

Short-Term Training Model of Academic Writing to High School Teachers

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Most high school teachers in Indonesia have been teaching English for years without taking care of their writing ability. They confirmed that they wrote their major papers (theses) for finishing their undergraduate program to be teachers; nevertheless, they confessed it was difficult to write. Those phenomena challenge the authors to conduct a research concerning an excellent strategy to motivate the high school teachers in generating ideas for writing. By conducting a short-term training to 33 high school teachers from distinct regencies of the province of South Sumatra for six hours, this study aimed at providing the teachers with a very short and effective way of writing academically as well as scientifically and analyzing the effectiveness of the short-term training model. The findings show that there is significant development of academic writing and the teachers have positive perspective toward the training model.

Keywords: training model, academic writing, paragraph, essay

Introduction

Language, the main means of communication among people, has long been recognized. It is believed that human beings and language are deeply embedded in the sense that people own a language and use it to interact with others. It is also viewed as a vehicle of thought and a system of expression that mediates the transfer of thought from one person to another (Finegan, 2004, p. 8). People learn languages in order to be able to communicate in different linguistic contexts such as getting knowledge and information. One of the most important means for acquiring knowledge and information is English. It has largely contributed to human life in many ways. Therefore, there has been a strong demand for English mastery due to the fact that process of communication can be carried out in the form of spoken and written language.

Learning to communicate in foreign language entails the necessity to learn both language skills and language aspects of the target language. Among the four skills, writing is a determinant of one's success in language learning. Finegan (2004, p. 418) argued that writing is the single most important invention in human history. Writing is a skill which requires organization of ideas to be communicated in a text. Indeed, writing entails many complex components such as grammar, spelling, vocabulary, mechanics, and more importantly, its unity, coherence and cohesion.

Many people find it difficult to write for many reasons. Even though there are many factors to consider, the skill of writing is a skill which can be learned. It just takes study and practice to develop writing skills. It is well accepted in both theory and practice that the best way to learn to write is by doing the writing as argued by Calkins (1986; as cited in Perego & Boyle, 1993, p. 182) that writing is another powerful strategy that promotes discovery, comprehension and retention of information. It is true that one's success in learning a language can be measured through his/her writing.

It is obvious that writing includes a complex process which allows writers to explore ideas and thoughts and make them visible and concrete to readers. Raimes (1983) stated: "recently the teaching of writing has begun to move away from a concentration on the written product to an emphasis on the process writing" (p. 10). During the writing process, writers rewrite and revise their sentences until they are satisfied that they have expressed their meaning (Byrne, 1998, p. 3). It implies that the teacher trainees pass through several developmental writing stages to produce a good final piece of writing.

Furthermore, Oshima, and Hogue (1999, p. 3) mentioned that there are four main stages in the writing process: prewriting, planning, writing and revising drafts, and writing the final copy. There are various features that a writer needs to consider in producing a piece of writing. In writing process, time is a crucial element in which the writers should have time to make decision, play around with ideas, time to construct sentences, and time to change their minds (Raimes, 1983, p. 21). It is obviously clear that writing is just like working in a project which considers everything in detail.

Essays consist of more than one paragraph. Complete essays contain three major parts, namely, an introduction, a body and a conclusion (Leki, 1995; Oshima & Hogue, 1999; Leonhard, 2002). First of all, the introductory paragraph attracts the reader's attention and informs the reader what the main topic of discussion will be. An introductory paragraph has two parts: (1) Several general sentences that give background information on the subject and gradually lead the reader into a specific topic; and (2) A thesis statement that states the subdivisions (topics of each paragraph), which may also indicate the method of development. Next, the body of an essay discusses the subdivided topics one by one. It contains as many paragraphs as necessary to explain the controlling ideas in the thesis statement. The last one, the concluding paragraph, reminds the reader of what he/she has said by using a "conclusion" transition signal. The concluding paragraph has a summary of the main ideas of a restatement of the thesis in different words and a final comment on the topic.

Writing an essay is more complex than a paragraph because writers are working with paragraphs. Those who write an essay should pay attention to the elements of writing an essay. Building up the overall structure through paragraphs which have clearly defined main points is a requirement of successful essays. Furthermore, in writing an essay, the writer focuses on achieving a purpose, organizing and developing ideas logically, using details to support or illustrate ideas, demonstrating syntactic and lexical variety, and engaging in the process of multiple drafts to achieve a final product (Brown, 2004, p. 220).

Since scientific writing becomes an important requirement of promoting teachers' position in their school life, the English teachers entail such a training model of generating their motivation to write academically. The teachers have been teaching English for years without taking care of their writing ability. How can they arouse their students' motivation in writing if they cannot write themselves. Based on the preliminary study conducted a few months ago, it was found that most teachers could not write academically. They confirmed that they wrote

their major papers (theses) for accomplishing their undergraduate program to be teachers; nevertheless, they confessed it was difficult to write.

