

TEACHING WRITING IN EFL CLASSROOM

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Abstract: Teaching writing in EFL classroom sometimes becomes a problem for the teacher. They are confused how to handle the class and where they have to start or end the class to fulfill the students' need. Incomplete language rule, lack of vocabulary, inadequate information to write, and the different competence in writing are some reasons why teaching writing sometimes leads to the teaching of writing not for writing. To avoid this problem, a teacher should know what they should do before, during and after the writing class to make the students to become a better writer.

Key words: teaching writing, EFL classroom

Writing class often becomes a burden for some students. They often think that writing is not interesting since they cannot express their idea easily. We can accept this phenomenon since writing is a common problem for them for several reasons such as: incomplete language rule, lack of vocabulary, and inadequate information to write. By having those problems writing is of course is a challenging lesson in the teaching learning process, especially for the teacher.

Despite having problem on the area of language and knowledge to write, the teachers may also face another problem, that is the students' various competence in writing which also need special attention from the teachers. In most writing classrooms, some of them are good but most others are still developing their skill. This competence is varied based on their previous exposure in this skill.

As a teacher, we often not surprised that our students competence in writing sometimes have positive correlation with their achievement on other subjects. For example, some students who have good competence on the language rule usually also have high intention to write outside the writing teaching learning context; for example, writing diary, or journal. Thus, they usually also have performance in writing class. In the contrary, some other students (and maybe most of the students) who have limited language competence usually also have low motivation to write outside the writing class context. Consequently, they have limited experience and insight on how to write a good writing product. Furthermore, writing competence cannot be developed automatically although they are at the same age or grade. According to Ghazi (.....) students pass through several developmental processes in writing as follows:

Stage 1

Novice Writer (unskilled, unaware, teacher-dependent writer)

- has little, if any, individual style

- has little awareness of writing process
- has undeveloped skills and techniques
- seeks approval from teacher
- is reluctant to revise any writing
- believes good writing comes easily

Stage 2

Transitional Writer (transitional, self-involved, self-delineating writer)

- needs support and coaching in order to develop
- learns from modeled behaviors
- is developing a degree of comfort with the craft
- is anxious to stand alone, yet is uncomfortable with peer collaboration
- is developing an awareness of personal needs, interests, and preoccupations

Stage 3

Willing Writer (peer-involved, willing writer)

- is able to collaborate well with others
- requires external feedback to shape progress
- is able to profit from criticism
- is developing objectivity concerning work
- enjoys practicing craft
- is developing a sensitivity to audience

Stage 4

Independent Writer (independent, autonomous writer)

- makes highly objective self-assessments
- has developed a sophisticated personal style
- has developed a writer's voice
- takes risks and experiments
- is self-motivating and self-aware as a writer
- is a craftsman

These differences in competence of course add the challenge for the writing teacher. In writing teaching learning process, sometimes the teacher may just do it following the book or conduct it just at what it is without understanding the principle underlying it. If it happens, it means that the teachers have misunderstood the teaching of writing in classroom context.

One example of teacher's misunderstanding on teaching writing is on the switching role the teaching writing for the teaching of grammar. Although many EFL students will have had some experience with paragraph and essay writing, they often will have quite poor writing skills at the sentence level. Run on and fragmented sentences are common errors frequently found in their writing product. Therefore, most teachers will concern on this aspect then they will take the students back to the sentence level and begin to teach them with the very basic structure and how to write simple. They believe that sentence level is the most important foundation in writing good paragraph or even an essay.

In addition, teachers need to emphasize that the teaching here is the teaching writing for writing since it has distinctive concept. Harmer (2007) states that teaching writing for writing is entirely different. Further he says that teaching writing is directed at developing the students' skill as writers. Teaching writing for writing is the teaching writing whose objective is to help students to become better writers and to learn how to write in various genres using different register. It means that the teaching writing is on this purpose not the other way around. As we know writing is often used as an integral part of a larger activity where the focus is on something else such as language practice, acting out, or speaking. For example, teachers often ask students to write short dialogues which they will then act out. The dialogues are often most useful if planned to practice, such as inviting or suggesting. Students work in pairs to make the dialogue and, where possible, the teachers goes to help them as they write. They now have something they can read out or act out in the class.

