
IGNITING STUDENTS' MOTIVATION IN WRITING THROUGH JOURNAL WRITING

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Abstract

Until recent decades, the effort on diminishing students' feeling of anxiety and less self-efficacy toward the writing activities in academic writing course still becomes a great concern for the teachers or practitioners of writing skill especially when dealing with students from multilingual society. These students, who learn English as a foreign language, often demonstrate the influence of their first language when composing a writing, even in a simple paragraph. Facing this situation, the teachers are forced to give attention more to students' grammatical composition, and as a result of this most of the students give excessive attention only to revise the grammatical mistakes. Based on this situation, they develop "mental block" towards writing and have less interest in writing. To deal with this situation, many studies suggest that teachers need to foster students' motivation since it is as crucial as developing students' writing skills through practice. Hence, this paper aims to describe the effectiveness of giving journal writing task and providing comments to students' writing in the task as a simple but useful way to ignite students' motivation in writing. The object of the research is the students of academic writing course in Faculty of Cultural Studies of Mulawarman University Samarinda. List of questions were given to the students after they experienced the task to figure out how much the task and the comments influence students' motivation in writing.

Keywords: motivation in EFL, writing skill, journal writing, teacher's comments

1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching English in multicultural society always encounter with a dilemma that the learners who typically have insufficient knowledge about English have to master English in limited period and inadequate environment that can support the learning. Particularly when learning writing skill, the condition of being a part of multicultural society with limited English background cause the learners to demonstrate the influence of their first language when composing a writing, even in a simple paragraph. Facing this situation, the teachers are forced to give attention more to students' grammatical composition, and as a result of this most of the students give excessive attention only to revise the grammatical mistakes. Based on this situation, they develop certain level of anxiety that lead to the construction of their own "mental block" (Liu; MacIntyre & Gardner in Shang, 2013) towards writing and have less interest in writing. To deal with this situation, many studies suggest that teachers need to foster students' motivation first in learning second or foreign language since it is as crucial as developing students' writing skills through practice.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED THEORIES

A. Motivation in learning EFL

Various definitions have been constructed to define what motivation is. In general, motivation is defined as an interest for doing something and the need or reason for doing something. Specifically, motivation in the context of learning EFL is defined as a kind of internal effort which encourage the learners of EFL to take part in the course which offer the EFL learning, be responsible to initiate the learning, and be persistent in the learning process over the long and difficult times (Dörnyei in Ghenghesh, 2010). In addition to this definition, Harmer describes motivation as some kind of internal drive which forces someone to do things in order to achieve something and points out that the motivation that brings students to the task of learning English can be affected and influenced by the attitude of a number of people, including the teachers (Harmer, 2007).

Although motivation is described as individual interest or internal drive, in fact there are two main divisions of motivation: extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation is the kind of motivation which is influenced by the outside factors of an individual, for example the need to pass a test, the possibility to study abroad, and the hope of financial reward. On the other hand, intrinsic motivation is a kind of motivation which comes from within the individual such as individual enjoyment of the learning process to make themselves feel better. The division of motivation provides information that motivation is not always the conscious interest which comes from inside, but it can also be influenced by some factors outside the individual. However, most researchers on motivation point out that intrinsic motivation is seen as the more important for encouraging success (Harmer, 2007)

