WRITING FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES: PROBLEMS FOR NOVICE RESEARCHERS

Research writing skills are much needed by academics, researchers and postgraduate students, and to some extent by undergraduates. However, despite initiation into the research community through reading of journal articles and research-related courses, the research report genre is a problem for novice researchers. This study examined the research writing difficulties of beginners in research, those of undergraduates attempting their final year projects, in terms of their development in knowledge of the research topic, organisation of research ideas, and ability to use research language. The research writing of 60 undergraduates was tracked from their first proposed research question through to the preparation of a mock proposal and the final report. The data were analysed using the genre analysis framework formulated based on Weissberg and Buker (1990). The development of the research knowledge was reflected in a move away from dwelling on general factors and problems towards specific aspects of a research phenomenon. As for the structure of the research report, the most difficult sections were found to be the introduction/literature review and discussion/conclusions arising from an inability to situate the research problem in the wider context and to see implications of the results respectively. These sections had a 'catalogue-style' effect where pieces of information were presented in isolation. Unfamiliarity with research writing conventions such as referring readers to tables and citations was common in the research writing analysed. The findings suggested that the underlying problems could be the conceptualisation of research as mere data collection and inadequate immersion in the research community.

Researcher
Dr Ting Su Hie