

SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' PROBLEMS IN WRITING

A Preliminary Study of Implementing Writing E-Journal as Self Assessment to Promote Students' Writing Skill

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Abstract

The study is aimed to investigate the internal and external problems in Writing by the Senior High Students in one of the school in Indonesia. The sample of this study is the eleventh grade students having low ability in Writing. This research is a qualitative study using purposive sample. In collecting the qualitative data the researchers did observation, and distributed questionnaire. This study reveals some findings related to the students' low ability in writing. There are internal problems which came from the students, such as: 1) the low motivations in learning English, 2) the difficulty to choose the appropriate words in writing, 3) the lack of vocabulary, 4) the difficulty to arrange words in the appropriate order, 5) the difficulty to spell the words, 6) the difficulty to write the sentences in appropriate grammar, and 7) the tendency to be passive learners in classroom activities. The external problems come from the students are: 1) the lack of practice, and 2) there is no feedback on their writing. The result indicates the most internal and external problems faced by students in writing class and the impacts of students' understanding of their writing problems in implementing writing e-journal as self assessment to promote students' writing skills. Furthermore, the paper concludes with some guidelines for students how to face their own problems in writing.

Keywords: writing problems, e-journal writing, self-assessment, writing skill

Introduction

Nunan (2003) states that writing is the process of thinking to invent ideas, thinking about how to express into good writing, and arranging the ideas into statement and paragraph clearly. It plays a major role in expressing one's ideas, thoughts, opinions, and attitudes. Through writing, people are capable of sharing ideas, feelings, persuading and convincing others. People may write for personal enjoyment or for some other purpose. Beside personal enjoyment, there are some students' internal and external problems that commonly occurred in writing based on some experts as below:

1. The Internal Problems in Writing

a. Grammatical Problems

Kharma (1987) in Melese (2007, p. 12) states that students have grammatical

problems with subject verb agreements, pronoun references, and connectors.

b. Problem of Word Choice.

Writing in a second language using the appropriate words in the appropriate place is a problem for students. The effort to impress the reader leads to a problem of diction.

c. Cognitive Problems

i. Punctuation Problems

According to Byrne (1988, p. 16), the fact that punctuation has never been standard to the extent as spelling, makes it is problematic.

ii. Capitalization Problems

Capital letters are useful for sentence initials, the beginning of important words, in topics, headings. The problems occur because the difficulty to classify nouns as

proper and common nouns (Gowere et al., 1995)

iii. Spelling Problem

Due to the influence of other languages, variant pronunciations and other historical reasons, the English spelling system which has become inconsistent is complex for students (Gowere et al., 1995)

iv. Content Problem

Learners of English as a second or foreign language also face problems of exploring ideas and thought to communicate with others

v. Problem Organization

Learners have the problem of structuring the paragraph, topic development of a paragraph, structuring the whole discourse and a theme in a discourse, differentiating a topic and supporting ideas or generalizations and specific details.

2. The External Problems in Writing

a. Lack of Knowledge about Writing Stages

Byrne (1988, p. 4) classifies the writing complexities into psychological, linguistic and cognitive problems. It means that writing does not come naturally but rather gained through continuous effort and much practice, it becomes a complex skill.

b. Lack Learners' Motivation

Writing tasks can be developed rapidly when students' concerns and interests are acknowledged, when they are given numerous opportunities to write and when they are encouraged to become participants. It means that learners will be encouraged to write if writing tasks motivate them and keep them interested.

c. Inadequate Time

Learners need time for gathering ideas, organizing their ideas, writing drafts, proof reading and re-writing. According to Quantum and Chakraverty (2000, p. 22),

writing, which is an important part of language learning, is essentially a reflective activity that requires enough time to think about the specific topics.

d. Lack of Practice

According to Davies (1998, p. 25), "writing is essentially a creative process and good writers must learn to communicate their ideas clearly to an unseen audience. In addition, learners must take the responsibility for their learning if meaningful learning is to take place. Furthermore, to become a good writer, a student needs to write a lot.

e. Teachers' Feedback

Byrne (1988, p. 29) thinks that if teachers are to be truly readers rather than judges, they should perhaps look not so much at what the learners have failed to achieve but rather at what they actually succeeded in doing. This might help students writers to appreciate receiving comments and use them in their revisions.