Indonesian government has implemented a huge program: TPTE (Teacher Profession Training and Education) through the National Education Ministry, to certificate teachers of all education levels since 2007. Specifically, English teachers are provided with the following subject matters: (1) teacher professionalism; (2) models of teaching, assessment, teaching media, and lesson plan; (3) English enrichment; (4) peer teaching practice; and (5) classroom action research and scientific writing.

TPTE is a nine-day training that functions to train teachers to be professional ones. The very short training with six hours allocated for writing session often made the trainers become disappointed since the majority of the teacher trainees failed to write, even only a single paragraph. This condition motivated the authors to discover a simple way to train them within six hours. The short-term training model is called “A Funnel from Paragraph to Essay Short-Term Training Model”. Consequently, this paper focuses on the scientific writing conducted by the teacher trainees by writing academically and collaborating among them in order to get improvement from the peer comments.

Method

The sample of the study consisted of 33 teachers from 32 senior high schools from some regencies of the province of South Sumatra Indonesia. The research instruments used were written tests that consist of writing tests, paragraph writing, essay writing and questionnaire. The writing tests were administered before and after treatment, while the questionnaire was given after the whole tests. Since it was a pre-experimental research, it used one group pretest-posttest design that was measured before and after being exposed to a treatment of some sort. To score the teacher trainees’ writing, a rating scale presented by Hill (2008, p. 292) was used.

Meanwhile, for the treatment, the steps of writing training were as follows: (1) asking the teacher trainees to write a paragraph under different topics; (2) asking the teacher trainees to answer ten questions dealing with their writing knowledge; (3) asking the teacher trainees to rewrite their previous paragraphs after they have understood the answers of the ten questions; (4) asking the teacher trainees to write their paragraphs based on the paragraph model given if they still found that writing was difficult; (5) asking the teacher trainees to proofread their peers’ paragraphs guided by the trainer; (6) asking the teacher trainees to revise their paragraphs; (7) asking the teacher trainees to pay attention to the explanation about essay; (8) asking the teacher trainees to develop their paragraphs into essays; (9) asking the teacher trainees to do collaborative writing; and (10) asking the teacher trainees to revise their essays.

Findings and Discussion

The data in this study refer to development of writing from a single paragraph to an essay and the teachers’ perception toward the short-term training model.

A Funnel From Paragraph to Essay

This training conducted for six hours brought a satisfactory result in which the high school teachers ultimately were motivated to write. At the first 30 minutes, the teachers showed uncomfortable face due to the first assignment, to write a free topic in five up to ten sentences in good paragraph writing. The result of their

first writing after taking long time to avoid writing scientifically was not so bad. The average score of paragraph writing in pretest was 58.1. After being given a test of writing knowledge and discussing the answers of the ten items, the teacher trainees revised their first writing. Therefore, the trainer showed them a writing model. They just imitated the paragraph entitled “Gold” taken from Oshima and Hogue (1999). While imitating, the trainer elaborated the parts of a good paragraph, that is, the topic sentence, supporting sentences, and concluding sentence and also reminded them of the other two important elements of a good paragraph: coherence and unity. At the third hour, the teachers could identify and understand how to write a good paragraph. The average score gained by the teachers was 79, with 85 as the highest score and 73 as the lowest score in the posttest of paragraph writing.

The histogram below shows the development even the improvement of paragraph writing (see Figure 1).

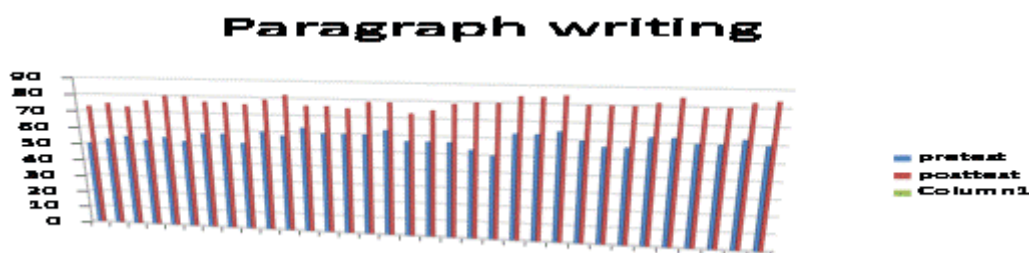


Figure 1. Paragraph writing.

To identify the improvement of paragraph writing, the writer exemplifies a paragraph written by Syafaruddin (2010), one of the teacher trainees, before and after the short-term training model.

