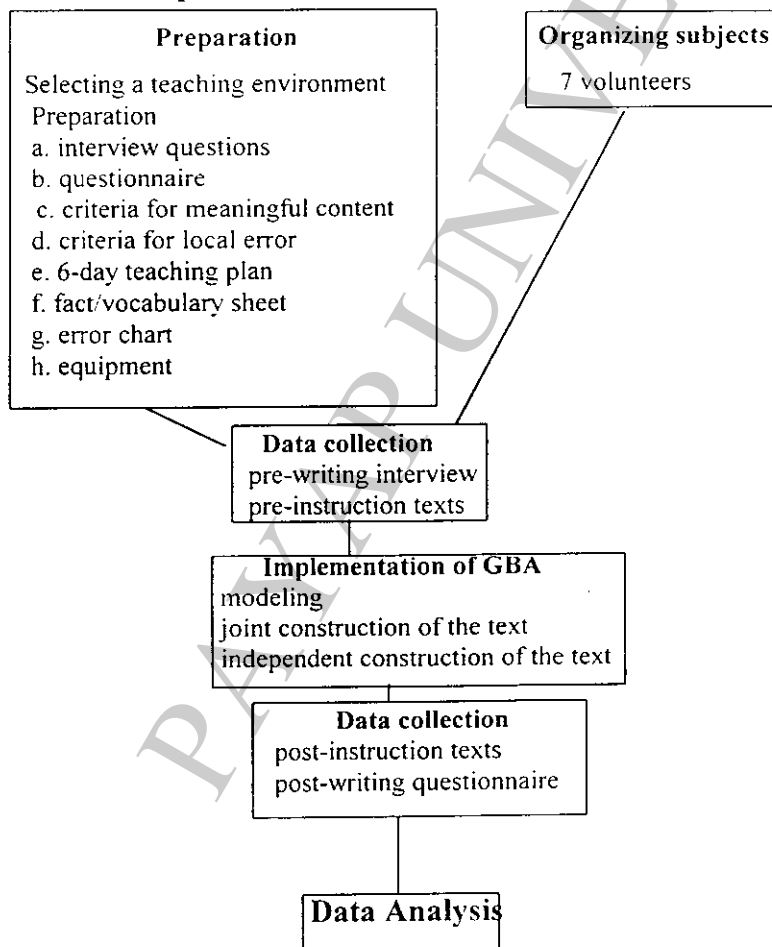


CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this study includes the processes of identifying the target subjects, developing the research instrument, conducting an interview, collecting the pre-instruction written texts, introducing the personal recount writing using the GBA within six days, gathering post-instruction written texts, evaluating GBA through students' written output, and analyzing the data. This chapter will therefore describe the following: (1) subjects, (2) instruments, (3) data collection, and (4) data analysis.

Figure 2. Conceptual framework of the research study



3.1. Subjects

This present study is qualitative research in that it focuses on a small number of participants in order to observe them more closely and to analyze their performance in some depth or detail.

The subjects of this study are seven volunteer students (six females and one male) who share the same interest in writing paragraphs, both in L1 and L2. They just passed grade 6 and were ready to enter grade 7 in June of the academic year 2000-2001. They are from the State High School, No.1, in Sangyaung, Yangon. They are from different sections: one from section A, two from section B, two from section D, and two from section E. They represent 3.5% of the total number of grade 6 students from that school. These students are from the downtown area and are usually placed into sections in alphabetical order, according to their total marks in the final examination.

It was found out that they were of the same age (12 years old) and received the same average grade (A), in grade 6 English. With such focus in mind, the researcher used a small number of participants who volunteered to be the subjects of the study and who were all interested in writing paragraphs in L1 and L2. This research mode could enable the researcher to manage the later processes of the study effectively within the research time frame of ten days. The homogeneity in the ages and English grades of the subjects indicated that the subjects have similar "developmental and social needs" (Hoyt in Hall 1988, p. 77) as well as the same aptitude level which Krashen believes to be the most important factor for formal learning (Krashen in Hahn, 1989).

