

Student's Perception about Reflective Writing Assignment

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Abstract

Reflective writing is one of writing assignment that is implemented in higher education. This type of writing has been claimed as the difficult activity for most of students when they are asked to write at the end of the semester. That way, the students might have different perception in conducting reflective writing. Therefore, this research discussed the obstacles revealed by students in conducting reflective writing assignment and to explore the strategies of the students in solving the problem of reflective writing assignment at English Language Education Department of a private university. This research used qualitative research approach and descriptive qualitative as the research design. The data were gathered by interviewing three students of ELED batch 2014 at a private university in Yogyakarta. The findings of this research revealed that the students faced the obstacles namely; content problem, vocabulary problem, grammatical problem, sentence structure problem, paragraph writing problem, and topic problem. In addition, the findings also showed the strategies in solving the problem that are reading some references reading some references, using translator tool, learning about grammar, making some highlights, asking the lecturer about the assignment, expanding the vocabulary knowledge, and practice writing.

Keywords: Reflective writing, obstacles, strategies.

Introduction

Writing is a crucial skill in English learning which requires much knowledge on how one communicates in academic education or in the community. Writing performance is the important point that assesses person's ability in elaborating the paragraph of writing. It indicates that the performance of people's writing has the impact to their competency in developing the content of their writing. Most studies tell that the important point of topic types will influence the final result and the writer's performance (Spaan, 1993). That way, the students need to do writing practice which can control their thinking skill in every opportunity and get relevant feedback. The more someone practice writing, the better someone will write (Tuan, 2010).

By writing, someone will calmly describe what happens and what they feel toward a certain event. This writing activity is usually called as reflective writing. Moon (1999) stated that reflective writing is a kind of activity to reflect the skills and many actions implemented in every different place and situations. Besides, reflective writing has an important tool for professional development (Schon, 1987). The students of college will usually reflect their experience of learning a course at the end of the semester (Boutet, Vandette, & Valquestte-Tessier, 2017). That way, it can influence someone to have critical response about all of learning activity and also affect someone's future achievement. Hence, the result of students' reflection can be the way to have more awareness toward what they have achieved in the learning process.

However, writing reflection is sometimes regarded as a difficult activity by the learners. There was other researcher who had been investigated the problem of reflective writing. In the study by Brauer (2009), the different level becomes one of student's problems in reflective practice. The different level means here that the student who are not aware of their levels will probably mention what they have done during learning process and jump to general conclusion

without giving some analysis toward the learning activity. On the other hand, the students who know what they should explain in their reflection do not have ability to explain the ideas in appropriate way.

Literature Review

Reflection

Dewey (1933) defined “reflection as action based on the active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it.” The statement mentioned that reflection can be one’s process to understand or learn every phenomenon in surroundings and have critical attitude to response the event. According to this definition, a reflective student is one who examines his or her practices comes up with some ideas as how to improve his or her performance and puts these ideas into practice.

Reflective Writing

Reflection assignments are an opportunity for the students to recall an experience that they had and reflect on it in a critical and detailed way (Holmquist, Ramovic, & Klases, 2016). As with other academic writing, most reflection papers will have some parts in writing context such as; introduction, body, and conclusion (Holmquist et al, 2016). Even though the paper is a personal reflection, it is still an academic assignment. Holmquist et al (2016) explained that the students should keep language professional and have properly structured sentences in reflective writing. From the statistical data by Burrows (2001), it showed that reflective writing also learning of content of course and measure knowledge level.

Reflective Writing Assignment at ELED of a Private University

There are many writing assignments that suggested for the learner in higher education. One of writing assignments is reflective writing that has been applied at English Language

Education Department of a private university in Yogyakarta. This kind of assignment has been implemented in some courses that are basic reading and writing, interpretive reading and argumentative writing, and also second language learning and language teaching. These courses are taught by one lecturer who gives students' assessment of self-reflection. Usually, the lecturer will distribute the syllabus of each courses and she tell what are activity and assignment that should be done by the students who joined her course.

