

Examine Task-based Learning (TBL) in students' writing skills

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ABSTRACT

Writing is one of the four essential elements that must be mastered to excel in English skills. At the Muhammadiyah University of Tangerang, task-based learning is implemented in the Writing skill class. This study investigated the implementation of task-based learning in the news writing class of seventh-semester students. The research aimed to understand the process of implementing task-based learning in writing skills and to determine the extent of student improvement in writing skills after its implementation. This descriptive qualitative study collected data through interviews with ten seventh-semester students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Tangerang, writing tests, and analysis of the students' initial news articles. After data reduction and scoring using a rubric adapted from Brown (2007), the results indicated that all students perceived an improvement in their writing skills, which was supported by a 15% increase in their test scores.

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1. Introduction

In education field, language learning has been a crucial issue. It is all because language learning is crucial for the effectiveness of communication, the expression of our mind, and for the participation in classroom activities. Many factors influencing language learning are cognitive, psychological, sociological, and so on (Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003). In language learning, there are four fundamental and interactive abilities; listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Bozorgian, 2012). Writing is one of our ways to communicate in written. Writing skill become the central role for the student (Masdianti et al., 2021), it (writing skill) also the most important skill the students need in university life (Rohim, 2019).

However, many students in Indonesia have difficulty in writing. Student feel writing activity is difficult to try because they feel confused on the rule, like: grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency (Gunawan, 2018). For example, students in the seventh semester of the English Education Study Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Tangerang still feel a lack of English writing skills, based on early interviews.

In Muhammadiyah University of Tangerang, task-based learning is one of the methods that the lecturer used for teaching writing skills. Task-based language learning, also known as task-based learning, is an approach that involves learners completing meaningful activities or tasks using the target language (Buyukkarci et al., 2009). Task-based learning using "task" itself as the method to teach the student.

Task-based learning has been used in several previous studies in teaching English skills at the high school level, and in this study, researchers chose students from the Muhammadiyah University of Tangerang as the subjects of the research. In this research, students are believed to be more independent and critical than high school students. Apart from that, this research aims to demonstrate how task-based learning can enhance or develop students' English language abilities at Muhammadiyah University of Tangerang.

Therefore, even though task-based learning already implemented in Universitas Muhammadiyah Tangerang, it is important to do analysis research to measure the extent of its benefits in students' writing skills in this university. Based on the explanation above, the researcher is interested in conducting a research with titled "Examine Task-based Learning (TBL) In Students' Writing Skills."

1.1. Theoretical framework

a. Writing skill

In learning language, there are four basic skills that need to be mastered, there is reading, speaking, listening and writing. Writing is a critical skill in the acquisition of a foreign language. Brown (2001, p. 34) in Tardy (2021) asserts that contemporary approaches to teaching writing in English as a Second Language (ESL) and other languages often integrate writing instruction with the teaching of other skills, particularly speaking and listening. When teachers prompt students to generate ideas for writing, students typically seek sources from the internet, newspapers, magazines, radio, and television. In this process of gathering information, they employ multiple skills, including speaking, listening, and writing. Spratt, Pulverness, and Williams (2005, p. 26) in Sari (2023), assert that writing is a productive skill, characterized by the creation rather than the reception of language. Hyland (2004, p. 09) in Simanjorang (2021) similarly posits that writing serves as a medium for sharing personal meanings, enabling individuals to express their ideas and purposes in written form. Individuals construct and communicate their perspectives on various topics, and these perspectives can differ based on personal beliefs. Therefore, clarity and acceptability are crucial when articulating these views. Writing can be conceptualized both as a process and a product. The product-oriented approach focuses on the final outcome of the writing task. Wallace (2023, p. 15) explains that writing as a product involves several discrete stages: note-taking, identifying the central idea, outlining, drafting, and editing. This perspective highlights the complexity of writing, which encompasses multiple sub-skills that contribute to producing a polished piece of writing. In contrast, the process-oriented approach emphasizes the importance of planning, drafting, revising, and producing the final text. This approach underscores the iterative nature of writing, where attention is given to each stage to refine and improve the work progressively.

