

Students' Perception on Essay Writing in Writing Class

Anzavia Putri

English Language Education Department, Universitas Muhammadiyah

Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the students' perception on essay writing in writing class including the benefits and the challenges of essay writing in writing class as perceived by the students. The participants of this study were four batch 2017 students of English Language Education Department at one private university in Yogyakarta. The findings of this study showed that the students achieved several benefits during writing an essay in writing class namely enriching students' vocabulary, improving grammar skills, expressing ideas, and increasing students' critical thinking. The findings of this study also presented that there were several challenges faced by the students during writing an essay in writing class. They were difficulty in the use of correct spelling, lack of linguistic knowledge, limited knowledge of the topic and limited vocabulary.

Keywords: Essay writing, benefits, challenges.

1. Introduction

Writing is one of the important skills in academic performance that should be mastered by students. Tsui (1999) stated that writing is one of the strategies that help students in developing their critical thinking skills. Paul, Richard and Elder (2007) also stated that writing can communicate the ideas into written form. There are three kinds of writing namely academic writing, job-related writing, and also personal writing. Brown (2004) stated that writing consists of three types including academic writing, job-related writing, and personal writing. An essay is a kind of academic writing text that is usually taught in writing class. Sutrisno, Rasyid and Rahmat (2018) stated that essay consists of several paragraphs that build one topic. Thus, an essay is a written text which includes several paragraphs that develop one certain topic. Essay writing is one of the common activities that is done in the learning process. Essay writing usually used by the teacher in the learning process as assessment tools. Spiller (2011) stated that an essay can be used as a flexible tool of assessment to measure the students' knowledge. Besides, essay writing usually also used as students' writing task. The Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (2002) defined an essay as "students' writing task about a topic that has been developed" (p. 240). Based on the researcher interview to the English students department at one private university in Yogyakarta, it was found that they have learned essay writing during English learning process. Thus, the aim of this study was to examine the benefits and the challenges of essay writing based on students' perception and experiences.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Writing

Writing is a way to express ideas into sentences in written form that readable by the readers and it is important for students to learn and understand in learning language, especially in learning the English language. Aydogan and Akbarov (2014) stated that writing is one of the productive skills in a written form. Besides that, Meyers (2005) also stated that writing is a process of determining and managing someone's opinions, putting them on paper, and then revising them. Then, Orianda and Rosa (2013) also said that writing is a way to express an idea and it combines several words into written form to communicate the meaningful message to the readers. There are several steps in writing including planning, drafting, editing, and final version. Moreover, Harmer (2004) stated that the process of writing consists of four stages. They are planning, drafting, editing, and final version.

2.2. Essay Writing

An essay is one of the academic writings that is commonly used and learned by students, especially for English students. Longknife and Sullivan (2012) stated that essay is a short piece of writing that develops a certain point into a group of paragraphs. Zemach and Ruimsk (2005) also stated that there are several paragraphs in an essay. Thus, an essay is a part of writing that develops one topic into paragraphs with logical and clear sentences in order can be readable by the readers.

In general, an essay consists of three main parts including the introductory paragraph, the body paragraph, and the concluding paragraph. The first is introductory paragraph. Zemach and Ruimsk (2005) argued that the introductory paragraph is the first paragraph of an essay that explains the essay's topic with general ideas and also states the thesis statement at the end of the first paragraph. The second is body paragraph. Zemach and Ruimsk (2005) said that the body paragraph comes between the introductory and concluding paragraph, it explains the developing ideas of the thesis statement. The third is concluding paragraph. Zemach and Ruimsk (2005) stated that the concluding paragraph is the end of the paragraph in an essay that summarizes or restates the thesis statement and supporting ideas of the essay.

2.3. Steps in Essay Writing

The students need to pay attention to a few steps in essay writing to produce a good essay. Longknife and Sullivan (2012) stated that in writing a good essay there are several steps that should be applied including narrow the focus and determine the thesis statement, choose the method of development, develop the outline, write the first draft, prepare the final draft, revise and finalize, and proofread. Those few steps should be combined and completed each of steps. Then Longknife and Sullivan (2012) also stated that it is important to combine and complete each of the steps in writing an essay.

