LAGGING BEHIND WRITING PEDAGOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS: THE IMPACT OF IMPLEMENTING PROCESS-BASED APPROACH ON LEARNERS' WRITING IN A VIETNAMESE SECONDARY EDUCATION CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

The field of English language education has seen developments in writing pedagogy, moving from product-based to process-based and then to genre-based approaches. In Vietnam, teaching secondary school students how to write in English is still lagging behind these growing developments. Product-based approach is commonly seen in English writing classes in Vietnamese secondary schools. Within that context of teaching and learning writing, this paper outlines the impact of our implementation of the process-based approach in English writing classes with Vietnamese secondary learners. The study following a two-group pre-test and post-test design aimed to test the effects of the process-based approach on learners' English writing and to investigate their perceptions of the learning process under this approach. Participants were 57 non-English major grade 10 students in an upper-secondary school in Vietnam's Mekong Delta. Participants were involved in a sixteen-week intervention program with eight forty-five-minute writing sessions every two weeks. Three instruments were used to collect data: the questionnaire on participants' perceptions toward the writing process, the English writing tests, and the interview on participants' perceptions. Results indicated a significant difference in learners' writing performance and their perceptions toward the writing process between the two groups after the study: Participants in the experimental condition outperformed those in the control condition.

Keywords: Writing, Product, Process, Impact.

INTRODUCTION

General education in Vietnam consists of 12 grades: grades 1-5 (primary education for the age range 6-11), grades 6-9 (lower-secondary education for the age range 12-15) and grades 10-12 (upper-secondary education for the age range 16-18). English is taught to grade 6-12 students in almost all Vietnamese secondary schools. However, learning to write in English has officially been brought into the curriculum as one of the required skills for Vietnamese students in the eighth grade since the school year 2004-2005. From this year on, writing was introduced into the English curricula for grades 9, 10 and 11 in sequence and in the 2008-2009 school year writing was introduced to grade 12 students. The reality of teaching and learning English writing at Vietnamese secondary schools has revealed that most students have problems in writing. Their problems are evident in the poor quality of their written texts and their unfavorable perceptions toward learning to write. The reasons for these consequences can be explained in terms of learning time, the material in English writing, teachers' and learners' roles in English writing classrooms and the mismatch between learning and testing.

Learning Time

In the context of secondary schools, where exposure to English is typically limited to two and a half learning hours per week, students receive little practice in writing in English. Of 42 hours of English per semester (18 weeks), only 6 hours is allocated for writing practice. Within this time constraint, it is unavoidable that students have difficulties in writing. Therefore, when they write, they find themselves confused with the generation and organization of ideas, word choice and grammatical uses. They translate ideas from their mother tongue into English, express their ideas in long and

vague sentences, and are not aware of different genres of writing. As a result, the quality of learners' written texts is not good and their perceptions toward learning to write are not favorable.

The Material in English Writing

Most English writing tasks in the Vietnamese secondary textbooks, especially English for Grade 10, are presented in light of controlled composition and the paragraph pattern approach. The focus of the writing lessons is on learning the language structures in the model text and then replicating this writing model to create a similar text. These product-oriented approaches have been the dominant mode of instruction in secondary writing classes, emphasizing students' final written texts rather than the way they are produced. The result is that students cannot write for real audiences with clear communicative purposes, which affects the quality of their written texts and their perceptions toward learning to write.

