SCAFFOLDING COLOUR CODES AND SAW APPROACH IN ESL ACADEMIC WRITING

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Abstract:
Past researches have shown that students use visual organizers to connect content and ideas in their writing. Graphic organizers serve as scaffolds to organize ideas in essays. The use of graphic organizers facilitates chunking of information and help in learning. Colour codes act as scaffolds (templates) for writers to transfer the information from the graphic organizers into paragraphs. The whole act of scaffolding knowledge to form new knowledge provides a learning experience to the learner. This research explores yet an alternative method for writers to learn to write paragraphs using colour codes as scaffolds. This method is rooted from the concepts of Selective Attention embedding colour codes as scaffolds. Colour codes are used to focus the learners' attention during the learning of academic writing. Modelling is used so learners can imitate the expected behaviour by the teachers. Graphic organizers are used as scaffolds for learners to write their essay. After one semester of using the techniques such as modelling, and scaffolding in the writing classroom, learners were asked to respond to a survey. 32 students participated in this action research. They responded to a questionnaire to reveal what they feel about this approach to ESL academic writing. The findings of this study reveal how students perceive learning ESL academic writing using the selective attention writing approach.

Keywords: writing process, selective attention, colour codes, modelling, scaffolding

1. Introduction

"Writing abilities are not naturally acquired; they must be culturally (rather than biologically) transmitted in every generation, whether in schools or in other assisting environment."

(Grabe & Kaplan; 1996, p6)

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The above quote strengthens the point on teaching writing. Unlike skills like speaking and listening, that is acquired by language learners, writing is a skill that needs to be taught.

1.1 Background of Study

Ask any writing teacher on what he/she feels about teaching writing and the most probable is "it is NOT easy!" According to Barkaoui (2007) writing is one of the most difficult skills that second-language (L2) learners are expected to acquire. However, academic writing skill is considered very important for students of in higher institutions of learning. This is because majority of the assignments are to written and that requires academic writing skills. The easy access of media and internet facilities has made writing easier than they used to be (by students)-not because writing is not really learnt, acquired, nor modelled. Instead, information has been conveniently copied. Hence, with the advancement of writing materials easily available, there needs to be more interesting writing teaching methods

1.2 Statement of Problem

Lee and Tajino (2008) found that ESL academic writers faced high degree of difficulty with the structure of the essay. Although they do face as much difficulty in the content of the essay, they felt that the structure was very important to "hold" the content together. Their research suggested that writing teachers design writing lessons to help learners scaffold structure from previous learning into new learning. In addition to that, Lee and Tajino (2008) also felt that teachers should also concentrate on teaching students skill on "holding" the content together in creative techniques.

Fadda (2011) reported that ESL students faced difficulties in making outlines and identifying main ideas and supporting details in their writing. He suggested that writing lessons focused on teaching learners skills to plan their writing. Graphic organizers have been found to be useful for writers to depend on when they planned their essays.

Barkaoui (2007) introduced the use of modelling by writing teachers when teaching writing. He suggested teachers use two types of modelling. The first type is process-modelling and this is done to allow learners to achieve automaticity in the writing skill. Students were taught to adapt and transfer the skills to different contexts. Next, text-modelling, involves introducing, negotiating, researching, modeling, and practicing the target text-types. This approach allows teachers to move from teacher-centred to joint negotiation mode with learners. He also suggested the use of authentic texts in ESL classrooms so students familiarize with different types of text types and linguistic styles.

1.3 Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to explore the yet another method of teaching academic writing in the ESL classroom. Specifically, this study explores the use of selective attention writing (SAW) method in the teaching of ESL academic writing. In addition to

that, this study also investigates the influence of models, graphic organizers and scaffolds in SAW.

1.4 Research Questions

The research is done to answer the following research questions.

    a) Are there any significant differences between selective attention writing process with colour codes, modelling and scaffolding?

    b) How does the use of models influence the process of selective attention writing?

    c) How does the use of graphic organizers influence the process of selective attention writing process?

    d) How does the use of scaffolds influence the process of selective attention writing?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Teaching Writing

Teachers teaching writing in the ESL classroom need to consider many aspects before they plan lessons. According to Rahmat (2011), there are five important components to look into when preparing the writing activities.

