

STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING WRITING TO EFL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Writing, as one of the language skills, is a compulsory skill to be mastered by EFL students and it has become a problematic skill for majority of students. Thus, EFL instructors are recommended to use various strategies in order to help improve their students' performance in writing. This article discusses some teaching strategies that the EFL instructors can use in teaching writing. Some experts stated that writing strategies determine the students' capability improvement in producing a longer and better essay. Among the strategies are Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD), process writing, shared writing, writing animation, and cooperative writing.

Keywords: strategies, writing, EFL students

ABSTRAK

Menulis sebagai salah satu keterampilan bahasa merupakan keterampilan yang wajib dikuasai oleh pembelajar Bahasa asing. Oleh karena itu, pengajar Bahasa asing disarankan untuk menggunakan strategi mengajar yang bervariasi untuk meningkatkan pencapaian atau keterampilan menulis pembelajar. Artikel ini membahas tentang beberapa strategi yang dapat diterapkan oleh pengajar Bahasa asing dalam mengajarkan keterampilan menulis diantaranya Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD), Shared-Writing Strategy, Animated Story, Cooperative Writing, Imaginary Strategy, Showing Pictures, and Scaffolding Strategy.

Kata kunci: menulis, strategi, pembelajar Bahasa Inggris

INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, since the implementation of the latest curriculum called Curriculum 2013, English is taught from secondary schools up to the university level. Writing is one of the four language skills that should be mastered by second or foreign language learners. It is one of the most important tools of communication. Celce and Murcia (2001:207) argue that in a language classroom, writing is considered a communicative activity. Therefore students need to be trained to write during the learning process. This argument is inferred in their statement as follows “Writing as a communicative activity needs to be encouraged and nurtured during the language learner’s course of study”. Similarly, Harmer (2007:203) states that writing is an attribute exploring school subjects and it can be a powerful process to discover meaning, not only to transcribe an idea but also to translate the writer’s mind. Therefore, it is important to teach writing in a foreign language classroom.

In the English language teaching process, a teacher has a very important role. Anderson (2008:1) argues that teachers have to gain a lot of ideas and strategies in order to carry out teaching assignments effectively, efficiently and professionally. A teacher must be able to modify a material so that it can be

accepted and understood by students appropriately and thoroughly. As a result, the teacher can achieve the desired learning objectives.

Of all the language skills, writing has become the most challenging skill for EFL students including university students. Qamariah (2016) explains that writing in university has been regarded as one of the complex English skills that require thoroughly ways in order to produce a highly rich piece of writing. Therefore, it needs a lot of effort on making the students write better. These efforts will be potential when they go to the right target. To reach the target, the English instructors should try hard to train the students by using various appropriate strategies.

For many students, writing a text is considered the most problematic skill to master since it does not only require the ability to have and develop ideas but also includes knowledge of many language components. Anderson (2008:1) suggests that creating a text requires the writers to make choices about the words they use and how he/she puts them together. If they make the right choices then they can communicate with others. In reality, some English instructors also still get difficulties in finding effective teaching techniques in improving the student's writing skills. They keep using similar techniques in teaching different topics since they do not have enough knowledge about various teaching techniques and strategies. Pardiyono (2007:1) points out that in general, teaching writing is mostly focused on writing grammatically correct sentences. Consequently, the instructor's correction process is focused on correcting grammatical errors rather than on meaning realization. Written text is only considered as a group of grammatically correct sentences, not as the realization of meaning through sentences.

This low achievement of the students is caused by several factors. One of the factors is the problems derived from the students as stated above. Besides, the dissatisfactory result of the student's achievement can be caused by the way the instructor teaches writing to the students. Most of the efforts are aimed at skill building and grammar instruction. Qamariah (2016) mentions that writing in university is not only about producing a grammatically correct piece of writing,

but the writing should be a well communicative deliver what the writer intended to convey. Therefore, lecturers should have competencies in applying the appropriate strategies to their students since it affects the success of the learning process and the aim of teaching.