Researches to examine the influence of motivation in learning EFL have been conducted for a long time and have come to a crucial conclusion related to the influence of motivation in learners. One of the most well-known studies is from Gardner in 1985 which is noticeable by the invention of AMTB. Regarding the role of motivation in learning second language, Gardner claims that students who have higher levels of motivation will do better than students with lower levels, and if they are motivated, they will have strong reasons for to make themselves involved in the relevant learning activities, show desires to achieve the goal, and enjoy the activities (Gardner in Al-Tamimi and Suib, 2009). In addition to this view, Dörnyei points out that motivation has an important role in language learning consequently without appropriate motivation, students' achievement cannot be realized (Dörnyei in Ghenghesh, 2010). These views are also in line with Harmer's view which proposes the idea that for most fields of learning, motivation is essential to success because the basic thing is we have to want to do something to succeed at it and without motivation, we will almost certainly fail to do the necessary effort (Harmer, 2007). The latest study was conducted by Anjomshoa and Sadighi (2015) who suggested that in EFL setting, without students' motivation, the class can be less attractive and even boring. Motivation is one of the important aspects of second language acquisition. Motivation is a kind of desire of learning. It is very difficult to teach a second language in a learning environment if the learner does not have a desire to learn a language. The strategy that the teachers use in teaching strategy will have an effect toward motivation, in which an enthusiastic approach is more effective to motivate than a gloomy approach. The importance of the teacher factor in having a high level of motivation in SLA cannot be ignored. Therefore, teachers need to know the type of motivation and the sources of motivation to meet the students' particular needs.

B. Teachers' role in developing students' motivation in learning writing

Writing is similar to speaking in terms of its kind as a productive skill. However, contrast to speaking, writing is rather complex since it is less spontaneous and more permanent. It is also obvious that in writing, unlike in conversation, we cannot interact with the listeners and adapt as we do the process of writing. It makes writing less flexible than conversation, and the language used in writing is more standardized (Broughton et al., 2003). In addition to this complexity, Cheng points out that writing is an emotional as well as cognitive activity, in which we think and feel at the same time when produce particular writing. (Cheng, 2002). Since writing is a complex activity, Bruning and Horn claim that it requires close attention to the conditions for developing motivation and skill (Bruning and Horn, 2000). This view is confirmed by the view of Brinton, Snow, and Wesche who emphasize that motivation plays a role in learning complex language structures, hence students with low motivation may have problems in language acquisition because it blocks language stimulation from reaching the brain. On the other hand, high motivated students result in an increased ability to learn and use a new language (Brinton, Snow, and Wesche in Hill, 2006) Consequently, the role of teachers in writing is not only to teach the skills, but it is more important that teachers can act as motivator where the teachers create the right conditions for the generation of ideas, encourage the students of the usefulness of the activity, and boost the students to make as much effort as possible for maximum benefit. This effort, therefore, should be carried out as a sustained effort on the part of longer process-writing sequences (Boscolo and Gelati, 2007).

According to Broughton et al. (2003), language learners are best motivated when the learners experience the language learning truly communicative, in which the learning is appropriate to its context and involve the teachers' skills to move them to a fuller competence in the foreign language. The importance of teachers' role in raising students' motivation is related to several matters. The first

matter is motivation is related to teachers' beliefs about writing which can influence the ways in which the teachers organize the writing setting and instructional practices. The second one is motivation is related to the following aspects: interest, collaboration, and evaluation. Therefore, writing instruction requires the teacher to choose tasks, activities, and strategies carefully and focuses in particular on the aspects. As a result of this, teachers as motivator become the dominant aspect that determine the motivation that the student will develop when learning.

The importance of the teacher factor in having a high level of motivation in second language acquisition is very important. The way that the teacher implement in teaching strategy will give an effect toward motivate, that is an excited approach is more likely to motivate than a gloomy approach (Anjomshoa and Sadighi, 2013). Related to motivation in learning writing, Graham (2007) suggests that to successfully engaged the students to have motivation in writing, teachers are required to have appropriate believe in writing. Teachers have to believe that writing is not only an important subject or ability in the curriculum, but an important experience that enable the students to find a personal meaning in learning practices through teachers' guide. It is also important that teachers' view of writing also influences students' motivation to write. When teachers view writing as a basically individual ability, they tend to stimulate motivation mainly through assigning interesting topics when possible.

