

WRITING PROBLEMS IN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL (SMPN 1) PEMATANGSIANTAR

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to answer the research problem about the non-linguistic problems in writing faced by grade eight at Junior High School 1 Pematangsiantar. The objective of this study was to identify some non-linguistic problems in writing faced by the grade eight at Junior High School 1 Pematangsiantar. Furthermore, the data were analyzed by using descriptive quantitative. The research participants of this study were thirty two students from grade eight of Junior High School 1 Pematangsiantar who had writing scores were the passing grade criteria. In addition, the instruments employed closed-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interview.

The result of the study revealed that the grade eight encountered several non-linguistic problems in writing, comprised of: (1)students lacked of learning motivation, (2) lacked of support from people surrounding, poor facilities, and teacher's related issues. Moreover, not all the students encountered those problems because every student had different linguistic problems in writing. Therefore, some contributions from the headmaster, English teacher and the students are needed in order to minimize those kinds of linguistic problems.

Keywords: *Writing definition, Writing problem, Grammar Translation Method*

INTRODUCTION

Hammadi and Sidek (2015) argues that writing in education is a way how students communicate with peers and engage in learning activities. Writing can help students to develop their social skills and promote their critical thinking. It encourages students to think critically in the process of providing arguments and judgments. Therefore, writing is very important to be taught to students. However, writing has been considered a complicated skill to teach students. Widiawati and Cahyono (2006) assert that teaching writing can support strengthening grammar, reading, and vocabulary used for communicative purposes. Therefore, the implementation of teaching writing to junior high school students in the context of EFL is still a challenge. Subsequent research conducted by Badi (2015) showed that the main factor of difficulty in teaching writing was related to the students' lack of experience, and their prior knowledge. Another study, Almubark (2016), found that teachers face challenges in developing teaching materials for writing English and the various approaches used to shape teaching English writing in terms of grammatical competence, sociolinguistic strategies and discourse.

In line with that, Nassi & Nasser, (2018) researched that when teaching writing, teachers have challenges related to differences in linguistic and cultural backgrounds between students, teachers and teaching contexts. Recent research conducted by Karki (2017) shows that the main challenges in teaching writing are seen from the aspect of large classes, low-ability students, pressure to complete

courses, less writing practice, and inadequate resources. In addition, there has been no empirical investigation that emphasizes the challenges experienced by English teachers in teaching writing to junior high school students. In fact, very rare investigations into how teachers overcome their challenges while teaching writing English. Therefore, this study aims to examine the challenges teachers face when teaching writing and how they overcome these problems in eighth grade junior high school students.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Definition of Writing

There are three definition of writing according to experts. According to White (1986:10) writing is the process of expressing the ideas, information, knowledge, or experience and understand the writing to acquire the knowledge or some information to share and learn. Besides that, Tarigan (1994: 3) stated, writing is activity to produce or draw graphic symbols which represent a language that is understood by people, so that other people can read the graphic symbols presented. People will understand the graphic symbols presented if they understand the language and the graphic itself.

Almost the same with Tarigan, Ramelan (1992: 14) also stated, writing is representation or symbol of language. From the definition above the writer can conclude that writing is an activity to express ideas, events, feeling or thinking in written form that can be the tool to communicate with the other people.

Kinds of Writing

There are four types of writing style :

1. Persuasive

For this writing style, the writer is trying to convince the reader of the validity of a certain position or argument. Persuasive writing includes the writers' opinions, and provides justifications and evidence to support their claims. Examples : Letters of recommendation, cover letters, Op-Eds and Editorial newspaper articles, argumentative essays for academic papers.

2. Narrative

Often seen in longer writing samples, the purpose of this writing style is to share information in the context of a story. Narratives should include characters, conflicts, and settings. Examples: Short stories, novels, poetry, historical accounts.

3. Expository

This type of writing is used to explain a concept and share information to a broader audience. Expository writing provides evidence, statistics, or results and focuses on the facts of a certain topic. This type is not meant to express opinions. Examples : How-to articles, textbooks, news stories (not editorials or Op-Eds), business, technical, or scientific writing.

4. Descriptive

This type of writing is used to depict imagery to create a clear picture in the mind of the reader. This method helps the readers become more connected to the writing by appealing to their senses. Descriptive writing employs literary techniques such as similes, metaphors, allegory, etc to engage the audience. Examples : Poetry, fictional novels or plays, memoirs or first-hand accounts of events.