Moreover, the small number of research subjects (seven) will enable the researcher to analyze the data cautiously and yield sufficient significant results. The writing problems and developments that will be uncovered in this qualitative research may be expected to be shared by other Myanmar students from grade 6 who were never exposed to the form and manner of writing done in the study. Inasmuch as English in grades 5, 6 and 7 in Myanmar is similarly taught, another implication could be made, that is, the common mistakes of any students in the junior years of the middle school level in that school. In other words, the findings of this study can be generalized to be more or less applicable to all middle school year (junior learners). Another implication for the English teachers is to have the emphasis more on the areas in which the students committed inn terms of treating errors.

3.2. Instruments

The instruments used in this study are:

1. Pre-writing interview questions which investigated the subjects background information; and
2. Post-writing questionnaire which reflects the subjects the subjects feedback regarding the GBA. Both of them were designed by the researcher. These are commonly used instruments in needs analysis (West, 1994);
3. Fact/vocabulary sheets of "Words I want to know" adapted from classroom observation made in the Australian writing classes (see Appendix E, p.10);
4. Local error chart adapted from Klassen (1991 in Kral 1995, p.135) (see Appendix D, p.100);
5. Two checklists, namely, assessment of meaningful content (see Appendix C.1, p.98) and assessment of local errors (see Appendix C. 2, p.99). Both of them

were adapted from TEEP's criteria (see Appendix F, pp. 102-3) for assessing written production together with Klassen's (1991) "Using Student Errors for Teaching". and

7. Six-day teaching plan (see Appendix K, pp.111-125) based on M.Callaghen and J. Rothery's (1988) "GBA Teaching and Learning Cycle" (see Figure 1, p.18).

Designing the questions for interview and questionnaire

Both the questions for interview and questionnaire were in two languages, i.e., Myanmar (Burmese) and English, to ensure that failure to understand the instructions or questions would not affect the responses.

The interview questions

The researcher directly interviewed the participants individually in order to gather their background information. This interview was done on the second day of the research. It was done in a friendly manner to ease the threatening writing environment. Twelve questions were developed from four key questions, namely:

1. How often did writing paragraphs in L1 and L2 take place?
2. What kind of written texts were mostly practiced?
3. How did the subjects learn writing paragraphs in both languages?
4. What kind of problems did the participants have in L2 paragraph writing?

The information on the content of grade 6 English text, the extra grammar exercises done in the class, the paragraph topics assigned for writing were gathered and then from such information, the researcher wrote the questions for the interview (see Appendix B.1, p. 96).

Designing the questionnaire

The purposes of the questionnaire are to find out if GBA is appropriate for teaching personal recount genre to this level of participants, and also to find out whether the GBA is workable in the normal EFL setting. The questionnaire serves as the students' feedback on GBA teaching process, especially, whether they understood the concept of "meaningful content" very well or not. The interview questions were asked to the subjects before the pre-instruction writing (see Appendix B1, p. 96). This questionnaire was given to the students on the day after the post-instruction writing (see Appendix B.2. p. 97). Some questions used in the questionnaire elicit fixed responses from the students while others were multiple-choice questions which allow the students to indicate their preference and exercise their options.

Making a six-day teaching plan

Preparation

In order to introduce GBA, particularly, a personal recount with a formal written style, the researcher drew a schedule of teaching plan for 6 days. Before introducing the teaching process, preparation (which determines the learners' performance in their writing) was done as follows:

1. The activities to familiarize the participants with the genre were planned.

The activities planned in this teaching process were comparing and contrasting the successful and unsuccessful written texts, drawing pictures to show the events in chronological order, watching a video tape, making notes, and exchanging written texts for peer feedback.

2. Sample texts on personal recount were chosen for modeling.

The sample texts chosen for modeling were one written text of an ESL student and one reconstructed text written by an English NS ESL teacher which were adapted from Reuter's (1999) examples, one written text of a native speaking student (a product from the researcher's observation class), and one written text of an EFL NNS teacher (see Appendixes G. 1-4, pp. 104-5). These four written samples were used for modeling because these learners have never experienced writing this particular type of genre and have not experienced focusing their writing on the meaningful content. They did not know the criteria used in identifying their errors.

3. The teaching process used some equipment.

The process used an OHP (overhead projector) and transparencies, white board and pen, audiovideo aids, fact/vocabulary sheets for "Words I Want to Know", and a vocabulary chart (see Appendix M, p.127-8).

