

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This concluding chapter will summarize and discuss the results of this study. The researcher concludes this study by recommending the workability of GBA for this particular research setting, and possibly for the rest of Myanmar middle schools.

5.1. Summary of the study

The history of teaching and learning English in Myanmar shows that the Grammar-Translation method has been overwhelmingly dominant in Myanmar school system of both yesterday and today and in the minds of the teachers teaching English. Therefore, it would seem that the teacher-centered classroom, the structured-based writing instruction, the scarcity of the well-qualified English teachers in teaching writing, and the few frequency of L2 paragraph writing practice have impeded the development of Myanmar students' writing capability.

Furthermore, the recent implementation of the Continuous Assessment Program (CAP) (see p. 8) compelled the teachers to "teach to the test." Thus, Myanmar EFL learners, particularly, middle school level learners, have been writing without realizing the purpose of their writing, nor identifying their audience. Neither were they conscious of the way they should express their ideas to produce comprehensible output or with meaningful content.

Throughout this study, the researcher has attempted to fulfil the following objectives: (1) to introduce the GBA to the Myanmar EFL middle school learners in writing personal recount genre; (2) to discern and analyze the development of the participants' abilities in writing with meaningful content by comparing their pre- and post-instruction writing; and (3) to identify and analyze the errors (both global and local errors) in their pre- and post-instruction texts in order to gain a clearer insight into errors that hinder communication.

The subjects who participated fully were six Grade 7 middle school students who shared the same interest in writing paragraphs, in both L1 and L2. They are from State High School No. 1, Sanchaung, Yangon.

The instruments employed in this study were: (1) pre-writing interview which investigated the subjects' background information; (2) post-writing questionnaire which reflects the subjects' feedback regarding the GBA; (3) the participants' pre and post-instruction texts; (4) fact/vocabulary sheet ("Words I Want to Know"); (5) Klassen's error charts which were employed to mark the frequency of local errors found in two texts; and (6) two checklists: one is used to look at the meaningful content and the other is used to assess the local errors. The checklists were adapted from TEEP "Writing Attribute Scales" and Klassen (see p. 51); and (7) a six-day teaching plan based on M. Callaghan and J. Rothery's GBA teaching and learning cycle.

The instruction used in this study was the Genre-Based Approach (GBA) for writing personal recount. The statistical treatments applied here are frequency and simple percentages. Tables and a pie chart are employed to present the results clearly. An

English native-speaking teacher helped the researcher in analyzing and evaluating the participants' writing.

The findings from this study are: (1) the participants' writing after they were given instruction on GBA have meaningful content while most of their writing before they were given instruction on GBA do not express the writers' ideas in a comprehensible manner; and (2) the local errors found in their pre-instruction writing became fewer in their writing after they were taught how to write personal recount, using GBA.

5.2. Discussion of the results

This section will discuss two results: (1) the results from the interview and the questionnaire; and (2) the results of the pre-and post-instruction writing.

5.2.1. The interview and questionnaire

The first part to be discussed is concerned with the results from interview questions. The first answer related to the participants' period of learning English reveals that all of the subjects have studied English since they were in kindergarten. The answer for the second question concerning the amount of time they spent for learning each of the four macro language skills indicates that all of them have spent the greatest amount of time in writing (40%) and the smallest amount of time in speaking (10%). For listening and reading skills, their answers varied. Three participants answered differently from others.

This variation may be due to the difference in their background in the primary schools. Their different English teachers might have taught them differently.

The average percentage of learning the four macro language skills reveals a clear picture of the influence of a Grammar-Translation classroom, in which teacher's talk dominates the class all the time without any interaction with learners nor among the learners. Although they spent the greatest amount of time in writing (40%), the answers for question three and four indicate that the participants write paragraphs only in the classroom, and the frequency for such writing was low. Again, this indicates that the students spent most of the writing time doing structure-based exercises, such as answering questions, correcting grammatical structures, and transforming sentences, such as affirmative to negative or active to passive voice.

Furthermore, since the average amount of time they spent in reading was only 18.6%, they could not have had an opportunity to learn the model for writing through reading. This also indicates that reading and writing skills were taught separately. The curriculum has not exploited the value of reading as an input for writing. Since reading and writing support each other (Morrow et al. 1994; Reid 1993), these students should have been taught reading and writing equally.