The Purpose of Writing

Tarigan (1994 : 24) summarize the purpose of writing, those are :

a. Assignment purpose

The writers will start writing when someone asks writers to write about something. Therefore, the idea which will be written by the writers does not come from writers itself.

b. Altruistic purpose

The purpose is to entertain the readers, to remove the readers sadness with the writer's work.

c. Persuasive purpose

It has purpose to convince the readers about the true opinion presented.

d. Information purpose

The purpose of writing is to give information, explanation to the readers.

e. Self-expressive purpose

The purpose is to introduce the writer to the readers.

f. Creative purpose

The writing has to achieve artistic value, value of art.

g. Problem-solving purpose

This writing is used to solve problem faced by the writer. Writers want to explain and observe carefully about his thought and idea to be understood and accepted by the readers.

The Principles for Teaching Writing

In the classroom activities the teacher should concern about the principles of teaching writing to achieve the goals of the students. So in practice the teacher must give opportunities for the students to try their best in producing the written text, and it is not simply that the teacher have to provide the students with the any kind of knowledge how to produce the text well. Brown 2004:61 states that there are some principles for teaching writing, they are understanding students' reasons for writing, providing many opportunities for students to write, providing feedback helpful and meaningful, and the teacher must clarify himself, and for his students, how their writing will be evaluated.

1. Understand students' reasons for writing It is important to understand the students' goal when they are writing. It is a big problem when the teacher's goals do not match the students' or when the teacher's goals do not match those of the school or institution in which the student works.

2. Provide many opportunities for students to write To improve writing skills, students must always practice. The teacher must give many chances for students to develop their writing skills by providing them some different types of writing. Persuasive, narrative, expository, and descriptive are the examples of writing types that can be provided by the teacher.

3. Make feedback helpful and meaningful Students crave feedback on their writing. The teacher must always provide a feedback for students. In providing a direct feedback, make sure the students understand the vocabulary or symbols that the teacher used.

4. Clarifying The teacher must clarify himself, and for his students, how their writing will be evaluated. Teacher must evaluate the students' writing objectively. A rubric is the answer that can elaborate the elements of writing that are to be evaluated.

Definition of Problem

According to the Oxford Dictionary, a problem is something that is difficult to deal with or understand. In everyday language, a problem is a question proposed solution, a matter stated for

examination or proof. In each case, a problem considered to be a matter which is difficult to solve or settle, a doubtful case, or a complex task involving doubt and uncertainty.

METHOD

This research is a qualitative descriptive study that observes grade 8 students at SMP NEGERI 1 PEMATANGSIANTAR. Data was collected through three methods, namely observation, interviews and researchers themselves. This research is an English teacher who teaches the material using the material using the constructivist method. The central assumption of constructivist methods is learning is discovering. That is even though the teacher conveys something to students, they carry out mental process or brain work on the information so that the information enters their understanding. Constructivism starts from problems that often arise from students themselves and then helps students solve and find steps to solve these problems.

DISCUSSION

1. Students Grammatical Competence

Based on interview results, the researcher identified that teachers faced assorted challenges when teaching writing to junior high school students. The students deficient grammatical competence was portrayed when they were employing the word “study”. To begin with, they seemed perplexed to differentiate the deployment of such a word (study) in various contexts and periods, such as simple past tense (e.g. he studies), present continuous tense (e.g. he is studying) or simple future tense (e.g. he will study). Another evidence illustrated that they were unable to articulate their ideas into written forms. This was affected by their poor conceptual and practical knowledge of English sentence structures. As a result, they confused when they were assigned writing tasks. Copland, Garton and Burns (2013) maintain that teachers commonly encounter a number of challenges while teaching writing, such as grammar, sentence structures, students boredom and their classroom disruptive behaviours (e.g. inattentive response to the teachers instruction). For these response, guiding students to comprehend and apply English Grammar during classroom writing activities remains pivotal to mitigate the impacts of their poor English grammatical competence on their writing performance.

