

Investigating EFL Learners' Challenges and Strategies in Writing A Text Through Process Approach

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the challenges faced by EFL students and the strategies they employ in writing hortatory exposition texts through the process approach. The background of this study stems from the complexity of writing as a productive skill, where EFL learners often struggle with generating ideas, selecting appropriate vocabulary, organizing sentence structures, and applying proper grammar and punctuation. Although the process approach is known to enhance writing skills effectively, research examining its implementation in Indonesian high school contexts remains limited, particularly regarding students' challenges and the strategies they apply. This research employed a qualitative method with a case study design, involving eight XI grade students from a senior high school in Karawang who had been taught how to write hortatory exposition texts using the process approach. Data were gathered through semi-structured written interviews conducted during each stage of the writing process: pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. The findings revealed that students encountered challenges in selecting suitable topics, developing main ideas, organizing paragraphs, and overcoming low self-confidence during the publication stage. To respond to these issues, students applied various strategies such as exploring digital platforms for topic selection, reading journal articles, creating writing outlines, requesting peer feedback, rereading drafts, and using online grammar checkers. These strategies helped the students complete their writing more confidently and systematically. The findings are expected to serve as a valuable reference for teachers and future researchers in developing more effective writing instruction.

Keywords: EFL Writing, Writing Challenges, Writing Strategies, Process Approach, Hortatory Exposition

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki tantangan yang dihadapi oleh siswa EFL dan strategi yang mereka gunakan dalam menulis teks eksposisi hortatori melalui pendekatan proses. Latar belakang penelitian ini bermula dari kompleksitas menulis sebagai keterampilan produktif, di mana pembelajar EFL sering kesulitan dalam menghasilkan ide, memilih kosakata yang tepat, menyusun struktur kalimat, dan menerapkan tata bahasa serta tanda baca yang tepat. Meskipun pendekatan proses diketahui dapat meningkatkan keterampilan menulis secara efektif, penelitian yang mengkaji implementasinya dalam konteks sekolah menengah atas di Indonesia masih terbatas, terutama terkait tantangan siswa dan strategi yang mereka terapkan. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus, yang melibatkan delapan siswa kelas XI dari sebuah sekolah menengah atas di Karawang yang telah diajarkan cara menulis teks eksposisi hortatori menggunakan pendekatan proses. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara tertulis semi-terstruktur yang dilakukan pada setiap tahap proses penulisan: pra-penulisan, penyusunan draf, revisi, penyuntingan, dan penerbitan. Temuan

penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa siswa menghadapi tantangan dalam memilih topik yang sesuai, mengembangkan gagasan utama, menyusun paragraf, dan mengatasi rasa percaya diri yang rendah selama tahap publikasi. Untuk mengatasi masalah ini, siswa menerapkan berbagai strategi seperti menjelajahi platform digital untuk pemilihan topik, membaca artikel jurnal, membuat kerangka tulisan, meminta umpan balik dari rekan sejawat, membaca ulang draf, dan menggunakan pemeriksa tata bahasa daring. Strategi-strategi ini membantu siswa menyelesaikan tulisan mereka dengan lebih percaya diri dan sistematis. Temuan ini diharapkan dapat menjadi referensi berharga bagi guru dan peneliti di masa mendatang dalam mengembangkan pembelajaran menulis yang lebih efektif.

Kata Kunci: Menulis EFL, Tantangan Menulis, Strategi Menulis, Pendekatan Proses, Eksposisi Hortatori

INTRODUCTION

EFL students specifically faced challenges in generating and expanding relevant ideas, structuring sentences effectively, choosing suitable vocabulary, and applying proper grammar and mechanics (Toba et al., 2019). Pasaribu et al. (2024) found that Indonesian EFL students experience 61.69% of the errors. Punctuation and capitalization errors accounted for 23.37% of the mistakes, while morphological errors made up 14.94%. The main factor contributing to these errors was interlingual interference, where the students' first language affected their English writing.

One approach that can be implemented in the writing process is the process approach (Setyawan et al., 2020). The process approach helps students develop their writing skills more effectively and explore their ideas as they go through the writing process (Keen, 2020). Implementing the process approach in teaching writing assists students' writing more flexible, enjoyable, and adaptable. Implementing the process approach in teaching writing makes students' writing more flexible, enjoyable, and adaptable. It is flexible because students can change and improve their ideas step by step without needing to be perfect from the start. Writing becomes more enjoyable because students get support from teachers and friends, and they can learn through each stage of writing. It is also adaptable because students learn how to adjust their writing for different topics, readers, and purposes. This helps them become more confident and effective writers (Abdullah et al., 2020).

