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YOUNG LEARNERS' PROBLEMS
IN ENGLISH WRITING

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Abstract: Writing still becomes a big problem for students, especially for young learner students. They thought that writing is the most difficult skill compared the other language skills. This study was conducted by using qualitative method in order to give more description about students' writing problems. Twelve elementary school students in the fifth grade were chosen purposely as participants. The data were collected by observing students and teacher activities in the classroom. Then, some students were interviewed to get further explanation about their problems. After that, students' writing were analyzed . The result of this study confirmed that students has problem in spelling words, grammar and choosing vocabularies. It is expected this research will help teacher in developing available strategies for teaching writing and can be a basic information for further research.

Key words: writing, English writing, young learners.

Abstrak: *Menulis masih saja menjadi masalah besar bagi siswa, khususnya siswa di sekolah dasar. Mereka berfikir bahwa menulis adalah ketrampilan yang paling sulit dibandingkan ketrampilan berbahasa yang lainnya. Kajian ini dilakukan dengan metode kualitatif untuk memberikan deskripsi lebih lanjut mengenai masalah siswa dalam menulis. Dua belas orang siswa sekolah dasar dipilih secara purposive sebagai responden. Pengumpulan data dilakukan dengan mengobservasi kegiatan siswa dan guru di kelas. Kemudian, beberapa siswa diwawancara lebih jauh untuk menemukan masalah mereka dalam menulis. Setelah itu, hasil tulisan siswa dianalisa. Hasil dari kajian tersebut ditemukan bahwa siswa memiliki masalah dalam kata, tata bahasa dan pemilihan kosa kata. Diharapkan kajian tersebut akan membantu siswa mengembangkan strategi untuk mengajarkan menulis dan bisa menjadi informasi dasar untuk penelitian selanjutnya.*

Kata Kunci: *Menulis, Menulis Bahasa Inggris, Pelajar Muda.*

Introduction

Language is a salient way to develop our thought. The idea in our mind can be communicated by using language. Nowadays, instead of language of nation, foreign language is also taught to the children. In Indonesia, English as foreign language has been taught to children in elementary school. The children learn English in form of listening, speaking, reading and writing skill. They learn listening and reading as receptive skill, and also speaking and writing as a way to produce their idea in language.

Writing as one of language skill plays a major role in the academic life of students although they are in the elementary level of education. Through writing, students will be able to share their ideas, arouse feeling, persuade and convince other people. Learning writing does not only involve learning by using word and symbol, but also learn how to generate and organize the ideas.

However, writing is often reported as a difficult skill compared to three other skills. Alwasilah (2000) cited that writing is perceived by teachers and students as the most difficult skill to teach and to learn, and unfortunately it has long been neglected in Indonesia schools. As writer observation, some teachers also do not prepare well before coming to writing skill, so it makes students face some difficulties in learning writing. Even some teachers ignore writing activities in the classroom because it is hard to be done by the students.

Teaching writing can be a challenge in the classroom of young learner students because teacher should be more creative in arranging material. Learning material should be appropriate with students' level. Some students overcome a big problem when the teacher serves them a structure of language or grammar in complicated models. They cannot differentiate the differences between the two languages, bahasa and English. They need to transfer the rules from their own language to target language.

Moreover, we know that writing spend much time than listening and speaking, it can be another reason why writing is difficult. As foreign learners, students do more listening English from their teacher rather than spending little of their time for writing. As a common opinion, the average person spend the most for listening, the second most for speaking, then reading finally writing.

It is assumed that many children who have learning disabilities are poor writers. They equate their struggles with handwriting, spelling, and language conventions with a lack of ideas and information worth sharing. This case often happens for the students in

the primary school especially for them who learn English for the first time. Thus, writing material also should be simpler and available with their level in elementary school.

Based on some problems above, it is important to investigate students' writing problems in elementary school. This study will identify problems that are faced by students in the fifth grade of elementary school.

With regard to the significant of the study, this study has the potential to the theory, education and professional practices. Theoretically, this study will be a consideration for the next research to improve teaching and learning writing for young learners. Practically, the result of the study can be a guide for teacher to develop material, method, technique and strategies in teaching writing.

Nature of Writing

Writing is a process of putting ideas down on paper to transform thoughts into words to sharpen main ideas and to give them structure and coherent organization (Brown,2001). In writing a text, the writer should arrange words into sentence and sentences into particular order. Moreover, Bryne (1988:1) defines writing as the usage of graphic symbols (letters or combination of letters which relate to the sounds we make when we speak), which are arranged according to certain conventions to form words. He also adds that the words are subsequently arranged to form sentences. Then, the sequence of sentences are arranged in a particular order and linked together in certain ways.

