REFLECTING ON “REFLECTIONS” OF NURSING STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY ON TASK-BASED WRITING

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ABSTRACT
In Thai classrooms, the learning process is dependent on the teachers who just relay them knowledge, thereby, critical thinking is not promoted nor encouraged. In medical related courses such as nursing, writing skills must be also given priority since it is a transactional skill which is useful in their future job. Task-based writing approach using reflection writing was integrated into the English for Careers subject among the second year nursing students of Vongchavalitkul University. It posited the following problems: 1) What are the problems encountered in completing the task; and 2) How to address the problems identified in the completed task? Reflective writing gives the students the freedom to analyze their situations and how to react to a given situation. After watching YouTube clips with Thai audio about HIV situation in Thailand, the students had this question to reflect on: As a Thai citizen and a nursing student, how can I help in the prevention of HIV-AIDS. The students were given a two-week period to write a minimum of 700 words reflection to be submitted in hard copy. The essays were graded using Rubric Scoring. Out of thirty-one participants, 80.65% or 23 students committed plagiarism while 19.35% or only eight students did not. Lack of lexical and syntactic skills hinder the students from writing passable English. Thus, writing must be given priority in ESP as well as in other English subjects to balance the speaking, listening and writing skills of the students.

Keywords: Reflection writing, Task-based writing, Nursing students, Plagiarism

1. INTRODUCTION
Communicative skill which is focused on speaking and listening is developed among the L2 students particularly to non-English majors. In medical related courses such as nursing, writing skills must be given priority since writing is equally important in their future jobs. Writing skills is given less priority because in Thai classrooms, learning process is dependent on the teachers who just relay them knowledge, thereby, critical thinking is not promoted nor encouraged (Deveney, 2005 & Dhanarattigannon, 2008, cited in Duereman). Writing is essential in L2 because it is the transactional skill in language learning (Willis and Willis, 2007). Atkinson (2003) believed that texts always reflect the students’ ability to solve a rhetoric problem, and their awareness of their own communicative goals, of the reader, and of the writing context.

Marashi et al (2012a) suggested that the teachers need to:
“...utilize different types of tasks, provide learners with adequate amount of input, actively involve them in the class procedures, and encourage them to be more creative in their writing and write their first draft freely without any concern for formal linguistic features”
(p.2506)

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Rod Ellis (2003) extensively discussed the task-based approach with this framework:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Examples of options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-task</td>
<td>1. Framing the activity (e.g. establishing the outcome of the task)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Planning time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Doing a similar task</td>
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<tr>
<td>During Task</td>
<td>Time pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Task</td>
<td>1. Number of participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Learner report</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Consciousness-raising</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In defining task-based in EFL or ESL, Willis (1996) stated tasks are “always activities where the target language is used by the learners for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome”. Hence, in giving a task, the students must also have a prior knowledge about the task. In Ellis’s it is the pre-task where activity is discussed, planned and later on to do a similar task.

The importance of task help the learners evaluate their learning because it requires them to use the target language (Bygate et al, 2001). The authenticity of tasks also provides learners a relationship with the real world.

As the goal of the task is towards completion using the target language, motivation plays an important role. Presentation of task is equally important as its completion, thus, a teacher must present it in a way that motivates the learners. (Dornyei, 1994). Further, Dornyei suggested that it is important to match the difficulty of tasks with students’ abilities in succeeding if they put effort on it.

2.1. Reflective writing as Task-based approach

Hyland (2003a, p.9) said that “writing is a way of sharing personal meanings and writing course emphasize the power of the individual to construct his or her own views on a topic”.

In L2 writing, Hyland said that writing activities are usually focused on themes such as pollution, relationship, stress, juvenile crime and so on. He stressed that this kinds of activity is useful in building up issues and relationships between them and putting themselves into it.