Out of many skills that the students need in the university, writing is most important. Writing is not only the words which you write on the piece of paper, but also the effective communication of complex ideas in the simplest form of words that every layman can understand. That is why it is the most important skill the students need in university life (Rohim, 2019). Writing is the work of pouring ideas, expressing those ideas, and organizing them into statements and paragraphs that will be clear to a reader (Andini et al., 2020). However, in writing, we cannot just write something carelessly without correct writing rules. Five points that students need to pay attention to in writing are content, organization, vocabulary, language use (grammar) and mechanic (Andini et al., 2020).

Content refers to the core message conveyed in the writing. Good content is relevant, engaging, and fulfills the purpose of the text, whether it's to inform, persuade, entertain, or explain. Students should ensure that their content is well-researched and thoroughly thought out, presenting clear arguments or ideas supported by evidence. This can involve checking facts, citing sources, and presenting logical reasoning that aligns with the objectives of the assignment.

Effective writing hinges on several key elements that ensure clarity, engagement, and correctness in any written communication. Content and organization are foundational; the content must be accurate, relevant, and engaging to hold the reader's interest, while the organization should ensure ideas are logically structured, featuring a clear introduction,

coherent body paragraphs, and a conclusive ending to guide the reader smoothly through the text. Vocabulary choice further enhances this by ensuring words are precise and suitable for the context, thereby improving the text's ability to convey its intended message clearly and impactfully.

Additionally, language use and mechanics play crucial roles in maintaining the quality of the writing. Proper grammar, including accurate sentence structure and verb tense consistency, ensure the text is understandable and free of ambiguities. Meanwhile, attention to mechanics, such as correct spelling, punctuation, and capitalization, is vital to avoid distracting the reader with errors, thereby upholding the writing's professionalism and polish. Together, these elements combine to create well-crafted and effective written communications that resonate well with their intended audiences.

1) Types of Writing Skill

Writing is one of ways to share personal meanings (Hyland, 2003). Writing includes sharing thought, ideas, and feelings through writing, that's why writing is not only for personal purpose, but also for academic writing, job-related writing and personal writing (Sholihah, 2011).

a) Academic writing

Academic writing is employed for pedagogical purposes and encompasses a variety of texts, including papers, essays, academic journals, technical reports, theses, dissertations, and others.

b) Job-related writing.

Job related writing is made to accomplish the communicative purpose in the work. For the example are messages, letters/emails, memos, schedules, labels, signs, advertisements, announcements, and manuals.

c) Personal writing

Personal writing is used by individuals for personal matters. Examples include letters, emails, greeting cards, invitations, messages, and fiction.

d) The Procedure of Writing

In writing, of course there is a process that we have to go through. Not just writing down what is on our minds, but there are several processes that must be gone through. Usually there are several steps in writing, namely prewriting, drafting and revising (Onozawa, 2010).

- Prewriting

The first step of writing process is prewriting. In this process, the writer gather the ideas, research and plan for the content of the writing. It involves brainstorming, researching, outlining and the setting of goals.

- Drafting

After the first step which is prewriting, the writer moves to drafting. During this process, the writer put all the thoughts and ideas into a real form. This phase can include writing a rough draft and focus on the content. In drafting, the writer often revisit and revise their drafts multiple times.

- Revising

The revising stage is the final phase of the writing process where the writer meticulously examines and refines the draft. This involves enhancing clarity, strengthening ideas, and ensuring overall quality. Key activities during this step include editing, proofreading, and seeking feedback.

There are also some people who use four steps in writing, namely thinking, planning, writing and editing (Onozawa, 2010).

- Thinking

Prewriting is the foundational stage of the writing process involving critical thinking, brainstorming, and idea generation. It marks the initial step in crafting a piece, focusing on clarifying the writing's purpose, exploring potential approaches, and considering the target audience and desired message.

- Planning

The second step is planning, where the writer organizes thoughts and ideas to create an outline and determine the overall structure. This involves developing a detailed outline, deciding on the structure including headings and subheadings, and allocating content to specific sections or paragraphs.

- Writing

Writing is the process of transforming thoughts and ideas into written text. During this stage, the writer expands, elaborates, and develops these concepts into a coherent and meaningful piece of writing.