Moreover, the answers for questions 5 and 6 indicate that for most of the participants, there were no other people but only the teacher who could assist them in writing paragraphs. Only one subject got help from her older sister apart from her English teacher. This shows us that the teacher was the only model and that the teacher also controlled their writing.

The answers for question 7 show that they had experienced writing three different kinds of paragraphs. However, due to the low frequency of practice, the teacher's control over their writing, lack of awareness of their purposes for writing, and lack of writing help, other than the teacher (from family members), it was logical for them to answer "No" for question 13. This also shows that they were not aware of their own problems in L2 paragraph writing.

Furthermore, the answer to question 12 indicates that these particular learners are still not familiar with collaborative learning or co-operative learning. Thus, we can infer that they are still in the hands of the teachers who learned through the Grammar-Translation method and who wanted to carry on that tradition.

In contrast, the answers to questions 8, 9, and 10 indicate that the frequency of L1 writing was almost once a week and they had more opportunities to express their own ideas or feelings freely in their L1 writing. However, they did not have a chance to write paragraphs in their L2 as they did in L1. The participants, therefore, did not know how to construct their own texts in L2 with meaningful content to communicate with their readers.

The data from this interview were very helpful in drawing lesson plans for the implementation of the GBA.

From the post-writing questionnaire, the researcher was able to discern the subjects' preferred learning styles and problems that they realized in the course of the writing process through peer evaluation and consultation with the teacher. In addition, the

researcher also found that after the GBA instruction, the participants became more confident in their writing and were willing to write some other different types of paragraphs besides personal recount.

The answers to questions 1 and 2 show that all subjects enjoyed writing personal recount, and that they now have positive attitudes towards writing using the GBA. Moreover, the answers to questions 3 and 4 show that they enjoy writing, both individually and collaboratively. This convinces us that they did not have any difficulty in the second phase (joint construction of text) or the third phase (independent construction of text) of the teaching process of GBA. The above-mentioned answers support Begin's (1971) belief that "Students who are placed in an environment which allows them to interact freely help one another develop a positive attitude towards learning and support each other emotionally" (in Hahn 1989, p. 77). Moreover, this supports Chastain's (1975) finding that affective characteristics have at least as much influence on learning as do ability factors (in Hahn 1989, p.78).

In answering questions 4, 5, and 6, they all expressed that they like "semi-guided" writing, in which teachers do not totally control the learners' writing but facilitate the process of writing, perhaps, through the use of writing aids, such as the fact/vocabulary sheet. This also shows that the participants want active roles rather than passive roles, and they prefer the teacher to be their facilitator rather than "a controller."

The answer to question 8 manifests that the instruction of personal recount writing was explicit, and it made them sure that they understood the nature of personal recount writing, using GBA (linguistic structure and language features). Regarding the problem

areas which they encountered during the process of writing, all subjects had difficulty in such areas as: what to write and how to write relevantly to the topic, how to organize their written texts very coherently, and which vocabulary items were appropriate to the topic. After the GBA instruction, 50% of the subjects realized that they still need more input in the area of word order. In addition, 50% of the subjects also realized that they still need help in writing cohesively, using conjunctions and personal referents. These answers would be very useful and helpful in drawing instructional plans for further writing activities that focus on meaningful content.

Regarding the areas of local error, all the participants realized that they still need to improve their knowledge of punctuation, and five of them still need to improve their use of correct prepositions. Four of them realized that they used the incorrect or inappropriate tense forms for their topics, and one subject still has difficulty in using the correct article.

These data also help the teachers realize that although their students have learned some extent of writing, the students still make such mistakes. In teaching writing, teachers cannot totally disregard these kinds of local errors.

The answers to questions 11 and 12 indicate that after learning how to write personal recount, the participants have come to regard themselves as capable writers by giving the same answer "yes" to question 11. Consequently, they were willing to write some other different kinds of genres by giving the same answer "yes" to question 12. This supports the strong belief of the Australian genre practitioners that "a genre-based approach is empowering and enabling, allowing students to make sense of the world around them and

participate in it, and be more aware of writing as a tool that can be used and manipulated" (in Kay and Dudley-Evans 1998, p. 340).

