

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

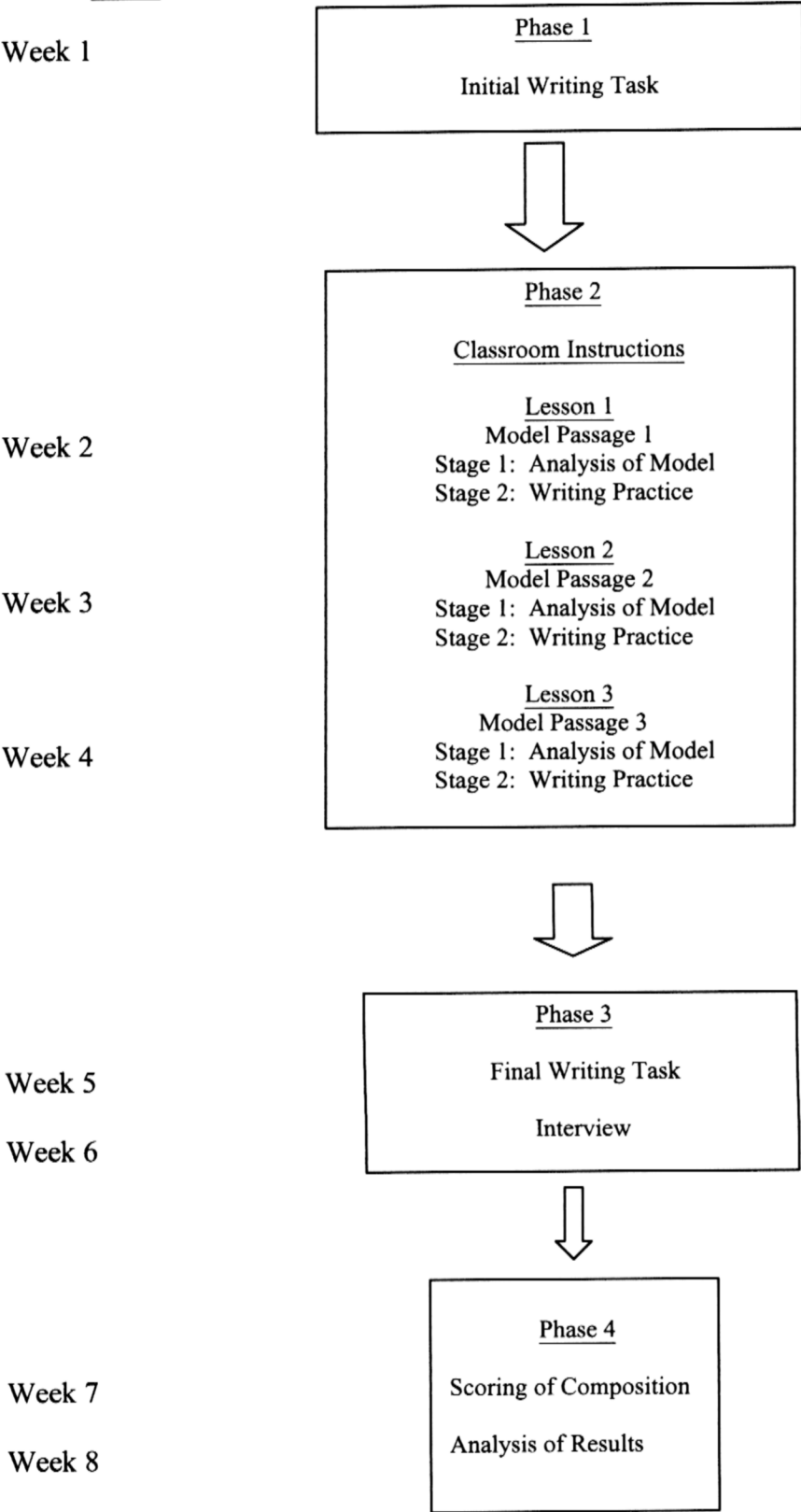
The purpose of this study is to find out to what extent the “reading → analyzing → writing” approach using model passages helps improve the overall writing performance of low proficiency ESL learners.

Research Design

The research is a classroom-based study to find out to what extent the “reading → analyzing → writing” approach based on model passages helps improve the writing performance of four low proficiency level ESL learners. For the purpose of this study, I have chosen three expository cause and effect texts as model passages. Research, according to Taylor (1985:119), has shown that many students have difficulties reading and writing expository texts partly because of factors related to text structure or the organization of main ideas and details in the texts. Hence, I have focused my study on writing instructions in expository text structure, which I believe, would benefit my students. Furthermore, the writing of this type of text is a requirement stipulated in the Basic English Proficiency Syllabus.

A diagrammatic representation of the research design is given in Figure 1, p. 23.

Fig. 1 Diagrammatic Representation of the Research Design



Instruction Schedule

The study was carried out in four phases stretching over an 8-week period. A description of the classroom instructions given during the study is found in the Outline of Lesson Plan (see Appendix A, p. 72).

Phase 1 (Week 1). Phase 1 began with the Initial Writing task given to the students by the researcher (see Appendix B, p. 75 for Initial Writing Task). Using information gathered from classroom discussions and readings at the pre-writing stage, each student then produced a total of three drafts after two rounds of peer editing and revisions. The final drafts were collected and evaluated as Initial Writing Scores.