- Editing

The writing process doesn't end with the initial draft. Writers must meticulously review, revise, and refine their work during the editing stage. This involves editing for clarity and coherence, proofreading for errors, and seeking feedback from others. Effective writing requires careful planning and organization to maintain focus and direction. To achieve this, Onozawa (2010) suggests a four-step writing process: thinking, planning, writing, and editing.

2) Indicator for Writing Skill

Writing is a kind of communication in which students can express their thoughts, views, feelings, and experiences. The more students write, the better their written works become (Apriyanti & Nurdini, 2021). But still, it is also important to establish specific indicators for writing skills, as outlined by Brown's (2003) writing skills theory. Brown (2003) identified several important aspects of writing, such as;

- a) Content, this indicator evaluates the substance of the writing, assessing whether the writer effectively conveys relevant information or ideas, supports arguments with evidence, and maintains coherence throughout the text.
- b) Organization, The organization of a piece of writing examines how well the writer structures their ideas, ensuring a logical flow from introduction to conclusion. It assesses the clarity of the thesis statement, the coherence of paragraph development, and the overall cohesion of the text.
- c) Grammar, Grammar proficiency reflects the writer's command of language structures and rules, including sentence construction, verb tense consistency, and agreement. It assesses whether the writer effectively applies grammatical principles to convey meaning accurately and clearly.
- d) Vocabulary; Vocabulary usage evaluates the writer's choice and deployment of words to convey precise meaning and nuance. It examines the richness and appropriateness of vocabulary in expressing ideas effectively and engaging the reader.
- e) Mechanics: Mechanics encompass the technical aspects of writing, including spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. It evaluates the writer's attention to detail in ensuring error-free text, enhancing readability, and demonstrating professionalism.

b. Task-Based Learning

Tasks are crucial for assessing teaching improvements following the implementation of activities designed to enhance the learning process. This research investigates the impact of teachers employing tasks as the primary learning method. Task-based learning is a pedagogical approach centered on communicative and interactive tasks as the core units for instructional planning and delivery (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). By focusing students on task completion, task-based teaching prioritizes meaningful language use over form (Harmer,

2007). Task-based language teaching is an approach built around tasks as the fundamental unit of language teaching planning and instruction (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Task-based learning is an educational approach centered around real-life tasks that compel students to utilize language in practical contexts. This teaching method prioritizes interactive and communicative tasks as the core of the learning process. The method's effectiveness stems from the essential role of group work in completing assigned tasks (Sholeh, 2021). By focusing on meaningful tasks, students are motivated to enhance their language skills. Ultimately, task-based learning emphasizes the application of language in everyday life to make learning more relevant and effective.

1) The Indicator of Task-based Learning Implementation

Task-based Learning is a learning method that uses tasks as the learning method itself. However, in task-based learning, still have the indicator for task-based learning implementation; Pre-task, task cycle, and language focus (M. Rodríguez-Bonces & J. Rodríguez-Bonces, 2010).

a) Pre-task

In the pre-task, The lecturer provides the lighter explanation to the students so that the students can have a better understand of the task that will be given. In this case, lecturers can use various types of media such as pictures, posters, or briefly explain the task that will be given. This aims to ensure that students remain on the same path as the lecturer's expectations (Sholeh et al., 2020).

b) Task Cycle

In the task cycle, students are given the opportunity to use the language skills they have mastered to carry out the task, then under the guidance of the lecturer, students will receive supervision while working on the task while they plan a report for their task. In this moment, students are really expected to be able to develop their language skills, because here there is a moment where students' abilities will be explored more deeply through guidance from lecturers. At this stage, students will be asked to complete task in pairs and/in small groups where the lecturer will supervise them. The lecturer then helps correct the task that have been completed in oral and written form (Sholeh et al., 2020).

c) Language Focus

Language focus stage the students to correct and discuss the special characteristics of each assignment given, be it listening or reading. From here the lecturer will guide students in carrying out the assignment by providing several practices in the assignment (Sholeh et al., 2020).