4. The environment in which the teaching and learning took place was chosen.

The room in which teaching and learning cycle took place had good physical environment, was wide enough for 7 participants, and the teacher (see Appendix L, p. 126).

5. The researcher (teacher) used bilingual instruction: Myanmar local language and English.

The researcher chose to use bilingual instruction because she agrees with Nathenson-Mejia's (1989) finding from a study on children who were already literate in L1 before learning L2. She found out that it is advantageous for L2 writers to have already done some writing in their own native language. She believes that prior

knowledge can be used to "make sense of the new language" (Nathenson-Majia in Girolamo, 1999).

Current literature indicates a new acceptance of translation from the native languages. The students' writing on their interest are rewritten in English and shared in the class. Leki (1991) supports the use of L1 in writing, pointing out that many writing classrooms now spend time on personal writing "in order to allow students to write on subjects they know about" (in Kral 1995, p.174). In this study, participants used writing as a tool to express their personal experiences to the readers. Hence, L1 translation was used as a guide in writing L2, particularly as reference for the meaning of what they intend to say in L2.

Another reason for using translation is to figure out whether the intended meaning is correctly expressed in their L2 texts or not. The evaluator (the researcher) could also assess whether the subjects include meaningful content in their L2 texts as they did in L1. The evaluator could find out accurately what content the subjects left out or added in their L2 texts.

Six-Day schedule

The six-day schedule is a part of the research time frame (ten days), excluding the data analysis. Organizing seven volunteer subjects and preparation for the research study, collecting data from pre-writing interview, and collecting pre-instruction written texts were done during the first three days of the research time frame. Teaching GBA to the subjects, collecting the post-instruction written texts, and collecting questionnaire data were involved in the six-day schedule. The procedure for

research in the ten-day frame and the six-day teaching schedule are demonstrated in the next page.

Using fact/vocabulary sheet "Words I Want to Know"

The fact/vocabulary sheets "Words I Want to Know" were used widely in Australian schools and the researcher adapted such tool for this present research. This fact/vocabulary sheet has three columns. On the first column, the subjects wrote vocabulary or expression in L1 for concepts or ideas which they could not express in L2. The researcher wrote the correct words in L2 (translation) in the second column. Then, the learners copied their L2 words in the third column, after which, the teacher checked the entries again.

Table 3. Research Time Table (ten days)

Day 1	Preparation / Organizing subjects
Day 2	Data collection through pre-writing interview
Day 3	Data collection (pre-instruction texts)
Day 4	Teaching personal recount with meaningful content using GBA along with six-day teaching schedule
Day 5	
Day 6	
Day 7	
Day 8	
Day 9	Data collection (post-instruction texts)
Day 10	Data collection (post-writing questionnaire)

The reason why the researcher used this sheet for this study is that since EFL learners would try to construct their own texts from their own experiences, they might use some vocabulary from their culture which they had never learned in their school texts, such as "fish-paste" or "offer the candles for Buddha."

The second reason is that since the study was made in a limited time, there was not enough time for the subjects to look up the words in the dictionary. The third reason is that Burmese-English Dictionaries were not available then. The last reason is to call the subjects' attention to the spelling since this was not stressed in the instruction.

The error chart

Many, if not most language teachers consider errors to be serious. But what exactly are language errors? Klassen (1991) defines error as "a form or structure that a native speaker deems unacceptable because of its inappropriate use" (in Kral 1995, p. 134).

Nowadays, as attention on errors has shifted to Error Analysis (EA) from Contrastive Analysis (CA), errors are no longer seen as the products of "bad habits." Rather EA sees errors as a natural phenomenon, a part of the learning process of both the first or second language (Klassen in Kral 1995, p.134).

Treating errors

Regarding treating errors, several educators agree to focus more on content or meaning rather than on language form (see p.35). Particularly, Klassen (1991) suggests that teachers focus on global errors or those errors which hinder the effective communication (Klassen in Kral 1995, p.134).

Categorizing, coding, and marking errors in sentences in a written text

The correction code suggested by Klassen (in Kral 1995, p.135) includes categorizing and coding according to nine main types of errors: punctuation, nouns,

verbs, modifiers, prepositions, syntax, lexical items, connectors, and style. The researcher adapted the TEEP criteria for assessing written production (1983) and Klassen's (1991) error treating (in order to discern the global and local errors from the data. Global errors include (1) relevance and adequacy of content, (2) compositional organization, (3) cohesion, (4) appropriateness and adequacy of vocabulary for purpose, and (5) syntax/ word order. Local errors include (1) mechanics such as punctuation, capitalization and spelling, and (2) basic grammar like tense, singular/plural, article, auxiliary, and preposition. The local errors are marked with symbols above each error (Klassen in Kral 1995, p.134).

