EXPLORING IMPLEMENTATION OF STUDENT’S DIARY AS A LEARNING REFLECTION IN EFL WRITING SKILL

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Abstract. This paper is a qualitative case study regarding one of learning strategies in English as Foreign Language (EFL) writing, literally called “student’s diary”. The students’ diary can be defined as a brief narrative text created by students that might be a brief summary of what they have learnt, teachers’ feedback and evaluation, or even a general impression about their writing process. It aims to naturally encourage students to conduct a comprehensive reflection on their progress in EFL writing through “a diary” in each writing class they have. As what has been perceived among EFL scholars, the use of student’s diary is effective in enhancing student’s interest in writing and it can improve students’ writing as well. The participants of this study are 30 students of EFL classroom in the fourth semester at STKIP Muhammadiyah Bogor who have taken the various writing subjects in their previous semesters. The researcher tried to investigate how the typical of student’s diary for learning reflection is, how the real implementation of student’s diary is conducted in EFL learners’ learning process, and to what extent it can be effective related to the strengths and weaknesses involved in the implementation process. Advisory and suggestion on giving corrective feedback regarding linguistic aspects in students’ writing in the use of student’s diary as well is presented as the implication of this research for further related studies.

Keywords: Writing, Feedback, Improvement, Strategy, Diary

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INTRODUCTION

A globalized world and technological advances lead people to master not only English speaking skill as the international communication tool, but writing skill as well. Writing is more than a matter of transferring ideas into a written form. However a written text implicitly shows how people structuring ideas into a systematic way and good organisation with appropriate lexical resources stored in their existing knowledge. Thus, this skill cannot be automatically acquired without learning process and frequent practices.

Although its importance in education, in another side, writing is not an easy skill to acquire particularly in Indonesian EFL classroom context. The researcher considers that writing is the most complex ability as it needs critical thinking ability and metalinguistic awareness of writer. Watskins (2004) stated that writing is a complex activity involving some stages of composition task completion. The difficulty not only caused by the need to express and organize ideas using the appropriate choices of lexical resources, sentences, and paragraph structures but also to turn such ideas into a comprehensible text along with a particular rhetoric pattern (Richards & Renandya, 2002 as cited in Solikhah, 2017). Moreover, in practical context, Indonesian learners often encounter challenges in transferring ideas from their native language (Indonesian) into the target language (English). For instance, they often use Indonesian rhetorical pattern of argument and thinking when writing English. This case calls for teachers and lecturers serious attention to conduct an effective teaching EFL writing for learners. As a consequence, EFL teachers in writing subject should be aware of creating effective learning and teaching strategies and techniques to improve their students’ writing skills that can be easily implemented formally in the classroom context or independently at home.
In terms of learning English writing skill especially in the context of English as Foreign Language (EFL), every teacher has their own strategies and techniques of teaching and learning method in order to improve students’ writing skills. One of the most widely used learning EFL writing strategies is “diary” or “student’s diary”. The advantages of diary are closely related to the aspects of self-expression and intuition, development of personality, stress healing, problem solving, reflection, critical thinking, and health (Hiemstra, 2001). A diary in the learning process of EFL writing can be contextually made in the form of descriptive text with various texts and themes.

Meanwhile the students’ diary in this paper can be defined as a brief narrative text created by students that might be a brief summary of what they have learnt, teachers’ feedback and evaluation, or even a general impression about their writing process. It aims to naturally encourage students to conduct a comprehensive reflection on their progress in EFL writing through “a diary” in each writing class they have.

The difference in variety and models of student’s diary in EFL writing itself are not becoming a crucial focus of this paper, but it would illustrate how the typical of student’s diary as learning reflection strategy in EFL writing is, how it can be implemented in the learning process of EFL writing. Then, since many researches stated the efficacy of using diary in enhancing EFL students’ writing skill, this research paper as well further discusses about the strengths and weaknesses of the student’s diary as the learning strategy in EFL writing.

Hopefully this research is able to give more comprehensive understanding of the use of strategies or techniques in learning EFL writing particularly student’s diary. The research findings presented in this paper aims to shed the light on the other sides of the use of student’s diary which may enrich the EFL scholars’ and practitioners’ references in developing their researches on the topics alike.

LITERATURE REVIEW
1. Diary Writing

Writing perceived as a way of expressing ideas in a structured written form. Diary that is explained in this paper means a set of written structure of someone’s feeling and situation in an honest and natural situation. Harmer (2007) said that diary writing has some advantages. The first is related to the value of self-reflection. Second is the state of freedom of expression. The last is its function in developing writing skills. The students’ diary can be furtherly defined as a brief narrative text created by students that might be a brief summary of what they have learnt, teachers’ feedback and evaluation, or even a general impression about their writing process. It aims to naturally encourage students to conduct a comprehensive reflection on their progress in EFL writing through “a diary” in each writing class they have.

