

An Analysis of Students' Writing on the Basis of Writing Anxiety Level and Cross-Cultural Understanding of the Target Language

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Abstract: Written communication has been claimed as the most difficult skill to acquire. This makes the students feel anxious to be involved in English writing. Understanding of the target language culture cannot be ignored toward the students writing quality. Errors in English writing might be made by the students, too. This study proposes to investigate the phenomenon of writing anxiety level, students' understanding on the target language culture towards the quality of writing, and errors identification made by EFL students in English writing. The data were collected from classroom observation, interview, questionnaires, and writing test. The result indicated that students felt medium level of writing anxiety. Closer analysis resulted that students' writing anxiety level were mostly affected by stress apprehension in time management during the writing task. However, they saw writing as a fun classroom activity. In line with this, students' good understanding of target language culture significantly influenced their English writing quality. Students expressed their ideas straightforward. Errors appeared because they had little knowledge of English vocabulary. Profound analysis showed that some students did not write thesis statement. Some placed it inductively. The number of paragraphs followed the rules. However, no use of discourse markers was still found on some respondents' writing.

1 INTRODUCTION

Negative view toward written communication in college life had led the learners feel uneasy during the writing task. EFL learners seemed to neglect writing class as writing class is time-consuming (Alwasilah, 2004). Also, Hedge (2000: 7) stated that written text production is complex by nature and requires plenty of procedures. The fact that writing is seen as psychological activity of the language user to put information in the written text (Siahaan, 2008: 215) and the demands of language features (Hedge, 1992:7) make EFL learners anxious to be involved in writing. Then, cultural factor of the target language plays crucial part toward the students' writing quality. This is due to the fact that writing is viewed more formal and it includes social factors (Brown, 1994).

From the viewpoints above, this study proposes to investigate and identify what factors affect writing anxiety level, how cultural factors affect the writing quality, and errors found in learner's writing.

2 METHOD

Research method used in this study was analysis descriptive. The respondents were 20 English major students in the fourth year who were taking Cross Cultural Understanding class. The data were gained from two different questionnaires, interview to selected students, classroom observation, and writing task as well.

Questionnaires were distributed in order to know students' writing anxiety level, named Foreign Language Writing Anxiety Scale (FLWAS) and Cross-Cultural Understanding Test. To calculate the collected data from FLWAS questionnaire, the writer used the formula given. The questionnaire used five-Likert scale consisting of 26 items. Then, CCU test was given by using 30-item questionnaire. The respondents were asked to have a check whether the statement is appropriate (A) or inappropriate (I).

A semi structured interview was conducted to three selected respondents in order to know their viewpoints toward writing class along with the

problems, their attitude toward writing class, and also their understanding toward American culture in written communication. The collected data were transcribed and described in depth analysis.

Then, the writer carried out a classroom observation to get the information toward students' attitude during writing task. Also, the collected data were described in depth analysis.

At last, writing task was given to identify errors made the respondents on the basis of their understanding of American culture in written communication. The task asked about their opinion about cultural differences. The respondents should spend about 40 minutes on the task to produce at least 250 words. The writer asked two raters to check the respondents' writing.

3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study show that EFL learners felt writing anxiety because of their unskilful time management during the task (Dally & Miller, 1975). Then, Gardner & Lambert (1972) and Schumann (1978) stated that good cultural understanding of the target significantly influences learner's understanding toward the target language itself. The former findings were supported by Boardman (2008) who stated that writing style in a certain language represents the characteristics or culture of a nation. A very time-consuming cultural understanding of a target language, to some extent, creates errors during writing task. Studies conducted by Ballard & Clanchy (1991), Cho (1999), Connor (1996), Cortazzi & Jin (1997), and Schneider & Fujishima (1995) mentioned five contrastive rhetoric; the occurrence of thesis statement, number of paragraphs, supporting details, word choice, and coherence and unity.

3.1 Factors Affecting Students' Writing Anxiety Level

From the data obtained, it is shown that the mean score of the respondents' writing anxiety is 68.25. It means respondents mostly felt medium writing anxiety level. Then, the mean score of students' English writing is 79.85, which means respondents had a good ability in English writing. However, some errors were still found on their work. The table following shows a very detailed description.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics.

