

Effectiveness of Journal Writing in Supporting Skills in Writing English Essay

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Abstract: This research was aimed at knowing the effectiveness of providing journal writing in supporting the students' skills in writing English essay. The subjects were English department students who took Writing III course in the academic year of 1995/1996. This study involved two intact groups of students. The experimental group was given weekly journal writing, while the control group followed the regular writing. At the end of the treatment, writing tests on free topics were assigned and the students' works were scored using ESL Composition Profile. The result of analysis using t-test indicated that journal writing scores of the students from the two groups were not significantly different. However, students' responses indicated positive evaluation on the application of journal writing.

Key words: writing skills, journal writing.

It has been widely believed that writing, among the four language skills, is the most difficult skill. This is because it involves several components which have to be considered while a learner is writing, for example contents, rhetorics, vocabularies, grammatical structures, and writing mechanics such as punctuation and capitalization (Hartfiel, *et al.*, 1985:102). As a complex skill which is not easy to teach, it has stimulated

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teachers and researchers to explore teaching techniques which could help learners write better.

One of the central issues in the teaching of writing is how to approach this teaching task so that the learners could be helped without realizing that it is a difficult activity to do. In other words, attempts have been made to provide learners with opportunities to express their ideas in a written form without being bothered by comments or evaluation from the teacher concerning linguistic components of their writing. They, therefore, could write in the real sense of purpose of writing, that is to express or communicate their ideas to an intended audience. One of the activities that can be carried out in a writing class is assigning the students to keep journal writing.

Prayogo (1997), on the basis of his literary study and exhibition of the works of elementary school students, states that journal writing could provide an opportunity for the students to express themselves through written forms. The provision of journal writing, then, is like pushing the door wide open for the students so that they can play and explore the wide world outside.

Stanley (1993) reports a study which was conducted by Christine Casanave in which she asked students to comment on the value of journal writing. Casanave grouped students' opinions into three general areas. They are comments about the results of journal keeping, the process of journal writing, and the educational aspects of maintaining a journal. Overall, the subjects of the study who were both low intermediate and advanced students found benefits in keeping a journal, remarking on changes in their language use as well as in their thinking.

The results more specifically indicated that many students found the routine of journal writing reduces the worry of writing in English. They were pleased to discover that writing without focusing on grammar does not cause the grammar to 'disappear'. In fact, they developed greater ability to produce longer, more complex sentences. One student expressed a worth noting remark, 'since I started writing journals I have several times been taken by surprise to discover my own way of thinking.' Other students commented that writing at length has broadened their views of the world. Several students realized that the journal helped them to use unfamiliar or difficult English expressions. An unexpected result was that students found a connection between journal writing and

speaking. By having the chance first to organize their thoughts on paper, they could then express their ideas more easily in speech.

According to Mukminatien (1991), the provision of journal writing assignment could serve as a way of giving an authentic communicative writing in terms of interactive learning process. She also confirms that journal writing is useful to broaden concept of writing purpose and audience. The writer no longer writes in vacuum because he gets feedback from the reader. Besides that, Ewald (1983:62) states that the application of journal functions as an introduction to a habit that many experienced writers do.

There are five types of journals that can be written. They are personal journals, dialogue journals, reading journals, learning logs, and simulated journals (Prayogo, 1997). The students may be given the type which the teacher thinks can be applied in the classroom. Besides, the topics written by the students should be various and come from the students' interest.

This study was intended to know the effectiveness of providing journal writing activities in supporting the students' writing skills. Besides, it was also attempted to know how the students responded to the provision of journal writing.

METHOD

This research was a quasi-experimental one which employed *post test control group design* (Wiersma, 1980). It involved two intact groups of English department students who took Writing III course in the academic year of 1995/1996. One of the groups was assigned to be the experimental and the other was the control group. Originally, there were 20 students from one class and 19 from the other. For the purpose of the research, preselection was done without disturbing the intact classes. Students in the two classes were matched in pairs with respect to their ability in writing which was indicated by their grades in Writing II. Not all of the students could be matched. The students who were not matched would be discarded in the analysis, though they could still be present in their classes. After the matching it was determined that there were 14 subjects in the experimental group and 14 students in the control group.