Figure 1: Components in a Writing Classroom (Rahmat; 2011; p16)

Figure 1 above shows the five important components in a writing classroom. Firstly, the teachers' role is important when deciding on what and how to teach the writing process. Next, the methods used by the teacher can determine the success or failure of the teaching attempt. Thirdly, learners need to participate actively in the process in order to gain maximum benefits. The appropriate choice of teaching materials will further support or hinder the writing lesson. Finally, the ability of the teacher to use the material properly will help to encourage maximum learning to take place.

2.2 Selective Attention Processing

According to Santrock (2009), the information processing in the human mind is depicted in the thought mechanisms in the computer. The information is gathered by the senses and processed in various ways. One of the ways is by selective visual

attention. This is like the "spotlight" model where the receiver focuses on a particular information. In learning, the teacher can decide on what he/she wants the learner to focus on. In this way, the learner is actually filtering the necessary information into his/her brain.

2.3 Theoretical Framework of the Study
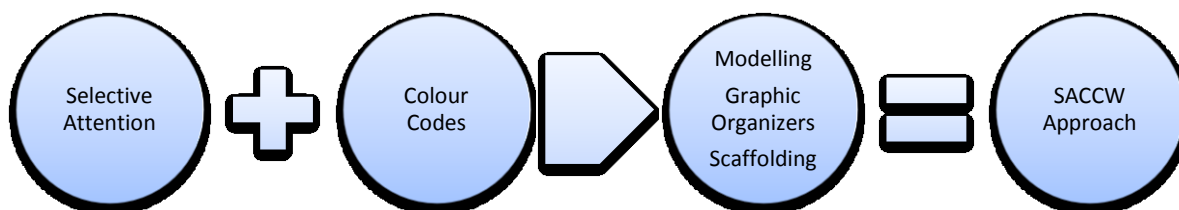
Figure 2: Theoretical Framework of the Study

Figure 2 above shows the theoretical framework of this research. The concept of selective attention approach is focued to the use of colour codes in the ESL academic classroom. The writing teacher uses the concept of (a) modelling to teach the initial part of the lesson. Next, (b) graphic organizers are used as templates for learners to understand how the concept of colour codes can be used in paragraph writing. Finally, the learners are guided to write their own paragraphs using the technique of (c) scaffolding.

2.4 Colour Codes

According to Meacham (2015), colour is processed in various parts of the brain. She specifically pointed out that colour is often used to direct the brain's attention to certain information. The use of different colour codes can be used to show the different functions of colours in a particular information. Colour codes will also enable learners to "hold" information in their proper sections as they (the learners) wrote.

2.5 Modelling

Since this is a rather unfamiliar technique to learn academic writing, teachers need to model the correct behaviour to the learners. According to Pavlov (in Santrock (2009), there are three types of learning and they are (a) learning through associations, (b) learning through consequences and (c), learning through observation (also known as modelling or observational learning). Associative learning takes place when learners are taught to make connections between two stimuli. Next, Skinner (in Santrock, 2009) reported that a learner makes an association between a particular behaviour and its consequences. Finally, Bandura (in Santrock; 2009), said that people's behaviour could be determined by the expectations of the environment.

2.6 Graphic Organizers

Virk,andWik (2011) reported that it is assumed that cognitive processes operate in an organized, predictable fashion. Incorporating the use of graphic organizers during the learning process help to enhance the functionality of these processes. The use of graphic organizers is also based on the constructivist theory that says that during learning, the learner uses the existing knowledge and the new information to construct new knowledge. Sharrock (2008) reports that the quality of students' writing will improve through the organizing the thoughts. Zaini, et al. (2010) adds that graphic organizer is simply a graphical or spatial representation of text concepts. It is an instructional tool that can help students to organize, structured the information and concepts to relate to other concepts.

