Chapter Five

Conclusion

5.0 Overview

The conclusion of this study discusses the summary of the findings, pedagogical implications of the findings, limitations of the study, and suggestions for further research.

5.1 Summary of the Findings

'Guided writing activities' were used as an alternative solution to problems in the EFL writing instruction of Grade 11 at Thayaiwittaya School, Songkhla, Thailand. The preliminary problems were gathered by interviewing the English teacher of Fundamental English course (E 0110) through the examination of semester 2/2000, and Blueprint book II. Apparently, narrative writing, namely telling a story through a series of pictures and friendly letter tasks presented problems in the students' writing performance. In narrative writing, the problems were misinterpreted content, incorrect grammatical structures and vocabulary items, as well as incoherent paragraph organization due to the complicated content of the series of pictures in the test; the Thai pictures in the original textbook did not convey the underlying meaning about Thai culture and were inappropriate for the view of Thai upper secondary learners. In letter writing, the problems were unclear purpose, uninteresting contents, and poor grammar structures. This was because the structure of the letter pertained to the free writing type which was beyond the students' writing ability, and the purpose of the task was ambiguous. These problems were also caused by such textbook
which was based on native English culture and advanced level of language structure. There were also a few relevant writing exercises from other texts. Consequently, the new guided narrative writing and pen-friend letter tasks based on the Thai teenage sub-culture were designed to overcome such problems.

The effectiveness of this guided writing material depends on three research questions.

(1) What are the strengths and weaknesses of using guided writing activities?
(2) What problems do the learners face while using guided writing activities?
(3) What suggestions are provided by the teachers to improve guided writing activities?

Such effectiveness had been evaluated in the experimental classroom consisting of twenty male and female students with good and average English language background from three classes of Grade 11 and three English language teachers at the upper secondary level through various instruments; lesson plans and worksheet of six lessons for 20 periods, namely 1 hour per period, the achievement test, pilot interview, naturalistic observation, the researcher’s file for note-taking, on-going assessment, students’ interview, teachers’ questionnaire, and analytical marking method.

5.1.1 Summary of the Strengths and Weaknesses of Using Guided Writing Activities

Eight aspects reflected the strengths of using guided writing activities. First, the total scores of the students’ guided writing abilities indicated that the majority of the students passed two guided writing tasks in the worksheet and test. Though some failed in
narrative writing because the content was complicated and the series of pictures in the worksheet and test were different, all passed letter writing since the content in the worksheet and test was similar and easier than narrative writing.

Second, guided writing activities motivated the students in creating pictures which were as colorful as in those in Blueprint book II and World Class book. The students’ painting of all the series of pictures in lessons 2-3 promoted their creativity and stimulated them while practising narrative writing. Meanwhile, such textbooks motivated the students through the interesting and colorful cover, fantastic pictures and non-linear texts.

Third, guided letter writing achieved the communicative approach as in the teacher’s adaptation of the textbook. The teacher changed from using the native English pen-friends to Thai ones in other schools due to the students’ linguistic incompetence. Likewise, in the achievement test the researcher changed from ‘the specially written Thai pen-friend’ to ‘the authentic Thai friend’, by adapting an excerpt from an English magazine in Thailand. This was to provide the basic training of the letter sender for the further actual written communication.

Then, the passage titled ‘the researcher’s story’, a model of narrative writing, was the creative technique enabling the students to enjoy reading and writing. This related to the teachers’ textbook adaptation, using ‘the teacher’s writing’ as a model of journal writing.

Next, the researcher managed the time allocated for lesson 3 of narrative writing flexibly according to the adapted lesson plan.
Moreover, the researcher’s specified criteria for learning group organization for the two guided writing tasks, such as counting, independent matching, and drawing a ticket in the raffle, resulted in the students’ effective interaction.

Furthermore, all the series of pictures conveyed Thai cultural content, both Thai local scenario and Thai teenage sub-culture. Such content was familiar to these students, so they could orally narrate the story through such pictures relevant to the guided pictures, elaborate on the content, and name the characters in authentic Thai style.

