PROBLEMS ON ENGLISH WRITING 1 COURSE: PARAGRAPH (A Case Study of the 1st Semester Students of English Education Program, Universitas Muslim Maros)

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ABSTRACT

Writing is a skill that requires students to keep on practice. This research is held to answer research questions as follow: (1) What are the writing problems that common appear to the 1st semester students of English Education program of Universitas Muslim Maros in the academic year 2020-2021, and (2) What are the possible factors which cause those students' problems in writing. This research was conducted in qualitative way. Since this research was conducted during pandemic of Corona Virus 19, Google Classroom application was also used as an instrument. The participants' selection is based on non-probability sampling based on their availability, time flexibility, convenient and represent some characteristics to ease the writer's investigation. The writer then analyzed the results of the observation and the interview descriptively. Results of this research showed that (1) most of the students were facing difficulties in Word Chosen, then (2) the main error the students mostly made especially on Grammatical related to connectors, pronoun references and correct verb, (3) whereas on Mechanical the students made mistakes on punctuation, spelling and capitalization. To another research question, this research revealed factors which contributed problems to the students in writing are lack of practice, time distribution and less motivated.

Keywords: *Writing Skill, Writing Problems, Pandemic Corona Virus*

INTRODUCTION

Practice is not only making someone perfect, but also more skilful, more expert, more proficient even become superior in a certain field, including learning new language.

Learning a new language puts the learners facing many difficulties at the initial stages. This may happen regarding to the structure complexity, vocabulary, semantics or pragmatics. Therefore, learners of language

have to put high focus on language skills because those are important in developing oral and written.

There are 4 macro skills on English namely reading, listening, speaking and writing (Aydogan, 2014). Reading and listening are considered as receptive skills, whereas speaking and writing are productive skills (Masduqi, 2016). However, writing skill is the most crucial in learning English as a foreign language for many students, especially in Indonesia (Maysuroh, 2017). Writing is not a natural skill but a learned skill which students need to practice repeatedly. More over a good writing should follow a structure contains a general idea in one sentence, supporting sentences which give clear explanation and details, and example to support the main ideas (Ariana, 2010). Anyhow writing skill is a skill that is needed to emphasize to support our studies and carrier. Imane (2015) stated that beyond the four vital language skills in the language process, competent writing is frequently accepted as being the last language skill to be acquired for native speakers of the language as well as for foreign/second language learners.

One of the skills needed to emphasize in teaching and learning a foreign language is writing skill. According to Hamp & Heasly in Imane (2015), writing is frequently accepted as the last language skill to achieve to the native speakers of the language as well as for foreign/second language learners. Writing English makes the early graders struggle hardly,

nevertheless do also university students. It is proved by data that consistently becomes evidences in many field (White & Hall as cited in Ariyanti, 2016) because writing is not only about producing or reproducing a good written language or essay but also oral message, involving activities such as processing, organizing, formulating and developing ideas on a piece of paper (or screen) so the reader (or audience) can follow the writer's purpose in conveying messages (Tanasy, 2017). Similarly, Abu in Alfaki (2015) stated that writing is difficult even to native speakers of English because they must able to balance multiple issues on a writing such as purpose, content, organization, vocabulary, mechanism, spelling and the audience.

Writing in English is more challenging because it clarifies, orders and represents yourself well on written text that will help your carrier in the future. From a writing, someone is able to know a person's style and attitude. Rao (2019) mentioned that formal or academic papers like essays, presentations, research papers and reports must be written in the correct way to present a polished and professional image. This is the reason why worldwide is demanding stricter standards of writing proficiency, whether you are an English teacher, a student or a business person (Wijaya, 2017).