In this case, the lecturer will also give the question of reflection that students should elaborate the answer into a form of paragraph. The kind of questions is different in each course. In the first semester, the lecturer asked the students to mention and explain their contribution during the learning process. Then, they are also asked to assess their performance by themselves. Moreover, in the second semester, the students are asked to describe the interesting activity that they are interested in the courses. In addition, the students should also answer the different question in the third semester. They are asked to explain the contribution of their group in making research paper. That way, they also give the score for each member in their writing.

Furthermore, the count word of reflection is different in each semester. It is because the higher the student level, the more words student should write. The first reflection was asked to write approximately 250 words in a form of paragraph. In the second semester, the students asked to write 500 words in their reflection. In addition, the students asked to write 550-750 words in the third semester. Reflective writing here is written in English and finished by the student at home. However, there is no rule of grammar in the writing. Therefore, the students elaborate the writing without using grammar rules. Thus, they are just asked to give supporting detail of their statement and the words should appropriate with the lecturer's order.

Obstacles in Conducting Reflective Writing

While students reflect their learning experiences in a written text, there must be the obstacles probably faced by them. English Foreign Language (EFL) learners still face some problems in writing skills especially in reflective writing because they learn English as a foreign language. Besides, each student has different abilities in achieving the goal of learning. Those may affect their performance in writing skills, and there will be any constraints which the students have. The problems usually faced by the students during writing reflection occur in content problem (Brauer, 2009; Heong, Yunos, Hassan, Mohamad, Othman, & Kiong, 2013; Brown, 2004; Buckingham, 2008; Fareed, Ashraf & Bilal, 2016, Park, 2013; Miller & Park, 1997; Bumroongthai, 2008), vocabulary problem (Bryne, 1998; Bryne cited in Alfaki, 2015; Fareed, Ashraf & Bilal, 2016, Gowere et al, 1995; Fareed et al, 2016), grammatical problem (Fareed, Ashraf, & Bilal, 2016; Bumroongthai cited in Sermsook, Liamnimitr & Pochakorn, 2017; Sermsook, Liamnimitr, & Pochakorn, 2017), sentence structure (Fareed, 2016; Alfaki, 2015), paragraph writing (Fanene, 2106).

The Causes of Obstacles in Conducting Reflective Writing

Each student might have different reason toward the obstacles that they have experienced when conducting reflective writing assignment. There are some possibilities causing the obstacles when students want to reflect themselves in writing form. The first cause is the ways of the students gather the ideas in writing process (Alfaki, 2015). In other word, the students are lack of seeking the proper ideas. Besides, it seems to be possible that they have inadequate time to think the proper ideas critically. In addition, the environment where the students live can influence their concentration in doing assignments such as self-reflection. Cambria and Guthrie (2010) argued that, “students who struggle begin to doubt their abilities expect to do poorly in

reading, writing, and talking about text. Sometimes, they believe that they are worse than they really are, and they stop trying completely.” Thus, the other cause can from the uncomfortable atmosphere to do assignment. Also, not all of the students are able to focus in conducting the assignment. Fareed, Ashraf, and Bilal (2016) also showed in their study that learners had several problems in writing especially in the lack of vocabulary knowledge aspect. The learners had explained that they faced writing problem on the use of appropriate words used to express their thought. Having errors belonged to vocabulary is the third highest as the cause of problem faced by the students in this study (Fareed, Ashraf & Bilal, 2016).

Strategies for Students in Solving the Problems of Reflective Writing

There are some strategies required for the students who want to overcome their problems in reflective writing assignment. Some researchers offer several strategies to guide the students through a period of reflection. Some strategies to overcome student’s obstacles when conducting reflective writing assignment are reading some references, using translator tool, learning about grammar, making some highlights, doing a consultation, expanding the vocabulary knowledge, and practice writing.

