

## MOTIVATIONAL WRITING PROBLEMS OF COLLEGE STUDENTS IN ENGLISH CLASS

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### Abstract

For college students, mastering foreign language such as English brings profitable for their career. Producing the language decently such as the ability of writing in English is one of the output in the language acquisition. In this study, non-English students in the end of their study were chosen as they've completed English courses. Moreover, the students were finishing their final project, definitely including the English abstract. Based on their learning experience, the writing process of English abstract showed indirectly their language ability. Regarding with, this study aims at finding whether the students have any learning progress during their study in the college. Additionally, not only the learners' motivation but also their learning habit, their confidence, and the learning facility during learning English were questioned in this study. The students completing their final project at the certain time were interviewed towards their learning language habits particularly in writing. The data collected were transcribed, analyzed and interpreted qualitatively. The results show that 77.3% of the students felt they have more progress during the target language instruction. Furthermore, 50% of the students believe in stating English on text though they confessed they (68.2%) have lack of English practicing at home. The students' positive attitudes presented due to their motivation in learning the language. The findings also indicated that all students (100%) believed that their teacher or lecturer motivates them to practicing writing English.

**Keywords:** *writing progress, EFL students' motivation, writing practice, language acquisition*

### 1. Introduction

Learning English as foreign language in Indonesia has become tricky since the curriculum keep being developed. During 1990 – 2000, English was not taught at Elementary schools. Then around 2000 until approximately 2010 English became a compulsory lesson in Elementary schools in Indonesia. However, it was eliminated again from the list of compulsory subjects during 2010 until last few years, and it has been taught again recently. Since primary school, most students attempted to master new language such as English. Gradually, students learning since very young achieve the target language. However, others are not able to have the skills though they study in the same classroom. This phenomenon has been debating especially in non-urban area, Aceh.

Regardless its rise and fall in the curriculum of elementary school, English has always been a required foreign language to be mastered by college students in Indonesia. University students will never be allowed to graduate unless they pass certain score of the TOEFL. For vocational college graduates, they do not only need TOEFL certificates at the end of their campus life but they also have to be actively proficient in English for their brighter career. International industries must require their employees to be proficient in all skills of English as they often have relations across countries. More and more, university

or college students are required to show their English ability during their study. It is general that college students have to show their English writing ability on their final project at least on abstract.

This situation shows EFL students' writing progress during their language acquisition. Having successful learning experience in writing class is definitely not investigated in any studies, however, miscarry parts need to be discussed in detail. In learning writing process, several problems emerge unconsciously. Ariyanti & Fitriana, (2017) found that the students faced writing difficulties on grammar, cohesion and coherence terms. Meanwhile, Novariana et al., (2018) found the internal problems caused the poor writing including low motivation, lack of vocabulary, words order, words spelling, grammar and be passive in classroom and external problems including lack of practice and no feedback.

The knowledge and the ability of generic structure on texts is another issue faced by students in learning writing. Research by Alisha et al., (2019) figured out that the majority of their respondents admitted that the highest difficulties they faced during writing English text is about understanding its generic structure. The students were confused about the types of generic structure. Another significant concern in students' writing practice is about plagiarism. It is often found that students have lack ability in paraphrasing ideas they get from articles, even most of the time they just copied the ideas into their writing without mentioning the source author's name. They do not really do it on purpose, but that happened just because they do not know how to do it wisely and acceptably. A related study in Makassar found that the students faced difficulties in avoiding plagiarism in their academic writing (Khadijah, 2020). Thus, that would challenge the students to develop ideas into their writing.

Most studies concerned on the EFL students' activities in writing class. Meanwhile, this study explored the students' habit not only in the classroom but also outside the lesson. With proper learning facilities and tools, EFL students can learn English easily nowadays. Wherever they are, at least dictionary was loyally there to support them develop their skills. Surely, the learning practice cannot be held without any willingness in the subject. The willingness in learning or it is well-known as motivation has played an essential role. Tambunan & Siregar (2016) agreed that motivation influences the students' learning. They added that motivation can be promoted by presenting effective teaching and learning strategies. On the other hand, (Bahous et al., (2011) found that the university EFL students were demotivated to language acquisition in the writing class. The students complained that language performances of the teachers were boring. Therefore, the teacher cannot motivate the students to be adequate proficiency in writing skills. Dealing with the explanation above, there are several issues are explored in this study. Meanwhile, to promote a successful English learning, the students' attitude towards writing experiences was examined. Additionally, the students' learning progress especially in writing during their study was investigated.

