

TRANSFORMING ONLINE CHAT DATA INTO ARTICLES: EXPLORING THE STUDENTS' WRITING QUALITIES AND DIFFICULTIES IN GENERATING AND ORGANIZING IDEAS

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has forced everyone to be skillful in using the technology willy-nilly. Consequently, training the students to take data digitally and then proceed them into any mode of reports became a necessary matter. This study will examine how students transform online chat data into articles, especially in terms of their writing qualities and their difficulties when generating and organizing ideas. Generating and organizing ideas play the primary role in the initial phase of the writing process, but a limited study is available in the literature that addresses this case. This descriptive study invited 66 students to answer the research questions by analyzing the questionnaires and evaluating their writings. The findings indicated that most students faced problems when generating and organizing ideas and that their articles' quality was still poor. Data analysis showed that the problems ranged from not fluent in writing in English, lack of practice to generate and organize the ideas, and not skilled at writing articles. Most of them did free writing and just write with the flow without thinking of the article's generic structure. Half of them were also unsure whether they used one of the suggested ways to generate and organize ideas. Some pedagogical implications were discussed, including stimulating the students' metacognitive skills during the process of writing and giving more explicit exercises to generate and organize ideas with frequent constructive feedback from the teachers.

Keywords: Generating, Organizing, Ideas, Difficulties, Writing

Introduction

Making a start in writing is somewhat not easy, even for adult writers. It commonly happens for many reasons, such as lack of ideas, the writer's belief that their idea is not good enough [1], or even too many ideas that come up in mind. The number of ideas which a writer struggle with seems to be poured all in one stroke. However, it will be better if these ideas are channeled in an orderly and smooth manner to produce a qualified writing. The activities to make the ideas structured and delicate are called generating and organizing ideas. These actions are in the pre-writing stage of the writing process. Based on the writer's observations, students who have received process writing material still find difficulties when being asked to do correct pre-writing steps [2]. This is because they

are not used to it. Therefore, writing is a skill that must routinely be practiced.

According to Oshima & Hogue [3], several things need to be done during the pre-writing stage, namely generating the ideas, which could be done by choosing and narrowing down the topic and then brainstorming. Brainstorming itself can be done through various techniques, for example, clustering, freewriting, or listing. Brainstorming may seem unnecessary at first, but after doing that a few times, their usefulness will be realized [3]. These pre-writing techniques have been shown to help students develop thinking skills and self-confidence in generating ideas [1]. After generating the ideas, a writer can organize the ideas into an outline. With an outline, it

should be relatively easy to write a paragraph.

Students' ability to generate and organize ideas will affect the richness and quality of their final writing. Most students usually do not plan their essay but jump-in and just start writing. They write without a plan and just go with the flow. However, some students still feel that thinking for a moment to determine what to write is necessary. Therefore, it is expected that students are trained to understand that writing is not an emergency activity but a process that includes planning, pre-writing, organizing, drafting, revising, proofreading, and producing a product. All of these stages are important to create a quality product.

To generate and organize ideas properly, students must start the writing process with full awareness and concentration. Students need to convey their perspectives and think creatively to get new ideas. In other words, students must decide what to write, develop a topic, research a topic, produce original thoughts, elaborate the ideas, use prior knowledge, think critically, and apply new and learned concepts. In his research, Kumari [4] also emphasized the importance of this cognitive process in writing.

Abbas and Herdi [5] had conducted a study to investigate EFL learners' ability to generate, organize, and elaborate ideas of an argumentative essay. They found that the learners' ability in generating, organizing, and elaborating ideas is at a low level of ability. The learners had low alertness and carefulness in writing, low motivation to write an essay, low confidence when writing, and seldom to practice writing at leisure time. They suggested that an appropriate writing strategy supported by suitable learning media is needed to facilitate and improve the learners' ability to write the essay.

Wahyuni and Inayati [6] also found in their research to seventh-semester students who were drafting research proposals that most of the students' reported facing problems when generating ideas during the

initial phase of research writing. The issues range from the topic development, theoretical frameworks identification, relevant theory search, trusted sources evaluation, research ideas, suitable theory connection, and problems and theory assessment. To overcome this problem, they highlighted the importance of providing constructive feedback promptly and discussing ways to evaluate quality resources.

