

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

5.1.1 Writing

It can be concluded that meta-cognitive strategy training helps learners develop their writing ability. After being trained in meta-cognitive strategies, learners' writing ability developed significantly. This can be seen in the gradually increasing essay scores from sets A to D. 66.09, 72.66, 75.31 and 80.63 respectively.

This research study may contribute to increasingly effective instruction and improvement of writing abilities of learners, and possibly lead to meta-cognitive strategy training being more actively incorporated into academic writing courses.

With regards to learners' class attendance, it is worth mentioning that those who generally attended class regularly have made the most progress judging by their average essay scores. This may be because they are more motivated students, or because they have taken part in class activities and exercises, and were better trained and equipped to employ the meta-cognitive strategies they have learnt.

Because of the often significant deviations between essay scores awarded by graders marking the same essay, emphasis should be given to the importance of

instructors/course facilitators/teachers to develop relevant, fair, realistic, detailed rubrics, leaving as small a margin for error as possible. It is essential that learners receive and understand the rubric before they perform the task. In cases where much depends on the scores awarded by instructors, learners should have the option of requesting a second rating by an independent grader or external moderator.

5.1.2 Learner Autonomy

For studies related to the enhancement of generic skills and learner autonomy, learners need to be able to think or learn to think independently, and to develop the capacity for autonomy, empowerment and self-direction. Teaching and learning activities need to encourage learners to take responsibility for their learning and to develop critical thinking and reflective skills (AVCC, 1993; Galbraith, 1996). Learners need a range of skills, beyond the specifics of a subject or discipline that will enable them to make an effective contribution to an employing organisation and to the wider society. Key generic skills include communication and structured writing, problem solving, interpersonal skills and teamwork (ACER, 2000). Appropriate meta-cognitive strategy training and learning activities can enhance these skills while learners are studying other aspects of their course.

The instruction of meta-cognitive strategies took place during a learner-centred writing course. Problems such as the inability to plan and organize writing content, which arose during the pilot study, were addressed by developing

learners' meta-cognitive strategies as a way to develop learners' ability to learn and practice on their own. Learners were asked to address their learning problems by using meta-cognitive strategies that emphasized learning through the identification of problems, causes and solutions, thus becoming more autonomous writers by utilizing self-instructive and training strategies. Future researchers may want to do their research with a group that is required to attend all classes. Because of time restrictions, absenteeism may affect the outcomes of the research.

Learners that are pro-active and responsible for their own learning behaviour, may select learning strategies to identify their individual learning problems. They may then find information about the particular problem and solve it in accordance with the strategies most effective or suited to them as individuals.

The purpose of this process is to give learners the opportunity to discover which strategies are most effective to them as individuals, as well as raise an awareness of strategy use according to their own needs and learning styles.

Evidently, not all learners have incorporated all the learning strategies taught throughout the course, which signifies a degree of individuality and autonomy in learners willing to make their own choices, and illustrates an awareness of their individual learning needs and learning styles.

There are cases where individual learners strayed from the norm, and experimented with alternative strategies to what they were taught, for example

relying on instinct rather than the rubric while planning their essays. Reasons may include an intrinsic confidence in their own writing ability, which in some cases were justified, but also a lack of understanding of the use of the rubric due to poor attendance and as a result a lack of practice opportunities.

5.2 Recommendations

For learners to become more proficient in writing, instructors can encourage learners to conduct their daily lives in English, by keeping their diaries in English, writing out their schedules and shopping lists in English, and blogging and chatting on-line, in English. These language production or output activities will provide them with opportunities to think about how they can express themselves, and describe their lives and products they use, in English. Getting used to the language and interacting with it every day, will increase learners' interest, motivation to produce the language, and proficiency in the language, by providing opportunities to practice, monitor, evaluate and improve their use of the target language. Researchers who are interested in pursuing these ideas further, can set up a study using two groups, a control group and another group charged with performing such tasks. Outcomes can be evaluated using both qualitative and quantitative research methods.

Further studies into meta-cognitive strategy training, specifically referring to reflective practice, planning, evaluation and monitoring, can be conducted

through the use of portfolios. Portfolios are useful records of learner development, as well as assessment instruments. Language portfolios provide progressive means to promote reflective practice and learner autonomy.

The dimension of rater reliability, that has only become a part of this study at a later stage, is especially worth further investigation. Specifically regarding raters' use of rubrics and the degree in which they notice and follow the criteria of the rubric. Rubrics, among other things, aim to reduce subjectivity in evaluations, and it is learners' right to receive a detailed rubric before doing major assignments, and to hold evaluators and moderators accountable. The great differences we saw between scores awarded by raters in this study, indicate that researchers conducting similar studies, should be sure to train prospective raters in the use of the rubric, and explain what the standard is with regards to scores awarded. Three or four raters could also be used, to possibility increase rater reliability.