## 2. Literature Review

Writing is a problematic activity for EFL learners particularly in Aceh, Indonesia. Not only writing in their L1 but also for the foreign language like English. In fact, most students have learnt English since they were kids. However, worries keep being exist as this skill is challenging. During the process, students commonly face several problems. Rahmatunisa (2014) found three main problems in writing argumentative essay for the university students. Those are linguistics problems, cognitive problems, and psychological problems. Among the problems, linguistics laid on the highest rank related to English grammar. In addition, academic writing problems including articles, punctuation, prepositions, irregular verbs, poor expressions, consistency paralleled structure, and used of verb tense were also found on university learners in Sudan (Al Mubarak, 2017).

Diction has also been mentioned as a problematic issue in students' writing class. It is challenging the students to choose the correct words for sentences. Tanasy & Nasruddin (2020) figured out that diction is one of the issues arise in basic writing class. To choose the correct verbs, to be, connectors, prepositions, articles and determiners was challenging as the students were new to English writing practice. Toba et al. (2019) stated that dislike writing, writing anxiety, negative writing perception are among a number of reasons for students to experience hardship in writing English text.

In learning activity, students need pretension to understand the subject easily. Commonly, students are hard to focus during classroom tasks. There is called motivation which is one of the main

feature is needed. Motivation refers to those reasons that underlie behavior that is characterized by willingness and volition (Lai, 2011: 34). Ryan & Deci (2000) explained in detail two types of motivation namely intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation means self-willingness of doing an activity while extrinsic motivation indicates self-willingness of doing activity due to external reasons or regulation. On the other hand, Budiana & Djuwari (2018) conducted research in a college in Surabaya found those types of motivation in English class. In their study, it was indicated that most students had extrinsic motivation since 78% agreed that they are studying English because it is a compulsory subject in the college. It also reported that local education system, students' attitudes to the language and teacher plays necessary role in their learning activities. Reversely, a survey conducted on English students in Banda Aceh university showed their motivation in learning English intrinsically. The results demonstrated that the students had higher intrinsic motivation than extrinsic one (Fachraini, 2017).

To acquire the target language during writing progress, conditions on both teacher and student play an important role. It is difficult circumstance since most students in Indonesia learning English for many years yet the output is still insufficient. In 2018, Hidayati investigated teacher's challenges on EFL students' writing class. Data from EFL teachers indicated two factors existed in writing class. Results indicated two factors contributing to teacher's challenging in the class. First, internal factor includes native language interference, English competence, motivation and reading habits of the students. Second, external factor includes the class condition, the availability of aids and time. Meanwhile, student's habit determines learning success. To develop writing skill, Putri & Salatar (2015) practiced diary writing habit on undergraduate students. Findings demonstrated the writing habit is beneficial to improve their writing proficiency. In addition, Khoirunnisa & Safitri (2018) analysed writing and reading relation. Their study concerned on academic writing showed reading habit has a contribution in academic writing. Meanwhile, Siregar (2020) believed that the use of technology in classroom were able to be applied in many activities. In Malang, he applied video based mobile learning technology in Senior High School. His study ascertained that the vocational students honestly stated that the video was beneficial for improving their writing skill. Therefore, to achieve language acquisition, both teacher and student do their best position to build positive classroom activities.

### 3. Research Method

In this qualitative study, the population who involved is the vocational college students of Aceh Polytechnic, Banda Aceh in the academic year of 2019/2020. The subjects of this research have completed the English courses (English 1, English 2 and English 3) were interviewed towards their experience during English class. The total of the non-English students writing their abstract of their final project in certain time was 22. The students varied at four study programs including informatics technology, electronics technology, mechatronics engineering and accounting. They ranged from 20-23 years old involving 12 male and 10 female students. For accomplishing their study, the college require them to write English abstract on their final project. Rather than waiting for others unfinished their study yet, those 22 students were determined to participate of this research.