When motivation is viewed and considered as an attitude to be developed and improved through meaningful activities, the setting of writing tasks will be clearly different. It is obvious that writing tasks sometimes can be boring, predictable, and the results of doing the task sometimes are not noticeable. Therefore, to help the students become a competent writer, it requires both students' involvement and teachers' authority in setting up the exercises. While students view writing in the classroom as consisting of meaningful experiences, they may also view less challenging tasks as important, not necessarily boring aspects of their becoming writers. This balance should also characterize the use of group versus individual writing in the classroom. The meaningful writing activities that teachers arrange to promote and sustain students' motivation to write may be isolated moments of classroom life for students, interesting and enjoyable but not sufficient to create a continuing attitude toward writing. It is teachers' responsibility to create continuity among these moments, such as by pointing out the contributions of individual students, showing the value of the results accomplished, and inviting students to find new and challenging writing tasks (Boscolo and Gelati, 2007).

Regarding the role of motivation in learning writing, it is obvious that the students with high motivation are those who value and are willing to use writing as a valuable activity or means of expression, communication, and elaboration. This kind of students are realistically self-confident about their ability to use writing successfully, and by having this self-confident, they develop the source for feeling satisfied and engaged when writing. Therefore, the problem of having lack of motivation is not always triggered by unattractive writing task, but it is more about how students are assisted during the learning to develop their self-confident on their writing so that they are able to raise their motivation to write. Together with beliefs about writing, students also develop self-perceptions and beliefs about themselves as writers, their writing competence, and their ability to manage writing tasks. (Boscolo and Gelati, 2007)

Bruning and Horn (2000) suggest four groups of activities that should be established by the teachers to develop students' motivation to write. These groups are interrelated to each other and teachers are responsible to create activities that can cover the four groups of activities. The groups include the activities to promote students' beliefs about writing as a useful activity for the students, raise students' interest toward writing through authentic writing goals and contexts, provide a supportive context for writing, and build a positive emotional environment. For each groups of activities, Bruning and Horn also offer the details of the activities, which of course not only limited to the following offers, but also are possible to be developed by the teachers. The details of the activities are as follow:

1. When promoting proper beliefs that writing is a useful activity for the students, teachers may begin with:
 - a. Creating a classroom community that can support writing activities

- b. displaying the ways that teachers use writing personally
 - c. find writing tasks that can help the students to achieve their success in writing
 - d. give opportunities for students to find out and build their own ability in areas they will write about
 - e. use simple daily writing activities to encourage regular writing
 - f. Encouraging writing in a wide variety of genres.
2. To foster students' interest toward writing through authentic writing goals and contexts, teachers can initiate several ways that include:
 - a. Requesting students to find examples of different kinds of writing
 - b. Encouraging students to write about topics of personal interest
 - c. Having students write for a variety of audiences
 - d. Establishing improved communication as purpose for revision
 - e. Making connection between writing and other instruction in other disciplines
 3. The need to provide a supportive context for writing can be accomplished by conducting several efforts such as:
 - a. Breaking complex writing tasks into parts
 - b. Encouraging goal setting and monitoring of progress
 - c. Supporting students in setting writing goals that are neither too challenging nor too simple
 - d. Teaching writing strategies and helping students learn their use
 - e. Giving feedback on progress toward writing goals
 - f. Using peers as writing partners in learning communities
 4. To create a positive emotional environment, teachers can do the following efforts that include:
 - a. Modeling positive attitudes toward writing
 - b. Providing a safe environment for writing
 - c. Giving students choices about what they will write
 - d. Providing feedback allowing students to remember control over their writing
 - e. Using natural outcomes as feedback source
 - f. Training students to engage in positive self-talk about writing
 - g. Helping students to deal with their feeling of anxiety and stress as natural arousal.