Learners should have reading habit in order they get knowledge about writing ability. It is because; reading has beneficial for the student to learn how the writers put their idea into writing (Ahmmed, 2016). To check writing whether it contains correct or incorrect words, students usually use translator tool, and it might reduce from errors of writing. Giannetti (2016) showed that using translator tool is a common strategy to speed up the learners’ comprehension process in their work of writing. The other way to improve students’ writing is by learning about grammar. As stated by Shin (2006), grammar lesson helps the respondents to review grammatical problem in the class. Mosleh and Baba (2013) also said that notes are mostly useful

to summarize the information in short sentences for several learning purpose. Besides, it might help the students to remind teacher's explanation if they want to review it at the end of semester.

Sometimes, not all of the students can comprehend the given question of lecturer's assignment. In other words, they need to have consultation by asking the lecturer about the assignment. Consultation provides students more information about the learning outcome (Mussawy, 2009). Furthermore, in students' writing, it should have more vocabularies to improve the content of writing. Harmer (1993) as cited in Ahmadi, Ismail, and Abdullah (2012) stated that "vocabulary learning not only develop learner's spelling but also their writing proficiency" (p.189). It can be concluded that expanding vocabulary knowledge of the students will overcome their error mistakes during writing process. The other strategy in overcoming the students' obstacles in reflective writing is by keeping writing practice. The learners should doing the exercise of writing such as reflective practice. Farrah's study (2012) said that "reflective practice is helpful for students improving the students' competence in writing" (p. 1006). In additon, the learners need to practice writing of making self-reflection in order to be expected to have good English writing with structured paragraph.

Methodology

This research used qualitative research design. According to Creswell (2012) "qualitative research has characteristic using theme text analysis which aimed at analysing the data and interpreting the findings of the research." The statement mentioned was in line with the aim of this study that the researcher wanted to investigate students' obstacles and strategies of reflective writing assignment. Furthermore, the researcher preferred to use descriptive qualitative design. "A descriptive qualitative design entails collecting data and presenting findings in everyday

language with minimal inference and interpretation by researchers unlike other qualitative methods” (Sandelowski, 2000). It was used in this research to describe and give explanation from the participants’ answer toward the perception of students about their reflective writing assignment at ELED. In collecting the data, the researcher used three participants at batch 2014. In this study, open-ended question was used to make the participants give opinions without pressure.

There were some steps to gather the data. An interview guideline was used as the instrument for the data collection. The interview guideline represented what were the related questions to the research questions and how many questions were asked to the participant. After the researcher decided the characteristic of participants who would be the interviewee, the researcher contacted the participant by using text message or social media they had. To make sure that the participants had faced obstacles during implementation of reflective writing assignment in each semester, the researcher asked them at first whether they had problems or not on the kind of assignment. That way, the researcher attempted to discuss the obstacles revealed by the students on reflective writing assignment at ELED as one of study aims. The interview was done at a private university in Yogyakarta which was depended on each participant’s willingness. For this interview, the researcher used a recorder to record all the data from the participants when answering the questions. Each participant was interviewed with different durations. The duration of the interview for the first participant was about nine minutes. Then, the second participant was interviewed by duration about 15.41 minutes. Furthermore, the third participant had duration about 12.33 minutes of the interview. The researcher used Indonesian language in the interview in order to make the researcher easier in gaining more information

from the participants. In addition, the researcher collected the data around two weeks because the researcher also checked the accuracy of participants' answer after conducting an interview.

All the data gained through the interview used in this research were analysed to obtain the result of the research. There were several steps used in this data analysis, and those steps were transcribing the data, member checking, and coding. The researcher transcribed the whole conversation from the recording of interview. After getting the data, the result of the interview was clarified in order to obtain the validity of the interview. Furthermore, the result was the respondents admitted that the transcription was same as what they had delivered in the interview. If the data had been already validated, the researcher continued the next step of data analysis that was coding.

