ENHANCING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' ENGLISH WRITING SKILLS ON CONTENT AREA

Mariana Ester Politton and K. M. Widi Hadiyanti
Atma Jaya Catholic University, Jakarta Indonesia
marianapolitton@outlook.com, and widi.hadiyanti@gmail.com

Abstract
Writing, as an instrument of communication, is nowadays accomplished mostly in English to ensure information understood globally via digital platforms. This creates a transformation in job fields into utilizing technologies to textually deliver messages. Therefore, it is vital to generate high qualified future employees competing in the work places. Accordingly, university students must be equipped with English writing competencies as well as strategies focusing on content area, in addition to forms, so as to promote meaning-making concerning critical and logical thinking skills, besides to comprise comprehensive realization. This qualitative research utilized a critical literature review by conducting in-depth data collection, organization, integration, and classification of writing strategies. It offers suggested maneuvers to overcome higher education learners' writing problems: lack of content maturation practices, through implementing collaborative writing discussions with either or both verbal or / and online discussions. It can as well integrate (intensive / extensive) reading and writing instructions in contextual cognitive processes concentrating on intellectual meaning development.

Keywords: content area, qualitative research, university students, writing strategies

Introduction

As the most commonly used language internationally, English has been a goal for people to communicate fluently both verbally and textually. Especially in this modern era of technology, writing becomes a social artifact and primary means to communicate in human daily lives to exchange information across countries (Xin & Liming, 2005:1). It is shown in how people are getting more connected in building written communication via digital platforms mostly in English to ensure that messages can be understood globally (Shaul, 2015:1). Consequently, it changes work places into physical office spaces where employees deliver messages textually via technologies which can be about product innovation targeted in global level.

Considering the fact, Indonesia certainly faces the crucial needs of producing high qualified employees with English writing capabilities. Therefore, universities in Indonesia should apply writing strategies through classroom activities focusing on content maturity. It is believed that the strategies will promote meaning-making skill on content area to develop the competence of providing critical information (Liao & Wong, 2017:155-156). The strategies should be adjusted with a writing

piece which inclines to coherence rather than cohesion to give comprehensive content cognition (Karadeniz, 2017:94).

However, the problem is that most English writing classroom activities unfortunately focus more on cohesion or grammar maturation (Liao & Wong, 2007:140, and Monaghan, 2007:6). As a result, the learners find hardships in building knowledge on content area. Studies about students' perception on writing showed concerns on it (Ismail, 2011 and Husni, 2017).

The present study is to introduce writing strategies which enhance university students' English writing skills on content area. Accordingly, the research questions are as the followings: (1) "What writing strategies can be classified applicable in a writing class with the benefits of enhancing higher education EFL learners' writing skills on content area?", and (2) "How are the strategies applied in the writing class?". There are few limitations of this study. First, the content discussion is about English writing skills on content area. Second, the target audiences are university students.

Finally, in an attempt to introduce the writing strategies, the explanations are built in a qualitative research study through critical literature review. It was preceded by a sort of library research and then applied in narrative descriptions which were based on Sukmadinata (2013) in Kameswara (2017:37). It explained that this type of qualitative research which discussed such kind of activities should be done through conducting in-depth data collection, organizing the data, integrating the data and classifying the writing strategies into the table of the writing strategies. Thus, the data consisting of 38 articles from different text types were examined by using tables of classification as measurement devices for gathering, organizing and integrating the data as the instruments. Based on the research methodology, it is believed the process will show explanations on the writing strategies which enhance the EFL learners' writing skills on content area through classroom activities managed by the lecturer and curriculum developers. Therefore, in the next sessions there will be discussions of the literature reviews about university students' English writing skills on content area. It is then followed by presenting the recommended writing strategies in order to boost university students' English writing skills on content area as the result of examinations about the articles analyzed.

University Students' English Writing Skills on Content Area

In cognitive process of writing, content area is presented to demonstrate one's notion in written speech (Coulmas, 2003:5, 9). However, it has to be factual and intellectual (Styron, 2014:26) in which the criteria are identified through its two different purposes in writing: writing to learn and writing to communicate.