C. Journal writing task and teachers' feedback

According to Scrivener (2005), many writing tasks are designed with less of direction and less of audience. As a consequence, many students only consider writing task as an activity that they have to finish in order not to get penalty from the teacher. If the students are in this situation, there is no doubt that they will have low motivation, and the quality of writing may not be satisfying because they will have no clear idea why the writing is being done. Scrivener suggest the following strategies for the teachers to make writing tasks more interesting:

1. Using task types, contexts and situation which directly relevant to students.
2. Let the students know what will happen when they finish the task since if students know who will read their text and what that reader may need or expect from it, then they have a clear idea of the purpose of the writing. Later, it will strongly influence many other decisions they take in the writing.
3. It is not recommended to mark and give feedback only on accuracy of language. Include attention to the question to of whether the writing is appropriate for the task type and is well targeted at the probable reader.
4. It is important to select writing tasks that are likely to reflect things that many students may need to write in real life.

Various tasks are available for the students to be completed as writing activity which enable them to develop motivation and skill in writing. It is the teachers' responsibility to choose or design appropriate tasks that suitable with their goals, students interest, or setting. Related to the effort in developing students' motivation in writing, the simple way is to ask them to write as many as possible in the most enjoyable situation. Especially when the learning happens in EFL context, motivation is really crucial to be improved. One of the well-known task is to ask the students to have

journal writing. According to Oshima and Hogue, journal writing is an activity that can allow the students to expand their vocabulary in writing through constant repetition, trial, and may error in nonthreatening environment. Journal writing facilitates the students to develop the language that they need in your everyday life (Oshima and Hogue, 2007). There are some reasons why journal writing can help the students in acquiring a level of fluency in written language without having anxious on the result of their writing as follow:

1. In journals, quantity is more important than quality. Writing everyday will help the students become fluent
2. In journal, students can write about topics that are interesting and relevant to their life. Students are practicing to express their ideas and feelings
3. Journals can help the students develop their ideas that can be used later in their paragraphs or essays.
4. Writing a journal can be a very enjoyable activity because students do not have to worry about using a dictionary or checking grammar or organization, and students do not have to write several drafts. Students just need to concentrate on the content. (Oshima and Hogue, 2007)

Although journal writing is seen a simple task that can be done by the students, it can be a great way that can help students to practice elaborating their ideas in the form of structured writing. Undeniably, the success of using journal writing in developing students' motivation in writing depend on how the teachers can provide appropriate comments or feedback to the students. Teachers should express enthusiasm and positive opinions about writing since positive feedback on the content of learners' writing can do a lot to increase the amount of writing that learners do and to improve their attitude to writing. (Boscolo and Gelati, 2007; Nation, 2009). When teachers provide comments to students' writing, they tell the students that their work is being read, is understood, and interests the reader. Nation points out that especially with younger learners, it is important not to discourage writing by always giving feedback that show the errors in the writing. There should be a place in a writing course for feedback on errors but this kind of feedback needs to be very carefully balanced against the positive encouragement to write more, and these two kinds of feedback need to be separated. The motivation to write is most helped by learners doing a lot of successful writing (Nation, 2009).

Particularly when learning writing in EFL context, Lee suggests that it is important to consider what kind of comments would help students most and how students can be helped to use teacher comments. Lee also emphasizes that students', no matter how proficient they are, need for more written comments because they like to have more information about their written performance, separately from feedback on errors (Lee, 2008).

3. DISCUSSION

This paper aims only to describe particular phenomenon using qualitative approach. There was no statistical data used in this research, and the way the writers draw conclusion is based on the information gained through the responses from the participants toward some lists of enquiries. The use of qualitative approach in this research influence the way the writers present their discussion and draw the conclusion in descriptive style. Therefore, the elaboration in this part will be presented in the form of describing the detail condition of the participants.

