

STUDENT'S ABILITY TO FORMULATE RESEARCH QUESTIONS: A STUDY OF INITIAL RESEARCH PROCESS IN PROPOSAL WRITING AT ENGLISH TEACHER EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Mochamad Imron Azami

Email: imron.azami@gmail.com

Universitas Ma'arif Hasyim Latief Sidoarjo

Abstract. The purpose of this study is to know the students' process in formulating research question in writing 4 (proposal) and also to know their reason why they choose that steps in formulating research question. This study used qualitative design and chooses descriptive methods to describe the data in this study. The researcher used interview guidelines gained the data through semi structured interview. This study used all of students in English Teacher Education Department in academic years 2012. The numbers of students in this study are 80 students. After gained the data from interview, the researcher used coding to classify the data, then used theory to assess whether the students' process in formulating research question is appropriate with the theory or not. The result shows that there are 7 types in formulating research question (from title, problem, journal, thesis, issue, topic and consulting to their lecturer). From each type, the researchers conclude that there was some students just follow 1 step in good process of formulating research question. There was one student just follow the first step (choose an interesting topic) in formulating research question. The others, just follow the second step (Do some preliminary research in your general topic). There was no student used all of good process in formulating research question. So the researchers conclude that there was no students at English Teacher Education Department Students follow good process in formulating research question.

Key Words: Research question, formulate research question, proposal

INTRODUCTION

This research presents qualitative data aimed to know students' ability how to formulate research question and the reasons why they chose that steps in formulated their research question. Ability means

students' process in formulating research question and then the reason means students' acknowledgement from question during the interview process. In concise, the purpose of this research identified students' variant step in formulating research question in writing 4 (Proposal) class and the reason why they chose that step.

In writing a thesis or proposal there is one thing which must be considered first before we write it. This thing is very important for writer before they accomplish writing process in research. It is also become measurement if the research proposal or thesis good or not. This thing is research problem. According to Creswell (2009):

“Many researchers begin a study by identifying a research problem that they need to address. The researchers write about this “problem” in the opening passages of their study and in effect, give you as a reader the rationale for why the study is important and why you need to read their study”.

In contrast, many of English Teacher Education Department students in UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya begin their proposal from title not research problem. According to preliminary research that the researcher did, from 63 students in seventh semester that have been taken writing 4 (proposal) in fifth semester, 31 students begin their proposal from title and the others from problem. Even though the student that begin their proposal by identifying the problem more than student that begin their proposal from title, this case proof that some of the students did not know that the good way how to begin the proposal starting from identifying the problem. Deciding the step in writing proposal can give effect for good quality of proposal. Therefore the researcher conducts this research to improve the student's ability in writing proposal especially in research question in English Teacher Education Department.

Research problem here becomes the base of proposing research question. The research problem is distinctive from the topic of study, the purpose or intent of the study, and specific research question (Creswell, 2009). In short, if the initial processes of students wrong it can affect for the next step that is formulating research question because research question can be generated from research problem. This theory is appropriate with the researcher theory about good process in formulating research question. There are 4 steps in

formulating research question. Those are choosing an interesting topic, do some preliminary research in your general topic, consider your audience and start asking question¹. These steps used by the researcher to assess the students' process in formulating research question through interview.

Research question can be generated from research problem. If the student in English Teacher Education Department cannot make a good research problem, it can give effect for their research question whereas the research question is the central of the study. Research question is a clear, focused, concise, complex and arguable question around which you center your research.² The role of research question for the researcher is can provide a way through the research and writing process to make focus in their study. Therefore, research question is important things in research.

METHOD

Data were collected from 83 students who have been taken writing 4 (Proposal) at English Teacher Education Department Students at UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya in academic years 2012 but there were 2 students who did not collect their proposal. Then, there was one student did not want to be interviewed, so this research just used 80 students.

According to Robert K. Yin (2011), most of researchers seek to use strong design to strengthen the validity of their studies and to ensure that the data to be collected properly address the research topic being studied. The researcher should be careful in choosing the research design, because it can give effect for the validity of the study. Research design also can influence the process of collecting data, analyze data and interpret data. So the researcher must be considered about the research design in their study.

Besides, according to Juanita Heighem and Robert A. Crocker (2009), listed that there are 5 approaches in qualitative paradigm,

¹ George Mason University Writing Center, "*How to Write a Research Question*" (<http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/how-to-write-a-research-question/>), Accessed on 7 July 2014.

² George Mason University Writing Center, "*How to Write a Research Question ...*"

those are narrative inquiry, case study, ethnography, actions research and mixed methods. In this study, the researcher used narrative inquiry or usually called descriptive approaches. According to Juanita Heighem and Robert A. Crocker (2009):

“There are many benefits to this type of research. Perhaps the most important is the variety of insights narrative and more specifically life history research can provide educators. Among other topics, narrative inquiry has been used in the field of applied linguistics to explore motivation, multilingualism, learning strategies, language loss, communities of practice and autonomy and self-directed learning, for a review of the literature on narrative inquiry in language learning.”

