

The Use of Theme-based Instruction to Reduce Writing Apprehension for Thai Undergraduate Students

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บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาเกี่ยวกับพัฒนาการทางความสามารถทางการเขียนของผู้เรียนไทยระดับอุดมศึกษาที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศเมื่อได้เรียนด้วยการสอนแบบหัวเรื่อง และเปรียบเทียบความวิตกกังวลในการเขียนของผู้เรียนไทยก่อนและหลังเรียนด้วยการสอนแบบหัวเรื่อง กลุ่มตัวอย่างในการวิจัยเป็นนักศึกษาชั้นปีที่ 3 สาขาวิชาอังกฤษของมหาวิทยาลัยมหาสารคาม จำนวน 23 คน ที่ลงทะเบียนรายวิชาการเขียนเรียงความแบบเล่าเรื่องและพรรณนาในภาคเรียนที่ 2 ปีการศึกษา 2557 เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลประกอบด้วยแผนการจัดการเรียนรู้ จำนวน 6 แผน, แบบวัดความวิตกกังวลในการเขียนของ Daly and Miller (1975), การสัมภาษณ์กึ่งโครงสร้าง, และแบบบันทึกวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลประกอบด้วยสถิติเชิงบรรยาย อันได้แก่ ค่าเฉลี่ย, ค่าเบี่ยงเบนมาตรฐาน, ค่าร้อยละและ t-test ซึ่งถูกคำนวณโดยโปรแกรมสำเร็จ ผลการวิจัยพบว่า

- ความสามารถในการเขียนภาษาอังกฤษก่อนและหลังเรียนโดยการใช้การสอนแบบหัวเรื่องสูงขึ้นอย่างต่อเนื่อง
- ความวิตกกังวลในการเขียนของนักศึกษาลดลงหลังเรียนด้วยการสอนแบบหัวเรื่อง

คำสำคัญ : การสอนแบบหัวเรื่อง ; ความวิตกกังวลในการเขียน

ABSTRACT

The objectives of this empirical study were to investigate Thai EFL undergraduate students' descriptive writing ability development and compare their writing apprehension before and after employing Theme-based instruction. The sample group was 23 third-year English majoring students enrolled in Descriptive and Narrative course, in the second semester of academic year 2014 at Mahasarakham University, Mahasarakham province. The instruments consisted of 6 lesson plans using Theme-based instruction, writing apprehension test based on Daly and Miller's study (1975), semi-structured interview, and students' journal. The statistics used for analyzing data were means, standard deviation and t-test.

The results of this research were as follows :

- The students' writing ability before and after application of theme-based instruction increased steadily.
- The students' writing apprehension test scores after application of being taught through theme-based instruction decreased.

Keywords : Theme - based Instruction ; Writing Apprehension



Introduction

At the present, four language skills have been provided and taught in English language learning and teaching for undergraduate level which are listening, speaking, reading and writing especially writing skill which considered as important factor to develop because it is the process to demonstrate knowledge, ideas, experiences or events perfectly, and it also can be used as written evidence. However, writing skill is difficult to learn compared to other skills that Thai learners have problems with it. (Watcharapanyawong and Usaha, 2013) For this reason, Thai learners have faced with writing apprehension which is a factor that affected to their writing because it is related with obstacles or problems in writing such as fear, lack of self-confidence including the fear to write sentences or structure in real situations. These are the feelings emerged from the learners in English writing which will lead to lack of self-confidence and reducing writing ability. (Daly and Miller, 1975 ; Smith, 1984 ; Horwitz, 1986 ; Reeves , 1997 ; Cheng, 2004)

As same as third-year students majoring in English, Mahasarakham University who enrolled in Narrative and Descriptive Composition course, writing skill must be applied to communicate in written letters. From the preliminary interview, it is found that most learners have experienced with the lack of writing efficacy such as the ability to express emotions, experiences and comprehension that they cannot bring these out through their English writing completely especially when they have to face with writing in actual situations. This can cause writing apprehension of learners. In addition, the learning contents are also crucial factor affected writing that

the students are not familiar with the contents so they are not interested and unmotivated to learn in order to write to illustrate their feelings and communicate through written language. This is consistent with the concept of Biggs and Watkins (1993) suggested that the students' lack of motivation to learn caused from the learning environment which is not encouraged and motivated the students to learn. In other words, the contents presented by instructors are not involved in learners' daily lives so they are not interested in the contents which are unfamiliar and not related with their study's objectives.