IMPORTANT AREAS IN WRITING

To avoid these misunderstanding, the teacher should know what actually the students need to help them to become a better writer. In general there are important areas that mostly needed by the students in writing classroom:

Language

Language is an important tool to express students' ideas. However, it usually becomes a problem for the students in completing the task since they only have limited number of vocabulary for example. It happens because they are still developing their competence in the target language. Here the students' language competence is mostly determined by their reading habit or how often they use those languages in daily usage. In addition, to produce a good writing product, there should be a good diction or certain expressions to use.

Ideas

Besides language, ideas are the most important aspect in writing. This information is mostly acquired by the students themselves outside the classroom context. In this case, reading a lot or the quantity of reading will also determine the quantity of their storehouse of knowledge to write. However, some students don't realize it so that when they are asked to write, they will get stuck and reluctant to write since they really can't find what they have to write.

Pattern and Scheme

Pattern and scheme are also important device for the students. The idea and the language are not enough for the students to complete the writing task. Writing has certain conventions to follow, for example in writing genre, an advertisement, a postcard, and a curriculum vitae will have different expression, tone and structure. This conventions must be mastered by the students before the complete the writing task since writing here is not refers to free writing style.

STRATEGIES OF TEACHING WRITING

Having reviewed these three students' necessity, the teacher must plan the strategy on how to teach them so that they can complete the writing task in the classroom well and gradually in the future can become a better writer. Harmer (2004) suggested some task which teachers have to perform before, during, and after students writing as follows:

Demonstrating

Demonstrating means teachers have to be able to draw certain features of writing to the students' attention. As we know that writing for classroom context is not a free writing style; however, it focuses on certain writing conventions and genre constrains in specific types of writing. In this case, a teacher needs to explain, present, and even discuss the concept as clearly as possible so that the teacher can bring the students interest on it. Here, the task of the teachers is not only make the students understand about the concept but they also have to make them be motivated and confident to write.

This task is very important in a writing class since some teachers sometimes explain the concept inadequately, for example, by discussing the a sample writing without elaborating the theory deeply so that the students don't have a clear picture about it. This point is very important to consider since most of the student of EFL only have limited grammar, vocabulary, and information to write. If this condition is combined by the unclear concept of writing style that they have to write, of course, they will reluctant to write. As a teacher we have to realize that how the students can write well if they don't know the pattern of certain type of writing to write. In addition, by having a good understanding about what they should write, it will improve their self confident of being able to write such writing.

Motivating and Provoking

Motivating and provoking means giving help to overcome the students' problems whenever it is needed. In EFL writing class, the common problem is that the students often getting stuck. They often "lost for words" to express their idea. When this happens, they usually spend long time searching for the answer. This condition sometimes makes the student get bored and break their concentration. As a result, they will often reluctant to continue their work in writing. In this situation the teachers' help is strongly needed to save the students stamina in writing. Here the teachers must give motivation to drag back their high intention to write at the first start. The motivation here can be in the form of directly the difficult words that they don't know to write due to their limited number of their vocabulary so that they will keep their interest in writing.

Another problem that is often faced by the students is the stuck due to the ideas. As we know that the most difficult part in writing is in prewriting activities which a good writer mostly spend his 85% of his time on. It also happens in EFL classroom where most of the students are in the first or second stage in the developing stage previously mention above. It is a common phenomenon which is not only happens for the beginner writer but also for the

professional writer. To overcome this problem, teachers may go to the class with prepared suggestions so that when the students get stuck they can immediately help rather than having themselves, to think of the ideas on the spot. The teachers can predict what the problems might be and anticipate the solution for it, for example, when we ask them to write descriptive paragraph or essay, we can provide the class with a lot of picture about certain object.

Finally the teachers also have to enthuse the students with the value of the task. Teachers can highlight the important of the task and persuade them what fun it can be. In conclusion, the teachers have to make those difficulties happening in the process of writing be easy and possible to conduct so that the class will run smoothly.

