CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background and Motivation

Writing has long been used as an important index of a learner's language proficiency level. TOEFL, for example has included a test of written English (TWE) in addition to tests on reading and listening since 1986. IELTS (International English Language Testing System) also includes a writing test. In Taiwan, composition writing, as reflected in different tests, is considered an essential part of language learning. For example, GEPT (General English Proficiency Test), an English proficiency test that has been widely recognized in Taiwan, has included writing ever since it was established in 2000. The previous JCEE (Joint College Entrance Exam) and the present APT (Academic Proficiency Test) have both included composition writing.

Important as it is, writing instruction, however, has long been ignored. Gomez (1996) observed that instruction in ESL has often focused on improving students' abilities in speaking, listening and reading but ignored the development of students' writing skills. Harris (1985) found that only 2% of ESL instruction was concerned with writing activities. Even when writing is taught, it is treated more as mechanical grammatical drills than as a creative communicative skill. In a typical writing class, students receive training in producing grammatically correct sentences instead of composing a well-organized text. In other words, writing instruction here is regarded as practice of grammar, sentence patterns and translation.

In the 1970s, writing researchers started to reexamine the writing instruction with a new perspective. Unlike the traditional approach of writing in promoting only students' linguistic skills for the written product, they looked into students' writing

skills in the process of writing. The proponents of process writing approach argue that teachers should teach students to think of composing as an activity of discovering meaning and communicating and that teachers should give students the opportunity to revise their texts to approximate their true intention (Murray,1978; Perl, 1980; Raimes, 1985, 1987, 1991; Sommers, 1980, 1982; Zamel, 1982, 1983, 1985). Perl (1980), for example, discovered that less skilled writers who regarded composing as a mechanical and formulaic activity might be hindered by their overconcern with correctness and form. They were not able, as a result, to get beyond the surface in order to anticipate the needs and expectations of their readers.

In recent years, researchers have started to probe into ESL/ EFL writing fields. It is found that ESL/EFL writing teachers, whose students are still in the process of developing their language, tend to emphasize, even more than L1 writing teachers, correctness and form (Zamel, 1982). Kim (1996) argued that grammar and vocabulary should not be taught as ends in and of themselves despite their importance in writing, but as the means with which to better express one's meaning. In his 1996 study of both the product and process aspects of native student writers and EFL student writers, Kim suggested that the obligation of teachers, especially EFL teachers, to upgrade students' linguistic competencies should not form the basis of writing instruction.

If grammar and vocabulary should not be the focus of writing instruction, what, then, should be the focus? Researchers propose that revision should be the main focus of a writing course and that the teacher, who traditionally provided feedback after the product, should intervene to guide students through the process (See for example, Beach, 1976; Sommers, 1980; Zamel, 1982). In the multi-draft writing procedure proposed by researchers, teachers lead students through "cycles of revision" (Zamel, 1985, p.95) by commenting on content and form in different drafts. Koffolt and Holt

(1997) pointed out it is expected that through the teacher-guided feedback-and-revision process of writing, students will become "more successful at producing good writing, and teachers can have the pleasure of noting students' progress as they read and grade better papers" (p.55).This procedure will ultimately result in a "more satisfying educational experience for both students and teachers"(p. 55).

Revision has been recognized as an essential part of writing process, yet empirical studies on how to make students revise successfully have been scarce, especially in EFL context. Besides, most of the researches on revision in L2 were case studies (Raimes, 1985), involving generally no more than 15 participants, usually university students (see for example, Conrad & Goldstein, 1999; Min, 2003; Paulus, 1999; Polio, Fleck & Leder, 1998). It is doubtful whether a study in an EFL high-school context with more participants would yield similar results. The present study is designed to examine both qualitatively and quantitatively the effect of revision on EFL high school students' writing quality and attitudes toward writing and revision.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the effect of multi-draft writing procedure on Taiwanese high school students' writing quality. It is also intended to explore the students' attitudes toward revision and writing after the treatment. Four hypotheses are tested in the study:

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant difference in the students' writing ability before and after the treatment for the multi-draft group and the single-draft group.

Hypothesis 2: Students in the multi-draft group significantly outperform students in the single-draft group in their writing quality after the treatment.

Hypothesis 3: There is a significant difference in students' attitudes toward writing between the two groups after the treatment.

Hypothesis 4: There is a significant difference in students' attitudes toward revision between the two groups after the treatment.

Four research questions are addressed in this study:

1. Are multi-draft writing procedure and single-draft writing procedure both effective ways to improve students' writing quality?

2. Is multi-draft writing procedure a more effective way to improve writing quality than single-draft writing procedure?

3. How do students in the multi-draft group differ from students in the single-draft group in their attitudes toward writing at the end of the experiment?