According to the problems mentioned above, it is necessary to apply appropriate teaching methods and techniques that can decrease writing apprehension of undergraduate students. This is an interested issue that should be resolved along with strengthening and intellectual development of scholar content especially the content which is crucial for students' learning. The learning content should be the content that learners are interested and familiar with. This is correlated with the concept of Biggs and Watkins (1993); Snow and Brinton (1997) which suggested that learning topics and contents should be selected from learners' interest related with Theme-based Instruction. This teaching method is adopted from Content-based Instruction that instructors create lessons based on the school curriculum and learners' needs and interests which emphasized on applying contents and topics which students interested in as the learning center. In addition, instructors will create or improve textbooks or instructional materials which integrated with language skills teaching by considering students' needs. This method also focused on choosing related subtopics to delve into subject content. (Brinton,

Snow and Wesche, 1998; Snow, 1991; Crandall, 1994; Grabe and Stoller, 1997 ; Davies, 2003)

Thus, applying familiar learning topics and related topics from students' daily lives in English writing teaching is a way to teach real experiences to the students including motivate them to be interested in language learning and get into academic content. Furthermore, it can also reduce students' writing apprehension. In addition, the researcher has studied the documents and related research both in international context and domestic context, and it is found that there has been no research which studied about applying Theme-Based Instruction method to reduce writing apprehension directly because most previous researches mainly focused on using Content-Based instruction in order to develop students' ability and achievement. For this reason, the researcher was interested to study in order to reduce writing apprehension of Thai students who study English as foreign language by using Theme[°] based Instruction, and provided opportunities for learners with different language abilities to do activities together in order to achieve academic goals by learning through the topics matched with students' needs and interests. Moreover, the researcher also believes that topics and contents which related with students' needs, interests and daily lives will help the students to be able to link knowledge and experiences into effective creative writing.

Research Objectives

1. To reduce writing apprehension of Thai undergraduate students by applying Theme[°] Based Instruction
2. To develop writing ability of Thai undergraduate

students by applying Theme[°] Based Instruction

Research Questions

1. Providing teaching activity by applying Theme-Based Instruction can reduce writing apprehension or not?
2. Providing teaching activity by applying Theme-Based Instruction can develop writing ability of Thai undergraduate students or not?

Research Methodology

1. Population

The population in this research is 67 third-year undergraduate students majoring in English, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Mahasarakham University who enrolled in Narrative and Descriptive Composition course in the first semester of the academic year 2014. In addition, all students must pass basic English writing course, English Structure and Usage course and Paragraph Writing course.

2. Sample

The sample in this research is 23 third-year students majoring in English, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Mahasarakham University who enrolled in Narrative and Descriptive Composition Course in the first semester, 2014 were chosen from the English grade they got last semester by random purposive sampling method. The students who got grade A to B were categorized in the group of high performance in writing whereas the students who got grade C to D were classified in the group of low performance in writing.

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Research Instrument

The instrument which applied in this research can be categorized in two types which were:



1. Experimental Instrument The researcher applied teaching plans based on Theme based instruction in Narrative and Descriptive Composition course in the amount of 6 plans, 3 periods for each plan and 60 minutes/ plan. (Total: 18 periods, 6 weeks)

2. The Instrument used in Data Collection The Instrument used in Data Collection divided into two categories:

2.1 English Writing Ability test is the assessment which the researcher created to measure students' writing ability before and after class in order to develop writing skill. For evaluating the students' writings, the researcher established writing assessment applied from descriptive essay writing assessment criteria by Kent butler (Online). This assessment had been examined by thesis advisor before handed to three specialists to consider and approve in order to be used in further teaching and data collection.

2.2 English Writing Apprehension test is the assessment which applied from the writing apprehension test of Daly and Miller (1975) which has rating scale characteristic composed of five scales which are strongly disagree, disagree, moderate, agree and strongly agree. The questions in the test are about feelings and opinions about English writing. The test contains of 26 questions which are 13 positive questions and 13 negative questions.

