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## ASSESSING AND EVALUATING EFL LEARNERS' ABILITY IN WRITING ACADEMIC ESSAY

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### **Abstract**

*English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Indonesia, especially in English Education Department is strongly expected to have good writing skill. This is because the learners' achievement in writing can be used as a valuable contribution towards the development of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Indonesia, especially in the teaching of writing skill. Therefore, it needs a writing assessment and evaluation to measure the learners' writing skill. This study aims at assessing and evaluating the EFL learners' ability in writing an essay, especially in writing academic or scientific essay. Quantitative method with descriptive quantitative design employed in this study. The writing test and unstructured interview were used in this study as research instrument. This study was conducted on November 2016 at University of Lancang Kuning, Indonesia. There were 80 learners selected as participants in this study. The result of the writing test showed that the learners' average score was 68.8 and it was categorized into fair level. Moreover, based on the interview the learners said that they felt difficult in developing and organizing idea with correct grammar and diction in a composition. It was basically influenced by limited writing strategy and learning materials. Therefore, appropriate learning materials supported by writing strategy are needed to facilitate and improve the learners' writing skill. In conclusion, the learners' writing skill is in fair level of ability.*

**Keywords:** *English as a Foreign Language (EFL), English Language Teaching (ELT), Writing Skill*

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Writing is one of the language skills that should be mastered by English Foreign Language (EFL) learners in university level, especially in English Study Program Faculty of Teachers Training and Education University of Lancang Kuning Pekanbaru. This is because the learners' achievement in writing can be used as a valuable contribution towards the development of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Indonesia, especially in the teaching of writing skill.

One of the writing skills that should be mastered by the students is writing an essay correctly. The better ability the students have in writing an essay, the better ability they have in writing another form of writing such as: academic writing, scientific writing, argumentative essay, or various English text types.

In writing, there are two aspects that should be considered. First, writing process such as: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing (Fachrurrazy, 2011:90). Second, micro and macro skills of writing such as correct use of diction, grammar, and mechanics such as capitalization, punctuation, and spelling (Brown, 2007:90). By considering those aspects of writing, writing activity will be easy and enable good improvement.

In line with those aspects, there are two another elements that should be existed in a composition. These two elements are unity and coherence. Oshima and Hogue (2006:18) state that unity is single idea in a paragraph and coherence is the relationship between one sentence to another or one paragraph to another. So, good paragraph or essay should be developed by good unity and coherence.

In accordance with those statements, the researcher interested to conduct a research in order to check the students' ability in writing an essay. The result of this research can give clear description of the students' ability in writing an essay. Moreover, the result of this research can be used as an evaluation of writing course to improve the quality of the teaching of writing skill.

**a. Research Question**

The research question of this study can be formulated as follows: How is the students' ability in writing academic essay?

**b. Objective of the Study**

This study aims at assessing and evaluating the learners' ability in writing an essay, especially in writing an academic essay or scientific essay.

**c. Significance of the Study**

This research is expected to be useful especially for: the students, the teachers, and future researchers.

**1. Learners**

The learners can get a reflection of their ability in writing an essay.

**2. Lecturers**

The lecturers can get clear picture of the learners' ability in writing an essay.

**3. Future researchers**

The references used in this study can be used by the next researchers to conduct further study.

**2. REVIEW OF RELATED THEORIES****a. Theoretical Basis**

In writing, there are many kinds of composition that can be produced such as paragraph and essay. Paragraph consist of several sentences explaining the topic (Hornby: 2010). Paragraph is also a group of related sentences which develop main idea of the topic. In a paragraph, there are three structures that can be written in a paragraph. The three structures of paragraph are: topic sentence, supporting sentence, and concluding sentence (Oshima and Hogue, 2006: 3-4). So, a good paragraph is a paragraph which contains the three structures of paragraph.

Meanwhile, essay is a group of paragraph which explains the subject or certain idea (Hornby:2010). In addition, good paragraph and essay should consist of Unity and Coherence. Oshima and Hogue (2006:18) state that unity is single idea in a paragraph, meanwhile coherence means idea in one sentence to another or one paragraph or another is hold together. So, a good paragraph or essay is a paragraph or essay which contains good unity and coherence.

In relation to the previous explanation, there are some aspects that should be considered in writing paragraph and essay. Those aspects are: Content, Organization, Vocabulary, Grammar, Mechanics (Brown,2007:90). As a result, by considering those aspects, the paragraph and essay will be well composed.

**b. Relevant Research**

In this part, the researcher highlights some previous research which relevant to this research in order to support the theories used in this research. The relevant researches are as follow.

1. Fajri (2016) conducted the research about the use of unity, coherence, and word usage in a paragraph. The result of the research showed that the students were not able to apply unity, coherence, and word usage in a paragraph correctly. General mistakes happened were basically influenced by mother tongue and learning difficulties. Therefore, the mistakes happened are due to the influence of language learning and acquisition factor.
2. The research done by Fahim and Rad (2012) about relationship between students with good thinking towards ability in writing paragraph. The research finding showed that the students who had good or critical thinking were very contributive toward their writing skill. So, the better way of thinking or thought in generating ideas the better ability in writing a composition.
3. Crosthwaite (2011) conducted research about the influence of cohesion and coherence in written or spoken discourse through scaffold between English native speaker and Korean students which use English as a second language. The research finding showed that the use of scaffold can help Korean students in expressing language or written and spoken discourse well. Therefore, cohesion and coherence in a discourse can also be applied well.