2. Previous Researches

Some researchers in English Language Teaching (ELT) had conveyed that writing a diary is effective to improve EFL learners’ writing skills. Sadeq, Akbar, Taqi, and Suqair (2015) surveyed 51 Kuwait participants’ (students) perceptions about the effect of diary writing, and found that the majority of them showed good interest in writing a diary and believed that their language and writing strategy has improved. They specifically stated that 78.4% of the participants agreed that diary writing could enhance their learning in writing, and 92.2% of the participants felt that diary writing enriched their lexical resources.

Meanwhile the other researches on similar topic in Turkey revealed that keeping a diary made people (writer) being accustomed and happy to write (Dincel and Savur, 2019). Furthermore, it was said that the feeling of happiness through diary writing led people to continue writing with variety of genres. To Dincel and Savur (2019), “this is the indication of how important effects it has to keep a diary on writing education”. In addition, the other two researches conducted by Maharani (2017), and
Vaseghi, Mukundan, and Barjesteh (2014) which sounds more quantitative stated that diary writing enhanced learner skill in writing. Specifically, it was stated in Maharani (2017), “the result of independent sample t-test on post-test showed that there was significant difference in the students’ writing achievement between the experimental and control group”. She further stated, “the mean result of pre-test in experimental group was 57.60 and the mean result of pre-test in control group was 57.29. while, the mean result of post-test in experimental group was 79.20 and the mean result of post-test in control group was 74.17. Then, the computation result sig.(2-tailed) result was lower than 0.05 (0.005 < 0.05)”. In other words, based on Maharani’s research conducted in Indonesia, it can be concluded that writing diary has a significant effect on students’ writing skill. Meanwhile another quantitative study on student’s diary declared that writing diary enhances second language writing autonomy in Iranian students (Vaseghi, Mukundan, and Barjesteh, 2014) which means that the use of diary can lead learners to be more independent or self-regulated in writing English. In relation to it, Dam (2001) confirmed that writing a diary assists learners improving their writing skills and provides them more original authority, and motivates them in conducting the project works in more relaxing circumstances.

From the descriptions of the previous researches above, it can be confirmed that the state of the art of this paper is the analysis and evaluation on the strength and weaknesses in the implementation of the student’s diary which perceived as an effective technique in improving students’ writing skills in Indonesian EFL setting. As far as the researcher concerned, no previous qualitative case study researches which focused on the implementation of the student’s diary in its relation to EFL learners’ writing skill.

**RESEARCH METHOD**

The researcher employed case study as the research methodology. Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explored the bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) overtime, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual materials, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes. For example, several programs (a multi-site study) or a single program (a within-site study) may be selected for study (Creswell, 2007).

The researcher chose selective or purposive sampling technique for this research. Selective sampling technique means the researcher has a full authority to select her sample to analyse based on the needs in the research context (Fraenkel, 2012). In this case, the sample being studied were 30 students of the fourth semester in the Department of English language education at the College of Teacher Training and Educational Sciences (STKIP) Muhammadiyah Bogor. Meanwhile the research instruments utilised in this research is the researcher herself, field-note, and the documents in the form of student’s diaries being studied and analysed by the researcher. Meanwhile data collecting and analysis technique of this research is triangulation which consists of in-depth observation, interview, and documentation review.

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Based on the researcher’s field-note during in-depth observation in implementing the student’s diary as learning reflection in EFL writing, the researcher would like to explain the following issues based on the research questions that has been mentioned in the previous chapter.

1. **How is the typical of student’s diary as learning reflection in EFL writing?**

   Students’ diary is one of learning EFL writing techniques that first raise students’ intrinsic-humanistic values such as motivation,
patience, and confidence in writing before paying attention to cognitive and linguistic aspects of writing itself. It is the type of Independent learning approach which aims to naturally encourage students to conduct a comprehensive reflection on their progress in EFL writing through “a diary” in each writing class they have. Furthermore, the students’ diary is a brief narrative text created by students as a brief summary of what they have learnt, evaluation and the teachers’ feedback, or even a general impression about their writing process. Honesty, self improvement, and evaluation that become a main concept in this learning strategy build their motivation to increase capability in EFL writing through that reflection process. It leads them to conduct self-correction and improvement based on their natural process during writing as well as corrective feedback from teachers. As what as has been stated before, the concept of student’s diary that the researcher highlight in this article is not a task in the form of narrative texts that are given to students to be assessed by teachers, but students’ learning reflection in EFL writing through that reflection process. It enhances their motivation to learn EFL writing through writing a diary like a portfolio consist of their own learning impression, and their action toward teachers’ feedback.

The examples of Student’s diary that the researcher frequently obtain from her students are as follow:

a. April 13rd, 2019

My teacher teaches me to use cohesive devices effectively to keep unity and coherence in my writing. It takes time for me to think about cohesive device within paragraphs, but it gives me some more insight about how to use appropriate connectors in my paragraphs.

b. April 20th, 2019

Using cohesive devices makes me easier to connect my ideas. Sentences that I produced were interconnected and easy to comprehend.

c. Aulia Rahma, April 13rd, 2019

The way my teacher describes the materials inspires me to be better in my writing. I try to generate my ideas using pre-writing strategies that she told me.

d. Arfandi Cahya, April 21st, 2019

I don’t know why writing seems really complicated task. I tried to explore my ideas, but my teacher told me that my sentences are less effective and in many cases more appropriate to be spoken language, not written.