Several studies have documented the implementation of the process approach in writing used by students. Gezmiş (2020) investigated the greatest challenge in the stages of the Process Writing Approach (PWA) for undergraduate students. Meanwhile, Huang & Zhang (2022) explored the effects of a process-genre writing intervention on L2 writers' perceived application of metacognitive strategies. In the other study, Albore et al. (2024) investigated the impact of a process-genre approach on second-year EFL students' utilization of writing strategies at university level.

Research studies on the process approach in writing have also been conducted in Indonesian contexts. Amalia et al. (2020) evaluated the effectiveness of the Process Approach in writing descriptive texts among senior high school students. Meanwhile, Dewi (2021) explored students' perceptions of implementing the Writing

Process Approach (WPA) in EFL writing classes. In the other study, Bisriyah (2022) investigated the challenges EFL (English as a Foreign Language) university students face in the essay writing process. Finally, Resmini et al. (2024) investigated the distinctive writing strategies used by first-year EFL students throughout the writing process.

Based on the aforementioned discussion, research studies discussing students' challenges and their strategies in writing through process approach in Indonesian high school contexts are still limited. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate EFL learners' challenges and their strategies in writing through the process approach. It also aims to examine how the students' strategies help them overcome their challenges in writing through process approach.

LITERATUR REVIEW

Process Approach in Writing

Teachers use the process approach in writing to help learners develop effective writing skills (Abed, 2024). Susser (1994) stated that process writing pedagogy is grounded in two key components: awareness and intervention. The first component emphasizes that the students are aware that writing is a process of discovery, where ideas are actively developed rather than merely transcribed. The second highlights the teacher's active role in supporting students throughout the writing stages, offering guidance and feedback to enhance the overall quality of their work (Susser, 1994). The process approach to writing involves iterative stages, such as drafting, reviewing, analyzing, and revising through which the writers can perfectly accomplish their written work (Nunan, 1991).

In this approach, the teacher acts as a guide or facilitator, primarily focusing on designing lessons to support students' writing development. Hayes (1996) further developed this approach by incorporating a concept known as working memory. This framework considers the writer's psychological and emotional aspects during the writing process. Additionally, it recognizes that writing is influenced by social factors. The process writing approach involves five key stages: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing (Graves, 1983; Johnson, 2008).

Students' Challenges in Writing

Writing is one of the most challenging skills in language learning, ESL/EFL learners often face various challenges in mastering it (Ali & Zayid, 2019). It is because this skill requires the ability to create and structure logical and cohesive discourse through structured processes (Yi, 2009). It also requires the writer to take various aspects into account, including grammar, content, paragraph structure, organization, and vocabulary (Rahayu, 2023). Challenge in writing act as a barrier that hinders the achievement of specific goals or objectives of the writing (Thao & Quyen, 2020). According to Flower & Hayes (1981), students may face challenges in writing, such as having limited vocabulary, weak writing skills, low motivation, an unsupportive environment, and difficulty choosing words or expressing ideas clearly.

Writing Strategies

The complexity of writing tasks often drives students to implement strategic approaches that support the development and clarity of their work. Sun & Wang (2020) found that students can complete their writing more easily if they recognize suitable strategies, making knowledge of writing strategies a crucial part of the writing process. Raoofi et al. (2017) highlighted that writing strategies help students to write better and more successfully. Language learning strategies play a vital role in students' writing skills as they serve as key components in developing writing abilities (Pongsukvajchakul, 2021).

Previous Studies On Students' Challenges And Strategies

There are several studies about students facing challenges and strategies during writing. Gezmiş (2020) conducted experimental study to determine which stage or stages of the Process Writing Approach (PWA) students find most challenging. The findings of this study reveal that drafting and revising are identified as the most challenging stages for undergraduate learners in PWA. However, despite these challenges, the study concludes that students can achieve effective writing through PWA, as they successfully produced academic essays.

The second is from Molyaty (2020) That conducted a study to observe how second-year high school students write narrative texts. According to the research, just 26.49 percent of students always utilized pre-writing methods, 26.4% used while-writing strategies, and 25.48% used post-writing strategies.