At Universitas Muslim Maros in English Education program, Writing course is divided into three levels namely (1) Writing 1 course:

Paragraph (taught to the 1st semester students), (2) Writing 2 course: Essay (taught to the 2nd semester students), then Writing 3 course: Argumentative (taught to the 3rd semester students). Regarding to the subject of this study, the writers focused on the students of the 1st semester that is Writing 1 course: Paragraph in which this course purpose is to develop the students' ability in writing good English sentences, to build English texts, to describe, to recount, to process sentences into paragraph. The materials that were being taught to the students refer to sentence combinations, sentence constructions, and sentence connectors, linking words, the variation of sources where the ideas coming from, topic sentences and main ideas, concepts of paragraphs, supporting details then paragraph development.

Since this research was held during the pandemic era of Corona virus 19 which has the students and lecturer conducted the learning process from their home, then Google Classroom were used as the medium in interaction. Even though some problems might occur during the process such as slow internet networking, students are late to join the lesson or running out of internet data package, but this research was successfully held with some findings. The findings then are expected to be optional information in the field.

Research Questions

Theories and studies above have encouraged the researchers to know and explore deeper about students' English process on writing subject. This also to be expected as a solution to overcome the problems encountered, and also the factors that may cause difficulties to the students of the 1st semester at Universitas Muslim Maros in English Education program in academic year 2020-2021. Therefore, the writer formulated research questions as follows: (1) What are the writing problems that common appear to the 1st semester students of English Education program of Universitas Muslim Maros in the academic year 2020-2021, and (2) What are the possible factors which cause those students' problems in Writing 1 course: Paragraph.

Objectives of the Research

The researchers aimed this research to find out the common problems appeared in Writing 1 course: Paragraph and also the possible factors which cause those students' problems in writing towards the 1st semester students of English Education program of Universitas Muslim Maros in the academic year 2020-2021.

METHOD

This research was conducted in qualitative and the method sections are explained as follow:

Participant of the Study

The selection of the participants in qualitative study is based on non-probability sampling. Since this research was conducted during pandemic of Corona Virus 19, the researchers selected the individuals based on (1) their availability, their time flexibility, their convenient and represent some characteristics to ease the writer investigation. This is matching to what Creswell (2012) stated about the participants selection in a research. The researchers then selected participants by using purposive sampling with consideration have mentioned earlier. Therefore, 8 students from the 1st semester students of Universitas Muslim Maros at English Edication program in the academic year 2020-2021 were chosen to be the sample in this research.

Data Collection

1. Instrument

The researchers acted as the research instrument in this research and then the other instruments also assisted such as interview guidance, recordings, photos, documents and observation notes. An application named Google Classroom was also used as instrument during the lesson proces. This application was used because both researchers and students could not attend the process by face to face during pandemic. Any how this application was helpful enough to transfer the material (through document-slide-drive-site-keep), to explain the lesson (through gmeet-forum),

for discussion purposes (gmeet-forum-chat-hangouts), even for scoring of filling the attendance list. Interaction by using this application enables the researchers to gather data. Data of actual problems that the students face in writing subject to be collected and analyzed.

2. Data Collection Techniques

In doing the data collection, the researchers conducted some techniques by using Google Classroom application as follows:

a. Observation

The researchers observed the learning process of the writing class while teaching Writing 1 course: Paragraph's material.

b. Interview

Researchers had arranged some semi-structured interview questions which open-ended questions was based on the topics in Writing 1 course: Paragraph materials to get deeper information from the students regarding to the research.

c. Recording or taking Photos

Every important action or activities, visual or audio, were recorded or taken in photographs to strengthen and support the data collection.

d. Documentation

All-important data were taken from the students about the students' problem in Writing 1 course: Paragraph were

analysed and documented to be reported.

3. Data Analysis

In analysing the data as the data analysis, the researchers analysed the result of the observation and the interview descriptively. The procedure of data analysis then applied following the procedures which had been proposed by Miles, Huberman dan Saldana (2014) consisting of data display, data reduction and conclusion drawing.