The influence of technology has important role on children's mindset. Why? The one way for children learning something is by using their eyes. They can learn easily by watching television or other technology tools. Based on this fact many scientists do a scientific research to know how far the influence of technology and its effect.

From the first draft, it can be seen that the topic sentence is not correct even though it consists of the topic and controlling idea, the supporting sentences do not really support the topic sentence, the conclusion sentence does not restate specifically the topic sentence, and the other two important elements of a good paragraph: coherence and unity, have not been used in it. As argued by Finegan (2004, p. 418), many complex components such as grammar, spelling and vocabulary are necessitated in writing, and so do its unity, coherence and cohesion.

After working on a test of writing knowledge, all the teacher trainees revised and rewrote their previous paragraphs. The following is also Syafaruddin's (2010).

Technology, a part of human life, has two kinds of influences on children's mindset. First, technology can be as a good media for children to develop and increase their knowledge, because one of good ways to educate children is by using technology. For example, Internet can help and make children find out information and knowledge everywhere. Another influence, it is a dangerous media for children character since it can make the children have negative thinking and action. For example, watching violent films on television can make the children be dangerous for others. So, to avoid the bad effects of technology, the children must know about it. In conclusion, technology can be good media to get knowledge and can be bad to children's character.

This second draft paragraph seems better. It is influenced by the discussion on the test of writing knowledge given after the teacher wrote their first draft. In the draft, it can be seen that the topic sentence consists of the topic itself (technology) and controlling ideas (two influences), the supporting sentences really support the topic

sentence with some transition signals, and the concluding sentence, indeed, summarizes the supporting sentences. Due to the complete and correct format applied in it, it can be categorized as a good paragraph.

Furthermore, the trainer explained how to develop the paragraph to be an essay. Figure 2 is the result of pretest and posttest of the teachers' essay. Similar to the previous paragraph, there is a significant difference of essay writing between pretest (the average score is 58.6) and posttest (the average score is 78.9). It is obvious that the improvement of their writing from paragraph to essay is quite good by examining the average score for the paragraph is 79 and the essay is 78.9. It is relevant to the statement of Raimes (1983), "... to an emphasis on the process writing" (p. 10). Similarly, Byrne (1998, p. 3) insisted that writers rewrite and revise their sentences in the process of writing through several developmental writing stages until they can express their ideas satisfactorily. Meanwhile, the improvement from pretest (Series 1) to posttest (Series 2) in essay writing can be obviously seen in Figure 2.

Essay Writing

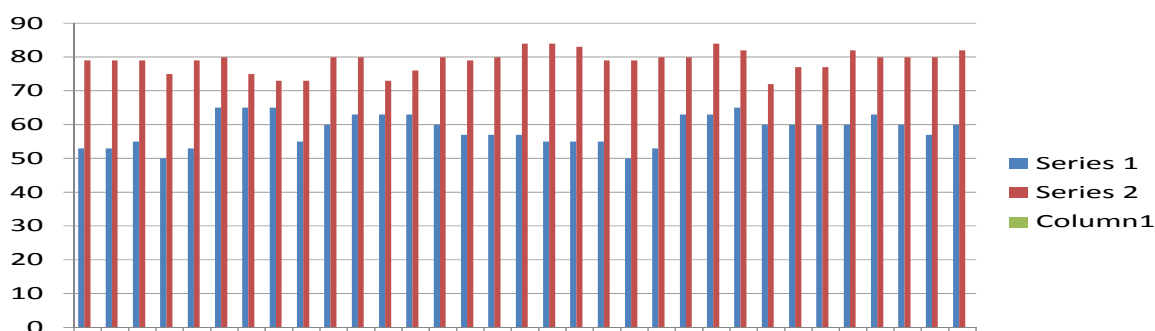


Figure 2. Essay writing.

In order to see the development from a paragraph to an essay, the following is taken from the same teacher trainee's.

Technology, a part of human life, has two kinds of influences on children's mindset. Based on Raihan (2006, p. 7), "Technology is a tool that can be the most important thing for children." This essay will elaborate two influences of technology on children's mindset, good and bad influences.

First of all, technology can be seen as a good media for children to develop and increase their knowledge because good ways to educate children is by using technology. For example, Internet can help and make children find out information and knowledge in everywhere. Nowadays, many schools in Indonesia use Internet to increase the quality of teaching-learning process especially for student, teacher and school quality because Internet is the easiest and fastest way to find out many information and knowledge.

Another influence is that it is a dangerous media for children's character since it can make the children have negative thinking and action. For example, watching violence films too much can make the children dangerous for others. So, to avoid the bad effects of technology, the children must know about it. According to Arrasyid (2006, p. 13) in his article, "There are 29 problems faced by children in a month because of their bad habits on watching video." It is the responsibility of all parents and teachers to guide the children in using technology.

