

THE STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN WRITING THESIS STATEMENT

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ABSTRACT

This study is aimed at identifying the students' ability in writing thesis statement. By implementing descriptive method, twelve students' texts were analyzed and the focus was on the introduction section of their essays. Interview was conducted to justify the result of students' text analysis, and also to find out the problems they faced in the process of writing and the possible solutions. The result showed that the main problems were on the grammar rules of the essay and how the ideas were delivered. These were mostly caused by the low capacity of the students' grammatical competence. It is therefore suggested that the teacher should give various exercises in the use of grammar of essay writing and how the ideas could be delivered well.

Keywords: *writing, thesis statement, grammar rules*

A. INTRODUCTION

Writing is a process of organizing and expressing your thoughts. Since writing is a process, there is no one or single manner of writing. However, "experienced writers pass through certain stages that overlap and circle back on each other" (Fowler et.al, 2007). These stages include (1) developing or planning through brainstorming, clustering, free writing, etc., (2) drafting, and (3) revising.

In essay writing, the development of ideas is determined by thesis statement. The thesis statement tells the reader what the essay is about, and what point you, the author, will be making, and as it is stated by Sullivan (1984) "thesis statement or thesis sentence (the terms are synonymous) states the purpose of the composition. It conveys the central or main idea of the composition and often indicates how the main idea will be supported. Ideally, it is a one sentence summary of the whole composition. (Sullivan, 1984:125)

Besides having a skill in organizing and developing ideas, a writer should also have a skill in grammar rules. Based on the writer's experience in teaching writing to the students, the most frequent problems the students face during the process of writing are on the grammar rules.

Based on the problems proposed earlier, this study concerns on the followings:

1. What are the students' difficulties in writing thesis statement?
2. What factors cause the difficulties?
3. What are the possible solutions to overcome the problem?



B. THEORETICAL REVIEW

As it was explained in the previous section, thesis statement plays a vital role in an essay because its function which informs readers about the contents of the essay and points out the sub-topics that will be developed in it.

But, in reality a writer often makes mistakes in writing a thesis statement. As it is stated by Langan (1996:42) who explains the common mistakes people make in writing thesis statement. The mistakes are: (1) It is usually an announcement of a subject, not a statement (2) The statement is either too broad or too specific; and (3) The statement has more than one idea. The explanation shows that writing a thesis statement requires a specific skill and a continuous exercise. The good thesis statements can be seen in the following examples:

- (1). *Women generally live longer than man for two reasons: they tend to take better care of their health, and they have better resistance to stress.*
- (2). *Capital punishment should be abolished not only because it deprives another person of life but also because it does not stop crime. (Oshima & Hogue, 1998: 106)*

Apart from having the ability to develop ideas into writing, a writer should have a grammatical competence. Canale and Swain in Gao (2001) states that grammatical competence focuses on command of the language code, including such things as the rules of word and sentence formation, meanings, spelling and pronunciation (Gao, 2001). The goal is to acquire knowledge of, and ability to use, forms of expression that are grammatically correct and accurate (Díaz-Rico & Weed, 2010; Gao, 2001). It can be said that someone's grammatical competence can be seen from his ability in using a language orally or in written. In someone's writing, we can find out his grammatical competence in his sentences which covers syntax (word and sentence formation, and meaning (semantics).

Syntax is the study of the rules that govern the ways words combine to form phrases, clauses, and sentences.

Syntax deals with how a linguistic unit is arranged to form a meaningful sentence (Thomas, 1993). There are many clause patterns that can be used to guide someone to make a coherence sentence both syntactically and semantically .

To form correct sentences, there are seven types of clauses (Quirk et.al, 1985:53). They are SV, SVO, SVC, SVA, SVOO, SVOC, and SVOA. Subjects (S) are nouns, pronouns, or noun phrase; Verbal (V) are verbs or verb phrase; Objects (O) are noun, pronoun, or noun phrase; Complements (C) are noun/ adjective/ prepositional phrase; adverbs (A) are adverbs or prepositional phrase. To form a subject or object in sentences needs specific noun phrase structure. If the students have difficulties in mastering the rules of forming phrase structures, they will have difficulties in forming a phrase, a clause, a sentence, and a passage.