Moreover, the last step was coding used in this data analysis. There were open coding, analytic coding, axial coding, and selective coding. In the open coding, it provided of the description and category of text piece of important statement (Strauss, 1990). The second step is analytical coding was the theme or topic of the research's finding (Gibbs, 2007). Then the next step was axial coding. Axial coding was the label of the statement from the participant. Finally, the last step was selective coding. Selective coding was the central category or phenomenon related to the validity of the result of interview. After selecting, the researcher ended up with reporting the data in the findings. So, the researcher found out the result of the research. In addition, the way of presenting the data in this research used description and narrating in detail the data which was collected from the field.

Findings

In this study, the researcher will use pseudonym to mention participants' name in reporting the findings in order to keep their privacy. The researcher used pseudonym name for

each participants such as Arga for participant 1, Bnei for participant 2, and Eva for participant 3. The researcher also revealed the most difficult thing and the causes of obstacle in reflective writing in this part. There are six findings that found by the researcher of this study.

The Obstacles in Conducting Reflective Writing Assignment

Based on the result of the interview, all of three participants faced the obstacles in reflective writing assignment. The researcher also revealed the most difficult thing and the causes of obstacle in reflective writing in this part. There are six findings that found by the researcher of this study.

Content problem. The first finding found that one of participants faced the content problem in expressing the ideas in this research. In addition, this participant explained that he felt hard in expressing the ideas was because of the question of reflection was hard to be understood. In line with that, Fareed, Ashraf, and Bilal (2016) found that some respondents “will not be able to pour any idea through their pen onto the page unless students have information” (p.85). It could be concluded that the student has a trouble to put several ideas unless he has an ability in memorizing all of learning activities. Another finding that the researcher found related to this issue was that one of the students felt difficult to generate the ideas. She did not know how to the way of generating ideas which would be explained for the first time in the writing. This finding was also in line with the study that Heong, Yunos, Hassan, Mohamad, Othman, and Kiong (2013) investigated the factors contributing to difficulty in generating ideas. In addition to the content problem, the researcher also found that the participant felt difficult to develop the ideas. This finding was also in line with Rass (2015) who had problem in developing the ideas, they might have problem in giving supporting detail, such as evidence and reason to develop the main

idea. Furthermore, there was one participant that had content problem in terms of difficulty in recalling memory of the lesson in his reflective writing assignment. Park (2003) found that “it is difficult for the students to faithfully recollecting their thought, feeling and reflections well after the event had been stressed to them at the very beginning of the course” (p.188). However, the content problem could be caused by the lack of seeking the proper ideas in reflective writing. They also lack of uncomfortable atmosphere in doing assignment. Cambria and Guthrie (2010) stated that, “student who struggle begin to doubt their abilities, they expect to do poorly in reading, writing, and talking about text. In addition to this study showed that there was one participant lack of adequate tool to do the assignment as the cause of content problem in his reflection.

Vocabulary problem. Another finding in this research was about vocabulary problem. The problems were in term of diction and word spelling. The researcher found that one of the students had problem of word choices. Fareed , Ashraf, & Bilal, (2016) also found that the respondent experienced in the order of inappropriate words when expressing of meaning. This kind of student felt hard to used the appropriate words in the appropriate place. Similarly, Gowere et al (1995) state “the English spelling system has become inconsistent for students due to the influence of other language and variant pronunciations.” It could be indicated that they lack of vocabulary knowledge in the vocabulary problem when they wrote a reflection. Correspondingly, Megaiab (2014) added that most of vocabulary errors were found in spelling and punctuations of student’s writing samples. In short, without a solid mastery of vocabulary, student might have incapability to share their thought by the words accurately (Megaiab, 2014).