2) The Importance of Task-based Learning in Learning Writing

Task-based learning have a very usefull effect for the teacher and the student because it is moving the focus of the learning process. Task-based lerning gives the different way for student to understanding language as a tool, not as a specific goal (Puspitasari, 2018) In this case, students will be involved in tasks that will reflect in real-world use. The emphasis on this approach also changes the method, which was previously only rote, into direct application.

a) Contextual Learning.

Task-based learning can provide a learning context that is appropriate to real life, this is because students are involved in tasks that imitate situations in real life (Puspitasari, 2018). Through these assignments, it will help students improve their ability to apply writing skills outside the classroom and also make a smooth transition from theory to real life application.

b) Communication skills.

Task-based learning can develop students' communication skills when working together with their group of friends to complete assignments. From here, students can

use language not only as an academic training tool, but also as a communication tool (Willis & Willis, 2007). This is because task-based learning encourages practical application which allows students to not only be proficient in academics, but in real life, especially in the application of language skills.

c) Problem solving

By giving assignments as a basis for learning, students need to solve problems with more critical thinking. This is what allows students to improve their problem solving sharpness (Puspitasari, 2018). Through task-based learning, students' critical thinking abilities increase because they are asked to solve problems and increase their understanding of the material.

d) Authentic Language Use

Task-based learning can also expose students to authentic language use, which is a reflection of language use in real life (Nunan, 2004). The use of this language is also due to giving assignments based on real life, which also offers students practical methods because in practically, task-based learning is based on everyday life.

3) The Procedure of Task-based Learning Implementation in Teaching and Learning Writing

Teacher provided an alternative teaching approach by using Task-based learning (Sholeh, 2021). Usually, conventional learning refers more to teacher central learning, but in task-based learning, learning will refer to student central learning where the teacher only serves as a companion and supervisor when learning takes place. There are several procedures in Task-based Learning Implementation, namely Pre-task, Task, Planning, Report, Analysis, and Practice (Frost, 2004).

a) Pre-task

Teacher start with providing the topic and the detail of that topic. In this step, teacher also explain about the task that they need to do. Teacher can give the example of the task and also the detailed outline of what to expect from the writing task. This pre-task aim so the student can understand about the task that they will be given and not lost in the track (Frost, 2004).

b) Task

The teacher will ask the students to do the task in pairs or groups. In this step, the teacher just acts as a supervisor, and helps if needed. The teacher will free the students to develop their ideas as long as they are still related to the existing theme (Frost, 2004).

c) Planning

Students will be asked to prepare a report both verbally and in writing. Here students will make plans about what they will present. The teacher will act as an advisor to help students prepare their reports (Frost, 2004).

d) Report

Students will report the results of their work in front of the class. The teacher will choose groups randomly or sequentially to make a presentation in front of the class. The teacher will also provide some feedback on the results of their work (Frost, 2004).

e) Analysis

From the students report, the teacher will analyze the highlight relevant part to be assessed. Students will also be asked to pay attention in their texts. Here the teacher can also do highlight the language that the students use from their report phase for analysis (Frost, 2004).

f) Practice

At the final stage, the teacher will ask the students to do another practice for writing activities after giving the students a useful note. This practice aims to increase the student's confidence to do another task (Frost, 2004).

2. Research method

In this research, the researcher employs a qualitative approach to investigate the effects of task-based learning (TBL) on writing skills among university students. Qualitative methods emphasize observing phenomena and further examining the meanings these phenomena hold. The primary focus in qualitative research is on the process and the interpretation of results (Basri, 2014). This approach is particularly suited to understanding the behaviors, perceptions, motivations, and actions of individuals through descriptive analyses using words and language.

2.1. Population/Subjects

The study is conducted at Universitas Muhammadiyah of Tangerang, targeting students who have reported challenges with their writing skills. This population is chosen because lecturers at Universitas Muhammadiyah Tangerang utilize task-based learning to enhance writing skills, making it an ideal context for this study.

2.2. Samples

The sample consists of 10 students from the seventh semester enrolled in a writing class that implements Task-Based Learning. The participants are selected based on specific criteria to ensure a focused examination of the impact of Task-Based Learning.

2.3. Data Collecting Techniques

Data collection is carried out using multiple techniques to ensure comprehensive insights into the effectiveness of Task-Based Learning.