Methodology

The researcher used qualitative method to describe the result of study. And through the documentation of previous writing test revealed some findings related to the students' low ability in writing. Then, the researcher used observation, and questionnaire as research instruments to investigate the students' understanding of their own problems in writing. The result indicates the the internal and external problems in students' writing and the impacts of students' understanding of their writing problems in implementing writing e-journal as self assessment to promote students' writing skills.

The data of this research are 27 students in eleventh grade of SMAN 1 Surakarta. The questionnaire contained of their external and internal problems in writing and they knowledge of e-journal learning.

Findings and Discussion

The version used in this study consists of fourteen Likert scale questions and one open-ended question about knowledge of e-journal learning.

1. The questionnaire of students' external and internal problems in writing

This is the result that commonly occurred in writing class. There was not much difference in the way the students reported of what the problems they got in writing. The result found that the most internal problems challenged the students in writing are grammatical problem and the second is lack of motivation. And the next is problem in cognitive and sentence structure. However, a few students have problem in word choice and vocabulary.

Furthermore, the students' external problems found in writing are because of lack of practice. It has been revealed that the reason that the students is lazy and lack of motivation to practice. And second problems most students got in writing is there is no feedback on their writing. Sometimes, teacher only give a score and correction on their writing without any feedbacks and comments.

In teaching and learning process, teachers also need the students point of view about their ability and need to know students' understanding of their own writing problems because there are many reasons that cannot be expressed by the students in the result of the test then teacher might be consider them as an evaluation for the next teaching and learning process.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the questionnaire.

Categories	Item	Percentage
The Internal problems	Q1	33% Grammatical Problem
	Q2	26% Lack of motivation
	Q3	15% Cognitive problem
	Q4	11% Problem of word choice
	Q5	15% problem of sentence structure
The external problems	Q6	30% lack of teachers' feedback
	Q7	15% lack knowledge of writing stages
	Q8	18% inadequate time
	Q9	37% lack of practice
The knowledge of e-journal learning	Q11	15% students didn't know about e-journal learning
	Q12	26% students have write journal learning.
	Q13	52% students interest to write e-journal learning
	Q14	37% students believe that it can improve their writing

The researcher suggested some guidelines for teachers how to face students who have problems in writing: first is give them opportunity to understand and try to solve their writing problem. Then give them positive feedback, try to evaluate their writing without judging their mistake but also prise their work. Teachers must consider a placement test to know the writing ability without rush writing. And encourage them to practice and give some revisions if there are some mistakes. Furthermore, ask them for an opinion about their own work. To know how much they understand about their own work. Then, emphasize reading; good readers are good

writers. And the last is give extra help if there are some difficulties occurs by students.

2. The questionnaire of the knowledge of e-journal learning.

Based on the results, most of the students stated that they never used journal as the writing method to recognize their own ability so far. The teacher stated that he only used the result of the test and student's behavior in class to know their skill. Furthermore, a few students have write journal learning. However, almost all students are interested to write e-journal

learning because they believe that it can improve their writing skill.

Writing journal is similar to writing diary which is one of traditional methods in writing. In the process of writing diary, the students are given opportunities to write by using a pen and a paper. However, this traditional method seems problematic by the students to write journal through paper especially for the teachers if they find a badly-formed letter in their students' writing. To minimize the problems, e-journal is the modern method that students only need smart phone or laptop and internet them a personal space to write their own improvement, worries, and problems personally.

In teaching and learning process, teachers also need the students point of view about their ability and need to know students' understanding of their own writing problems because there are many reasons that cannot be expressed by the students in the result of the test then teacher might be consider them as an evaluation for the next teaching and learning process.

Conclusion

It is concluded that students are still have the same difficulties from the past. To minimize the problems, e-journal is the modern method that students only need smart phone or laptop and internet connection to write their learning activity. It is an easy way to reduce the stress and to motivate students in writing and to give them a personal space to write their own improvement, worries, and problems personally. In teaching and learning process, teachers also need the students point of view about their ability, because there are many reasons that cannot be expressed by the students in the result of the test. And then, for the teacher, it might be considered as teaching evaluation for the next teaching and learning process.

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