Students write their diary in EFL writing subject in their specialnotebooks they had. They write on it each time they learn EFL writing in the classroom and each time they learn to write in English such as when doing homeworks at home or assignment individually or collectively. What they frequently write are their impression in learning EFL writing, the feedbacks from teachers, their progress in writing, their difficulties and the solution they got from their teachers or from their own way of thinking.

2. How can the student’s diary be implemented in the learning process of EFL writing?, and what are the strengths and weaknesses of it?

As far as the researcher concerned, student’s diary can be implemented during learning process of EFL writing with two categories. The first is “thematic diary”. It means that a teacher gives the students task to write a diary by specific themes familiar to the students which is decided by the teacher. For example, the teacher gives the topic about “hobbies”. Then, the students are encouraged to tell their hobbies in a written form. The purpose of this category is to explore students’ skill in structuring their ideas, enrich students’ vocabularies, and other writing aspects such as spelling, punctuation, capitalisation, and grammatical errors. Since the specific theme is determined by the teacher, it
can be more in length of the text than the next category.

The strengths of “thematic diary” is that it has more complete language aspects explicitly presented by students in their writing product. Therefore it can be much longer in total of words than the next category. However this can consume much time for students to conduct the task and for the teacher to give feedback. Another drawback is that it could not adequate to draw reflection of learning writing itself as the theme given makes the students’ texts seem not different from the other EFL writing tasks such as narrative text, descriptive text, explanatory text, opinion text, etc.

The second category is “reflection diary” that has been explained in previous point of research result. Based on the researcher’s experience, “reflection diary” defined as a brief narrative text created by students as a brief summary of what they have learnt, evaluation and the teachers’ feedback, or even a general impression about their writing process. Students can write about their impression in learning EFL writing, the feedbacks from teachers, their progress in writing, their difficulties and the solution they got from their teachers or from their own way of thinking.

Different from the previous category, this one has no theme but the free reflection of students’ learning in writing process. That is how the function of the diary is. An honest impression of what learners have been thinking, doing, feeling, concerning, etc. Therefore, the researcher called it as “student’s diary” for this category as what has been stated on the main title of this research paper.

The student’s diary should consist of seven important aspects in writing that frequently become problems in writing. Habibi, Wachyuni, Husni (2017) listed writing problems as follows; poor organisation/illogical sequence, problem of word choice, grammatical error, spelling problem, confused on supporting the ideas, punctuation problem, and capitalisation. The students maintained their learning progress and achieved reflection process of their learning in EFL writing through the content or the message they expressed in their diary as well as the language aspects described above.

In order to increase the efficacy of this student’s diary, the teacher should consider some rules of instruction related to the task will be given such as the time limitation for working on the task, length of the text that should not exceed one paragraph, the content of the text which should be honest and shows humanistic impression of students during EFL writing, the seven language aspects (organisation/sequence, word choice, grammatical, spelling, supporting ideas, punctuation, and capitalisation) as the scoring rubrics used when giving feedback.

Based on the observation, deep interview and discussion with the students during four months in the fourth semester in the English language education department at STKIP Muhammadiyah Bogor, the researcher has classified the students’ impressions and opinions into psychological aspect and non-psychological aspect or linguistic aspects. In other words, particularly 23 of 30 (77%) students felt that teaching EFL writing using student’s diary psychologically influence their interest, motivation, and self-esteem in the learning process. Meanwhile 18 of them (60%) obtained improvement in their EFL writing skills. This slight difference in percentage in terms of students’ impression regarding the psychological as well as linguistic aspects is due to the duration limitation of the subject given in the classroom. Thus, not all students is able to get feedback from the teacher.

CONCLUSION

The “reflection diary” or the “student’s diary” can be utilised as one of teaching and learning strategies in EFL writing with some instructional rules when it is implemented in practical context in order to increase its efficacy in improving EFL students’ writing skills. These rules These rules including the time limitation for accomplishing the task (student’s diary), one
paragraph in length. The honest and humanistic view in expressing the learning reflection into the text, and the seven language aspects used as the scoring rubrics (organisation, word choice, grammatical, spelling, supporting ideas, punctuation, and capitalisation) when giving feedbacks. The above rules should be applied in order the teacher have enough time to give feedback to students’ texts. Because without feedback, it will only affect students’ psychological aspects such as motivation, enthusiasm, etc without improving their language skills in EFL writing context.

From this case-study research as well can be concluded that 77% of 30 participants felt that the student’s writing gives them psychological satisfaction related to the betterment of their motivation, interest, and self-esteem. In addition, 60% of the participants improved in their linguistic aspects of EFL writing through student’s diary. It means that some other factors such as existing knowledge and experience, and exposure to the authentic English materials may cause the rest 40% of the participants to not gaining meaningful improvement in the linguistic aspects of EFL writing. Therefore, more exposure towards various English sources of material may assist to overcome this problem.

REFERENCES