

# STUDENTS' BARRIERS IN WRITING ESSAYS IN BAHASA INDONESIA AND ENGLISH

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## Abstract

An issue regarding writing as a challenging skill to be mastered in many languages is in line with Lindastom (2007) as cited in Westwood (2008:57) which stated that many students experience difficulties on writing greater than on reading activity related to the complexity aspect. Dealing with the issue, this study aimed at uncovering the students' barriers in mastering their writing skill conducted in tertiary level. Qualitative in form of case study through triangulation involving observation, questionnaire, and interview was employed. As the result, students' main barriers in writing are divided into three parts; the components of writing, the intrinsic factor of students, and the extrinsic factor of students' writing activity.

Keywords: *Students' barriers, writing skill, analytical exposition text*

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## INTRODUCTION

In every often quoted definition, writing has been categorised as a process to express ideas and thoughts through written product. Writing process is undertaken by pupils in educational circumstance which must be acknowledged by teachers (Fleming & Stevens, 2004). This process has been assumed by many students as a difficult activity since its development involves proper coordination of cognitive, linguistic and psychomotor process (Westwood, 2008:56; Harmer, 2007a). This relates to complex thinking that must integrate multiple components; topic or theme, choice of words, organization, purpose, audience, clarity, cohesion, sequence, and transcription (Brown, 2010; Sturm and Kopenhapper, 2000; as in Westwood, 2008:56). Those multiple components are integrated with writing requirements in academic setting (Paltridge, 2004) by requiring the students to write short tasks less than half a page of writing in response to given question or other stimulus. These requirements frequently ask students to write exposition and argument text type and in particular, cause and effect, problem-solution, classification/enumeration, compare/contrast, and analysis type text. Further, these were followed by exercises which required the application of some discipline specific tool or model to a particular situation, research reports, reviews, literature reviews, research proposals, summaries, and short answer which required the reproduction of previously provided items of knowledge (such as from lectures or textbooks). Thus,

reasonably, by that complexity of writing activity, number of students experience difficulties on writing are greater than on reading activity related to the complexity aspect (Nguyen, 2008; Lindastom, 2007; as in Westwood (2008:57).

In a specific circumstance, the percentage of English students faced writing problems, which is surveyed to the senior high school students in Garut, is more than 70% (Ristianingsih, 2012). This condition, presumably, becomes the main concern that should be handed by educators. As in line, encouraging the students' fluency in writing is the first essential step (Westwood, 2008). As instance, in encouraging students' fluency, the areas of students difficulties in writing should be reached. Therefore, the barriers encountered by students in writing became the main concern that should be uncovered in this study. Accordingly, the objective was mainly focused on analyzing what barriers encountered by students in their writing process.

Related to the previous study, students' barrier has been found by Ristianingsih (2012). It covered both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Additionally, the motivation of the students support them to peel up their idea and thought into the writing activity (Isnaini, 2004). It means, the students will not be productive if they are less of motivation.

As the scope of the study, the study was conducted to the second grade students in English Education program in one of Private Teacher Training and Education College in Garut. This research also confirms that the problem analyzed in this study is about students' barriers on their writing. In other words, the research was conducted to analyze students' barriers in writing.

## **METHODOLOGY**

As research design, this study was a Case Study since the analysis focuses on one phenomenon which is students' barriers in writing essay in *Bahasa Indonesia* and English. This study was held in two different major; Bahasa Indonesia Education Departement and English Education Departement. In this study, the triangulation used were observation, questionnaires, and interviews to both the lecturer and the students in writing course. In order to achieve the research purposes, this research was done by three steps involving collecting the data and data analysis, discussion, and report. In the step of data analysis, this study was conducted in inductive analysis covering organizing the data by noticing students' writing test result from the lecturer and arranging the description of observation, questionnaires, and interview data.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings of the study show that every student had different barriers encountered in their writing activities. There are some barriers that the students face in mastering writing skills as follows:

## **Anxiety**

There more than 16 out of 35 students who stated they had anxiety in writing. They were afraid of doing mistakes in writing. Some of them could not arrange words and sentences in good structure. Other students were confused in determining proper diction in order to be understandable. The others anxious to write since they didn't know where from they had to start writing.