2.7 Scaffolding

According to McLeod (2012), when that assistance is given, students become able to achieve his/her goal. This activity is also provided with appropriate support at the right moments. Students in classrooms will be able to achieve tasks that would otherwise be too difficult for them. Vygotsky's scaffolding" is a term used to describe a method of teaching that involves providing resources and support to students as they learn new concepts. As the students develop skills in those areas, the supports are gradually removed so the student can accomplish a task with no assistance. Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky developed the concept known as the zone of proximal development, or ZPD; this theory essentially stated that a difference exists between what a person can do and learn on his or her own, and what can be learned or done with the assistance of another person who is more experienced.

2.8 Past Research

Lee and Tajino (2008) conducted a study to find out the perceived difficulties in academic writing among students. He studied 95 first-year Japanese university students' perception on academic writing. The results of the study revealed that students did find academic writing difficult. Specifically, the students faced more difficulties in language-related components of academic writing than structure/content-related components. They were also reported to face difficulty with research design. Lee and Tajino (2008) concluded that the source of difficulties in academic writing among students could be external. They also added that perceptions of difficulties can make students lose self-confidence and become demotivated for future learning.

Another research on writing difficulties was done by Fadda (2011). His respondents were 50 postgraduate students who enrolled in King Saud University during the academic year 2009-2010. His findings data showed that English as a second language (ESL) students face many difficulties. The learners were also reported to face stresses in their academic writing. The stresses include difficulty in distinguishing between spoken and written English, making an outline before writing a draft, identifying the skills needed for successful writing, and avoiding plague words and phrases.

3. Material and Methods

3.1 Research Design

This action research uses both qualitative and quantitative data. The instruments used in this study are questionnaire and students' writing journals. The questionnaire has five sections and they are Section A-Demographic Profile, Section B-Writing (Planning, Translating and Reviewing), Section C-Graphic Organizers, Section D- modelling, and Section E-Scaffolding. 32 students will be chosen for this exploratory research. They are from one class studying the course Integrated Skills: Writing in a Malaysian university. Students are taking Diploma in Business Studies. Students went through a semester of learning academic writing using colour codes. Throughout the semester, students wrote entries into their writing journals. These entries are taken as data for triangulation in this study.

3.2 Steps to Teach the SAW (Selective Attention Writing) Approach

Figure 3: Steps in SAW Approach
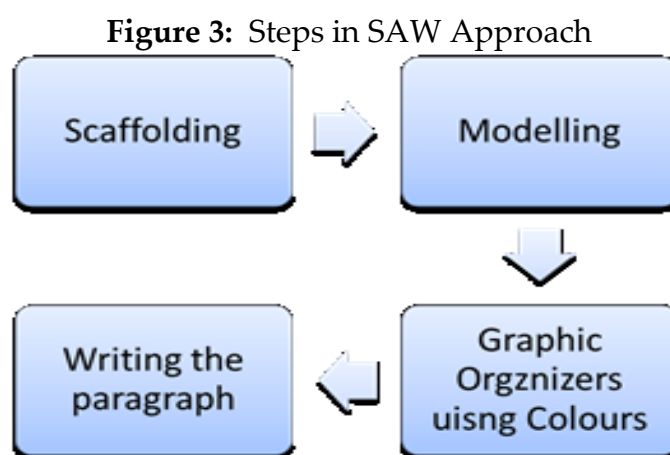
Figure 3 above shows the steps in SAW Approach. The stages are;
a) Scaffolding: Students are introduced to the diamond (Rahmat, 2014) concept of paragraph.
b) Modelling: Teacher models to the students how to write a paragraph using the diamond and the colour code.
c) Graphic Organizers Using Colours: Students attempt to write their own paragraph using the diamond scaffold with the colour codes.
d) Writing the Paragraph: Students combine their paragraph with their peers to form a complete essay.

3.3 Method of Data Analysis

At the end of the semester, students responded to a survey. The questionnaires were analyzed to determine the students' perceived difficulties on ESL academic writing. Mean score, t-test and one way ANOVA were used to report on the findings. Data from students' writing journals were analyzed for emerged recurring patterns on the topic of the use of (a) modellling, (b) graphic organizers and (c) scaffolding in academic writing.