2.4. The Benefits of Essay Writing in Improving Writing Skills

Eventually, students can get the benefits from essay writing. First, expressing students' ideas. Sutrisno, Rasyid and Rahmat (2018) said that

English essay writing aims to train the students in expressing their creative ideas which cover the criteria of the essay writing including format, mechanics, content, organization, grammar and sentence structure. Second, increasing students' critical thinking. Tabatabaei and Assefi (2012) stated that an essay helps the students to increase their critical thinking. Third, developing students' arguments. Therefore, Nesi and Gardner (2006) found in their survey of assessed writing in 20 disciplines that a commonly recognized value of the essay is its 'ability to display critical thinking and development of an argument within the context of the curriculum' (p. 108). Fourth, motivating students to learn the learning material. Borthwick and Brown as cited in Wagner (1998) stated that essay can motivate the students to learn the material.

2.5. The Challenges of Essay Writing in Improving Writing Skills

During the process of essay writing, there are several things that make essay writing not going well. Students faced some challenges during essay writing. First, students not being able to understand well about what they should write in their essays. Hartley and Chesworth (2000) stated that the students faced difficulties in understanding what they going to write in their essays. Second, students faced challenges in developing their arguments. Bacha (2010) stated that many students difficult to develop their argument. Third, students faced challenges in using the appropriate grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Younes and Albalawi (2015) said that during writing an essay, the students faced some different problems such as grammatical errors, punctuation errors, and spelling errors. Fourth, students faced challenges about word choice

problems. Alfaki (2015) stated that the use of the right words is one of the problems faced by students in writing an essay.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study used a qualitative approach. By using the qualitative approach the researcher could explore more information from the participants about the benefits and the challenges of essay writing in writing class. Besides, this study used descriptive qualitative design. Therefore, by using descriptive qualitative design, the researcher could get pure data from the participants about the benefits and the challenges of essay writing in writing class which could support the study.

3.2. Research Setting

The researcher conducted this study at English Education Department in one private university in Yogyakarta. The researcher conducted this study at English Education Department in one private university in Yogyakarta because in that department essay writing had already been used by teachers during the learning process and also used as assessment tools. Besides that, the researcher conducted this study at English Education Department in one private university in Yogyakarta because the researcher has got permission and also access to conduct study there. The researcher completed the data retrieval in three weeks which includes designing interview guideline, recruiting participants, doing the interview, analyzing the data, and reporting the findings of the study.

3.3. Research Participants

The participants of this study were four students of English Education Department at one private university in Yogyakarta. The participants of this study were that one male and three female students of English Education Department at one private university in Yogyakarta. The researcher set some criteria in choosing the participants of English students in that department. First, the students from batch 2017 that already entered and took the course that is related to essay writing. Second, the students who have high attendance in essay writing class. Third, the students who have high achievers in essay writing class. Fourth, the students who have low achievers in essay writing class.

3.4. Data Collection Method

The researcher used the interview in collecting the data to get detailed information and a deeper understanding of students' perceptions on essay writing in writing class including the benefits and the challenges of essay writing based on students' experiences during the learning process. Then, the researcher used open-ended questions to get in-depth data about students' perceptions on essay writing in writing class including the benefits and the challenges of essay writing based on students' experiences during the learning process. Besides that, the researcher also used indirect question format as question format in order the participant could feel free to deliver their ideas or answers based on the question that interviewer asked to them which was about students' perception on essay writing in writing class including the benefit and

the challenges of essay writing based on students' experiences during learning process. The researches also employed unstructured response mode, in order the participants could give their answers about students' perception on essay writing in writing class freely and there were no limitation answers. The researcher also used the interview guideline as a research instrument.

3.5. Data Collection Procedure

The procedure of data collection was described in several steps including made the interview guidelines, recruited the participants to join this study, set up an interview schedule, and did the interview. The place for did the interview was suitable with what the participants and the researcher agreed. Then the researcher used the Indonesian language during the interview process. Besides, the researcher also used a cell phone as a tool to record during the interview process.

3.6. Data Analysis

After gathering the data through interviews, the next step was analyzing the data from the interview. The purpose of analyzing the data was to identify and explain the data to find out the benefits and the challenges of essay writing in writing class. There were several steps in analyzing the data such as transcribing the data, member checking, and coding.

4. Finding and Discussion

4.1. The Benefits of Essay Writing in Writing Class as Perceived by the Students

The first finding is related to the benefits of essay writing in writing class as perceived by the students. Based on the data gathered from this study, the

researcher found that the students obtained several benefits during writing an essay in writing class. There are four benefits that are found in this study related to essay writing. Essay writing is found to enrich vocabulary, to improve grammar skills, to express idea, and to increase critical thinking.