The third study is from Singh (2021) who conducted a descriptive survey method research to evaluate high school students' proficiency in English writing and explore the strategies they employ to enhance their writing skills. The findings of the study revealed that high school students demonstrated strong expressive writing skills in English. The survey indicated that 45% of participants identified themselves as having good writing abilities. Moreover, students showed a clear awareness of general writing strategies and applied these strategies more frequently during and after writing tasks rather than before them. The study also found that general strategies were commonly used, with 37% of students utilizing them the most, particularly during and after the writing process.

The fourth study is from Shuyi & Chunrong (2023) that conducted a research to examine the use of English writing strategies among senior high school students from a thinking capacity perspective. The findings reveal that senior high school students receive limited systematic and personalized training in English writing strategies. Most writing activities focus on exam preparation, with a lack of timely and tailored teaching plans.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs the qualitative approach to investigate students' challenges and strategies in writing a text through the process approach, as well as how the strategies they use in implementing the process approach help them

overcome their writing challenges. This is a case study research that enables the researcher to conduct an in-depth investigation even with a limited number of participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). In this research context, the case study design allows for a detailed understanding of students' experiences throughout the writing process, even with a limited number of participants. This research design also allows this study to reveal the students' challenges during writing using process approach and discover the strategies that they use to overcome their problem.

Research Site and Participant

The research was conducted at a senior high school in Karawang. The school was chosen as the research site because it had implemented the process approach in teaching hortatory exposition writing, aligning with the objectives of this study. Eight female students voluntarily participated in this research as participants when they filled out a consent form. The participants were selected purposively in order to provide accurate, reliable, and rich information in order to obtain thorough understanding to answer the research problems (Fraenkel et al., 2012; Singh, 2017). The students participating in this research had experience in writing a full hortatory exposition text.

Data Collection Technique

To collect data from the participant, this research employs written interviews about students' writing challenges they face, students' writing strategies they use in writing a text through process approach, and how the strategies help them. The written interviews were distributed to eight students-participants. The Written interviews were distributed to eight student-participants and conducted at each stage of writing using the process approach. This method enabled the researcher to observe how students expressed their thoughts, revised, and refined their answers in written form.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis involves organizing and interpreting data to uncover explicit and implicit meanings, underlying patterns, and representational structures within the collected information (Özden, 2024). The analysis may involve comparing individuals or groups experiencing the phenomenon to identify similarities or differences, explaining the underlying causes of these variations, and ultimately developing a theory grounded in the data (Flick, 2014). According to Miles & Huberman (1994), three simultaneous processes make up analysis: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusion.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

This section presents the research outcomes derived from addressing the two primary research questions: (1) What are the EFL students' challenges in writing text using process approach? and (2) What are the students' strategies and how do their

strategies help their writing through process approach? The findings are presented with evidence from written interviews.

Students' challenges in writing through process approach

The information was obtained from written interviews of EFL senior high school students in Karawang. The data reveal that students encountered several challenges that affected their performance at each stage of the writing process. Based on the written interviews, the researcher found that students had difficulty in writing through process approach. This difficulty hindered students in making progress at each stage of the process approach.

a. Pre-writing stage

Determining topics

During the pre-writing stage, many students struggle to choose topics that interest them and are appropriate for their intended readers. Because they were given several topic options, the students found it difficult to determine which ones were currently being discussed by the public.

"My biggest difficulty in choosing a topic is that I have to be able to choose a topic that relates to the readers because finding interesting topics is difficult" (EF).

Finding the correct keywords

Another challenge that happened in the pre-writing stage to the student is finding the correct keywords on the topic. One of the participants called AA said that she had a problem to find keywords on her topic. She also did not find the keywords that she expected.

"I have trouble finding keywords in my topic and when I want to put my ideas into words." (AA)

b. Drafting stage

Determining main idea

At the drafting stage, students often face challenges in finding the main idea to start a paragraph. According to Shelton et al. (2021), main idea is something that is important in a paragraph because this determines the next sentences.

"For me the most difficult thing is to find the main idea and assemble it into an interesting sentence because the main idea determines the direction of the writing." (DD)

Developing ideas

Developing main ideas sometimes take a long time. This is because to get attention from the readers, writers should put something interesting in the paragraph.

