

following chapter summarizes the results and conclusions of the study and answers the research questions posed.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

5.0 Introduction

This chapter summarizes the findings from the study to address the two research questions posed in Chapter One. The scores obtained from each of the dependent variables, i.e. fluency, accuracy and complexity, are compared against the independent variables, i.e. NP, PTP and WTP, to address the first research question. Results from the questionnaires and interviews are discussed to address the second research question. This study closes with suggestions for further research and a conclusion of the study.

5.1 Summary of findings for Research Question 1

The findings are summarised with respect to the effects of each type of planning in the writings of the participants in terms of the three measures, i.e. fluency, complexity and accuracy. Specifically, the results of the NP task condition are compared with that of the PTP and the WTP task conditions.

5.1.1 Fluency

Participants of the PTP group produced slightly more syllables per minute than the WTP and NP group. PTP learners wrote with better fluency than the WTP participants especially in terms of the number of dysfluencies. They had planning time to understand the story and plan the content and organization of the story. They, however, did not emphasize planning the language to be used. PTP learners wrote with the least dysfluencies of all three task groups and the number of syllables and dysfluencies amongst the individual learners were less varied in range than among the WTP and NP learners. This showed that pre-task planning was somewhat beneficial in helping PTP participants to write fluently. As all the participants were average proficiency learners, the planning time appears to have given them time to elaborate their ideas, but limitations in terms of vocabulary and grammar, as well as writing time, may have hampered them in producing more language.

NP participants wrote with fewer syllables per minute than the participants from the WTP group but both groups had the same mean number of dysfluencies. This suggests that some of the WTP participants may have hurried through their writing although they had unlimited writing time. The high dysfluency rate in both groups seems to strongly suggest that some planning time is needed prior to writing the story. Hence, it is the finding of this study that planning, whether in the form of pre-task planning or planning while writing, had some positive impact on the fluency of the written narratives of undergraduates.

5.1.2 Complexity

The data for complexity in terms of verb tense showed that NP learners used a greater number of tenses than PTP learners, but overall the WTP participants produced the most number of verb tenses, as they wrote the longest essays. However, NP

participants correctly used more past tense than both PTP and WTP participants, who favoured writing in the present tense. Grammatically speaking, the narrative ought to have been written in the past tense, as it was a guided pictorial story that had already happened. The past tense is also indicated in the prompt that was given. PTP learners did not focus on the grammatical structures to be used during the planning time, but rather on the content. This is supported by the questionnaire data where only one participant said she focused on planning the language before writing, while seven focused on the content. Although all of them planned the language during the writing process, the limited writing time was not sufficient for them to focus on language.

For the WTP participants, the unlimited time given seemed to have helped in the variety of verb tenses used because one participant used an instance of past perfect continuous tense. Within-task planning may have given learners opportunity to generate ideas and content without time constraint, but the immediacy of the task may have prevented them from thinking about the tense, as a result of which most of them used the present tense, which could be more convenient or easy for them, in their text.

On the other hand, PTP participants wrote the most modals and the greatest variety of modals compared with NP and WTP learners. It is surprising to note that none of the PTP participants claimed to have planned the modality used, according to the questionnaire data. Similarly, none of WTP participants planned the modality, according to the questionnaire data. WTP learners probably emphasized the content and grammatical structures to be used without focusing on modality. They also produced the most number of active and passive constructions in total compared with NP and PTP learners probably because they did not have any time constraint. The unlimited time gave them the freedom to plan linguistic units and execute them on paper without pressure. In addition, WTP learners had the opportunity to practise monitoring when reading through and editing their written work.

