

EFL STUDENTS ATTITUDES TOWARDS ENGLISH ACADEMIC WRITING

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Abstract

Writing has become the most incredible and difficult skills for EFL learners to master relating to generate and organize ideas. This research tried to investigate the importance of writing skill in English Writing subject specifically about students' responses toward writing difficulties. Thus, the objectives of the study are describing the EFL students' attitude toward writing, discovering the EFL students' view of writing difficulties and discovering students' effort to improve their writing skill. This is a qualitative research conducted through analysis of a questionnaire, interview and students' written compositions. The survey involved 25 EFL (English as a foreign language) students from the English department of UIN Ar-Raniry who attended Writing class. Data were gathered through questionnaires and one-to-one semi-structured interviews. The results from the questionnaire indicated that the students who have moderate attitude to writing, view writing as difficult, and stressful. Meanwhile, those who have high attitude, mostly suppose writing as interesting and challenging. The result shows that the students encountered numerous difficulties while composing writing: effects of L1 transfer lack of reading, motivation, and practice. Most of the students find it very challenging to obtain sufficient and relevant source information, paraphrase or summarize information, and they are not accustomed to use an English academic writing style. The finding of interview also reveals that several efforts that the students do to improve their writing skill, among others are practice writing with their friend, reading a lot for knowledge and ideas, and composing journal writing. This finding implies that the students should be helped to acquire skills that will enable them to express their ideas clearly and effectively in writing.

Keywords: *EFL Students, writing difficulty, Students' perception*

INTRODUCTION

Writing has become the most challenging area in learning second language. It is related to appropriate and strategic use of language with structural accuracy and communicative potential. Kellogg (1990) defines writing as a cognitive process that tests memory, critical thinking ability and verbal communication to successfully express those ideas in written language; because proficient composition of a text indicates successful learning of a second language. Therefore, learning how to write has gained considerable importance for the last two decades due to two factors: its use as a tool

for effective communication of ideas, and the extensive research work carried out in this area to examine various issues faced by EFL students.

Composing a good piece of writing in the native language is a hard work to do particularly for EFL students. In achieving a well written piece of paper, the students need to broaden their knowledge of words, grammar, language styles, and organizational patterns. This is not a new issue for foreign language students that writing is supposed as a less forgiving of grammatical and other technical errors. Commonly, students face various challenges in English writing: effects of L1

transfer, lack of reading, motivation, and practice. These problems can be classified into linguistic, psychological, cognitive and pedagogical categories and linguistic problems while converting ideas into text, (Hyland,2003). Based on my experience in writing class particularly, when students were asked to write in English during a class, the majority of them fell hesitate to express their state of ideas and only a small portion of students attempt to produce a written assignment.

In some circumstances, it is found that students' writing skill and their academic achievement are closely related. Research has shown that students' writing ability influence their academic success. Preiss et al. (2013) researched how writing envisages the university students' subsequent academic grades. The result finding shows that compared to other subjects skills, writing becomes a significant forecaster of university achievement over time. Their research also has shown that between students' writing attitudes and their writing achievement is enormously connected. Consequently, if the finding of this research is correctly taken, it implies that better writer has more chances to get better marks in academic matters.

In addition, it seems that investigating students' perceptions toward academic English writing plays an important role in writing process. All of possible phenomenon in writing class needs to be observed for knowing the factors that cause an ineffective of students' writing based on students' point of view. Therefore, more research needs be conducted to understand how EFL view writing and identify the possible solutions to the problems that might occur from the students' point of view. The aim of this

paper, thus, is to determine whether students' attitudes/beliefs regarding their performance in writing skills namely a) describing students' view point of their writing ability in English, b) discovering kind of difficulties faced by the students in composing writing, c) discovering students' effort to improve their writing skill.