In this research, the participants were selected based on the situation that they were given the task and comments by the lecturer. Through the questionnaire, they responded about their own experience of doing journal writing task and receiving the comments from the lecturer. The participants were taken from two different classes who are the students enrolled in academic writing course in semester four at the faculty of Cultural Sciences Mulawarman University. The two classes were chosen as the participants because in these classes the lecturer asked the students to do journal writing task and give comments to their writing. The total number of the participants was sixty-one students from two different classes. The students in this class were asked to write on their journal writing about the topic that had been determined by the lecturer and they had to submit the journal every week on the day of the course. The lecturer was responsible to give different topics every week,

read the students' journal and provide comments and motivation to the students' writing. The comments from the lecturer are only related to the content of students' writing and motivation to the students to keep practicing writing through their journal. The positive comments were directly assigned to what the students wrote in their journal, such as "I like your idea about...", "I agree with your opinion that...", "It is interesting to know about your story". The lecturer also provided responses to the questions that the participants enquired through their journal.

After 6 weeks of completing the task of journal writing, students are asked to answer the questions related to the influence of journal writing and lecturer's comments in increasing their motivation to write. Six questions were developed in the questionnaire to know whether the students have motivation to write after they complete the task and read the comments from the lecturer. The list of questions enquire how students feel when learning academic writing in terms of the feeling of interest and motivation, how are their motivation in doing the journal writing task, their opinion towards the way the lecturer gave comments and whether the comments are able to rise their motivation to write, and what kinds of comments that they expect from the lecturer to be given in their writing.

The result of the questionnaire showed that all of the students have positive attitude about learning academic writing. They emphasize that the course is really important to develop their skill in writing by learning how to write appropriately and correctly. In relation to students' motivation to learn academic writing, one student responded that she needs more attractive learning activity in order to rise her motivation. However, all participants generally responded that they feel motivated because they want to know the right thing to do in their writing, particularly because they feel that they still have some problems in their grammar. In addition to this respond, some students point out that they feel motivated to learn academic writing because the lecturer was able to give clear explanation about the materials in the class and the lecturer keep providing supporting motivation in their task.

Towards the journal writing task, almost all of the participants responded that they were really interested with the task because the task helps them to practice writing. Only a few of the participants point out that sometimes the task made them stress out because it was hard for them to brainstorm the ideas about what to write even the topic of the task had been determined by the lecturer. Most of the participants also like the way the lecturer gave comments toward their writing and they pointed out that they were really appreciated by the lecturer because their writing was read and given comments. Some students even cannot wait to read the comments from the lecturer because the comments make them feel motivated to write the next journal. One student however responds differently that he thought that the teachers comment is similar to one another therefore he expects that the teacher provides diverse comments. In the questionnaire, the participants also point out their expectation to what kind of comments that they expect from the lecturer. The following items are the responses from the participants regarding the kinds of comments that they are expecting from the lecturer:

1. Detail comments about their grammatical error in their writing since they have doubt about their grammar skill
2. Comments that contain more motivational words because they find the source of their desire to write from such comment
3. Some students chose not to be given bad or critical comments on their writing because they felt it can lower their motivation to write. On the other hand, it is not a problem for some students to have any kind of comments, either positive or critical comments since they can use the comments to motivate them to make more writing
4. Comments should be different between one student to another student.

Apart from the kinds of comment that the students expected from the lecture, there is also an expectation that the lecturer can provide more interesting activity in learning process, such as learning through games activity and give more challenging topic to the students. In addition, lecturer is also expected to be more enduring with the students in the class because of the diversity of background of the students.

4. CONCLUSION

Motivation as the crucial factor that influence a person in doing something must be seen as primary aspect that needs to be developed and maintain, especially when discussing about the way to help the EFL learners to be successful learners. The findings of this research is only the brief evidence that to build students motivation can be done through simple task, but the point is that the feedback or comments from the teachers are the crucial factor that can raise students' motivation to write. It is definitely not a generalization to only use single task, that is journal writing, as a media to develop students' motivation to write. Yet, it is worthwhile to try giving positive and motivational comments in every students' task as Nation's view that positive feedback on the content of learners' writing can be very useful to develop the amount of writing that the students do and to improve their attitude toward writing (Nation, 2009).

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