5.2.2. Results related to the subjects' pre- and post-instruction texts **Discussion on Meaningful Content**

The comparison between the pre-and post-instruction writings shows that all the pre-instruction texts do not have adequate content and their content was not relevant to their topics. All the sentences they used in their texts were mostly fragments rather than sentences. For instance, subject 1 wrote about "Going to the market with her mother." She tried to write her text from her experience, but the sentences she wrote were "Driled shrimps bought. Mother salads bought and rice bought." Such writing does not even follow English phrase structure or word order. The sentences were not logically connected to each other, and, of course, the writing was incoherent.

Most of the word order patterns used in the texts were incorrect or "un-English." For example, in the first sentence of Subject 1 " Yesterday I mother help." The verb "help" comes after the object "mother." This peculiar word order can be seen in almost all sentences in their pre-instruction texts. This writing is a manifestation of the thinking process that the participants undergo, in which, they try to translate their English texts directly from their L1 SOV (Subject-Object-Verb) structure. Thus, the L1 grammar transfer shows in their L2 writing.

Most of the sentences in their pre-instruction texts show that they tended to use the main participant "I or We" in their first and last sentences. In other sentences, they

usually left out the main participants. This is another problem of language transfer too. In Myanmar language, the main subject needs to be mentioned only in the first sentence to introduce it, and it is only mentioned in the concluding sentence. The same main participant need not be stated again in other sentences. Their language transfer phenomenon is manifested in the seventh sentence of Subject 5, "Cooked curry." The writer used the L1 discourse rule in her L2 writing.

In Myanmar (Burmese) language, the verb is always placed in the last position; the subject, object, place, and time can be anywhere. This kind of language explains the distributions in word order in the English output as the last part in the second sentence of Subject 3, ". . . I bus to up quickly went." Moreover, in Myanmar language, "verb supporter" plays a very important role, which is transferred by English learners into their English. This phenomenon explains the distribution in the sixth sentence of Subject 7: "I Grandmother's shop at counter sit is give." She appears to mean "I helped my grandmother by sitting at the counter." The verb supporter "pay" in Burmese means "help" in English. The writer used L1 semantics in her L2 writing.

The cohesive devices, particularly, connectives were not used to connect the sentences. Thus, it is very difficult to understand the events in chronological order. For instance, the two last sentences of Subject 2, "Salads bought. MY MOTHER AND ME mon-hin-gha eat soon going to the home." were not connected with appropriate conjunction such as "Then" or "After that". In Burmese rhetorical style, the events are not necessarily arranged in chronological order. That is the reason the participants did

not use the connectives to show the sequences of events in L2 writing. That is another case in which the writer used the L1 discourse rule in L2 writing.

Moreover, they could not use personal referents in their pre-instruction texts. Like Subject 2, she used "My mother and me" repeatedly instead of using "We." They do not know the use of "I" instead of "me." They might have overgeneralized that pronouns after preposition must be "object pronouns." They could also have misunderstood "and" to be a preposition instead of a "connective."

Regarding the vocabulary, all the subjects got help from the researcher by using "Words I want to know". However, the vocabulary they used in their texts was out of context. For example, Subject 3 used the word "rich" in her sentence, "Mother help cooking rich eating." In Burmese language, "rich" also means "more." Hence, Subject 3 tended to translate from her L1 and seemed to mean "cook and eat more." Subject 2 could not use the appropriate word "plentiful" so she used "poll" and "pold" instead. In Burmese, we pronounce /p / for the meaning of "plentiful." It seemed that Subject 2 wrote something similar to a Burmese word. This is a case of phonological transfer from L1 into English writing.

In using action verbs, although they knew some action verbs, they tended to use one or two verbs such as "went," "bought," and "cooked," and "wash" repeatedly.

For these above reasons, they could not construct their own texts correctly and clearly.

The above findings manifest what Raimes (1984) and Garner (1982) say about the characteristics of the unskilled L2 writers, that they have difficulties with text structure (organization), and cohesive devices (conjunction and misuse of pronouns or referents).

As a result, although all the participants tried to construct their texts based on their own experiences, their pre-instruction paragraphs appear to be "not a good piece of work," "not understandable," "not coherent," "meaningless," and "hard to understand." In other words, they were incapable of producing comprehensible written output.

On the other hand, the post-instruction texts appear to be shorter than their pre-instruction texts, but have meaningful content. Such communicative writing was achieved because the writers followed the linguistic structure and linguistic features of personal recount.