Data Collection

1. Data collection before class was divided into two processes as follows:

1.1 In initial data collection, the researcher observed the problems about writing apprehension

by using writing apprehension test applied from Daly and Miller (1975) in order to understand the main problems found in the sample directly, and the test was also used as a guide to design writing teaching which was appropriate for learners' context by collecting information from third-year undergraduate students majoring in English who enrolled in Narrative and Descriptive Composition course in August in the first semester of the academic year 2014. After that, the data would be brought to search for the statistic percentage of the problems and the level of anxiety that most students had.

1.2 When the writing apprehension problems had been known, the researcher observed for the students' needs about the interested topics and forms of learning activities related with student-centered teaching approach in order to be used as a guideline to design teaching-learning activities which appropriate for student's need based on three main topics that students are most interested in. Each topic consists of subtopics in learning unit related with the main topic. Thus, the activities in each learning unit would be correlated with the students' interested topics.

2. Data collection in class was divided into two processes as follows:

2.1 The researcher taught in class by using Theme-based instruction which selected from the students' interested topic and students' need. Furthermore, the researcher would measure student's writing performance from the writing ability test before the lesson was introduced and after learning activities completed. In the writing ability test (before and after class), the students can choose only one interest topic out of three topics that they want to write most in order to evaluate descriptive

essay writing development both before and after class by using evaluating criteria of descriptive essay writing assessment.

2.2 The researcher measured writing apprehension level of the students by using writing apprehension test of Daly and Miller (1975) before class and also after class in order to compare writing apprehension before and after learning activity based on Theme⁹ based Instruction. The comparison was analyzed in each item, and then the researcher would interview the students by applying Semi Structured Interview after completed learning activities and after writing apprehension measurement to gain qualitative insight data. The interview is a method that helps researchers to be able to determine students' attitudes in various dimensions. In this research, six students from all 23 students of the sample who have writing apprehension in high, moderate and low level would be chosen to interview.

2.3 For each class, the research would

assign the students to write student's diary about the content they learn each period in order to describe their feelings about teaching activities each time, for example, learning content, gained knowledge, learning problems and obstacles they found in class, etc. This would be applied to become more insight data

Data analysis

The statistics used in this research is descriptive statistics which composed of Means and Standard Deviation that would be used in data analyze from writing apprehension test. In addition, T-test would be applied in hypothesis testing of writing ability test both before and after class.

Findings

Part 1 Providing teaching activity by applying Theme-Based Instruction can reduce writing apprehension or not.



Table1 : Comparison of the students' writing apprehension level before and after class by using Theme-based instruction in order to reduce descriptive essay writing apprehension.

Item	Writing Apprehension before class		Writing Apprehension Level	Writing Apprehension after class		Writing Apprehension Level
	\bar{X}	S.D.		\bar{X}	S.D.	
	1.	2.91	0.73	Moderate	2.30	0.63
2.	2.61	1.12	Moderate	2.22	1.00	Low
3.	3.00	0.80	Moderate	2.52	0.79	Moderate
4.	3.09	1.12	Moderate	2.61	1.12	Moderate
5.	2.73	1.14	Moderate	2.30	0.97	Low
6.	1.48	0.73	Lowest	1.40	0.58	Lowest
7.	3.70	1.06	High	3.17	1.03	Moderate
8.	1.91	0.85	Low	1.91	0.73	Low
9.	2.57	1.12	Moderate	2.52	0.90	Moderate
10.	2.87	0.87	Moderate	2.39	0.72	Low
11.	3.65	0.71	High	2.83	0.58	Moderate
12.	2.78	0.95	Moderate	2.70	0.76	Moderate
13.	3.43	0.95	Moderate	3.00	0.90	Moderate
14.	3.52	0.67	High	3.00	0.85	Moderate
15.	3.00	0.64	Moderate	2.39	0.58	Low
16.	3.26	1.01	Moderate	2.35	0.78	Low
17.	2.83	0.58	Moderate	2.17	0.83	Low
18.	3.52	0.95	High	2.74	0.86	Moderate
19.	2.82	0.72	Moderate	2.48	0.67	Low
20.	2.39	0.72	Low	1.83	0.83	Lowest
21.	3.57	0.84	High	2.91	0.85	Moderate
22.	3.61	1.20	High	2.83	0.83	Moderate
23.	3.61	0.78	High	2.83	0.58	Moderate
24.	3.09	1.12	Moderate	2.52	0.79	Moderate
25.	1.91	0.85	Low	1.83	1.11	Low
26.	2.70	1.26	Moderate	2.00	0.90	Low
Total	2.94	0.45	Moderate	2.45	0.38	Low
Average						