The experimental group was given weekly journal writing, while the control group followed regular writing. The type of journal writing given was dialogue journal. Through this journal the students communicated with the teacher concerning things that the students thought they could write. The topics were various and they may cover both academic and non-academic matters. There were two meetings in a week. The students were required to write the journal writing regularly, once a week, and to hand in their work in the second meeting of the week. The assignment started in the third week of the semester and ended in the third week before the end of the course. So, the students wrote approximately 12 journal assignments in the semester.

At the end of the treatment, writing tests on free topics were assigned and the students' works were scored using ESL Composition Profile (Hartfiel, et al., 1985:102). The scoring of the students' works involved two raters. Prior to the scoring work, a workshop was held for the two raters in order to have the same procedures of scoring. Several pieces of the students' works which had been evaluated previously by the two raters were analyzed and discussed in the workshop to highlight possible differences in the results of scoring. From the workshop, a better perspective in scoring from the two raters could be attempted.

In addition to test, the students from the experimental group were also given a questionnaire to evaluate the application of journal writing as an additional activity. Ten questions were addressed to them. The ten questions are:

1. Do you like journal writing as additional activity besides regular writing tasks?
2. Do you feel free in expressing your ideas in the journal?
3. Is your journal regularly responded by the teacher?
4. Are the responses given by the teacher adequate?
5. Are you helped to solve your academic problems through the journal?
6. Are you helped to solve your non-academic problems through the journal?
7. Does journal writing help you develop your skill in developing ideas in writing?
8. Does journal writing help you develop your skill in organizing ideas in writing?
9. Does journal writing increase your motivation to write?
10. Do you think it is necessary to have writing in the next writing course?

Five alternatives were given after each question. The students were required to choose one of the options which they thought best in their opinion. The five alternatives were ranged from the most positive to the most negative responses. The students' responses were then analyzed to find the central tendency. The mean of the learners' scores for a particular item is judged using the following criteria: 5 is the most positive, 4 positive, 3 fairly positive, 2 negative, and 1 is the most negative.

In addition to the ten questions, an open ended space was provided in the questionnaire for any comments the students wanted to give on the application of journal writing. Twenty students from the experimental class answered the questionnaire.

RESULTS

Even though the students were assigned to write free topics for their evaluation, their writings tended to be colored by the temporary events happening at that time. The topics that the students choose, among others, centered on *Conflicts of a Political Party*, *Corruption and Collusion following Tansil's Flee*, *Euro Cup Fever*, and *Controversies about the Miss World of Indonesia*. Other topics included those which are familiar to the students' world of knowledge and experience, for example *Juvenile Delinquency*, *The Roles of Parents*, and *How to be ready for a Party*.

The writing scores of the students both from the experimental and the control groups can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1 Writing Scores of the Experimental (X) and Control (C) Groups

Subject	X Group	C Group	Subject	X Group	C Group	Subject	X Group	C Group
1	80	73	6	73	76	11	77	76
2	73	72	7	90	71	12	89	94
3	92	89	8	90	97	13	76	76
4	70	76	9	80	86	14	74	71
5	94	93	10	74	75			

The scores of the students were then compared using t-test statistical analysis. The results of the comparison of the scores in writing English essay of the two groups were presented in Table 2.

Table 2 The Comparison of Scores in Writing English Essay of the Experimental and Control Groups

Groups	N	s	X	t
Experimental (Journal Writing)	14	8.04	80.86	0.454*
Control (Ordinary Writing Tasks)	14	14	9.00	80.35

* Nonsignificant

The means of the students' responses to the items in the questionnaire can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3 The Means of the Students' Responses

Item no	Means
1	3.52
2	3.6
3	4.8
4	3.3
5	3.45
6	3.85
7	3.89
8	3.6
9	3.2
10	3.43

DISCUSSION

The result of analysis using t-test indicates that scores of the students from the two groups were not significantly different. Statistical compu-

tation resulted in a t of 0.454. The t table was used to determine whether null hypothesis could be rejected. Using 26 (n_1+n_2-2) degree of freedom, the required t at the 0.05 level was at least 2.056. Since the calculated t of 0.454 does not exceed the 0.05 level, the null hypothesis was accepted. In other words, there is no significant difference in the ability in writing essays between the students who were given journal writing and those who followed regular writing.