4. How do students in the multi-draft group differ from students in the single-draft group in their attitudes toward revision at the end of the experiment?

Definitions of key terms

A number of concepts relevant to this study are defined in this section.

Local errors vs. Global errors

Two distinct kinds of errors are identified in writing researches: local errors and global errors. Local errors are lower-level, "surface level, word level, phrase level, or clause level" errors (Bridwell, 1980), such as errors in grammatical structures, words or expressions (Chen, 1997). By contrast, global errors are the errors that occur in whole chunks of discourse and require a reordering of the whole (Sommers, 1980). This kind of errors involves meaning-level concerns, such as content and organization (Chen, 1997). In this study, local errors are defined as the type of errors that occur in grammar, vocabulary and mechanics while global errors are the kind of errors that occur in content and organization.

Revision

Revision has been defined differently by researchers. It may involve only minor changes in wording or the replacement of entire pages (Hull, 1987, cited in Chen, 1997). Murray (1978) identifies two distinct kinds of revision: internal and external. Through internal revision, writers rescan the whole work and rework the subject, the information, the arguments and the structure until their intended meaning is satisfactorily communicated. External revision, on the other hand, refers to the final process of working with style, tone, language and mechanics. Taylor (1981) tries to clarify the distinction between revision and cosmetic editing or proofreading. He defines revision as "that crucial point in the process when discovery and organization come together, when writers refine and recast what they have written and shape it into a coherent written statement" (p. 7). In the present study, revision is defined more broadly, including the process of improving the content and organization as well as proofreading for errors in grammar, vocabulary and mechanics as conceptualized by Hansen (1978).

Teacher Feedback

Teacher feedback is also termed teacher comments, teacher evaluation, or teacher response. It refers to a teacher's oral or written comments in response to the content and form in students' writing. Teachers' oral comments are given in the form of teacher-student conferences. Teachers' written comments, on the other hand, encompass error identification with signals and symbols, error correction, content suggestions and praises or criticism. In the present study, teacher feedback refers to teachers' written comments on both the content and form of the students' compositions.

Peer Feedback

The peer feedback technique, also referred to as peer review, peer evaluation, or peer editing, has been an essential activity of much process oriented writing instruction. Although some researchers have tried to distinguish these terms (Mangelsdorf, 1992), they are generally used interchangeably. In a typical peer feedback activity, students read one another's drafts of essays in order to make suggestions for revision (Mangelsdorf, 1992). Mangelsdorf (1992) identified two levels of peer review. For beginning ESL students, they read or listen to a peer's draft in a group and then comment on what they found most interesting, what they wanted to know more about, where they were confused, and so on. The writers then revise their writing based on these responses. For more advanced student writers, they can engage in both oral and written feedback, filling out worksheets to answer questions concerning specific content or organization problems. Afterwards, students discuss with their peers about the suggestions they made for revision.

In peer feedback session, teachers may assign students to work in pairs or in groups. Mittan (1989) suggests working in pairs when students provide feedback for it provides greater opportunities for intensive discussion. Min (2003), however, recommends the use of response groups to maintain a balance between writers' ownership of the text and sensitivity to audience needs.

In the current study, the peer feedback sessions follow the procedure suggested by Mangelsdorf (1992). Students exchange orally their writing, share their opinions, and give each other suggestions. Also, in the study, students are not limited to a fixed partner or partners so as to allow students more opportunities to see different perspectives.

Significance of the Study

The present study is significant in the following aspects.

First, the study can provide teachers with a new perspective in incorporating revision into their writing class. In Taiwan, the English composition writing ability is considered an important skill for high school students. Many writing teachers in high school have been looking for effective and efficient intervention strategies for teaching English writing. This empirical study attempts to determine the effect of revision on students' writing quality and their attitudes toward writing and revision in a typical high-school classroom and will shed light on the effect of revision through multi-draft writing on students' writing quality in a high school classroom context.

Second, the multi-draft feedback in this study can provide teachers an alternative way for providing feedback. In the present study, the teacher-researcher attends not only to the form but also to the meaning of students' writing, and for compositions by the multi-draft group, she gives comments first on the content and the organization and then on the grammar, vocabulary and mechanics. This is very different from traditional single-draft writing class, in which teachers either give a grade with a brief general comment or devote all their attention to correcting grammatical errors.

Finally, the positive and negative responses reflected by the students in the questionnaires to the peer review activity can provide English teachers some perspectives in incorporating peer review in their writing course.

Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed the background and the motivation of the study. The purpose of the study, the research questions and the definitions of the key terms are also covered. The significance of the study is also included in the last section.