Those students answered in different responses about their effort to overcome the problem of anxiety. However, all of them answered the similar statements; they did nothing since they didn't know how to solve that problem. Meanwhile, students gave variety of suggestion to the teacher: to explain every single detail of materials more slowly and to give more examples of working product and references.

From explanation above, the researcher concludes that many students experienced anxiety in their writing activities. Of course, it made them not keen on writing. The researcher assumes that if students are not enjoying in doing an activity, therefore, the result will also be far from the expectation. It means that it's reasonable when the result of writing test was not satisfying. It is also in line with Lindstom (2007) that the student's anxiety may perceive that writing is a difficult activity. Of course, they become have less motivation even anxiety which interfere both the quality and the quantity of the writing products.

## **Motivation**

There are 20 out of 35 students had lack of motivation in writing. Those students exactly stated that they were not motivated since they thought that writing was very difficult lesson. Surprisingly, one of students stated that s/he gave up in writing since every written product was always wrong. There were also 5 students who stated similar answers that they were not motivated since they experienced getting unsatisfying scores in both writing I and II lectures. In terms of efforts, 6 students stated that they made effort in asking extra work to the lecturer and studied in peer group to practice writing. Other students said that they only followed the lectures' instruction to do writing while trying to understand every material given in each meeting. However, the others did nothing since they thought that later on they would have been motivated if they had understood the writing itself. As suggestion for the lecturer, 10 students wanted the lecturer to understand the character of students; furthermore, 7 students suggested the teacher to be more interactive and communicative with students, and the others had no comment to the lectures.

From the previous discussion, it is shown that a lot of students had perception that the difficulties of writing brought them out to have less of motivation. It's also correlated with their previous achievement in getting unexpected results of writing lesson.

## **Vocabulary Enrichment**

Actually there were 25 out of 35 students stated their barrier in writing was lack of vocabulary items. Surprisingly almost all of them argued that being rare to open dictionary was a major cause why they had poor vocabulary items. Furthermore, there were 10 students who blamed the lecturer of vocabulary in previous semester which they believed that he had been failed to encourage their vocabulary enrichment. They explained that the lecture never gave them a strategy how to increase vocabulary in target language. There were only 5 students who stated that they were lack of vocabulary since they were lack of reading habit. Most students believed that opening dictionary then memorizing words continually could help them overcoming their barriers in vocabulary. As 10 students also suggested the lecturer of writing to do translation when he discussed a student's work in order to make sure that other students understood his explanation well.

In relation to this, Harmer (2007) states that vocabulary roles an important part in every language skill, including in writing. A writer will get difficulties if he has poor vocabulary enrichment, in the contrary, a writer will be able to express his thoughts and ideas in rich vocabulary enrichment.

In addition, students' lack of vocabulary is one of reasons why students are hard to start writing. He states also that the teacher gives insufficient limit of time given to students' writing activity. Both barriers are faced by students in their writing performance (Brown, 2001).

## **Punctuation**

In fact, there were only 5 students who chose punctuation was one of their barriers in writing. They stated that she could not differentiate the use of punctuation mark properly. There were some efforts done; 2 students stated that they only asked some friends in classroom to help them; the others chose to open books or browse the internet source. However, all those 5 students did not have any idea to give suggestion to the lecturer of writing III since they thought that the material of punctuation has been explained in the last semester.

Therefore, the researcher concludes that most students didn't experience any barriers in terms of punctuation in their writing. There were only 5 students who felt that punctuation was a difficult aspect in writing; however, they still have to be concerned since punctuation is an important aspect in writing which can influence the meaning of a statement.