Furthermore, Heong et al. [7] noted in their study that most of the technical students (69.6%) believed that the difficulty of generating ideas was a key factor affecting the achievement of their assignments. This difficulty led to the students' problems in completing the assignment. The deadlock of ideas was the most frequent factor experienced by the students. Hence, they argued that the students need to learn higher-order thinking skills which are essential skills enabling students to generate ideas and consequently complete assignments.

Those studies mentioned above inspired the researcher to conduct this study. This study is a preliminary study to identify the students' writing quality and problems in generating and organizing ideas. Since it is currently in a pandemic situation, the researcher assumes that to train the students to take data digitally and then proceed them into any reports became a necessary matter. Therefore, this study explores the students' writing qualities and difficulties in generating and organizing ideas when transforming online chat data into articles. It is hoped that the identification found in this study will give implications to writing instruction and future studies.

Methodology

A descriptive qualitative study was employed to answer the research questions in this study. First of all, the writer evaluated the students' writing qualities using a writing rubric. The rubric (adapted from Brown [8]) contains a scoring guideline to see whether the idea,

organization, grammar, vocabularies, and mechanics of a text have been good enough or not. Then, each writing piece was assessed qualitatively by comparing the data and the article. The writer looked closely at every data and article to observe the problems that may occur when the students transformed the information into their articles, particularly on how idea generation and organization were made. This analysis was then compared with the data gotten from the questionnaire. The questionnaire was given to the students at the end of the class, which contains some questions about their feelings, strategies, and obstacles when generating and organizing the ideas in their writings.

The writing assignment that the students need to accomplish was as follows.

"In this individual project, you are asked to make a communication with a

person from another country either via chat or video conference. Your partner can be a friend from one of the English-speaking countries or countries that regard English as a foreign or second language. Make at least three times of conversation with three different topics. The first topic must be self-introduction so that I know your friend's background. The second and third topics are up to you as long as they are not personal topics to discuss. Do not forget to record all of your discussions. Based on your three times of conversation, pick an interesting topic you can write and develop into an article to be submitted. Write your article in Ms. Word between 300-500 words."

The students' articles were then evaluated using the following writing rubric in Table 1.

Table 1:
 Writing rubric

Dimension	Weight	Score	Descriptor
Ideas	3	5	The idea is relevant to the substance of the assignment. The topic sentence is developed by accurate and adequate details. Rich insight about the topic.
Organization	3	5	Ideas are arranged logically and cohesively. Ideas are conveyed smoothly and effectively.
Grammar	1	5	Using complex and effective sentences Inconsiderable mistakes in agreement, tense, words order, articles, pronouns, and prepositions
Vocabulary Style	2	5	Rich with vocabulary The selection and the usage of words and idioms are accurate and appropriate with register Good mastery of words formation
Mechanics	1	5	Showing good mastery in writing convention Showing good ability in using punctuation and capital letters accurately Considerable spelling mistakes

Findings and Discussion

The analysis of each article based on the rubric of writing showed that the students' articles' quality was still low, with an average total score of 62.9. Table 2 presented in detail each component's average score. Although the assignment asked them to write and develop only one

exciting topic among the three topics that they needed to discuss their chats, but most talked about all of the stories. It made the score of idea development became low. It seemed that they did not care about the relevance of their writing with the assignment, and it could be noticed that the insight about the topic was not rich since

they must write about three general topics rather than only one deep topic. The topic sentence was also not clear, not accurate, and adequate details were not found. Similar to the development of the ideas, the organization of the articles was also scored low because they did not follow the correct generic structure of an article, did not make a plan or outline, and just write as they felt right. Besides, the ideas were not arranged logically and cohesively. However, they were clear but not smooth and not effective.

Regarding grammar, most students used simple sentences but effective. Considerable mistakes in agreements, tenses, prepositions, and words were still found but not severe. Their vocabularies were also not rich, although the selection and usage of words were accurate and appropriate. Poorly, many of them did not show good mastery of writing conventions and good ability in using punctuation and capital letters. It showed their reluctance to do the assignment well. Yet, inconsiderable spelling mistakes were found.

