

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.0 Introduction

In this concluding chapter, the summary, discussion of findings and conclusions, pedagogical implications, limitations of the study and directions for further research are discussed.

5.1 Summary

The present study was concerned with the role of text structure instruction in writing. Specifically, the main aim was to examine the effects of text structure instruction on the composition of expository prose by good and poor ability writers of ESL learners. The design of the study allowed for the investigation of the effects of teaching text structure instruction (the use of graphic organizer and transitional expressions) on comparison/contrast structure of the good and poor ability writers. In an attempt to investigate the effectiveness of text structure instruction on ESL learners, a total of 63 ESL learners of good and poor language proficiency from an upper secondary school in Malaysia participated in the study. Thirty subjects were identified as good ability writers and thirty-three subjects as poor ability writers.

Before instruction on text structure was given, the subjects wrote a free expository composition of the comparison/contrast structure, "Studying in local universities and abroad" in the first week. Next, after two hours of training in text structure instruction, the subjects wrote an immediate free expository composition on "The full-time housewife and the career woman in a modern society" in the second week. Later, in the third week, the subjects wrote a delayed composition of the expository prose on "The single-sex school and co-educational school". In the fourth week, the students did not write any composition. Finally, in the fifth week, the subjects then wrote a free composition on "Working in the private and the public sector". The scores on the organization of the five elements of the writing skills and the number of times the transitional expressions used were recorded. The residual effects of teaching text structure instruction in the pre-test and the delayed post-test were recorded, too.

5.2 Discussion of findings

Primarily, this study found that teaching students about text structure instruction (graphic organizer and transitional expressions) and to use it in expository free writing increased the students' performance in the poor ability writers in composing their compositions. It is evidently clear that an increased focus on the organization aspect of text will help to increase their overall writing performance. This supports earlier findings of other studies, particularly those by Raphael, Englert and Kirschner (1989) which also taught text structure instruction and found that there was an improvement in fifth and sixth-grade free writing ability. However, text structure instruction does not

have any effects on the good ability writers. This, may be due to the attitude of the good ability writers whereby they were not bothered and they became totally bored when they were asked to write various titles on comparison/contrast structure.

In terms of each element of the writing skills, this study demonstrated that the subjects of poor ability writer benefited most in the area of text organization. This could be attributed to the fact that the poor ability students were directed towards the identification of the organizational features of the comparison/contrast structure and they were more eager to practice on their essay writings. Since the subjects' attention was drawn towards the rhetorical structure of the expository text, therefore, their gains in text organization would also be far greater. Thus, it can be assumed that in this study, the poor ability writers were more motivated to improve their compositions and even more receptive in accepting any advice and support to improve their writings than the good ability writers. The view that explicit instruction in text structures could enhance writing performance is corroborated by Carrell (1987) who said that :

... students need to be explicitly and effectively taught about rhetorical text structure. Teaching the identification of text structure apart from content as well as providing in different text structure on a variety of experiments should provide benefits to ESL writers (Carrell, 1987 : 52).

Witherell (1993) also found that direct instruction of expository text structure through the use of graphic organizer is an effective method to help improve the expository writing ability of second grade students. Miller and George (1992) confirmed this effect with sixth graders. However, she used a different strategy of study

guides called expository passage organizers. It was found that such study guides which highlighted the structures of textbooks made a significant effect in writing performance.

Basically, what all these studies cited above have in common, is the firm belief that teaching students about the text structure instruction of expository prose can help them interact with the text ; thus producing a better composition.

In fact, the study of text structure has been largely in reading, especially reading comprehension. However, Carrell (1987) posits that these research findings have direct implications for ESL classroom. Shanahan (1984) and Carson (1993) further support this notion and agreed that whatever knowledge a reader utilizes to construct meaning of a text may also be the same knowledge that a writer uses to create meaning in text production or composition.

There has not been any research on the effects text structure instruction on pre-test and delayed post-test. Nevertheless, there are research studies on the effects of text structure instruction on immediate and delayed recall in reading comprehension.

Using the organization scores from the ESL Composition Profile, this study revealed that text structure instruction helped the poor ability writers to perform better in organization in delayed post-test than in the post-test. This is true because of the fact when students are aware of text structure instruction in a comparison/contrast structure in composing expository prose, they would use this structure in the next composition.

Thus, they performed better in writing compositions in the delayed post-test than in the post-test because they were aware of the structure previously introduced to them during the treatment.