Before the students were interviewed, they had consulted their writing to the English lecturer several times. The lecturer decided whether their abstract was able to be published. These processes bring them passing the writing progress. The students' language competence during their study in the college was shown on their English abstract. Their experiences towards writing progress during the language acquisition were questioned on the interview. During the interview, the students were interviewed one by one by recording the conversations. Semi-structured interviewed were applied to expand the information.

The data collected were coded then transcribed. Obtaining the transcription, the data were grouped based on the number of the interview questions. Next, the data were analyzed and presented descriptively. As Ritchi & Lewis (2003) stated that the interview is a cooperative action to gather the data. The questions adapted from Klimova (2014) and Afrin (2016) consisted of five questions. The data were coded and transcribed. The scripts were analyzed based on the issue and performed qualitatively.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

Based on the data transcribed, it is surely stated that each of the students have dissimilar learning experience. Among 22 students at their final year of study believed that they are motivated to practice writing in classroom. All of them (100%) stated that their lecturer gave them motivation to achieve this skill. Confidently they said that the lecturer always motivates them ever meeting. Moreover, two of the students said that their lecturer wholeheartedly encouraged them to acquire the target language. Based on this fact, it can be assumed that the whole students have positive attitudes towards English learning especially in writing classes.

Although all students had positive perception on high motivation during language acquisition, no more than a half said they are confident to text in English. Without giving more explanation, 50% of the students believed that they had pretty confidence in writing English. However, 31.8% was less confident to say some words on text. One of them expressed that he/she had lower confidence since he/she'd started to learn writing in English at college. Meanwhile, 18.2% responded that they have no confidence in using English by text.

Learner's motivation was influenced by external factor such as learning facility during the process. On the interview, the participants were also questioned about the supporting learning facilities. 59.1% of the students admitted that they were exposed to English with lack supported facilities. Meanwhile, 40.9% said the learning tools were sufficient to support them during learning process. Several students also expressed that they had less focus during English instruction though the facilities were satisfactory. Additionally, one student expounded that though the learning tools are adequate, the total of learning hours need to be added. The total of learning meeting is inappropriate with the students' necessity since they are studying in vocational school. Having proper English is an additional competence for their future career. Another one described that learning discussion was fewer in the college. The college should be compulsive to practice the foreign language outside the class. In other words, there should be a media for students to practice their English routinely.

The following question during the interview is about the students' frequency of writing practice at home. Not only in English classroom, but also at home most students accustomed to increase their proficiency. In this case, the findings show that 31.8% of the students did the writing practice at home. One of the examples was he/she used to chatting in English while another one was teaching English for his/her younger sister and brother. On the other hand, 22.7% voiced that they seldom practiced outside the classroom, although they keep practicing in certain time for example if they had homework. Last but not least, without giving any reasons, 45.5% said they had no practicing at home. Hence, 68.2% honestly stated that they have lack of writing practice outside the class.

The final interview question was the result of learning since years ago. It was asked whether they had progress in English or not. The data illustrated that 77.3% believed that they have progress during learning English. Little by little they felt their skill is better by the time. Contrary, five students (22.7%) briefly stated that they had no progress during the learning process.

Although all students (100%) stated that their lecturer encouraged to practice writing in the classroom, the majority of the students (68.2%) never or seldom practice writing at home. The findings expressed though the lecturer encourages her students to keep practicing English writing, a confession showed they have lack of motivation in language development. In fact, not only motivation leads in the language context but it also works on the quality and quantity in learner's language learning (Mahadi & Jafari, 2012). In their study, it is suggested that teacher understands both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational strategies to promote effective and successful language class. The students' low inclination to develop their language skill at any place indicated the decline of the intrinsic motivation. Furthermore, Valerio (2012) stated intrinsic motivation as a crucial element in teaching learning process that teacher takes apart on it to let students expand their learning experience as the basic thing for their life. To deal with this issue, both students and language instructor need to collaborate to evolve more successful second language competence. Although motivation has been given, its development according to extrinsic and intrinsic counterpart should be comprehended then applied during the process of learning writing.