4.1.1. Enriching vocabulary

The first benefit that is found in this study is that essay writing enriches students' vocabulary. The students' vocabulary enriched because during writing an essay the students learned to use some vocabulary to write essay sentences. During writing an essay, the students need to look up the vocabulary meaning in the dictionary to find out the word meanings that they do not know. The students find out the word meaning to help them in writing essay sentences. Thus, it helps the students to add more new vocabulary.

4.1.2. Improving grammar skills

The second benefit that is found in this study is that essay writing improves students' grammar skills. Essay writing improves grammar skills in the term of the use of tenses, punctuation, and conjunction. The students can improve their grammar skills through writing an essay because during writing an essay they also learn about grammar. Through learning grammar, the students can produce good essay sentences with the correct meanings. Thus, by using the correct grammar the readers can easily read and understand the essay sentences.

4.1.3. Expressing idea

The third benefit that is found in this study is that essay writing helps the students express their idea. During writing an essay the students need to write a good essay and it requires the students to deliver their idea into essay sentences. The students can use their creative ideas to form essay sentences readable by the readers. The readers can get some information regarding what the students had been written in their essays. So, indirectly through writing an essay the students can communicate to the readers in a written way.

4.1.4. Increasing critical thinking

The fourth benefit that is found in this study is that essay writing increases students' critical thinking. The students' critical thinking increased because during writing an essay, the students need to find out and read some sources related to the essay topic. The students need to sort out some sources to determine whether the information can be used to support their essay or not. Thus, it helps the students to increase their critical thinking.

4.2. The Challenges of Essay Writing in Writing Class as Perceived by the Students

The second finding is related to the challenges of essay writing in writing class as perceived by the students. Based on data gathered from this study, the researcher found that students faced some challenges during writing an essay. There are four challenges that are found in this study related to essay writing. They are difficulty in the use of correct spelling, lack of linguistic knowledge, limited knowledge of the topic and limited vocabulary.

4.2.1. Difficulty in the use of correct spelling

The first challenge that is found in this study related to the use of correct spelling. Sometimes, when students writing an essay they did some technical errors, one of them is a misspelling. For example, when the students should write the word that contains double letters, but they miss one of the letters. Misspelling can make the word have incorrect meaning. Therefore, the students should pay attention during writing an essay to avoid misspelling.

4.2.2. Lack of linguistic knowledge

The second challenge that is found in this study related to lack of linguistic knowledge. The participants of this study reported that they have lack of linguistic knowledge. There are some problems faced by students regarding lack of linguistic knowledge during writing essay process. They are limited vocabulary, word choice problem, and the use of formal language. The detailed explanation about some problems regarding lack of linguistic knowledge will be explained in the statements below based on what the participants had been reported.

4.2.3. Limited knowledge of the topic

The second challenge of essay writing that is found in this study related to limited knowledge of the topic. The students cannot free to deliver and develop their ideas into essay sentences because they do not enough knowledge about the essay topic. The students' knowledge about the topic became one of the important things that students should be paid attention during writing an essay. If the students have limited knowledge about the topic related to the essay that

they going to write automatically it can be a challenge when they are writing an essay. In addition, the students difficult to create their essay because they do not really understand the topic being discussed in their essay. Students are hard to develop an essay topic because the students have a lack of reading. On the other hand, if the students have good knowledge about the essay topic that they going to write, it can help them to make a good essay.

4.2.4. Less understanding of essay structure

The third challenge of essay writing that is found in this study related to less understanding of essay structure. During writing an essay, the students difficult to write sentences because they do not know what should they write in a paragraph, for example, the students difficult to write opening sentences and also difficult to write the conclusion.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the students' perception of essay writing in writing class as experienced by English Department students at one private university in Yogyakarta. There were two purposes of this study. The first purpose was to identify the benefits of essay writing in writing class as perceived by the students. The second purpose was to identify the challenges of essay writing in writing class as perceived by the students.

There were two findings of this study including the benefits and the challenges of essay writing in writing class as perceived by the students. First, this study showed that there were four benefits of essay writing. The benefits were that essay writing enriches students' vocabulary, essay writing improves students'

grammar skills, essay writing helps the students to express their ideas, and essay writing increases students' critical thinking. Second, this study found four challenges faced by the students during writing an essay. They were difficulty in the use of correct spelling, lack of linguistic knowledge, limited knowledge of the topic and limited vocabulary.

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