More development on writing teaching approaches have been growing in the recent decade, such as; “portfolio assessment, peer evaluation, conferencing with instructors, communicative approaches, computer writing software, mail exchange, and many more.” (Lee, 2003:112). Some previous research findings prove that the strategies the instructors use in teaching affect the students’ capability in producing their writing. A survey conducted by Hawken from the University of Utah (2009) proves that the quality of the writing instruction given by high school teachers from the United States raised some concerns. The writing activities the teachers assigned most frequently did not involve much analysis and interpretation, and the majority of the teachers did not assign multi-paragraph writing assignments monthly. In addition, most of them did not provide the evidence-based practices assignment frequently. This caused the low capabilities of students’ in writing.

Research on the impact of teaching strategies toward better writing competence was carried out by Paz and Graham (2002) as well. The research focused on the strategies used by middle school teachers in the United States to help students as developing writers who have not yet mastered important writing processes, skills, and knowledge involved in planning, drafting, and revising text. In the present study, middle school students were directly taught strategies that facilitated the execution of each of these processes. They were also taught the knowledge and skills needed to carry out these strategies and these strategies facilitated students to produce essays that were longer, contained more mature vocabulary, and were qualitatively better.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Writing in Language Learning

According to Celce and Murcia (2001:207), writing is one of the main important skills in learning English. In writing, ideas are arranged in a series of sentences that are related to each other so the information can be comprehended. It takes ideas, thoughts, and emotions about what has ever been read, seen, or experienced and get them transferred into paper (or computer screen) using the knowledge of language conventions and the writing process to create meaningful text. In addition to the above statement, Hedge (2005:55) states that writing skills learnt in the first language will transfer successfully to a second language. She discusses that EFL students require linguistic assistance such as syntax and grammar but they also need to learn how to organize their texts and ideas since conventions for this can differ from one language to another. So, writing activity consists of many aspects. These are (1) writer, (2) idea or feeling, (3) language, (4) targeted reader, (5) aims of writing, and (6) interaction between writer and reader through the text.

According to Hyland (2002:78) writing is learnt, rather than taught, and the teacher's best methods are flexibility and support. He states that writing is about guiding students to produce whole pieces of communication, to link and develop information, ideas, or arguments for a particular reader or a group of reader. Therefore effective writing requires several things: a high degree of order regarding the development and structuring of ideas, information and arguments. Furthermore, Hedge (2005) mentions features such as: a high degree of accuracy, complex grammar devices, and a careful choice of vocabulary and sentence structures to create style, tone and information appropriate for the readers. Hence, Harmer (2007:117) states that writing is producing a sequence of sentences arranged in a particular order and linked together in certain ways. The sequence may be very short, but it is put in order and linked together until they form a coherent that is called text.

In writing, the students need to learn how to express ideas, thoughts and feelings in the best way on the page. There are several reasons underlying why writing

must be mastered by students. Riddell (2003: 130) states that the first reason is that effective communication can be done through written media. Second, academic writing emphasizes on accuracy and better formal language used by students to achieve their informational level.

All the above points reveals that writing is one of the skills in English language teaching that has certain components to include in its process.

2. Teaching Strategy

Muzaro'ah et.al (2021) mentions that the teaching strategy is the teacher's action in implementing the plan of teaching, meaning that the teacher's efforts to use several teaching variables (objectives, materials, methods, and tools as well as evaluation) in order to influence students to achieve the goals that have been set. Thus the teaching strategy is real action from the teacher or the practice of teachers carrying out teaching in a certain way, which is considered more effective and efficient.