METHOD

The research is designed as a descriptive study. There were twenty five EFL students of English department in batch 2018 who participated in this research; English Education of Islamic State University of Ar-Raniry located in Banda Aceh-Indonesia. The instruments used were an adapted questionnaire, interview, and documentation of students' composition. The questionnaire aimed to investigate students' perception toward English Academic Writing with total of 25 items. Some of the students were randomly interviewed to find out their attitude to writing. Along with the questionnaire the students' compositions were also analyzed. To analyze the data, simple codification was used. The scores in the questionnaire range from 1 (the lowest) to 5 (the highest). The result of the students' questionnaires were analyzed quantitatively.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

After collecting and analyzing the data, the findings of this study have been categorized into following three major areas: describing students' view point of their writing ability in English, b) discovering kind of difficulties faced by the students in composing writing, c) discovering students' effort to improve their writing skill.

Approximately 25 students in first year student of English department had been surveyed related to the topic, Students' attitudes towards English academic writing on May 06, 2019. The students' responses to the questionnaire items were scored by the given values; 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5= strongly agree, respectively. The questionnaire was divided into three categories; Attitude towards interest and awareness in writing (5 items), Attitude towards difficulties faced in learning

writing (10 items) and attitude toward the effort in overcoming writing obstacles (ten items). The data were analyzed descriptively by calculating the percentages.

Result

In discovering students' view point of their writing ability, there are five questions delivered into questionnaire related to students' writing activity in the class. The result of these kinds of question can be seen in the table below:

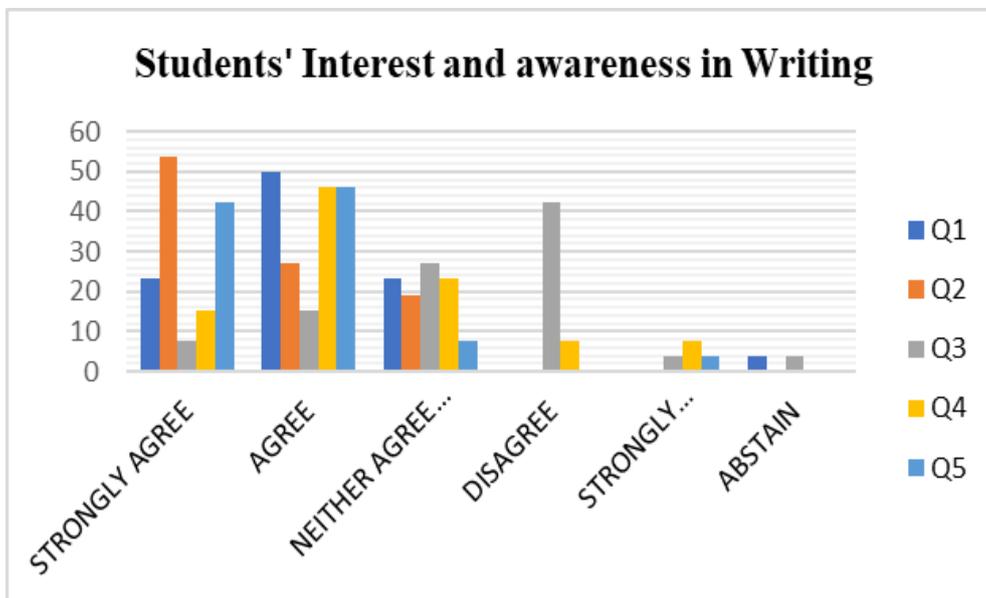


Figure 1. the students interest and their awareness in Writing

The table above illustrates the frequency of students interest and their awareness in writing. It consists of how the students view about writing skill, what they suppose writing should be and whether writing simple for them or not. It is found that fifty four percent of the students have a positive attitude toward writing, they are really attentive and show their interest in learning writing

that they eager to be writers at the end of the teaching learning process. Meanwhile, eight to fifteen percent of the students state that writing is not simple for them. It indicates that there has eighty five percent of the students encountered the difficulties while composing writing. Most of the students find that it is very challenging to acquire the skill to write particularly in generating and organizing the ideas.

