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Analysing Rhetorical Problems in Writing

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Abstract

Different categories of writers face varying problems when it comes to academic writing. There have been reported studies revealing academic writing problems stem from lack of background knowledge in the content area. Some studies reported that some writer have to deal with their fear of writing. One of the major problems in writing is not lack of linguistic competence of the writer. The source of difficulty is the lack of competence in composing. Recall the way we were taught writing- we spent much time thinking of "what" to write" but when it comes to the process of writing, we are alone. This qualitative study looks into the problems that writers face in their composing process. Three writers comprising of one undergraduate, one postgraduate (masters) and one postgraduate (doctorate) were asked about what their writing problems were. Data will be coded into specific categories to reveal different categories of difficulty faced by these writers. Findings bear interesting pedagogical implications to both teachers of writing and writers.
Keywords: Writing, Problems, Composing Process, Undergraduate, Postgraduate

Introduction

Over the years, efforts have been made to improve the teaching of writing. According to Graham (2019), classroom writing practices are further influenced by teachers' beliefs and knowledge. There are many factors that contribute to the success of writing lessons. The environment that the writers are put into to go through the writing process is as important as the content of the writing (Rahmat, 2018). Many of the factors are beyond what is taught in the class. As such, different categories of writers face different types of writing difficulties. According to Rahmat (2020), the difficulties that writers face can be seen as either internal or external dimensions.

Singh (2019) students face challenges when they write academic texts. When they are faced with problems in academic writing, they would turn to resources available to solve their problems. Some depended on their writing teachers, some to to their peers, while some may turn to plagiarism. It is almost impossible that writers (even the skilled ones) do not face

problems when they write. What makes the difference is that some learnt to cope and find solutions to their writing problems, while others constantly need help to find solution. According to Flower and Hayes (1980), writers face rhetorical problems when they write. The rhetorical problems that they faced can be categorized into two (a) rhetorical situation and (b)writers' own goals.

This study explores the measure taken by different categories of writes to solve their rhetorical writing problems. Specifically, this study is done to answer the following research questions;

(a)   How do writers attend to rhetorical situation in their writing?
(b)   How are writers' goals used to solve writing difficulties?

Literature Review
Introduction
This section discusses rhetorical problems and challenges in writing ; as well as past studies and conceptual framework of the study.

Rhetorical Problems
It is not a norm for writers to face problems when they write. Some face problems before they write, some face problems with their language, while some face problems making citations. According to Flower and Hayes (1980) in figure 1, writers face rhetorical problems when they write. This rhetorical problem can be further categorised into (a) rhetorical situation and (b) the writer's goals. For rhetorical situation, writers face problems with (i) the assignment and also the (ii) audience. For writers' goal, writers face problems with (i) the readers, (ii) creating a persona or voice, (iii) building meaning and also (iv) producing the text.
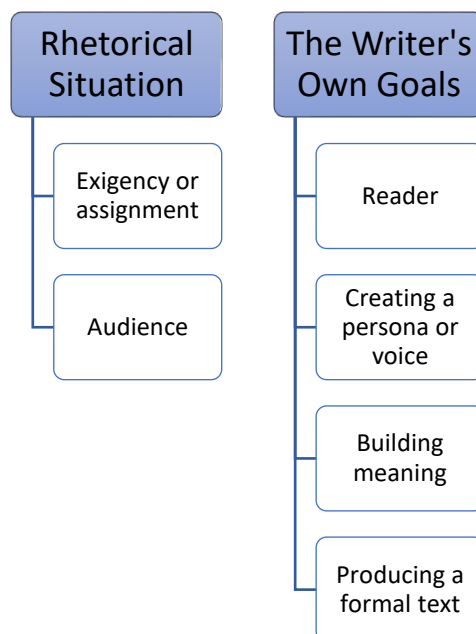

Figure 1:Rhetorical problems
Source: Flower and Hayes (1980)

Challenges in Academic Writing
When it comes to academic writing, challenges are faced both by the learners as well as the teachers. Bryne (1988) categorised writers' difficulties into (a) Linguistic Difficulty, (b)