4. The research done by Gupta and Woldemariam (2011) about the influence of motivation and attitude toward writing strategy. From this research, it can be explained that the students with high motivation in writing can be viewed from high level of interest in writing, confident, good ability, and good attitude toward writing strategy. This result showed that, in order to be able to write composition well, it needs good motivation and high level of confident supported by good attitude and thought.
5. The research conducted by Ahmed (2010) about Cohesion and Coherence in writing an essay. From this research, it can be identified that the students had difficulties in writing introductory paragraph, topic sentence, and concluding sentence. This result showed that, there should be considered the aspect of cohesion and coherence in writing a paragraph. This is done in order to produce a good composition.

### 3. METHOD

#### a. Research Design

The research design used in this study was descriptive quantitative. In this study, the researcher analyzed the data quantitatively by using scoring guide and its formula. Then, the researcher described data descriptively. Moreover, the procedures of this research are as follow.

1. The researcher prepared the writing test for the students.
2. The researcher analyzed the learners' ability in writing an essay.
3. The researcher interviewed the students to get additional information
4. The researcher concluded the learners' ability in writing an essay.

#### b. Setting of the Study

The setting of this study was at English Education Department Faculty of Teachers Training and Education University of Lancang Kuning Pekanbaru, Riau Province, Indonesia.

#### c. Participants

The participants of this study were 80 learners. Moreover, the detail information about participants of this research can be seen at Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1 The Participants of the Study**

No	Grade	Learners
1	IV A	25
2	IV B	27
3	IV C	28
<b>Total</b>		<b>80 learners</b>

#### d. Technique of Collecting Data

In this research, the researcher collected the data by using test. The test used was writing an essay. Then, the students were asked to write an essay for about 5 paragraph (500 words) in 90 minutes length. After that, the researcher interviewed the students to gain additional information about students' ability in writing an essay.

#### e. Technique of Analyzing the Data

The data which has been collected through the test was analyzed by using scoring rubric of essay writing. Then, the data from interview was analyzed descriptively. Moreover, the scoring rubric can be seen at appendix.

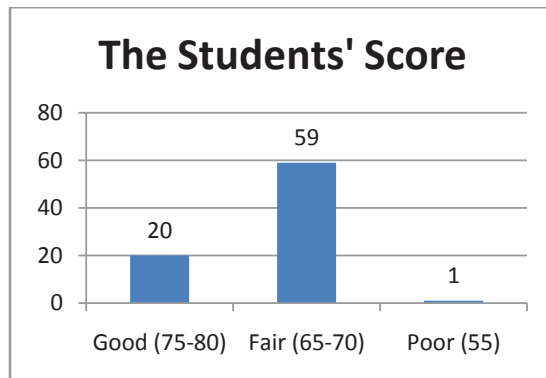
### 4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In accordance with the data gained in this study, it can be stated that the students' result in writing an essay was categorized into **fair level**. It was because the students' average score was 68.8. From the scores, it can be identified that 20 students achieved good score category with the score range 75-80, then 59 students got fair score category with the score range 65-70, and 1 student

obtained poor score category with the score 55. Moreover, the students' scores can be presented in the Table 4.1 and Diagram 4.1 below and the individual score can be seen at appendix.

**Table 4.1 The Students' Score**

No	Obtained Score	Score category	Number of students
1	75-80	Good	20
2	65-70	Fair	59
3	55	Poor	1
Total of students			80 Students



**Diagram 4.1 The Students' Score**

Pertaining to the students' score presented in the Table and Diagram 4.1, it can be explained that the students' difficulties in writing an essay were in terms of generating ideas for thesis statement. The students were also felt difficult in applying correct grammar, choice of word, and writing mechanics such as: punctuation and capitalization.

In relation to the previous statement, the students' difficulties in writing an essay were basically influenced by several factors such as: lack of ideas, low motivation to write an essay, poor grammatical ability, and seldom to practice writing at leisure time. This is in line with the research done by Fahim and Rad (2012) about thinking or thought, Ahmed (2010) about Cohesion and Coherence in a composition, and Gupta and Woldemariam (2011) about motivation to write composition.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the students' score in writing an essay is categorized into fair level score category. This is because the students' average score is 68.8. In addition, it can be stated that the students' achievement in writing the essay is influenced by several difficulties and factors such as: the students feel difficult in generating ideas for thesis statement due to lack of ideas, the students are also feel difficult in applying correct grammar, choice of word, and writing mechanics such as: punctuation and capitalization, the students have low motivation to write an essay, and seldom to practice writing at leisure time. From this result, the students' difficulties or problems in writing the essay can be solved by considering appropriate or effective writing strategy. Therefore, it is suggested to future researchers to follow-up this research to become classroom action research or experimental research design as one of the solutions to overcome the students' problem in writing the essay.

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