From the Table 1, it shows that average writing apprehension level of the students before class is 2.94, and S.D. value is 0.45. On the other hand, average writing apprehension level of the students after teaching by Theme-based instruction is 2.45, and S.D. value is 0.38. When the average writing apprehension level of the students before class and after class were compared, it was found that average writing apprehension level of the students was decreased for

0.49. In addition, the S.D value before and after class were also compared, and it is discovered that the distribution of writing apprehension level of the students decreased slightly so there is significant statistically difference at level .05 that writing apprehension level of the students value after class was decreased.

Part 2 Providing teaching activity by applying Theme-Based Instruction can develop writing ability of Thai undergraduate students or not.

Table 2 : The testing result of descriptive essay writing test by applying Theme-based instruction (Pre test- Post test)

Score	Statistics				
	\bar{X}	S.D.	Percentage	T	Significance Level
1. Pre-Test Score	11.23	2.93	56.16	-11.64	.000
2. Post-Test Score	14.97	2.25	74.86		

According to table 2, it can be seen that the average pre-test score is 11.23 (S.D. =2.93), and the percentage of average score is 56.16. (this score has not reached at the determined criteria yet). On the other hand, the average post-test score after Theme-based instruction is 14.97 (S.D. =2.25), and the percentage of average score is 74.86 (this score reached at the determined criteria at above 60%) It is found that the average and percentage of writing ability

test of the students is 18.40 percent increased after teaching by Theme-based instruction. Moreover, it is also found that the distribution of writing apprehension of the students was slightly decreased when considering from S.D. value, and the score from English writing ability test before and after class has significant statistically difference at level .001. Furthermore, the average score of writing ability after class is higher than the average score before class.



Table 3 The scores received from descriptive essay writing ability assessment of the students from first draft to final draft

Draft Writing	Number of Students	Statistics			Result
		\bar{X}	S.D.	Percentage	
1. First Draft	23	10.57	3.05	52.83	Not pass the criteria
2. Second Draft	23	13.03	2.84	65.48	Pass the criteria
3. Final Draft	23	14.70	2.74	73.48	Pass the criteria in good level

According to Table 3, it illustrates that the average score of First Draft is 10.57 (S.D. = 3.05), and the overall percentage is 52.83 that the score did not reach determined criteria. In addition, after the students attended in Theme-based instruction activity by peer coaching and one on one conference from the studying plan provided by the researcher, it is discovered that the average score of the Second Draft which the students received is 13.03 (S.D. = 2.84), and the overall percentage is 65.84 which means they passed the criteria. Moreover, the average score of the Final Draft which the students received is 14.07 (S.D. = 2.74), and the overall percentage is 73.48 which means they pass the criteria in good level. This suggested that the development of students' writing skill has been gradually increased.

Discussions

1. From the study results, overall, the students have writing apprehension level at moderate level with average means of 2.94 before Theme-based instruction class. However, the writing apprehension level of the students is declined to 2.45 which means that Theme-based instruction can reduce English writing apprehension of Thai students who study