## **Topic**

There were 20 out of 35 students who claimed that the problem encountered by them in writing was choosing the topic. Most of them said that determining a topic was confusing since they did not understand clearly about what the topic was. There were also some students who conveyed that they were often difficult to find out topic before

starting to write, even there was a student who said “*otak saya mendadak jadi beku ketika dosen menyuruh saya untuk menentukan topik sebelum saya mulai menulis.*” It means that determining a topic was a part of students’ barrier in their writing. To overcome this case, almost 20 students had same strategies; those were by browsing the information from internet source, reading some articles in newspapers, and discussing with their friends to share the information about some issues which could be developed in their writing. Moreover, some students wanted their lecturer not too fast in explaining the topic related to a certain paragraph discussed. Other students suggested their lecturer to give them more references and more examples in order to cover their problems since they believed that most students did not understand clearly about the concept of building a topic.

From the previous discussion, the researcher concludes that there were many students who were still not able to determine a topic in their writing. Of course, it influenced to their writing process since the topic is the first and major scope of what students will write.

### **Idea**

There were 18 out of 35 students categorized idea as one of their barriers in writing. Some students stated that they got difficulties in composing their ideas in good sequence. Sometime, there were a lot of ideas but they could take which ideas were proper to be written. Other students explained clearly that having got the topic, they were hard to generalize it into ideas. They were afraid of putting ideas which were out of the topic they determined before. Moreover, 10 students delivered that they had tried to read a lot, to discuss with their friends in emerging and organizing ideas though they felt that they still could not overcome their problem, meanwhile, the other students delivered that they still did not find out the solution towards this barrier.

### **Spelling**

According to the result of questionnaire, there were 8 students who claimed that spelling was a problem they encountered in writing English essay which not happened in bahasa Indonesia. Here is the example of a student’s statement, “*Ejaan dalam bahasa inggris itu susah soalnya apa yang ditulis sama apa yang dibaca itu beda, terus satu huruf itu dibaca nya bisa beda beda, jadi saya pusing, gak paham!*” The previous statement indicated that some students were not familiar with English words. They actually had the same strategy, which was by opening dictionary to help them in writing some words. However, they had no any ideas as suggestion to the lecturer of writing III about the barrier of spelling.

From the previous paragraph, the researcher infers that some students were still unfamiliar with English sounds and their transcription. This can affects to their results of writing in which misunderstanding may take place.

## **Grammar**

Based on the questionnaire result, there were 25 out of 35 English students who believed that grammar was a part of their barriers in writing essay in English. This aspect did not become the big problem faced by the students since they are used to using Bahasa Indonesia. In English, all of them stated that they got difficulties in using proper tenses. Some of them added that they had understood about the use of tense, but if they were asked to write, they were often difficult to actualize their tense understanding into their written work. Others told that they were difficult in placement of part of speech since the target language is different from Bahasa Indonesia in arranging sentences. They often used the pattern of Bahasa Indonesia into their English work, and they realized that the way used was wrong. The others said that grammar was difficult for it was very complex rule; they were hard to remember each tense and to understand part of speech.

There were several efforts stated by those students. Some of them often read grammar book and browsed the internet source to get additional understanding about both tense and part of speech. Other ones preferred to discuss with their peers if any grammar they did not understand and the other students had tried to practice more on doing some exercise though they stated that they were often lazy to do practice. All those students had the same suggestion to the lecturer of writing III that he was better to give little explanation about grammar during writing lecture since they would be helped automatically to remember the rule of English pattern.

From the previous phases, the researcher infers that most students experienced the barrier of grammar in their writing. They got confusing mostly in both tense and part of speech. Actually they had the same hope; that was the lecturer could give them the explanation of grammar during the writing lecture. In relation to this, Graham (2009: 3) states that handwriting will reflect the writers' ability to make a good form of their essay which may include the ability of using correct and appropriate grammar.

