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# An Analysis of the Third Year Students' Difficulties in Writing Argumentative Essay at English Department of FKIP Bung Hatta University

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### A B S T R A C T

This research aimed to find out students' difficulties in writing an argumentative essay. The research used descriptive method; the population was the third year students of the English department, FKIP Bung Hatta University Padang. They were divided into four classes, A, B, C and D. Sample of this research was class B, and the size of the sample was 35 students. The writer used the cluster random sampling technique to get a representative sample. The research result showed that that is 21(60%) students have difficulties in writing an argumentative essay and the result of the writing test. Specifically, from data analysis of writing task showed that 21(60%) students had difficulties in organization of idea, 22(62.85%) students in grammar, 20 (57.14%) students vocabulary, 21 (60%) students in using transition signal, and 21(60%) students in mechanics.

## INTRODUCTION

Writing becomes one of the important skills to be mastered by students besides the other skill like speaking, reading, and listening. It helps the students express their ideas, thought, and opinions into written form. By expressing their ideas into written form, the students can improve their knowledge because they need to have a lot of ideas and information to be expressed. It also allows them to improve their critical thinking because they have to make their ideas and thought become visible and concrete. Writing is a means to tell others about our idea [1]. It means that we can express our idea is not only in the form of speaking but also in writing.

Based on the writer's short observation when she studied writing subjects, students had corrections in their writing exercises, especially in the aspect of writing. They had mistakes in grammar, choice of words, punctuation, spelling, organization of the idea, and using transition signals. It can be seen from the lecture's comment on their essay exercise. It is necessary to investigate scientifically whether they had difficulties in writing an essay or not, even though

the students knew writing a good essay. Writing an essay is more difficult than writing paragraphs because the writers need more information to write. Writing an essay is not more difficult than writing paragraphs [2]. The principles of organization are the same for both, so if the writers can write a good paragraph, of course, they can write a good essay.

There are many kinds of essays. One of them is argumentative essay. Argumentative essay is an essay about certain issue with logic reason [2]. The students may support their idea with solid reason and support their reason with solid evidence. In writing argumentative essay, our purpose is not only to convince our reader but also but to present a well-rounded, logical, and rational discussion of the topic and our reader can accept our opinion.

In writing an argumentative essay, the students should pay attention to some consideration in giving opinions or arguments. Several elements of writing should be taken into account for having good writing. They are content, form, grammar, vocabulary, language use, mechanics, coherence, and transitional words [3]. Contents deal with the substance of writing or the ideas expressed by the writer. Form deals with the organization of content. Grammar is an important thing when the writer wants to write something because it is the employment of the grammatical forms and synthetic patterns. Vocabulary deals with a total of words in a language. Language use deals with the form of language use in particular writing. Mechanics is the use of graphic conception of the language, spelling, and punctuation. Coherence deals with the ideas joined together by transition, repetition, modification, and logical order. Transition words deal with words that gives connection among ideas.

The purposes of this research were to describe the difficulties found by English Department students in organizing the idea, choosing appropriate words, grammar, using appropriate transition signal, and using mechanics. After finding the students' difficulties in writing an argumentative essay, the researcher hopes that this study has a contribution to lectures and students. The lectures can solve this problem with action, for example, giving more explanation about argumentative essays and use interesting explanations to their students.

## **METHOD**

This research used a descriptive method that had the purpose of describing the difficulties found by the students in writing an argumentative essay. Descriptive research involves collecting data to answer the question concerning the current status of the subject of the study [4]. The population was the third year students of the English Department of FKIP Bung Hatta University in the academic year 2010/2011. The total numbers of the population were 149 students, and the numbers of the sample were 37 students. The writer used the cluster random sampling technique to get the sample because the population is grouped into the same group or classes, and they are homogeneous. Cluster random sampling is a sampling technique in which the sample in the group and not individual is randomly selected, and all members of the selected group have similar characteristics [4].