4. Trustworthiness

Qualitative research needs trustworthiness or truth value to ensure that the results of this research were accurate, transparent, and useful and contains integrity just like Bernard (2017) mentioned. Even though it was held online, this research results are valid because the researchers still hold the etiquette and rules of research strongly to keep the trustworthiness maintained. Regarding to that, the researchers took the following criteria of trustworthiness promoted by Lincoln and Guba in Billups (2014) as follows:

a. Credibility (the truth); means whether the qualitative findings believable or not, the findings are truthful and capture holistic representation of the phenomenon or studies under exploration.

b. Dependability (the consistency); whether the findings stable, consistent and applicable over time and condition.

Also, the data collection methods give the same or similar result.

c. Transferability (the applicability); whether the findings comparable by describing a phenomenon in sufficiently. To make it so, the researchers can begin the evaluation extension to make sure that the findings are transferable from times to times, situation, people and settings.

d. Conformability (the neutrality); whether the findings accurate or not. Audit trails are designed to research a study blueprint, detail of outlining and procedural records maintained. The blueprint must accessible to external researchers to do replication (in case their research produce similar results), therefore conformability is strengthened.

e. Reflexivity; this is the combination of the researchers' knowledge, background, methodology, perspective and even bias towards a research. It means that researchers can find solutions to minimize or neutralize his bias, interest, motivation as findings that will be reported.

FINDINGS

1. Problems Faced by the Students in English Writing 1 course: Paragraph

Finding the data of the research which conducted online are slightly different from the usual ones. Yet, results of this research which

had been collected from the students' writing's task showed that the participants encountered problems at; (1) word chosen problem, (2) grammatical problem, and (3) mechanical problem. The results are drawing into some table as follows:

a. Word Chosen Problem

Most of the students were facing difficulties in choosing the right words to write. For example in Writing 1 course: Paragraph material about "Maros", below are the results:

Table 1.

No.	Original Text	Correction
1	Bantimurung waterfall place in valley….	Bantimurung waterfall **is located** at the valley….
2	Entomologists still coming here for see butterflies and insect other.	Entomologists still **come** here **to look at the** butterflies and **other insects**.
3	It is limit near Pangkep regency at north.	It is **adjacent to** Pangkep regency **in the** north.
4	There are much cave in cliffs.	There are **many** caves in these cliffs.

b. Grammatical Problem

According to this research, grammatical problem is the most problem that appear to students. The main error that the students mostly made especially related to connectors, pronoun references and correct verb. This result proofs that students were still difficult in choosing the correct verb in writing subject. Below are the descriptions:

Table 2.

No.	Original Text	Correction
1	You visit Rammang-Rammang with he.	You visit Rammang-Rammang with **him.**
2	Dani forget he is suitcase.	Dani **forgets his** suitcase.
3	Ruli and romi cooking in near bantimurung cave.	Ruli and Romi **cook/are cooking nearby** Bantimurung cave.
4	We climbes the hill quick quick before rain.	We **climb** the hill **quickly** before **it rains.**
5	Bantimurung famous because much butterfly live there.	Bantimurung **is** famous because **lot of butterflies** live in there.
6	Maros have rules for visitors to follow.	Maros **has** rules for visitors to follow.
7	The leang-leang cave dont have fee for visitors.	The Leang-Leang cave **doesn't take any charge** for visitors.
8	Ancestors write and draw in ceiling cave dreaming.	Ancestors **wrote** and **drew on** ceiling of the **Dreaming cave.**

c. Mechanical Problem

- Capitalization

Capitalization actually is a very easy rule in writing mechanical. Anyhow, new students of English Education program still made mistakes while writing as proven below:

Table 3.

No.	Original Text	Correction
1	Ruli and romi cooking in near bantimurung cave.	**R**uli and **R**omi cook/are cooking nearby **B**antimurung cave.

