

Students' Perception and Their Accomplishment in Essay Writing Class

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Abstract—Writing is one of four skills learnt in English learning. It becomes a significant skill in the higher education since students are required to produce many types of essays in this level of education. Yet, some students stated that they have difficulty in essay writing class. Thus, the researcher conducted this study to reveal students' perception and accomplishment in their essay writing class. This study is a mix qualitative quantitative study in the form of case study. There were twenty-seven Agribusiness students who became the participant of this study. The study was conducted at Language Training Center of Yogyakarta Muhammadiyah University. The instruments for collecting the data were interview guidelines and students' paper writing final exam score. Based on the interview, 40.76% students stated that their highest difficulty was in discovering ideas, 14.81% students stated that brainstorming (pre-writing) was their highest difficulty, 14.81% students stated that organizing the idea is their highest difficulty and the rest, 29.62% students stated that writing the first draft became their hardest part of writing process. Whereas for the paper writing final exam score, introduction was the aspect that had the lowest score. While three aspects of mechanics (spelling, punctuation and capitalization) got the highest score.

Keywords—*perception, accomplishment, essay writing class*

I. INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of four skills learnt in English learning. It becomes a significant skill in the higher education since students are required to produce many types of essays in this level of education. Slightly different to the lower level of English classes where the writing is usually about simple topic, English writing in university is more academic and complex. The types of required essay to be written also more complex than lower English level.

Anticipating the high need of academic writing, Language Training Center held a course entitled Essay Writing since 2015/ 2016 academic year. This course is a course in the blended curriculum in which the students have to pass four previous courses. Students are expected to be able to write five types of essay namely descriptive essay, comparison and contrast essay, cause and effect essay, argumentative essay and reaction essay. Having passed the four previous courses, the students are expected to have good grammar, rich vocabulary and good writing skill. Yet, some students complained that this course is quite hard for them. So, the researcher conducted this study to reveal students' perception on which parts of the writing process became their highest difficulty and how are students' accomplishments in their essay writing class.

A. Writing

Writing is a means of communication to speak to other people. It can be done on papers or computer screen. Meyers in [1] states writing as a way to produce language you do naturally when you speak. Writing is also an action- a process of discovering and organizing your ideas, putting them on a paper and revising and reshaping them. Writing is a complex process. The writers plan a little, put words on paper, stop to plan when we want to say next, go back and change a sentence, and change our minds altogether. It is in line with Palmer in [2] who says that writing is recursive. It goes back and forth. Whereas. Boardman in [3] states that writing is a continuous process of thinking and organizing, rethinking and reorganizing. Writing can be a powerful media to influence other people's minds and opinions

There are some steps in producing good writing. These are some steps written by Meyers in his book *Gateways to academic writing: Effective sentences, paragraph and essay*. They are:

1) Exploring idea

We do writing to express our ideas. Yet, students often do it reversely. They have to find ideas because they need to write. Thus, it is important to set the mind freely to discover what subjects they are going to write. Sometimes, the object is too broad or too narrow which make it difficult to write. It is better to revise it into an appropriate subject. The next step is deciding the purpose of the writing, whether it is to explain, persuade, entertain or to argue. The purpose of the writing will define the type of the essays and its elements. The last one is knowing your audience. It will influence the diction, the style, and other elements of the writing.

2) Pre Writing

After finding the ideas, the writing process is about to start. In this process, the writers may change their minds and wording to generate the ideas. The first thing to do is brainstorming, or listing thoughts that come to the brain. Brainstorming will ease us to do the writing because it will guide us during the writing process. Many ideas might come, so we need to do clustering to decide which ideas are in line with our subjects. We need to remove ideas that do not relate with the subject. Next step is starting the free writing where we simply write about the subjects without worrying about sentences, structure, spelling, logic and grammar.

3) Organizing

In this step we need to return to the pre writing and do the following:

- a) Underline or highlight the ideas in the brainstorming, put related ideas, add more ideas and remove unrelated ideas.
- b) Choose the part of the clustering diagram that has the best ideas. Do a second clustering diagram that explore the ideas in greater details. Ignore the parts of the original diagram that are not related to your choice
- c) Circle or highlight the best parts of your free writing
- d) Outline

4) *Writing the first draft*

Some steps for drafting can be stated as follows.