The researcher used the writing essay test to collect the data. The test was used to identify students' difficulties in writing an argumentative essay. The students were asked to write an argumentative essay by choosing one of these topics provided. The time allocated was 90 minutes to do the test. To see the reliability of the test, the writer used the inter-rater technique. There were two assessors. And then, to calculate the correlation coefficient of the two scorers, it was used Pearson Product Moment formula [5] as follows:

$$r_{xy} = \frac{n \sum xy - (\sum x)(\sum y)}{\sqrt{\{n \sum x^2 - (\sum x)^2\} \{n \sum y^2 - (\sum y)^2\}}}$$

Where:  $r_{xy}$  = The coefficient correlation between x and y variables

n = The number of students who follow the test

x = The first scorer

y = The second scorer

The researcher used the degree of coefficient correlation based on Arikunto's idea (2006:75) :

0.81 - 1.00: Very high

0.61 – 0.80: High

0.41 – 0.60: Enough

0.21– 0.40: Low

0.0 – 0.20 : Very Low

After calculating, the result showed that that coefficient correlation of the test was 0.99. It means that the degree of coefficient correlation of the test was a very high correlation.

The procedures of gathering data by using the writing test are following;

1. The writer reads the students' writing one by one
2. The writer gave the check  $\surd$  to the kinds of difficulties found by students
3. The researcher identified whether the students have difficulties or not on these criteria:
  - Students have difficulty in the organization if they don't relate each of the paragraphs well; ideas didn't clearly state or disconnected and no good organization [6].
  - Students have difficulty in grammar if their grammar is not on the rules or don't use the appropriate tenses [7]
  - Students have difficulty in vocabulary if they don't use appropriate words, little knowledge of English vocabulary, and the words are not based on the grammatical function of the word [6].

After getting the data, the researcher used the following procedures:

1. The researcher checked the table that indicates the students' difficulties in each aspect of writing an argumentative essay.
2. The researcher listed the students' difficulties and counted the percentage of the students who have difficulties with each component of writing an argumentative essay by using the following formula from Arikunto [5].

$$P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100\%$$

Where P= Percentage

F= Frequency

N= Total Sample

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In general, from data analysis of writing tests, it was found 21 (60%) of students had difficulties in writing an argumentative essay. The instruments showed students had difficulties in writing an argumentative essay, especially in the organization, grammar, vocabulary, using transition signals and mechanics. The students' results were tabulated in table 2.

**Tables 2. Students Difficulties in Writing Argumentative Essay**

NO	Component	Number of Students	Percentage
1	Organization	21	60%
2	Grammar	22	63%
3	Vocabulary	20	57%
4	Transition Signal	21	60%
5	Mechanics	21	60%
	<b>Average</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>60%</b>

The researcher presented the result of the student's difficulties with details as follows:

### **Difficulties in Organization of Idea**

From the data analysis of the writing test, it was found that 21 (60%) of students had difficulties in the organization of idea. The researcher found students did not stay in one idea and some of them did not support their paragraph with concluding paragraph. They did not organize their idea clearly.

### **Difficulties in Grammar**

From the data analysis of the writing test, it was found that 22 (62.85%) of students had difficulties in grammar. The researcher found students had difficulties in grammar especially in rules of grammar and they did not use appropriate tenses. The students cannot write a simple present tense and passive voice correctly.

**Difficulties in Vocabulary**

From the data analysis of the writing test it was found that 20 (57.14%) of students had difficulties in vocabulary. The researcher found students had difficulties in vocabulary especially in the aspect of the function of words. They did not use appropriate words in showing their idea on argumentative essays.

**Difficulties in Using Transition Signals**

From the data analysis of the writing test it was found that 21 (60%) of students had difficulties in using transition signals. The researcher found the students had difficulties in the function of transition word especially in an alternative idea and opposite idea.

**Difficulties in Mechanics**

From the data analysis of the writing test it was found that 21 (60%) of students had difficulties in Mechanics. The researcher found the students had difficulties in mechanics especially in spelling, and punctuation.

**DISCUSSION**

The researcher found that there were some difficulties that students had in writing an argumentative essay such as Organization the idea, grammar, vocabulary, using transition signal and mechanics. They are described in detail below.