In terms of complexity, within-task planning enhanced complexity only in terms of verb tenses. Pre-task planning seemed to have aided modality use although PTP participants claimed that they did not emphasize on modality when they planned the language. Both types of planning aided complexity in different aspects. The unlimited writing time allowed WTP participants to elaborate the story, thus the presence of more verb tenses, whilst PTP learners possibly included modality as part of planning the content and stored it for use during transcription. As WTP participants had unlimited time and wrote longer essays, they also generated more active and passive constructions in the sentences compared with the PTP learners. Thus, similar to the fluency variable discussed above, the study shows that complexity was also positively influenced by planning.

5.1.3 Accuracy

Pre-task planning did not have much effect on the accuracy of PTP and WTP learners. In fact, NP participants produced the least number of clause errors although they performed under the most stringent condition. Though PTP participants had planning time, they wrote the least clauses compared with NP and WTP learners but had the highest percentage of clause errors overall. WTP participants produced more independent, adverb and adjective clauses than the NP and PTP groups and produced the most number of clauses overall, but generated more clause errors than the NP participants. PTP learners spent more time overall in the task than NP participants because they had the extra planning time, but yet their language was no more accurate than the NP learners. There seemed to be a semantic gap between what they had in mind and what they could actually express in words, though they had time to plan.

PTP participants also produced the fewest verbs but had a higher percentage of verb form errors compared with WTP participants. This showed that PTP learners did

not monitor their written task after executing it. The time constraint could have caused them anxiety to want to finish the task in time, and it could also have deterred them from revising and editing their work as half of them did not complete the task in time. The WTP participants did not fare better either. In particular, they made more errors in tenses and spellings compared with the NP and PTP groups. Having unlimited time was somewhat detrimental to WTP participants' accuracy because the more they wrote, the more errors they committed. WTP participants' proficiency level may also have undermined their accuracy rate because they could have used the time to edit their work but yet they still made more errors. On the contrary, NP participants wrote fewer words than PTP and WTP participants, but paid attention to the potential errors they may commit. It is possible that NP participants crammed planning, executing and monitoring during the short limited task time because they wrote with better verb tenses and clauses than the PTP and WTP participants and managed to achieve the highest accuracy rate. It is likely that they put a great load on their working memory throughout the task. As a result, they made fewer clause and verb form errors.

It can be concluded that pre-task planning time allotted to PTP participants gave them an opportunity to perform process planning to understand the pictures and formulate ideas. Pre-task planning also enabled them to perform text planning in thinking how to present the content and organize them in a coherent manner, as posited by Hayes and Nash (1996, as cited by Alamargot & Chanquoy, 2001). It provided the environment for generation and elaboration of ideas together, but the time was not used much for planning the language. The limited writing time was not sufficient for them and did not enhance the accuracy of the PTP participants. Within-task planning also did not increase the WTP participants' accuracy because the more writing time they had, they more errors they made. As such, unlike fluency and complexity, the study found that planning did not seem to have much influence on accuracy.

5.1.4 Research Question 1

The first research question of this study is:

How do students perform in narrative writing in terms of fluency, complexity and accuracy of language under different planning conditions?

The study showed that the three different planning conditions had varying effects on the fluency, complexity and accuracy of learners' written narratives. In terms of fluency, both pre-task and within-task planning had positive effects on the written narratives of the participants. In particular, PTP participants' dysfluency rate was the least among the three groups. Participants who did not have planning time wrote less fluently because they had more dysfluencies.

In terms of complexity, both pre-task and within-task planning also had a positive impact on the written narratives. Pre-task planning enhanced syntactic variety in the use of modals. Within-task planning seemed to be advantageous to participants in the usage of verb tenses.

Both pre-task planning and within-task planning did not seem to have much positive effect on the written accuracy of the participants. Moreover, more time given to WTP learners seemed to have been a detriment to the accuracy of their grammatical structures. Judging by the PTP learners' planning papers, most of them planned in detail. However, they could not express themselves well in writing. In fact, most of the language used was not on par with what one would have expected from undergraduates. It is interesting to note that NP participants produced more accurate language than the other groups although 70% of them admitted to facing difficulties during the task. It is possible that because there was no planning time, these participants probably made a greater effort to try to complete the task on time. Connelly, Dockrell & Barnett (2005) found that undergraduates who can write faster fluently are able to apply higher level

cognitive resources to perform better in writing. It is possible that NP participants, under the stress of no planning and limited writing time, wrote quickly and applied higher order resources to hasten their writing process.