Sanjaya (2006) states that in the education world, strategy can be defined as a plan, method, or series of activities designed to achieves, a particular educational goal; thus a strategy of learning can be interpreted as planning containing the design to reach a certain education goal. Mely (2015) says that a strategy in teaching is planning the ways that will be used by the teacher in the learning where the learning process focused on student activities. The selection is done by considering the situation and condition, the source of learning, needs and the characteristics of learners so that the learning objectives are effectively and efficiently achieved. According to Hamalik, (2001) teaching strategy is overall methods and procedures that focus on the activities of students in the learning process to achieve certain goals. Additionally, Uno (2009) defines learning strategies as the ways that will be used by the teacher to choose the learning activities that will be used during the learning process. The selection is made by considering the circumstances, learning resources, needs and characteristics of learners encountered in order to achieve certain learning objectives.

Brown (2004: 103) states that the fundamental of teaching strategies is to make it easier to implement a variety of teaching methods and techniques. A strategy generally involves setting goals, determining actions to achieve the goals, and mobilizing resources to execute the actions. Kathy (2019) confirms that teaching strategies, also known as instructional strategies, are methods that teachers use to deliver course material in ways that keep students engaged and practicing different skill sets. Moreover, Graham (2003) writes that process

writing generally requires quite a lot of classroom time. Furthermore, he writes about the importance of feedback regarding process writing since it takes a lot of time and effort..., and so it is only fair that the student's writing is responded to suitably" (www.teachingenglish.org.uk). Moreover, Ismudiati (2019) argues that in teaching writing a teacher needs a strategy. The strategies used did indeed provide progress in the ability of students to study. In applying the teaching of writing, a teacher should be able to encourage his students to understand, remember, explore, and expand what is learned so that writing can be a means to help and improve student learning.

Based on the above points of views, the teaching of writing is a complex matter since it covers a variety of components and skills. Therefore, this should be taken into consideration for efficient learning of writing strategies.

4. Strategies for Teaching Writing

a. Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD)

Paz and Graham (2012) argued that concerns about students' writing have led to calls for improvements in the teaching of writing. This is a particularly challenging task as skilled writing requires the acquisition and coordination of strategies for regulating the writing process (e.g., strategies for planning, monitoring, evaluating, and revising), skills for producing text (e.g. handwriting, spelling, sentence construction), and knowledge about specific genres, writing conventions, and so forth. Thus, efforts aimed at improving writing instruction need to help students develop the strategies, skills, and knowledge needed to write effectively.

Paz and Graham (2012) reported the present study that examined the effectiveness of an instructional program designed to improve the writing performance of middle school students. This strategy is called SRSD (Self-Regulated Strategy Development). Although the program primarily focused on teaching students strategies for planning, drafting, and revising text, the knowledge and skills needed to support these processes were also emphasized. This emphasis included knowledge about the characteristics of good writing,

criteria for evaluating writing, and the structure of expository essays that involved explanation and persuasion (the writing task emphasized in this study). Writing skills that were addressed included constructing a thesis statement and using mature vocabulary, transition words, and different types of sentences. These skills are not only important in constructing a good essay but were also stressed on a state-wide writing competency exam taken by students.

b. Shared Writing Strategy

In addition to the points discussed above, Booth and Swartz (2004) point out a set of strategies for teaching writing called the Shared Writing Strategy. Shared Writing strategy offers an opportunity that allows the teacher to model good writing for his/her students. Shared Writing is a joint writing strategy in which both tutor and learners contribute to the plan, the ideas, and the language of the text they construct together (Tertiary Education Commission, 2009). The teacher begins the teaching by gathering the students around an easel and starting a discussion about a shared experience. The Shared Writing strategy facilitates students to model good writing from the teacher. It establishes an activity in which students are gathered around an easel and start a discussion about the shared experience that they are studying now or have ever experienced before. Students can benefit from practicing writing about the result of their research, as well as expressing their own feeling and experiences (Wijayanti, 2014).

c. Animated Story

Furthermore, Agusta (2015) proposes a writing strategy called animated stories. Animated stories are stories which are presented in the form of animation. It means that the stories are displayed in moving pictures to help the viewers understand the stories. Using animation as a tool to encourage and develop children's learning is not only fun but effective. It means that the students will enjoy the teaching-learning process when the teacher uses animation because it is more interesting. Agusta also states that by using animation, children develop skills and competencies in storytelling, visual communication, cognition, emotional, ethical and aesthetic aspects, observation, and sensory aspects, concentration, problem-solving and innovative aspects.

d. Cooperative Writing.