As stated in Gunawan (2009:10), Alwasilah defined writing skill as a process not an instant product. So, writing should be started from the interest of the students to the writing itself, because students will not feel comfortable to write something if they feel forced to do so. Here, writing can be done after writers know more about what they want to learn. When one learns to write, they will learn ways of meaning or ways of organizing experience in different language pattern.

The writing process consists of the steps we take when we produce a piece of writing. The process may include some or all of the following:

a. Brainstorming (making a note of ideas, words and phrases related to the topic, in the order they come to mind)

b. Planning (categorizing and ordering the ideas according to the task)

c. Drafting (a first attempt to write the ideas as a continuous text)

d. Revising (deciding how to improve the first draft, in terms of both content and accuracy)

e. Rewriting (writing the text again including the improvements)

The writing product in 'real life' is a text with a purpose. The purpose may be for example to inform, to thank, to request, or to simply entertain. The success of the text depends on the accuracy of the writing and the appropriacy of the content. The accuracy of the writing includes grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling, capitalization, legibility, appropriate text conventions. The content also should be communicatively effective (the writer successfully conveys information to the reader), sufficiently detailed, logically organized (the reader finds it easy to follow the writer's idea), original/ interesting (not just copied or part copied), believable (the ideas expressed make sense in terms of the real world), stylistically appropriate (it conveys the tone required e.g formal for a job application)

It can be inferred, writing as a long process means that in writing activity firstly there is an idea and then the idea produce words then those words will be arranged into sentences and become paragraph and at last it becomes writing, which has a message to be delivered.

Aspect of Writing

Brown (1994:320) stated several aspects of writing:

a. Content, the substance of writing, the ideas expressed

b. Form, the organization of the writing

c. Vocabulary, the students' consideration in choosing the better words in expressing their ideas

d. Grammar or language use, the employment of the grammatical form and syntactic pattern

e. Mechanics, mechanical consideration such as spelling and punctuation

Reid in Kroll (2001) cautions that some techniques may run counter to a given students' learning preferences; students should be asked to practice all techniques but should later focus on using those that clearly serve them best.

1. Brainstorming. This is often a group exercise in which all students in the class are encouraged to participate by sharing their collective knowledge about a particular subject. Students can then utilize any or all of the information when turning to the preparation of their first drafts.

2. Listing. The student is encouraged to produce as lengthy a list as possible of all main ideas and subcategories that come to mind as he or she thinks about the topic at hand

3. Clustering

Clustering begins with a key word or central idea placed in the center of a page around which the student quickly jots down all of the free-associations triggered by the subject matter, using words or short phrases.

4. Freewriting

The main idea of this technique is for students to write for a specified period of time without taking their pen from the page. For EFL/ESL students, this often works best if the teacher provides an opening clause or sentence for the students to start with to structure the freewriting.

Characteristics of Young Learners

Pinter (2006) defines young learners as those who are studying in primary education. In some context, it lasts from 5 to 11 years of age, while in other contexts children start school at the age of six or seven. They can finish their primary education at the age of 14. However, Pinter asserts that young learners are those who start school from 5 to 14 years of age.

With regards to their characteristics, in general, children are unique in such a way that they have their own world, different from adults. Mustafa (2003) points out main characteristics of children: (1) having short attention span; (2) hands on experience; (3) learning through physical activities, and (4) here and now principle. Children learn through physical activities. They explore their environment by experiencing through their senses. They are actively giving meanings to whatever they are experiencing. They also have short attention span. They cannot concentrate on one activity if it is one attracting their interest anymore. They change their current activity to something else that is more interesting to them. The last is that they learn through what they see, hear, touch, and smell at the moment. In other words they focus on concentrate activities.

Teaching Writing for Young Learners

Teaching English to young learner needs a careful design. Syllabus for language program describes content goal for teaching writing comprises structures that arranges grammatical structures, like *the present continuous tense and the simple present tense.* And, sometimes it complies list of structures, e.g *I like swimming/ singing/reading* or *I don't/can't/ won't.*

Teacher also needs to pay attention to how to provide content goals in the classroom. Linse (2005) suggest providing context and building schema be important to lead to meaning and understanding of the language learned. For example, if a teacher is going to talk about animals, he/she may build students' knowledge by give them pictures of cow, cat, dog,etc

Furthermore, according to Brown (2001), in relevance to the "here and now" principle, children do not need to be taught the grammar to the extent of using term like 'the present time' or 'relative clause', not to mention the rules of using English. Instead, they can be exposed to how the language is used. Some grammatical concept, especially at the upper levels of childhood, can be called to children end of the word, children's attention by showing them certain patterns and examples. For example, they can be drawn to notice 'ing' at the end of the word, and the teacher can say and act.