4. Results and Discussion

This section discusses answers to the four research questions in the previous section.

Research Question 1: Are there any significant differences between writing process with modelling, graphic organizers, and scaffolding?

Table 4: Correlations between Writing and Modelling

		Writing	Modelling
Writing	Pearson Correlation	1	.208
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.238
	N	34	34
Modelling	Pearson Correlation	.208	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.238	
	N	34	34

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05level (2- tailed)

To determine if there is a significant association in the mean scores between writing and modelling, a correlation coefficient test was conducted. Table 4 shows that there is a weak positive association between rate of writing and modelling (r=.208) and (p=.238). The correlation coefficient is significant at the 0.05 level. The coefficient of determination between the two variables has shown that only 4.33% of the rate of writing can be explained from modelling and vice versa. Therefore, we fail to reject the null hypothesis. This study showed that modelling has an impact on students' writing.

Table 5: Correlations between Writing and Graphic Organizers

		Writing	Modelling
Writing	Pearson Correlation	1	.363*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.035
	N	34	34
Graphic Organizers	Pearson Correlation	.363*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.035	
	N	34	34

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05level (2- tailed)

To determine if there is a significant association in the mean scores between writing and graphic organizers, correlation coefficient was conducted. Table 5 shows that there is a weak significant association between writing and graphic organizers (r=.363) and (p=.035). The correlation coefficient is significant at the 0.05 level. The coefficient of determination between the two variables has shown that only 13.18% of the rate of writing can be explained from the graphic organizers and vice versa. Therefore, the use of graphic organizers give impact on students' writing process.

Table 6: Writing and Scaffolding

		Writing	Modelling
Writing	Pearson Correlation	1	.339
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.050
	N	34	34
Scaffolding	Pearson Correlation	.339	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.050	
	N	34	34

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05level (2- tailed)

To determine if there is a significant association in the mean scores between writing and graphic organizers, correlation coefficient was conducted. Table 6 shows that there is a weak significant association between writing and scaffolding (r=.339) and (p=.05). The correlation coefficient is significant at the 0.05 level. The coefficient of determination between the two variables has shown that only 11.5% of the rate of writing can be explained from scaffolding and vice versa. Thus, although findings indicated minimal influence, scaffolding has shown to give impact on students' writing.

Research Question 2: In what ways do modelling students learning of essay writing using colour codes?

Chart 7: Frequency for Modelling
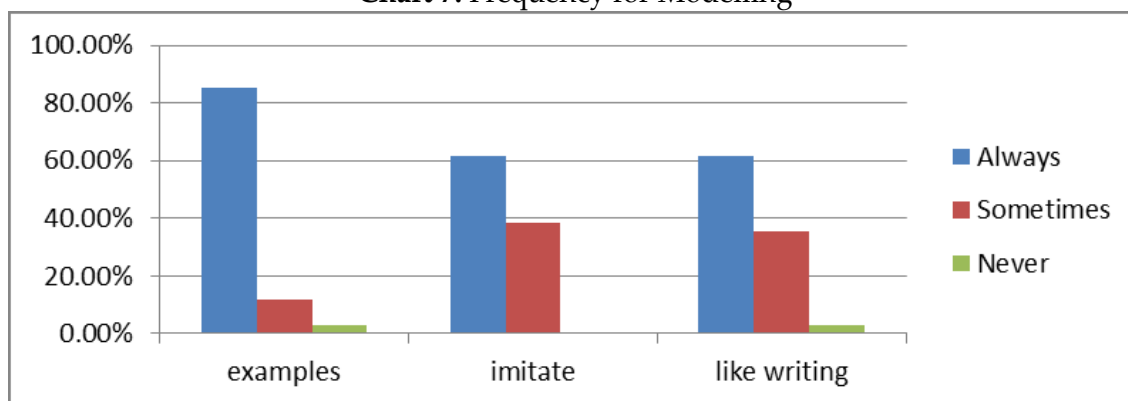
Chart 7 reveals the responses for modelling in the writing class. This section reveals the use of diamonds (Rahmat, 2012) in the use of paragraphs. Students found modelling useful when they were shown examples (85.3%). In addition to that, they also found the use of imitation (61.8%) useful. Firestone (2015) also felt that modelling help give the learners more confidence as they were able to see how successful the method is carried out by someone else before they attempted to try out the method.