2. Students Incapability of Developing Ideas for English Writing

Another finding highlighted that students were incapable of developing their ideas for English writing. As an illustration, their confusion to shape sentence structures contributed significantly to their writing performances and products. In practice, they couldn't write what the teachers instructed, such as writing the sentence “ I went to the zoo yesterday”. The worse, they were incompetent to continue the subsequent sentences representing their ideas. In the same way, that they were also unable to identify the main ideas of the assigned texts. This affected to their comprehension and logical thinking on how a text is comprehended and produced. The most salient feature of their confusion were symbolized by their reluctance to read the given texts as a model for them to write and the ignorance of accomplishing the writing tasks assigned by the teachers. Moreover, they couldn't communicate their ideas into their writing effectively. Aligned with these phenomena, Adas and Bakir (2013) postulate that the teachers possessed various problems during teaching writing, such as students brainstorming, ideas cultivation and creativity.

3. Students Inadequate English Vocabulary

Knowledge the students inadequate English vocabulary knowledge has become a central issue affecting students writing activities. For instance, they were not able to understand the word “pergi” in English (going) and exert it in distinctive tenses, such as “go” (simple present tense) and “went” (simple past tense). Assuredly, vocabulary plays a prominent role to support students to produce coherent writing

Ali and Rahmana (2018) add that vocabulary pervades in the four language skills, including writing. Another evidence has proven that they were lazy to understand the meaning of English vocabulary and its applications in a sentence or a text. Additionally, they didn’t comprehend the main ideas within a text since they lacked vocabulary knowledge. Even, they didn’t know the meaning of each word. For instance, they didn’t know what pergi (going) , sepeda (bicycle), bangun (wake up), mandi (take a bath) are in English. As a result, this inhibits them to produce English sentences, paragraph or text effectively. Nakagawa and Leung (2020) reported that the majority of teaching writing challenges faced by teachers, notably in ESL and EFL landscapes was students’ limited English vocabulary. Equally, Rovikasari, Suparno, and Supriyadi (2019) assert that in teaching writing, a lot of teachers had problems related to students’ vocabulary. For example, students were not able to put the appropriate verb, noun, and noun phrase. Another challenge is students’ laziness in interpreting the English vocabulary. This occurs due to they have not gained sufficient language exposures to the target language (English) compared to those utilizing English as a native language (ENL) (Tandiana, Abdullah & Komara, 2018; de Magalhães, Cotterall, & Mideros, 2019). Given these facts, teachers should pay more attention to guide and facilitate their students in understanding English vocabulary and its applications to encourage them to write through various practices (e.g. familiarizing them with common English words through attractive instructional media).

The Solution of The Problems

From the problems above, we can solve the problem by a Grammar Translation Method.

1. *The Grammar Translation Method Theory*

The GTM is based on an idealist philosophy which holds that ideas are absolute and unchanging. According to this doctrine, ideas make up fundamental reality and are even seen as being the only true reality. In other words, the only real things are mental entities, not physical ones. Likewise, truth and values are universal and unchanging. This universal view of learning is the reason why the method insists on translating text that reflects perennial truths. Latin and Greek were held in high esteem and those who could read the Greek and Latin texts were respected and given high social status.

In addition, the method views language learning as consisting of memorizing a set of grammar rules and trying to understand and manipulate the morphology and syntax of the target language. Another feature of the method is that the mother tongue is maintained as the reference system in the acquisition of the second language. It is the vehicle of language teaching.

How is the Grammar Translation Method implemented in the classroom?

- Using of mother tongue to teach the target language.
- Grammar is taught deductively.
- Memorizing vocabulary items that are taught in the form of word lists.
- Memorizing grammar rules.

- Elaborate explicit teaching of grammar.
- Focusing on reading and writing.

It is surprising to see that the Grammar Translation Method is still in use in some classrooms. Maybe, it's because it has some advantages.

The method may be still implemented in today's classrooms. Depending on whether your school tolerates the use of L1 (i.e., the student's first language), you may adapt the method accordingly. Assuming that you are a bilingual teacher, here are some activities that you might try:

1. Ask students to memorize a rule and apply it to their own sentences.
2. Invite students to memorize a short list of words each day in English.
3. Ask students to pick five vocabulary words they like from a text and then translate them into their mother tongue.
4. Ask students to translate different language functions (e.g., inviting, making requests; offering help, asking for clarification, etc.) from their mother tongue to English.
5. Ask students to identify a certain part of speech (e.g., verbs, nouns, adjectives, etc) from a text. Invite them to translate these words and then use a dictionary to find synonyms and antonyms.
6. Assign different parts of a text to different groups of students to translate. When they finish, regroup them to produce the final version of the whole text making the necessary changes.
7. Ask students to translate their favorite quotes, jokes, idioms, or poem from their mother tongue to English.
8. Ask students to use google translate or any other translation application to translate texts and see to what extent the translation was good, making the necessary changes to improve it.