Both pre-task planning and within-task planning evidenced benefits in the written narratives of average proficiency undergraduates (Table 5.1). However, the unlimited time given to participants may have resulted in more errors produced. Results from NP participants also suggest that these average proficiency participants do not really need much planning time in order to write with better accuracy or fluency. Shi's (1998) study suggested that more writing time given to students after prewriting discussions may lead to better quality writing. The findings here also suggest that more writing time — but not unlimited time — given to students may increase fluency, complexity and accuracy, without the need for much planning time. More writing time may also enable participants to carry out the process of monitoring carefully. However, improvement in the area of vocabulary and grammar can be achieved further with increased reading and practice in writing.

Table 5.1 Summary of effects of no planning, pre-task planning and within-task planning on written narratives

Planning Condition	Fluency	Complexity	Accuracy
No planning	Moderate fluency with many dysfluencies	Moderate use in modality and verb tense	Highest accuracy
Pre-task planning	Highest fluency with least dysfluencies	Highest use and variety in modality	Moderate accuracy
Within-task planning	Moderate fluency with many dysfluencies	Highest use and variety in verb tenses	Moderate accuracy

5.2 Summary of findings for Research Question 2

To answer the second research question, the data from the questionnaires and interviews from each of the three planning groups, i.e. NP, PTP and WTP were analyzed. The findings are summarised below.

5.2.1 Perception of NP participants on their written performance

In view of many NP participants' rating of the task as average and the quality of the written text that they produced, it could be said that their perception of the task difficulty did not correspond entirely to the data found. Although they felt that they wrote with the highest accuracy, they still faced linguistic difficulties in terms of vocabulary. The anxiety of the limited time probably spurred them to write as much as they could. The limited time and their restricted vocabulary probably led them to focus on finishing the task rather than on using complex language structures, which was the reason that complexity was the hardest to achieve during the task. Interviews with two of the NP participants also revealed that they felt extra time to do the writing of the narrative would have been beneficial to their written performance.

Some planning time would have been appreciated by all the NP participants. The data shows that planning and revising the words and sentences would have been their top priority, and this shows that NP participants were not very confident of their level of English. Additional writing time would also have allowed them to create and organize a more interesting story, which implied translating their ideas into L2. Thus, these participants could be said to be novice writers, doing more local planning than global planning (Sasaki, 2000). Although these students strived to achieve their best in the written task, they did not possess the capacity to express themselves well in writing. Overall, the perception of the NP participants on their written performance concurred

somewhat with the quality of their written output in terms of accuracy and fluency but not in complexity.

5.2.2 Perception of PTP participants on their written performance

None of the PTP participants rated the task as difficult, and this was probably due to the planning time given to them. The guided pictures which they studied during the planning time may have looked very simple and given them the impression that the narrative was very easy. However, it appears that the benefit of having 10 minutes of planning time was overshadowed by the difficulties they faced from two sources: lack of vocabulary and limited writing time. Their limited lexical and grammatical knowledge, and the limited writing time was a stumbling block to writing a good story. The task itself was not perceived to be difficult, but the manner in which it was carried out constrained their written performance.

Although half of the participants did not complete the task, one of them admitted to encountering difficulties. These learners were confident of their writing skills. The planning time could also have enhanced their confidence in the task, as suggested by Ellis and Yuan (2004). It is possible that these learners either did not have sufficient time to elaborate on the details of the story or they were slow writers. These participants needed more writing time to organize the story and use better words and sentences. Moreover, as their planning papers were removed at the start of the writing task, they had to rely on their memory to recall what they had planned. This was confirmed by the questionnaire data, where most of them stated that they would have preferred to be allowed to keep their planning notes with them during the writing process.

