Teaching Comparison Essay using Mentor Text: Investigating Students' Perception on the Use of Mentor Text in Comparison Essay Writing Class

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Abstract: Comparison essay requires students to be able to develop clear and organized essay writing. The previous experience in teaching comparison essays, the researchers conclude that most of their students were not able to elaborate thesis statement adequately which covers developing ideas, organizing essay, and using language accurately. Therefore, mentor texts are used to help students tackle this problem. Mentor texts are texts selected and used from which students learn the writing craft. Twenty-six undergraduate students of English Language and Literature program from Department of English, Faculty of Letters in Malang participate in the study. This study aims at finding out how students use the mentor text as a reference during text production and how they feel about the mentor text application in comparison essay class. The result supports Turner (2015) finding where the use of mentor text make the students as better writers and allow them to see many of the aspects where writers or authors use when they write. The majority of the students show awareness in developing ideas, organizing their essay, and using English written language correctly. In addition, students discover new vocabulary which they use in their writing.

1 INTRODUCTION

In the Catalogue of Department of English Year (2016) it is stated that by the end of their study, one of skills the graduates of *Sarjana* program needs to have is the ability to communicate ideas effectively and appropriately in written forms both in academic and non-academic contexts. The skills referred to by the syllabus are reading and writing skills. In the English Department, Faculty of Letters, Universitas Negeri Malang, writing is taught in three consecutive courses: Paragraph Writing, Essay Writing, and Argumentative Writing. Essay Writing is the middle writing skill because in producing this type of writing students use all what they have learned in the previous writing classes. The course description of Essay Writing Course states that "The course is designed to develop the students' ability to write expository essays using different methods of development; logical division of ideas, chronological order, comparison and contrast, cause and effect, and classification."

From the researchers' experience, this course has been taught using a combination of at least two approaches: the process approach and the genre based approach (GBA). The presence of modelling reflects the use of GBA while producing an outline and revising and editing reflects the employment of the process approach. Modelling has been done by presenting model texts as found in Oshima and Hogue (2006) Writing Academic English, and Smalley's (2011) Refining Composition Skills: Academic Writing and Grammar. Model texts are analysed and discussed in terms of how hook is achieved, how thesis statement and topic sentences are developed, how supporting details are collected and used to support the thesis, etc. Then students practice writing the essay's components either individually or in group, and may also be asked to produce an essay in group. The process usually ends in students' selecting a topic from a list and develop an essay individually. The essays produced by students then are revised and edited, either by the lecturer or through peer editing and revising, before they come to their final form.

The use of model texts is beneficial as stated by Scrivener (2010) that from model texts students can learn about the layout, the overall message, the

organization of the items, the use of specific phrases and sentences, distinctive grammatical features, the style and tone, and the effect on the reader.

Recently, the use of model text has progressed into what is called mentor text. A mentor text serves as models of how to write well within a genre (Pytash & Morgan, 2014). The use of mentor text in teaching writing is in line with the concept of reading and writing connection. In this concept, writers read before they write. Reading provide the writers with ideas, language choice, structure, and other writing craft that they can emulate. In this case, mentor texts are read, studied and imitated by writers in the process of text production. The practice of using mentor texts has been described in professional books as being effective with students.

Mentor texts are pieces of literature that we can return to again and again as we help our young writers learn how to do what they may not yet be able to do on their own (Dorfman & Cappelli, 2017). These texts can play a role as a mentor in the process of learning and teaching writing just as stated by Dorfman and Cappelli (2017). Moreover, in terms of new literacies, digital literacies, and media literacies, we must help students read like writers by exploring these new texts and analyzing them with the eyes of those who construct such texts (Gainer, 2013). With this, the importance of utilizing mentor texts in teaching writing is crucial for scaffolding the materials. The scaffolding method is similar to what the curriculum cycle has in the first stage which is Building the field. In this stage the purpose is to ensure that students have enough background knowledge of the topic so they can write about it. In addition, Derewianka and Jones (2012) strongly suggested reading and writing should take place through scaffolded, sequenced instruction, which includes teacher modelling, shared instruction and collaborative practice, with the goal that successful independent outcomes will be achieved.

Writing comparison essays require students to be able to develop the thesis statement and support it with appropriate and adequate supporting ideas in such a way so that it can be meaningful to the readers. From the previous experience in teaching comparison essays, the researchers conclude that most of their students were not able to create strong thesis statement and inadequate supporting ideas and inaccurate language use. Therefore, mentor texts are used to help students tackle this problem. Mentor texts are texts selected and used from which students learn the writing craft. Mentor texts have also been studied and proven to have a beneficial influence on students' writing knowledge. The students learn to

examine, replicate, and implement author's strategies and techniques (Turner, 2015).

Mentor texts were viewed as writing guides, sources of literature that can be used to teach the craft of writing. These texts can be viewed as the "more knowledgeable other" when teaching students to write (Turner, 2015). Dorfman and Cappelli (2017) further elaborate how mentor texts can guide writers to imitate the writing styles and strategies used by the author, and "help writers notice things about an author's work that is not like anything they might have done before, and empower them to try something new" (p. 3).

