

FACTORS AFFECTING STUDENTS' PROBLEMS IN WRITING CAUSE AND EFFECT ESSAYS

YULIADI

MTsN Dharmasraya

Koto Baru-Dharmasraya-West Sumatera

Yuliadi270784@gmail.Com

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to investigate the factors affecting students' problems in writing cause and effect essays at the third year of English department students of Bung Hatta University. The type of this research was qualitative and data were taken from twenty seven records of interview. The result of this research defected that there were several factors affecting students in writing cause and effect essays. They were interference of the first language (Bahasa Indonesia), the difficulties of English, lack of knowledge of writing components, intelligent Quotient (IQ), personality (mood and confidence), time allotted and lack of knowledge about general topics. The research finding implied that the students need to deepen their knowledge about the component of writing, especially a cause and effect essay since there are two ways to organize the idea in cause and effect essay; block and chain organization. Moreover, they are expected to read the current news or topics so as that they have prior knowledge when they are assigned to write as well as they are expected to write as often as possible so as that they produce better writing.

Key Words: *Factors, Students' problems, Cause and effect essays*

A. INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the most difficult skills for students to acquire since it is unlike spoken language, as it requires the readers or audience to understand and interpret what has been written. Oshima and Hogue (2003:3) agree that writing is not easy to do because writers need to master several process of writing in order to be able to produce a good writing. Blanchard and Root (2003:1) also support this view that writing is not easy but by having everyday training it will help students to have a good writing skill. Moreover, Langan (2004) and Gunning (1998) have the same opinions that writing is not easy and it is more complex than talk. As a result, it is evidently true that writing process a number of problems to the students as it is a difficult skill to be mastered. It is believed that writing demands a great deal of skills and convention, for instance content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, mechanics; spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.

Realizing the significance of mastering the elements of writing, they become parts that produce a good writing quality. Components of writing are main bases to shape a good writing. They must be included in it. By having them, readers are able to understand what the writers imply. If one of the components is missed and or misused, the meaning may change or the writing is not included a good or qualified composition, for instance, "*Because of the Chemicals in soaps and deodorants may affect our health. Customers need to select which cosmetics do not have bad effects.*"

The use of *period* (.) is wrong. It should be *comma* (,) after the word *healthy* and the beginning letter for the word *customers* is not in form of capital letter. In addition, the dependent clause in first sentence is not able to stand alone. It needs main/independent clause.

There are several elements of writing. Murcia (2007:17) mentions there are several components of a good writing. They are ideas, vocabulary, grammar, and spelling. Writing consists of several components namely content, organization, vocabulary, grammar and mechanics.

Though there are fluency and idea, they can be included in content and organization. The first is content. It is very essential since it is related to the idea of the writing. Content is very important in piece of writing. When writers write, idea can catch readers' attention to read. It is supported by Grenville (2002:9), saying that even a dumb idea can lead a better idea. It means that people may have many brilliant ideas in mind, but they need to express them in oral and written form. In other words, the content containing ideas are the heart of writing which can be as the reason for the writers to write.

The second is organization. Well organization of writing will benefit writer and readers. For writers, they can express their ideas in the right way since they can convey their messages successfully by using a good organization while the readers are guided by the organization from the beginning to the end of the writing. According to Olson (2005:157), writing effectively involves organization the ideas well. It means that the ideas are the heart of what the writers write and convey about. In other words, ideas are very essential component of writing. As writers, they should state their ideas clearly so as that the readers are able to catch the message. When there is no idea, the writers fail to convey the message effectively to the readers.

The next one is grammar. Grammar cannot be separated from writing since it forms a good writing. Richard and Renadya (2002:145) state that grammar is the rule of language that is very important. Without using correct grammar, our writing cannot be acceptable. In other words, the readers may misinterpret what writer says and even they do not understand the message on the text.

Moreover, mechanics are considered as the component of writing that should be mastered. Starkey (2004:48) says that mechanics involves spelling and punctuation. Spelling contributes the quality of the writing. Thus, the writers are expected not to misuse spelling in their

writing. By making errors in spelling, the readers may misunderstand about the ideas that are conveyed by the writers. Since spelling is very important, the students should learn it. Punctuation can make writing to convey the ideas directly. There are several types of punctuation; full stop/period, comma, colon, semi-colon, question mark, exclamation mark, quotations mark, hyphen, dash, etc. Each of them has a different function.