There are two good sets of reasons for teaching writing for young learners. The first set of reasons relates to writing skill itself. The second set relates to foreign language learning in general. The young learners cannot be expected to develop their writing skills without teaching them how to write and giving them opportunities to practice. Learners do not necessarily transfer their skill in writing from what they can do in their own language. In the case of young learners, they may not have developed their writing skill, even in their own language. Writing is probably the most personalized, creative activity in the language class. By developing writing skills early, young learners are making a valuable investment for their future studies.

In foreign language learning, writing gives learners the opportunity to find ways of expressing their ideas in a foreign language. Writing gives learners the opportunity to try out the language with plenty of thinking time. A learner's writing gives the teacher a good opportunity to diagnose grammar and vocabulary problems and to identify progress. Writing allows learners to practice new structures in an extended context. Writing can provide more variety in classwork.

In many classes, attention to writing is very limited. The teacher gives the learners a title or a topic. The learner produces a text, and the teacher marks the grammar, vocabulary and spelling mistakes in it. Writing is then merely a testing tool. This is perhaps the reason for writing's 'bad reputation'. Some solution for teaching writing can be described as follow (www.hancockmcdonald.com),

    a. Pay attention to the writing process by providing opportunities for learners to brainstorm, plan, draft and revise. Remember that young learners will perhaps

not use these strategies yet even in their own language. Many of these may be class or group activities, which can help make writing a less lonely process.

b. Give learners something to write about. Pictures are a particularly good way to provide content:'a picture is a text for which the learner provides the words'.

c. Choose topics which the children can relate to in their own experience, for example in the playground, rather than in the bank.

d. Stimulate young learner's creativity by putting familiar things together in an unfamiliar way. For example, "animals" and "hotel": ask students to describe a scene at a hotel for animals.

e. Make sure the learners will be able to do the task with the language level they have (pay attention to vocabulary, useful expressions and structures at the pre-writing stage)

f. Set the writing task itself as homework if time is short, but at least try to find time for some preparation work in class.

g. Give the children the opportunity to become involved with their writing. For example, let them choose to be a character in native.

h. Be prepared for mixed ability. For example, have extension tasks for students who finish early like adding a *ps* to their letter.

i. Encourage young learners to take pride in the presentation of their work, for example by decorating it with pictures. Ask them to write on alternate lines so there is space for comments.

j. Encourage learners to consider their audience. For instance, if they are writing postcard, get them to imagine clearly who they are writing to; a parent or a friend for example.

k. Be an interested audience by responding to the ideas in the learner's work, not just the language. Take on the role of intended audience as you mark.

l. Don't just mark work for accuracy; mark for content as well. Select some appropriate aspects of content to consider as you assess and comment on them when giving feedback.

m. Be success-oriented: don't only mark mistakes. For example, mark positively for good and ambitious use of language too. Learners need to be told what they are doing right as well as where their own particular problems are. It is good for learners to develop a positive attitude to writing from an early age.

n. Involve the learners in their development. Encourage students to reread their work and to make necessary corrections. Let your students know know in

advance what you will be assessing when you mark. This will give them manageable criteria to evaluate their own work and improve it before handing it in. Also, encourage students to record their marks and their feelings about each piece of writing. For example, they could draw a happy face if they are pleased with their writing. This helps them to chart their progress, motivating them to become more involved in it. It may also provide a basis for teacher – student discussion.

o. Look out for ways of using the learner's completed texts after writing. For example, students could work in pairs, asking and answering questions about content, or give each other clues about a character or plot for their partner to guess who or what was written about. They could also be encouraged to assess each other's work.

p. Consider different ways to "publish" learner's writing. Display it on the wall, or get them to make a magazine, on paper or the internet.

Method

This study was designed in qualitative research. Qualitative research is concerned with nonstatistical method of inquiry and analysis of social phenomena. McRoy (1995) states that qualitative research uses detailed descriptions from the perspective of the research participants themselves as a means of examining specific issues and problems under study. The samples are usually small and are often purposively selected. In qualitative research, there is no preconceived hypothesis to be tested. McRoy added that hypotheses emerge from the observation and interpretation of human behavior, leading to further observations and the generation of new hypotheses for exploration.