Teachers' and Students' Roles in English Writing Classrooms

In the Vietnamese classroom context, it has long been the tradition that the teacher is supposed to be a knowledge provider. The teacher provides accurate and carefully selected language samples in the model texts and instructs students to deal with them so they can memorize and create similar pieces of writing. Another role the teacher is supposed to assume is a feedback giver. Teacher feedback focuses more on grammatical and lexical errors instead of meaning-oriented exploration. Learners are expected to be good knowledge receivers and imitators of their teacher. Their key activity of writing is to imitate and manipulate model passages that are pre-packaged. For most of the learning time, the interaction in the classroom is merely one-way, between the teacher and the students, which results in passive learning attitudes. It is, therefore, unavoidable that most students are likely to think that writing in English is individual work, not a collaborative effort. They are not accustomed to pair work or group work as part of the writing process. They almost never share their written texts with their peers in order to get feedback as well as to learn from their peers' written products. Besides, in English writing sessions, students are never asked to revise their work for improvements based on the teacher's feedback; the first draft is always the final one. Such practices in teaching English writing lead students to a position where they fail to reconsider their errors and deprive them of opportunities to improve their writing ability.

The Mismatch Between Learning and Testing

English writing instruction in Vietnamese secondary education is examination-driven. Although the Vietnamese secondary English curricula involve developing the four macro-language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), the test and examination formats, in the form of multiple-choice questions, emphasize correct linguistic forms instead of students' development of creative thought. In these tests and examinations, reading ability and the knowledge of grammatical structures are areas which are most targeted. As a result, this reading-dominated principle and the test-oriented approach bring about negative effects to secondary students. They perceive that learning to write in English means learning the grammatical structures of the English language, not the ways to express their ideas. Their mis-perceptions, to some extent, affect the quality of their writing.

Teaching English writing in Vietnamese secondary schools is a challenging job for many Vietnamese English teachers because it requires not only high language competence from the teachers themselves, but also the application of appropriate writing pedagogy. Therefore, this study was conducted to test the effects of the implementation of the process approach to writing instruction on students' quality of EFL writing and investigate students' perceptions toward the use of the process-based writing activities in their writing class. It was hypothesized that implementing the process approach could be an effective strategy, which could help enhance students' writing performance and their perceptions toward learning to write.

Using The Process Approach In Teaching Writing In A Vietnamese Context

Approaches to Teaching Writing

Among different approaches to teaching writing, controlled composition and the paragraph pattern approaches are the most prominent and widely used in English writing classes in Vietnamese secondary education.

In the controlled composition classroom, the primary focus is on formal accuracy. The role of the teacher is to provide accurate and carefully selected language samples that students can repeat, memorize and imitate. The teacher can also give structural frames in which students can do controlled substitutions. These activities are done in an attempt to help learners avoid errors presumed to be related to the first language interference, and to reinforce appropriate second language behavior (Silva & Matsuda, 2002: 258). For instance, students may be asked to change all the present tense verbs in a story into past tense verbs to form a new story. In such a case, they may need to alter time references from present to past time. Applying this approach, therefore, they pay more attention to practice with previously learned discrete units of language than to ideas, organization and style.

In the paragraph pattern classroom, the primary focus is on linguistic form. The role of the teacher is to provide models and instruct students to deal with them so that students can create similar pieces of writing. At the most basic level, students are asked to choose among alternative sentences within the context of a provided paragraph or text. At a higher level, students are instructed to read and analyze a model text. They then apply the knowledge gained from this analysis to writing another piece of writing that has the same organization with the original one. At the most complex level, students are required to list and group relevant facts provided, rearrange them in the logical order to form an outline, and then write a complete text based on that outline. This approach, therefore, considers a finished writing as being made up of increasingly complex discourse structures (i.e., sentences, paragraphs, sections), each of which is embedded in the next larger forms.

It is clear that these two approaches aim at developing classroom activities in which the student is engaged in imitating and manipulating model passages or texts. In light of these approaches, little attention is paid to the ideas and meaning of students' writings. However, the notion of learning by imitating is not in line with more contemporary views of language learning, which concentrates more on language at the level of discourse. Instead of looking at complete texts, writing teachers become much more interested in the processes writers go through when composing texts. It is recognized that competent writers cannot produce final texts at their first attempt, but through a long and often painful process, in which the final text emerges through successive drafts (Bridwell, 1980; Flower & Hayes, 1980, 1981; Larsen, 1983; de Beaugrande, 1984; Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Witte, 1987; Byrne, 1988; Hedge, 1988; Jensen, 1993; Lipson, Mosenthal, Daniels, & Woodside-Jiron, 2000; Seow, 2002; Braaksma, Rijlaarsdam, van den Bergh, & van Hout-Wolters, 2004). This realization leads to the development of the process approach to writing instruction.