Finally, some students’ vocabulary skills in guided narrative writing in the achievement test developed. Previously they had limited vocabulary items and hence they copied these items from their friends and textbooks, as well as did not expand vocabulary items contextually despite the teacher’s guidance. Later, they seemed to understand some unseen words as 3 lessons progressed due to the researcher’s explanation in detail. Then, their written performance in the achievement test highlighted the contextual expansion of guided lexical items, new vocabulary creation, and the appropriate use of Thai lexical transfer or creativity in Thai-English lexicons.

On the other hand, 10 aspects of the weaknesses of using guided writing activities are found. Firstly, mean score of the students’ guided narrative writing and letter tasks from the worksheet to the test was decreased; 6.35-6.125 marks for narrative writing and 7.55-7.275 marks for letter writing. This showed that the students’ writing performance in the worksheet was better than in the test.
Secondly, the chronic language and content problems of the students prior to using guided writing activities remain in the post experimentation. While using Blueprint book II, they seldom tried to generate original content and produce grammatical sentences, such as verb-tense, due to limited English competence rather than the weakness of the textbook. Problems, such as ungrammatical structures, content irrelevant to the guided pictures, and insufficient elaboration were still found in their two guided writing tasks.

Thirdly, the grammar translation method in guided writing activities was ineffective as previously used by the teachers. Despite the requirement of CLT, the teachers needed to use GTM through the textbook because of the students’ limited aural-oral skills in English. This resulted in their understanding of written English in Thai. While using guided writing, the researcher’s GTM focused more on Thai than English and the students’ pair and small group interaction was only in Thai despite code-switching requested. The effect of this weakness was Thai interference in the students’ guided narrative and letter writing.

In addition, the students lacked originality in pre, while, and post-using guided writing. Initially, the teachers said the students liked copying the language patterns of the reading and writing tasks in the textbook and those of their friends. Then, in naturalistic observation, they insisted that during the pair work, some average students copied such patterns and vocabulary items of the good students. Likewise, the researcher found that the style of their guided letter writing in the worksheet and achievement test, especially the introductory and ending paragraph, was similar to that of the models in previous activities in the worksheet. Hence, they still adopted the language patterns of the model letters due to the content framework for each paragraph of the letter in the worksheet and test was quite
the same. This reflected the view of Raimes (1987) that the controlled and guided writing approach failed to promote the linguistic creativity of the students.

Besides, the students' guided letter writing was influenced by the form of Thai letter, such as the use of abbreviations translated from Thai for addresses, for they could not differentiate between the sections of Thai letter and English letter despite having learnt the correct form of English letter.

Moreover, before and after using guided writing, the students did not improve their grammar skills though they were extensively helped by the teachers and the researcher.

Furthermore, the researcher did not explain to the students the use of punctuation thoroughly because he assumed that they had sufficient knowledge to understand it in the note. Such assumption resulted in errors about 'the use of comma' for clauses and complex sentences in the students' guided narrative and letter writing.

Then, the students spent too much time in pair and group work in narrative writing, lesson 2 because of their deficiency in handling the activities.

Apart from these, in pre-using guided writing, the teachers said self-evaluation with the researcher's guidance in language, content, and rhetoric was appropriate, but the students disliked it due to the belief that the first draft was completed writing. Similarly, while observing the actual use of guided writing, they revealed that it was still not achieved since only ten percent of the students actually utilized it. Hence, the researcher concluded
that ignoring self-evaluation resulted in errors in spelling in the students' guided writing.

Finally, the teachers complained that peer-evaluation was difficult for the students; the students seldom commented on their peers' writing due to ignorance of language criteria and fear. The researcher tried to guide them through questions to enable them to give such comments, but they did not try to think critically.

5.1.2 Summary of the Problems the Learners Face While Using Guided Writing Activities

There are four problems of using guided narrative writing activities. Firstly, the researcher found that some learners struggled to interpret some unseen words and complex sentences of the passage, namely 'the researcher's story' in Thai due to less experience in reading English and inadequate utilization of contextual clues.