Charting errors

The errors were put in a chart following Klassen's (1991) method to make them clearer for learners and teachers. The chart enables the learners to see their own errors. On the part of the teachers, they could see their learners' mistakes at the time they are still making them and also see the stage that the students have reached. In addition, teachers can treat or show the errors of the whole class in a single chart. In this way, teachers can see graver problem areas of the students (in Kral 1995, pp.135-136).

Klassen (1991) shows how to chart the errors for individuals and the whole class from their several different essays. In this study, individual error charts were made for seven participants to show the errors in their sentences in two essays: their pre-and post-instruction texts. There were two error charts for each participant: one error chart for pre-instruction text and the other is for post-instruction text (see in Appendix D, p. 100).

Adapting the TEEP criteria for assessing written production

Weir (1990) states that the failing of the analytic mark schemes in the past have been in the choice and delineation of appropriate criteria for a given situation. In designing the appropriate criteria for assessing a written text, Weir (1983) felt that the assessment of samples of written performance should be based on appropriate, behaviorally described, analytic criteria, graded according to different levels of performance. They also thought that the criteria needed to be comprehensive and based on empirical job sample evidence (Weir 1990, p.68). Thus, they designed TEEP (Test in English for Educational Purposes) where the preference was with evaluating the communicative effectiveness of learners' writing. (p.67).

As this study focuses on the meaningful content in a written text, the main criterion is evaluating whether such text has communicative effectiveness in such writing. Thus, the researcher divided the TEEP criteria into two parts, namely, assessment for global errors and assessment for local errors. As stated before (see p. 50), the researcher adapted the Items A to E from TEEP and also followed its scoring system of it ('0' to 3 points each for Items A to E) for meaningful content or global errors.

As the total score for meaningful content is fifteen points, the grades for meaningful content were given as follows.

Total score for meaningful content (15 points):

13-15 points =	Grade A	"Excellent"
10-12 points =	Grade B	"Very Good"
7- 9 points =	Grade C	"Good"
4- 6 points =	Grade D	"Poor"

Below 4 points = Grade F "Very poor"

The researcher adapted the latter parts (Items F and G) for local errors such as mechanics and simple/single grammatical elements (see p. 51). The researcher used the error chart to mark the frequency of local errors in each sentence.

3.3. Data collection

Four different data were collected: (1) data through interview questions, (2) pre-instruction data, (3) post-instruction data, and (4) data from post-writing questionnaire.

Pre-writing interview data were collected on the second day of the research time frame (ten days). Pre-instruction data were collected on the third day while post-instruction data were collected on the ninth day of the research period. These were both in L1 and L2. Post-instruction writing data from the questionnaire were collected on the day after the teaching plan.

3.4. Data Analysis

The data from the pre-writing interview was analyzed and interpreted by the researcher in a table (see Table 4, p. 57). The subjects' average percentage for learning each language skill is also shown in a pie chart (see Figure 3, p. 58).

Both the pre- and post-instruction data of the subjects are presented in the tables (see Table 5 and Table 6, pp. 61 and 64). In order to do this, the researcher followed the procedure. First, the native English-speaking EFL teacher read the written texts and wrote the comments about the meaningful content of the texts. Then, the

researcher checked the global errors and underlined them. Later, the researcher consulted with that native English-speaker teacher to assess the meaningful content in their written texts using the checklist adapted from TEEP Writing Attribute Scales. The grades on meaningful content were also assessed from those pre- and post-instruction writing (see Table 5, p. 61).

The researcher used the individual error chart (both for pre-and post-instruction texts) to check the frequency of the local errors in the sentences. She used symbols to indicate the local errors. Finally, assessment of individual subject's local errors in their pre- and post-instruction texts appeared as frequency in the table (see Table 6, p.64).

The post-writing questionnaire was analyzed by the researcher and the data were interpreted in a table (see Table 7, p.68).

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