The Contributions of The Process Approach to Learners' Writing Ability and Perceptions towards Learning to Write

The process approach became prominent in English-speaking composition classrooms during the 1980s. This approach entered the classroom as the 'process movement': a concentration on personal writing, learner creativity, and fluency (Zamel, 1982). It sees the composing process as a recursive, exploratory and generative process wherein ideas are discovered and meaning made.

In the classroom, this process approach "calls for providing and maintaining a positive, encouraging and collaborative workshop environment" (Silva & Matsuda, 2002: 261). Within the collaborative environment, students can work through the composing processes with ample time and minimal interference of the teacher. In a study of 41 students in a Form One Junior Secondary School class in Gaborone, Botswana, Adeyemi (2004) finds out that the use of cooperative strategy for English writing works better than the individualized strategy in improving students' writing performance in communication, grammar and mechanics (spelling and punctuation). In an investigation of 23 ESL adult students completing degree courses at a large Australian university, Storch (2005) finds out that most students are positive about collaborative writing because it provides them with opportunities to compare ideas, observe and learn from each other different ways of expressing their ideas. In this way, creativity can be increased: One group member can suggest a certain idea; the others can expand or complement it (Claire, 2008). In such a collaborative environment, learners'

anxiety in writing can be eased and they feel cheerful and relaxed to work together (Luo, 2007). Also, collaborative writing is helpful in both improving grammatical accuracy and learning vocabulary because it provides learners with an opportunity to give and get immediate feedback on their writing. The more people look at the writing, the easier they can identify mistakes and the more improvements they can make in their writing (Claire, 2008).

It is clear that the process approach does not deny that grammatical knowledge plays an important role in writing, but it maintains that grammatical knowledge alone is no guarantee of a good writing. The role of the teacher is to help students develop viable strategies for getting started, drafting, peer-evaluating and revising so as to produce good quality writing. The students play the role of both the writer and the reader. As a writer, he/she is engaged in the discovery and expression of meaning. As a reader, he/she is engaged on interpreting that intended meaning.

A number of research studies related to the implementation of the process approach in teaching writing have been conducted in different parts of the world. Scannella (1982) conducted a one-year experimental study of the effects of the writing-as-process model on the writing of 121 average and above ninth- and tenth-grade students. Scannella found that students taught in the process method proved to gain greater improvement in their expository writing, not in their creative writing; the experimental group showed a statistically significant increase in positive attitudes toward writing. In Bruno's 1983 experimental study, it was indicated that the writing of 654 third- and fourth- and fifth-grade students taught using the process approach was rated superior to that of those taught by the traditional product method, especially in terms of the overall organization and format. Robinson (1986) conducted an experimental study with 120 fifth-grade students to investigate the effects of process writing instruction and to determine the number of revisions as a result of 1- and 2-day lessons on revision. Robinson found that students who were taught using the process approach scored higher on final writing samples and engaged in 2.5 times more revisions than those taught by a traditional composition method. Croes (1990) used a nonequivalent

control group design to study the efficacy of the writing process in helping 157 learning disabled students in grades 1-5 improve their overall writing performance. Harris (1992) investigated the relationship between writing quality and attitudes toward writing in a study of 34 third-graders randomly assigned to one of four treatment groups. These last two studies indicate some positive effects of the writing process on the variables examined. To gain more insights into the effectiveness of the process approach, Honeycutt (2002) carried out a study with 11 fifth-grade students following a quantitative and qualitative research design. The result showed that the overall quality of participants' writing improved when they internalized specific strategies for prewriting, writing, and revising, employed self-regulation strategies to monitor the development of a text and activated strategies for dealing with negative emotions that arise during the composition process.