**Students' Difficulties in Organization of Idea**

Based on Heaton's [6] criteria, students had difficulty in the organization, if they don't relate each of the paragraphs well; ideas didn't clearly state or disconnected and no good organization. In writing test, researcher found many students did not organize the idea clearly and they did not support their essay with the concluding paragraph. Below are examples of students' difficulties in organizing the idea:

*Smoking is harmful for our health and for pregnant women. More and less we always find that term in cigarette pack, but should cigarette smoking be banned? For me smoking cigarette should be banned, because it give bad effect for our health. But some of people who consume the cigarette they will say cigarette smoking should not be banned. For me there some reason why cigarette smoking be banned, it will give bad effect for passive smokers. It is more dangerous to passive smokies than active smokers. Some of people who consume, they thing cigarette is for fun.*

From example above the researcher found students had difficulties in concluding paragraph because they could not conclude their essay. From example we can read there is not concluding paragraph in the essay.

**Students' Difficulties in Grammar**

From data analysis of writing test, the researcher found the writer found that students had difficulties in grammar. Based on Douglas' [7] students had difficulty in grammar if their grammar is not on the rules or don't use the appropriate tenses. The students had difficulties in simple present tense and passive voice. The difficulties were such as:

- a. Students' writing : Heart disease, bronchitis and lung cancer have all linked

- The right one : Heart disease, bronchitis and lung cancer have all been linked
- b. Students' writing : The lecture always give us many home work
- The right one : The lecture always gives us many home works

From example above, it is demonstrated that the students could not write simple present tense and passive voice in the right way. Example "a" showed that students wrote wrong passive voice and example "b" showed that students wrote wrong simple presents tense. So we can conclude that they still had difficulties in grammar because the students did not use the appropriate tenses.

### Students' Difficulties in Vocabulary

From data analysis of writing the researcher found that of students had difficulties in vocabulary. Based on Heaton's [6] students have difficulty in vocabulary if they don't use appropriate words, little knowledge of English vocabulary and the words are not based on the grammatical function of the word. The writer found students had difficulties in using verbs, and adjective. Below are examples of students' difficulties in vocabulary:

- a. Students' writing : We use our money for cigarette
- The right one : We spend our money for cigarette
- b. Students' writing : The good way for smoker is never consume the cigarette any more
- The right one : The best way for smoker is never consume the cigarette any more

From example above, it is demonstrated that the students did not put the words in appropriate function. In example "a" the students made "use our money" but the right one is "spend our money". In example "a and b" shown that students had difficulties in verbs and adjective. It means that students still had difficulties in vocabulary because they did not put the choice of word (vocabulary) in appropriate word.

### Students' Difficulties in Transition Signals.

From data analysis of writing task, the researcher found that students had difficulties in using transition signal. Students have difficulties in using transition signal if they don't use appropriate function of transition signal [8]. The writer found students had difficulties in function of transition words especially in alternative idea, and opposite idea. Below are examples of students' difficulties in using transition signal.

- a. Students' writing : Smoking is harmful for our health or for pregnant women
- The right one : Smoking is harmful for our health and for pregnant women
- b. Students' writing : Home work give us advantages. And the home work is helpful for us
- The right one : Home work gives us advantages. In addition, the home work is helpful for us

From example above it demonstrated that the students did not put the transition words based on their function. In example "b" the students use "and" as transition word for sentence connector

but the right one is “in addition”. It means that students still had difficulties in using transition words.

### Students’ Difficulties in Mechanics

From the data analysis of writing test, the researcher found that students had difficulties in mechanics. Based on Heaton’s [6] criteria students have difficulty in mechanic, if there is no mastery of convention and they cannot use the spelling and punctuation on the appropriate function. Below are examples of students’ difficulties in using transition signal:

- |                      |   |   |
|----------------------|---|---|
| a. Students’ writing | : | <u>in 2011</u> many people in the world consume cigarette   |
| The right one        | : | <u>In 2011</u> , many people in the world consume cigarette |
| b. Students’ writing | : | <u>cigarette</u> smoking is dangerous                       |
| The right one        | : | <u>Cigarette</u> smoking is dangerous                       |

From example above, it is demonstrated that the students did not use punctuation, spelling, and capitalization in appropriate function. In example “a and b” it is showed that they made wrong in punctuation and they made the wrong capitalization. It means that they still had difficulties in mechanics.

### CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the students still have difficulties in writing argumentative essay. They need to improve their ability in writing. They should pay attention to the components of writing argumentative essay such as organization idea, grammar, vocabulary, using transition signal and mechanics. They have to increase their practice in writing if they want to improve their ability in writing. Therefore lectures have strategies in explaining about how to write a good argumentative essay and give them more exercise in writing argumentative essay.

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