Grammatical problem. It also has been found that using the correct grammar was a difficult matter for three participants in this research. They were tenses, passive and active voice, and the verb used in a sentence. Fareed, Ashraf, and Bilal (2016) stated that the highest number of learners' writing errors was made in grammar in their research. They mentioned that grammatical errors included errors of subject-verb agreement, tenses, forms of singular and plural and etc. However, from the participants' statement mentioned above, it could be indicated that their grammatical problem was caused by the lack of reading English book. In line with that, student might have limited vocabulary and have no interest in reading English literature. (Iqbal, Noor, Muhabat, & Kazemian, 2015).

Paragraph writing problem. Another finding of this study showed that there were two participants had the problem in terms of paragraph writing. He did not aware about the rule of making a paragraph while he typed a word by word. In line with that, Alfaki (2015) also stated that "those students who have the problem of writing good sentences structures are unable to produce longer sentences requiring subordinate and coordination" (p. 45). It could be concluded that the student did learn much yet in making paragraph with well-structured sentences. Differently, Eva argued that determining the topic sentence as her problem in terms of paragraph writing. Fanene (2016) also found that approximately 64.3% of respondents identified the skills of writing a main idea or topic sentence as problem areas. It seemed to be possible that the student took a long time to start the writing by thinking what proper sentence for the first main idea is (Fanene, 2016). It could be indicated that the participants had the obstacle in paragraph writing was caused by the lack of English writing practice.

Sentence structure problem. It also has been found that in using the proper sentence structure was a difficult matter for one of participants in this research. She explained that she had

problem in writing two clauses in a sentence and she wrote the words as she is pronounced. Thus, in this finding, it has been proved that the lack of English writing practice caused the students faced the obstacle in term of sentence structure problem.

Topic problem. The researcher found that there was topic problem faced by the one of participants in this research. The student felt difficult to decide the topic. He said that the question of reflection was not specific question. In line with that, Lagerberg (1995) mentioned the student's problem in writing that they write poorly organized papers and sometimes fail to select a topic.

The Strategies in Solving the Problems of Reflective Writing Assignment

In this point, the findings and discussions related to the strategies used by the students on reflective writing assignment are presented. Based on the result of the interview, all of participants mentioned their strategies in solving their problems of reflective writing assignment.

Reading some references. The research revealed that reading some references became the strategy of reflective writing for two participants in this research. He explained that he would get the idea of reflection by reading some assignments or papers that related to the courses. Additionally, reading some references could be the way to overcome the obstacles in conducting reflective writing assignment especially in the content problem that was faced by all of participants in this research. Correspondingly, Charles (2015) added that, "by suggesting readings the students might find relevant ideas by returning personal comments to the journals" (p.81). Furthermore, Ahmmed (2016) concluded that reading English text can enriches learner's knowldege in writing.

Using translator tool. Another finding of this study showed that there were two participants have same statement that using translator tool as their strategy of reflective writing. They could solve the problem of word choices or diction and word spelling through checking them into translator tool. Therefore, these obstacles in term of vocabulary problem might be reduced after the students checked the word into Google translate or dictionary. Giannetti (2016) showed that using translator tool was a common strategy to speeds up the learnr's comprehension process in their work of writing.

Learning about grammar. Another finding of this study showed that learn about grammar became the strategy of reflective writing for one of participants in this research. Moreover, learning about grammar could be the strategy of students' obstacles in term of grammatical problem that found in this study. In line with that, Shin (2006) also found that grammar lesson helped the respondents to review grammatical problem in the class.

Making some highlights. It also has been found that there was one participant overcome his obstacles of reflective writing by making some highlights. The student preferred to make a note about learning activity of the courses. Moreover, making some highlights could become the way of students in solving the obstacle in reflective writing especially content problem. The author suggested that an organized notes support the student to obtain any missing past information which would be reflected (Mosleh & Baha, 2013).

