

Thai students' Efforts in Improving Writing Skill at English Department of Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta

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ABSTRACT This paper aims at describing the efforts of Thai students in improving their writing skills. The objective of the study is to describe ways of Thai Students to improve their writing skills in English Department of Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta. Many Thai students come to Indonesia without strong English knowledge and skills because almost all of them cannot communicate in English. However, some of them entered English department in Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta and then all of them had a difficulty to adjust for a new environment and faced cultural problems in Java, Indonesia. This study is a descriptive qualitative study which employed interviews and Questionnaires as techniques of collecting data. The data in this research are analyzed by data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusion Miles and Huberman (1994). Based on analysis, it is found that the efforts of improving writing skills in class by Thai students include doing rehearsal and a lot of practice to improve their writing, asking peers and lecturers and learning from social media.

Keyword: Improving writing skills, Thai students

INTRODUCTION

Written and spoken language is “an important communication tool to unite the whole world for communication. Language can indicate the place where the human life and power come from; when we know a language we can speak and be able to be understood by others who know the language” (Victoria, Robert and Nina, 2013: 1). It is the heart of communication for human life in the world which we can find more information through language. So, language is required for human life and people could use language to understand about what we explained.

Effort is “the activity of moving the body, energy and mind to achieve a work goal (actions, initiatives, efforts) to achieve something” (Aziz Erwati, 2013: 20). A person could be said to make an effort if he exerted his energy and mind to solve a case by accomplishing a solution to produce a goal. So, that the effort can be interpreted as something that is part of the person had to response to an event will be an effort to exert effort and mind to achieve a goal to influence and direct. As for the intent of the effort here is an effort that must be done by students to achieve goals with quality.

Students' effort in learning activities referred to the action of the behavior that the students did in improving their skill. According to Pace (1998) in Pass (2013: 44) that “quality of student effort is defined as how much voluntary behavior or personal investment a student makes for their education”. It has been examined as how often students carried out learning activities, such as taking detailed notes during class. Students adapted to improve their understanding. Therefore, effort is allocated to learning activities and the students have a chance higher level of mastery may be achieved. Pass (2013) said that the intensity of student effort is conceptualized as the student's perception of how hard he or she works on activity.

According to Baker (2012) Thailand as “a country that has never been colonialized by any foreign countries, has both advantages and weaknesses in term of international language. One of the shortages is insufficient skills and knowledge in learning other languages such as English as the international lingua franca (Baker, 2012)”. Now

Thailand is focusing on improving their English language because English language is number one all of language in ASEAN. So, they want to develop in integrating students' English education skill because English education in Thailand is still low ostensibly. So, Thailand still has been a minor is English language compared to other countries. Thailand entered ASEAN English community and since then English language has been the tool of communication for everyday life. It is inevitable of Thai education to urge students to have communication skill in English about writing, speaking, reading and listening.

Thailand is now entering the ASEAN English Community, therefore English is practically a medium tool for everyday communication and for careers. As a consequence, English is the key for all the member countries developing their human resources so as to compete in the local, national, or international job market in Asia. It is inevitable for Thai universities to urge students to have communication skills in English: Writing, Speaking, Reading, and Listening. Writing is a skill used in everyday life Such as, filling forms, taking messages, writing emails, or conducting business correspondence. Moreover, such skill is vital when some of the students participate in international environments such as studying overseas to have further education. Writing is "seen as the most challenging skill for a significant number of Thai students" (Sangiamchit, 2017).

Many of Thai students came to Indonesia without strong English knowledge because almost all of them cannot communicate in English. However, some of them entered English department in Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta and then all of them had a difficulty to adjust for new environment and faced cultural aspects of Java in Indonesia. The environment of education in Indonesia where teaching style and learning context are different from former experience is the problems which led to high disappointment, confusing and stress for Thai students in Indonesia. However, Thai students are trying of study hard and improving their Indonesian language and English language at the same time. "Communication barriers in the form of language and social norms can hamper international student's ability to acculturate and pose a great barrier to academic success, which was usually one of the key objectives of the international students" (Kim, 1995, in Ward et al., 2001).