Physiology Difficulties(writes thinking, no interaction with reader) and also (c) Cognitive difficulty. Linguistic difficulty refer to the language forms and functions used in the writing. This is also supported by Moses & Mohamad (2019) who also reported that many writers felt that they lack of vocabulary, are weak at grammar and spelling. Next, physiology difficulties refer to difficulties writers face as they felt they could not interact with the readers. Cognitive difficulties refer to the writers' problem to transfer their though processes into written form. Next, writing teachers too face difficulties. Moses & Mohamad (2019) reported that some writing teachers found it hard to motivate students to write. Also, they found it difficult to focus as there are many different levels of students in the class. Many students lack interest and motivation to write.

Past Studies

Different writers face different types of writing difficulties when they write. The study by Fadda (2012) explored the difficulties that King Saud University students encounter when learning to write academic English. The study is also done to differentiate between students' learning needs and objectives. The sample consisted of 50 postgraduate students enrolled in King Saud University during the academic year 2009-2010. Analysis of the data showed that English as a second language (ESL) students face many difficulties and stresses in their academic writing, such as difficulty 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.

This study by Stapa, Tengku Mohd Maasum, and Abdul Aziz (2014) investigated the problems in writing research proposal introductions by novice ESL academic writers in a local university in Malaysia. After identifying the problems, the students were introduced to an approach in academic writing namely the genre approach. The study employs a qualitative research design using action research. The sample of the study is a group of 22 second year students majoring in English language Studies at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. They are currently attending a course on Research Methodology whereby they are required to write a research proposal at the end of the course. The instruments for the study were (a) A collection of 22 research proposal introductions, (b)Genre-based materials for the intervention, and (c) A collection of 22 research proposal introductions after the intervention. Findings revealed that . Using this approach it is found that the problems in writing research proposals' introductions were minimised, and by using this approach the students were able to write more clear and effective introductions.

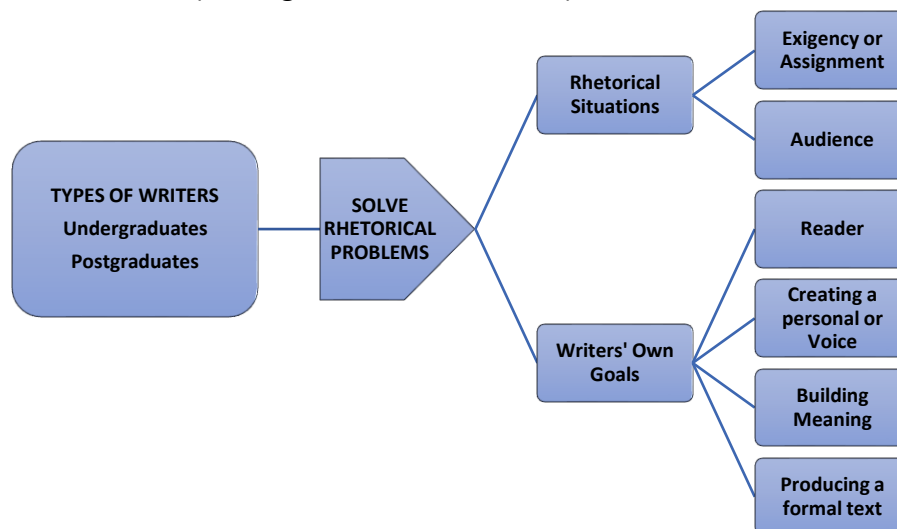Conceptual Framework (Solving Rhetorical Problems)

Figure 2-Conceptual Framework of the Study: How Different Types of Writers Solve Rhetorical Problems in Academic Writing
Source: Flower and Hayes (1980)

The conceptual framework of the study is presented in figure 2 above. This framework is rooted from the theory of rhetorical problems by Flower and Hayes (1980). This study is done to explore how different types of writers' way to attend to their rhetorical problems when they write. According to Flower and Hayes (1980), there are two types of rhetorical problems; and they are (a) rhetorical situations and (b) writers' own goals.

(c) Rhetorical Situation

1.1.c.1 Assignment-How writers perceive the topic/needs/requirements of the writing assignment.