Asking the lecturer about the assignment. There has been found another finding that one participant will ask the lecturer about the assignment to become the other strategy in writing reflection. The student was hoped to be able to overcome the problem by asking the lecturer about the given question of reflection in order he could understand what he would to reflect

Mussawy (2009) added that consultation was the way to provide students more information about the learning outcome.

Expanding the vocabulary knowledge. Another finding of this study showed that expanding the vocabulary knowledge become the strategy for one participant in this research. In addition, this strategy could be used as problem solving in term of vocabulary problem that faced by the participants in this research. That way, the problem of word choices and word spelling could be reduced by the way of expanding the vocabulary knowledge. In line with that, Harmer (1993) as cited in Ahmadi, Ismail, & Abdullah (2012) stated that “vocabulary learning not only develop learner’s spelling but also their writing proficiency” (p.189).

Practice writing. It also has been found that there was one participant overcome her obstacles of reflective writing by practicing the writing. As we could see at the previous finding of the student’s obstacles in conducting reflective writing, there were participants who faced the problem of paragraph writing and sentence structure. Therefore, by keeping practice writing, the students were expected to be able to improve their writing ability to better than earlier. Thus, they could write an essay or reflection properly. In line with that, Farrah (2012) said that reflective practice is “helpful for students improving the students’ competence in writing” (p. 1006).

Conclusion

The aim of this study is to discuss the obstacles revealed by students on reflective writing assignment at English Language Education Department of Private University and to explore the strategies in solving the problem of reflective writing assignment at English Language

Department of Private University. Standardized open-ended interview was used as the instrument in collecting the data. Moreover, the data was analyzed based on the objective of this study.

Based on the finding of this study, there are two findings which were discussed by the researcher. In the first finding, there are several obstacles of reflective writing and the cause of obstacles in reflective writing that mentioned by all of participants. The participants faced many obstacles that are content problem, vocabulary problem, and grammatical problem. Besides, the participants also had obstacles of paragraph writing problem, sentence structure problem, and topic problem. Moreover, the researcher revealed the most difficult thing in reflective writing for each participant that they had problem of the content and paragraph writing. In addition, there was also found the cause of obstacles in reflective writing that the participants had content problem due to they are; lack of seeking the proper ideas, lack of uncomfortable atmosphere in doing assignment, and lack of adequate tool to do assignment. Then, the students faced vocabulary problem because of the lack of vocabulary knowledge. They also lack of reading English book in their grammatical problem. Lastly, they had paragraph writing problem and sentence structure problem due to the lack of English writing book practice.

This research also found seven findings related to the strategies of the students in solving the problems of reflective writing assignment. Therefore, the strategies are related to the way how the participants overcome their obstacle in reflective writing. Each participants mentioned several strategies that are; reading some references, using translator tool, learning about grammar, making some highlights, asking the lecturer about the assignment, expanding the vocabulary knowledge, and practice writing.

Recommendation

Based on the result of this study, there are some recommendations or suggestion for some parties who are related to this study such as, students, lecturer, and further researcher. **For students.** The students should improve grammatical knowledge in order for them to be able to write reflective writing properly. Moreover, the students also need to keep writing practice in order to improve their writing competency in reflective writing so that in the future they would be able to make a good reflective writing. **For lecturers.** The lecturer should give clear understanding about the assignment in order the student able to comprehend the instruction from the lecturer. It might reduce the obstacles that faced by the students and needed for student's achievement whether she or he has good performance or not in producing reflective writing skills. Additionally, the implementation of reflective writing can be one of the kinds of assignment for the other lecturers in order they can know their students' feeling or perception toward each courses. **For further researchers.** In the future, other researchers might follow up this research. Therefore, the result of this study can be used as additional information for further researchers who want to conduct the different study related to document analysis of student's reflective writing assignment. So, the researchers are suggested to analyze the student's work of reflective writing that can be expanded into different areas such different participants, different research methodology, as well as different techniques of data collection. By doing so, this research is expected to investigate greater finding with more detail information.

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