In Asian educational contexts, the process approach to writing, an innovation in a product-oriented culture (Cheung, 1999), has been seen as an improvement over the traditional methods of writing instruction in recent years. Empirical evidence from Alias (2002), Meeampol (2005), Mu and Carrington (2007) and Chunling Sun and Gouping Feng (2009) support the feasibility of the implementation of the process approach to teaching and learning to write. These research studies show positive results due to the implementation of the process approach. Alias (2002) carried out a study with 12 Malaysian secondary school students using the instruments of observation and questionnaire. It was shown that the stages in the process approach were effective in aiding the subjects to generate ideas and reduced writing problems like writing anxiety due to the fact that the process approach promotes both collaborative and communicative learning environments. Meeampol (2005) conducted an experimental study with 88 students from two EFL second-year classes at Bangkok University. It was found that the participants with the process-based treatment could gain better writing ability and have more positive attitudes toward this approach than the ones who did not receive the treatment. Ho (2006) carried out a descriptive research with 200 students in six Hong Kong primary classrooms. It was shown that the process writing program brought about positive results

across all classes in terms of writing performance and attitudes toward the process writing, though the results in each classroom differed slightly. Mu and Carrington (2007) investigated the writing processes of 3 Chinese post-graduate students in an Australian higher education institute. The results showed that for success in the target academic community, all the participants employed a broad range of writing strategies (e.g., rhetorical strategies, meta-cognitive strategies, cognitive strategies and social/affective strategies) in their writing practice, though each participant had a preference of writing strategies and used them differently. To achieve better results in English teaching and to develop Chinese students' writing competence, Chunling Sun and Gouping Feng (2009) proposed two teaching models using the process approach, namely, the full open process teaching of writing, and close process teaching of writing to different English level students. The results showed that the subjects were all making significant progress in their writing skill.

Current literature reveals that most of the studies indicated positive effects of using the process approach on improving the quality of students' performance in English writing in terms of content, organization, vocabulary, language use and mechanics and attitudes toward learning to write in English. The results of studies in the field under this investigation offer evidence to support the idea that the process approach to writing instruction in English as a foreign language could be potentially beneficial to English students in the context of Vietnamese secondary education. In Lee's 2008 study, an interaction between writers' perceptions and their performance on a field-specific writing tests was found. For these reasons, the researchers conducted this research to gain insights into the impact of implementing the process approach to teaching writing at a Vietnamese secondary school. It is also noticed that there has not yet been any empirical study on the addressed matter in English writing classes in the Mekong Delta in Vietnam. This study attempts to find out the answers to the following questions:

(i)   Does implementing the process approach improve students' writing in English?

(ii) Does implementing the process approach affect participants' perceptions toward the use of the process-based writing activities in their writing classes positively?

(iii) Is there any correlation between students' perceptions and their writing performance?

Research Method

Design

This research is a quasi-experimental quantitative and qualitative study. The two-group pre-test and post-test design was employed to test the effects of the process approach on teaching and learning writing in English writing classes. During this study, the implementation of the process approach - the independent variable - was monitored and participants' writing performance and perceptions toward the use of the process-based writing activities - the dependent variables - were measured.

Participants

57 secondary school students in grade 10 in an upper-secondary school participated in the study. They were permanently arranged in two classes by the school. One was randomly assigned to be the control group and the other, the experimental group. Participants' writing ability before attending the study of the two groups was the same: $F_{(1, 55)} = .421$, $p = .52$; $M = 5.59$ ($SD = 1.37$) for the control group and $M = 5.78$ ($SD = .63$) for the experimental group.