No.	Original Text	Correction
2	Ancestors write and draw in ceiling cave dreaming.	Ancestors wrote and drew on ceiling of the **D**reaming cave.
3	Not only in south sulawesi but also in southeast asia.	Not only in **S**outh **S**ulawesi but also in **S**outheast **A**sia.
4	Maros regency is one of the former kingdom.	Maros **R**egency is one of the former kingdom.
5	each february 1st commemorated as anniversary maros regency.	**E**ach **F**ebruary 1st commemorated as the anniversary **M**aros **R**egency.

- Spelling

No.	Original Text	Correction
1	We are realy proud of Maros.	We are **really** proud of Maros.
2	About 15 metre lower than Bantimurung waterfall.	About 15 **meter** lower than Bantimurung **waterfall.**
3	You can enjoy the bauty of limestone.	You can enjoy the **beauty** of limestone.
4	Maros is rich with kerst mountains and spread of pady field.	Maros is rich with **karst** mountains and spread of **paddy** field.
5	Maros is neighborhod of Makassar citie.	Maros is **neighborhood** of Makassar **city.**

- Punctuation

No.	Original Text	Correction
1	Im on my way to my hometown.	**I'm** on my way to my hometown.
2	The name Bantimurung came from Buginese language Benti and Merrung.	The name Bantimurung came from Buginese language, **"Benti"** and **"Merrung"**.

No.	Original Text	Correction
3	Bantimurung is located 20 km from Hasanuddin Airport about 15 km from center of Maros.	Bantimurung is located 20 km from Hasanuddin Airport**,** about 15 km from center of Maros.
4	I wanna say thank's to government of Maros	I wanna (want to) say **thanks** to government of Maros.
5	The blue butterfly flaps it's wing	The blue butterfly flaps **its** wing

2. The Factors which cause Problems in Writing 1 course: Paragraph

The data from the interview revealed the factors which contributed cause problems to the students in Writing 1 course: Paragraph. The most common factors are 3, namely:

a. Lack of Practice

Writing is very complex skill that needs not just efforts but also continual practice. Sadly, interview with Sh revealed that "Writing is a boring activity to practice because it takes full concentration, that's why I am lazy to do it. My friends also feel the same as we sometimes talked about it in WhatsApp group", from this this research found out that the students practiced their writing skill very seldom. They only will practice when given task. Moreover, nowadays pandemic is still going on making them even lazier to practice at home. The implication was the difficulties in writing their ideas and thoughts on a piece of paper or screen.

b. Time Distribution

Writing is a process that started from thinking, drafting, exploring, revising and editing. Those seems a long journey before produce 1 good writing production. These were the reasons why students felt reluctant when attending writing class and agreed by Nf on interview that, "If only writing simply write down our ideas and need not to matching it with the correct rules in writing or relevant sources, it won't spend too much time then. But the real writing course is tough and the time given to us is very limited". From her statement, it clarifies that the students thought the time given in the classroom for writing was very short and they demand for more time doing the task at home. But when the lecturer approved it, still they could not make it on time at their home.

c. Less Motivated

Attending writing class and doing the task are considered an obligation to get a good score. The students did the writing not for the sake of their own goodness, but an obligation just like what Rm said that, "I wish to make it higher so my score is good, but it is very difficult. I am worried that my score is poor, but I think it may happen because I am lazy to write. So far, I don't know how to improve my score in writing, it's difficult". From this, it can be said that the students saw writing as difficult, boring and long process. Furthermore, students needed "to

pay attention to every single aspect of the new language such as grammar" (Nuraeni 2019 p.78). These kinds of thought dragged their willingness and interest out of the learning process. As the result, they lost their motivation in doing writing to improve their skill and let them stay behind the lesson objectives' standard.