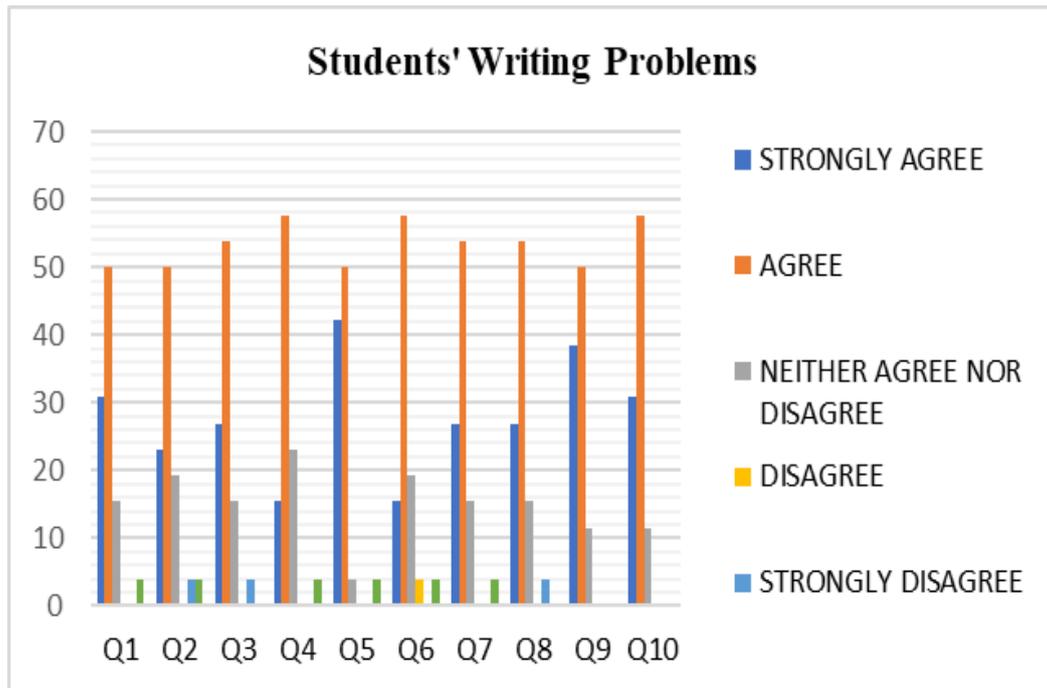


Figure 2. Students' difficulties faced in learning writing

The figure 2 describes students' barriers in learning writing. Some of questions asked to them related to their opinion about teaching and learning resources, first language interferences, difficulties in content mastery of the content of writing text, and so forth. Thirty percent of the students convey that they found inadequate learning materials and resources. The students obtain insufficient and relevant source information to put on their writing. Meanwhile, forty percent of the students face L1 interferences. They have to translate the ideas into understandable paragraph. It implied that

the difficulty may be because of the fact that L2 writing requires some elements including learning an L2, creating a text. Limited vocabularies problems in use of grammar (tenses, sentence structures) are also become the obstacles faced by the students. Almost sixty percent of the students reveal that lack of grammatical and vocabulary knowledge becomes the most influence features in constructing their writing. This factor, however, always faced by the first semester students and can be overcome by doing reading activity before writing practice to enrich and develop students' vocabularies.