Studies which were carried out on the effects of awareness of text structure on writing revealed that subjects who were aware or sensitive to the different ways in which expository text were organized were found to perform better than those who were unaware of the text structure instruction. Englert and Hiebert (1984) concluded in their study the sixth-graders were somewhat structure - aware whereas third graders were not because the sixth graders performed equally well on all the four structures given to them than the third graders. It was found to be true in an earlier similar study by Hiebert and his colleagues (1983) when they compared high ability and low ability college students awareness on four different expository structures. They found that the high ability students identified enumeration and comparison/contrast structures better than those of low ability. It shows that the high ability students were more structure - aware than the low ability students because they could comprehend the ideas better in a text than the low ability writers. It can be said that structure - aware students are more likely to use a "structural strategy" (Meyer, Brandt & Bluth, 1980) when they write than unaware students. One of the most interesting findings of the present study shows there are striking differences in the capability of poor ability writers compared to good ability writers especially when there is a difference in time frame. In brief, this study found that the poor ability writers performed better in organization in the delayed post-test than in the post-test when compared with the good ability writers. The good ability

writers did not show an improvement in the post-test and the delayed post-test because of the titles of the compositions. They were more keen to write on compositions titles that they liked most and the titles that they have more knowledge (Refer to Appendix J-P).

Furthermore, the use of transitional expressions in this study affected the organization between the pre-test and the post-test. Further discussions with the students revealed that the transitional expressions help the students to connect and link ideas and to represent these ideas into various related paragraphs in their compositions. Nevertheless, this study could not identify whether or not there is an interaction between the number of transitional expressions used and the organization in the post-test and the delayed post-test. However, according to the students, the graphic organizer and transitional expressions helped them to present content better and used better language for the compositions besides having better organization in their essays.

Surprisingly, this finding also revealed that the good ability writers did not perform better in the post-test and the delayed post-test than in the pre-test. This study provides evidence that text structure instruction did not help good ability writers to write better in their compositions and this finding did not support all the other findings mentioned earlier. There are many reasons that contributed to the failure of text structure instruction to help the good ability writers. May be, it was because the researcher carried out all the three tests. The good ability writers were not motivated because they had to compose a composition almost every week during the study. When

discussions were held with the good ability writers, they mentioned that they had lacked of interest in the titles of the composition given. To conclude, the students' attitude, the motivation, the titles of the compositions, the time frame, the various times in teaching text structure instruction and with the different teachers are factors to be well considered for this study to be carried out.

5.3 Conclusion

This study demonstrates the positive effects of teaching text structure instruction on the composition of expository prose of ESL learners. Nevertheless, it clearly shows that text structure instruction helps only the poor ability writers to organize their compositions and they were also able to add more content towards the compositions.

The results of positive effects of text structure instruction on writing of expository prose justify the use of text structure instruction on the poor ability writers. The findings of this study confirmed earlier findings that ESL learners of poor writing ability can be taught to effectively use text structure as a strategy to bring about improvements in the organization of their expository free writing.

5.4 Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions

This study seems to support that explicitly teaching ESL learners about text structure instruction has positive effects on the organization of expository prose for poor ability writers. This suggests that text structure instruction training should become part of ESL writing lesson especially for the weak students. Text structure instruction has a significant role in composition and so needs to be taught. ESL teachers must be cognizant with text structure instruction in order to assist ESL learners to improve their writings. Through explicit teaching, ESL learners must be made aware of the need to identify the structure of the composition first because this structure would help them to organize their ideas and facts to produce an effective piece of writing.

Teachers also need to teach text structure instruction explicitly on the various organizational patterns found in the different expository text structures.

This study showed text structure instruction to be significantly effective in improving poor ability writers of ESL learners' of organization of expository free writing. Therefore, weak students in writing compositions should be exposed to different text structures in order to allow them to compose, organize and integrate their ideas in writing.

5.5 Limitations of the study

Like any other study, this research too manifests some limitations.

First, due to the limited size of the subjects chosen, the generalizability of the results to other subjects might not be apparent. Therefore, the findings cannot be applied to ESL learners who are good and average ability writers. Future research might consider a bigger group of subjects comprising good, average and poor ability writers in the various secondary schools where English is taught as a second language.

Second, the present study was limited to an examination of the effects of instruction on focusing an expository prose on one structure, i.e., the comparison/contrast only. Hence, there is a need to examine other types of texts and other structures.

Third, the lack of time in producing delayed post-test. More time should be given for example after two weeks, to see whether they could still remember all that was embodied in the text structure instruction when composing expository prose or not. This will in turn provide empirical evidence whether the subjects will benefit more from text structure instruction in the post-test or delayed post-test.

Fourth, in this study, the researcher taught the ESL learners on text structure instruction. Further research should be carried out with other teachers besides the researcher to see the differences if there is any.

5.6 Directions for Further Research

It is evident from the present study that additional research focusing on text structure instruction is necessary especially, on the effects of text structure instruction on the organization of the expository prose. The limited types of text structure investigated in this study suggest that more texts of various organizational patterns on various topics be analyzed. Additional research is needed to find out if the results of this study are generalizable to other expository text structures.

Further research is also needed to replicate this study, using the same design but with different samples of ESL subjects for example the average and poor ability writers and in the various upper secondary schools in Malaysia.

In conclusion, it is hoped that the results of this study would serve as a valuable guide for future research in helping the ESL learners to develop skills in teaching and utilizing text structure instruction to enhance not only the organization of the composition but also the overall writing performance.