1.1.c.2 Audience-The efforts of the writer to communicate with the audience

(d) Writers' Own Goals

1.1.d.1 Reader- The effects that the writer wishes the readers to have upon reading what they wrote.

1.1.d.2 Personal or voice-This involves the writer's effort to make the text clear to the reader. It involves the use of voice and tone of the writer.

1.1.d.3 Build meaning-This is the writer's attempt to build coherency of the ideas to make meaning clear.

1.1.d.4 Formal text- This includes using the proper conventions of writing.

Methodology

This section discus the research design. Population, sample, instrument, method of data collection and analysis. This qualitative case study explored students' difficulties in writing. This case study aims to comprehend students" difficulties in essay writing which occurred in natural events, i.e. teaching and learning process in the classroom. Therefore, the researcher administered open ended questionnaire results in order to reveal students' problems in essay writing. The population of this study is academic writers from different levels of study. Purposeful sample was done on three writers; undergraduate, postgraduate pursuing a master programme and postgraduate pursuing a doctoral programme. The instrument used for this study is a set of open-ended questions. There are six questions and

the questions are constructed to mirror the main components in Flower and Hayes (1980) rhetorical problem. Data is collected from the students' written responses in the open-ended questions. The responses are categorized into six themes; assignment, audience, reader, persona, meaning and text. In addition to that, data presented is categorized into problems in writing faced by (a) undergraduate, (b)postgraduate-masters and (c) postgraduate-doctoral students.

Findings
Introduction
This section discusses the findings based on the two research questions presented. Data is presented according to the level of the writers (undergraduate, postgraduate-masters and postgraduate- doctoral). The data is also sub-categorised based on the six themes to fit into the two research questions.

Rhetorical Situation
RQ1: How do writers attend to   rhetorical situation in their writing?
During academic writing, different categories of writers attend to the (a) assignment and (b) the audience in varying ways.

(e)   Assignment

Category of student	Writing Problem
Undergraduate	The writer focuses on the "topic", "meaning of the topic" and then proceed to "search for articles" for the content.
Postgraduate- Masters	Look for materials
Postgraduate- Doctoral	"what" to write, think of potential ideas, "planning", plan "objective of writing", "significance"

Table 1- Problems with Assignment

Table 1 presents the problems that students face with "assignment". The undergraduate student focused on the topic at the initial stage. Both the undergraduate and postgraduate - masters' students focused on looking for materials. However, the postgraduate-doctoral student chose to approach the assignment from a bird's eye view. She preferred to make plans about the assignment from the beginning.

(f)   Audience

Category of student	Writing Problem
Undergraduate	The writer uses "attention grabber"
Postgraduate- Masters	be neutral when writing
Postgraduate- Doctoral	Be creative, focus on how to expand idea, use simple and easy language

Table 2- Problems with Audience

A summary of problems with audience by all the three writers is portrayed in Table 2 above. Both the undergraduate and postgraduate-doctoral writers used creativity to capture the

attention of their audience. However, postgraduate writers chose simple and neutral use of language.

Writers' Own Goals
RQ2: How are writers' goals used to solve writing difficulties?

In order to solve writing difficulties, the writers focus on writers' goals such as (a) communicating with the reader, (b) improving on the personal and (c) focusing on creating meaning to improve on the (d) written text.

(g)   Reader

Category of student	Writing Problem
Undergraduate	To avoid using "words that are too heavy or complicated", shorten sentences
Postgraduate-Masters	Making thesis statement clear
Postgraduate-Doctoral	Have proper "plan", sketch ideas, for reader to understand-clear-cut introduction

Table 3- Problems related to reader

When the writers were asked what they did in their writing to consider their reader (table 3), the undergraduate writer focused on using less complicated words ad shorter sentences. The postgraduate -masters writer focused on making the thesis statement clear; while the postgraduate-doctoral preferred to make a "proper plan".