Research Question 3: In what ways do graphic organizers influence students learning of essay writing using colour codes?

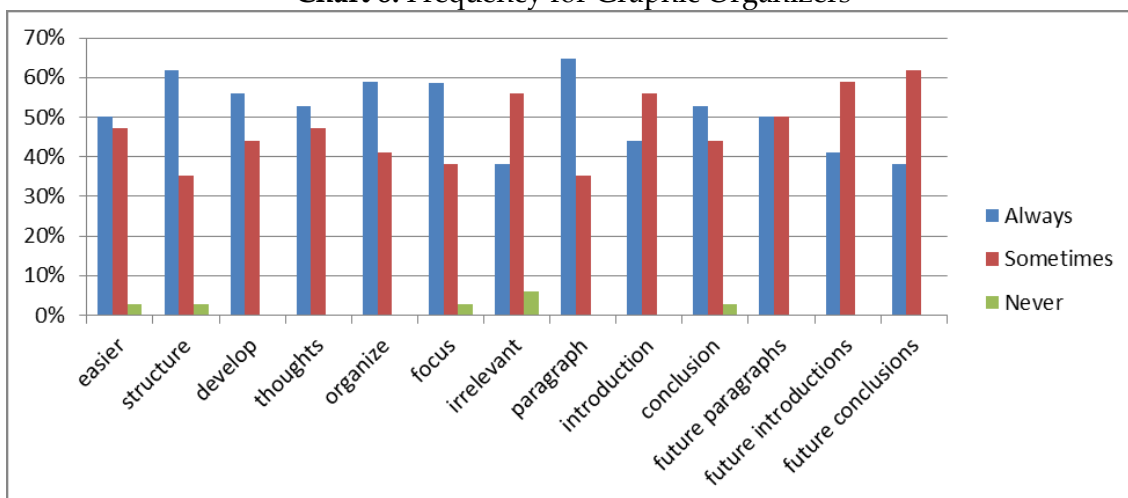**Chart 8:** Frequency for Graphic Organizers

Chart 8 shows the percentage of frequency for how students feel about using organizers in their writing class. The learners found the use of graphic useful for their paragraph writing (64.7%), structure of the essay (52.9%), organization of the content, and focusing on relevant ideas (58.5%). Similar report was made by Sharrock (2008) who revealed that graphic organizers helped learners to improve the quality of their essay content.

Research Question 4: In what ways do scaffolding students learning of essay writing using colour codes?

Chart 9: Frequency for Scaffolding
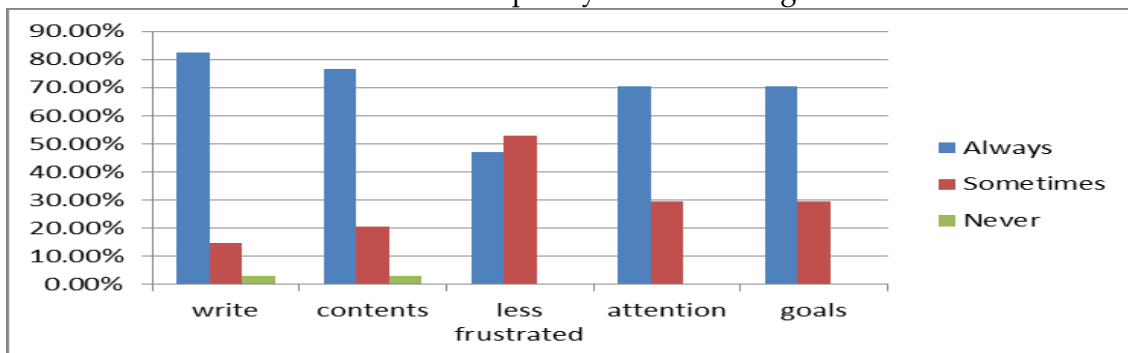
Chart 9 shows the percentage for frequency of scaffolding. Here, students reveal their responses towards the use of colour codes as scaffolding their learning. Scaffolding activities made the students careful with what they write in general (82.4%) and in writing their contents (76.5%). This has in turn made them more attentive in class (70.6%) and more focused (70.6%). According to McLeod (2012), scaffolding enables the learner to feel that help is given when they needed it and slowly diminish when they become more confident with the new learning. This finding is also in accordance with the study by Fadda (2011) who also agreed that interesting activities can help boost learners' self-confidence in future learning.