English as foreign language that can be seen clearly from the scores in writing apprehension from writing apprehension test of Daly and Miller (1975). Although, there has been no research both in Thai and foreign context which verify that Theme-based instruction can reduce writing apprehension, this research results are correlated with empirical research of Pansue (2008), Chaopong (2012), Manphonsri (2012), Phetmeekeaw (2012) and Wongduangchan (2014) which attempt to apply many teaching methods, and it was found that writing apprehension of Thai students had been declined after using related teaching methods and techniques such as Social Cognitive, Scaffolding, One on One Conference and Peer Coaching, etc. These research studies are relatively new fields of the writing apprehension study, and can be used in order to expand many points of view in education. Thus, this research is considered as other research studies continuance, and the results are the evidence to affirm that applied teaching methods or techniques are important factors which can reduce writing apprehension. Research studies in the past 20 years were survey research studies which focused on the efficacy of writing apprehension test and writing apprehension. In addition, the past research studies

studied about the factors which affected writing apprehension such as gender, motivation, etc., however, there is no research which studied about the efficacy of teaching methods and writing apprehension. For this reason, this research will be contributed as the guidance for those who interested to study about writing apprehension in the future because now there are not many studies which research about the effectiveness of teaching methods and writing apprehension that focused on experimental research. Thus, this research results can be verify that Theme-based instruction is a teaching technique which can reduce writing apprehension of the students who study English as foreign language.

In addition, the researcher also discovered interesting information from the sample in semi-structured interview. The information will be discussed as follows.

1.1 According to preliminary interview, it is found that every group of students have faced writing problem about language composing which emphasized on transmitting the main idea for effective writing. Moreover, they also have grammar writing apprehension that they have got anxiety when they have to write. It is also discovered that the students who got low and moderate writing apprehension have good basic of language and grammar, and they also have personal passion about writing that they can convey language and emotions in their writings quite well without prejudice. Therefore, the two groups of students have same writing goal to provide creative writing effectively which emphasized on language composition and language convey. Although they have grammar writing apprehension, they can solve grammar

problems well. Meanwhile, the students who got high writing apprehension tend to have quite high grammar writing apprehension due to knowledge of basic language structure, vocabulary limitation and negative attitudes about writing. For example, they were scare to write their works in English including lack of self-confidence because they are not good at it, and they also fear to make mistakes which will be occurred with their writings. Thus, the goal of this group of the students is to convey language via writing in the correct pattern of writing that they focused on linguistic accuracy which is related with the research study of Zamel (1983). Zamel found that the students who have poor writing skill interested in linguistic accuracy and writing pattern more than contents and idea organizing which caused grammar writing apprehension. This is different from the students who have good writing skill that they emphasized on writing, reading and improving their writing step by step to present their ideas more than trying to edit language only. Furthermore, an interesting issue is that students with low and moderate writing apprehension mostly have good basic language, and they also like to research for additional information. These can lead to great creativity and imagination in order to apply with their writing appropriately so they don't have many English writing problems when compared with other groups. The students with low and moderate writing apprehension level have intelligence to solve the problems more than the students with high writing apprehension level, for example, writing correction, language structure understanding, and applying other techniques to apply with their own works. This is correlated with the research study of Sommers (1980) which reflected that the writers who have more



experiences tend to have flexible writing plan, and writing has always been able to adjust when they have new ideas or information. On the other hand, the writers who have less writing experience take limited time to review their writing.

1.2 All groups of students were satisfied with the teaching activity consisted of Theme-based instruction because it is the teaching method which focused on the students' familiar contents based on the interest of the students and selected from the students' needs. This can create good attitudes with writing course so the students would learn without prejudice. Although, the students have different level of language knowledge and skill, they all enjoy writing about their interests and their familiar topics which will bring effective, smooth, and interesting detailed writing. According to Perl (1980), it is said that the students would write much and more accurate if they wrote about themselves or their interests. Topic familiarity is the factor affected to writing as Hyland (2003) suggested that experiences and prior knowledge are the most important factors which affected writing because the learners can write familiar topics or their interested content in English easily that the content is not hard to imagine, and the learners can write creatively. According to the research result of Tedick (1988) which studied about using familiar topics in English writing with foreign learners, it was found that the learners were able to produce and create more effective writing when they wrote familiar topics than essay writing with given topic that was not familiar to them.

