

THE USE OF DIALOGUE JOURNALS ACTIVITY IN ESSAY WRITING COURSE (STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENT)

Hidayah Nor

hidayahnor616@gmail.com

UIN Antasari Banjarmasin

Abstract: *This research is aimed to describe the use of dialogue journals technique in improving students' writing skill especially students' achievement in short essay writing course. The researcher used descriptive qualitative research for conducting the research. The subjects of this research were the fifth semester students of English Education Department academic year 2016-2017 and there were two classes which involving 65 students. The instruments that were used to get the data are the writing test in form of essay. It is considered valid based on the view of test content and the representation of the materials tested since the test uses content validity. Then, all the data were analyzed descriptive qualitatively and concluded inductively. The result of this research was to provide English lecturers with interesting and effective teaching strategies in enhancing the students' active participation in teaching and learning process and improving students' writing ability. The students were expected to use dialogue journals activity to improve their ability in writing. This research also gave additional value to the effort of increasing the quality of teaching English particularly teaching writing in Indonesia.*

Keywords: *dialogue journals, teaching writing, essay writing course*

BACKGROUND

Writing is as an important skill in the EFL setting. It helps learners to acquire English language because the activity stimulates thinking and facilitates them to develop some language skills simultaneously. According to Bello (1997), writing, as a productive language skill, plays an essential role in promoting language acquisition as learners' experiment with words, sentences, and large chunks of writing to communicate their ideas effectively and to reinforce the grammar and vocabulary they learn in class.

Based on the students' point of view, writing is considered to be the most difficult skill to master by them. This is not quite surprising due to the fact that while everybody enjoys talking, not so many people consider writing as something enjoyable. White (1995, p. iv) believes that the great rise in interest in spoken communication, characteristic of the past 20 years, has challenged the status of writing. An ability to speak a foreign language has then become a more highly rated skill than an ability to write in it.

Most ESL/EFL writing teachers would strongly believe with the statement that teacher correction feedback is a necessary part of any writing course. Regarding language use or grammar, most would also conclude that grammar correction is essential. A study conducted by Cohen and Cavalcanti (1990) stated that teachers tend to focus more on the use of mechanics (such as spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and paragraphing) and

language use (such as tense, word order, articles, pronouns, and preposition) in their students' piece of writing than on the content (such as knowledge of subject, substance, and development of thesis) and organization (such as fluent expression, clear statement of ideas, and logical sequencing).

However, Gray (2004), reports that previous research conducted in the last 20 years has revealed it to be wrong. Plentiful studies have also revealed that grammar correction to second language writing students is actually discouraging to many students, and even harmful to their writing ability.

A Journal is a record of one's thought, feeling, experiences, usually in written form as Prayogo (1997) stated that journal writing could provide an opportunity for the students to express themselves through written forms. Students can express their feeling or thoughts without the threat of their thoughts being judged later by the teacher.

Brown in his book *Language Assessment* (2010:134) mentioned seven types of Journal writing:

- a. Language-learning logs, in English language teaching, learning log have the advantage of sensitizing students to the importance of getting their own goal and then self-monitoring their achievement
- b. Grammar journals, this is especially appropriate for courses and workshops that focus on grammar.
- c. Responses to readings, this type are simple responses to readings (and/or to other material such as lectures, presentations, films, and videos).
- d. Strategies based learning logs, this type is specialized journal that focus only on strategies that learners are seeking to become aware of and to use their acquisition process.
- e. Self-assessment reflections, journals can be a stimulus for self-assessment in a more open-ended way than through using checklist and questionnaires.
- f. Diaries or attitudes, feelings, and other affective factors, teachers can thereby become better equipped to effectively facilitate learners' individual journeys toward their goals.
- g. Acculturation logs, is one that focuses of acculturation in a nonnative country.

A dialogue journal is an informal written conversation between student and teacher which provides a meaningful writing activity. According to Fulwiler (2000), journal writing is an important way of individualizing instruction and encouraging independent thinking.