They all started their first sentences with background information (who was involved, what happened, when it happened, where it happened, and how it happened). This can be seen in the first sentence of Subject 7, "I went to night market with my mother on foot yesterday." After the orientation stage, they continued to state the sequence of events in chronological order. This can be seen in the five sentences written by Subject 5 (see Appendix I, p 110).

They all concluded their texts with their personal comments. For instance, Subject 7 concluded her text with: "That day was a very busy day but I was very happy." They had more or less similar personal comments.

The participants also improved in using cohesive devices (connectives and personal referent) in the post-instruction texts. All of them used "Then," "but," and "after that" in their texts to show logical connection and the sequence of events in chronological order. The noun phrases ". . . my auntie, my younger brother, my sisters and I" in the first sentence of Subject 4 show that she could use the correct personal referent properly.

Regarding appropriate vocabulary, they all could use a variety of action verbs in their texts. For example, in the text of Subject 2, she used "went," "had," "dressed," "arrived," "poured," "prayed," and "came." They also expressed some detailed information such as "hotels," "stores," "teashops," "swimming pool," "aquarium" in appropriate contexts in their post-instruction writing.

Although there are still some problems in word order in the post-instruction texts of some subjects, if we compare these with their pre-instruction paragraphs, a significant improvement can be seen in their post-instruction writing. Their post-instruction texts were given the remarks: "a meaningful text," "a coherent paragraph," "a comprehensible output," and "a good work."

Thus, the difference between the pre- and post-instruction paragraphs indicates that after implementing the GBA, all the participants improved in writing with meaningful content in their L2 texts.

Discussion on local errors

Regarding the local errors, punctuation is the greatest problem in the participants' pre-instruction writing. Many of the students did not use full stops (period) between the sentences. For instance, in the second sentence of Subject 3, "Hantharwaddy bus stop [50] bus wait reach my mother and sister with and I bus to on quickly went.", it is very difficult for the researcher to determine which is the beginning or the end of the sentence.

For some participants, they did not know how to use capitalization properly. For example, Subject 1 used all capitals in her first sentence and last sentence. e.g., "TOLL

FREE" and "MY MOTHER AND ME." Regarding spelling, there were still incorrectly spelled words in some subjects' texts, although the researcher helped them through the fact/vocabulary sheets ("Words I Want to Know").

In the area of grammatical elements, all subjects had difficulty with tense. As they tried to tell their past experiences, they did not use the past tense, they used the simple present or gerund instead, such as "help," "wash," "cooking," and "sweeping." They tried to use the past tense only for some words such as "went," and "bought." Apparently, the Burmese learners transfer the L1 verb system, in which there are no inflections into L2. But they could use the clearly marked or clearly inflected forms, such as "cooking." Burmese verbs indicate tense with a free form particle. e.g., "thwar keh" which translates to "go + past."

Regarding preposition, some subjects had difficulty. They either left out the preposition or used incorrect prepositions. For example, in the eleventh sentence of Subject 5, "Parent words exactly listen," she left out "to" (in addition to omitted subject and faulty word order and spelling). In Burmese language, there is no use of such idiomatic expression as "listen to." Thus, the writer used the L1 grammar rule in her L2 writing.

Some subjects could not use the correct singular or plural words in their pre-instruction texts. For instance, Subject 5 used the word "Parent" for "Parents." In Burmese language, "a couple of parents" is used as a compound singular noun. Thus it seemed that she transferred her L1 knowledge in her L2 writing. Subject 1 used "mango" for "mangoes" in her pre-instruction writing. In Burmese language, there are two

particles ('myar' and 'do?') which are used to show plural form. There is no irregular inflectional morphemes used in L1. Hence, Subject 1 seemed to use singular form for "mango" rather than "mangos." Such two errors manifest another case of L1 grammar transfer into their L2 writing.

Quite different from their pre-instruction writing, their (individually) post-instruction writing has much fewer local errors. For some subjects, like subjects 3 and 5, their local errors in the area of grammatical elements significantly decreased.

5.3. Conclusion

The significant improvement in the data shows that the students have improved in writing, not only in grammatical elements or linguistic features, but also with meaningful content. The researcher therefore concludes that the GBA provides a useful framework for the teachers and the students in expressing meaningful content (see p. 22). The researcher has shown that it is indeed easier for the students to write with meaningful content by following the framework. In this way, the GBA enables them to produce a text that serves its intended purpose. In the long run, with more practice and more familiarity with other forms of genres, it is hoped that the students can construct their own texts creatively. Thus, GBA does not only offer the student a practical way to write confidently, independently, and creatively with meaningful content, but also offers teachers an effective way of teaching writing communicatively. Hence, GBA turns the

negative attitude towards writing as expressed in the comment: "Writing is the most ignored skill" to a positive one: "Writing is fun."