The aim of writing to learn is to deliver the notions of the writer or specific trusted people through discovery thinking or reflecting process on personal knowledge in informal pieces. Although the knowledge must be factual, it is built without being critical and logical. Meanwhile, writing to communicate is intended to express enormous ideas to the readers through critical thinking or contextual knowledge building process on content area in such formal products as, essays,

business letters, and publications (Young: 2006:9-10). This is in line with university students' need (Salahshour & Hajizadeh, 2013).

It is obviously identified that content area in writing to communicate is related to the cognitive process as it enhances one's conceptual understanding leading to provide vital information (Hamby, 2011:29; and Ulusoy & Dedeoglu, 2011:11). The ideas are the answers to the five W (who, what, when, where, why) and the big H (how) questions completing the critical building of content area confirming one's intellectual deep knowledge (Hamby, 2011:6). However, one must master some specific competencies involving meaning making process to convey notion and conclusion (Javed et al., 2013:130) like selecting sources, organizing and integrating ideas with critical thinking to construct deep knowledge (Walker, 2003:263).

In brainstorming activities, gathering ideas is regarded crucial to ensure the truth of the content itself (Zemach and Rumisek, 2005:6). The reason is that the process involves researching factual sources to find as many credible, accurate and logical information as possible related to the topic (Ningsih, 2016:7). However, the skills need to be followed by organizing ideas because not all of the gathered information is necessary to put in the content area. Therefore, one must continuously process the information in such activities as undergoing and splitting them into relevant and irrelevant ideas, accumulating them in an illogical group, analyzing and evaluating them to identify vital ideas which are sufficient "to support the topic" (Styron, 2014:26; Walker, 2013:263, and Cameron, 2009:2-4). Then, the ideas must be arranged in relatable and meaningful content areas by integrating them logically so that the arguments are built meaningfully (Raisig & Vode, 2016:222). It can be done through making notes, or clustering to help one generate ideas, and see connection between them by considering the target readers.

To provide one's deep knowledge on the content area, critical thinking is needed to promote intellectual activities such as purposeful thinking toward one's intellectual standards, recognizing and solving problems, working on reflective questions, and constructing conclusion (Walker, 2006:263-266). Each describes individual engagement to cultivate notions in cognitive processes like analyzing, evaluating and interpreting ideas.

In building the writing skills on content area, one needs to be exposed to products of intellectual activities involving building arguments critically. It is to provide deep knowledge as the core content area itself. The product must be academic writing essays in meaning-making skills through its aspects which incline to coherence and unity rather than cohesion (Vyncke, 2012:21). Coherence is about internal logical and relatable ideas, while unity is focusing on one topic consistently. It may present cohesion for formal mechanism on grammar connection, but it focuses more on the two meaning-focused aspects upholding intellectual thinking on a problem-solving topic.

Thus, university students are to produce essays which are informative, argumentative and analytical. Each is built in text-structure consisting of paragraphs of an introduction including a thesis statement, rhetorical supports and conclusion (Ahmed, 2010), composed with at least 5-10 sentences (Zemach & Rumisek, 2005:11). Accordingly, one should write various types of the essays (AlOmrani,

2014:108) to enhance more critical understanding (Vyncke, 2012:11). Higher education must apply a communicative approach in the classroom activities. It involves cognitive process in prewriting, writing and revising on both content and academic rules which are vital and appropriate in the level (Negari, 2011:299, Zemach & Rumisek, 2005: iv,2, Salhshoura & Hajizadehb, 2013:165, and Iksana et al., 2012:71).

The Recommended Writing Strategies

In order that the lecturer can successfully guide the university students to reach their highest potency in English writing, the teaching process must utilize writing strategies including communicative and intellectual practices frequently (Han, 2012:356). There are factors to consider like the lecturer's dominant role in leading the class to engage the learners in applicable activities they are eager to learn (Xin & Liming, 2005:47); the appropriate time availability in each session by separating the activities in stages according to each purpose to ensure the learners can follow the process (Weida & Stolley, 2008:1); and the most vital objective is focusing on the learners' content development through brainstorming activities in meaning-making process (Monaghan, 2007:6).