The researcher used this approaches because the researcher would analyze learning strategies in formulating research question which related in the use of this approaches that examine the learning strategies. The researcher asked the question “How do the student’s process of formulating research question in writing 4 (proposal) proposal at English Teacher Education Department, Faculty of Education and Teachers Training, UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya in academic years 2012?” to know how is the student’s process in formulating research question in writing 4 proposal and also their reason why they chose that steps.

At this point, it was important to understand the range of available data collection techniques. According to Scott W. Vanderstoep and Deirdre D. Johnston (2009), qualitative studies use interviewing (face - to - face question - and - answer process), ethnographic observation (observing people enacting culture), analysis of documents and material culture (written texts or cultural artifacts), and visual analysis (e.g., interpretation of mediated communication texts such as films or television programs).

In this study, the researchers just used interview to answer the research question in this study. Why the researchers used these strategies? Because in interviewing process, the researcher just found how the student’s process of formulating research question in writing 4 (proposal) and their reason why they chose that step is. This research also used field note during the process of interview. Field note are types of personal journal and written (Given, 2008). So, doing the interview toward the students, the researcher made personal journal

from students' acknowledgement in every question in interview guidelines.

Interview Guidelines

The typical qualitative research interview has been described as a 'conversation with a purpose' (Burgess, 1984) or 'professional conversation' (Kvale, 1996), and has been described as 'the gold standard of qualitative research' (Silverman, 2000). Interviewing was not just a matter of using question to gaining the information from respondent then we will analyze it, but interviewing is offer different ways of discovering people's experience and views.

There are essentially three types of interview: the structured interview, the open interview, and the semi-structured interview (Heigham & Crocker, 2009) but this research used semi-structured interview.

Semi-structured interview

Although the semi-structured interview is the most commonly used type, Juanita Heigham and Robert A. Croker think that Dörnyei argued (2009):

"...is right to describe it as a 'compromise' because it does illustrate to some extent on both of the other types. This type of interview has a precisely list of question which does not permit to direct. A semi structured interview is open interview permitting new ideas to be brought up during the interview as an outcome of what interviewee said."

From explanation above, the researcher used semi-structured interview because this interview is suitable to answer the research question about the process of formulating research question in writing 4 (proposal) and their reason why they chose those step. The researchers also prepare some question to collect the data from interviewee that the questions allowing the interviewee to give new ideas about the process of formulating research question because every student has their own way to create research question.

RESULT

The result of this research is aim to answer the two research question about the students' ability in formulating research question and why they chose those steps in formulating research question. Here the researcher presents the result of interview conducted on 2 April 2015 – 23 May 2015.

In this research, there were 83 students who have been taken writing 4 (proposal), but there were 2 students did not collect their proposal and there was one student who did not want to be interviewed.

Types of beginning the proposal and number of students

Types of beginning the proposal	Number of student	Students' code
Title	21 students	A1-A21
Problem	15 students	B1-B15
Background	20 students	C1-C20
Research Question	17 students	D1-D17
Review of Related Literature	3 students	E1-E3
Research Method	1 student	F1
Outline	2 students	G1-G2
Topic	1 students	H1

The result of the interview done on 2 April 2015 until 23 May 2015 to 80 students who have been taken writing 4 (proposal) at fifth semester, showed that there are 8 types of students process in beginning their proposal. Those are *Title*, *Problem*, *Background*, *Research Question*, *Review of Related Literature*, *Research Method*, *Outline* and *Topic*. This classification made based on the answer of second question in interview guidelines. If this result related to the preliminary research done at 17 December 2014, then it proof that there were still students began their proposal from the title.

This research also used coding for subject of the study based on the classification. Coding used to make easy to organize the data and also to relate the students' process of formulating research question and their reason why they chose that steps.

The researcher has classified the data based on students' acknowledgement in interview process about formulating research question. Then, the researcher found that students have different ways in formulating research question. The researcher will presents the data in the table below:

Students' way in formulating research question

Types of formulating research question	Number of student
Formulating from title	26 students
Formulating from problem	40 students
Formulating from journal	8 students
Formulating from thesis	2 students
Formulating from issue	2 students
Formulating from topic	1 student
Formulating by consulting to lecturer	1 students

From the table above, the researcher found 7 ways in formulating research question; those are title, problem, journal, thesis, issue, topic and consulting to lecturer.

DISCUSSION

Students' ability to formulate research question.

Based on the result of interview, there were 8 classifications in beginning the proposal. In deciding this classification, the researcher made this classification based on the students' initial process in beginning their proposal. Those were title, problem, background, research question, review of related literature, research method, outline and topic. If the researcher related with the preliminary research in this study, this result proof that there were still student began their proposal from problem.

Then, the researcher found 7 ways in formulating research question. Those were formulating research question from title, problem, journal, thesis, issue, topic, and consultation.