Diction or vocabulary is another component of writing. It has an important role too in writing. According to Peha (2004:12) diction does not mean that the writers use a lot of words, fancy and unusual words. It means that the use of diction is on the right thing on the right way so as the readers understand what they mean. As writers, they need to have many vocabularies so as that it is easy for them to develop a paragraph.

Based on information got from Writing 3 lecturer at English education department of Bung Hatta University on Monday, 2nd of November 2015, only two of fifty six students got A for Writing 3. Six of them got A-. Eleven of them got B+. Thirteen of them got B. The rest got B- and C. These data show that some of them need to learn writing seriously since it is not spontaneous. In addition, based on interview to several students on Tuesday, 3rd of November 2015, they just knew cause and effect essay but they did not know the patterns of the essay. Moreover, they did not know the conjunctions and verbs are usually used in the essay. It can be concluded that they had limited vocabulary and limited knowledge about organization of the essay. Further, they also said that grammar as a rule of language is not easy and they made errors to develop idea or thesis statement. Then, they said that they did not know to combine dependent clause and main clause. So, they misused punctuations. Therefore, that is why cause and effect essay need to be studied.

These problems could be caused by several factors. They were internal and

external factors. The internal factors come from the background knowledge of the students, to illustrate their intelligence and motivation, the lack of knowledge in developing paragraph, the lack of practice, the lack of understanding of language structure, ideas and the lack of knowledge how to develop cause and effect essay in a good way. Meanwhile, the external factors may come from lecturer's capability, facilities, books and students' environment.

According to Sadiyah, (2009:21) there are some factors that affect students' problems in writing. The factors are interference of the first language, the complexity of the target language and the lack of knowledge about writing elements. The elements are grammar, content, organization, mechanics and vocabulary.

In relating to the above problems, several researchers had conducted researches in several schools or universities, to illustrate Fery (2011), his finding shows that the quality of writing descriptive text at the third year students of English department of Maha Putra Muhammad Yamin University was mostly poor. The next researcher is Erita (2010). Her finding shows that the students' average score was 67.6 at SMAN 1 Payakumbuh and based on the interview, the students had difficulties in limited vocabulary, grammar, ideas, and the generic structures of recount text.

Another researcher conducting a research that relates to this study is Ka-kan-dee and Kaur (2014). The findings of this research were the Thai English students had difficulties in vocabulary, grammar structure, structure of writing argumentative essays, time constraints, organizing ideas, fulfilling task demand, understanding the questions, L1 transfer and translating and writing thesis statements.

Therefore, by having these views, this study was conducted at English education department of Bung Hatta University to investigate the factors

affecting students' problems in writing cause and effect essays.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

The design of this research was qualitative. There were 27 scripts of interview used to investigate the factors influencing students' problems in writing cause and effect. Thus, interview guide was used to obtain the data. The data of this research were utterances that were uttered by the students. The source of data was the students of English department in the fifth semester of Bung Hatta University in academic year 2013/2014. Technique data analysis used was based on the idea of Miles (1994). The steps were data reduction, data display and conclusion and verification.

C. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Based on analysis of the script of recordings, there are several factors influencing students' problems in writing cause and effect essays. They are interference of first language, the complexity of target language, lack of knowledge of writing components, emotional quotient, lacks of confidence, mood, time-allotted provided and lack of general knowledge.

Interference of first language is one factor that affects students' problems in writing cause and effect essay due to the difference of first language from the target language (Saadiyah, 2009). The differences are not only on the words but also on the structure and the way to pronounce the words. Here are the examples of script of the interview:

Participant 1

Researcher : Apakah ketika menulis karangan Cause and Effect anda

menggunakan bahasa Indonesia sebelum menulisnya ke dalam bahasa Inggris?

Participant 1 : Saya langsung menulis ke dalam bahasa Inggris tapi dalam pikiran saya memikirkan bahasa Indonesia. Tapi

langsung ditulis ke dalam bahasa Inggris.... Di dalam kertasnya.

Participant 7 : Ya. Saya menulis apapun esainya saya tulis bahasa Indonesianya dulu dan diartikan ke bahasa Inggris. Lalu ditulis ke double folio.

Translation:

Researcher : OK. Did you use Indonesian before writing in English when you wrote cause and effect essay?

