer had used prewriting activity in the UHB 1412 class.

61% of the respondents use prewriting activity before they start to write and 39% did not use prewriting activity.

Table 3, on the previous page shows to what degree of usage of the prewriting activities that the lecturers use in the UHB 1412 class. All of the respondents mentioned that they always use prewriting activities in their teaching.

Hence, it can be concluded that majority of the lecturers and students carried out the prewriting activities in the UHB 1412 class. It is because they indicated that to produce a good piece of writing, students need to have a prewriting activities to stimulate and generate their ideas as this is similar to what White and Arndt (1991:17).

Research Question No. 4: What are the lecturers' perception on the use of prewriting activities in the teaching of writing?

Table 4 : Lecturer's perception on the prewriting activities.

Questions	Responses
Question 9: Do you think that the prewriting activities that you carry out help your students in their writing?	<p>L1: <i>"It does help with ideas. Students not stuck. I think it helps them a lot."</i></p> <p>L2: <i>"Yes, it depends on the level of proficiency. If lower more and higher less"</i></p> <p>L3: <i>"Yes, a little bit in the way they express their idea."</i></p> <p>L4: <i>"Yes, it helps them and they pay more attention in the class."</i></p> <p><i>"No, for those who take the lesson likely."</i></p>

<p>Question 10: If yes, do you notice any improvement in your students' writing when you used prewriting activities in writing?</p>	<p>L1: <i>"Before and after...yes."</i> L2: <i>"Yes, in content and organization."</i> L3: <i>"Yes, depends on the students' perception."</i> L4: <i>"Yes."</i></p>
<p>Question 11: In your opinion, which is the best, asking students to do their own prewriting activities or by having the teacher gave a sample or a model of an essay for them to look at?</p>	<p>L1: <i>"Both should be okay."</i> L2: <i>"Depends on the level of proficiency."</i> L3: <i>"Both. Teacher as a facilitator to provide opportunity to students, so students can develop their own idea by having their own prewriting activities."</i> L4: <i>"Both ways will help the students. It gives student more time to brainstorm and do the mind map. But for higher</i></p>
	<p><i>level, they don't need a model of essay."</i></p>
<p>Question 12: In your opinion, is it necessary for a lecturer to use a textbook as a reference for their prewriting activities? Why?</p>	<p>L1: <i>"In my opinion, textbook is the idea of these a few authors. So, doesn't mean that I have to follow their ideas. Besides that, students will be bored if the lecturer uses the old methods. By the way, I also use video clip to stimulate idea."</i> L2: <i>"Can use but lecturer need to be creative. Use other method to attract students' interest."</i> L3: <i>"As guidance yes. But not 100%. Lecturer needs to be creative."</i> L4: <i>"Yes, I use textbook. I am not creative and I have a limited time."</i></p>

From Table 4, we can see that all of the respondents said that prewriting activities help their students in their writing however it also depends on the level of the students' proficiency. Some of the higher level proficiency students conduct less prewriting activities compared to lower level proficiency ones. It is because for higher level proficiency students, it is much easier for them to organize their ideas directly in the essay. Prewriting activities also help to enhance students' understanding by clarifying their thoughts and at the same time organize their ideas properly and consistently. All the respondents share the same views on the prewriting activities with other English teacher that was claimed by Johnny Lee Kean Ghee (1999) in his research of secondary school

students that teachers do agree that it is important to do prewriting activities to prepare students with ideas before they write.

Finally, lecturers gave their opinion on the use of textbook. Three out of four respondents think that it is not necessary for a lecturer to use textbook because it will limit their creativity. Only one respondent uses textbook because of the time constraints in preparing the material.

Conclusions

The following conclusions can be drawn based on the findings of the study. To begin with, this study has shown that the UHB 1412 lecturers conduct the prewriting activities frequently in their writing class. Some of the lecturers conduct the prewriting activities based on the level of their students' proficiency. It is because they claim that higher level students can do their own prewriting activity compared to lower level ones that need guidelines in the class.

Moreover, there are also different types of prewriting activities used in the teaching of writing such as brainstorming, discussing, mind mapping, through lyrics and movies, searching samples from the Internet, debating, drawing, listing and giving samples to the students. The study reveals that lecturers who taught not more than two years are more creative compared to teachers who have taught the UHB 1412 course for a long time. It is because they believed that creativity is a way to attract students to like writing and at the same time, they are able to produce a good essay. They also said that they are not relying on the text book because text book is the author's idea. The lecturer can produce better prewriting activity that will be much better because every student have their own style of learning. Thus, a lecturer can take this opportunity to arouse their students' interest in the classroom if the lecturer chooses the correct prewriting activities based on their students' learning styles.

In addition, the lecturers interviewed also think that prewriting activities do help their students to improve their writing but it is based on the level of the students' proficiency. It is because for the higher proficiency students, it is much easier for them to organize their idea directly in the essay. However, all the lecturers agree that it is important to conduct prewriting activities to prepare their students in the writing class.

Finally, data collected from the students' questionnaire disclose that many students are aware of the importance to conduct prewriting activities in essay writing. From the findings, students think that prewriting activities do help and improve their writing.

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