

Collaborative Learning to Enhance Reflective Writing in English

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Abstract: Writing is one of the skills in English needed to express someone's view. However, some students have problem in elaborating their idea or view. As one of the media to communicate, writing is important to study. Unfortunately, writing as an essential skill that all higher education students must master to succeed in their degree and professionally is not an easy thing to learn. It takes practices and techniques. One of the applicable techniques is reflective writing which is also known as journal writing. There are several studies which examined the benefit of doing this, yet the result of this technique combined with another technique is needed to know. The researcher would like to know the result when collaborative learning is mixed with reflective writing. It has been known that collaborative learning inspires students to read, listen, write, and reflect on their work together. In this current study, the researcher wanted to find out (a) the ability of social factors to enhance the journal writing, (b) whether collaborative learning gives impact to student's performance in reflective writing. Data have been gathered through questionnaires from vocational students. Likert scale was employed with scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) to find out how social collaboration helps students do their reflective writing. The findings provide evidence that (1) social factors such as interaction with peers and lectures and social presence positively impact reflective writing, (2) in terms of reflective writing, most of participants focused more on using descriptive words. It has been concluded that overall, collaborative learning engaged well and enhanced the reflective writing. Therefore, their usage must be stimulated in studying English.

Keywords: reflective, writing, learning, collaborative, English.

Introduction

Collaborative learning in Studying English

Collaborative learning is believed to encourage students to be more active and self-reliant in their ability. Moreover, it engages students in one activity which results in working with peers or sharing ideas. Brown and Lara (2011) stated that there are three methods when students take action in connection to the actions of the other. One might promote the success of others, obstruct the success of others or do not give any effect at all. Collaborative learning is often associated with the active learning. It involves students to participate and interact in a group condition and to manage themselves in developing content (Lee, 2014). The greater the social presence, the more will be active learning (Cho et al., 2015). This technique facilitates

students to share their ideas, viewpoints and opinion. Thus, based on the previous discussions, it is notable to note that collaborative learning might impact the process of studying. There are interactions that benefit the students in collaborative learning which is believed can be combined with other approaches in learning English. Studying English as the second language in vocational program has its own challenge. One of the biggest confrontations is the method applied in teaching and practising the English. Thus, this research aims to find out whether the reflective writing combined with collaborative learning can be enjoyment for the students.

Reflective Writing

Reflective writing has been long considered as one of the technique in mastering writing. It is different

from the writing that students usually do such as essays, surveys, or reports. First, English as a foreign language (EFL) university students are encouraged to maintain writing competence, which includes the ability to produce texts (McIntosh et al., 2017). Reflective writing is centralized on the personal thought and how to learn from one experience. It includes self-critical to know and to measure how good the product of writing is. The challenge in doing this type of writing is that the students often unfamiliar with it. Moreover, it usually requires critical thinking to do produce a reflective writing which some students also have difficulty on that.

Ullman (2019) stated that Reflective thinking is a conscious, goal-oriented cognitive process that seeks to learn solutions to personally important, often weakly defined, ambiguous problems of past and present experience and anticipated future situations that often involve thinking about the important elements of the experience, a critical analysis of the problem including the analysis of the thinkers' own personal perspective and feelings as well as the perspective of others. In reflective writing, not only do the writers practice but they also reflect what they have done. This makes the students understand what they have produced rather than just knowing how to create. There is numerous researchers on reflective writing both in quantitative and qualitative study. However, most of it relies on the content analysis (Houston, 2016). Writing reflective journals is thought to have the power to bridge the gap between existing and new knowledge. As a learning tool, writing a reflective journal promotes critical thinking (Ebadi & Rahimi, 2018), cognitive task complexity (Johnson, 2017)

Collaborative Learning and Reflective Writing in English

Several studies have been done on the impact of collaborative learning on the reflective writing. One of that is from Jackling, 2015 which studied the use of blogs to reflective and collaborative learning. From that study, it is found that there is an enhancements for the learners when they involved in blog-based study which facilitating both collaborative and reflective learning. Another research that focused on this method is from

Herder, 2018 who found that students have better orientation on writing when they worked together in a responsive manner.

One of the way to score the impact of collaborative learning on reflective writing is by using content analysis. According to Krippendorff (1980) content analysis is any method used to explore the nature, characteristics, and inherent meaning of a unit of study no matter how large or small. In this study, the content analysis is done by analysing the students paper and clasifying whether they use descriptive technique more than evaluation technique in writing journals. One of the most useful reflective writing products is creating personal essay or portfolio. This fact supports the researcher to conduct this reflective writing research. In this research, the researcher wants to find out, how if the collaborative learning is combined with the reflective writing for students who studies English in Vocational study programme. Little was research done on this topic. For that reason, this current study aims to find out how collaborative learning or studying in social setting gives impact to the students ability in mastering the reflective writing. It is something interesting since most of reflective writinnng is done without any involvement from social interaction.

Materials and Methods

Before doing the test, the participants in this study are asked to work together as a group. Each stuedents have to share their opinion about the English lesson taught before. Initially, the lecturer trained them on how to make their own resume or experience of themselves in 150-250 words. The participants of this research are ten students who are picked randomly. The method implemented is Quantitative Content Analysis Procedure (QCA). QCA itself is defined as systematic procedure for analysing the content of documents (e.g. students' reflective essays) with coding categories and coding rules to make inferences about the underlying construct (Poldner, 2014)

Each student wrote reflective essays about their personalities or experiences. Since the scope of this research is juts to find out the effectiveness of

studying in a group to the reflective writing, the researcher decided to limit the assesment into two steps. The researcher just applied two out five categories of the reflection writing. According to Leijen (2012) there are five levels and content in reflective writing, those are description, evaluation, justification, dialogue and transfer. However, since this research is assessed both by the lecturer and by the other students, the steps taken are just description and Evaluation. It is done in order to let students do the assesment in an ease way. Next, the description is divided into *Actions (A)*, *Situations (S)* and *Goals (G)*. As for the Evaluation is diverged into *Behaviour (B)*, *Expectations (E)* and *Results (R)*. Each of the description is examined by using the grammatical features and lexical items on the students paper.

