Pre-writing Techniques for the Development of Logical Thinking of EFL University Students in Writing Argumentative Essays

Peggy Magdalena Jonathans[1] and Utami Widiati[2]
[1]Universitas Kristen Artha Wacana; Graduate Program of Universitas Negeri Malang
jonathanspeggyofficial@gmail.com; peggyj@ukaw.ac.id
[2]Fakultas Sastra, Universitas Negeri Malang
utami.widiati.fs@um.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Writing an argumentative essay might put more challenges toEFL low proficient students. This paper seeks to shed light on the contribution of pre-writing techniques to the development of logical thinking expected in an argumentative essayamong Indonesian EFL university students. With two objectives leading the discussion, the paper suggests pre-planning to construct thinking while simulatenously reading going along with the writing as a source of input. Clustering and outlining, the proposed two pre-writing techniques, are found to facilitate the students' abstract thinking prior to writing and assist the higher order thinking skill for better writing outcomes. It is suggested that pre-writing techniques should be a regular practice especially for low proficient student writers, with each technique serving different purposes.

Keywords:_argumentative writing, clustering, outlining, pre-writing techniques_

1. INTRODUCTION

Developing the writing skills of adult learners with low English proficiency seems to be a challenge for many teachers. Among EFL university students in the Indonesian context, there have been several common writing problems indentified such as low English proficiency, cultural understanding, limited writing experiences, heavy dependence of writing model, fewideas, which according to Rahmatunisa (2014, in Toba et al., 2019) can be classified into three main issues: linguistic, cognitive, and psychological.

Writing in EFL is not only about knowledge of the language but also about knowledge of the culture of the language and all the registers applied in the writing task. For example, when writing argumentative essays in English, Indonesian students are expected to meet the English rhetoric. According to Ballard et al. (1991), there might be discrepancies in the knowledge of rhetorical style as presented in the minds of overseas students (non-native English speakers, or NNES). This suggests that the cultural environment and previous learning experiences may reflect various ways of thinking. In a nutshell, as indicated by Widiati and Cahyono (2006), in terms of rhetorical and coherence qualities, tertiary students tend to be better, which can be elucidated that EFL students may learn and practice more to be critical at university level.

Of several genres of essay writing, argumentative type is of a highly demanding task, yet the practices are not adequately exercised and designed in the earlier secondary education (Widiati& Cahyono 2006). As a result, university student writers tend to be overwhelmed when assigned to write an essay of this kind. They were troubled in using grammar, cohesion, coherence, paragraph organization, diction and spelling errors in essay writing (Ariyanti et al., 2017, in Toba et al., 2019). The knowledge is actualy pre-requisite for the argumenative essay (Turmudi, 2020), and this should be understood by the teacher that the students' production is time consuming involving drafting and revising; teachers need to give extra care for overcoming such problems (Ariyanti, 2016).

The causes are related to the knowledge students should acquire regarding the macro and micro components of the argumenative essay (Schneer, 2014, cited in Turmudi, 2020); the macro componentdeals with the structure of the essay (thesis–argument–conclusion), while micro component

is basically the body of the paragraph (statement with arguments and examples–counter rebutalwith arguments and examples- discussion-recommendation on one's stance). In this sense, critical thinking takesa significant role. Building good arguments must be supported by convincing claims and thoughtful word selection free from logical fallacy in their sentences and statements (Indah, 2016).How the two (argumentative essays and logic) are related has beeninterpreted by inferring Stapleton's (2001) assertion stating that students' argumentative work of writing is a measurable manisfestation of their crticial thinking skills that cover raised arguments supported with evidences and facts. This paper aims to discuss the importance of pre-writing techniques in developing critical thinking and identify the challenges university students face whenwriting argumentative essays. More specifically, two pre-writing techniques, outlining and clustering, are being explored in this paper.

2. WRITING ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAYS

The success of writing an argumentative essay relies on the skill of being able to develop a strong argument (Murphy, 2007). Miller (1998, cited in Widiati& Cahyono, 2006) specifies models of writing into three: 'writing as a product', 'writing as a process', and 'writing as a social activity'. It is undeniable then to see that argumentative essays bear the combination of the three writing models;writing such a typeseems to be the most challenging compared other types because there should be elements of being critical from the authors. In this case, Murphy sees the advantage of becoming critical in that students are able to make judgment about conflicting claims. This is certainly the case in many Indonesian universities which are beginning to foster a climate of critical enquiry, prioritizing academic papers for students. Students will continuously connect what they have already written to new ideas while rehearsing, drafting and revising in writing.It seems that reading facilitates the process of thought, or it becomes the food for the brain.

Better critical thinking skillsmight result in more creative, innovative, independent and self-confident students (Indah, 2016). To achieve these objectives, teachers can strategically and skillfully assist their students the strategies until their uses become an integral component of their inventory (Al-Shaer, 2014). Indah's (2016) study findings suggest that students develop their critical thinking skills by elaborating logic construction and flawless reasons through the essay.

Some scholars have attempted to resolve the problems of critical thinking in an argumentative essay by introducing pre-writing techniques, which should be inseparable parts of the whole writing activities for Indonesian EFL tertiary student writers. Students who integratedly make pre-writing (explicit planning) override in writing test results as opposed to those who randomly use rough drafting (implicit planning) (Setyowati et al, 2016). Since writing can be taught, teachers should assist learners to craft their written work in an organized manner, i.e. utilizing pre-planning which plays a very important role in structuring abstract thinking into a developedand manageable draft. Murray (1982) asserts that pre-writing accounts for 85% of the writer's time. Several previous studies address outlining and clustering especifially in terms of whether there are impacts from the techniques on task demands (Kellogg, 1990), on encouraging higher-level thinking through semantic mapping(Schultz, 1991), and on the development of collaborative skills through the use of the clustering technique (Fosmire, 1965), unveiling the basic principles of thinking that the acquisition of new knowledge hings upon the previous knowledge (Al-Shaer, 2014).