- a) Say something about before you write in
- b) Write fast by hand or computer
- c) Use only one side of the paper
- d) Leave wide margins and double space to make room for changes
- e) Save your work every five or ten minutes in your computer

5) *Revising the draft*

Revising means improving what you have written by examining how well the first draft delivering the ideas and achieve the purposes. In this step we may re- arrange ideas, develop further ideas, remove unsupported ideas and change the wording.

6) *Producing the final copy*

There are two steps in producing the final copy. The first is editing. It requires careful checking on grammar, word choice, verb forms, punctuation and spelling. Re- read the paper and re- print with all correction. This draft must represent the writer's best effort. The second is proof reading. It means read your writing more carefully to check the revisions and editorial changes were made correctly.

B. *Perception*

Richards & Schmidt in [4] stated that perception is the ways the learners recognize and understand events, objects, and stimuli by using the senses such as sight, hearing, touch, etc. Recognizing the events or stimuli might be different from one learner to another. In comprehending the events, objects, or stimuli, a learner has tendency whether he or she is better to understand something by seeing of the things, hearing the sounds, or touching the things. Thus, it will lead to the insight that a learner has a variety of ways in comprehending something.

Reid cited in Nichols [5] explains that perception as the process of justification of the beliefs on certain objects. In this process, people might give arguments to what they see as the way they perceive the things. Moreover, the beliefs will lead them to accept something as it is. The process of perceiving something through the senses such as hearing, sight, and touching. In short, this process includes the application of concept to the intentional object of perception. From the definition above, it can be concluded that perception is the way that the learners can do in processing the events, objects or stimuli through recognizing, understanding and interpreting them by using the senses.

There are three types of perception as proposed by Richards & Schmidt [4]. they are visual perception, auditory

perception, and speech perception. However, there are only two perceptions will be discussed. First is visual perception. It refers to the perception of visual information or stimuli. Rookes & Wilson in [6] explain that visual perception is the most common type done by people which include eyes as the media and becomes the crucial sense of human. The process of visual perception is divided into two categories which are top down and bottom- up processing. Top down processing refers to the way of understanding the visual input by using the stored knowledge. Meanwhile, bottom- up processing is the way to reach comprehension by getting the information from the sensory input which then is transformed and combined.

The second type of perception is auditory perception. It refers to the perception of information or stimuli received through the ears. This requires the listeners to detect different kinds of acoustic signals and to judge differences between them according to the frequency, amplitude, duration, order of occurrence and the rate of speech.

Motivated from above explanation, this paper presents students' perception and their accomplishment in essay writing class. This paper uses is a mix qualitative quantitative study in the form of case study.

The rest of this paper is organized as follow: Section II describes proposed research method. Section III presents the obtained results and following by discussion in section IV. Finally, Section V concludes this work.

II. PROPOSED METHOD

This study was conducted from May 2018 to June 2018. The research was carried out at Language Training Center of Yogyakarta Muhammadiyah University. The participants in this study were the fourth semester of Agribusiness students in the Faculty of Agriculture in Yogyakarta Muhammadiyah University. There were 27 students who consist of 26 students who had taken Free Conversation class in the previous semester and 1 student who had already taken Essay writing class in the previous semester but he failed the class. This research used two instruments namely interview and data analysis in obtaining the data. During the interviews, the students' answers were written down and recorded to make sure no misunderstanding happen.

This study on students' perception of the writing process in essay writing class and their accomplishment in the essay writing class is a mix quantitative qualitative research in the form of case study. The descriptive study used interviews and data analysis for the data collection. The interview was used to obtain the information about the students' perception of the writing process in the essay writing class. Whereas data analysis is used to know the students' accomplishment in the essay writing class. Yin in [7] stated that defines a case study as a qualitative approach which investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real- life context and the boundaries between phenomenon and context that are not clearly seen. The researcher intentionally intended to cover the contextual conditions which are highly relevant to the phenomenon under this study to discover meaning, to investigate processes, and to gain insight into and in- depth understanding of an individual group and situation.

III. RESULTS

The researcher conducted semi- structured interview to the students to know the students’ perception toward the process of writing in the essay writing class. Interview was chosen to get in- depth data. The students were asked which part of writing became the main difficulty. The students reflected their writing process for five types of essay they have done. The result of the interview is given in Table I as follows.