Materials

The material used in this study was the textbook English for Grade 10 written for Vietnamese students (Hoang, Nguyen, Hoang, Do & Nguyen, 2006). This textbook was used as the main course book for the two groups. Participants were instructed the first eight units of the book including eight topics for writing practice. A series of eight lesson plans designed in light of the process approach was implemented in the experimental group. The theoretical framework for these lesson plans was adapted from Seow's process model (2002) and writing activities for each lesson plan were developed by the researchers. Each lesson was taught in the procedure as follows.

In the first lesson, the teacher demonstrated how to generate ideas and develop an awareness of discourse

organization through pre-writing activities. These activities could happen in numerous ways: Reading, skimming and/or scanning a passage, brainstorming, listing (in writing – individually), discussing a topic or question or instructor-initiated questions and probes. After exploring the ideas, the teacher then showed students how to put them into paragraph form, keeping in mind how to use facts and statistics to make writing powerful and convincing. Students stepped out of their own perspectives to see what they had created through the eyes of others, to discover the impact of their expressions on their readers' comprehension so that they could improve their composed texts. The editing checklist helped students to check and improve their texts. In this stage, the teacher gave them a step-by-step guide on how to work on their peers' writing using the editing checklist. Once students received feedback about their first draft, the teacher demonstrated how to revise the first draft in order to improve it, making it clearer and more convincing. Peer-editing followed this first step, in which students shared what they had written to see whether they were successful in conveying their intended meaning.

In the subsequent lessons, students worked through the four stages of a similar learning procedure, from modeling to collaborative practice and then to individual practice, ensuring that they had clear input and enough consolidation to help them master the strategies. At each stage, teacher help was first given and then replaced by peer help, these being gradually withdrawn to allow the participants to work independently.

Instruments

Three instruments were used to collect data: The questionnaire on participants' perceptions toward the writing process, English writing tests, and interviews on participants' perceptions toward the use of the process-based writing activities in their writing classes.

Questionnaire

To measure participants' perceptions on the writing process, a fifteen-item questionnaire was used as the pre-test and the post-test. The original version of this questionnaire (from http://www.sasked.gov.sk. ca/ docs/ mla/questionnaire.pdf.) was a sample writing process assessment checklist which was used to assess students'

different activities during the writing process (i.e., pre-writing, drafting and post-writing). This checklist, consisting of 20 items, aims to collect information on the frequency (i.e., always, usually, never) of writing activities students perform throughout the writing process. This checklist was adapted to fit the researchers' research purpose in investigating the participants' perceptions toward the use of the process-based writing activities in English writing classes in Vietnam. The adapted inventory consists of 15 items. All the items are divided into four clusters including various writing activities used in four different stages of the writing process: pre-writing, drafting, peer-evaluating, and revising. Each item includes a statement about students' perceptions on the writing process in English followed by a Likert scale. The scale test was run to check the internal consistency of the questionnaires. The result showed that the reliability coefficient of the pre-questionnaire was 0.75, and that of the post-questionnaire was 0.83.

Writing Tests

Writing tests were used to evaluate the quality of participants' writing performance in English. The test type selected for this study is a common kind of writing test similar to what is often used in the Vietnamese secondary classroom context. The pre-test and the post-test on English writing are similar but not the same. They are similar in format, instruction, length, level of difficulty, allotted time and genre but the specific writing topics between the two tests are different: one is writing a letter to the head of the local authorities complaining about the methods of catching fish in the lake; the other is writing a letter to the director of the V&T Company complaining about the poor quality of its hotel service. After designing the pre-test and the post-test, the two tests were piloted to ensure its validity. To grade the pre-test and the post-test, an analytic marking scale adapted from Jacobs et al's (1981) and from Hoang's (2007) was used. The scale consists of five aspects including: content (0-3.5), organization (0-1.5), vocabulary (0-1.5), language use (0-2.5), and mechanics (0-1). The reliability of the piloted pre-test and post-test was the same

(= 0.87). For the inter-rater reliability, prior to the present study, the researcher and her colleague had tried co-rating the piloted tests to determine the reliability of the rating.