In conclusion, using the technology for its advantages only and avoiding the bad influence, one by telling which one is important and which one is dangerous to children and everyone. (Syafaruddin, 2010)

This essay is not successful in closing the last paragraph. The teacher did not restate correctly what he has discussed in it.

Teacher Trainees' Perception Toward the Short-Term Training Model

In order to know the participants' point of view toward the short-term training model of writing, the 33 teacher trainees were asked to respond to 14 questions. The following is the result of their responses to the questionnaire distributed. First of all, the teacher trainees stated that they never wrote scientific paper beside their undergraduate papers. They had known kinds of text such as narrative, recount, descriptive and procedure text, but there was only one teacher that had an experience of writing narrative and descriptive texts. Those who answered never wrote such texts could identify the characteristics of the texts.

Furthermore, they were asked to comment on their own paragraph writing after three hours of training. Only two (6%) out of 33 said that their paragraphs were bad. As for others, 15% is good enough and 79% is good. One of those whose writing was good cited that structurally her paragraph was good as it followed the rule or the format of writing, but the quality of diction was still poor. Figure 3 shows the participants' comment toward their writing at the first three hours of training.

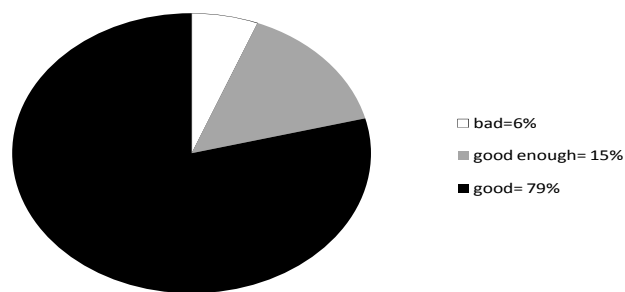


Figure 3. The result of writing.

After being explained, all the participants could identify the parts of a good paragraph. Unfortunately, there were 28 (85%) teachers who cited that they found it difficult to develop supporting sentences since getting idea is so difficult, developing sentences is not easy, and connecting one sentence to other sentences is hard to do. Nevertheless, 100% expressed that the short-term training model was worthy because it was important for teachers to know how to write. It also motivated them to write academically. And since the writing material was understandable, it could inspire the teachers to write an essay. Furthermore, it was valuable because some teachers did not know the system of good writing, and it opened their minds that writing was not difficult after they had known the procedure of writing. This is supported by Brown (2004) that successful essays depend on building up the overall structure through paragraphs which have clearly defined main points.

After knowing how to write a paragraph well, the trainer taught them how to write an essay by developing their previous paragraph and the teachers said that they could understand it but 35% (11 teachers) still found it difficult to write the conclusion. The teachers actually had to restate the ideas that they have discussed in the supporting paragraphs (Oshima & Hogue, 1999).

It is interesting that 100% agreed that writing an essay by developing similar paragraphs was easily understood. Consequently, they found it easy to write a piece of essay by the help of paragraphs they composed before.

Since the participants were provided with a module of language skills, they had read before the training began. It was a pity that they could not understand the material well. Therefore, all the teachers insisted that the instructor's explanation was easier to understand than the material being read, because she could explain well and their techniques of writing were initially poor. However, there was 6% (two teachers) who claimed that their ability in writing was still poor after attending the short-term training. It is indicated in Figure 4.

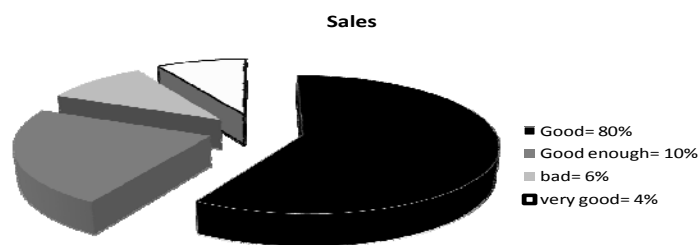


Figure 4. The teachers' opinion to their essays.

The last question posed in the questionnaire was to figure out their opinions to the instructor's technique of training the teachers in writing scientifically. Ninety-six teachers were interested in the way she presented the writing material since she explained the parts of the essay that were difficult to understand in detail and guided them step by step. Besides, she also checked and asked them to revise their essays.

Conclusions

Based on the findings above, it can be inferred that the teachers could ultimately write a good paragraph as well as good essay even though some of them still found it difficult to develop supporting sentences in an essay. Due to the limited time, the teachers' writing showed only a little progress; however, it can be concluded that "A Funnel from Paragraph to Essay Short-Term Training Model" is effective to develop the teachers' ability in both writing paragraph and essay. The effectiveness of the model is also strengthened by the teachers' perception toward the model implemented that they have positive perception to the model of writing being trained.

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