Table 2:
 Average Scores for Each Writing Component

Components	Average Scores
Development of Ideas	64
Organization	62,65152
Grammar	62,77273
Vocabulary	63,24242
Mechanics	62,25758
Total	62.9

After analyzing the articles using the rubric, the researcher looked at each article and compared it with the chat data. The researcher wanted to see how the students

generated and organized the chats' ideas into the articles. Table 3 described these observation results.

Table 3:
 Observation of Ideas Generation and Organization

How they begin their writing process—generating their ideas	Number of students	Percentage (%)
a. Jump-in-start writing	20	30
b. free-write but a bit structured	37	56
c. brainstorm – follow the generic structure	7	11
How they organize their ideas		
a. telling all topics	58	88
b. choose one topic only and develop it	6	9,1
How they develop their ideas		
a. poorly developed	5	7,6
b. developed just like the data	53	80
c. creatively developed	6	9,1
Organization of ideas		
a. logical order	41	62
b. not in a logical order	23	35
Copy and paste articles – following their data	2	3

It can be noticed that there were still very few students who did the proper way to start writing by doing steps of generating

and organizing the ideas. 20 (30% of) students seemed just to jump in and start writing without thinking of one impressive

topic they actually can generate from their data. They only told what they had done, just like telling a story. What made them even worse was that they bundled their long story only in one single paragraph. Then, the other 37 (56% of) students were seemingly had attempted to be structured by doing free writing, but each paragraph's topic sentence was still not clear. If only they did more seriously by rereading and revising their articles, their writings would be better. Only 7 (11% of) students were noted following the correct generic structure, namely introduction, body, and closing, and it seemed that they also did brainstorming to generate their ideas. It can be seen from the quality of each paragraph they wrote, in which it had an accurate topic sentence and adequate details.

In terms of the way they generated their ideas, it can be seen that only 6 (9,1% of) students picked one topic among the three topics they discussed in the chat and then creatively developed it. While the rest of the students were just telling the three topics that they had discussed. The researcher also noted that from the 58 (88% of) students who said the entire topics, only 53 (80%) wrote similar to the data they got. While the other 5 (7,6% of) students wrote very poorly and told less information than they had. It seemed that they were not serious about doing the assignment.

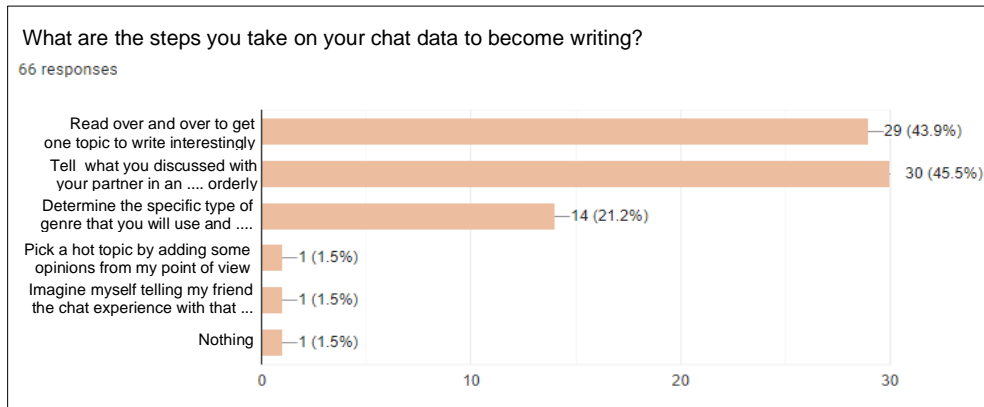
Furthermore, it was found that 41 (62% of) students had written in a logical order, while 23 (35% of) students were still writing in confusing orders. Logical order here means that the students organized the sentences to help the reader follow the development of their ideas or understand their points. While not in logical order implies that the students wrote as they

wanted or felt was correct without thinking about the readability of their texts. In this analysis, those 23 students wrote their article in only a paragraph, even though their information was many. This way of presentation would make the readers confused.

Besides, it was found two students who did not do the articles by themselves. It was say so because different information was identified between their articles and the chat data they got. Hence, these two articles were scored very low.