DISCUSSION

This discussion deals with the findings derived from elaboration methods. The description of the data that gained from the students' writing tasks and interview are as follows:

1. The students' most problems in writing

From data mentioned before, it showed that the students' most problems are word chosen, grammatical and mechanical problem after being tested by using writing task about "Maros". In word chosen problem, the students were facing difficulties in choosing the right words in writing. They did not use correct verbs, to be, connectors, prepositions, articles and determiners. Even some of them did not know how to transfer their thoughts in correct English words. It is mostly because these students just joined English department, just like Rm said that "I did not know that in English department we must study subjects which 100% using English. My English is very poor and I don't have enough basic, Mam". This finding is in line with Imane (2015) statement that the students are in a serious problem because they did not use or practice the English language

often enough before enrolling in to academic life and seldom use it in daily life.

In grammatical problem, the students mostly made error about connectors, pronoun references and correct verbs. This error happened because they did not understand about subject, object or possessive position and functions. They only knew the words' meaning but not the appropriate usage, for example they knew that "he, his and him" means a man or a boy so they used them randomly in a sentence without knowing the real function and position. Ms argued that, "He, his and him are human, a man. What is the difference? Anyhow people will understand that what I meant was a man whether I use he, his or him just like she or her". Alfaki (2016) determined that "Second language learners tend to produce words according to their first language translation without considering the correct language structure". This is accurate with another finding that the researchers found that the students tend to transfer Bahasa Indonesia simply to English like in sentence "We climbes the hill quick quick before rain". There were some errors occur but we decided to focus on the word "quick-quick (cepat cepat/quickly)". In Bahasa Indonesia, it is correct if we repeat word "cepat" into "cepat-cepat", the word function will change from adjective (cepat) into adverb (cepat-cepat). However, this case cannot be applied in English language as 'quick' belongs to adjective while 'quickly' is an adverb. So, the

correct sentence is "We climb the hill quickly before it rains".

The next problem that the students' made was mechanical such as capitalization, spelling and punctuation. These mechanical aspects seem very easy, but this is still a matter for the new students. For instance, in capitalization they did not put the correct capital letter in a people's names or places. They only understood that every beginning of a sentence must be capital, else from it, they did not know. One of the participants, Ft, explained this as, "Since elementary school I use full stop to end my sentence, capital to start my sentence, sometimes a comma in between my sentence, or a question mark if my sentence about question. I don't really pay attention to another punctuation mark in writing or capitalization. These are new info for me and I promise will learn and practice them even better mam". So, this is emphasized that actually they don't have prior knowledge about these rules.

Then they also made mistakes in spelling the writing, inserted incomplete words, less letter in a word, wrong letter or wrong letter position. For example, they wrote "realy" instead of "really", "metre" instead of "meter" and "kerst" instead of "karst". Sh mentioned his reason that, "I am just lazy to look up dictionary, because I think I already knew the English word for what I meant. But then when I eventually check it again, I was wrong". This inevitable error happened not only because

they are lazy to double check the words at the dictionary, but the inconsistency of English spelling rules which persisted long enough, deeply ingrained and hard to overcome as a result of more than just the inconsistency of the rules (Fanning, 2018). Another problem the students made was in punctuation such as apostrophe and double quotation mark. For example, in the original text "The blue butterfly flaps it's wing". Here, the apostrophe's placement in "it's" is wrong, because "it's" is the abbreviation of "it is" which has different meaning from the original text. The correct sentence of that original text supposed to be "The blue butterfly flaps its wing", no apostrophe is needed because "its" is a possessive form of "it/butterfly" which the text pointed.

2. The students' possible factors which cause them problems in writing

Beside from the students' task, this research data also derived from interview. 8 students namely Rz, Ms, Nf, Mw, Sh, Hm, Rm dan Ft were chosen because matching with criteria mentioned before. From the participants, the researchers knew that the possible factors which contributed problems to the students in writing were lack of practice, time distribution and less motivated. This finding is in line with Aydogan (2014) who found that It goes without saying that various handicaps are identified by the participants not only in terms of students' all four skills in English which renders but also less practice, less time and less motivation which effected the

situation students critical thinking ability in writing for regular university students.