A dialogue journal, according to Peyton (1993), is a written conversation in which a student and teacher communicate regularly (daily, weekly, etc., depending on the educational setting) over a semester, school year, or course. Students write as much as they choose and the teacher writes back regularly, responding to students' questions and comments, introducing new topics, or asking questions. This kind of writing activity makes this technique enjoyable and thus popular as a writing technique. It can be viewed from the fact that many teachers as well as lecturers have already applied this technique in their writing classes and lots of research studies have been carried out dealing with this teaching technique.

To name a few, Erin Gruwell, an English teacher at Woodrow Wilson High School in Long Beach, California, America as well as the founder of Freedom Writers Foundation, for instance, writes in her memoir that her students are enhanced in their writing ability after she utilizes this technique (Gruwell, 2007). In fact, Gruwell makes an inference that a dialog journal is not only good at improving writing skill but it can

also improve students' attitudes. In EFL/ESL context, Burton and Carroll (2001) say that this technique has already been proved effective to promote the writing skill of EFL/ESL students in some countries.

In line with Gruwell's and Burton and Carroll's findings, Walker (2006) finds that journal writing assignments can benefit students by enhancing reflection, facilitating critical thought, expressing feelings, and writing focused arguments. Journal writing can be adapted into a student's clinical course to assist with bridging the gap between classroom and clinical knowledge. In addition, journals can assist athletic training students with exploring different options for handling daily experiences.

In addition, Burniske (1994) states that since the purpose of a dialogue journal is to supply students with a real audience and enhance their rhetorical awareness, the teacher would respond only to the content of the student's progress, not to grammatical and mechanical errors in the writing; instead, the teacher would lead by example, modeling grammatical and mechanical correctness in his/her own written responses.

In sum, dialogue journal is a written conversation that is aimed to supply students with a real audience and develop their rhetorical awareness in which a student and teacher communicate frequently over a semester, school year, or course.

Teaching Writing by using Journal Writing Strategy

Teaching writing by using journal writing strategy can be done by asking students to make a journal. The students are asked to write anything what they want to write. The teacher who received the students' journal reads the entry and responds to it. This journal is interactive and takes the form of a conversation Tompkins (2002) states that "Most importantly, dialogue journals are an authentic writing activity and provide the opportunity for real communication between the student and the teacher" (p.235)

Journal writing helps learners write better and better day by day since it provides learners with more opportunities to freely write about what they wish to whenever they feel like writing as Hamp and Heasley (2006) recommended:

"The most obvious way you can help yourself become a good writer is by writing. We strongly suggest that in addition to completing the tasks, you also keep your own personal journal. Buy yourself a notebook, and try to write down some ideas every day, in English, about anything that interests you (...). You will surprise yourself by producing pages and pages of writing." (p.5)

The use of dialogue journals, on the other hand, can help students to destroy or, at least, to reduce the existing difficulty in writing. When the students are given the freedom to write anything they want and are told that the teacher is going to respond to their journals individually, the atmosphere becomes less frightening. This will also lead to the writing activity with a sense of purpose and a sense of audience (Peyton, 1993). In addition, Burniske (1994) states that since the purpose of a dialogue journal is to supply students with a real audience and enhance their rhetorical awareness, the teacher would respond only to the content of the student's progress, not to grammatical and mechanical errors in the writing; instead, the teacher would lead by example, modeling grammatical and mechanical correctness in his/her own written responses.

The idea to carry out this study first struck when the researcher assessed the students' pieces of writing in English Education Department. In this exam, students were to write both narrative and descriptive texts. The researcher was startled to know that

some of the students were not competent enough in doing the writing test, especially dealing with a narrative text. These students got lower English writing scores than what they were expected to achieve.

All of these facts brought about an assumption that the teaching of writing at English Education Department needs improvement. To be more specific, it was essential that teachers, including the researcher, need to get introduced to a *new* technique in teaching writing and then apply the technique in the teaching and learning process. The word 'new' here does not necessarily mean that it is up to date or current. As long as the teachers never utilize the technique, it could also be categorized as 'new.' The technique that at last comes into the researcher's mind is dialog journals.

