Reading-Based Writing: A Model to Foster EFL Learners' Academic Writing Skill

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ABSTRACT

Writing is often regarded as a difficult skill to acquire by majority of EFL learners. Teaching writing is also unquestionably challenging. It is argued that an essential effort to enable learners to write better is to assign them to explore as much information through reading topic and genre- related sources both online and offline. This article aims to test the effectiveness of a model of teaching writing, called Reading –Based Writing. This model is a product of an R&D conducted in a university in Padang. There are two groups of students involved; experimental and control group. Experimental research was taught using Reading-Based Writing Model, while control group was taught with Genre Based Approach. Two genres (descriptive and analytical text) were taught in 8 meetings of this experimental. Based on the result of analysis, it was found that students in experimental group outperformed students in control group which indicates that Reading Based Writing Model is significantly effective to foster students' academic writing skill.

Keywords: Reading-Based Writing, teaching model

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is a complicated process which involves various factors, cognitive and metacognitive factors, in composing a piece text. It is, in fact, undeniable that writing is cognitively challenging for students, especially in EFL context. They need to go through processes such as planning, generating ideas, organizing, drafting and revising. Besides, it gets harder with the fact that students in EFL like Indonesia, for example, have limited exposure to written form. Therefore, it is commonly found that students often feel reluctant when doing writing practice in/ and outside class. Therefore, the researchers, teachers and experts in this particular field keep doing research on strategies, method and approach to improve students' writing skill particularly students who were less exposed to English text. One of the foremost theories in language learning, also applied to writing skill, by Krashen [1] is that students need massive input before they begin writing. Language input proposed by Krashen is in form of reading.

Based on this theory, reading holds a prominent role in writing. It implies that reading can be the key to improve students' writing skill. Through reading, the students can improve their writing skill as well as their writing quality as they expand their vocabulary, learn coherence of a text and apply the grammar knowledge. Thus, the inclusion of reading in writing class is required. Yet, this idea is not recent, it has been thought as alternative solution by writing practitioner and experts.

There are a lot of studies conducted in order to reveal the good impact of reading on one's ability to write. Research evidence from experimental studies have strengthened the position of reading in writing which is the most influential factor [2,3,4,5,6]. It implies that if students desire to write better, they are better to work on their reading first.

Lee and Hsu [2] and Mermelstein [4] carried out an experimental study investigating the effect of Extensive Reading (ER) on students' writing ability. These two studies were alike. The differences lay on the time doing reading in writing class. In Lee Hsu's study, the students did self-selected reading for 50 minutes in each period, while in Mermelstein's, the students did 15-20 minutes reading, then continue outside the class. The results from both studies reported that ER practice made significant difference in all aspects of writing; fluency, content, organization, vocabulary, language use and mechanics. .Another experimental study was carried out by Kirin [3]. The samples were Thai EFL learners with low motivation in reading. They did ER practice for 15 weeks in which their writings were assessed every five weeks. The findings showed affirmative impacts of reading on writing. In reference to these

experimental studies, input (reading) plays big role in writing academic work.

Moreover, other than experimental studies, there are also several studies aiming to find the correlation of writing and reading. Sakurai [5] did a study aiming to find out the relationship of students' reading habit and their academic writing's ability. These correlational studies have proven that students' reading habit undoubtedly contributed on students' academic writing ability. The relationship between reading and writing is strong. Reading contributes a lot to writing.

However, the abovementioned experimental studies focused on reading as additional activities before students begin writing. Besides, reading in writing class is not guided by teachers as students read for pleasure (doing Extensive Reading). Similarly, this study focuses on the inclusion of reading in writing class. The inclusion is not just bolt-on activities; however, it is a required step in an approach, called Reading-Based Writing. Thus, this feature makes this study distinctive.