C. METHODS

This research analyzed twelve introduction section of essays taken from students' essays. Before they started writing their essays, the students were given explanation and examples on how to make good thesis statements. The examples can be seen below:

1. *My two sisters are as different as day and night not only in their looks but also in their characters.*
2. *An architect should be both an artist and an engineer. (Oshima & Hogue, 1998: 106)*

The students were also given the explanation that a thesis statement is a form of statement which is neither too broad nor too specific, and the function is to state a specific opinion of the writer. After having the explanation on how to make a good thesis statement, the students were asked to make a draft of their essays and write the introduction section of their essays.

When the students have collected the introduction section of their essays, their writing were analyzed based on their problems in grammatical competence, and the development of thesis statements. To justify the data obtained from students' text analysis, interview was conducted.

D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The students texts were analyzed and then classified based on their difficulties in developing ideas in their essay, and using grammar rules. The result of the students' text analysis were then justified by the result of interview.

4.1 Results of students' text analysis

The result of students' text analysis shows that students' difficulties in writing thesis statement covers two things, they are the difficulties in delivering ideas, and the difficulties in using the grammar rules.

4.1.1 Difficulties in delivering ideas

Most students have difficulties in delivering ideas of their writing. It can be seen from the extracts below:

1. *Many people like smoking even they know it is bad for our healthy, tobacco is cause of nasty disease, and to stop smoking is so difficult.*
2. *Playing football is interesting, that is why a lot of people like it, and it is also a cheap game.*
3. *Maintaning a machine is not difficult if you know the ways because it is not complicated, even it is so simple.*

Thesis statement (1) has four clauses, therefore the main idea is not clear. This student will have difficulties in writing his essay because of the unclear thesis statement he made. To write an essay, only one of the ideas is needed and he should



focus on the idea. The idea that can be developed into essay is reasons why to stop smoking are difficult (to stop smoking is so difficult).

In thesis statement (2), the student should look for a correct sentence structure so the ideas that he would put forward can be delivered in his writing. If he used this sentence (2) he would have difficulty in developing his writing. It is better if he change his sentence into *A lot of people like playing football because it is not only an interesting but also inexpensive game.*

Similar with thesis statement (1), thesis statement (3) also consists of four clauses. Therefore the writer will be difficult to develop his thesis statement into an essay. It is recommended that the idea that can be developed into an essay is the reasons why maintaining a machine are not difficult (maintaining a machine is not difficult).

4.1.2 Difficulties in using grammar rules

The students' difficulties in using grammar rules are classified into several categories that will be elaborated below.

4.1.2.1 Difficulties in determining singular and plural noun

Some students found difficulties in determining the singular and plural nouns. The example can be seen from the extract below.

4. *Technology affects almost all of our life's aspects such as the jobs, educations, and informations.*

Thesis statement (4) shows that the students used the word 'informations' in his sentence. 'Information' belongs to the uncountable nouns, so it is always considered singular. Therefore it will not have a form of plural noun by adding a suffix 's'. It could be said that this student did not know that the word information is an uncountable noun. It also indicates that this student made a parallelism with other nouns in his sentence such as 'jobs' and 'educations'. The words jobs and education belong to the countable nouns, so they will form either a singular or plural noun. If they form plural nouns, the words are added suffix 's'.

4.1.2.2 Difficulties in using determiner and verbs

Some students faced difficulties in using determiner and verbs. It can be illustrated by the extract below.

5. *By having many knowledges, we can doing many things such as studying, and finding a job easily.*

The use of determiner many before the noun 'knowledge' shows the incorrect use of determiner because the noun knowledge belongs to uncountable things which cannot be formed plural. It should be replaced by determiner 'much'. Besides that, there is other incorrect use of main verb 'doing' preceded modal auxiliary 'can' (*can doing and finding*). This indicates that the student does not know the structure of modal auxiliary that should be followed by bare infinitive (*can do and find*).