Title

There were 26 students who formulated their research question from title. Then the researcher found 5 variants way in formulating research

question from title. Those were formulating from variable in the title, based on the title, appropriate with title, generated the title into research question, from title made 5W1H question. From each ways in formulating research question, there was no 1 step in this way that included in good process of formulating research question. So, this way was not appropriate with the researcher theory about formulating research question.

Problem

There were 40 students who formulated their research question from problem. Then, the researcher found 7 variants way in formulating research question from it. Those were formulating research question based on problem, from problem-title-research question, by observation, from gap-problem-research question, from problem that occur in the background, from preliminary research and problem-specific problem-research question. From 7 variants way in formulating research question from problem, there was 1 step in this way that appropriate with the theory in this research, preliminary research. However, there was just 1 student in this way that followed the second step in good process of formulating research question. So, the researcher conclude that there was just 1 students' way in formulating research question that appropriate with theory in this research.

Journal

There were 8 students who formulated their research question from journal. The researcher found 7 variants way in formulating research question from journal. Those were reading journal-found problem-related to society-research question, reading journal-topic-title-research question, reading journal-observe-preliminary research-problem-research question, reading journal-related to society-gap (problem)-research question, reading journal- observation-problem-research question, from problem in journal and translated English into Indonesian. There were 2 ways in formulating research question from journal that appropriate with theory in this research, topic and preliminary research. From each way, there was just 1 student that used that way in formulating research question. In concise, there were 2 students' ways that appropriate with the theory in this research.

Thesis

There were 3 students who formulated research question from thesis but the researcher found 2 ways in formulated their research question. Those were reading the thesis and mad suitable research question on it and reading further research part in thesis then formulated it into research question. In contrast, there was no step in this way that appropriate with the theory that used in this research. The researcher concluded that students' way in formulating research question from thesis did not appropriate with the theory that used in this research.

Issue

There were 2 students in this way. Both of them formulated research question from the issue. The researcher found 2 ways in formulating research question from issue. The first was the student formulated research question by analyzing the new issue in society. The second was by finding new issue in society then formulated it into research question. In conclude, there was no step in this way that appropriate with the theory that used in this research. The students' way in formulating research question from issue did not appropriate with the theory that used in this research.

Topic

There was just 1 student who formulated research question from topic. This student formulated research question based on the topic. This student just followed 1 step in good process of formulating research question in this research.

Consultation

There was just 1 student who formulated research question by consult it to their lecturer. This student formulated research question just made research question then consulted it to their lecturer. This student' way in formulating research question was not appropriate with the theory in this research. So, the researcher concluded that formulating research question by consultation with the lecturer was not appropriate with the theory that used in this research.

On the other hand, this research was conducted because of context problem that found in English Teacher Education Department, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teachers Training UIN Sunan Ampel

Surabaya. The researcher found that there were 31 students from 63 students in academic years 2011 began their proposal from the title while the researcher still found the student began their proposal from title after the research conducted the interview to 80 students in academic years 2012.

There were 21 students from 80 students began their proposal from title. These students who included in this classification are much than the others classification. They should begin from the research problem because the research problem is distinctive from the topic of study, the purpose or intent of the study, and specific research question (Creswell, 2009). This can be related from good process in formulating research question that the first step is choosing an interesting general topic. So the context problem that the researcher found in academic years 2011 was still exists in the students in academic years 2012.

The result of interview can be representation for English Teacher Education department students' process in formulating research question is still low. They must consider their process in formulating research question because the research question was the core of the research and become measurement that the research was good or not. So they should improve their quality of their proposal by follow the good process of formulating research question.

Students' reason why they chose that steps in formulating research question

The researcher found 21 reasons why the students chose that steps in formulating research question but there were 2 major reason that usually said by the students during the interview process. Those are easy steps and taught by their lecturer. There were 38 students from difference ways in formulating research question said that they chose that step because it were easy steps in formulating research question. This reason did not have the strong basic become a reason to formulated research question.

On the other hand, there were 14 students said that they chose that steps because their lecturer was taught that step to them. Students in every way in formulating research question have the same reason on it. Even, there were 3 lecturers who taught writing 4 (proposal).

Every lecturer has different way to formulate research question. It affected for the students process of formulating research question. There were some students who taught by the same lecturer but they have different way to formulate research question.

CONCLUSION

Based on the report and analysis above, students' way in formulating research question are not the same with the theory of formulating research question that used in this research. This research used 4 step in formulating research question (choosing an interesting topic, do some preliminary research, consider your audience, and start asking question) and several of the students just used 1 step in formulating research question. Ex. Students formulate their research question based on the variable in their title.

The majority of students' reason why they chose that step in formulating research question is easy step. There are 41 students from 80 students said that they chose that step in formulating research question because that step is easy step. This reason is not strong reason and do not have basic theory that justify their process of formulating research question is good. The strong reason should be based on expert opinion in the book or the lecturer step in the learning classroom. Although the steps taken did not interfere with the result of the written research questions, it is important, however, that students knew.

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