Hence, the research objectives of the research are to know the implementation of dialogue journals activity in teaching writing for the fifth semester students of English Education Department at UIN Antasari Banjarmasin. To know the students' achievement in essay writing course for the fifth semester students of English Education Department at UIN Antasari Banjarmasin.

Theoretically, the result of this research is expected to give some more additional theory related to the use of dialogue journals technique in teaching writing as viewed from the students' achievement in essay writing course. It can also change students' perception that not all writing activity is boring or threatening, so that they can improve their writing ability.

On the other hand, practically, the result of this research is precious in practical contribution to the lecturers, teachers, students, and future researchers. It is expected to provide the lecturers and teachers with new interesting teaching technique in improving students' competence in teaching and learning process. The students are expected to apply dialogue journals to improve their ability in writing competence. For future researcher, it is expected that this research can be a reference for those who want to conduct a research on the similar field but in different skills.

METHOD

This research is a descriptive qualitative research. Qualitative Research is primarily exploratory research. It is used to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations. It provides insights into the problem or helps to develop ideas or hypotheses for potential quantitative research. This research tries to explore the use of dialogue journals activity in teaching writing as viewed from the students' achievement in essay writing course for the fifth semester students of English Education Department at UIN Antasari Banjarmasin.

The population of this research is the fifth semester of English Education Department Students academic year 2014 who took Essay Writing Course which consists of four classes. The numbers of population are 135 students.

Considering the large number of students, the researcher applied simple random sampling to be involved in this study. The writer took 65 students from two classes (Class A and D) who involved in this research.

Research Instrument

In conducting this research, there are three instruments to be used as follows: First, writing test by asking the students to write the short essay, in this research, the lecturer asked the students to write various essays based on the syllabi. Second, Observation, by observing the students and the lecturer in applying dialogue journal activities and notebooks are used during the teaching and learning process of writing. Third,

Documentation of the students' final score when they have already finished the course at the end of the semester.

Data Analysis

All the collected and processed data are analyzed descriptively and qualitatively. Data analysis is a process by which data simplified into a form can be interpreted and read easily.

FINDINGS

This part deals with the result of the research based on some facts found in the data. It covers the use of dialogue journals activity in essay writing course as viewed from the students' achievement for the fifth semester students of English Education Department at UIN Antasari Banjarmasin.

1. The implementation of dialogue journals activity in essay writing course for the fifth semester students of English Education Department at UIN Antasari Banjarmasin.

This research is involving 65 students of the fifth semester students who took essay writing course. However, for the findings of the research, it was only focused on the two examples of students' essays in various forms to make the analysis clearer. The students' names are Asmariah and Nella Vicca.

Here is the sample of essay writing by Asmariah.

At The Museum

One day I was visited a museum in the country of south Kalimantan. There were 5 floors in the museum and the inside architecture reminded us of the imperial age. We could see the top of the building from the ground **floor**. People from different age groups and countries were closely observing the museum. Taking photo was prohibited; moreover I was sometimes allured to take some hidden snaps especially when I saw the colossal dinosaur fossil and alien ship!

The first floor of the museum had some art from famous artist of the world and sculptures from different era. The first floor gave us the impression of visiting a theatre or art gallery rather than museum. We came to know that some of the arts were so expensive that one can buy an island by selling it! Then we **moved** to the second floor which was full of Second World War memories. Guns, tanks and other materials from 1945 WW II had been arranged there. A video was showing some of the fighting scenes of WW II.

When we reached third floor, it's been already **2.5** hours. We found all the costumers and traditional things from different parts of the world have been placed here. One can easily learn about the customs of different ages and they were historically famous. I felt like see the first computer, speed boat, wheel, Motor Engine and many more famous **inventions** of history at this floor. In addition, I was so much dying to touch the first for **wheeler** that had been placed there. I had the whole museum as much as possible and spent almost the whole day. I was so enthralled to visit the place. Consequently, I forgot to have lunch. **To overall experience** was fantastic and I learned **so many** things in few hours. As soon I left the placed. I planned to revisit at home.