- a. Interviews: Conducted both online and offline to accommodate the preferences and availability of the subjects. These interviews gather detailed responses from the students about their experiences with task-based learning in writing classes.
- b. Tests: Administered by the researcher to measure the improvement in students' writing skills after a semester of task-based learning.
- c. Study Documents: Examination of test results and archived written works produced by the students at the beginning of the seventh semester, providing insights into the practical outcomes of implementing Task-Based Learning in their curriculum.

2.4. Research Instruments

The research employs three main instruments to collect data:

- a. Interviews: Used to gather qualitative data on students' experiences and perceptions.
- b. Tests: Designed to assess improvements in writing skills.
- c. Study Documents: Review of students' written work and test results to track progress over time.

2.5. Data Analysis Techniques

The data collected from these instruments are analyzed using thematic analysis for interview transcripts and document analysis for test results and academic performances. This comprehensive approach aims to provide a detailed understanding of how task-based learning impacts writing skills.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. The Implementation of Task-based Learning (TBL) in Writing Skill

Based on the result of interview, the researcher found several things. The implementation of task-based learning in writing skills in the seventh semester is not a new experience for 70% of subjects. The subject also recognizes that task-based learning was effective because of the similarities between the tasks and examples from real life. On the other hand, 30% of subjects said that they did not know about task-based learning. This is what makes some subjects feel confused about the task-based learning method at the early semester. Subjects also felt that the tasks given were monotonous, the instructions given by the facilitator were unclear, causing boredom and confusion.

In the process of implementing task-based learning in writing skills, it has three stages, namely; Pretask, task, and discussion. 20% of subjects found difficulties to adapt to the task-based learning

process, but over time they finally got used to the learning format. Students' active involvement in existing tasks makes 10% of subjects feel satisfied with this task-based learning. The tasks given in this method are assignments of different roles for each student in one group and they must be responsible for their respective roles (Zhou et al., 2013). However, 20% of the subjects felt that the workload with short deadlines created challenges in time management and completing their assignments. The rest of them stated that they could follow the task-based learning well.

The implementation of TBL in writing skill instruction appears to be highly effective. All of the subject agree that Task-based Learning indeed have more positive outcomes. It aligns well with constructivism theories (Vygotsky) that advocate how students build knowledge and skills through interaction with their environment. In this theory, knowledge is not considered as something that already exists absolutely, but is built through a process of interaction and individual experience. However, successful implementation of TBL requires careful planning and adaptation based on student needs and contexts.

3.2. Improvement in Writing Skill after Task-based learning Implemented

Test data and also the results of interviews conducted by researcher show how Task-Based Learning has influenced the learning process and students' ability to learn writing skills. Test data shows a significant increase in students' writing abilities after implementing Task-based Learning. This increase is measured through tests taken by the researcher from subject assignment data at the beginning of semester 7 and tests taken by the researcher recently. These two tests assess critical aspects of writing skills such as content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics.

After do the research, which show significant improvements in student grades after the implementation of task-Based Learning, offer concrete evidence regarding the effectiveness of Task-based Learning in increasing academic achievement. An average increase of 15 points, or about 19%, is not only an impressive statistic but also an indicator that signals substantial change in students' writing competence.

4. Conclusion

Based on the research result and discussion on in the presented in the previous chapter, all of the subject agree that task-based learning does improving the students writing skill. All respondents felt there was better improvement after task-based learning was implemented. This improvement is caused by giving assignments repeatedly, making students familiar with the existing assignments and being able to more easily complete the assignments given as time goes by. Improvement in writing does not only occur in one aspect, but in several aspects, namely in the placement of content where there are topics and details. News organizations that can be seen in headlines, bylines, leads, body and endings have also increased. More precise use of grammar, greater variations in the choice of vocabulary and finally mechanics, namely spelling, punctuation and capitalization. This can prove the theory of constructivism, where knowledge is built by humans little by little, where the results are expanded through a limited context and not suddenly. In this case, task-based learning forces all students to learn independently and actively, which makes task-based learning make students the center of learning and not dependent on the teacher. This is what makes task-based learning more effective than conventional methods.

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