First, one paper was randomly chosen and graded. The score results from both raters were brought into a discussion so that they could reach a mutual understanding in grading. Later, another five papers were graded. The score results given by both raters were found to be very close. Then the two raters started grading the rest of the papers. For the present study, the correlation coefficients between Rater 1 and Rater 2 of the pre-test and of the post-test on English writing were very high (N = 57, r = .97; p = .00 and N = 57, r = .99; p = .00 respectively) which were statistically significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Interviews

Follow-up interviews were conducted to collect insights into participants' perceptions towards the use of the process-based writing activities. Two participants who gained the most (M gained = 3.0), two who gained averagely (M gained = 1.75), and two who gained the least (M gained = 0.5) in the writing tests were selected to be interviewees. The interviews were conducted in Vietnamese to ensure that the interviewees could understand the questions and express their opinions freely. Each of them was asked to answer two questions:

(i).   How do you evaluate the use of the process-based writing activities?

(ii).   Of the two approaches to learning to write, the product approach and the process approach, which one do you prefer? Why?

Procedures

In week 1, the pre-questionnaire on participants' perceptions on the writing process and the pre-test on their writing performance respectively were administered for both control and experimental groups. From weeks 2 to 17, the product-oriented approach was adopted and applied in the control group whereas the process approach was used in the experimental group. In week 18, the post-questionnaire and the post-test in writing were administered in both groups. In week 19, interviews were conducted with six participants from the experimental.

Results

Data gained from the pre-tests and post-tests on perceptions toward the writing process and writing performance from the participants of the two conditions were subjected to the software SPSS version 11.5 to measure their gains in perceptions toward the writing process and writing performance respectively. The GLM Repeated Measures tests were run to check for the mean difference in participants' perceptions and writing performance within the two groups before and after the study, the One-Way ANOVA tests for the mean difference in participants' perceptions and writing performance between the two groups before and after the study, and the Pearson's Correlation tests for the correlation between the participants' perceptions on the process approach and their writing performance.

Participants' perceptions toward writing process

Table 1 reports the descriptive statistics of the results on perceptions towards the writing process of the pre-test and post-test for the two conditions during the semester.

As can be seen from Table 1, participants' perceptions on the writing process in the control group before and after the study (M = 3.68) remain unchanged (F (1, 29) = .279, p = .60). Meanwhile, there is a significant change in participants' perceptions in the experimental condition (F (1, 26) = 9.803, p = .004); the post level (M post = 4.12) is higher than the initial level (M pre = 3.78). The post level of participants' perceptions in the experimental condition is significantly higher than that in the control condition (F (1, 55) = 18.73, p = .00).

Interviews were conducted to collect information about the participants' perceptions toward the use of process-based writing activities. Six participants from the experimental group were invited for interviews. All interviewees reported that learning to write in the process approach created good opportunities for them to develop ideas, which created chances for them to write for communicative purposes. They perceived that this teaching approach specifically contributed to the

Conditions	Questionnaires	N	Min.	Max.	M	SD
Control	Pre-	30	2.40	4.47	3.68	.49
	Post-		2.60	4.47	3.68	.47
Experimental	Pre-	27	2.40	4.40	3.78	.47
	Post-		3.73	4.80	4.12	.20

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of participants' perceptions toward writing process

improvement of their writing due to the creation of opportunities for the exchange of ideas, arguments and organization with their peers and thanks to the help of the teacher as a facilitator.