Task-based writing instruction within the larger framework of TBLT (Task-based Language Teaching) makes learners involved in active mutual work on tasks that are reasonable for them and related to their real life experience (Kawachi, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2000 in Marashi, 2012b). Reflection writing is a part of task-based writing instruction within the framework of TBLT.
In reflective writing the students provide an insights on what do they need to do and their roles in a given situation. Moon (1999, in Watton et al, 2001 p.4) explained reflection as: “a form of mental processing with a purpose and/or anticipated outcome that is applied to relatively complex or unstructured ideas for which there is not an obvious solution.”

According to Hatton and Smith (1995 in Watton et al, 2001, p.5) there are four levels of reflection namely: Descriptive writing, a description of events or literature reports; Descriptive reflective, which is basically description of events, but shows some evidence of deeper consideration in relatively descriptive language; Dialogic reflection, a that writing suggests there is a ‘stepping back’ from the events and actions which leads to different level of discourse and the Critical reflection which is a form of reflection, in addition, shows evidence that the learner is aware that actions and events may be ‘located within and explicable by multiple perspectives, but are located in and influenced by multiple and socio-political contexts’.

2.2. Problems in L2 task-based writing

It is evident that writing is the biggest challenge for many students. Therefore, many associations exert their effort to improve learning English (Ellis, 2003). Still, it is a very tough mission for teachers to teach English creatively so that students could become independent learners and benefit a lot from the innovative teaching techniques adopted by the teacher (Ellis, 2005).

2.4. English in Thailand

King Rama III (1824-1851) introduced the official use of English language in his court because he believed that it was necessary in dealing with Britain (Baker, C. and Phongpaichit, P., 2005). It was only in 1921, that English was introduced to the school curriculum but was treated as an academic subject rather than as a means of communication (Wongsothorn, 2003).

Thai students spend twelve years studying English in primary and secondary schools, but upon examining the English-language classes, many researchers pointed to a few main factors contributing to the failure of English-language teaching-and-learning: unqualified and poorly-trained teachers, poorly-motivated students, learners of mixed abilities in overly large classes, and rare opportunities for student exposure to English outside of class time (Noom-ura, 2013; Dhanasobhon, 2006; ONEC, 2003). Compared to the neighboring countries, Thai’s English proficiency is very low. In 2010, the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOFL) result showed that out of 163 countries Thailand ranked 116th. The international average score was 80 but Thai average score was 75. On 2011, Thai’s made a consistent average score of 75. These problems are also blamed on the lack of interactive media, relevant textbooks and creative learning materials do not support the promotion of English (Punthumasen, 2007; Snae & Brueckner, 2007).

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to Hyland (2003b) process theory focuses on how a text is written instead of the final outcome. The theory suggests that it has a major influence on understanding the nature of writing and the way writing is taught. The theory emphasizes the importance of certain procedures such as
pre-writing, drafting, evaluating, and revising. He pointed out that the process theory would involve introducing techniques that help the students identify and engage a topic; students are required to show multiple drafts of a work. After discussion and feedback from evaluators, the students would revise the drafts. Rewriting, revision, and editing are essential parts to writing in this theory. Hayland further explained that writing is a product constructed from the writer’s command of grammatical and lexical knowledge, and writing development is considered to be the result of imitation and manipulating models provided by the teacher – which is often regarded as extension of grammar.

4. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM
The nursing students at Vongchavalitkul University are considered to be at the intermediate level based on the exit examination conducted every semester by the VU Language Center since 2016. English for Communication, Reading and Writing and English for Daily Life were pre-requisite subjects to be able to take English for Careers. Although the students can communicate orally, assessment on writing skills was never done. The study posited the following problems: 1) What are the problems encountered in completing the task; 2) What are the identified problems on the reflection papers? 3) How to address the problems identified in reflection paper writing?

5. METHODS AND METHODOLOGIES
Task-based writing approach using reflection writing was integrated in the English for Careers subject among the second year nursing students of Vongchavalitkul University. Reflective writing gives the students freedom to analyze their situations and how to react in a given situation. Thirty-one students participated in the study conducted from August 15 to September 15, 2016. The students were asked to watch the following: Temple of Death for AIDS sufferers in Thailand (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=36fePIVCE80) and AIDS Hospice in Thailand (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bw352hRhHF4). It was done during the one period which was three hours. The video clips were in Thai language with English sub-titles. The papers were graded using Rubric scoring for writing.