## **Enthusiasm**

There were 18 out of 35 students thought that writing was not interesting enough. All those students claimed that they were not enthusiastic since writing was difficult activity. Some of them stated that they preferred speaking to writing since speaking was not as complex as writing. They thought that in speaking, they could express what were in their minds without concerning some rules too much; meanwhile, they felt that they couldn't express what they wanted to say freely in writing since they had to obey some complex rules in their work and they believed that it often limited their freedom to express. Others delivered that they were lack of enthusiasm since they had perception that they could not write well and it's proved by their scores they got in writing I and II.



To overcome the lack of enthusiasm, they had different ways; doing writing task with their friends, trying to be active in writing lecture, and learning to write interesting topic as practice at home. However, there were 5 students who said that they did nothing to increase their enthusiasm in writing. These 18 students also gave different suggestion to their lecture of writing III; to give variety of teaching techniques in writing, to explain the material more slowly, to give more interesting references about writing lesson to students, and to be more open to students.

From the previous statements, the researcher concludes that many students did not have high interest in studying writing. They had different reasons one another. Therefore, it reflected to their writing work result.

### **Time Allocation**

There were 15 students who claimed that they got insufficient time to conduct writing activity. Some of them stated that when a lecturer gave them task, they almost could not write maximally since they were limited by the time given. Meanwhile, the others said that the writing lecture time was very limited; they had no sufficient chance to ask many things in classroom. To overcome this case, some students conveyed that they often studied in group out of the lecture time to practice writing, other students preferred to learn writing through browsing the theories from internet source then tried to practice at home. Meanwhile, the others chose to maximize the time of learning writing only in the classroom. Almost all these 15 students suggested the lecturer to give them more time to do the task at home and they hoped the lecturer could give extra time when they were in writing exam.

From the previous discussion, the researcher infers that students needed more time to conduct writing activity both in test and in daily task. They felt that the time given is not sufficient to encourage them in doing writing maximally.

In relation to these; in fact, the teacher did not know all students have barriers in their writing. The teacher emphasized that students problem was they were lack of writing practice; furthermore, the students had some barriers related to; anxiety, motivation and enthusiasm, grammar, vocabulary, ideas, theme, topic, punctuation, spelling, and time allocation. In case, most students were lack of writing practice.

In other words, all students experienced barriers in their writing. Most students had difficulties in vocabulary and grammar when they were writing. Actually many students had no enthusiasm and motivation to write. They also stated that they were hard to find out the proper topic and rich ideas in their writing. There were many students who claimed that they were anxious to write, they were afraid of making much mistakes in their written work. Furthermore, some students believed that they were lack of time in writing practice in lecturing. They assumed that it's not enough to study writing only a hundred minutes a week. However, there were only a few students who had barriers of spelling and punctuation in their writing.

To cope with these problems, accordingly, the lecturer always gave students' direct feedback about students' written work in form in classroom. However, the lecturer only took 3-5 students' writing product to be discussed in each meeting; the work was taken from some students who wanted to get direct feedback about their writing result. The lecturer said that the time had been limited; therefore, he only invited students who were eager to get the correction during the learning process. Instead many students were active in writing III classroom. The lecturer was communicative with his students and most students felt any progress on writing III lecture. Westwood (2008: 60) also confirms that in order to encourage students' writing fluency, it is important to identify the areas of students' writing difficulties. Therefore, the researcher assumes that teachers should be able to analyze the barriers encountered by students in writing in order students could develop their writing skills to fulfill a demand of education system.

## CONCLUSION

There are three conclusions which can be drawn related to the components of writing, the intrinsic factor of students, and the extrinsic factor of students' writing activity. First, as the components of writing, students mostly had barriers in vocabulary and grammar, emerging and generating topic and ideas, spelling and punctuation. Second, anxiety, lack of motivation and less enthusiasm are categorized as students' intrinsic barriers. Third, time allocation is also one of extrinsic factor of students' writing barrier since it is assumed that learning writing in ten minutes a week is not sufficient.

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