(h)   Persona

Category of student	Writing Problem
Undergraduate	When faced with difficulty to use accurate words, writer will consult friends, or the Thesaurus, and also online
Postgraduate-Masters	Use words synonym to represent intended word, properly define the word
Postgraduate-Doctoral	Problem to choose relevant words, to solve-look for synonym, refer to related text as reference (scaffolding)

Table 4- Problems related to persona

Figure 4 presents the findings about problems related to persona. All three writers found that the main problem was finding the relevant words. They preferred to look for synonym of the words.

Meaning (c)

Category of student	Writing Problem
Undergraduate	Focus on writing clear thesis statement and conclusion
Postgraduate-Masters	By stating point of view, elaborate each point
Postgraduate-Doctoral	Proper planning helps, be mindful about language and sentence structures, arrangement of ideas,

Table 5- Problems related to meaning

When asked what the writers did to get meaning across (table 5), the undergraduate writer focused on improving aspects of the writing-for example the thesis statement and conclusion. The postgraduate-masters focused on elaboration of the points while the postgraduate-doctoral writer focused on language and sentencing skills as well as arrangement of ideas.

(i) Text

Category of student	Writing Problem
Undergraduate	Group discussion, get different perspectives from peers, use more credible articles
Postgraduate-Masters	Use citation, add conclusion based on previous studies
Postgraduate-Doctoral	Refer to several references, valid reasons, before writing read articles or text beforehand so that it is easier to align the ideas and come up with a good one

Table 6-Problems related to the text

The three writers were asked about problems related to the text. Findings (Table 6) revealed that the undergraduate writer chose to solve the problem by having group discussion with his/her peers. This is to allow him/her to gain different perspectives. Both postgraduate-masters and postgraduate-doctoral chose to refer to relevant references to make sure the content is appropriate to their text.

Conclusion
Summary of Findings and Discussions
Rhetorical Situations
Compared to the undergraduate writers, postgraduate-doctoral student chose to approach the assignment from a bird's eye view. She preferred to make plans about the assignment from the beginning. This study revealed that the postgraduate writers chose simple and neutral use of language. The study by Fadda (2012) also found that postgraduate writers had problem with choice of words when they wrote.

Writers' Own Goals
All three writers found that the main problem was finding the relevant words. They preferred to look for synonym of the words. This is also agreed by Stapa, Tengku Mohd Maasum, and Abdul Aziz (2014) who found that writers found it difficult when it comes to choice of words to use. When it comes to meaning making, the undergraduate writer focused on improving

aspects of the writing-for example the thesis statement and conclusion. The postgraduate-masters focused on elaboration of the points while the postgraduate-doctoral writer focused on language and sentencing skills as well as arrangement of ideas. Findings also revealed that the undergraduate writer chose to solve the problem by having group discussion with his/her peers to gain different perspectives. Postgraduate writers chose to refer to relevant references to make sure the content is appropriate to their text.

This case study has revealed an interesting way for different types of writers respond to the rhetorical problems. The study by Ibrahim, Rahmat, Daut (2017) also showed that undergraduates and postgraduates use different strategies when they wrote. Undergraduate attend to rhetorical problems by focussing on what needs to be improved. Bowen (2012) also found that undergraduate students focus on content addition in their writing, they could get by with some errors in the form of grammar, typos, spelling and even documentation. On the other hands, Mu(2007) said that the major hindrance for postgraduates is the background and rhetoric of writing. In general, the postgraduates attended to rhetorical problems from a birds' eye view and make plans way before they began writing. Previous findings have shown that writers at the undergraduate level and postgraduate level use different strategies when they wrote. Perhaps the different strategies are the reasons why these writers solve rhetorical problems.

Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions for future Research
The teaching of writing needs to be done at many different levels. Aripin & Rahmat (2021) reported that planning, monitoring and evaluating play significant role to guide writers produce a good text. There are times, writing teachers focus on expanding ideas. Other times, the focus is on sentencing skills and choice of words. There are times when the focus is more on the content organization and less on language. The teaching of writing needs to cater for the "how: as much as the "what" to write. The teaching of writing should also include problem solving skills to equip writers to solve their own writing problem in future. It is recommended that future research look into how different types of writing instruction influence writers in different ways. More qualitative studies to look into what goes on the in the mind of writers when they encounter problems and how they solve the problems.

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