Supporting

The term 'support' is closely allied to the teachers' role as motivator and provoker mentioned before. It means that the teacher must function as a counsellor for the students. They must help and support the students whenever they need them. It also means that the teacher must reassure the students when they are doing the task of writing since the students may encounter several problems during the process of writing. As we know that the writing task in the class can be an under pressure activity for some students since when they are writing the task, they are not always in the good mood which is strongly needed for gathering the ideas or completing words to express their idea. Meanwhile, to produce a good writing product usually we need fresh physical condition so that we can concentrate and think brightly to get the ideas or even words. When the writing class is conducted in the last period for example, most students usually cannot reach the joy of writing since they are already tired, sleepy or hungry to accomplish the task. When the students are not fit to follow the class, they usually cannot express their idea optimally since the students' stamina will support their creativity in writing.

In addition to the physical condition, the students' low competence usually also determines their self-confident in writing. It is a common phenomenon that in writing class, there will be a lot of questions asked from the students such as questions related to the ideas or even a simple question about correctness of the words. For the teachers, those questions sound silly, but that is they who are really don't certain about. These questions may come and go during the teaching learning process. In this context, the teacher must come to give their hands to overcome the problems. Besides, as the counsellor the teacher must be very patient to answer every question proposed by the students. Remember if they ask a question, it means that they have already participated in the class. We need not to become angry to answer those questions, even the silly one since it is very human to make mistakes for everyone, including the students of writing class. Brown, H. Douglas (1987) states that human learning is fundamentally a process that involves the making of mistakes. In this condition the teacher must build the students' self-confidence and cheer up their spirit during the teaching learning process so that they will keep writing and smiling in the class.

Responding

The way we react to students' written work can be divided into two main categories, that of responding and that of evaluating. Responding here refers to the teacher's reaction to the content and construction of a piece supportively and often (but not always) makes suggestion for the improvement. It should be noted that in responding the students' work the teacher should not judge rudely, for example, by having a lot of red ink accusing for their weaknesses, for example, in the area of grammar or vocabulary. It is not a time for the teacher to blame their errors for their incomplete competence in writing.

Moreover, Elizabeth West (.....) states that good writing does not just happen, the best writers spend a great deal of time thinking, planning, rewriting, and editing." It means that it is very common for the students to make such mistakes during the writing task. The task of the teacher here is to respond to the content only in such a way that the students won't be ashamed when the teacher recognizes the weaknesses of their work. For Example, the students write a story about their holiday in a journal, the teacher can give comment to the student's work: Your holiday sound interesting, Annisa. I like a bit about running out of petrol but I didn't understand exactly who went and got some petrol. Could you possibly write and tell me on your next journal entry? In addition the teacher can also make comment about their use of language and suggest ways of improving it, for example, 'be careful with your past tense Andi!' It means that when we respond to the students' work at various stages, we will not be grading the work or judging it is a finished product, but this is done as a part of a process rather than part of an evaluation procedure.

Evaluating

Evaluating is different from responding. When we respond we may not judge the students' work; in other hand, when we evaluate it means that we try to measure on how well the students have done the task. At this step we can determine, whether the students' work is good or not, where they wrote well, where they make mistakes, in what areas they still make mistake, and even what grade they deserve to. Here the teacher can give a clear cut on their achievement without having inconvenience about their affect will be since it is already the final product. If they make mistakes, we can clearly and explicitly give comment on it. For example, when the students make mistakes on grammar, we can point them in detail showing each part of the mistakes by giving certain symbol for correction. We can also use marking scale or, selective correction and other way depending on the method of evaluation that we choose. Evaluation is still necessarily done since all of us, both the teacher and the students; want to know what standard we have reached. Although evaluation has explicit comment and may make the students fell uncomfortable, it still has benefit for the students.

From the students' side, evaluation can be used as a learning opportunity, in which the students can take the important comment as the improvement in developing their skill. By reviewing these notes, they can not only recognize but also search for the correct form so that they will not do the same thing in the

next task. However, this only occurs for the students who are willing to pay attention on their improvement, not just putting the teachers' note into garbage.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, as the teachers of writing, we should know what we should do in the classroom since it is a precious time for both the students and the teachers. We should not waste this important time by giving something inappropriate for their need. Although it is not time for the teachers cantered and the students' success is usually strongly determined by the students themselves, we as the teachers must be responsible for their development since the teachers' role is still strongly needed to help and assist them to be a better writer. By emphasizing the students' need and performing the task before, during, and after as mentioned above, hopefully we can be one of the craft men who contributed in their development to become a better writer.

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