In this study, six Thai students studying English language at the Department of English Education of Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta were selected. Robertson et al. (in Sawir, 2005: 569) concluded that "language issues were the major area of unsolved problems faced by international students". Because of the teaching learning at department of English education in UMS the lecturer used two languages, namely: Indonesian language and English language, therefore, for The International Undergraduate Thai students, they have to learn Indonesian first, to make success in second language learning. At the same time, they took English Department in UMS so that they have to learn English as well. It means that they have to learn both Indonesian language and English language. They should make balance to learn both of the language. For The International Undergraduate Thai students, the first time they join class they feel worried and feel unconvinced about themselves because of the situation in the class they never faced before.

There are some previous studies about Efforts of improving writing skills. A study was conducted by Wijayanti (2008) concerning teaching writing. She investigated the teacher of SMAN 1 Wonosari who asked the students to make composition on a piece of paper. After that, the teacher collected their tasks and gave responses or judgement of their writing. The responses are usually realized by putting the cross mark or check mark without explanation to the students. The students do not understand what the teacher correction is. So that, the students can not improve their writing. Actually it needs guidance or more explanation to make the students' writing better. As a result, the students remain confused and they have no progressive skill. It is not effective because the students cannot understand clearly with the error or mistake that was made. To improve the writing skill of the students, the teacher should change the correction technique that was implemented to the students to be more effective. So, the students can understand clearly with the error or mistake that was made and they can improve their writing skill. The second study by Jumadilah (2011) considers that there are many aspects involved in a writing process and the analysis of determining the passing grade which covers the level of learning indicator complexity, the level of ability of the students, and the level of support of school facilities. He investigated the English teachers of SMP Negeri 2 Mondokan Sragen to propose that the passing grade of writing is 6.5. It means that the learners will have mastered the minimal requirements of writing skill when the result of test is 6.5.

This research was conducted Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta. Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta (UMS) is one of the biggest Universities organized by Muhammadiyah. Muhammadiyah with approximately 29 million members and is one of the largest socio religious organizations in Indonesia. Established in 1912, so Muhammadiyah is older than the Republic of Indonesia. Muhammadiyah is known to be a modern Muslim organization that plays a significant role in Indonesia's development through impressive records of providing education and health services in Indonesia. (<http://kui.ums.ac.id>)

In this research, the researcher focused on various semesters of Thai students. They are the third semester, fifth Semester and seventh Semester that provides writing subject on academic writing and the kind of writing that students study about essay writing and all about writing skills. Essay has become a major part of a formal education. Secondary students are taught structured essay formats to improve their writing skills, and essays are often used by universities in selecting applicants. In both secondary and tertiary education, essays are used to judge the mastery and comprehension of material. Students are asked to explain, comment on, or assess a topic of study in the form of an essay. During a course, university students would often be required to complete.

This research is focused on the efforts in improving their academic writing in English language while they are learning English at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta. The subjects of the research are Thai English students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta. Then, the researcher conducted a research entitled “THAI STUDENTS’ EFFORTS IN IMPROVING WRITING SKILL AT ENGLISH DEPARTMENT OF UNIVERSITAS MUHAMMADIYAH SURAKARTA”.

METHOD

This research used descriptive qualitative research to collect and analyze the data. According to Moleong (2007) descriptive qualitative research is “having view on natural phenomenon of which the subject research can be a behavior, perception, motivation, action, by holistic and exploiting various natural methods. It means that descriptive qualitative is type of analytic research which does not include any calculation”. Therefore, the data in qualitative research concerned appear in words rather than in number. That is the reason why the researcher used descriptive qualitative research to collect and analyze the data. The research focuses “Efforts and Problems of Thai Students’ Learning in Improving Writing skill of English Education Department at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta” who took writing subject. Sugiyono (2013: 2) states research method is the scientific way to get the data for the purpose and the utility of something. To get the data, the researcher used two techniques of collecting data, they are questionnaire and interview. The data in this research are analyzed by data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusion. Thus, this research tried to analyze the interview transcript and then the researcher drew the conclusion from the data analysis. The techniques of data collection are done by interview and Questionnaires. The subjects of this research were Six Thai students of English Education Department in Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta in academic year 2020/ 2021. The six Thai students come from various semesters consisting of the third semester; they are 1. MAS (TS5) 2. MNT (TS6), fifth semester; they are 1.MNS (TS3), 2.MMD (TS4), and seventh semester; they were 1. MAM (TS1), 2. MNH (TS2). The researcher used students’ initial names.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This research is based on the results of interview and Questionnaires to Thai students about efforts in writing improvement. The researcher found three efforts to improve their writing skills. They are doing a lot of practice, asking friends or lecturers and learning from the social media.