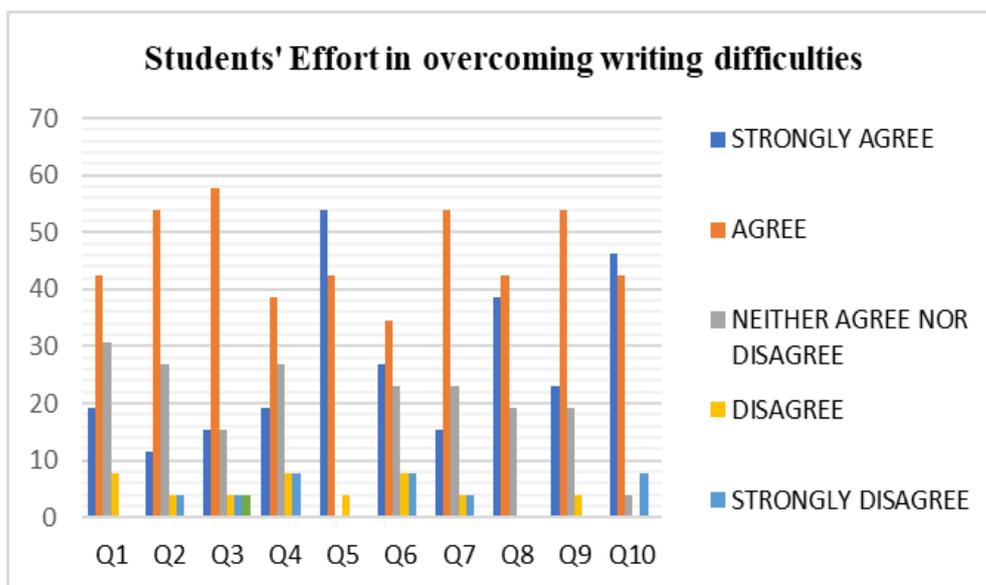


Figure 3. Students' Effort in overcoming writing difficulties

The finding of students' effort in overcoming writing difficulties in the table 3 shows that almost fifty percent of students practice writing by planning and discussing the topic given along with their peer or partners. Meanwhile, fifty five to fifty nine percent state that the way they overcome the writing obstacles by taking a chance to share and exchange their opinions and ideas with friend. The rest of thirty five percent of students use strategy by asking the teacher to give the feedback and suggestion toward their writing in order to help them overcome the problem of writing.

Discussion

From the result of data, it implied that students highly have a positive response toward writing activity. They showed an excited and enthusiastic effort in mastering writing. However, there have been some problems that the students struggle to overcome such as regarding to grammatical problems and finding sufficient source of information to put on their writing. It is in line with Flower (1989) pointed that some common

problems in academic and professional writing is the absence of referent, immature and imprecise ideas, some senseless discussions and being unsuccessful to convert private thoughts into a public. The ideas of giving feedback on the students' writing by focusing more on grammatical errors and spelling mistakes should be decreased otherwise the problems like using irrelevant information or unorganized information never get solved.

Afterward, other common problems found that all of the students had the same opinion that while translating their ideas from the first language to the second language in which they faced problems due to different sentence structures. Previous studies of Tirumalesh's (1991) finding also show that writing something in mother language is an automatic process. On the other hand, writing in second language is a self-defeating process. One non-native person from different cultural and geographical area cannot become native English by writing in English. Though one may try to achieve total identification in L2, there will always be a difference. A person always has a prior formation from

his mother language therefore this formation cannot be changed by his second language. New thoughts and ideas always get mixed with the existing pattern. In order to alleviate the weaknesses, Badger and White (2000) suggest that teachers should provide learners with some examples of the text type that they have to write so as to allow them have a clear understanding about the aim and framework of a particular writing type.

The result data from the questionnaire also reveals that the students expressed their willingness to overcome the obstacles faced by them. They could enjoy a writing task if they had to do it together or in group discussion. This result was similar to Storch's (2005) findings about collaborative writing. When students were given the choice to work either in pairs or individually, a number of them chose to work in pairs and produced shorter and better pieces of writing. All students were found to have positive attitude toward pair-work, group-work and collaborative writing in general.

CONCLUSION

Regarding to the main finding, it can be concluded that that students' attitudes towards writing had been influenced by their academic writing performance. Most EFL students deemed writing as important and challenging while the rest of them view writing as difficult activity that they encountered some problems toward writing activity particularly when they asked to form composition, it is such a difficult task for them. The most common issue encountered by the students is related to language use as well as lack of reading, motivation, and practice. Others are

related to the capability in expressing the ideas in writing, finding relevant topics and sources information; and the last and less problematic one is paraphrasing or summarizing information. Another conclusion which can be drawn is that a variety of factors may contribute to those difficulties. The main factor is the lack of previous experience and knowledge about the use of English Academic writing style.

Furthermore, there are some efforts that the students do in order to improve their writing skill. In practice, most students conveyed that the difficulties which they encounter in writing are often resolved through discussion while they are writing, such as the students frequently corrected and revised their own work after having had the opportunity to read and compare with their peer's work. They also practiced reading a lot for knowledge and ideas, and composing journal writing. Through working in groups or in pairs to produce a piece of writing, the students have an opportunity to ask each other and the teacher if need be about spelling, vocabulary, grammar and the best ways of expressing things.

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