Writing Test	FLWAS
Valid (listwise) N= 20	
N=20	N=20
Minimum= 64	Minimum= 57
Maximum=92	Maximum= 76
Mean= 79.85	Mean= 68.25
Std. Deviation= 9.304	Std. Deviation= 4.745

Medium level may manifest signs of writing anxiety during writing task (Dally & Miller, 1975). This statement is supported by the result of data obtained during classroom observation. Learners tended to show the indicators of writing anxiety, for instance, looking at the watch, wrinkling their forehead, and grumbling (like "huuhh"). These all were caused by their poor time management. The result of questionnaire also indicated that 65% respondents had terrible time organizing their ideas in English composition course. Respondents should spend 40 minutes to finish the task to write at least 250 words. Besides, they were urged to write an opinion essay so that it might be hard for some students to express their ideas. In contrast, they saw writing as an enjoyment. This finding can be seen in students' response in statement 6, 8, and 17. They mostly, 75% respondents, stated that English writing is a lot of fun. It means that the learners had no problem with their writing product. See Table 2.

Table 2: FLWAS Questionnaire Result.

Statement	Response
6. Handing in a composition (written in English) makes me feel good.	Agree (75)
21. I have a terrible time organizing my ideas in a(n English) composition course."	Agree (65%)
25. I don't like my (English) compositions to be evaluated."	Disagree (70%)

Closer analysis resulted on surprising findings. To indicate whether or not the respondents felt evaluation apprehension, the writer analyzed statements 2, 5, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, and 25. Seventy percent students disagreed with statement 25 "I don't like my (English) compositions to be evaluated." This finding represented that they had no problems with their writing processes or with particular writing skill, such as invention.

To examine the occurrence of stress apprehension, the data from questionnaire showed that their problems fell into the statement 21, "I have

a terrible time organizing my ideas in a(n English) composition course.” About 65% respondents agreed with the statement. To note, this sign may manifest students’ medium writing anxiety level.

3.2 Cross-cultural Understanding and Quality of Writing

Students’ cultural understanding of the target language significantly influenced their writing quality. Respondents mostly expressed their ideas in English writing straightforwardly. However, mean score 79.85 indicated that some students might face some problems during the writing task. The detail information was described as follows:

Extract 1:

Q : Do you think that writing in English is the same way in writing in Indonesia?

S.1: Different.. it’s totally different. Because, let’s say, for example, like in Bahasa Indonesia we can say yeah.. in a long sentence while we translate in English, so it can only in one sentence.

Extract 2:

Q: Writing and culture cannot be separated. Agree or not?

S.1: Eee.. .. yes miss. Writing and culture cannot be separated.

S.2: What I thought is that writing and culture cannot be separated. Mmmm. in this case that it influences any aspects. What I have ever read, if we have understanding in American culture, we can express our ideas in writing.

Respondents had good understanding toward the target language culture and agreed that it could influence the quality of their writing.

3.3 Errors Identification on the Basis of cross-cultural Understanding

Mean score in writing task 79.85 showed that respondents had good ability in writing. However, findings from the data obtained showed that some students still had problems in English writing. The following describes the errors made by the respondents:

1. The occurrence of thesis statement. Three respondents did not write thesis statement and only two respondents place the thesis statement deductively. This means that mostly the respondents did not follow the writing rules in English.

2. Number of paragraph. Mostly, respondents wrote in the right track. Their essay covered three parts: introduction, body, and conclusion.
3. Supporting details. Respondents understood well that topic sentence and supporting details did not run like a zig-zag or circular.
4. Word choice. Surprising finding resulted on one respondent often use metaphors and proverbs. This writing sample was shown as “ *Therefore, the proverb said, “When in Rome, do as Roman does”*”.
5. Coherence and unity. Respondents, to some extent, forgot to use discourse marker, like conjunction or connectors. However, it did not distract the reader’s understanding.

Errors made by the respondents in choosing the appropriate word choice might be influenced by their first language mastery. It was due to the fact that Indonesian people mostly expressed their ideas in written communication by the use of metaphors and proverbs, while writing in English requires language learners to be accustomed to writing straightforwardly. Then, English writing rule requires to place of thesis statement deductively, while the respondents mostly put it vise versa. These two findings rejected the result of the study done by Ballard & Clanchy (1991), Cho (1999), Connor (1996), Cortazzi & Jin (1997), and Schneider & Fujishima (1995).

In regard of the paragraph organization and the presence of supporting details, mostly, their writing processes run smoothly. Even though some respondents forgot to use discourse markers, it did not distract the readers.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The result of the study has concluded that the respondents’ medium writing anxiety level has been an inevitable phenomenon in foreign language learning. Internal and external factors significantly affect the respondents’ attitude during writing task and quality of writing. Therefore, EFL learners are expected to anticipate their particular needs and find appropriate strategies for reducing their stress that support their fully understanding of a good English writing. Teachers’ roles in EFL classroom cannot also be denied. Then, the introduction of culture of the target language in language learning processes respectively manifests the quality of writing.

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