2. According to the research result, it is found that the students were able to develop their writing skill progressively after Theme-based instruction class. The result shows that the average score of the

first draft is 52.83%, 65.48 percent for the second draft and 73.48% for final draft. This suggested that Theme-based instruction can help to improve writing capability and performance of students due to various activities and teaching techniques which applied with students' interest and needs to develop their writing performance effectively. This is related with the research of Osman (2009) which studied about the effectiveness of Theme-based instruction in persuasive essay writing of undergraduate students, the result showed that the students were able to apply knowledge they received from the class activities with their classmates in order to create and develop their effective writing. As well as the study of Senaloy (2012), it was discovered that the teaching method which applied Theme-based instruction and process writing can provide learners to have an opportunity to practice process writing in the topic of their interests and needs directly that they can improve their writing performance effectively. Thus, from the mentioned research results, it can be said that Theme-based instruction can promote effective writing and writing process because it is related with learners' interests and their familiar topics.

Conclusions

1. After teaching by Theme-based instruction that the students learned about their familiar topics and interests, it is found that their writing apprehension level is decreased from moderate level to low level. In addition, it can be seen from the 26 items of the writing apprehension test that writing apprehension level of all 26 items is decreased, and there is no high level of writing apprehension after applying theme-based instruction in class. In addition, the data analysis result from the students' diary and the

interview can be concluded that most of the students were satisfied with Theme-based instruction activities in class that it can reduce students' writing apprehension in English course quite well. Moreover, this can help the students to have good attitudes with writing that they enjoy and have confidence to write. Also, all students believed that the knowledge gained from the class can be applied in their learning in the future.

2. After teaching by Theme-based instruction, the writing performance of the students had been improved that can be seen from the individual score from English language proficiency test before and after class which shown that 90% of the students passed determined criteria of writing ability test, and there is only 10% of them did not pass the test because they have language grammar and structures problems, however, they were able to understand descriptive writing and write correct pattern of descriptive writing.

Suggestions for Teaching

1. In order to teach by applying Theme-based instruction, instructors should observe for students' needs and interests including learning contents before teaching. The topics which will be used to observe must be the topics that related with learners' interests, experiences, gender, age, and aptitude. Thus, the instructors should know about the students' basic language and previous experiences before the class begun.

2. Instructors can use various writing apprehension test from other researchers in order to plan teaching activities for reducing students' writing apprehension because the most effective writing apprehension test is not determined. It

depends on the instructors to decide to use appropriate writing apprehension test for their class. The writing apprehension problems should not various problems, but it should be the problems that most students faced with. For this reason, all students with different language performance should be asked about their writing apprehension problems. In addition, instructors should apply Triangulation data collection such as interview, observation, diary writing, etc. in order to get insight information which related with the problems of the samples.

3. In order to organize teaching activities for undergraduate level, students should have prior foundation in sentence structure and grammar at average level to good level which will lead to effective and untroubled teaching. On the other hand, the students who do not have prior writing ability and basic writing will bring unsuccessful teaching, and they may also have negative attitudes and writing apprehension if some types of teaching activity based on Theme-based instruction such as cooperative learning or learning strategies are applied with the students learning. Thus, instructors should advise students about necessary grammar used in writing or writing techniques which can enhance effective writing and also teach about writing strategies which are appropriate for types of writing. Furthermore, instructors should have explicit teaching process from the beginning of writing until the writing is completed in order to let the students practice writing correctly and appropriately. This will cause more effective writing and reduce writing apprehension in unstructured writing.

Suggestions for Further Research

1. Theme-based instruction should be applied



in reducing writing apprehension for other types of English writing such as argumentative writing, creative writing, academic writing, cause and effect writing, persuasive writing and narrative writing, etc. This will provide new knowledge and more diversity of research in writing field.

2. The action research by applying various teaching methods and other teaching techniques should be used in order to reduce writing apprehension, for example, task-based teaching, genre-based teaching or project-based teaching, etc. This may also applied with other samples in other education level such as high-school level, college level or undergraduate students not majored in English such as science, business ,etc. in order to provide more various and different research studies.

3. The duration of research study should be extended in long term as longitudinal study in order to provide the opportunity for learners to practice and develop English writing proficiency. For further research, Mixed-Method which emphasized on qualitative and quantitative research tools may be applied in further studies such as questionnaire, in-depth interview, observation, journal or diary, portfolio, checklist and video recording, etc.

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