4.1.2.3 Difficulties in parallelism

Almost all students found difficulties in parallelism. The examples of thesis statement that are not parallel can be seen from the following extracts.

6. *I did many things on my holiday, met many people and happy.*

In thesis statement (6) the syntax units that are not parallel are ‘met many people and happy’. The student put the adjective ‘happy’ after the conjunction ‘and’ to combine the first idea which is the verb ‘met’. This makes the statement not parallel because what is needed after the conjunction ‘and’ is another form of verb. The correct one is ‘met many people and felt happy’. This indicates that the students did not know how to make the sentences parallel.

7. *Running is a kind of sport that makes my body healthier and save money.*

Thesis statement (7) shows the in parallel of syntax unit which is combined by conjunction ‘and’ (*that makes my body healthier and save money*). The verb ‘save’ should have a suffix ‘s’ (*saves*) which makes it parallel with the previous verb ‘makes’. This shows that the student did not understand parallelism so he did not pay attention the other idea in his sentence to make it parallel with ‘makes my body healthier’.

4.2 Result from Interview

In general the results from interview support the data obtained from the students’ text analysis.

Most students stated that the main difficulty they encountered in writing thesis statement is determining the main idea which will be developed into an essay. They often mixed many ideas into one sentence, therefore it made them difficult to develop their ideas. The main problem of determining ideas that will be developed into an essay can be found from the following extracts:

(1). I often have several ideas that I would like to deliver in my thesis statement, but then I am confused which idea that can be developed into an essay (R2).

(2). I know that to make a thesis statement needs main idea that will be developed into an essay, but I always feel difficult to determine the main idea.(R5).

(3). I know the theory of making a thesis statement but I have a difficulty in making a good thesis statement (R7)

(4). In my opinion thesis statement is important because it consists of main idea that will be developed into an essay. I will have no difficulty if I could find the main idea that will be developed (R1).



The extracts show that most students still have difficulties in making thesis statement especially when they have to determine the main idea that will be developed into an essay. It indicates that they still have low capacity in making the thesis statement. It is therefore recommended for teacher to give explicit teaching about how to make a good thesis statement. The students should also be guided by being given a lot of exercises about making a good thesis statement.

Referring to the students' difficulty in grammatical competence, the following extracts are taken from the students' responses.

- (1) When I was asked to make a sentence, I always had difficulty in determining the correct form noun whether it is singular or plural (10).
- (2) I am always confused when to use articles *a, an, the*, *much dan many* (R11).
- (3). I did not know when to use the correct form of verb/ tense (R12).

The extracts show that some students have difficulty in determining and applying grammatical rules in their writing. This mostly caused by their limited capacity in understanding the grammatical rules. It is therefore recommended for teacher to give explicit teaching in terms of grammar rules.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Based on data obtained from students' text analysis and interview, it can be concluded that the students' difficulties in writing thesis statement are in terms of delivering ideas and implementing the correct grammar rules. These are mostly because they do not have clear understanding in grammatical competence to be able to make a good thesis statement that can be developed into an essay. The students' difficulties in delivering ideas could be caused by their low capacity in determining a specific main idea that will be developed into an essay.

The students' difficulties in terms of grammar rules include the difficulties in using singular and plural nouns, determiner, verbs, and parallelism. These could be caused by the students' low capacity in using the grammarrules in their writing.

Based on the findings and discussions, it is advisasble for teacher to do many things to solve the students' difficulties in writing thesis statement. Giving students explicit teaching about the theory of making good thesis statements should be done regularly. The teacher should also know factors that cause the students' difficulties in making thesis statement, so he will be able to find solutions for the problems. The teacher should pay attention to improve the students' understanding in writing a good thesis statement not only in terms of grammar rules , but also in terms of delivering their ideas by focusing on one specific main idea that will be developed into an essay.

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