Thai Students’ Efforts to improve their writing skills in English Education Department of Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta

Every Thai student had problems to achieve learning writing skills in class and every time. Thai students make an effort in improving writing skills in class and out class; therefore their efforts will help them writing better. To improve their writing skills, Thai students did the following ways, such as: doing a lot of practice, asking friends or lecturers and learning from the social media.

Doing a lot of practice

The practice is the act of rehearsing behavior over and over, or engaging in an activity again and again, for the purpose of improving or mastering it, as in the phrase “practice makes perfect”. Thai students do a lot of practice to improve their writing. The followings are Quotation of Thai students:

[“First of all, my practice was to do a lot of reading books, then practice grammar, memorize words, and then write Thai first and then translate into English and through YouTube to improve my writing skills, I would practice 1 times a week in writing”.]

(interviewed with TS1 on Friday, January 15th, 2021)

[“I would practice 3 times a week in writing. But I often practiced through google or internet and practice by form homework assigned by lecturer”.]

(interviewed with TS2 on Friday, January 15th, 2021)

[“In a week, I would practice at least writing 3-4 times in week. I would memorize word and read book. Although I did not understand much, I tried my best improve my writing skills”.]

(interviewed with TS3 on Thursday, January 14th, 2021)

[“about 4 times a month that I had practiced in writing, because when I had anxious to somethings in my mind, I felt force that could not focus. But I was still effort to practice. I really practice via internet to purpose of improve my writing”.]

(interviewed with TS4 on Friday, January 15th, 2021)

[“I had practiced 2 time a week, because lacked grammar, vocabulary and then I attempted to understand that material via internet and reading book so, I would practice writing a lot”.]

(interviewed with TS5 on Saturday, January 16th, 2021)

[“I had practiced 1 time a week because my writing was wrong and I wanted to understand writing better than this. I had practiced via YouTube and Practiced old work for improve my writing”.]

(interviewed with TS6 on Saturday, January 16th, 2021)

Based on the result of interview, it could be stated that Thai students afford to improve their writing by practicing. That efforts of students to developing writing skill, include reading book a lot, practiced through YouTube and practiced from the homework assignment by lectures.

Asking for Advice

Asking is the way for everyone to know the answer and also asking to know something clear. “Everyone can ask others who have more knowledge than us”. Based on interview, it is confirmed that Thai students improve their writing by asking.

It is stated by TS1 that when she did not understand or did not know, she first asked her friends to explain what she did not know or understand.

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(interviewed with TS1 on Friday, January 15th, 2021)

It is stated by TS2 that if she did understand anything about writing she first asked her friends because her friends could explain to easier understand or she asked senior to understand material. But if she did not understand it again, she would ask the lecturers

“My effort was if I did understand anything about writing I first ask my friend because my friend could explain to easier understand or I ask senior to understand material. But if I did not understand it again, I would ask the lecturers”.

(interviewed with TS2 on Friday, January 15th, 2021)

It is stated by TS3 that when she learned writing, then she was confused anything, she dared to ask lecturers right now because lecture guide more to make understand then her friends.

“When I learned writing, then I was confused anything, I dare to asked lecture right now because lecturers guide more understand then my friends”.

(interviewed with TS3 on Thursday, January 14th, 2021)

It is stated by TS4 that when she did not understand, she first asked her friends because her friends understand more, but if she did understand she would ask the lecturer although she did not dare to ask lecturer.

“When I did not understand, I first ask my friends because My friends understand more, but if I did understand I would ask the lecturer although I did not dare to ask lecturer”.

(interviewed with TS4 on Friday, January 15th, 2021)

It is stated by TS5 that if she did not know or did not understand she would have asked her friend first help her to explain writing. When she did not understand again she would gather to ask the lecturer.

“If I did not know or did not understand I would ask my friend first help me to explain writing. When I did not understand again I would gather to ask the lecturer”.

(interviewed with TS5 on Saturday, January 16th, 2021)

It is stated by TS6 that when she was confused, she would have asked her friend first because her friend used language of communication which was easier to understand in writing. but if she did not understand it again, she would ask the lecturer.

“When I was confused and dead end, I would ask my friend first because my friend used language of communication which was easier to understand in writing. but if I did not understand it again, I would ask the lecturer”.