Therefore, the writing strategies should be about incorporated learning activities of applying social engagement among the learners in verbal discussions, as well as combining reading and writing in one instruction. Each is regarded beneficial because of the potency to promote content skills among the students.

In teaching writing, collaborative learning activities combining writing with verbal communication are regarded important because it promotes content enhancement. The process starts from discussing the ideas to write in cognitive social interaction which simultaneously proves the existence of communicative approach during the content-based process (Fatima, 2012:105,107). The discussion can be done in pairs or in groups to ensure the learners discuss the content leading toward the enhancement of critical thinking ability, the understanding of forming arguments, and demonstrating deep knowledge onto a content-based writing piece (Xin & Liming, 2005:47).

The lecturer, as the most superior in the class (Sugiharto, 2006:1), must focus on the topic selection since the chosen topic influences the learners' writing process as well as discussion manner intellectually and critically (Fatima, 2012:105, and Rathakrishnan et al., 2017:3). It should promote critical thinking according to the students' knowledge realization and understanding about current social issues such as humanitarian or society (Monaghan, 2007:89, and Fatima, 2012:105).

Regarding the implementation, discussion and writing must be separated as the discussion is intended to be the guidance to build content to write whereas writing is purposed as the main learning objective for individuals (Fatima, 2012:107). However, it has to be noted, the lecturer should ensure the learners really follow the discussion process according to the intention. The students can be paired or put in small groups to equalize the contribution among the active and passive ones (Connor-Greene, 2005:173); given a specific discussion question list on content related to the topic and monitored in the process (Xin & Liming, 2005:50).

Here are the two ways in collaborative writing discussions considered applicable writing strategies focusing on content enhancement: oral group discussion and online discussion in a writing class. In oral group discussion, the strategy is identified as direct discussion face-to-face among the learners to do information exchange to write (Coulmas, 2002:9). The process starts from direct conversation in groups and then displacing it by silently building internal conversation with oneself about ideas in a content-based writing piece (Xin & Liming 2005:46).

The steps are divided into introduction, main activity and closing. First, introduction is about giving first movement of building the understanding toward the whole activity and the topic through warming up activities in 5-20 minutes (Washington University, 2018:1), explanation on academic writing rules and the detail of the task as well as presenting the topic in 5-7 minutes for each. Second, the main activity is about helping the learners reach the main objective i.e. content enhancement through arranging the learners in small number of groups to do discussion, giving the discussion question list, instructing for the discussion in 30-40 minutes followed by individual writing in 50 minutes. Lastly, the closing is all about giving review through any brief activity.

Online group discussion utilizes technologies and internet access in doing the process of collaborating writing discussion. It is regarded appropriate and beneficial for the learners' learning process, since the activities demand the learners to research and demonstrate the ideas by posting them on the chosen online platform. For sure, the lecturer and the learners are beneficially engaged on the content more easily. However, during the discussion process, the discussion question list prepared according to each writing stage purpose is presented in Crafting Questions. This refers to analyzing information process by "breaking down parts, recognizing patterns, forming assumptions and inserting relevant ideas" through specific questions built by the lecturer based on the objectives of the writing stages (Rathaksihnan et al., 2017:1-2).

Consequently, the application steps for online discussion in writing involve the three focuses stated previously in oral discussion face to face for writing, but with different implementation. First, although the introduction involves the same steps in order, they are followed by introducing the online platform. After that, the whole process is accomplished using technologies.

Integrating reading and writing instructions will possibly boost university English learners' writing on content area. Both skillful learning activities have similar cognitive process focusing on organizing, negotiating and analyzing intellectual meaning critically and logically (Elhabiri, 2013:22-23, Adam & Babiker, 2015:115). The integration may enhance the learners' abilities of knowledge construction, critical thinking and content comprehension (Ahlem, 2017:161, and Monaghan, 2007:37-38). To do so, the process should start from giving more opportunities to the learners to read to build ideas for writing before independently writing the ideas themselves (AlOmrani, 2014:106).

