

Students' Difficulties in Writing English
(A Study at The Third Semester Students of English Education Program
At University of Bengkulu Academic Year 2011-2012)

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ABSTRACT

The title of this study was “Students Difficulties in Writing English”, which was aimed at knowing the students’ difficulties in writing English at third semester students. The population of this research was the whole students at third semester in University of Bengkulu, they were 79 students. All of them are taken as a sample of this research. The data of this research were obtained by using the test of writing a composition, which was scored by using ESL Composition Profile suggested by Jacobs, ET all (1981). Writing difficulties at the third semester varied in the result of the students’ score. The writing difficulty related to the linguistics difficulty (language use and vocabulary aspects) was most difficult one compare to the Cognitive Difficulty (organization and mechanics aspects) and Physiology Difficulty (content aspect) as well.

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is a method of representing language in visual form. Writing systems use sets of symbols to represent the sounds of speech, and may also have symbols for such things as punctuation and numerals. According to Lado (1964), Writing is a partial representation of Units of language expression. In academic work, students are often expected to give definitions of key words and phrases in order to demonstrate to their tutors that they understand these terms clearly. Academic writers generally, however, define terms so that their readers understand exactly what is meant when certain key terms are used. When important words are not clearly understood misinterpretation may result.

It is not enough for all the students just focus on oral communication, but they also need to master writing in target language. Linse (2005) stated writing is productive skills because the focus is on producing information. However when they are writing, they clearly have more time to think about what they want to say than they are speaking. This is why their sentences need to be correct. It is supported by Oshima and Hogue (1997), Writing is a progressive activity. This means that when the students first write something down, they have already been thinking about what they are going to say and how they are going to say it.

In English study program of Bengkulu University, Writing I is given at second semester, Writing II is given at third semester, Writing III at fourth semester, Writing IV at fifth semester and the last Academic Writing will give in sixth semester. In writing course, students learn about how to write in English to increase students' skill in writing and to develop ideas into written form.

The ability of third semester students' in writing English is good enough, although they still have weaknesses in terms of grammar, vocabulary and some other skills that should be owned by the student in writing. In fact, based on my discussion with one of the lecturers who teaches at this semester, the students still have difficulties in building sentences. The students' difficulties in writing English can be influenced by lack of many vocabularies, and grammar, lack of written exercises and ideas. It is supported by Sulasti (2003), The problems that they mostly face are about how to write, what to be written, and lack of vocabulary words as well as incompetence in structure.

2. LITERATURE

2.1 The Definition of Writing

Writing is one way to express ideas, experiences and feeling into written form. This statement is supported by Finocchiaro (1974), students' should be encouraged to express their ideas, experiences, thoughts, and feeling. Nunan (1989) said that Writing is not a natural activity. Physically and mentally, normal people learn to speak a language. According to Dumais (1988), writing in English is meant to fill the gap that exists between the ability to express ideas, feelings, opinions, and others in Indonesia and the ability to express the same things in written form in English. It means that by written forms, someone can express ideas and sense more correctly. In writing we have to choose the good and right words and phrases, and must follow the proper structure.

In mastering writing, students need to practice and counseling from the teachers. In writing, the students try to use English in oral form as well. Writing can be satisfying if we master vocabulary, grammar, punctuation and idiom. According to Zulfani (2001), writing can help students to make stronger by adding more grammatical structures, idioms, and vocabulary, as the important thing in learning a language. According to Asmuti (2002), by mastering writing skill, the writers can elaborate their ideas in a systematic arrangement. Before writing, the writers need to think how the ideas of the writers can be understood by the reader. The writers have to use the correct written language, so the reader can understand the ideas of the writer.

According to Heaton (1975), varied skills are necessary for good writing which can be grouped into five general components or main areas.

1. Language use : the ability to write correct and appropriate sentences
2. Mechanical skills: the ability to use correctly those conventions peculiar to the written language, for example punctuation, and spelling
3. Treatment of content: the ability to think creatively and develop thoughts, excluding all irrelevant information
4. Stylistic skills: the ability to manipulate sentences and paragraphs, and use language effectively
5. Judgment skills: the ability to write in an appropriate manner for a particular purpose with a particular audience in mind, together with an ability to select, organize and order relevant information.

2.2 Definition of Grammar

Grammar is also one of English language component that must be learnt and understood by students. According to Nunan (2003), Grammar is generally thought to be a set of rules specifying the correct ordering of words at the sentence level. It is a very basic knowledge and an important tool for students to master English. It is a science that teaches students how to speak, to read, and to write

English correctly. Besides, by learning grammar the students will know about system of language so they will be able to compose words into meaningful sentences.