Participant 1 : I wrote in English directly but I think the idea in my mind. But writing in English directly....on a piece of paper.

Participant 7 : Yes. I wrote every essay by using Indonesian first then I translated into English.

The data above shows that the student writes directly into English without using Indonesian first. However, the student thinks the idea what to write and even the student create an outline of the essay. Student who is good at writing, he/she does not want to write essay by using Indonesian first since doing writing has time allotted. In addition, student's first language influence student's second language since Indonesian is different from English as a foreign language in Indonesia. Since they have limited vocabulary, she said that it is helpful to use Indonesian. Student who is accustomed to writing by using Indonesian, then translate it into English sometimes makes him/her easy. In other words, his/her first language helps him/her to write even though it will spend much time.

The complexity of target language is the second factor that affects students' problems in writing cause and effect essay due to the elements of writing in target language is different from the Indonesian (Saadiyah, 2009). Here are the examples of scripts:

Researcher : Apakah menurutmu kaidah penulisan bahasa Inggris sulit?

Participant 10 : Ya.

Participant 7 : Sebenarnya tidak sulit. Tetapi kita kan gak menguasai, itu yang menjadikan sulit.

Participant 23 : Nggak juga namun juga terkadang sulit

Translation:

Researcher : Do you think that English principle is difficult?

Participant 10 : Yes.

Participant 7 : Actually it is not difficult. But the problems is we do not master it.

Participant 23 : Not really but it sometimes it is difficult.

The data above shows that learning the principle of a language needs to be learnt due to the writer makes a mistake or errors, the meaning will be different or it will be misinterpretation from the reader or listener. English principle is not the same as Indonesian, for instance *Gadis cantik* (Modified-Modifier) in Indonesian meanwhile *Beautiful girl* (modifier-modified) in English. This simple phrase sometimes makes students doubt. That is why English is not easy for them. Thus, by mastering grammar or principle of a language, a student will not have problems in writing. In contrary, when he/she does not master it, he/she will have problems in writing.

Knowledge is as another factor that influences students' problems in writing cause and effect essay (Saadiyah, 2009). By having much knowledge, they think that writing is not difficult. Meanwhile to those who have lack of knowledge, they think that writing is difficult. However, whether the students have much knowledge or not, learning the elements or components of writing are important due to writing is not spontaneous. It needs thinking time to express the idea. Here is the example of script:

Researcher : Apakah menurutmu penting mengetahui komponen-komponen menulis?

Participant 16 : Ya.

Translation

Researcher : Do you think that it is important to learn the components of writing?

Participant 16 : Yes.

The data above depict that limited knowledge of writing elements can influence a student in writing. Even though she said that it is important to learn the components of writing, they do not know them especially the organization of cause and effect essay. By having known the elements, they make the writer easy to express an idea in writing. As a result, his/her writing is acceptable. In other words, the writing can be understood by the readers.

Besides the three factors above that influence students' problems in writing cause and effect essays, other factors were found. They are mood, intelligence, lack of confidence, lack of general knowledge and time allotted provided. These factors will be discussed as follows. Here are the examples of script:

Researcher : *Ok. Pertanyaan pertama apakah ketika menulis karangan Cause and Effect anda menggunakan bahasa Indonesia sebelum menulisnya ke dalam bahasa Inggris?*

Participant 5 : *Ah..... itu tergantung mood. Kalau moodnya lagi baik, langsung ke bahasa Inggris. Kalau lagi malas mikir, ke bahasa Indonesia dulu.*

Translation

Researcher : *OK. Did you use Indonesian before writing in English when you wrote cause and effect essay?*

Participant 5 : *Uh.... It depends on mood. If I am in good mood, I wrote in English while I am in bad mood, I wrote it in Indonesian.*

The data above describe that mood affects students to write. Since mood relates to personality, it may change sometimes. A student who is in a good mood to write, writing becomes easy and it is easy to develop the idea. However, the students those who are in a bad mood, writing is not easy. It becomes problems for them.