5. Conclusion

Figure 1A: The SAW Approach in the writing classroom
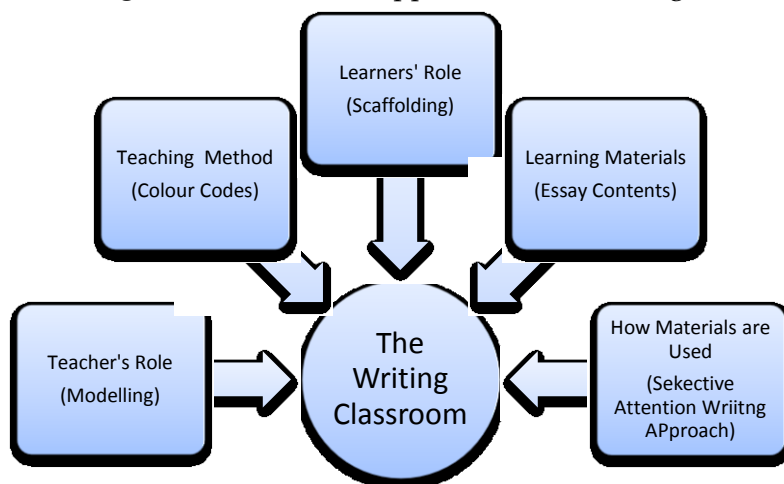
The findings of this research can be combined into the components of the writing classroom in Figure 1 above. Figure 1A above shows how the Selective Attention Approach can be used in the writing classroom. The teacher's role is to model the correct writing behaviour to the students. This is done using the method of colour codes. Consequently, the learners need to be active participants when they learn to scaffold. They also need to transfer their learned information into the coloured scaffolds. Finally, the use of large papers for group work and coloured markers made the classroom lively and fun to be in.

Figure 10: Summary of Findings
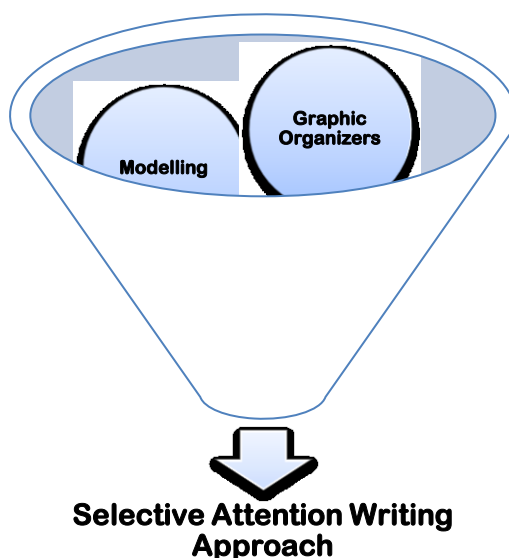
Figure 10 shows the summary of findings for this study. The use of colour codes to teach paragraph writing can be done through proper planning by writers and

modelling by teachers. Students learn through activities that encourage scaffolding through the use of graphic organizers. Findings of this research supported the claim that the use of graphic organizers facilitate chunking of information and help in learning (Virk and Wik, 2011). There is no one way of teaching writing. Since essay writing is an activity many students find time-consuming and sometimes complicated, writing teachers need to constantly come up with many alternative ways of teaching writing in the ESL classroom, and beyond.

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