Here is the lecturer's response toward the essay writing by Asmariah.

Your Descriptive essay writing is very good because you describe the museum clearly so that the readers can imagine the museum looks like.

However, there are some mistakes in terms of grammar and subject verb agreement in writing and you have already checked and revised it. For the words in bold, were the correct ones of your writing that we have already discussed for revising.

Asmariah's Response

Thank you so much for your suggestion and correction, and sure I would revise it based on your notes and submitted to you as soon as I can.

Here is the sample of essay writing by Nella Vicca.

My Friend is Jamilah

Jamilah is one of my friends in A Class English 2014. She has short body, black skin, she is very quite I think, she is very rarely spoke when in front of class or join discussion with us in the classroom. She is very mediocre and not over powering in the class. But I was suprised when I saw her study result card. She always get A+ in all subjects.and I think no one knew in our class that fact, Including the fact she recived the scholarship in the form of money 2 millions rupiah. May be she has mysterious personality.

Here is the lecturer's response toward the essay writing by Nella Vicca.

Your Descriptive essay writing is too short and did not include the three components of essay (Introduction, Body, and Conclusion) and you also still had grammar mistakes in writing and you should revise it based on my notes and give more description about Jamilah in your writing as clear as possible.

Nella's Response

Thank you mom for your correction, I realized that my essay had many weaknesses and of course I will revise I based on the notes and give more explanation about the essay.

2. The students' achievement in essay writing course for the fifth semester students of English Education Department at UIN Antasari Banjarmasin.

The second research problem for this research is to know the students achievement in short essay writing course after applying dialogue journals activity in the teaching and learning process, and this is the results of students' final course, and the researcher have already categorized the students' score from the lowest to the highest one as follows:

NO	NAMA MAHASISWA	NIM	MID	TUGAS	FINAL	NA	BOBOT
1	MRS	1401240829	78.3	84	50	68.69	C+
2	SM	1201240764	62.5	60	73	65.95	C+
3	UM	1301240927	0	60	0	18	E

NO	NAMA MAHASISWA	NIM	MID	TUGAS	FINAL	NA	BOBOT
1	AA	1401240795	69.2	73.5	70	70.81	B
2	AM	1401240801	72.9	75	73	73.57	B
3	MR	1401240817	72.5	73	75	73.65	B
4	MM	1401240825	73.5	74	75	74.25	B

5	NPS	1401240770	73.7	76	70	72.91	B
6	PMC	1401241504	73.4	70	76	73.42	B
7	SH	1401240783	74.1	75	73	73.93	B

NO	NAMA MAHASISWA	NIM	MID	TUGAS	FINAL	NA	BOBOT
1	AM	1401240800	81.7	78	74	77.51	B+
2	AMR	1401240802	77.2	78	80	78.56	B+
3	AR	1401240804	78.7	81	74	77.51	B+
4	AB	1401240805	76.9	75	80	77.57	B+
5	AMH	1401240806	78.1	82	75	78.03	B+
6	ADR	1401240809	75.9	85	73	77.47	B+
7	DM	1401241502	76	82	78	78.6	B+
8	FH	1401240724	75.7	80.5	76.54	77.48	B+
9	FF	1401240810	75.5	76	77	76.25	B+
10	KNB	1401240812	78.1	76	81	78.63	B+
11	MNA	1401240750	78	77	80	78.5	B+
12	MHR	1401240822	76.5	82	77	78.35	B+
13	MLA	1401240835	76.2	75	82	78.16	B+
14	MNZ	1401240826	75.7	83	76	78.01	B+
15	MZA	1401240834	80.5	80	77	78.95	B+
16	RF	1401240835	73.7	79	74	75.41	B+
17	RS	1401240836	73.2	80	82	78.76	B+
18	SFI	1401241503	73.7	75	84	78.21	B+