However, in general, students' responses indicate positive evaluation on the application of journal writing. This conclusion can be derived from the data in Table 3 which presents the means of the students' responses on the application of journal writing. The first item which inquires the students' preference gains a mean of 3.52. This indicates that students' preference is positive. Concerning the second item, a mean of 3.6 indicates that students feel a positive freedom in expressing their ideas in the journal. Computation of answers of item number 3 concerning the regularity of the teacher to respond the students' journal results in the mean of 4.8. This means that the teacher gives responses in very positive frequency to the students' journal. A mean of 3.3 for item number 4 indicates that the responses that the teacher gives are adequate enough.

Items 5 and 6 are intended to know whether journal writing helps the students solve their academic and non-academic problems. Means of 3.45 and 3.85, respectively, for the two items indicate that through journal writing student's academic and non-academic problems can be solved in a positive degree. Items 7 and 8 are aimed at knowing whether the journal helps the students improve their ability in developing and organizing ideas. The means of the two items, 3.89 and 3.6 respectively, indicate that journal writing could help improve in a positive degree the students' ability in developing and organizing ideas. Besides, the students are also sufficiently motivated to write through journal. This is indicated by a mean of 3.2 for item 9 which inquires their motivational development to write because of the journal.

When the students were asked whether they think it is necessary to have journal writing in the next writing course (Writing IV), their response is positive enough. This is indicated by the mean of 3.43.

A chance which was given to the students to write their comments and impressions about the application of journal writing results in various

comments. The comments commonly are in line with what they have stated in the questionnaire. A student states: 'journal writing makes us like to write because we're free to express any problems or memories without fear of being evaluated.' Another student writes: 'journal writing is good and should be continued because we can get a lot of good things. Besides, we are trained in writing and in expressing what is in our mind or problems we face. In short, journal writing is OK.'

Besides positive evaluation, some notes are worth considering to improve the implementation of the journal writing. A student writes: 'the difficult times in journal writing is when I have nothing to write in the journal, so I just write as long as I could hand it in.' Another student states: 'in journal writing, a student must have a desire that the lecturer will respond her journal. But sometimes, the responses are not satisfactory (i.e. too brief) although she has to realize that a lecturer is so busy because of other matters that he only gave a little comment.' One more important comment is as follows: 'journal writing is important. But it could be an additional burden when it has to be written. Because the students are demanded to do so, they did it reluctantly.'

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusions

It can be concluded that journal writing does not give significant contribution to the development of the students' writing skills. This is proven by the result of the statistical analysis that shows that there is no significant difference between the scores of the experimental group who were given journal writing activity and the control group who followed regular writing. However, the students' evaluation indicates that the application of journal writing gives positive effects towards some aspects in writing though they are not necessarily related to the ability in writing essay, for example freedom in writing, ideas generation and development, motivation, and the relation of teacher-students in solving both academic and non-academic problems through journal.

Suggestions

In relation to the findings of the research some suggestions could be given. *First* of all, although journal writing does not support the

students' skills in writing English essay, journal writing could be maintained. This is because of some positive elements that it could provide. *Secondly*, in the application of journal writing, the teacher should provide more adequate responses which could satisfy what the students want from the teacher. *Thirdly*, journal writing should not be made compulsory. However, the teacher has to remind the students that journal writing is still necessary, both for their practice in writing and for the beneficial influence as stated in the evaluation of the students. *Finally*, more research on the application of journal writing should be carried out. Among other topics that could be studied are the adequacy of responses, the variety of topics that the students write, the sense of audience and purpose in the journal, rhetorics in journal writing versus in essay writing, and language styles in journal writing.

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