TABLE I. STUDENTS’ PERCEPTION OF THE ESSAY WRITING PROCESS

Parts of writing	Number of students	Percentage
Exploring ideas	11	40.76%
Pre- writing	4	14.81%
Organizing	4	14.81%
Writing the first draft	8	29.62%
Revising the draft	0	0
Total	27	100%

From the Table I above, 40.76% students stated that the hardest part of the writing was discovering the ideas. The students said that they had difficulty in finding the ideas to write, meanwhile 14.81% students said that the brainstorming which was part of pre writing became the main problem. They had difficulties in deciding what ideas were best- related to their subject and which were not, meanwhile 14.81 % students found that organizing was an obstacle for them to produce smooth and coherent writing. It was mostly caused by the jumped ideas that they directly wrote in their first writing, meanwhile 29.62% students stated that writing the first draft was the step that took the biggest time during the writing process. No students stated that revising the draft became their difficulty.

The researcher also did data analysis from the students’ paper writing final exam score. The result of the data analysis can be seen in Table II.

TABLE II. STUDENTS’ PAPER WRITING FINAL EXAM SCORE

Students	Introduction	Body	Conclusion	Organization	Style			Mechanics		
					Sentence flow	Variety	Diction	Spelling	Punctuation	Capitalization
1	6	6	6	5	6	4	4	7	8	8
2	4	5	5	4	5	3	4	5	6	8
3	4	4	4	4	3	3	3	6	6	7
4	8	8	7	8	8	9	9	9	10	10
4	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	10	10	10
5	5	5	5	5	6	5	5	5	5	5
6	7	8	8	7	7	7	7	8	8	9
7	4	5	4	5	3	4	4	7	7	7
8	5	6	5	7	5	6	5	8	7	8
9	6	7	7	5	4	5	5	8	8	8
10	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
11	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	6	6	5
12	4	5	4	5	5	5	6	7	8	7
13	6	6	7	7	6	7	7	9	8	8
14	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
15	9	7	8	8	8	8	8	9	9	8
16	7	7	7	7	8	7	7	7	7	7
17	5	6	6	6	5	6	6	7	8	8
18	6	8	7	7	8	8	8	9	9	9
19	7	6	8	7	7	8	8	8	9	8
20	5	5	6	5	6	6	7	8	8	7
21	4	4	5	6	6	6	6	7	7	7
22	8	8	9	8	8	7	7	9	9	9
23	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	6	5	5
24	5	6	7	7	6	7	7	8	7	7
25	7	8	8	7	6	7	6	9	9	8
26	7	8	7	7	8	7	7	9	8	9
TOTAL	161	171	173	169	167	169	170	209	209	209

From the Table II above, it could be seen that the highest score is at all aspects mechanic which consist of spelling, punctuation and capitalization. The second highest was conclusion. The third was the body of the essay. The fourth was diction. The fifth is variety and organization. The sixth was sentence flow and the introduction part had the lowest score.

IV. DISCUSSION

Based on our review and study result, it is found that discovering ideas is the biggest difficulty faced by the students. It may come from the wide topics that can be chosen. Teachers may minimize the difficulty by providing some topics to be chosen or giving an area to be discussed. Although it may limit the writing topics yet it will guide them to decide what topic they are going to write.

Whereas from the students’ paper writing final exam, it is found that the lowest score is for introduction. Some students stated that they are confused in starting the essay. Most of them have no idea how to write a good hook to arouse the readers’ interest. Thus they simply write the point of the topic which actually should be written in the body.

The second lowest is the sentence flow. The students still have difficulties in making coherence paragraphs. Their sentences are fairly good but it jumps from one sentence to another. Thus, the researcher suggests to essay writing teacher to explain and give more exercise to the students in using connectors.

The third lowest is the variety and organization. The students used the same term over and over in the essay. The

fourth is diction. Although one of the expected ability from essay writing students is having rich vocabulary, the students still have difficulty in choosing the most appropriate terms, It will be helpful to advise them to use thesaurus so they may find various terms to be used in their writing.

On the other hand, the second highest is conclusion. Most of the students are able to write a good conclusion of their essay. The highest score that are at all aspects of mechanics indicate that most of the students are good in writing mechanic. They know how to spell the words correctly and use punctuation and capitalization correctly.

V. CONCLUSION

This paper has presented students' perception and their accomplishment in essay writing class. From the findings, it can be concluded that writing a good introduction needs bigger attention from the teacher. Interesting hook will arouse the readers' interest to read the whole paragraph. The sentence flow also needs to be given more exercise in producing coherence sentences.

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