The next factor is low intelligence and lack of confidence. Here is the example of the script:

Researcher : *Apakah ketika menulis karangan Cause and Effect anda menggunakan bahasa Indonesia sebelum menulisnya ke dalam bahasa Inggris?*

Participant 18 : *Ya.*

Researcher : *Kenapa seperti itu?*

Participant 18 : *Mungkin. Saya orangnya kurang..... agak ragu-ragu. Jadi ditulis ke dalam bahasa Indonesia dulu. Baru ditulis ke dalam bahasa Inggris.*

Translation

Researcher : *Do you use Indonesian before writing in English when you are writing cause and effect essay?*

Participant 18 : *Yes.*

Researcher : *Why?*

Participant 18 : *Perhaps I am low..... pretty hesitated. So I write in Indonesian first. Then I write the essay into English.*

The script above depicts that intelligence and lack of confidence influence students' problems in writing. In relating to intelligence to foreign language learning, it can be said simply that a smart students will be able to learn or write in English more successfully because of greater intelligence. The students who have low intelligence, they have lack of confidence. Thus, when they try to write, they are hesitated because of making mistake. In other words, they often think whether the sentence they write is right or wrong. As a result, they lose their courage to write in English.

The other factors are lack of general knowledge and insufficient time-allotted. Here is the example of the script:

Researcher : *Apakah menurutmu kaidah penulisan bahasa Inggris sulit?*

Participant 11 : *Saya kira sulit. Soalnya kalau menulis tu kan berarti kita mesti punya ide. Jadi kita dituntut banyak membaca, banyak mendengar juga dari sumber-sumber yang lain kayak gitu. Jadi untuk menemukan ide itu Ira rasa susah.*

Participant 27 : *Sebenarnya tidak sulit kalau kita mempelajarinya. Tapi kadang-kadang waktunya itu tidak sesuai dengan tema atau judul yang diberikan. Jadi sering lupa-lupa terkadang.*

Translation:

Researcher : *Do you think that the principle of English is difficult?*

Participant 11 : *I think so. If we are assigned to write, we need an idea. So we are expected to read much from some references. To find an idea is difficult I bet.*

Participant 27 : *If we learn it, I don't think so. However, sometimes time-allotted given is not sufficient to write the essay.*

The data above depict that it is important for students to have much general knowledge as well as knowing the elements of writing. If a student is good at mastering the elements, but she/he does not have general knowledge, she/he will have problems in writing, such as developing thesis statements in an essay needs the general knowledge. Thus, to produce qualified writing, the students are expected to read several books or references. Time allotted provided in doing a test is essential. It influences the quality of writing, the longer time given the better quality produced since a writer is able to reflect the organization of writing, to illustrate unity and coherence, transitional words, diction, the use of correct grammar and mechanics. Here is the example of script that depicts time-allotted is vital in writing.

There were several factors that influence students' problems in writing cause and effect essays. They are interference of first language, the complexity of target language and lack of knowledge about elements of writing. Other factors are mood, insufficient time-allotted, lack of general knowledge, low intelligence and lack of confidence. These factors certainly affect students' problems in writing since writing needs thinking time and there are some elements need to be mastered by a writer. Moreover, English has a role as foreign language in Indonesia.

Therefore, mother language influences the English language.

English is not a first language in Indonesia and it is as a foreign language. Since most of students learn English starting from Junior High School in the country, it becomes problem for students to use the language. Even though they are able to speak English well, it is not guarantee for them to write well. In fact, there are some elements that need to be mastered by them. To those who use Indonesian as positive transfer, when they are assigned to write, their first language help them to transfer the meaning into English that is why they write in Indonesian first then they translate into English. However, to those who directly write in English, Indonesian does not help them. It is called as a negative transfer. In fact, whether the student write in English directly or Indonesian first then translate into English, these strategies in writing do not become a problem yet they need to consider the time allotted given in the instruction of the writing test. Time-allotted given is significant, a longer time-allotted a better quality produced. And also, by having the sufficient time-allotted, students have much time to reread and or to revise the writing so as that they produce better writing quality. Moreover, by having broad general knowledge, students will produce good writing.

Personality and psychological factors influence students' problems in writing cause and effect essay. One of psychological factors is low intelligence. Intelligence affects students whether they produce good or bad writing since those who are intelligent; it is easy for them to develop an idea. However, those who have low intelligence, they will hesitate in writing. In other words, they are afraid of making mistake due they have lack of confidence.

Student, who has high intelligence, he/she is much expected to read some sources or book so as that it is easy for them to develop idea. Having known much about elements of writing, but it is not supported

general knowledge, a student will have problems when they are assigned to write.

