

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In this concluding chapter, a summary of the study is presented. Implications for teaching are then presented based on the findings of this study. The chapter then concludes with suggestions for further research.

5.1 Summary of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine writing strategies used by weak ESL learners and the problems encountered in the process of writing business letters. It has been discovered that students used various strategies and these strategies affected the writing process. These findings are important because of the implications they have on the teaching and learning of business letter writing.

The think-aloud protocols revealed three types of writing strategies: cognitive, metacognitive and social strategies. Six dominant strategies being transcribing, rehearsing structure, monitoring production, scanning, translating, rehearsing ideas and repeating, were found to be common in the students' repertoire of strategies.

As for the problems encountered, students were found to be concerned with comprehending the task and production of ideas. The study showed that while some students were able to identify their problems in writing accurately, others were not able to do so. This affected the range of strategies adopted in the writing process and the effectiveness and appropriateness of the letter written.

One of the main problems encountered by weak learners in the process of writing business letters, as observed in this study, was in comprehending the task requirements. This problem ranged in complexity from the basic word meaning problems to contextual problems in comprehension, and it resulted in inappropriacy when students misinterpreted the task demands. The study found that the reading ability of weak learners impaired their ability to reach comprehension of the task. To compensate for their inadequate reading ability, some students resorted to guessing. However, as revealed in the study, the guess is often wrong, and this strategy may prove to be a disaster when used in real-life business situations.

The study also found that only a few of the students were concerned with the style for writing business letters which were the emphasis of the business correspondence course they were attending. Concerns which involved the 5 C's commonly taught in such courses seem to be beyond the capacity of

these students who were struggling with the more basic problems of comprehending task demands, generating, shaping and structuring ideas.

It was also found that strategies can be used effectively as well as ineffectively. The use of resourcing, for example, was found to be effective for only some students because the manner it was used rendered them useful or otherwise. Therefore, the use of a particular strategy would only be beneficial to the student if it was used appropriately.

All these have important implications for teaching, and they will be discussed in the next section..

5.2 Implications for Teaching

The findings of this study highlighted task comprehension as one of the major problems encountered by weak learners in the process of writing business letters. This poses important implications to the teaching and testing of business letter writing. Teachers who have to deal with weak learners will have to bear in mind the added complexity of the written task. Weak learners in a business writing environment would have to juggle with multiple constraints at the same time. They will have to try to deal with their incomplete comprehension of the task, before they can focus their attention to other aspects of business letter writing.

Teachers who are not aware of the tremendous challenge faced by these learners may fail to understand the challenge faced by these learners in each of their attempts. In addition to these demands, these students have to get to manage negative emotions that accompany such demands, i.e. their own expectation as well as that of their teachers. Therefore, heightening teachers' and learners' awareness of these factors can probably help teachers plan teaching and learning activities more effectively, and prevent mismatches of teaching and learning styles adopted for the learning process.

This study found that weak learners usually fall back on social strategies like questioning others to help them overcome mental blocks in the process of writing, and this provides further support for the use of discussions prior to writing in the classroom. Such discussion could help students acquire a complete understanding of the task which requires not only proficiency in the target language but also knowledge about the task (e.g. letter writing conventions and the 5 C's for business communication) as well as knowledge about the context and the roles played by the recipient and the sender of such letters within a particular context.

The study has also identified some patterns of behaviour in strategy use which provide insight into why students do what they do in the process of writing. Students in this study were found to use the dictionary and the textbook as language resources. However, some were not able to use them

effectively. The random search for words and phrases often conducted by the students in the process of writing suggests that teachers can introduce new strategies for these students to compile a more reliable and assessable language reference store. Teachers may also need to train students to use the dictionary effectively in order to render it a useful tool for language learning. In addition, these students may also be trained to use modelling as a strategy of adapting model letters for appropriate situations.

Students in this study were found to use different ranges of strategies to deal with the problems encountered. Students who wrote effective letters were found to have used strategies like summarizing, making connections, monitoring style, resourcing (memory) and resourcing for specific letter plans. Given the nature of this study, generalization cannot be made about the effectiveness of the use of these strategies. Nevertheless, teachers can explore the effects of training students with such strategies for effective management of task comprehension and idea generation in the writing process.

5.3 Suggestions for Further Research

As mentioned earlier, the number of participants involved in this study is small; therefore, findings of this study cannot be generalized to a larger population of weak learners. Further research is needed to validate the assertions made in this study on the positive correlation between higher-order

reading strategies like summarizing and making connections with task comprehension. Future studies can also study the transfer effects of training such strategies on task comprehension and writing performance of business letter writing to collaborate results from this study. Such studies will strengthen the existing theories on reading-writing connections, and provide more reliable recommendations of strategies for autonomous learning.

The current study found that weak learners may have a limited capacity to deal with the stylistic aspect of business writing because of their inadequate proficiency and their concern for more basic problems like word meaning, and task comprehension. Hence, more insight is needed on the development of ESL writers struggling with language demands as well as stylistic demands of letter writing defined by the discourse community.

Strategy choice of skilled and proficient writers of business letters would also be a necessary extension to this study. This study would provide more insight on the range of strategies needed for writing business letters. Comparative studies between skilled and unskilled writers, and between undergraduate and working professionals in the letter writing context would also shed more light on research into this type of writing. These studies would also provide more information on the difference in the range of strategies used (if any) and on other possible factors that affect strategy choice for effective letter writing in the business environment.