> …Group discussion to brainstorm the topic would likely generate a variety of ideas from which I could benefit for my writing… (Nguyen from condition low) …I could express what I wanted for my own purposes using my own ideas… (Tran from condition low)

> …The teacher asked me some questions to help me focus on what to write. She also provided me with unknown words and structures so that I could express my ideas around the writing topic… (Tran from condition low)

All interviewees explicitly expressed their preference for the peer-evaluating activity. They reported that the specific and constructive evaluation from multiple peers helped them revise their first draft and encourage them to learn from each other. They contended that learning to write in the process approach gave them more chances to revise their writing. In this way, they could reflect on the meaning of their written texts, make their writing clearer and more relevant in terms of content. Besides, peers' feedback enabled students to recognize their mistakes and avoid making the similar ones. One participant said,

> …The peer evaluation stage allowed for peer writer-reader interaction and helped us refine our first draft by diagnosing our own mistakes with the help of a checklist on content, organization, vocabulary, language use and mechanics prepared by the teacher. This enabled us to revise our writing and helped reduce our mistakes in the second draft… (Huynh from condition mid)

From the interview data, however, some negative perceptions on the process approach were found. Two participants from condition low said that they had difficulties using the editing checklist. They reasoned that although it was easy to give ticks on the checklist, they did not know how to correct the mistakes after completing it. They said,

> …It seemed easier for us to give comments on our friends' writing, such sort of things as "I like your ideas

about…", or "I think your writing could have been done better". However, it was difficult for us to suggest corrections to my friends' papers…

Do, one participant from condition high, supposed that the peer-evaluating activity did not really bring out effectiveness. To him, reading and evaluating his friends' writing took too much of his time and he doubted his peers' ability to give helpful and corrective evaluation on his own writing. He said that he hardly got any suggestions to improve his writing from his friends because he was the best student in his group.

> …My friends just gave me general comments like "good grammar", "good structure", or "interesting ideas". I even asked them to suggest improvements to my writing, but got nothing new. I thought that it was unfair and not good. They should know that I not only wanted to learn from them but needed to improve my writing as well…

Despite some unfavorable feedback, all interviewees asserted that learning to write in light of the process approach could improve their writing ability and that they preferred to learn writing in the same way in the future.

> …We liked to learn to write in this new way because we felt comfortable to express our ideas… Working in groups helped us write better thanks to our friends' contribution to our writing… (Huynh and Dang from condition mid)

Participants' performance in writing

Table 2 reports the descriptive statictics of the results on writing performance of the pre-test and post-test for the two conditions during the semester.

Table 2 indicates that participants' writing performance in the control group changed after the study. The mean score of participants' writing performance of the control group after the study (M post = 6.06) is higher than that of the same group before the study (M pre = 5.59), but this mean

Conditions	Writing Tests	N	Min.	Max.	M	SD
Control	Pre-	30	2.50	8.00	5.59	1.37
	Post-		5.00	8.50	6.06	1.14
Experimental	Pre-	27	4.00	6.75	5.78	.63
	Post-		5.00	9.00	7.66	1.07

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of participants' writing performance

difference is not statistically significant (F (1, 29) = 2.85, p = .102, d = .089). Meanwhile, there is a significant change (F (1, 26) = 123.72, p = .00, d = .83) in participants' writing performance in the experimental condition: their post level (M post = 7.66) is higher than their initial level (M pre = 5.78). The post level of participants' writing performance in the experimental condition is significantly higher than that in the control condition (F (1, 55) = 29.62 , p = 00).

Correlation between participants' perceptions toward writing process and their writing performance

The Pearson's Correlation Test was used to investigate the correlation between the participants' perceptions on the process approach and their writing performance. Table 3 below presents the result of this test.

Table 3 shows that after the study, there is no correlation between participants' perceptions and their writing performance for both control and experimental groups (N = 30, r = .076; p = .689 and N = 27, r = .246; p = .217 respectively).

Discussion, Conclusion & Recommendations

Discussion

The results of the study showed that using the process approach to teaching writing in secondary education in a Vietnamese context improved students' writing in English and brought about positive perceptions toward learning to write in light of the process-based approach.

