AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY ON A PROCESS-GENRE APPROACH TO TEACHING IELTS WRITING TASK 2 TO NON-ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS AT BAND 4.5-5.5 IN A VIETNAMESE UNIVERSITY SETTING

Nghiên cứu cải tiến sư phạm về việc áp dụng đường hướng kết hợp quá trình và dựa vào thể loại trong việc dạy viết luận IELTS, phần 2, cho sinh viên khối không chuyên tại một trường Đại học ở Việt Nam

M.A. MINOR PROGRAMME THESIS

Field: English Teaching Methodology
Code: 60140111

HANOI-2016
THE UNIVERSITY OF LANGUAGES AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
FACULTY OF POST-GRADUATE STUDIES

TRẦN THỊ THỌ

AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY ON A PROCESS-GENRE
APPROACH TO TEACHING IELTS WRITING TASK 2 TO
NON-ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS AT BAND 4.5-5.5 IN A
VIETNAMESE UNIVERSITY SETTING

M.A. MINOR PROGRAMME THESIS

Field: English Teaching Methodology
Code: 60140111
Supervisor: Dr. Hoàng Thị Hạnh

HANOI-2016
Contents

Statement of Ownership ........................................................................................................ i
Acknowledgements .............................................................................................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.
Abstract .............................................................................................................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.
List of Abbreviations .......................................................................................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
List of tables and figures .................................................................................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
PART A: INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................. III
  1. Rationale of the Research .............................................................................................. III
  2. Aims, Scope, Methods, and Significance of the Study .............................................. IV
    2.1. Aims and Objectives .............................................................................................. IV
    2.2. Scope of the Study ............................................................................................... V
    2.3. Research methods ................................................................................................. V
    2.4. Significance of the Study ...................................................................................... V
PART B: DEVELOPMENT .................................................................................................... VI
CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW .................................................................................... VI
  1.1. IELTS: the International English Language Testing System ................................ VI
  1.2. Process-based approaches ..................................................................................... VII
    1.2.1. Model of process-based approaches ................................................................... VII
    1.2.2. Advantages and disadvantages of process-based approaches ....................... VII
  1.3. Genre-based approaches ........................................................................................ Error! Bookmark not defined.
    1.3.1. Model of genre-based approaches ...................................................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
    1.3.2. Advantages and disadvantages of genre-based approaches ........................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
  1.4. The Process Approach vs the Genre Approach ..................................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.
  1.5. Integrating process and genre approaches to teaching writing ............................. Error! Bookmark not defined.
1.7. Previous studies on the applications of process-genre approach to teaching L2 writing: findings and limitations..........................Error! Bookmark not defined.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY ...............................................Error! Bookmark not defined.

2.1. The current situation of IELTS in Vietnam....Error! Bookmark not defined.

2.2. IELTS in National University of Civil Engineering (NUCE)..............Error! Bookmark not defined.

2.3. The Context of the Study and the Research Participants.....Error! Bookmark not defined.

2.3.1. The research participants..........................Error! Bookmark not defined.

2.3.2. The writing IELTS Preparation course in NUCE .. Error! Bookmark not defined.

2.4. Action Research..............................................Error! Bookmark not defined.

2.5. Data collection procedure ..................................Error! Bookmark not defined.

2.6. Data Collection Methods ..................................Error! Bookmark not defined.

2.6.1. Observation ..............................................Error! Bookmark not defined.

2.6.2. Semi-structured interviews.............................Error! Bookmark not defined.

2.6.3. Collection of students’ writings throughout the program ............Error! Bookmark not defined.

2.7. Data Analysis Procedures .....................................Error! Bookmark not defined.

2.7.1. Data from observations and interviews ....Error! Bookmark not defined.

2.7.2. Data from the collection of student’s writings ...... Error! Bookmark not defined.

CHAPTER 3: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS Error! Bookmark not defined.