Then, constructing title, introduction, content, and conclusion according to structure of the story for 'class composition' through the researcher's help was influenced by the structure of the Thai story, especially capitalization of the title which was not found in Thai.

Besides, the cloze passage without lexical choices was difficult due to its linguistic elements and the learners' linguistic incompetence. The learners had to analyze the written discourse of the whole passage to create certain words grammatically and contextually. However, they could create only Thai words since they failed to recall certain vocabulary items, and had insufficient knowledge about contextual clues and sentence analysis.
Finally, in the final activity of lesson 3, the learners were unable to integrate the little guidance from the task and the researcher in order to structure sentences and organize a paragraph because their chronic linguistic problems from pre to post-using guided writing activities had been fossilized.

The learners' problems of using guided letter writing consist of two issues. The learners mixed up labeling the 'opening-greeting' and 'closing-ending' sections of a letter due to direct translation from Thai. The 'opening' was the first section referring to the recipient while 'greeting' was the first paragraph with the statement about making a new friend because the words 'closing' and 'ending' in Thai are synonymous.

Likewise, the learners mixed up rearranging the sentences 'hopefully you can be my pen pal' for the ending paragraph and 'I want to be your pen pal' for the opening paragraph in the letter form due to the confusion about the similar function of 'you-my pen-pal' and 'I-your pen pal'. They also struggled with the meaning and usage of the sentence 'I look forward to hearing from you' due to direct translation from Thai, especially the new word 'forward'.

5.1.3 Summary of the Teachers' Suggestions and Feedback for Improving Guided Writing Activities

(1) The teachers' suggestions or feedback for improving guided writing activities

In narrative writing, the number of pictures for a series should be increased to at least 10 pictures so that there is sufficient material for the students to elaborate on the
content. Conversely, the length of rubrics and pages in the worksheet should be reduced, such as by using brief instructions. Finally, the researcher should give more assistance to the average students during the individual work. In letter writing, authentic pen-friends from neighboring countries of Thailand should be used to enable the students to genuinely correspond with pen-friends with more culturally familiar. Next, partial dictation of the letter writing task should be based on native English readers to enable the students to practise the actual aural and writing skills as required by the recent curriculum. Finally, the correct format for writing addresses on envelopes should be taught.

(2) A comparison of the guided writing material and the teachers’ previous material

The three teachers agreed that “the range of controlled and guided writing activities based on the familiar Thai teenage sub-culture and on detail linguistic assistance of the task and the researcher’s guidance that aimed to enable the students to develop their actual writing skills” differentiated this new material from their previous material and textbook.

(3) A comparison of this achievement test and the teachers’ final exam paper

The teachers agreed that ‘pre-writing and actual writing stages as the preparation for the students’ ideas, language, and paragraph organization’ of this test, designed for the real measurement of the writing ability were not found in their former examination.

(4) The teachers accepted guided writing activities as a part of lessons in this classroom and other classes at the upper secondary level due to the suitability to the students’ need, level, and linguistic and communicative competence, as well as cultural norms and social standards of English usage in Thailand.
5.2 Pedagogical Implications of the Findings

The findings of guided writing activities have some pedagogical implications. Firstly, the weaknesses of Blueprint book II to this writing classroom should be considered by the Thai Ministry of Education. Though the EFL textbooks in the Thai context have not been produced yet, the teachers should seek other textbooks recommended by the Ministry that contain sufficient controlled to guided writing activities as well as the balance of western and eastern cultural contents.

Then, the similar style of the students’ guided letter writing as in the models implies their lack of personal expression. This reflects the claim of Christensen (1993) that the model caused students to imitate the model writer rather than to enhance their creativity. She also suggests the solution; the student writers took a long time to explore the relevant models by reading, analyzing, and writing until there was greater creativity. This solution seems beyond these students’ linguistic and writing ability, and is time-consuming. The teachers should thus simplify the models of pen-friend letter writing with different styles from various sources for the students to study in groups, pairs, and individually as often possible so that they can create some new content and language patterns.