The descriptive method was used to describe the data found during the research. This method seems suitable to present the fact found during the study and to interpret of how the facts related to the problem under investigation (read Gay, 1987). Nasir (1983) stated that the characteristics of descriptive method are focused on the concentration how to solve the actual problems (cited in Haris, 2012). The collected data of the research will be concluded in description. Then, the data will be analyzed and discussed in detail in order to answer the research questions.

Data Collection

Participants of this study consisted of ten students of the fifth grade in one elementary school in Bandung. They are five girls and five boys. The classes were headed

by one teacher. The reasons choosing this class as research subject were this class has come to writing skill and they also has learned a material about daily activities. Thus, there was no big problem in doing research in that class. The data in this study were collected through data analysis and interview.

Document Analysis

Regarding the importance of document in a research, Merriam (1998:120) explained that since the investigator is the primary instrument for gathering data, he or she relies on the skills and intuition to find and interpret data from documents. "Document is an umbrella term to refer to a wide range of written, visual, and physical material relevant to the study at hand" (Merriam, 1998: 112). Futher, Merriam elaborates that the data found in documents can be used in the same manner as data from interviews. It also, as Merriam adds, can furnish descriptive information, verifies emerging hypotheses, advances new categories and hypotheses, and offers historical understanding. By using documentary materials, the researcher uses objective and unobtrusive instrument.

Interview

Gray et.al (2009, 370) mentions that interview is a purposeful interaction in which one person obtains information from another. Genesee (1996) mentions that by doing an interview, a researcher can probe the respondents for additional information in response to interesting or important answer that arise unexpectedly from the planed questions (cited in Haris,2007). Thus, the interview was done to get participants' response in depth and to examine attitudes, interesting and feelings.

The interview was done after observing the activities in the classroom. The interview focused on five points that is related to their interest in learning English; difficulties; the strategies that they apply in learning English. To interview the students, the researcher used Indonesian language to avoid students' misunderstanding in answering the questions and expressing their feeling.

Observation

Observation is done just one time when the writing skill is taught. It is conducted on May 13th, 2013. This was focused on what teachers and students did in the teaching and learning process in the classroom, focusing on the problems students faced in writing English.

The researcher conducted the class observation in the fifth grade. During the observation, the researcher sit in the classroom to observe, and watch the teaching and learning activities. The researcher used some supporting instruments to analyze the data easily, such as digital camera was used to record research documentations.

Data Analysis

Data analyses were conducted while collecting the data. Ongoing data analyses were based on data obtained mainly from the observation. The procedures of data analysis were: (1) analyzing the data in accordance with the method of research, (2) displaying the data, (3) interpreting data analyzed, (4) making conclusions and recommendations of the research.. It is formulated by using

$$P = \frac{n}{\sum N} \times 100\%$$

The analysis of interview data was done through three steps as proposed by Maxwell (1996: 78-79). First, the interview recording was transcribed to get the precise and more accurate data. In transcribing the interview data, the name of participants was coded to protect them confidentiality. Second, students' answers were categorized based on the problems in writing.

Finding And Discussion

Data from Observation

Data from observation were used to identify problems in English writing. During classroom observation, the researcher recorded students' and teacher's activities in teaching learning process. The discussion will be focused on data from observation, interview and students' writing.

At the beginning of meeting, teacher prepared the students and checked attendance list. Then, teacher reviewed the previous lesson and recalled students' background knowledge about a topic "daily activities". Teacher used picture to encourage students' interest and asked them to guest some pictures. After that, teacher gave some new vocabularies related to daily activities.

Then, teacher distributed a task for students and the students asked questions to the teacher if they found difficult words. Teacher helped them by giving explanation and translating some words. Teacher guided students to write some sentences based on pictures given. Some students still confused about their task and they did not know how to do the task. Teacher would come to them and helped them. After the students write

sentences, there is evaluation of their work by discussing their work in front of the class. Some students read their sentences and the others listened, then, the teacher and other students would give comment.

4.2 Students' problem in writing

As previously stated in chapter I, this study means to explain the problems in writing English by elementary students in the fifth grade. After collecting and analyzing data, the writer found some problems and errors in students' writing. The errors are classified based on aspect in writing. The errors were classified into three aspects.