Furthermore, the lecturers should first, select properly reading approaches between intensive and extensive reading to ensure the learners' understanding about its content (Rashidi & Piran, 2011:471, and Miller, 2013:71); second, utilize proper

text types between fiction and non-fiction which both present deeper and complex meaning in different characteristic of literacy to determine the kind of background knowledge comprehended and built by the learners (Alvarado et al., 2015:280); and third, present topics about human life and society (Kozulin, et al., 2013:307) to lead the learners toward intellectual process of linking what they know and what they just learn for writing (Morales, 2017:6).

In doing that, the lecturer should exploit the Developmental Reading and Writing Lesson (DRWL) instructional framework regarded as an appropriate reading and writing teaching plan with four purposes of silent reading (Scott & Piazza, 1987:58-60). They are gathering new information in the pre-writing stage, identifying more vital information in the writing stage, clarifying the arguments in the revision stage and checking the cohesion aspect in the editing stage. Each is achieved by involving simple reading assignments such as underlying key points or main ideas, making notes, and doing classroom discussion between the lecturer and the learners. After that, the process can be completely finished with submission.

Rooted in those explanations, the implementation can consider two applicable methods as parts of the strategy. They are intensive as well as extensive reading for writing which can enhance students' content construction in writing.

As intensive reading refers to meaning development process dealing with content comprehension in detailed (Rashidi & Piran, 2011:471, and Miller, 2013:71), the intended strategy for writing certainly needs professional supervision from the lecturer. The dominant control is reflected through reading material preparation which must not be complicated in cohesion instead entirely focus on critical and intellect content presentation (AlOmrani, 2014:101, 104, 108, Morales, 2017:22).

After that, the lecturer should focus on the whole activity implementation divided into the same parts as the previous strategy. However, the differences are that in introduction, there must be specific explanation about the relationship between reading and writing. Even more, the main activities of reading in 30-35 minutes (Lampariello, 2017:1) and writing in 50 minutes (Mermelstein, 2015:183) are both done individually. The rests are all the same.

Relation to the characteristic of extensive reading, which is for pleasure, the strategy of extensive reading for writing surely has to be about reading what the learners are interested to read. It can be done by giving them freedom to select their own reading materials concerning with the topic. The purpose is to easily encourage the learners to do the whole process of analyzing information on the materials to construct ideas about problems and solutions into a piece of writing (Mermelstein, 2015:188).

However, it has to be noted that the lecturer should still guide the learners during the process. In doing that, the lecturer must professionally show the dominance of teaching and setting the criteria of the reading materials such as the intellectual topic and the page number limitation in at least 15-30 pages (Lampariello, 2017:1) by initially presenting the samples in first session. Even more, the lecturer should adjust the appropriate time availability for reading in 90 minutes (Kirin, 2010:289) which can be divided into reading in and outside class.

The steps are divided similar with the intensive reading for writing. However, the introduction involves presenting reading samples in the first session to give the illustration of what to bring next. The reading activity as one of the main activities is done individually in 90 minutes or less if the lecturer includes the reading process as home assignment previously. If so, the classroom discussion about the task at home can be done in exchange. The next steps follow.

Conclusion

Implementing writing strategies has been noticed important in university where the EFL learners must reach written competency on content area as it is acquired in job fields. This study introduces two major writing strategies to attain the purpose. They are collaborative writing discussions combining verbal discussions (face to face and online) in pairs or small groups, as well as integrative reading and writing instructions incorporating intensive as well as extensive reading and writing in contextual cognitive process. Both writing strategies focus on intellectual meaning development by using the combination as a process of building ideas to write which result in the enhancement of university students' English writing skills with content maturity.

However, there are some suggestions to consider for the lecturers as well as the curriculum developers, the EFL learners, and future researchers. First, it is suggested to consider the needs of enhancing cohesion skills in writing as it is also important to present the content. Second, it is encouraged that the students utilize the strategies outside the class for better results. Third, it is recommended that future studies find the effectiveness by doing scientific quantitative investigations on the topic. By doing so, the goal to help university students enhance their English writing skills on content area through writing strategies can be accomplished in their classes.