Alizadeh (2016) overviewed the role of motivation that is a main factor in language development. It was also added that positive attitudes towards L2 community, the enjoyment of learning, and external pressures were key factors of motivation. Furthermore, her study suggested for teachers to promote students to keep learning by motivating them. On the other hand, Takahashi, (2018) proved the usefulness of motivation for school students. Among motivation types including unwillingness based on motivation, intrinsic motivation, anxiety-based motivation, future-oriented motivation, and praise-oriented motivation. It showed that praised oriented motivation brought a significant role to promote motivation. Meanwhile, without recognizing language rules, high school students in Kermanshah, Iran were highly motivated for foreign language improvement. Getting students involved in learning activities such as group problem solving, helping to decide what to do and working with each other, the students were interested in the classroom (Mohammdi, 2012). This study demonstrated that by motivating the students in the foreign language class, the students were quite confident to text in English. Therefore, the findings clearly showed that learners' motivation played a significant role in the English skill progress.

The findings implicated that with the students' confidence, they need no English practicing seriously at home. It shows that the confidence is a main learning key in the writing achievement. At a glance, this situation linked to their habit in texting English commonly by translator. As long as they have a helpful tool such as e-dictionary and e-translator, they easily practice their English to develop writing skill. In other words, with the practical English facilitator students independently enhance the skill at home. However, a study by Nalliveettil & Mahasneh (2017) in Aljuf University verified their students' strategies of translating words became a barrier to achieve English writing competence. Even though dictionary aided in reducing errors in writing spelling, the grammar can be incorrect. During the translation, language interference frequently produces the inaccuracy of the target language. In this study, though having high confidence in language proficiency is necessary, the learning strategies are crucial within writing progress. Additionally, the undergraduate students should have basic understanding to develop their language individually.

Referring to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, the data illustrated that all students are intrinsically motivated since they all have positive attitudes towards English writing class. They do have strong desire to be able to write in English as their teachers always encourage them so. This fact could not be argued as an essential point to lead students to be successful in learning English. Sadighi & Anjomshoa (2015) stated that one of the difficulties in teaching a second language is that once teaching students without the desire in themselves. No matter how good the method applied by the teacher in his/her teaching process, the students will never have the curious and seriousness in learning because they do not have the desire to learn the language. Therefore, knowing that a hundred percent of the students have good mood to learn English is a worthy first step of English teaching learning process, in this case in writing class.

However, the extrinsic motivation seems to be limited. As the students admitted that, they were exposed to lack facility of the classroom and lack of practice. Facility and practice are not less essential than the desire of learning. It is generally accepted that practice always makes perfect. We never expect our students to be proficient in English without adequate practice of the language. Longer period of study involving intensive practice considered as valuable in learning a second language (Thompson, 2020). The implication for writing class is that the intensity of writing practice both at college and at home is the point to consider. Since the students confessed that they have limited access into practice.

## 5. Conclusion

Among the problems encountered in writing class, majority of the students confessed lack of practice and facility as crucial fact. Lack of practice and adequate facility will surely lead the students to lack of motivation to learn. In the foreign language acquisition, motivation is a key role for the students. They can be up or down during the target language due to the motivation in themselves. By giving motivation to learn writing, the students who did not practice writing English at home felt confident to write in English. Having good confidence however, does not guarantee that the students perform well.

They are always confident to submit their copy pasted writing task from the Google. So, this habit should be switched off in order to bring the students into good environment of learning.

In addition, with the lecturer support through motivation, they realized the language progress since they learnt English at the college. Intrinsic and extrinsic are the types of motivation that could not be separated each other. Motivated only intrinsically could not guarantee students to succeed in learning writing, however, adequately exposed into good facility and practice (extrinsic) will never make students feel happy to learn since they do not have the desire to do so. Thus, not only the teacher but also the students have to be aware of the essential of these types of motivation, so that they could wisely apply them into their teaching and learning process.

For further study, it is recommended to investigate how the teacher/lecturer promotes motivation in the writing class. Furthermore, students learning progress should be measured in specific educational tools. Providing supported environment for students to practice writing is another point to consider. It always is a dilemma since we teach English in a non-speaking English country, it is so hard to get our students into real English. Therefore, it is worth if there is an idea of how to create an upright circumstance for students to intensively practice writing.

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