"Develop words with existing ideas, create interesting opening sentences. this is because existing ideas are quite difficult to develop words..." (DN)

Word choice

Word choice plays a key role in making writing engaging, but selecting the right words can be challenging when trying to clearly convey the message and purpose to the reader (Fu & Guan, 2020). In the drafting phase, students struggled to choose the right words to develop the ideas they had written.

"Making interesting sentences, and it is difficult to find references to fill in the paragraph. This is because it is difficult to find references in reliable journals." (NW)

c. Revising stage

Grammar skill issue

Grammar is an essential aspect of writing, especially in English, as it helps writers clearly convey their ideas (Fitrawati & Safitri, 2021). In the revision stage, two students make an effort to correct the grammar in their writing.

"I have difficulty in determining good and correct grammar because I am not proficient in determining grammar." (AZ)

Sentence construction

Another challenges by students while writing was adjusting their sentence structure. A good sentence structure will make the writing pleasant to read so that the message to be conveyed will be well received by the readers (Maamuu jav et al., 2021). In the revising stage, students have difficulty in improving, constructing, and adjusting their sentence.

"Sometimes my writing is not well organised because I'm not careful in composing at times." (DC)

Organizing paragraphs

Organizing paragraphs is essential, as each paragraph should connect clearly to ensure coherent writing (Karjono, 2020). In the revision stage, two participants have trouble in aligning paragraphs to create coherence by using clear and effective sentences.

"What's difficult for me is how to make the content between paragraphs harmonise while still using effective sentences..." (EF)

d. Editing stage

Punctuations and grammar

Students make punctuation and grammar errors that lead to unclear sentences. Therefore, they need to correct the punctuation to ensure the paragraph is clear and easy to read. Two participants had this problem in editing stage.

"Small mistakes, such as spelling or punctuation that sometimes feel right but are actually incorrect." (DD)

e. Publishing stage

Lack of self-confidence

Publication is done when the writing is ready and worth reading. This process is done after the writing is well modified and made as interesting as possible by the author. However, almost all participants have the same challenges at the publication stage. they lack confidence when publishing or submitting their writing.

"I'm worried that my writing won't be understood by the readers." (HP)

Students' strategies in writing through process approach

This section outlines the strategies students used to address the challenges they faced while writing a Hortatory Exposition text through the process approach. The findings show that students implemented a range of practical strategies across all stages of the writing process to overcome specific challenges.

a. Pre-writing stage

Choosing a topic and ideas through online platform

In the pre-writing stage, students sometimes have difficulty in determining the topic, generating ideas, or finding the correct keywords before starting to write. This difficulty become an obstacle for them to start writing. But they solve this by doing research through online platforms to see what topics are being discussed and also collecting ideas. All participants used this strategy to decide what topic they should write about.

"I usually choose topics that are familiar and I usually research from social media... with this strategy, it makes it easier for me to explore the topic I choose." (EF)

b. Drafting stage

Read the journal article as a reference

In drafting stage, collecting before starting to write can be done in various ways. One of the ways is reading journal articles. The purpose of reading journal articles is to get valid data considering that the text written by participants is hortatory exposition text. Reading journal articles also serves as a strategy to overcome challenges in idea development and word choice.

"By reading articles that support my ideas, this strategy helps me find sentences that fit well with the opening sentence." (DC)

Create a writing outline

Another strategy students use to overcome the challenge of determining idea during the drafting stage are creating an outline. With an outline, writers can easily create a flow of writing so that it can be one way to avoid writer's block (Ramzan & Hafeez, 2021).

"I usually create an outline first, then develop each point into explanatory sentences. with this strategy, I can enrich my insight in writing drafts and get ideas easily." (HP)

Utilizing online information as references

Some students use online information sources to overcome difficulties in word choice. Online information can be a great sources to get references of vocabulary for students. A lot of the latest information circulating on the internet that writer can very easily access.

"I look things up on Google as a reference for my writing so that I stay on topic. This method really helps me, as it allows me to continue writing the next part of my text more easily." (AZ)

c. Revising stage

Reread the writing

In the revision stage, the writer takes several steps to revise their writing before moving on to the next stage. One of the methods used is rereading the written text. This helps to modify or improve the sentences, paragraphs, and grammar as their challenges. Almost all participants used this method to revise their writing.

"I reread my writing carefully, and if it feels clear and well-structured, it becomes a more accurate piece of writing. This approach helps me avoid using inappropriate or unclear sentences." (NW)

Asking friends for feedback

Asking friends for feedback and guidance is another strategy used by participants in the revising stage. Two participants used this strategy to overcome their challenges in writing, such as grammar skill and sentence construction by asking their friends for feedback even guidance.