The need to investigate students' perception is crucial because it will serve as a basis for pedagogical implication for teaching comparison essay and writing classes. As using mentor texts in teaching writing is considered new in our English department, the researchers will try to elicit students' opinion on what they feel and think on how the use of mentor text helps them in essay production. The research is aimed at founding out what students learn from mentor text in terms of developing ideas, what students learn from mentor text in terms of organizing essay, and what students learn from mentor text in terms of language use.

2 METHODS

This research employs qualitative design since it has the characteristics stated by Bogdan and Biklen (1982). First, it is conducted in natural setting, i.e. the classroom where the teaching and learning activity normally takes place. Secondly, the researchers act as the key instrument. Third, the data collected is in the form of words not numbers. Fourth, it aims to find out meaning from the perspectives of the research subjects, i.e. the students. In conclusion, qualitative design is appropriate method for this study.

The research is conducted in the campus of Universitas Negeri Malang, Building D8, Room 102. A group of third semester students taking Essay Writing is the subject of the study. There are 26 students majoring in ELL in this class and the course outline can be found in appendix 1. The students are taught comparison essay using one mentor taken from Great Essays book by Folse, Muchmore-Vokoun, and Solomon (2002) with title "Not as Different as You Think" was used as a mentor text.

The data collected in the study consist of statements from the subjects as they fill out the questionnaires provided in the form of Google form;

The data was used to answer the main and specific problems of the study. The data was collected after the students are taught using mentor text and asked to write comparison essay during which process they are suggested to use mentor texts for reference.

The research instruments used in the study is the questionnaire in the form of Google form. The questionnaire is to elicit students' experience when using mentor text as their reference during text production. The questionnaire includes three aspects stated in the research problems, i.e. what students learn from mentor texts in terms developing ideas, organization of the essay, and language use. The data from the questionnaire was analysed by scoring them and then put them into categories. The categories reflect the levels of subjects' advantage in using the mentor texts.

The treatment in using mentor text was conducted through the following steps. First, a comparison essay taken from Folse et al. (2002) entitled "Not as Different as You Think" was distributed to the subjects. Students were asked to read the essay loudly; one student read one paragraph. After that, there was class discussion on several aspects of the essay. The discussion centred around how the hook was presented, what information was included in each paragraph, how the information was structured, how the writer ended the essay in the concluding paragraph. In addition, language focus was done by identifying what new words were used, and students practiced making new sentences using words found in the text and they wrote down the sentences on the white board.

After text mentoring, students were asked to write a comparison essay which topic was similar to the one in the mentor text. However, the subjects found it difficult to compare two countries, so they were allowed to choose topics that they felt comfortable to develop into an essay. The essays were home assignment and the products were sent to the researchers' email.

3 FINDINGS

3.1 Developing Ideas, Writing Organization and Language Use

The study aims to explore what the students learn from mentor text in Essay Writing class. There are 25 responses from the google form questionnaire. Six questions were asked to elicit the students' opinion in regards to what aspects they have learned from mentor texts in the classroom. The following is

Table 1.1 which illustrate findings in regards to students' ideas, writing organization, and language use.

Table 1: Ideas, Organization, and Language Use.

No.	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Model text "Not as Different as You Think" gives me ideas of what to write in my essay.	28%	72%	0%	0%
2	Model text "Not as Different as You Think" gives me ideas how to organize my essay.	20%	76%	4%	0%
3	Model text "Not as Different as You Think" gives me ideas how to use English correctly in my essay.	12%	80%	8%	0%

The first three statements in the questionnaire addressed issues regarding developing ideas in essay, organization of the essay, and language use. These statements helped to establish the foundation of what aspects that students learned from the mentor text in the writing class. The result showed that in regards to developing ideas, organization of the essay, and language use, students gained some positive learning experience in using mentor text in their essay writing. From the data, over half of the students agreed that the mentor text provided them with ideas of what to write in their essay. In addition, 76% of the students also agreed that the mentor text gave them ideas to organize their essay. Lastly, 80% of the students thought that the mentor text helped them to use English correctly.

3.2 Referring to Mentor Text

The following three statements from the questionnaire highlighted what aspects the students refer to in mentor texts. The result illustrated how students benefited from having mentor texts as a model to analyze and imitate as they write their own essay. Over half of students (56%) referred to the mentor texts to express something in English. 64% students referred to the mentor text to organize their essay and write introductory paragraph.

Table 2: Referring to Mentor Text.

No.	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	When I am writing my essay, I refer to the essay "Not as different as You Think" to find how to express something in English.	20%	56%	24%	0%
2	When I am writing my essay, I refer to the essay "Not as Different as You Think" to help me organize my essay.	36%	64%	0%	0%
3	When I am writing my essay, I refer to the essay "Not as Different as You Think" to help me write the introductoy paragraph of my essay.	24%	64%	12%	0%

4 DISCUSSIONS: WHAT STUDENTS LEARNED FROM MENTOR TEXTS

After employing the mentor text in the class, most of the students stated that they were strongly influenced in the way they developed ideas, organized their essays, and used language correctly in their writing.