2. METHODS

Reading –Based Writing Model is a model to teach writing skill which integrates reading in teaching writing This teaching model was the result of R & D research prior to this study. This research was in fact to test the effectiveness of this model. In addition, two classes were involved as participants of the research namely, the control and experiment classes. Experimental class was taught with Reading-Based Writing Model, while the control group was taught with Genre Based Approach. The treatments were carried out for eight meetings using two text genres (descriptive and analytical exposition texts). Then, the results were analysed using independent t-test.

3. FINDINGS

After given the treatment for eight meetings, the students in both group was given writing test. Based on the result of the posttest in the control and experimental group, it is revealed that the mean scores for the control and experimental groups were 80.81 and 75.52 respectively. The statistics of the score is presented in following table.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of writing test of two groups

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std Error Mean
Experimental	21	80.8095	8.54177	1.86397
Control	21	75.5238	7.48745	1.63390

From the table, it is seen that the mean score of experimental group was higher than control group which indicates the difference. t-test was then conducted

whether the difference could provide significant effect. The result of t-test conducted in SPSS program is as follows;

Table 2. Result of independent t-test

Group	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		t-test for Equality of Means		
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Experimental	.466	.499	2.132	40	.039	5.28571	2.47871
Control			2.132	39.325	.039	5.28571	2.47871

Independent sample t-test was conducted and it showed that the significance value was 0.039 which was lower than the significance value of 0.05 (sig 0.039 < sig 0.05). It means that Reading-Based Writing Model provided significant effect towards students' writing quality.

4. DISCUSSION

The result of the model implementation shows that the academic writings produced by the students in the experiment class are significantly better than those produced by the students in the control class. The findings of this research relate to the theories which mention that reading and writing are two skills that are closely and tightly connected to each other [2,3,4]. These findings also strengthen what Krashen [1] states in his Input Hypothesis theory. Aside its relation to

theories, the results are also in line with result of previous studies conducted by Lee & Hsu [2], Kirin [3], and Mermelstein [4]

In reference to findings, there are some points that need to be discussed. Data analysis reveals that the students' writings in the experiment class were far richer in term of ideas development compared to those in the control class. Since the reading in this class is guided. Students are prompted to do reading related to particular topic from multiple sources; thus, it enables them to develop ideas more broadly and deeply. It is accordance to what Plakans and Gebril [7] suggest that reading will provide benefits when reading sources assist students in gaining more ideas and form the opinion.

Reading- Based Writing model also enables students to identify their own grammatical errors as well

as to develop a wide range of new vocabulary and phrases needed to create a satisfactory piece of writing. In terms of vocabulary mastery, it has been proven that when students read excessively and receive abundance of input, they will acquire more vocabulary [8,9,10]. The vocabulary acquired from reading is then applied in students' writing which improves their students' writing quality. In addition, grammar is simultaneously improved while students are reading. Studies conducted by Alqadi and Akqadi [11] revealed that reading in writing class improves students' writing quality particularly in terms of grammar accuracy.

This study gives students an opportunity to acquire two complicated language learning skills i.e. reading and writing at the same time. It is then evident that the writing model developed in this research is useful for enabling students to produce academic writings better. Additionally, some points to be noted in implementing this model in teaching writing. Firstly, the role of teachers is vital to provide guidance in reading since reading in this class is focused, not free reading. It is also important for teachers to read as well on chosen topic. Moreover, theoretically speaking, reading process should be done before writing in the class; however, the limited time given in teaching writing in one meeting makes it challenging to do. Thus, the students are led to collect sources and begin reading outside the class. Then, the teacher in the class will lead the discussion on the topic.

5. CONCLUSION

The present study addresses the gap in literature and literacy context by investigating the effect of reading-writing integration in one teaching model, Reading- Based Writing. The Reading enforcement prior to writing activity is notably effective in activating not only the students' ability to develop ideas, but also enrichment of the vocabulary and sentence constructions. Students can be encouraged to read more through several intervention strategies such as giving them their favorite topic to read both online or offline-selecting interesting reading passages from which they will be exposed to various ways of developing ideas, wider range of vocabulary and grammatical expressions.

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