Meanwhile, the questionnaire's analysis noted some points that are actually in line with the findings above. First, in terms of the students' strategies to transform their data into articles or generate ideas, 45% of the students confessed that they just naturally told what they had discussed with their partner. It means that most of them did not follow a proper process like narrowing down the topic and brainstorming to proceed their data into an impressive article. They only wrote what had happened. Besides, although 43.9% of the students said that they read for many times to find one interesting topic to be written, as explained above, only six students wrote an article with one interesting topic. The rest of the students were telling all of the topics that they had talked about. At this point, the writer assumed that they did reread their data to find ideas or points to write, yet not to find one topic to be developed. Then, 21.2% of students said that they tried to write their articles based on the elements of a particular genre, namely opening, body, and closing.

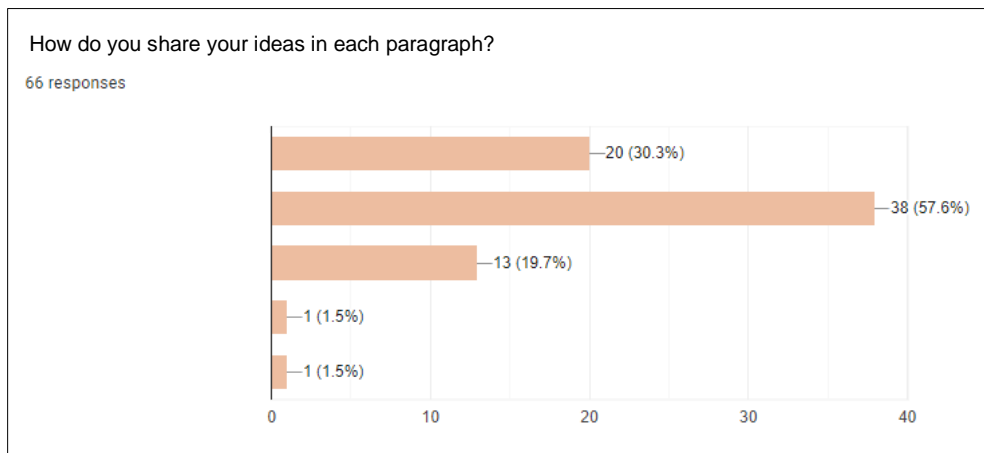
Graphic 1:
Ideas Generation Strategies



Regarding the way they organized their ideas into paragraphs, it was found that 57.6% of students wrote with the flow based on their feeling. This case is similar to 19.7% of students who declared that they used their feeling when making a new paragraph. The writer argued that this was what happened to most of the articles. The students seemed to make new paragraphs when they felt it was the time. This way of writing need to be repaired, and more practice should be given. They should try to make a plan or outline before writing.

Meanwhile, 30.3% of students said that they made a mind map for each paragraph. It was expected that the students could make better articles if they had made a mind map, but the results of the analysis did not say so. Therefore, it must be checked whether the students had made a correct mind map. Further, two students also said that they had decided what topic to be discussed in each paragraph. These just the same with making a mind map, as discussed previously.

Graphic 2:
 Ideas Organization



Graphic 3 described the students' answers when asked about their problems in generating and organizing ideas. It was noted that 56.1% of the students felt that they were incapable of writing in English. It means that the students need extra time to practice writing in English, including pre-writing stage practice, which consists of choosing and narrowing down the topic and

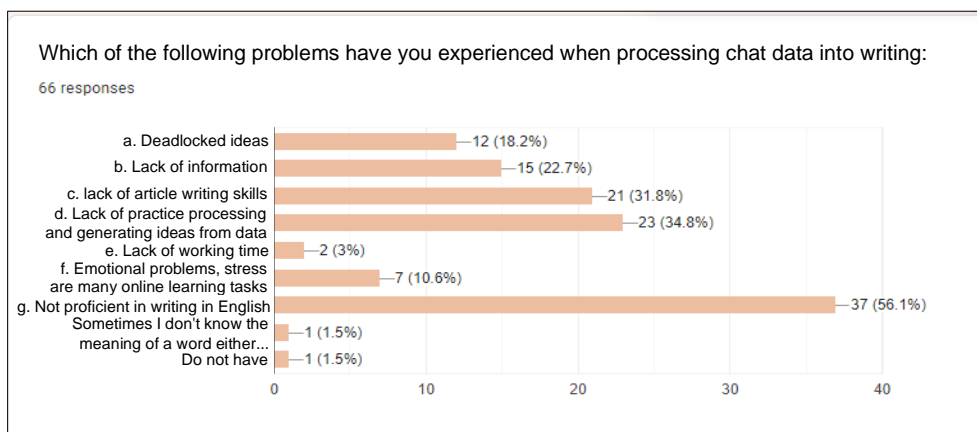
then brainstorming. Some of them said it was difficult to start writing or write the first sentence in the introduction and then bring it to the main topic. This case is likely to happen, yet with more pre-writing practice, it can be minimalized.