(interviewed with TS6 on Saturday, January 16th, 2021)

Based on interviewee’s answer, it could be conducted that when Thai students did not understand their study, they asked friends more than lecturers because it is more interesting in asking friends than lecturers.

Learning from social media

Social media is interactive digitally-mediated technologies that facilitate the creation or sharing exchange of information, ideas, career interests, and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks. The use of social media in education provides students with the ability to get more useful information, to connect with learning groups and other educational systems that make education convenient. Social network tools afford students and institutions with multiple opportunities to improve learning methods”. Thai students’ effort to improve their writing is by learning from social media.

It is stated by TS1 that she used google translate and watch YouTube to practice her writing.

“My obstacles to writing was vocabulary because must not enough to understand the vocabulary. But I could to understand about grammar, that’s not enough to create sentence very well, so I use google translate and watch YouTube to be practice my writing”.

(interviewed with TS1 on Friday, January 15th, 2021)

It is stated by TS2 that when she had overcome the problems to learn from YouTube before entering her class; it made her more prepared to learn writing and even better, when doing practice sessions or when she did not understand while she studied at the campus, she would go back home to study with YouTube again.

“When I had the problems, I learn from YouTube before entering my class, it made me more prepared to learn writing and even better, when doing practice sessions or when I did not understand while I studied at the campus, I would go back home to study with YouTube again”.

(interviewed with TS2 on Friday, January 15th, 2021)

It is stated by TS3 that the most common thing in her learning was that the internet helped her understanding and the favorite apps for learning were YouTube, Facebook and google.

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(interviewed with TS3 on Thursday, January 14th, 2021)

It is stated by TS4 that her basic to addition English skill, is to learn in internet. In every work she used social media to help her understand it. When she did not understand while learning something in class, she would research or study in google and YouTube.

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(interviewed with TS4 on Friday, January 15th, 2021)

Based on the result of interview, it was found that the internet helps Thai students learning. The efforts include using social media to improve their writing such as: using Google Translate to adjust words in the sentence of writing. It helps pupils to develop their confidence level and watching YouTube to social media, writing rules are easy on social media. They also learn lots of new things instead of learning only vocabulary and grammatical rules, and online writing is a new method that needs to be implemented to enhance their English writing skills.

In the research conducted, there were at least three efforts made by Thai students in facing academic writing. The first Improving is Thai students were utilizing social media to help in the learning process. In accordance to Suriyato's study (2010: 100) which states “that one effort to improve writing skills was the use of tools or media in the learning process”. Suriyato continued that “in learning to write, the role of the media was very central because the function of the media is also as learning material”.

Another effort undertaken by Thai students in facing writing was to increase training. In accordance to Pass (2013: 44) stating that “the principles of developing writing activities must involve various exercises to produce good and correct writing, that the intensity of student effort is conceptualized as the student's perception of how hard he or she works on activity”. The quality of effort produced for someone who has a large portion of practice will produce better writing than someone who rarely practices writing.

In facing writing, MNH(TS2), MNS(TS3) and MAS(TS5) have a greater portion of training than MMA(TS1), MMD(TS4) and MNT(TS6). So the score produced by them is different. From the assignments given by the lecturer especially to TS1, TS2, TS3, TS4, TS5 and TS6, in general TS1, TS3 and TS5 were superior to TS2, TS4 and TS6.

The last effort made by Thai students in facing writing was active asking friends or lecturers related to writing to explanations or assignment. While writing, they also tried to translate into Thai in order to make good writing easier. Aziz Erwati (2013: 20) states that, “a person can be said to make an effort if she exerted her energy and mind to solve a case by finding a way out to produce a certain goal”.

Thai students have made every effort ranging from additional learning using social media, forming habits so that it is easy to make writing and trying to actively ask the lecturer. In addition to the effort that has been done by Thai students, the role of a lecturer in providing scaffolding in the form of activities and feedback is very much needed; the aim is to achieve good writing.

CONCLUSION

Based on the finding and discussion, in this research, the researcher had found that there were three of efforts that Thai students used to achieve in academic writing. First Thai students studied additionally outside the classroom with seniors and then they did a lots of practice to write in writing skills. The Second, the efforts of Thai students were active asking friends or lecturers related to writing for the explanations or assignment given by the lecturers and the third, Thai students were utilizing social media to prepare their assignments given by lecturer.

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