Further, students who are in bad mood tend to be lazy to do various activities, especially activities associated with writing. Negative mood will trigger more bad energy to students for being less concentrated and unfocused on the topic given in writing.

Writing is an important skill to be mastered. Writers need to pay attention to some elements of writing. By having good elements, the quality of writing will be better if the messages are understood by the readers. However, students' writings are influenced by some factors. The factors are the interference of the first language, the complexity of target language and the lack of knowledge about writing components (Sadiyah, 2009). The finding of this research also shows the three factors are still found on students' writing cause and effect essays. This finding also supported by another previous researcher. The findings show students had difficulties in vocabulary, grammar, structure of writing, time constraints, organizing ideas, L1 transfer and translating, and writing thesis statements (ka-kan-deeand Kaur, 2004).

Besides, time allotted also affects students' writing. Thus, writing lecturers need to consider time provided when they assign students to write. Moreover, the findings of this research were quite difference. The differences are Inteligent Quotient (IQ), mood and confidence affecting students' problem in writing cause and effect essays. Therefore, the three of these findings make this research different.

D. CONCLUSION

Due to writing is not an easy skill, it requires the students to master the elements of the skills. Those elements are content, organization, grammar, vocabulary and mechanics. To produce a qualified writing, a writer should be able to use them well,

unless a reader may misinterpret the meaning from the writer's utterance. However, some students still have problems in using those components, especially at English department of Bung Hatta University. There are some factors influencing their problems. They are interference of Indonesian as a mother language, the complexity of English, lack of components of writing elements, lack of general knowledge, insufficient time-allotted provided, psychological (intelligence) and personality (mood and lack of confidence) factors.

To overcome these problems, writing lecturers need to explain the elements of writing deeply so as they do understand and produce qualified writing. In designing the topic for writing test, they need to consider the time-allotted provided. If it is possible, try out the test to see the face validity of the test like its direction or instruction of the test, time-allotted given and the clearness of the topic given. To those who have low intelligence, one of ways to overcome it is by using Indonesian then translating it into English. The most important thing is students need to consider the time-allotted and the appropriate writing elements based on the English principle. And also, when the students are in bad mood, do not try to write since good writing is produces from a good mood. To boost the mood, find a place where you can be calm and feel free so as to find a brilliant idea. Moreover, students need to read many sources or books in order to be able to develop idea or thesis statement when they are assigned to write.

E. BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Blanchard, K and Root. (2003). *Writing for Study Purposes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Erita, Yoni. (2010). *An Analysis of the X.8 Grade Students' Writing Skills of Recount Text at SMAN 1 Payahkumbuh in 2011/2012 Academic Year*. Unpublished

- Master Thesis. The State University of Padang.
- Fery, Andy. (2011). *The Study of The Quality of Descriptive Text Written by The Thrid Year Students of English Department of Maha Putra Muhamad Yamin University Solok*. Unpublished Master Thesis. Padang: Pasca Sarjana UNP.
- Grenville, Kate. (2002). *Writing from Start to Finish: A Six-Step Guide*. Sidney:Griffin Press.
- Gunning, T.G. (1998). *Assessing and Correcting Reading and Writing Difficulties*. Bostob: Allyn and Bacon.
- Ka-kan-dee, Maleerat and kaur, Sarjit. (2014). *Argumentative Writing Difficulties of Thai English Major Students*. The 2014 WEI International Academic Conference Proceedings, Bali-Indonesia.
- Langan, John. (2004). *College Writing Skills*. Sixth Edition. New York: McGraw.Hill Press
- Miles, Mathew B. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Source Book*. 2nd Edition. London: Sage Publication.
- Murcia, Celce. (2007). *Toward More Context and Discourse in Grammar Instruction. TESL-Ed. Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language*. 11 (2).1-6.
- Olson, Judith. (2005). *Writing Skills: Success in 20 minutes a day*. New York: Learning Express, LCC.
- Oshima, Alice and Houge. (2003). *Writing Academic English*. New York: Addison Wesley Longman.
- Peha, Steve. (2004). *What Is Good Writing*. New York: Learning Express, LCC.
- Saadiyah, Darus. (2009). *Error Analysis of the Written English Essays of Secondary School Students in Malaysia*. *European Journal of Social Science* 8 (3).
- Strakey, Lauren. (2004). *How to Write Great Essay*. New York: Learning Express Lic.