2.3 The Characteristics of Writing

According to Ur (1996), there are 8 characteristics of writing skill:

1. Permanent, it means that the form of discourse is fixed and stable, we however can read it in any condition we want to.
2. Explicit, it means that there must be clarity about the context and reference. The writer must be careful for arranging the form of words, so readers are directed to the same interpretation about the written work.
3. Density, the information that will be given to the reader are translated effectively. The use of repetition words are rarely found in the written form. It is very different to spoken language.
4. Detachment, the writer must have an ability to predict their readers reaction about their writing, because the writer doesn't interact directly to the reader
5. Organization, the writer usually has an opportunity to edit the written work before it is available to be read. So the written work tends to be organized and well purposed
6. Slowing of production, speed and reception are slower than spoken
7. Standard Language, it is usually acceptable for a varied language
8. A learnt skill, it must be learnt and thought to acquire the skill

2.4 Difficulties in Writing English

Like all learning problems, difficulties in writing can be devastating to a student's education. Heaton (1975) stated that writing skill is complex and sometimes it is difficult to teach. Requiring

mastery are not only of grammatical and rhetorical devices but also of conceptual and judgmental elements. As students' progress, they are increasingly expected to express what they know about many different subjects through writing. If a student fails to develop certain basic skills, he will be unable to write with the speed and fluency required to excel as these demands increase. Indeed, for a student's struggling with a writing problem, the writing process itself interferes with learning. Students faced with such difficult odds have trouble staying motivated.

The basic point that makes writing difficult is the use of language aspect or ability in written likes punctuation, spelling, grammatical, vocabulary and so on. According to Jordan (1997), writing is often confusing with the process of putting words down on paper in the same structure as an outline prepared with appropriate style and vocabulary the major ideas arranged in some often on the correction of mechanical and grammatical errors.

Bryne (1988) divided the problems that make writing difficult into three categories. The first is Linguistic Difficulty. Linguistics aspect like grammar, vocabulary, language use and choice of sentence in writing must have fully monitoring. The second is Physiology Difficulty, which more focuses on the writer's difficulty because there aren't direct interaction and feedback from the reader when they are writing. This difficulty more focuses on difficulty in develop written material or content of composition. The third is cognitive difficulty. Writing has to be thought through formal instruction like spelling, punctuation, capitalization and paragraphing.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This research used the descriptive method to find out the students difficulties in writing English at the third semester students of English Education Study Program of UNIB in Academic Year 2011/2012.

3.2 Population

The population of this research was the whole students of the third semester English Education Study Program of UNIB in Academic Year 2011/2012. The number of population 79 students.

3.3 Sample

The samples of this research were the third semester students of English Education Study Program of UNIB in Academic Year of 2011/2012. There are 2 classes of the third semester students. Class A consists of 40 students and Class B consists of 39 students. All of them are taken as a sample of this research. (*See table 1*)

Table 1.

NO	CLASSES	POPULATION
1	A	40
2	B	39
TOTAL		79

3.4 Data Collection

The data were collected by giving the task to the students to write down a paragraph. Then the data were gathered from students and analyzed by the researcher.

3.5 Instrument

The instrument of this research was a writing test. The researcher asked the students to write a paragraph.

The instruments are:

1. “Please write a paragraph about University of Bengkulu”
2. “Make a paragraph about your last holiday”

3.6 Data Analysis

After all of the data is collected, each piece of writing was read by the researcher. The data collected is various and the data needs depend on the focus of the research. After the data are gathered, the researcher was doing the correction of the test.

The data of the writing test was analyzed by the ESL Composition. Profile suggested by Jacobs ET in Nurjana (2002). The grading of the composition is clarified about:

A. Content

- Excellent to very good (25-28)

The content mostly relevant to the subject of writing. The students had some knowledge of the subject. In this case the students had more than three references or relevant information about the subject of writing.

- Good to average (24-21)

The students had three references or relevant information about the subject of writing.

- Fair to poor (20-17)

The students had less than three references or relevant information about the subject of writing.

- Very poor (16-13)

The students did not have references or relevant information about the subject of writing.

B. Organization

- Excellent to very good (20-18)

The organization of the students' composition had logical support, the main ideas were very noticeable, and the sequences were complete. In this case one paragraph consists of more than three sentences.

- Good to average (17-14)

The organization of the students' composition had limited logical support. In this case, only three sentences in a paragraph. The sequences were complete and the main ideas were very noticeable.

- Fair to poor (13-10)

The organization of the students' composition had limited logical support. In this case only three sentences in a paragraph, but the sequences were in complete and the main ideas were not noticeable.

- Very poor (9-7)

The organization of the students' composition had limited logical support. In this case less than three sentences in a paragraph and than the sequences were in complete and the main ideas were not noticeable.

C. Language Use

- Excellent to very good (25-22)

- The language use in students' composition was effective and it was not problem in complex construction, tense, number, article, pronoun, and preposition Good to average (21-18)

Actually this condition was indicating by the students had mistakes in complex construction, tense, number, article, pronoun, and preposition. In this case, the mistake was not more than five points.

- Fair to poor (17-11)

Mistakes in complex construction, tense, number, article, pronoun, and preposition was not more than ten points.