Furthermore, they also felt less skilled in processing and generating ideas from the data (34.8%), specifically

analyzing and processing chat data, then generating and organizing the ideas obtained into a writing framework or outline to be developed. These activities are part of the pre-writing and planning stages. In fact, exercise is the only thing that will make students more proficient. Then, 31.8% of students admitted that they were less skilled at writing articles, including making effective sentences and arranging

them into paragraphs. This is because they rarely do it and tend not to know what should be a part of an article. Some students stated that they lacked information about their assignments (22.7%) and stuck ideas (18.2%). 10.6% of students stated that personal problems due to the stress of many online assignments were also the cause, and 3% of students felt that they were not given enough time to complete the assignment.

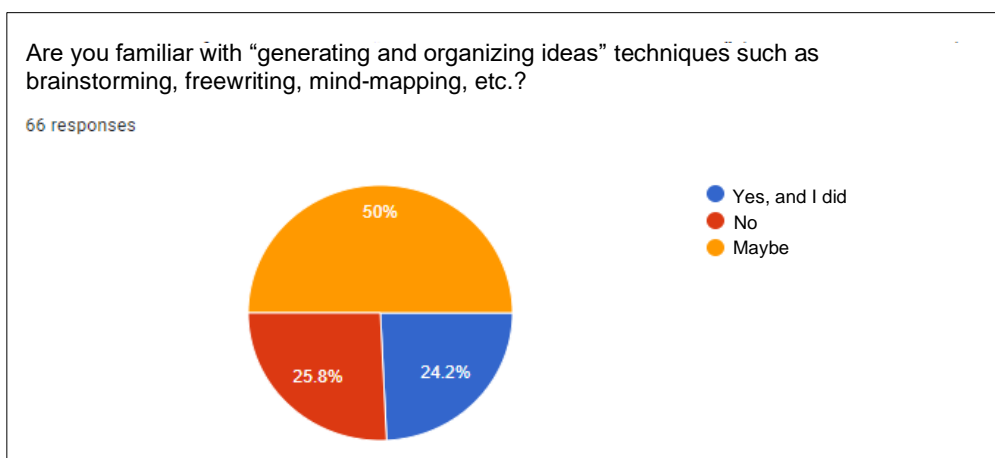
Graphic 3:
 Difficulties in Generating and Organizing Ideas



Furthermore, when they were asked whether they were familiar with generating and organizing the ideas, most of them (50%) said that they were not sure. In this case, the writer argued that they had learned about this, either in Bahasa Indonesia or English class, but they were not sure since

they got inadequate practice. Meanwhile, 24.2% claimed that they did know about it and had done it. The rest of them (25.8%) said that they were not familiar with generating and organizing ideas. Graphic 4 presented these results.

Graphic 4:
 Familiarity with the Generating and Organizing Ideas Techniques



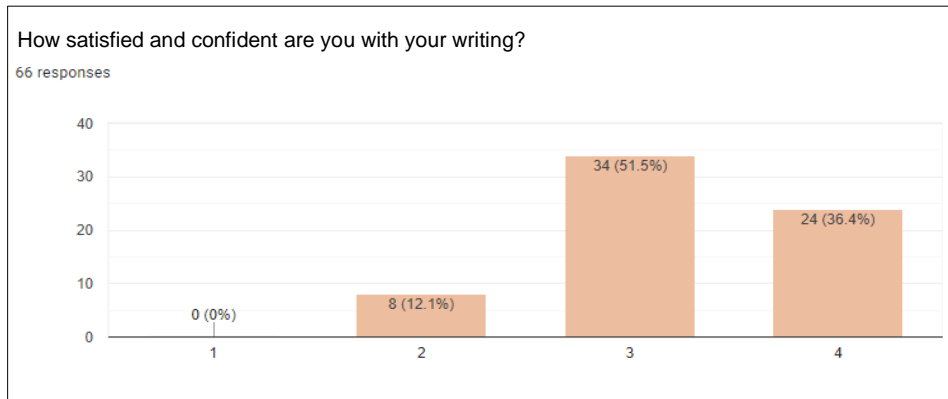
Finally, when asked whether they were satisfied with their writings, 51.5% of