Ikaningrum (2015)) explains that cooperative learning is one of the techniques of writing that is very interesting for the students. By using cooperative learning, the students will get the idea easily, enjoy the teaching-learning process and become interested in learning English especially to develop their writing skills. Besides that, the students will also be motivated in learning English and get more enthusiasm to learn English. They can enhance many life skills through teamwork. One of the strategies in cooperative learning is Gallery Walk. According to Alber (2018), the Gallery Walk technique allows students to be actively engaged as they walk throughout the classroom. They work together in small groups to share ideas and respond to meaningful questions, documents, images, problem-solving situations or texts.

Chain Writing is an effective way of promoting writing performance. According to Fitriyani (2019), Chain Writing is a method in which stories are written by a group of students by trying to connect sentence by sentence to make a good story. Syathariah (2009) in Saragih and Rabbani (2017), explains that the Chain Writing method is a method which requires students to be active in the learning process and which gives them a chain to write a certain topic together with their classmates. It is used to help students in language learning especially in writing because they will take turns writing sentence by sentence until they become a passage.

e. Imaginary Strategy

Imaginary strategy is a strategy that is easy to apply in class when teaching descriptive writing. In implementing this strategy, the teacher gave an example of a story, but the teacher did not fully use the English language, because it was feared that the students would not understand the meaning of the story. After that, the teacher asked the students to write the theme. In this strategy, students can imagine something they like in their lives, and this will make students more independent to write. According to Ulfa & Rusdi (2014), the Imaginary Strategy is a strategy that can encourage students' writing skills. In addition, students will easily develop their imagination and ideas in writing a

paragraph. The Imaginary Strategy shows that students can produce creative writing, especially descriptive ones. It can be concluded that this strategy can make it easier for students to collect ideas for writing. So, this strategy is very suitable and effective to apply in writing classes.

f. Showing Picture

Showing Pictures is one of the activities or strategies that can be carried out in the teaching and learning process. According to Solahudin (2009), showing or describing pictures is useful for training students in imagination and story- retelling. The use of pictures must be appropriate to the student's level and the pictures must be visible to the students, Harmer (2007). In implementing this strategy, the instructor prepares some pictures, for instance, the zoo pictures. Then the instructor asks the students to write according to the actions they see in the pictures. So, it can be concluded this strategy is effective and suitable when it is used to teach writing because it can develop students' ideas.

g. Scaffolding

Holton and Clarke (2006) state that scaffolding is a teaching strategy that supports direct construction knowledge by students and provide the basis for future independent individual study. It means, that the scaffolding strategy can support knowledge and develop students' ideas in independent learning. In implementing this strategy, the teacher explains the descriptive text material, gives some examples of descriptive text and ensures that all students understand. After that the teacher asked the students to write based on their work. The scaffolding strategy succeeded in helping students to solve students' problems in writing multi-paragraph text, and is effectively applied to teach writing to students.

Based on several arguments above, it can be inferred that in order to produce effective writing, students need to be trained to apply some appropriate writing strategies.

CONCLUSION

Applying the appropriate strategies in teaching writing is one of the most important factors in language teaching since it helps improve the students' capability in producing better and longer writing. Some strategies that can be applied by foreign language instructors are Self-Regulated Strategy Development, Shared Writing Strategy, Animated Story, Cooperative Writing, Imaginary Strategy, Showing Pictures, and Scaffolding Strategy. Therefore, EFL instructors are recommended in using various teaching strategies in the classroom.

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