5.4. Implications and Recommendations

The Genre-Based Approach to teaching writing has been widely applied in the ESL elementary setting in Australia and in the ESL University setting (English for Academic Purposes) in the United States. This present study shows that GBA is workable, not only in a Myanmar EFL middle school setting, but also in other countries still using the Grammar-Translation method in EFL.

The implementation of the Genre-Based Approach enables the EFL teacher to change his or her traditional perspective: "Writing is copying or creating sentences from word lists" to the pragmatic perspective: "Writing is a tool through which the writer can communicate with his/her readers."

By implementing the GBA, teachers can enable their students to interact with their audience communicatively. In light of the results of this research, the researcher would like to suggest that GBA be introduced as soon as the learners are able to write any single meaningful sentence. This suggestion is also in consonance with Allison's (1999) belief that genres are relevant in teaching at any level as well as Christie and Rothery's (1990) view that "preparation for writing the many genres. . . should start in primary school" (in Christie 1990, p. 199).

In addition, this study shows that the GBA enabled the participants to write their personal experiences meaningfully, even though they were introduced to it in a relatively short time. Thus, the researcher would like to suggest that EFL teachers make their students aware of the other genres as much as possible and encourage them to practice writing paragraphs on those genres.

To be able to instruct the GBA process to the students, the teachers are responsible for preparing all three of the phases of the teaching process. Preparation is crucial as it determines the good or bad quality of a written performance. The teachers select the models, the instruments, the language activities, and the language environment, which are appropriate to the learners' needs, situation and interest. The implication is that the EFL teachers give their students plenty of modeling for their writing because the students do not have the criteria to identify global errors or local errors.

In the joint construction phase, the teacher gives the students opportunities to interact with the teacher as well as with their peers. The teacher as a "facilitator" rather than "a controller" can draw the potential out of the students. Furthermore, working in pairs or in groups (in constructing texts or in peer editing) provides the students mutual benefits by exchanging ideas and learning from each other. They begin to consider other ways of doing things and appreciate the work of others. Therefore, the researcher suggests that EFL teachers facilitate rather than control, and encourage their learners to work collaboratively. Healy (1998) claims that "Group work can make individual writers better-faster."

In most EFL classrooms, L1 is inevitably used in giving instruction. The implication here is that EFL children benefit from instruction in their L1 as it transfers, rather than interferes with, their L2 text construction. Toh (1998) noted the important role of L1 (mother tongue) instruction with the Thai students and Lao students. Thus, the researcher recommends that EFL teachers use L1 as well as L2 in giving instruction.

GBA encourages writers to choose their own topics according to their interest, and experiences. EFL teachers should give their learners free choice for the topic to write. When students are motivated to write, they will write in a comprehensible manner and appreciate their own texts.

In evaluating the students' writing, ESL or EFL teachers look at both local errors and global errors. However, the current thinking on writing focuses on communicative writing or meaningful content. In other words, meaning and effective communication should be given priority in writing. On the other hand, local errors should be treated secondarily. Therefore, in evaluating compositions, ESL or EFL teachers should give more weight to meaningful content than local errors. For example, if a written text were given 100%, meaningful content should be given 80% and local errors 20%.

To ensure that the GBA will help Myanmar teachers move away from the "text-centered" approach to the "learner-centered" approach, the researcher suggests that teacher training on the teaching of writing in L2, particularly using the GBA, be conducted.

As Littlefair (1991) pointed that the knowledge of genre can be drawn upon in the teaching of reading, the researcher would therefore like to suggest that writing be

integrated with reading. An integrated reading-writing instruction will make learners aware of genres in the texts that they read and will consequently make them apply their observations in their own writing.

The research was carried out within a limited time and the advantage of the outcome was only from the small group of grade 7 students using a particular writing, personal recount. Thus, the researcher would like to suggest that further research be carried out to look into the workability of GBA with other varieties of genre among students in other levels. In this way, the effectiveness of the Genre-Based Approach for EFL writing with communicative meaning can be further explored.

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