- Very poor (10-5)

Mistakes in complex construction, tense, number, article, pronoun, and preposition more than ten points.

D. Vocabulary

- Excellent to very good (20-18)

Consisted of adequate range, there are not regular errors or mistakes of word/idiom form, choice of word and usage.

- Good to average (17-14)

Consisted of adequate range, regular errors or mistakes of word/idiom form choice of word and usage was not more than five points.

- Fair to poor (13-10)

Consisted of adequate range, regular errors or mistakes of word/idiom form choice of word and usage was not more than ten points.

- Very poor (9-7)

Consisted of adequate range, regular errors or mistakes of word/idiom form choice of word and usage more than ten points.

E. Mechanic

- Excellent to very good (5)

There were not regular errors or mistakes of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing in the composition and the meaning was not made difficult to see or understand.

- Good to average (4)

Occasional errors or mistake of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing was not more than five points.

- Fair to poor (3)

Frequent errors or mistake of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing was not more than ten points.

- Very poor (2)

Errors or mistakes of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing was more than ten points.

4. RESULTS

The data shows that the language use and vocabulary were the most difficult aspect for the students. In their composition in language use aspect there were still major problem in arrangement, tense, number, word order/ of fragments, deletion and meaning confused or obscured. In vocabulary aspect, the students composition still limited range, frequent error in choice of words and the meaning confuse obscured. In content aspect, most of students have criteria Good to Average. It could be inferred that most students did not have problem or difficulties in content aspect. Organization and Mechanic aspects were easy for the students. The students have Good to Average criteria in this aspects, even though several students have Fair to Poor criteria. The fact told us that students' composition loosely organizes but main ideas stand out, limited support, logical but incomplete sequencing.

Discussion

The difficulties of writing consist of three categories according to Bryne (1988). There are difficulties in Physiology (content aspect), Linguistics (language use and vocabulary), and Cognitive difficulty (organization and mechanics). The students' difficulties varied as indicated by scores or criteria of writing test.

From the result, it can be said that the most difficult aspect that were found in the students' writing is the language use and vocabulary aspects, and conversely they found no difficulties in organization, mechanic, and content. Why is it categorized to the most difficult? Because most of the student have criteria of pair to poor and very poor. It makes a sense if the students most difficulties in the language use. Bryne (1988) said that linguistic aspect like grammar, vocabulary, language use, and choice of sentences in writing must have fully monitoring, because English is a foreign language. As students' of non native country, language use always becomes a problem.

Not only for English language, even for Bahasa Indonesia, it known well that not all of Indonesian students' have skill in Bahasa Indonesia use.

The result of this research shows that the Physiology difficulty (in content aspect) not happened to the students. There are twenty five students who have negative criteria. In Cognitive difficulty which is consists of two aspects, organization, and mechanic not happened to the students'. There are only seventeen students' who have negative criteria. Especially in organization aspect, it means the students' have been trained enough to create understandable composition. This result just as Nurjana (2002), she said that the Linguistics difficulty was the most difficult aspect. On the Cognitive difficulty, it is found that more than half of students actually do not found difficulty.

In general, the writing difficulties related to the Linguistic difficulty (in Language Use and Vocabulary Aspects) were the most and dominant difficult aspect for the students, and then followed by writing difficulties related to the Cognitive difficulty (in Organization and Mechanic Aspects), and Physiology difficulty (in Content Aspect).

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

5.1. Conclusion

Based on the result of the research, the researcher found that the third semester students of English Department of FKIP University of Bengkulu have some difficulties in writing. Based on the data, the researcher has grouped the difficulties into the following term:

- ❖ Physiology Aspect (Content)
- ❖ Linguistics Aspect (Language use and Vocabulary)
- ❖ Cognitive Aspect (Organization and Mechanics)

Writing difficulties at the third semester varied in the result of the students' score. The writing difficulty related to the linguistics difficulty (language use and vocabulary aspects) was most difficult one compare to the Cognitive Difficulty (organization and mechanics aspects) and Physiology Difficulty (content aspect) as well

5.2. Suggestion

After discussing the result and making the conclusion, there were some suggestions for the students' at third semester, for the lecturer and also for the next researcher, as follows:

a. For the students:

1. It is found that the students' difficulties in writing English in language use aspect. It meant that they need to improve their ability in choosing the language use that related to their writing topic.
2. The students' have the difficulties in Vocabulary aspect, so they should increase their vocabulary by practicing in writing English. The students' should pay attention to the tense, vocabulary, punctuation etc.

b. For the lecturers:

1. The lecturers have to give the explanation about the language use itself and how to use the language related to the topic of writing.

c. The lecturers have to give more exercise in writing English to improve the students' ability in writing and the students' can increase their vocabulary by doing the exercise. For the next researcher:

The researcher think it would be better if the next researcher will investigate more about writing, especially difficulties in writing with different sample, or correlate it to other variable.

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