PTP participants perceived complexity to be the hardest to achieve and fluency the least difficult, and this concurred with the quality of their essays. Most of the

planning time was used to plan the content and organization, rather than the language. As most of them planned the language only during the writing time, the limited writing time probably was not enough for them to complete the task, as shown by the questionnaire results. Although all the participants had planning time, it did not enhance their fluency, complexity and accuracy very much more than the NP and WTP groups. From the questionnaire data, it can be seen that the participants think that to improve their writing performance, having more writing time is better than having the planning time given to them. Generally, the PTP participants' perception of the task corresponded somewhat to the quality of their written performance in terms of fluency, but not very much in terms of complexity or accuracy.

5.2.3 Perception of WTP participants on their written performance

As with the PTP participants, none of the WTP participants found the task to be difficult but overall they did not perform very well. WTP participants had the advantage of unlimited time to complete the task though they had to formulate ideas, execute them and revise their work all at the same time as they were not given planning time. From the problems that they faced during the task, it can be seen that poor linguistic knowledge in grammar and vocabulary was the predominant hurdle in the task because they faced difficulties in using the right words and sentences.

WTP learners focused more on the content and the language than the organization of the story. They produced the most number of verb forms. However, they did not write with greater accuracy compared with NP and PTP participants. Within-task planning aided fluency to a certain extent because WTP participants wrote the most words but had many dysfluencies. Thus, their perception that fluency was the least difficult to achieve, and accuracy the hardest to achieve in the writing task, corresponded with their written text.

Although WTP learners were not pressured to complete the task within a time span, they still felt that planning time was necessary prior to the writing task. WTP learners utilized the unlimited time to plan the content and language the most. Thus, it can be said that writing time aided the participants more than planning time in this study, though the participants did not feel so. WTP learners could have performed better in terms of fluency, complexity and accuracy if they had possessed a better grasp of the language. On the whole, the WTP participants' perception of the task corresponded somewhat to the quality of their written performance in terms of fluency, but not very much on complexity or accuracy.

5.2.4 Research Question 2

The second research question for this study is:

How do students perceive their performance in narrative writing under different planning conditions?

Most of the participants said the task was not difficult but most of the essays were not well-written. Although they were average proficiency students, most of the participants had a poor vocabulary repository to express themselves well in the written task. Weak vocabularies seemed to hinder them in producing quality writing even though they did not perceive the task as difficult. As found in Whalen and Ménard's (1995) study, linguistic knowledge plays an important role in how well students are able to plan. McCutchen (1984) also noted that an essay which is "well-planned" may not be "well-written" (p.226).

Raimes (1985) in her study of ESL undergraduates found that the proficiency level of the students did not necessarily reflect their writing abilities. The same could be said of some of the participants of the study. They did not claim to have difficulties in

the task but the results showed otherwise. They may have felt that they were just average in proficiency and thus the level of English they could produce at best was just average. On the whole, complexity and accuracy were the most difficult aspects to be achieved by most of the participants in each group. They did not find fluency very difficult to achieve, as was shown in the data in each group where their fluency measures differed not so much in terms of the number of words, but in the number of dysfluencies. Their performance results seem to correspond relatively accurately with their perception with regard to fluency. These average proficiency learners are able to write but the boundaries of time and limited vocabularies impeded them in terms of complexity and accuracy. Both NP and PTP participants claimed that more writing time would have been advantageous to them with respect to content organization and language usage.

Complexity was least emphasized by all the participants when they write essays in general. NP and WTP participants focus more on accuracy and content planning, while PTP learners focus more on fluency and content planning. This may be so because most of their writing tasks are graded assignments. Hence, having fewer errors would mean better grades in the assignment. However, they do so at the expense of other aspects like complexity.