Phase 2 (Week 2 – 4). Treatment in the form of classroom instructions began in Phase Two. It was implemented in three lessons over three weeks. Each lesson involved direct classroom teaching of the “reading → analyzing → writing” approach based on a model passage. Each lesson was conducted in two stages, namely the Analysis of Model stage and the Parallel Writing Practice stage.

During the Analysis of Model stage, copies of the model passage (see Appendix C1, p. 76) were distributed to the students. Together with the researcher, the students read the model carefully and analyzed the passage in terms of its organization (see Appendixes C2-C4, pp. 77-80) and its Language Pattern (see Appendix C5, p. 81). The Parallel Writing Practice stage involved a controlled writing exercise where the students

wrote a passage on a related topic by imitating the language patterns and constructions of the model passage given.

The above-mentioned treatment was repeated in Lessons 2 and 3 based on Model 2 (see Appendixes D1- D4, pp. 82-85) and Model 3 (see Appendixes E1-E4, pp. 86-89) respectively.

Phase 3 (Week 5-6). After having learned about the writing of cause and effect paragraphs based on the three models, the students then embarked on their Final Writing tasks in Week 5 (see Appendix F, p. 90). Using information gathered from their classroom discussions and readings during the pre-writing stage, each student produced a total of three drafts after two rounds of peer editing and revisions. The final and third drafts were collected and evaluated as Final Writing Scores.

After all writing activities were completed, each of the students was interviewed in turn, based on the Interview Schedule in Week 6 (see Appendix G, p. 91). The questions were posed orally to which the students responded either in English or in Bahasa Melayu.

Phase 4 (Week 7-8). Scoring of the Initial and Final Writing samples was carried out in Week 7. An adapted version of the ESL Composition Evaluation Schedule (Hughey, et al., 1983, cited in Chelliah, 1993:166) provided the criteria for the purpose (see Appendix H, p. 92). For each writing sample, the total score obtained was the sum total of the scores for each of the following writing components: Text Organization, Content Development, Vocabulary, Language Use, and Mechanics of writing. The total scores from the Initial and Final Writing samples were compared and the samples

analyzed in Week 8. The resultant data was used to investigate the extent to which the writing performance of the subjects had improved as a result of instructions using the "reading → analyzing → writing" approach based on model texts.

Responses to the Interview Schedule were also analyzed to inform the extent to which the writing approach based on models has helped meet the students' writing needs.

Subjects

The subjects involved in this study were selected from student teachers undergoing a 3-year diploma teacher education course at Institut Bahasa Melayu Malaysia (IBMM), currently in their third semester of their course of study. Prior to their admission to IBMM, these student teachers have had eleven years of exposure to the English Language at the primary and secondary school levels. At this juncture, it is pertinent to describe the status of English in the school curriculum and in the country. Although English is the second official language in the country, many, especially those residing in the rural areas, rarely get the opportunity to interact in the language. To this category of individuals, which includes most of the teacher trainees at IBMM, English is often regarded more as a foreign language, rather than as a second language. The teacher trainees entering IBMM are accepted based on their Bahasa Melayu results in their school public examinations. A pass in the English Language paper is not a prerequisite for admission.

The subjects for this study were selected based on their scores in the English examination paper taken at the end of their second semester in IBMM. Among those who scored below 50%, four were randomly selected to participate in this study.

Instrumentation

The instruments in this study consisted of an Interview Schedule (see Appendix G, p. 91), an adapted version of the ESL Composition Evaluation Schedule (see Appendix H, p. 92) , the students' Initial Writing samples (see Texts 1(A), p. 38; 2(A), p. 43; 3(A), p. 48; 4(A), p. 53), the students' Final Writing samples (see Texts 1(B), p. 38; 2(B), p. 43; 3(B), p. 48; 4(B), p. 53) and three model passages. The adapted version of the ESL Composition Evaluation Schedule provided the criterion for evaluating and scoring the students' initial and final writing samples. Three cause-and-effect expository passages, namely, Model 1 (see Appendix C1,p. 76), Model 2 (see Appendix D1, p. 82) and Model 3 (see Appendix E1, p. 86) were used as the model passages for this study.

Analysis of Data

Two sets of data were collected, one set being the subjects' responses to the Interview Schedule and the other being their Initial and Final writing scores based on the adapted version of the ESL Composition Evaluation Schedule.

The writing scores were obtained in two stages. In the first stage, an Initial Writing task was administered to the four students. Four Initial Writing samples were collected and graded using the ESL Composition Evaluation Schedule The writing tasks were scored over one hundred marks, the overall mark being the sum total of the scores obtained for each of the following writing components: Text Organization , Content Development, Vocabulary, Language Use and Mechanics of writing. A detailed description of each of the criteria and the descriptors is found in Appendix H, p. 92.

In the second stage, a Final Writing task was administered to the students and four Final Writing samples were collected and graded using the ESL Composition Evaluation Schedule in the same manner as mentioned above.

The Final Writing scores were then compared with the Initial Writing scores and analyzed. The resultant data was used to investigate the extent to which learners using the “reading → analyzing → writing” approach based on model passages improved in their overall writing performance – thus answering the first research question.

Responses to the interview questions were also analyzed to examine the extent to which the approach helped meet the learners’ writing needs – thus answering the second research question.