students said they were satisfied, 36.4% were very satisfied, and 12.1% said they

were reasonably satisfied. This level of satisfaction actually indicates that they were quite confident with their writing no matter the difficulties they faced, and even though

when being analyzed, their writing qualities were still low. Graphic 5 presented these results.

Graphic 5:
 Satisfaction with their Writing Products



These results showed that there were still very few students who followed the proper way of generating and organizing ideas to transform the chat data into an article. Only one-fourth of them claimed that they have known about and did the techniques of generating and organizing ideas. Still, based on each article's observation, only 11% of them had seemingly done a correct brainstorming. Besides, most of them did the same failure, namely wrote all of the topics rather than choosing and narrowing down the topics into one interesting topic to be developed in the article as instructed in the assignment. Just 9.1% of students did this thing. That is why the average writing score of the students was still low, i.e., 62.9.

The students' writing's low average score was caused by many problems, including the difficulties in generating and organizing the ideas, which is a determining factor in this assignment. This assignment was designed to enable the students to take data digitally and then proceed them into any mode of reports, especially an article. In this case, the skill of generating the ideas from the data taken and organizing the ideas into an outline to be developed and written became very prominent. However, the score

results showed that the students face many problems in doing these stages. Their difficulties ranged from less proficient in writing in English, not skilled in processing and generating ideas from the data, not sure about the techniques to generate and organize ideas, less skilled at writing articles, misinformation about their assignments, deadlocked ideas, personal problems due to the stress of many online tasks, and not enough time to complete the assignments. These problems were somewhat similar to what had been found by Abbas and Herdi [5]. They noted that the learners' ability in generating, organizing, and elaborating ideas is at a low level of ability. The learners had low alertness and carefulness in writing, low motivation to write an essay, low confidence when writing, and seldom to practice writing at leisure time. Besides, these findings are also in line with Heong et al. [7] study results which noticed that the difficulty of generating ideas was a key factor affecting the students' problems in completing the assignment. The deadlock of ideas was the most frequent factor experienced by the students.

Based on the discussion above, several steps aimed at improving the quality

of articles to overcome the obstacles in generating and organizing ideas need to be done. This improvement step requires collaboration between students as target individuals and also teachers as facilitators. Since generating and organizing ideas are part of cognitive processes, it is valuable to stimulate the students' meta-cognitive skills during the writing process. Metacognitive skills are the skills to realize what is being thought to be more strategic in taking steps. Metacognitive stimulation will encourage students to be aware that they are writing and improve the quality of their writing [2], [9]–[11]. Besides, the teacher can provide more explicit practice to generate and organize ideas with more frequent constructive feedback. Writing assignments must not always be individual because collaborative writing is also effective and offers many advantages [12]. It is also necessary to provide scaffolding that builds writing [13]–[16] and provide a list of questions [17] or authentic assessment [18], [19] to organize ideas. Providing good examples of text also helps in generating ideas for writing [20]. Besides, the use of idea generation strategies, such as brainstorming, effectively prevents students from unnecessarily pausing pens and frequently erasing what they produce [21].

Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussions, it can be said that the students' quality of writing was still low due to some problems in generating and organizing the ideas. These problems including less proficient in writing in English, not skilled in processing and generating ideas from the data, not sure about the techniques to generate and organize ideas, less skilled at writing articles, misinformation about their assignments, deadlocked ideas, personal problems due to the stress of many online tasks, and not enough time to complete the assignments.

To overcome those problems, in future studies, other researchers can observe whether stimulating the students'

metacognitive skills during the process of writing and giving more explicit exercises to generate and organize ideas with frequent constructive feedback from the teachers are effective as suggested in this research.

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