Procedures

Having been given training on how to do reflective writing, all the participants were given two weeks to accomplish the reflective writing in form of a resume or their own experience. The question is the same for all of the participants. Write your self-reflection essay about your own experiences in the current three months (150-250 words). After finishing their report, their essays will be checked by the lecture to find out the which part of *decription* and *Evaluation* is used the most.

In the last stage, each students got one paper to write down their own feeling after doing such reflective writing. Afterwards, they were gathered in one group and take turn to share their own knowledge to peers about the reflective writing. In the last step, they answered ten questions related to this activity in form of google form. From this activity, participannts know that the use of descriptive words to represent feelings, personal beliefs, difficulties and intentions (Ulmann, 2017). The next step is to classify whether their essay mostly used Description or Evaluation. Hence, interview is also conducted to find out the students perception about the whole process done in this research.

Results and Discussions

This research gives result as follows. (a) The results show that most of students in this research use

Description Technique in writing their essay. As decriptive writing is defined as text picturing the person, place and thing with clear detail to help the readers visualize an object which is described" (Abisamra, 2001) . So, by writing a descriptive text, the writers will create their sense of impression and get a clear picture of the object which is describe. Furthermore, description activity is used to describe an object and the readers become easily to be understood, so that they can imagine the object which is described clearly like the real one. Other Characteristics for the descriptive essay are (a) focus on specific participants, (b) simple present tense, (c) the use of noun phrase, (c) the use of auxilary verb, anad (d) the use of linking verb (Gerrot,1994). The words that they used mostly are *feel, learn, know, develop, studied, experienced, think, read, understand* and *analyse*. The most sub technique used from description technique is situations. The participants focused on elaborating their condition and how they feel rather than writing about the actions happened.

| Description Technique | Actions | Situation | Goals |
|-----------------------|---------|-----------|-------|
| Percentage of words | 13% | 73% | 14% |

As for the Evaluation, students in this research did not really use this technique because they concentrated in describing their experience rather than telling their characteristics. The words that found related to the Evaluation are *lazy, want, sad, expect, need, finally, happy, planned, tried, made*. The highest sub categories for this technique are expectation.

| Evaluation Technique | Behaviour | Expectation | Result |
|----------------------|-----------|-------------|--------|
| Percentage of words | 19% | 61% | 20% |

In collaborative learning, the students were asked to answer 10 questions in likert-scale. Here is the distribution of the questions.

| Questions | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|--|----------------|-------|----------------------------|----------|-------------------|
| 1. I have better understanding about both techniques after sharing with my friends in a group. | 3 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| 2. I gained new vocabularies after reading my friend's essay | 1 | 7 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 3. I understood my friend's essay content | 3 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 4. I have better knowledge about reflective writing after doing this exchange correction | 2 | 3 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| 5. I found this activity interesting | 7 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| 6. I needed to re check more than twice on my friend's essay paper | 2 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| 7. I found this activity boring | | | 2 | 4 | 4 |
| 8. Once I have done checking my friend's essay, I promptly understood about it | 2 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 9. I think my essay is better than my friend's | 1 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| 10. I want to redo this activity | 1 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 1 |

From their answer, it can be deduced that after doing collaborative learning:

1. Participants have better knowledge about the topics given after doing collaborative learning
2. Vocabularies are the aspect that they think improve much in writing diary (reflective writing)
3. Most of them could understand their peers' work of writing
4. After being taught and told to do this project, the participants have better understanding
5. Most of the students find that this social activity is interesting
6. However, rechecking their friends piece of writing is needed by most of the participants
7. This class project is not tedious
8. Some participants think that their essays are not as good as their peers
9. Some participants want to repeat this activity.

All in all, the finding aids the previous research which stated that reflective journal writing had the potential to help the students in this study to understand the topics being discussed better while advancing their professional development at the same time (Jarvis & Baloyi, 2020)

Discussions

Reflective Writing helps students express themselves in a way that in the same time contributes to the collaborative learning if it

involving other students to check. This research this study confirm the research of Bell, Kelton, Mcdonagh, Mladenovic, and Morrison (2011) and Delandshere and Arens (2003) who found that student writing in reflective essays is largely descriptive, even when a reflective vocabulary is present. Moreover, this study also supports the previous research done by (Daljet, 2015) who stated that the students perceived that collaborative learning tended to help them reflect on the content and context of the tasks they had to carry out. The combination of these two techniques also helped learners to write confidently and to talk honestly about others writing.

Conclusions

Collaborative learning helps students to share and exchange the views and opinion they have about one task. It also stimulates students confidence in giving opinion and make correction upon their peers' task. Teacher could adapt to the collaborative learning in order to enrich their knowledge. On the other hand, reflective journal writing is important in learning writing because it supports the EFL students to rethink a wide range of learning activities and to identify the strengths and weaknesses of subsequent learning processes. Reflective journal writing is a type of diary in which students express their honesty, self-

discovery, and self-improvement in order to improve their learning practice quality. This activity is proven interesting for 10 students in Politeknik Negeri Media Kreatif. Small group is suggested at first since both of the researcher and participants need to have deep understanding on the result. Lastly, by doing this activity, students have time to reflect on their writing and to reason to others why they choose to do so.

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