NO	NAMA MAHASISWA	NIM	MID	TUGAS	FINAL	NA	BOBOT
1	ALD	1401240796	89.2	82.3	78	82.65	A
2	AMN	1401240712	83.2	85	82	83.26	A
3	AMH	1401240713	89	84	85	85.9	A
4	DA	1401240716	83	85	86	84.8	A
5	EP	1401240721	86.5	83	86	85.25	A
6	EZ	1401240723	87.5	82	84	84.45	A
7	HM	1401240812	76.7	83	82	80.71	A
8	HDI	1401240736	87	84	85	85.3	A
9	IA	1401240740	78.1	85	80	80.93	A
10	MAM	1401240819	86.9	78	80	81.47	A
11	MAH	1401240820	82	80	85	82.6	A
12	MR	1401240830	83	84	85	84.1	A
13	MN	1301240921	85.7	82	85	84.31	A
14	MMI	1401240756	79.2	81	85	82.06	A
15	NVA	1401240761	89	77	85	83.8	A
16	NI	1401240762	85.7	87.6	84.3	85.71	A

17	NM	1401240766	83.7	83	85	84.01	A
18	NH	1401240768	78.1	85	87	83.73	A
19	NHD	1401240769	89	82	84	84.9	A
20	OE	1401240774	85.5	81.2	84	83.61	A
21	PSA	1401241505	83	82	86	83.9	A
22	SDH	1401240782	86.9	82	85	84.67	A
23	SER	1401240784	83.5	81	84	82.95	A
24	SU	1401240788	86.5	80	87	84.75	A
25	SRI	1401240789	86.5	80.7	87	84.96	A
26	SYD	1401240837	89	82	86	85.7	A
27	WK	1401240838	87	85	88	86.8	A

NO	NAMA MAHASISWA	NIM	MID	TUGAS	FINAL	NA	BOBOT
1	END	1401240720	87.5	88.13	94.5	90.49	A+
2	FH	1401240726	87.8	92.8	93.4	91.54	A+
3	FDP	1401240730	93.2	90.76	87.8	90.31	A+
4	FRD	1401240811	89.2	88.6	92.7	90.42	A+
5	JM	1401240741	93.7	87.3	89.7	90.18	A+
6	MA	1401240751	86.5	93.8	94.6	91.93	A+
7	M	1401240753	87.5	91.4	94.3	91.39	A+
8	MDS	1401240754	88.1	91.5	90.5	90.08	A+
9	NRI	1401240760	88.7	94.55	88.54	90.39	A+
10	NH	1401240765	86.9	92	98	92.87	A+

Based on the tables above, it can be seen that the highest score (A+) is gotten by 10 students of short essay writing class, and there were 27 students who got A, and for B+ has successfully achieved by 18 students. For the rest, there were 7 students who got B and 2 students have C+, and 1 student are considered failed for this course because he did not attend the middle test and final test, so that the lecturer gave him E score.

DISCUSSION

The researcher analyzed the written texts of the dialogue journals using a scheme of language functions developed by Shuy (1993) for his study of dialogue journal interactions in an ESL teaching context:

1. Reporting personal facts
2. Reporting general facts
3. Reporting opinions
4. Requesting personal information
5. Requesting academic information
6. Requesting general information
7. Requesting opinions
8. Requesting clarification
9. Thanking
10. Evaluating
11. Predicting

12. Complaining
13. Apologizing
14. Giving directives

This is the finding of the research based on the theories of dialogue journals language function, as follows:

Reporting personal facts

Jamilah is one of my friends in A Class English 2014.

Reporting general facts

There were 5 floors in the museum and the inside architecture reminded us of the imperial age.

Reporting opinions

To overall experience was fantastic and I learned so many things in few hours.

Requesting personal information

Give more description about Jamilah in your writing as clear as possible.

Thanking

Thank you so much for your suggestion and correction

Evaluating

However, there are some mistakes in terms of grammar and subject verb agreement in writing and you have already checked and revised it.

Giving directives

For the red signs of the writing, were the correct ones of your writing that we have already discussed for revising.