3.1. Findings and analysis.................................Error! Bookmark not defined.

3.1.1. Students’ perceptions of process-genre approach application ........Error! Bookmark not defined.

3.1.2. The effectiveness of process-genre approach on students’ writings Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.2. Discussion.................................................................Error! Bookmark not defined.
CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSIONS ........................................Error! Bookmark not defined.
  4.1. Synthesis of the study’s major findings.............Error! Bookmark not defined.
    4.1.1. Research question 1...............................Error! Bookmark not defined.
    4.1.2. Research question 2...............................Error! Bookmark not defined.
  4.2. Pedagogical implications.................................Error! Bookmark not defined.
  4.3. Limitations of the study.................................Error! Bookmark not defined.
  4.4. Suggestions for further studies ......................Error! Bookmark not defined.
REFERENCES........................................................................................................ IX
APPENDIXES .................................................................Error! Bookmark not defined.
PART A: INTRODUCTION

1. Rationale of the Research

Writing skill is deemed to be difficult for EFL students in the language learning (Richards, 1990). According to Richard and Renandya (2002), the difficulties include those in generating and organizing ideas, using an appropriate choice of vocabulary, sentence and paragraph organization and putting such ideas into an intelligible text. As for Vietnamese EFL students, besides these difficulties, they have to face many other obstacles when learning to write compositions in English, especially to non-English major students who are taking IELTS exams.

In IELTS writing task 2, students are asked to respond to a topic by giving and justifying an opinion, discussing the topic, summarizing details, outlining problems, identifying possible solutions and supporting their ideas with reasons, arguments and relevant examples from their own knowledge or experience (IELTS Test Booklet, 2014). To non-English major students, it is even quite a challenge to make a sentence on their own, not to mention a short simple paragraph. As a consequence, the task of composing complicated essays like in IELTS writing task 2 become harder, which they rarely perform well.

Although some approaches are applied in teaching writing such as process and genre-based, besides the merits, there are also some drawbacks in each of these approaches. The former helps learners to develop more effective ways of conveying meaning and to better comprehend the content that they want to express (Walsh, 2004). However, it has a very restricted view of writing, in which the practice of writing is identical regardless of what the topic is and who the writer or the reader is (Badger & White, 2000). The latter is seen as an extension of the product approach, in which the writing “varies with the social context in which it is produced” (Badger & White, 2000, p. 155), also critised because it may not requires students to express
their own ideas or may be too dependent on the teacher finding suitable materials as models (Caudery, 1998).

With the hope to seek for ways that can enhance students’ writing skills in IELTS task 2, especially of those who do not major in English, and lessen disadvantages of process and genre-based approach, the researcher would like to test whether the integrated approach of these two above which was developed by Badger & White (2000) could help students improve their writing and whether they find such approach effective.

2. Aims, Scope, Methods, and Significance of the Study
2.1. Aims and Objectives

This research tries to seek the possibilities to apply process-genre approach in teaching writing skills to non-English major students in IELTS preparation courses. While each approach has its own upsides and downsides in teaching application, the more effective one for writing needs is to incorporate the insights of these approaches (Badger & White, 2000). Also, this research aims to unpack the factors that effect students’ writing performance.

The above goals are specified into the following objectives:

- To explore the perspectives of the students towards process-genre approach in learning IELTS writing task 2
- To see whether the application of the process-genre approach to teaching writing IELTS task 2 to non-English major students is effective

To achieve the above-stated aims and objectives, the study was designed to answer the following research questions:

(1) What do students perceive about process-genre approach in learning writing IELTS writing task 2?
(2) Does the integrated process-genre approach help improve students’ performance in IELTS writing task 2? If yes, to what extent?

2.2. Scope of the Study

The research is confined to the application of the process-genre approach to teaching writing Task 2 in IELTS exams in a writing course of 15 lessons. A class of 14 non-English major students was investigated.

2.3. Research methods

As regarded as “the practical judgment in concrete situations”, which support the practitioner researchers in facing with the challenge and problems of practice and carrying through innovations in a reflective way (Altrichter, Feldman, Posch, and Somekh, 2013), the action research was selected to investigate the practicability of process-genre approach in teaching and learning IELTS writing Task 2. The research instruments were the pre-test and post-test, writing portfolios and interviews.

2.4. Significance of the Study

There are some reasons motivating me to conduct this research. First of all, the finding of this research will show how the process-genre approach and its stages could change students’ writing performance and reflect students’ views and their reactions on the process of teaching and studying writing. Thanks to that, I could adapt my teaching methods and materials so that they could be suitable and useful for my students.