6. ANALYSIS OF THE STUDY
6.1. Preparation
6.1.1. Pre-Task. Thirty one nursing students participated in the study. For the pre-task, the students watched the YouTube video clips in Thai language discussing about the HIV-AIDS situation in the country. These were the titles and links: Temple of Death for AIDS sufferers in Thailand (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=36fePIVCE80) and AIDS Hospice in Thailand (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bw352hRhHF4). The video clips were in Thai language with English sub-titles. During the pre-task, the students were instructed to write a 700-word minimum reflection paper. While watching the clips, the students were instructed to take down notes on the issues of HIV in Thailand. The students were grouped together and discussed HIV prevalence in Thailand. However, their group discussions were in Thai. Two questions were given to them as a
point of reflection: As a nursing student, how can I help in the prevention of HIV-AIDS; and, As a Thai citizen, how can I help HIV-AIDS sufferers.

6.1.2. **During the task.** The task which was writing the reflection was done at home or during their free time. In the succeeding class prior to submission, the researcher reminded the students about the reflection paper. The students submitted their papers on the designated date which was August 31, 2016. No students asked for extension of deadline. Hence, the task was completed.

6.1.3. **Post-task.** The class size was 33, but those who submitted their papers on time were 31 students. The students who were not able to submit their papers on time were not considered for the study. The researcher asked five participants to discuss their reflections in class without reading their papers. Table 2 showed the conscious-awareness on the topic given to them as discussed by the five volunteers, based on their reflection papers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>As a nursing student, how can I help in the prevention of HIV-AIDS</th>
<th>Thai citizen, how can I help HIV-AIDS sufferers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Volunteer in HIV campaigns in schools/universities.</td>
<td>2. Donate money to temples.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Distribution of condoms</td>
<td>3. Do not disclose the identities of persons with HIV-AIDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Discourage many boyfriends/girlfriends (promiscuity)</td>
<td>4. Do not discriminate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. **Problems identified on the reflection papers**

Plagiarism is the first major problem identified on the task-based writing. The researcher read each papers and entered particular texts for Grammarly to check whether the paragraphs are plagiarized or not. In the classroom, the students could barely speak in English without the aid of a device like smartphones. Thus, flawless English in paragraphs with more than 700 words gave them in. Percentage was used to determine the occurrence of plagiarism/”copy paste”. Out of thirty-one participants, 80.65% or 23 students committed plagiarism while 19.35% or only eight students did not. Lack of lexical and syntactic skills hinder the students from writing passable English. The students used Google translation which is not accurate in translating Thai sentences.

Although the task was completed in due time, objective of the task was incomplete. Thus, writing must be given priority in ESP as well as in other English subjects to balance the speaking, listening and writing skills of the Nursing students in Vongchavalitkul University.

The researcher and the students discussed the task to be able to find out the difficulties encountered when writing in English. The researcher used informal discussion to get feedback from the students. The feedback were the following:

1. Too long.
2. Not used to write long sentences in English.
3. Not enough time to write.
4. No term for medical and health related English

When asked if they can write the same topic in Thai language, they all answered in the affirmative. However, the students also found the task challenging because they were able to think and write in the English language as well as searching for the associated topic in English.

Instead of English for Specific Purposes which involves English commonly used in different workplace such as hospital setting, tourism, pharmacy etc. the Nursing Faculty of Vongchavalitkul University uses English for Careers. English for Careers is a general subject which does not cover Hospital English. Hence, the nursing students are not exposed to terms use in medical and health related occupations.

8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Task-based approach prepares the students on dealing with real activities in a given situation. However, it is quite different since the students, particularly in Thailand are not generally exposed to English language when they leave the English classrooms. Focusing on English usage even outside of the EFL classroom is important in the medical field since upon graduation, the nurses are practically interacting with different nationalities who are seeking medical services in Thailand. To encourage English writing among the students, social media must be explored also such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Thus, writing must be given priority in ESP as well as in other English subjects to balance the speaking, listening and writing skills of the students.

9. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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10. REFERENCES


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