It can also be surmised that most participants were not familiar with the conventions and requirements in writing a narrative, and most of them had some form of difficulty throughout the task. This was in contrast with Kellogg's (2004) study which found narratives to be the easiest to write compared with argumentative and descriptive texts. If the participants had been taught the process of writing a narrative, increased writing time may increase the quality of their writing because they would have utilized the given time wisely. This was found in Kroll's (1990) study, where extra

time at home did not significantly impact the quality of the students' writings because they were unfamiliar with the process of writing.

On the whole, pre-task and within-task planning were beneficial in different aspects of writing. Although most participants did not perceive the task as difficult, most of them did not perform well in terms of complexity and accuracy due to poor vocabulary and limited writing time. All the participants claimed that planning was important for them, but results showed that those who did not have planning time did not perform badly, and in some aspects, even performed better. The findings of the study show that learners need more time to write than they need to plan. It can be said that during the writing process, revising is more important than planning. However, it is important to note that given the parameters of this study, the results of the study cannot be generalized.

5.3 Suggestions for further research

The criteria for students' participation in this study were based mainly on overall MUET results. The researcher did not consider specific aspects of MUET like reading, writing, speaking and listening scores. These participants' writing skills may actually have been weak but their reading, speaking and listening skills may have been better and thus overall their MUET scores indicated an average proficiency. Therefore, using only MUET writing results as a criterion for the selection of subjects would yield an even more uniform group of participants with similar proficiency. Also, the participants of this study were average in proficiency. Conducting another study using participants of different proficiency levels may yield different results.

Replications for this research in other genres like argumentative writing can give further insights into students' fluency, complexity and accuracy. Further research under

different conditions such as different planning time and more writing time could be performed to compare the results of this study. As the participants of this study were Arts students, taking participants from other disciplines could yield different results. Having participants from a larger sample could also help to confirm the results of this exploratory study.

The current study was done as and when participants were free and in different settings, e.g. empty classrooms, the library, open areas and the common room. It may not have been very conducive for collecting uniform data as distractions were sometimes inevitable. It is proposed that future studies be conducted in a room where all the same groups of students can be tested at the same time.

5.4 Conclusion

The current study examined the effects of planning on the fluency, complexity and accuracy of the narrative writing of Malaysian tertiary level students. The results found have been interesting as planning did not necessarily affect all three aspects positively. Based on Kellogg's model of working memory in writing, it is surmised that pre-task planning allowed learners to formulate ideas and execute them accordingly but nevertheless did not allow much opportunity for monitoring. On the other hand, within-task planning gave learners ample time for monitoring their work but they had to plan and write at the same time. Learners who had to write in a limited time without any planning time were forced to perform the task very quickly, putting a heavy demand on their working memory.

This study also revealed that too much time given for writing may not be a good practice for average proficiency learners as the level of accuracy may be compromised. However, it showed that writing time is more important for average proficiency learners

than planning time to attain good written performance. More writing time within a time frame gives learners opportunity to revise and edit their work. The current study also found that learners perform differently when they write under duress and when they do not. Those who had limited time to write claimed that extra writing time would be beneficial towards their performance. This salient point needs to be considered when students are assessed in examinations. It suggests that students who do not perform well in examinations may not necessarily perform poorly in classroom settings with less anxiety and more writing time.

Almost all the participants of this study did not find the writing task to be difficult but the quality of their written work was mostly not reflective of the linguistic depth expected of undergraduates. There is room for improvement in the participants' grammar and vocabulary as many of them were handicapped by the lack of appropriate words to use. Most of these learners were concerned about the accuracy of the language used in their writing. Based on this study, instructors in second language writing need to know the proficiency of learners in order to assign an appropriate amount of planning and writing time to students to improve their performance. The difference in the learners' perception of the task and the quality of their performance suggests that instructors need to be sensitive to the learners' perception and expectations of writing assignments given to them.