Besides, for other classes in the similar context, this research may act as a reference for pedagogical skills and research practice. Other teachers may find in this research some suggestions or implications for their teaching writing IELTS and carrying out further research on this issue.
CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the literature on the process-genre approach to teaching IELTS writing Task 2. It starts with some background information, definitions and theories of key terms related and specific to this line of research. This is followed by a critical review of previous studies on the applications of process approach, genre-based approach and the integrated of both to teaching L2 writing.

1.1. IELTS: the International English Language Testing System

IELTS, the International English Language Testing System, is designed to assess the language ability of candidates who want to study or work where English is the language of communication.

The IELTS test (academic module) is made up of four components: Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking. The Writing component is a direct test of writing, requiring candidates to produce two samples of writing in 60 minutes allocated. In Task 1, candidates write a short description of information presented in the form of charts, diagrams, tables, and maps. Task 2 requires candidates to write a composition, usually an essay, in response to a proposition or question. In both tasks, candidates are assessed on their ability to write with “appropriate register, rhetorical organization, style and content” (UCLES, 1996.)

According to the instruction in the IELTS Handbook (1999), in task 2, candidates are presented with a point of view or argument or problem. In this task, the candidates are assessed on their ability to: “provide general factual information”, “outline a problem and present a solution”, “present and possibly justify an opinion, assessment or hypothesis”, and “present and possibly evaluate and challenge ideas, evidence and argument” (p.11). The instructions suggest that candidates will be
required to produce an argument type of text, which may be a discussion, opinion or problem and solution essay.

1.2. Process-based approaches

1.2.1. Model of process-based approaches

Process-based writing is viewed as the way writers actually work on their writing tasks from the beginning stage to the end of the written product. O’Brien (2004) defines this approach as an activity in which teachers encourage learners to see writing not as grammar exercises, but as the discovery of meaning and ideas. During the writing process, teachers can enable learners to explore their thoughts and develop their own writing by using the five-step writing process model developed from Scott (1996). This model consists of five stages, including: prewriting, first draft composing, feedback, second draft writing, and editing (Tompkins, 2000, p. 223)

Through the writing process, professional writers or even students hardly follow the fixed sequence of writing stages linearly because they have to move back and forth among different writing steps in order to come up with better ideas. In other words, the stages of writing process may come flexibly, not in a fixed order. The writer may evaluate while generating ideas or thinking up new ideas when he does evaluation (Scott, 1996).

Writing in the process approach can thus be seen as a dynamic and unpredictable process (Tribble, 1990) while writers try to reformulate their ideas and approximate the meaning of what they want to express in their work.

1.2.2. Advantages and disadvantages of process-based approaches

First, the process approach stresses the process that writers go through in composing texts (Nunan, 1991). It allows students to manage their own writing by
giving students a chance to think as they write (Brown, 2001, p. 336). That is, students convey their messages to the readers in written form through the complex writing process; prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing.

The second point is related to what learners have internally. Brown (2001) claims that the process approach is advantageous to students in language learning because students are the creators of language, they need to focus on content and message, and their own intrinsic motives are valued. Raimes (1983) indicates that in the process approach, students do not write on a given topic in a restricted time and hand in the composition but explore a topic through writing. Raimes also states that through the process approach teachers find that the writing process is a process of discovery for the students: discovery of new ideas and new language forms to express those ideas. In addition, the approach is beneficial to students because the approach focuses more on the various classroom activities. This is believed to promote the development of skilled language use, and a number of interesting classroom techniques have emerged from the process approach to writing (Nunan, 1991). When various group activities are utilized in writing classes, the learners exchange comments or responses, or work together to write a paragraph or an essay. Nunan (1991) also affirms that this approach also encourages collaborative group work between learners as a way of enhancing motivation and developing positive attitudes towards writing.

In spite of being widely used in ESL/ EFL composition, process-based writing still has some limitations. Firstly, as Leki (1992) asserts, some people think that the process approach is unrealistic because it puts too much emphasis on multiple drafts which may cause ESL students to fail the academic exams with their single draft restrictions. In addition, Badger and White (2000) also point out that learners have no clear understanding about the characteristics of writing and are provided insufficient linguistic input to write in L2 successfully in a certain text type.
REFERENCES