"I will ask a friend who is more skilled in grammar to correct the grammar in my writing. This strategy really helps me improve my writing." (AZ)

d. Editing stage

Using grammar checker online

In the editing stage, three participants used online grammar checkers to solved their challenge in punctuations and grammar. This feature is useful for them to check whether there are any errors in their writing, and it also provides good time efficiency.

"I use digital grammar checkers like Grammarly. This way, I can correct my grammar mistakes before publishing my writing." (HP)

Peer review

In the editing stage, students double-check before submitting their completed writing. one of the strategies used is asking their friends to check

if there are any mistakes in their writing especially in punctuations and grammar.

"I ask my friend to check my writing to see if there are any mistakes. This strategy is very helpful because my work is read and evaluated by someone who has a better understanding than I do." (NW)

Teacher also plays an important role in supporting students throughout the writing process. The teaching methods provided by teachers help students produce better-written work. Through effective communication between teachers and students, both the learning process and writing development can be carried out more successfully.

Discussion

Students encountered a range of challenges throughout the stages of writing a hortatory exposition text using the process approach. In the pre-writing stage, they struggled to determine suitable topics due to limited background knowledge and had difficulty identifying accurate keywords—issues also reported by Ashrafiany et al. (2021) and Palanisamy & Aziz (2021). During drafting, challenges included identifying main ideas (Mulyasin et al., 2023), developing coherent ideas (Tasya, 2022), and selecting appropriate vocabulary (Thuy et al., 2022). In the revising stage, grammar usage (Rahman et al., 2024), sentence construction (Masowa & Thetso, 2025), and paragraph organization (Saprina et al., 2020) posed difficulties for students. The editing stage revealed continued struggles with grammar and punctuation, consistent with findings by Tasya (2022) and Fitrawati & Safitri (2021). Finally, in the publication stage, a lack of self-confidence hindered students from submitting their work, as they doubted the clarity and quality of their writing, aligning with Adelita et al. (2023), who reported similar concerns among student writers.

During the writing process, students implemented various strategies across different stages to overcome their challenges. In the pre-writing stage, they used online platforms such as social media and search engines to select topics and gather ideas, which mirrors Novawan et al.'s (2020) findings. During drafting, they read journal articles to enrich their content and support their arguments, a strategy also noted in Zahra's (2024) study. Creating outlines was another effective strategy to organize thoughts and prevent writer's block, as supported by Ramzan & Hafeez (2021). The internet also played a significant role in accessing current topics and expanding idea generation, consistent with Nur et al. (2020). In the revising stage, rereading their own work helped improve organization and idea development, aligning with Farhanah et al. (2024), while seeking peer feedback allowed students to receive constructive input, similar to findings by Zahra (2024). During editing, participants used grammar checkers like Grammarly to identify errors, as found in Apriyani's (2022) research. Additionally, peer review was employed to refine their work before submission, echoing the strategy observed in Law & Baer's (2020) study.

CONCLUSION

The study was carried out to address two research questions. The first research question is what are students' challenges and strategies in writing text using process approach and the second research question is how do the strategies that the students use help their writing using process approach.

The data indicates that students encountered several challenges while writing a Hortatory Exposition text. The challenges consist of, lack of self-confidence, determining topics, word choice, sentence construction, determining point of view on the topic, determining a main idea, developing ideas, grammar skill issue, organizing paragraphs, punctuations, and finding the correct keywords. These various challenges highlight the complexity of writing a Hortatory Exposition text using process approach, particularly for Senior High School's students, although they have been taught about Hortatory Exposition text and the process approach.

In response to the challenges they faced, students used various strategies to overcome challenges in their writing. These strategies were applied at each stage of the process approach. During the pre-writing stage, students used strategies that helped them select appropriate topics and keywords. In the drafting stage, they employed strategies to assist in developing ideas and constructing sentences. Furthermore, in the revising stage, students used strategies to address the challenges they faced when reviewing their writing. Finally, in the editing stage, they used grammar checkers and sought feedback from peers before submitting their work.

The strategies they used helped them overcome challenges in writing a Hortatory Exposition using the process approach. The strategies they implemented at each stage of the process approach supported them in completing their writing effectively.

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