3. PRE-WRITING TECHNIQUES

Pre-writing techniques vary in their objectives, andstudents' preferences for pre-writing techniques count (Kieft et al., 2007, in Setyowati et al., 2016).Pre-writing seems to be an essential stage of a writing process before writers start drafting their paragraphs and worry about word choice and sentence structure. Widiati and Cahyono (2006) suggest collaborative pre-writing to foster the flow of ideas. Two popular and essential pre-writing techniques being proposed here are outlining and clustering. Outlining functions as a higher-level overview of the organizational features of a piece of writing; outlining helps writers clarify their writing plan at a level of description that abstracts away from the details of word choice and sentence structure.Outlining can be done traditionally or through internet application to make more engaging experience for students (Al-Shaer, 2014).Kellogg (1990,

in Setyowati et al., 2016) experimented with the two techniques in contrast to each other, and concluded that outlining is significant for improving the overall quality of a document, achieving the strongest result for the topic-condition task and idea organization. Although outlining is more time-consuming for low-proficiency students, he asserts that the effect overcomes students' difficulty of the task when they start from scracth.

In addition to outlining, for low-proficiency students, clustering is highly suggested to use for ideas production in order to enrich students' ideas or to link new knowledge to the knowledge previously acquired (Jonathans, 2009). The exercise of presenting a two-sided argument helps students to think critically because they have to contrast ideas and anticipate other views throughout the essay.In support of semantic mapping or clustering, Schultz (1991, p. 983) adds that this technique maximizes intellectual input, constraining students' thinking by imposing rigid format. Once students understand accurately the concept mapping, they are more potential to write coherently in an organized manner of writing (Al-Shaer, 2014). The more familiar students are with a pre-writing technique, the less time they need to spend on drafting (Jonathans, 2009). More exercises involving exposure to the topics through reading are necessary in order to eliminate some of the difficulties students face in pre-planning activities. Having something in mind motives student to write more.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Pre-writing techniques have facilitative effects on fostering logicand exploring ideas. It is strongly recommended pre-writing techniques be a regular part of classroom practice in relation to thinking stimulant to support the writing outcomes. Integrating reading activities into a writing class might contribute to the richness of students' ideas. Various articles fromlocal or international sources are useful to compare opinions of the same issue while students are exercising to strengthen their two-sided arguments.

References

Al-Shaer, I. M. R. (2014). Employing concept mapping as a pre-writing strategy to help EFL learners better generate argumentative compositions. *ijSOTL, 8*(2) pp. 1-31.

Aryanti. (2016). The teaching of EFL writing in Indonesia. *Dinamika Ilmu, 16*(2), pp. 263-279.

Ballard, B., & Clanchy, J. (1991). Assessment by Misconception: Cultural Influences and Intellectual Traditions. In Hamp-Lyons, L. (Ed.). *Assessing second language writing in academic contexts* (pp. 19-35). London: Ablex Publishing.

Fosmire, F. R. (1965). Clustering as function of associative commonality. *The American Journal of Psychology, 78*(1), 39-47.

Haines, K. (2004). *Assessing students' written work, marking essays and report.* New York: Routledge Falmer, Taylor & Francis Group.

Houston, G. (2004). *How writing works.* Sydney: Pearson Education, Inc.

Indah, R. N. (2016). Logical flaws in Indonesian argumentative essays. LSCAC Proceeding, pp. 358-364.

Janet, E. (1983). *The web of meaning, essays on writing, teaching, learning and thinking.* New Jersey: Boynton/Cook Publisher.

Jonathans, P. M. (2009). *Pre-writing in Indonesian EFL classroom: Students' perceptions and writing outcomes.* Australia: Unpublished Master Dissertation, The University of Queensland.

Kellogg, R. T. (1990). Effectiveness of pre-writing strategies as a function of task demands. *The American Journal of Psychology, 103*(3), pp. 327-342.

Murphy, E. (2007). *Essay writing, made simple.* Australia: Pearson Education Australia.

Murray, D. M. (1982). *Learning by teaching, selected articles on writing and teaching.* New Jersey: Boynton/Cook Publisher.

Rahmatunisa, W. (2014). Problems faced by EFL Indonesians learners in writing argumentative essays. *ERJEE, 3*(1), pp. 41-49.

Setyowati, L., Latief, M. A., & Widiati, U. (2016). The implementation and its effects on EFL students' writing performance. *Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan, 22*(1), pp. 26-35.

Suhartoyo, E., Ni'mah, D., & Ismiatun, F. (2020). The common mistakes of undergraduate EFL students in writing argumentative essays. ELLit Proceedings, pp. 37-41.

Toba, R., Noor, W. N., & Sanu, L. O. (2019). The current issues of Indonesia FL students' writing skills: Ability, problem and reason in writing comparison and contrast essay. *Dinamika Ilmu, 19*(1), pp. 57-74.

Turmudi, D. (2020). Investigating the Indonesia EFL students' argument in argumentative essay. *PJEE, 9*(2), pp. 251-276.

Widiati, U., & Cahyono, B. Y. (2006). The teaching of writing in the Indonesian context: The state of the arts. *Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan, 13*(3), pp. 139-150.

Biodata
Peggy Magdalena Jonathans is serving at Universitas Kriten Artha Wacana, Kupang, Indonesia in teacher education and now is enrolled in doctoral study in ELT in Universitas Negeri Malang. She earned her Master of Arts in 2009 from the University of Queensland, Australia, and since then, she has been teaching, working and researching on TESOL issues and teacher education program.