In lack of practice factor, Mw revealed that "Because of pandemic Corona Virus 19, all day we stay at home only and it makes us lazy to write but only laying on bed watching television or playing with mobile phone". Similar to Mw, Rm said "Yes our lecturers gave us task regularly, but I don't know… I just feel lazy and postpone, forget the task or even never do it". Another student, Rz even said that "I have a very bad English. I think learning from home like this is useless and not helping me to improve my English as I expected. I don't understand the language, I don't understand the lesson, so what should I write there? I become lazy…". These students strengthen the fact that even when they have lot of spare time at home due to pandemic, they do not take advantages on it by learning independently. In fact, they became lazier to write.

Another factor which is causing the students' problems in writing course is time distribution. This research was held on September till October, when the students still had to learn from home, Ms said that "Since covid, all day I just play with my mobile phone surfing on my social media, but very rare doing my college task". Another reason was stated by Nf, she said that "Because we are not studying in classroom, I have lot of spare time to do nothing. Then I choose to work as a freelance. But that's job is very tiring so I cannot manage my time to do my writing task anymore. When

I'm reached home, I'm too tired so I just rest and sleep". What had been stated by Ms and Nf emphasized that the switch from offline to online learning affected negatively to the student's writing achievement even though when they had more time to spend for learning, in fact they choose to spend more time to the things which had nothing to do with their academic like surfing on social media or working.

Less motivated factor is also a problem in writing course. For the students, learning from home online is not as effective as the normal ones and it made them feel less motivated to learn as they used to. Like Sh said "To be honest I am lazy doing my task because I don't see the impact directly, I mean there is no competition between me and my friends because everyone is losing their intention to learn seriously. Nowadays we rely on internet and just copy and paste the task from there. This is very frustrating me because I need challenges and socialization". Another reason but relevance impact is stated by Ft, she said that "Learning from Google classroom is ineffective for me. I live in small and far district where the internet signal is very rare and weak. I found difficulties in joining the classes. I also hardly understand what the lecturers explained because between the lessons, my internet always lagged or disconnected, so I give up". Then another student, Hm also said that "I become lazy to write because the environment at home is not supporting. I have 3 younger siblings who are too talkative, an older sister who is married and has a noisy son. My mom also has a small stall at home where people come any time to buy and I must help my mom serve the buyers. So, I can't study". It is very understandable that the students felt insecure and frustrate studying at home because the situation was making them felt isolated and difficult in concentrate (like the connection is poor or home is too noisy). Pietro, *et al* (2020) concluded in their report, that the students who are confined at home due to COVID-19 may feel more stressed and anxious which lead them to negative symptoms including poor concentration, depression, anxiety, and insomnia. These all drag the students' learning achievement down. If we relates these to the students of the 1st semester at Universitas Muslim Maros at English Education program in academic year 2020-2021, it is very clear that the students' writing achievement was poor not only because the students had low knowledge in five components of writing (purpose, audience, clarity, unity and coherence) which made them failure in doing the task, but also because of the pandemic of Corona virus 19 which had them to study independently from home even when the university provided remote schooling by applying Google Classroom application, they think that it is not effective at all.

CONCLUSION

This research brings some results which answering the research questions and can be concluded as below:

1. During the teaching process, the researchers found that the students mostly facing problems at (1) mechanical (including capitalization, spelling and punctuation), (2) grammatical, and (3) word chosen which resulting them difficult to write perfectly.

2. This research also found out that there were some factors which cause those problems including lack of practice, time distribution and less motivated. These factors contributed to their bad scores in writing.

3. This research was held to the 1st semester students of English Education program of Universitas Muslim Maros in the academic year 2020-2021 through an application called Google Classroom due to pandemic Corona virus 19 where most of the students' interview results mentioned that their achievement was much related to the situation (study independently from home). It means that this case may also happen in other places with more or less results. Since this study was held by the researchers which took action as the lecturers, many weaknesses or imperfect results may happen. Somehow, this research can give contribution to another researchers, especially in writing course.

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