In this Vietnamese context, the process approach could make participants take into account the notions of readership and the communicative purpose of writing tasks. Learning about those to whom they write could help participants make decisions on the structure and the language use in their writing. The communicative purpose of a piece of writing could help them choose relevant text types and appropriate language. Collaborative writing could contribute to participants' success by arousing the participants' interest in actively engaging in group work

Correlation	Conditions	N	R	Sig. (2-tailed
Perception-Writing performance	Control	30	.076	.689
	Experimental	27	.246	.217

* The correlation is significant at the .01 level.

Table 3. Correlation between participants' perception and writing performance

activities in which they could share, discuss and evaluate their group members' ideas (Storch, 2005; Luo, 2007; Claire, 2008). This active and friendly learning environment facilitated learners' writing because they did their writing based on their group's selection of content and logical sequence of arguments.

Focusing more on the content of the writing than grammatical problems could play a role in students' better English writing. Via activities such as brainstorming, rewriting and giving feedback on the content of the text, the implementation of the writing lessons in the study focused on the expression of participants' messages in their writing practices rather than making grammatically correct sentences. These activities are compatible with what Torwong (2003) proposed for non-native writers: Grammatical and mechanical accuracy should be proportionally de-emphasized in order that writers' motivation is not affected.

Peer evaluation gave students a more active role, the role of a reader and advisor. Since the readers read the draft and tried to judge the meaning of the writing from their own perspectives (Torwong, 2003), the writers tried to write as comprehensibly as possible so that their readers understood accordingly. Through making choices, expressing purposes, reading and re-reading their own and peers' written drafts, students were gradually able to identify errors in their own writing in terms of content, organization, vocabulary, language use and mechanics. It could also be the case that learning to write in the process approach gave participants chances to revise their writing. As participants' texts were read and their mistakes (e.g. spelling, verb tenses etc.) were pointed out by their peers, participants became aware of their writing problems and could avoid making similar mistakes in subsequent texts. Therefore, participants confirmed that learning to write in the process approach contributed to the improvement of their writing quality, which resulted in their desire to learn to write in light of this approach.

The reason for negative perceptions on the process approach from two participants from condition low could be explained in terms of psychological problems. As weaker learners in their groups, these participants just gave

comments on the content of their peers' writing. They thought that they did not have enough linguistic competence to correct grammatical errors; therefore, they feared ridicule from peers due to their poor writing proficiency (Kalikokha, 2008). Negative perceptions from one participant from condition high could be explained that not all feedback from peers was accurate and constructive. In fact, some learners just gave common comments like 'good grammar' or 'interesting ideas', which might make the feedback receiver confused. He might feel such evaluation was not useful for him because the role he played was only a feedback provider, whereas the other learners were receivers. This feeling might result in the belief that the peer-evaluating activity was for higher achievers to help lower ones.

As regards no correlation between participants' perceptions and their writing performance, it could be seen that these constructs were not compatibly developing. A high perception of the benefits of the process approach to writing from a poor writer does not guarantee an ability to write well.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In a context where English is taught as a foreign language and where teaching students to build up sentences by using word cues and to replicate writing models are considered as "teaching writing", the use of the process approach in writing classes results in positive gains in students' writing performance and perceptions toward the process-based approach used in their writing classes.

While preparations in terms of updated English language philosophy, communicative learning materials, and teachers' expertise towards the implementation of genre-based approach in writing classes are on its way, findings from this study raise implications for learning and teaching in contexts like Vietnam. In the first place, teachers should provide time for writing and revising (Lee, 2006) in the supported learning environment. Meta-cognitive strategies for pre-writing, drafting, evaluating and revising will benefit students (Lv & Chen, 2010). Collaborative writing also provides them with critical readers of their composed texts. Finally, training, tutoring (Williams, 2004) and support from teachers should be provided to students at the peer-

evaluation stage (Min, 2006) in the way that all students are willing and capable to participate and benefit from peer-evaluating activities.

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