Besides, it is difficult to give up the grammar translation method in the writing classroom in Thailand. The teachers should thus try to balance the use of ‘code-switching’ from English to Thai so that the students can construct sentences in English and eliminate Thai interference. They should teach memorization of vocabulary items and grammar rules, and analysis of grammatical sentences in context rather than in isolation, such as
through the reading and writing tasks so that the students will have adequate vocabulary and sentence learning strategies for their writing. Next, GTM should also be integrated with the communicative approach. After practising sentence analysis, the students should be taught how sentences could be combined to form larger stretches of discourse, and the rhetorical features of texts (Morais, 2000).

Furthermore, the communicative approach for narrative writing has faced some troubles, particularly with regard to the purpose and audience. Hence, the teachers should remind the students to write a story from their experiences and perceptions in a series of pictures to their friends, not the teacher. At this point, the students’ oral narration in pairs can be a regular practice which is the basic training for genuine communication.

In addition, the use of self-evaluation with the researcher’s guidance in language, content, and paragraph organization does not succeed due to the students’ ignorance. The teachers should thus control the students in self-correcting their writing closely after their first draft has been submitted.

Lastly, peer-evaluation did not achieve its goal due to the process approach, the students’ lack of critical thinking skills, and time constraint. The possible solution will be extra tuition with flexible time. It should be conducted in small groups with equal numbers of good, average, and weak students. Actual-oral peer evaluation should be done within individual groups with the good students’ helping the rest and the teacher’ extensive guidance. The teacher should also assist the students’ rewriting stage as much as possible.
5.3 Limitations of the Study

This study faces some limitations. First, this experimental research had no control group, so there was no comparison of the writing performance between the experimental group and the control group. However, this guided writing material was also compared to the former material via the views of the students and the teachers in the experimental classroom.

Second, the sample size was quite small. One school, one classroom, twenty students, and three teachers were representative of other classrooms at the upper secondary level in only the approximately 100 Islamic private schools in Southern Thailand, and might not be representative of other private and public schools in the country.

Third, Grade 11 was chosen instead of the other grades. This was because the researcher also being the teacher involved, taught only the Grade 11 students of Thayaiwittaya School who were freer than the other students.

Next, the sampling method focused on only the good and average students. Hence, these students’ writing abilities were probably not very varied. From the findings, however, some average students were considered unskilled EFL student writers as they have failed the two tasks. The rest who passed the two tasks also obtained only average scores.

Then, almost free writing activities were absent in this material, so the development of the students’ guided writing ability to creative writing ability was difficult. However,
such activities were difficult for Grade 11 EFL students due to their linguistic inability, so the range of almost controlled to a little guided writing activities was more appropriate.

Later, the researcher faced time constraint in data collection. The guided writing classroom had been experimented before and after final examination of the students. Hence, some students seemed unready for some lessons and lack preparation for the test.

Finally, most of the references which were directly relevant to the research came from the 1970s, such as in the study of Tongue et al. (1976) and Edwards (1975). Although guided writing began in the ESL context about three decades ago, it is still regarded as a new teaching-learning activity in the EFL context in Thailand.

5.4 Suggestions for Further Research

Suggestions for further research are firstly that guided writing activities could further be conducted for experimental and control group including the good, average, and weak students in order to compare the effectiveness of the two groups' writing performance. Then, this guided narrative writing and pen-friend letter tasks can be a model for designing and developing other guided communicative writing tasks in the recent English syllabus of the upper secondary level. Moreover, the range of controlled and guided writing activities for Grade 11 students can be the guideline for further study of the range of guided and free writing activities based on the process approach for Grade 12 students in order to prepare them for creative writing and writing for academic and other specific purposes at the tertiary level. Besides, the researcher can gain further insights into the experimental
study of guided writing activities in the two tasks and other communicative tasks in
Thailand and other EFL countries to replicate such findings for the validity of this study.
Finally, the material development division of Curriculum Development Center, the Thai
Ministry of Education can consider the findings of this study to implement research about
‘trends of the EFL textbooks in the Thai context’.