Twenty one (21) errors of aspect in writing were found; they were classified as follows:

    a. Errors in spelling of words = 7

    b. Errors in grammar or use of systematic pattern = 12

    c. Problems in vocabulary or choosing of words = 2

As stated in the previous chapter that calculation the frequency of each problem is employed in the following formula:

$$P= \frac{n_1}{\sum N} \times 100\%$$

The frequency calculation of each problem can be described as follows:
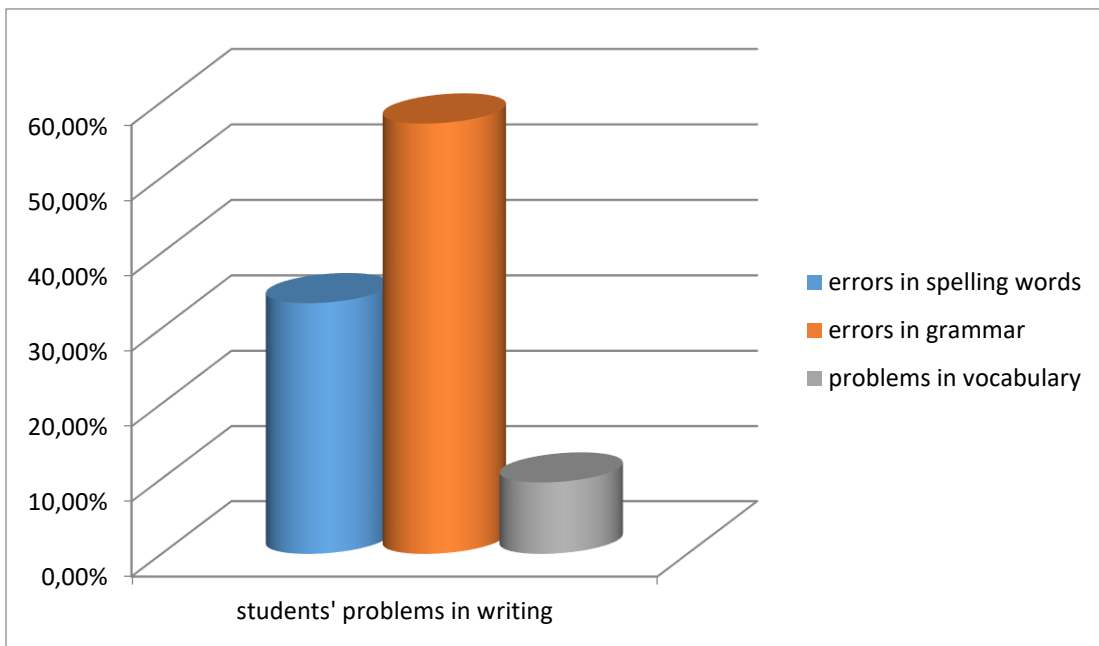
1. Errors in spelling words

   The number of errors in this aspect is seven (7) and the total errors is 21.

   So frequency of this error is:

   $P = \dfrac{7}{21} \times 100\%$

   = 33,33 %

   Some students still have difficulties in writing some words or spelling words. They were confused how to spell words correctly. It needs more practice and guidance from teacher. Here are some examples of invented spelling:

   For example: * *Mia is breakfeast in the kitchen*

   Mia is breakfast in the kitchen

   *Roni is cooking pegetable

   Roni is cooking vegetable

2. Errors in grammar or use of systematic pattern

   The number of errors is 12. So the frequency is described as follows:

   $P = \dfrac{12}{21} \times 100\%$

   = 57,14 %

   In this part, students try to remember the pattern that has been given by teacher. The teacher has given the form of present continuous (to be + V.ing). However, teacher did not give structures formula, she just serve students the systematic pattern. Teacher also gave samples of many verbs and sentences on the whiteboard.

   For example : * Ratih is eat in the kitchen

   Ratih is eating in the kitchen

   *Andre and Nina playing card the living room

   Andre and Nina are playing card in the living room

3. Problems in vocabulary

   The number of problems is two.

   $P = \dfrac{2}{21} \times 100\%$

   = 9,52%

   At that time, vocabulary did not become a big problem for students because the teacher has served them some words would be used in writing the sentence. They just choose the words to build their sentences. As the students said in interview, they just

asked question to the teacher if they did not know some words, and they never use dictionary to find some difficult words .

For example :*Siti is eating Senweed*

Siti is eating cereal

Sofia is drinking coffee and sithdaw in sofa in the living room

Sofia is drinking coffee and sit on the sofa in the living room

Conclusion And Recomendation

Young learner students have some problems in learning English writing. They faced problems in structures of sentences, choosing vocabularies and be aware of these problems to create an available strategy in teaching problems. By conducted this study, it is expected:

a. This study will help teacher in developing technique, method and material in teaching writing

b. This study will be a basic information in conducted the further research

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