4.1 Developing and Organizing Ideas in Essay Writing

Some students mentioned that from the mentor texts, they learned to organize ideas easily, clearly, and correctly. In addition, they learned to find a new idea. *"It helps me to find a new idea for my essay."* Another student explained how she used a mentor text for essay organization inspiration. *"The organization of ideas was really helpful how to write essay easier. We can learn that a good essay is begin with organization some ideas."* In addition, another student mentioned they learned to write every sentence carefully so all the sentences in a paragraph will be related and organized. This corroborates Pytash and Morgan (2014) finding where they mentioned the importance of using mentor texts with students provide them specific possibilities to try in their own writing.

Another student mentioned the importance of conjunction, *"To use effective conjunction between sentences to make coherence paragraph"*. *"I've learned the use of particular conjunction to express different ideas"*. This statement also mentioned by other students who pointed out how paragraphs should be related and easy to be understood in order to make a clear and coherence essay. In order to help students to be aware of the structure of the comparison essay, mentor text is utilized and analyzed so they can imitate the structure. As such, the use of mentor texts may seek to remedy writing difficulties within various aspects of text production including structure, genre, word choice, voice, content clarity, idea development, and so forth Oczkus, 2012 and Robb study, 2011 (as cited in Alméciga et al., 2014). The use of such texts aligns with current trends in the L2 writing paradigm as texts in the target language are often brought to the foreground of literacy instruction so that exemplary writing can be examined and, it is hoped, replicated in the students' work Silva & Leki (as cited in Alméciga et al., 2014).

Dorfman and Cappelli (2017) stated how mentor texts can guide writers to imitate the writing styles

and strategies used by the author, and "help writers notice things about an author's work that is not like anything they might have done before, and empower them to try something new" (p. 3). Throughout the study, students have managed to replicate what they found in the mentor text in terms of developing and organizing ideas. They demonstrated growth in understanding how texts should be structured and organized. In other words, this finding supported Turner (2015) study where there was an increase in students' awareness of writing elements, techniques, and strategies with the use of mentor texts. They were mostly eager to finally manifest what they have learned through mentor texts in their own essay writing.

4.2 Language Use: Vocabulary and Grammar

Regarding the vocabulary, the majority of the students stated that the mentor text has enriched their vocabulary variation. "*The use of vocabulary is interesting. The writer show the vocabulary which I don't know earlier. It helps me to improve the way I choose vocabulary to make my essay interesting even more.*" The mentor text and the lecturer's instruction had paved the way for students to gain new vocabulary. One student explicitly mentioned the vocabulary they learned: "*I have learned some new words and the meaning. Then, the text it can helps me to increase my vocabulary. For example, the word "divisive" which I have found in the text.*" The exploration of mentor text in the essay writing class enabled the students to discover new vocabulary. Dorfman and Cappelli (2017) discuss mentor texts that allow students to concentrate on skills and strategies and help readers notice things in published works, empowering them to try something new in their own writing. When educators help students see themselves as writers, they begin to read like writers and to write under the influence of reading.

In regards to grammatical range and accuracy, one student mentioned "*I have learned how the sentences it can be connected with each other. Then, I found the example of right sentences and grammar for essay writing, which it can helps me to write a good essay.*" Another student elaborated further by stating that "*I have learned how to write carefully, as the text's sentence structure is very simple yet clearly explained.*" One student specifically mentioned the aspect that she learned from grammar, "*I've learned more about subject-verb agreement in sentences*". It refers to what Newman

and Fink (2012) stated that writers learn to write by emulating and adapting what their favorite author's do, which is the main concept of the mentor text approach

5 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

To conclude this study, we found that the students had a positive experience when they were taught using a mentor text which supports Almeciga et al. (2014) finding where mentor texts can have a positive impact on the production of students' academic writing. After employing a mentor text in essay writing class, we also found that students had shown awareness in developing ideas, organizing their essay, and use English written language correctly. In addition, students discovered new vocabulary which they use these new words in their writing. Thus, the use of mentor text encourages students to be better writers and allowed them to see many of the aspects where writers or authors use when they write (Turner, 2015). The use of model texts is beneficial as stated by Scrivener (2010) that from model texts students can learn about the layout, the overall message, the organization of the items, the use of specific phrases and sentences, distinctive grammatical features, the style and tone, and the effect on the reader.

The point needs consideration is regarding how the teacher needs to refine the delivery of mentor text to students in the teaching and learning of writing skill. The research and findings obtained from this study would be beneficial for lecturers and teachers of writing to implement mentor texts into their classes to strengthen students' competence in writing and moreover their awareness of writing aspects within an essay. Further research may explore other types of writing and how mentor text can increase students' writing skill in writing classes. These types of research may provide better insight to improve the teaching and learning of writing in all level of education and guide students to become critically literate.

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