Based on the explanation above, the researcher found 7 categories of language function of dialogue journal activities in writing, they are: (1) Reporting personal facts, (2) Reporting general facts, (3) Reporting opinions, (4) Requesting personal information, (5) Thanking, (6) Evaluating, (7) Giving directives.

As explained in the theoretical review, dialogue journal is a written conversation in which a student and teacher communicate on a regular basis. Students write as much as they choose and the teacher writes back responding to students' questions and comments, introducing new topics, or asking questions. The teacher is actively participating in the interchange; the lecturer also can be an evaluator who corrects or comments on the student's writing and in this case the lecturer gave the comments and suggestion for improving students' writing in short essay writing course.

Dialogue journals are beneficial for all types of students including all ages and levels because offering an interactive but individualized learning context, it also can improve concentration, generate better quality writing, and promote understanding. In addition, dialogue journals activity offer creative, safe and open outlets for articulation via the written word, offer students ways to express themselves and offer teachers ways to individually respond to each student's needs via modeling according to each learner's need (Sartor, 2011).

The previous study which conducted by Haynes-Mays et al (2011) demonstrated that daily dialogue journal writing is highly effective in improving African American fourth-grade students' writing skills. This improvement is based on the student's ability to reduce many of the AAVE features in their writings. Further, it is the direct and constant model of the teacher's response of Standard American English (SAE) in the

journal that proves to be very instrumental. These beneficial outcomes were obtained even though the experimental conditions were not significantly different on measure of instructional progress. In line with this research, the result of this study can give the benefit to the students to improve their writing and gave them high score in short essay writing class.

Dialogue journals not only open a new channel of communication, but they also provide another context for language and literacy development. Students have the opportunity to use English in a non-threatening atmosphere, in interaction with a proficient English speaker. Because the interaction is written, it allows students to use reading and writing in purposeful ways and provides a natural, comfortable bridge to other kinds of writing.

Dialogue journals are similar to personal journals. The exception is that they are written with the intent to be shared with a teacher or classmate. The person who receives the journal reads the entry and responds to it. These journals are interactive and take the form of a conversation (Tompkins, 2002). "Most importantly, dialogue journals are an authentic writing activity and provide the opportunity for real communication between students or between a student and the teacher" (Tompkins, 2003, p.235).

Dialogue journals are particularly successful in promoting the writing development of students learning English as a second language. Researchers have found that these students have the most success when they have the opportunity to choose their own topics and when their teachers contribute to the discussion by requesting a reply, statements or other comments (Peyton & Seyoum, 1989; Reyes, 1991). Staton (1993), states that learning to read and write for nonnative, as well as native speakers, can be a process much like the natural, practical process of oral language acquisition as it occurs between parents and children. Dialogue journals, as written conversations, resemble in many ways the types of interactions characteristic of first language acquisition. Reyes also found that students who are English Language Learners (ELL) were more successful in writing dialogue journal entries than in writing in response to books they have read.

Dialogue journals are especially advantageous since they provide an authentic writing experience while they help build a relationship between the teacher and student. Among the benefits of using dialogue journals in the classroom are that they often provide a positive writing experience for English Language Learners, they foster trusting relationships, guide instruction, and promote discussions about literature.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of dialogue journals activity in teaching writing for the fifth semester students of English Education Department at UIN Antasari Banjarmasin academic year 2016/2017 is considered as a place for students to communicate with their lecturer and allows for communication and in each informal entry, the students write to the teacher. After that, the teacher reads the entry and responds. The students write about a topic that is interesting to them in various types of essay based on Short Essay Writing course syllabi. Lecturer also can use dialogue journals to help determine which stage of invented spelling a student is in, in order to accommodate that student in classroom instruction.

The students' achievement in short essay writing course for the fifth semester students of English Education Department at UIN Antasari Banjarmasin academic year 2016/2017 are very good because most of the students got A score for short essay writing

course, it is a prove that the use of dialogue journals has positive effect on students' personal adjustment, development of awareness for audience, understanding of others, increased motivation for purposeful writing, improved skill in conversing, and overall growth as writers.

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