2. *Explicit English Vocabulary Teaching*

One of the solutions taken by teachers to overcome the previous challenges in teaching English writing is the explicit teaching of English vocabulary. This method is applied to overcome students' problems with insufficient English vocabulary. Obviously, vocabulary is one of the key components for learning language skills, including writing. Thus, equipping students with adequate vocabulary knowledge supports them to produce cohesive and coherent writing. The teacher instructs students to memorize English vocabulary in terms of shape and meaning. The teacher guides the students to select Indonesian vocabulary first and translate it into the target language (English). Then, they have to memorize it over and over again to enrich their English vocabulary. It aims to enrich students' English vocabulary so that they can produce English texts easily. Teachers can help students improve their vocabulary knowledge and develop ideas when they have writing assignments. However, this activity does not guarantee them to spread English vocabulary contextually in written discourse.

3. *Collaborative English Writing Activities*

Collaborative English writing activities can be an alternative solution for teachers to solve their problems of teaching English writing challenges. This activity encourages students to generate, organize and articulate their ideas systematically. activities that serve to stimulate students' creativity in the classroom, especially when learning to write English. It helps students expand ideas and allow them to provide feedback to one another. Collaborative writing exercises improve the overall quality of students' writing, such as : improvement of students' writing skills, where students can write texts using more clauses and be more creative.

Therefore, collaborative activities in writing English take into account the motivational and student aspects understanding learning to write English can be a solution to overcome difficulties in

teaching English write. Furthermore, students can explore their ideas in written form in groups so that they can motivate each other and can also share their understanding of English writing assignments.

4. Practice Writing English

English writing exercises can be an alternative solution to improve students' writing skills. By doing. So, teachers enable students not only to strengthen their writing skills but also to practice in constructing sentences and learning contextual tenses. Giving practice to students is one solution to overcome the challenges of teaching writing for students junior high school students. Teachers provide exercises to practice their grammatical competence and motivate them to produce sentences. For example, the teacher facilitates students' writing activities through picture books. More practically, they match the picture with the sentence, filled in incomplete sentences and designing more creative writing teaching materials. Muhammad (2018) argues that to overcome the challenges of teaching writing, teachers can try to ask their students to use internet and make more creative exercises for them to learn to write English. In other words, giving English writing exercises help teachers to solve their writing teaching challenges. In this case, they can provide writing exercises after explaining the teaching material in class. students are trained to grow their writing skills on a regular basis, such as practicing making sentences based on the given tenses. In the present continuous tense, for example, the teacher can ask students to make sentences based on what they were doing at the time.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to describe the challenges and solutions in teaching English writing to junior high school students. Based on the findings, there are three challenges faced by teachers and three solutions to overcome these challenges while teaching writing to junior high school students. The challenges include Students Grammatical Competence, Students Incapability of Developing Ideas for English Writing, Students Inadequate English Vocabulary. On the other hand, solutions to overcome these challenges include Explicit English Vocabulary Teaching, Collaborative English Writing Activities, and Practice writing English. Therefore, by knowing the challenges faced by teachers in teaching writing and their solutions,

To overcome challenges during teaching writing to junior high school students, it is recommended to improve teacher performance in teaching writing, such as teachers being able to identify, prepare improvement and evaluation for teaching and learning process of writing English. However, solutions to overcome these challenges can make the learning process in the classroom more effective. The limitations of this study are a single data collection technique (semi-structured interviews), focuses on the perspective of in-service teachers, describing challenges and solutions in teaching English write. First, this research only focuses on challenges and solutions during teaching English writing to junior high school students. Furthermore, this study only used a single data collection technique, namely interviews. This study only describes challenges and solutions in teaching writing to junior high school students.

After discussing the results and making conclusions, there are some suggestions for junior high school students grade 8 and for teachers, as follows :

A. For students :

1. It was found that the students' difficulties in writing English were in the aspect of language use. It means that they need to improve their ability in choosing the use of language related to the topic of writing.

2. Students have difficulty in the vocabulary aspect, so they have to improve their vocabulary by practicing writing in English. Students must pay attention to tense, vocabulary, punctuation, etc.
B. For teachers :

1. The teacher must provide an explanation of the use of language itself and how to use language related to the topic of writing.
2. Teachers should provide more English writing exercises to improve students' writing skills and students can improve their vocabulary by doing exercises.

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