References

Adam, A. A. S. & Babiker, Y. O. (2015). The role of literature in enhancing creative writing from teachers' perspectives. *English Language and Literature Studies, 5*(1). Retrieved from: http://www.ccsenet.org/ells

Ahmed, A. (2010). Students' Problems with cohesion and coherence in EFL essay writing in Egypt: different perspectives. *Literacy Information and Computer Education Journal (LICEJ), 1*(4). Retrieved from: https://www.researchgate.net

Ahlem, L. (2017). An integrated reading/writing instruction for better EFL trainees at the teachers training school of Constantine (ENSC). *Université des Frères Mentouri Constantine1,* (47). Retrieved from: http://revue.umc.edu.dz

AlOmrani, A. (2014). Integrating reading into writing instruction in the EFL programs at Saudi universities. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ), 5*(3). Retrieved from: http://www.awej.org

Alvarado, P et al. (2015). The power of informational texts. *Language Arts, 92*(4). Retrieved from: http://www.ncte.org

Cameron, J. (2009). Prewriting strategies for organizing ideas, (Online), Retrieved from: https://www.douglascollege.ca/-/media/

Connor-Greene, P. A. (2005). Fostering meaningful classroom discussions: student-generated questions, quotations, and talking points. *Teaching of Psychology, 32*(3). Retrieved from: http://journals.sagepub.com

Coulmas, F. (2003). Writing systems: an introduction to their linguistic analysis. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from: http://pdfs.semanticscholar.org

Elhabiri. (2013). Teaching the writing skills through literary texts: case of 2nd year EFL students at Djilali Liabes University. Magister dissertation. Algeria: University of Tlemcen. Retrieved from: http://bibfac.univ-tlemcen.dz

Fatima, S. (2012). Teaching report writing skills through communicative activities. *American International Journal of Contemporary Research, 2*(2). Retrieved from: http://www.aijcrnet.com

Garro, L. (2014). The importance of reading fiction. Magister dissertation. United States: University of Central Mussouri. Retrieved from: https://centralspace.ucmo.edu

Hamby, P. A. (2011). Writing across the curriculum: case studies of three content-area teachers (Doctorial dissertation, Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw, United States). Retrieved from: https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu

Han, C. (2017). The effectiveness of application of writing strategies in writing instruction. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research, 8*(2). Retrieved from: http://www.academypublication.com

Husni, N. (2007). Students' perception on writing problems in the fifth semester students at One Islamic University in Jambi. Indonesia: Universitas Jambi. Retrieved from: http://repository.unja.ac.id

Iksana, Z. H., et al. (2012). Communication skills among university students. Social and Behavioral Sciences, 59. Retrieved from: https://www.sciencedirect.com

Ismail, S. (2011). Exploring students' perception of ESL writing. *English Language Teaching, 4*(2). Retrieved from: https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1080715.pdf

Javed, M., Juan, W. X., & Nazli, S. (2013). A study of students' assessment in writing skills of the English language. *International Journal of Instruction, 6*(2). Retrieved from: http://e-iji.net

Kameswara, S. (2017). Representasi gaya hidup perempuan modern pada CosmoGirl! Indonesia (analisis framing pada rubric LIFE SPECIAL majalah CosmoGirl! Indonesia edisi bulan Februari-April 2017). Undergraduate dissertation. Indonesia: Universitas Bina Nusantara)

Karadeniz, A. (2017). Cohesion and coherence in written texts of students of faculty of education. *Journal of Education and Training Studies, 5*(2). Retrieved from: http://jets.redfame.com

Kirin, W. (2010). Effects of extensive reading on students' writing ability in an EFL class. *The Journal of Asia EFL, 7*(1). Retrieved from: http://www.asiatefl.org

Kozulin, et al. (2013). *Vygotsky's educational theory in cultural context*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Lampariello, L. (2017, March 8). Intensive vs. extensive reading. Retrieved from: http://www.thepolyglotdream.com

Liao, M. & Wong, C. (2007). Effects of dialogue journals on L2 students' writing fluency, reflections, anxiety, and motivation. *Reflections on English Language Teaching, 9*(2), pp.14, 140. Retrieved from: http://www.nus.edu.sg

Mermelstein, A. D. (2015). Improving EFL learners' writing through enhanced extensive reading. *Reading in a Foreign Language, 27*(2). Retrieved from: http://nflrc.hawaii.edu/rfl

Miller, K. (2013). Intensive reading, extensive reading and the English reader marathon at Tsurumi University. 大学紀要. Retrieved from: http://library.tsurumi-u.ac.jp

Monaghan, C. (2007). Effective strategies for teaching writing: a project Submitted to the faculty of the evergreen state college in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree master's in teaching, p. 6. Retrieved from: http://archives.evergreen.edu

Morales, H. S. (2017). Effects of scaffolded intensive reading on students' reading comprehension performance. *Revista Actualidades Investigativas en Education, 17*(1). Retrieved from: https://revistas.ucr.ac.cr

Negari, G. M. (2011). A study on strategy instruction and EFL learners' writing skill. *International Journal of English Linguistics, 1*(2). Retrieved from: https://www.ccsenet.org/ijel

Ningsih, J. S. (2016). Using jigsaw method to gather ideas to initiate writing an analytical exposition essay: A case study (Undergraduate dissertation, Atma Jaya Catholic University, Jakarta, Indonesia) Retrieved from: https://lib.atmajaya.ac.id

Putri, N. (2009). Collaborative writing interactions in writing argumentative essays. Undergraduate dissertation. Indonesia: Atma Jaya Catholic University. Retrieved from: https://lib.atmajaya.ac.id

Raisig, S. & Dzifa, V. (2016). A workshop to help students integrate sources into their writing. *Journal of Academic Writing, 6*(1). Retrieved from: http://dx.doi.org

Rashidi, N. & Piran, M. (2011). The effect of extensive and intensive reading on Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary size & depth. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research, 2*(2). Retrieved from: http://www.academypublication.com

Rathakrishnan, M., Ahmad, R. & Suan, C. L. (2017). Online discussion: Enhancing students' critical thinking skills. The 2nd International Conference on Applied Science and Technology 2017 (ICAST' 17). Retrieved from: http://doi.org

Salahshour, N. & Hajizadeh, N. (2013). *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences, 70*. Retrieved from: http:// www.sciencedirect.com

Scott, D. & Piazza, C. L. (1987). Integrating reading and writing lessons. *Reading Horizons, 28*(1). Retrieved from: http://scholarworks.wmich.edu

Shaul, B. (2015). Survey: 35% of users check their phones more than 50 times per day. Retrieved from: http://www.adweek.com

Styron, R. A. (2014). Critical thinking and collaboration: A strategy to enhance student learning. *Systemics, Cybernetics and Informatics, 12*(7). Retrieved from: http://www.iiisci.org

Sugiharto, S. (2006). Learn writing through collaborative method. Retrieved from: https://lib.atmajaya.ac.id

Ulusoy, M. & Dedeoglu, H. (2011). Content area reading and writing: Practices and beliefs. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 36*(4), pp. 1, 18-19. Retrieved from: http://files.eric.ed.gov

Vyncke, M. (2012). The concept and practice of critical thinking in academic writing: an investigation of international students' perceptions and writing experiences. Magister dissertation. London: Kin's College. Retrieved from: https://englishagenda.britishcouncil.org

Walker, S. E. (2003). Active learning strategies to promote critical thinking. *Journal of Athletic Training, 38*(3). Retrieved from: http://journalofathetictraining.org

Washington University (2018). College writing 1 information literacy toolkit. Retrieved from: http://libguides.wustl.edu

Weida, S. & Stolley, K. (2018). Invention: starting the writing process. Retrieved from: https://owl.english.purdue.edu

Xin, S & Liming, Y. (2005). Group discussion and EFL writing. *CELEA Journal, 28*(5), p. 1. Retrieved from: http://www.celea.org.cn

Young, A. (2010). *Teaching writing across the curriculum: Prentice Hall resources for writing*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.

Zemach, D. E. & Rumisek, L. A. (2005). *Academic writing from paragraph to essay.* Oxford: Macmillan.