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by Iskandar Iskandar

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Pedagogical approaches to the teaching of ESL/EFL writing: a literature review

Iskandar

English Department, Universitas Faculty of Languages and Literature, Universitas Negeri Makassar, Makassar, Indonesia
e-mail: iskandar@unm.ac.id

Abstract

Since the dawn time of the teaching of ESL/EFL writing, teachers and researchers have established and developed pedagogical approaches for the purpose of meeting the needs of students. This paper highlights some prominent approaches to ESL/EFL writing that have taken place; starting from earlier approaches, such as form-dominated approach, writer-focused approach, content-based approach, and reader oriented approach, followed by collaborative approach, computer-assisted, and lastly social media approach as the state of the art. Advantages and weaknesses of each approach were elaborated. Polarization between process and product oriented of writing were also highlighted. This study contributes to the understanding of pedagogical approaches that teachers may apply based on their specific context and students' circumstances.

Keyword

Pedagogy; English as a Second Language (ESL); English as a Foreign Language (EFL); writing.

1 INTRODUCTION

Writing is considered the most difficult to teach compared to other skills because when we teach writing all other skills are also involved. For many decades of teaching ESL/EFL writing, there have been lots of attempts done by teachers and researchers to find out best approaches for teaching this skill. Each approach tries to eliminate factors that may hinder students in their writing processes. Commonly, there are two core circumstances often impeding students when they are dealing with writing. First, students tend to think in two different languages at the same time, so it is understandable when they use inappropriate translations from the first language. Second, they are aware of their weaknesses in the mechanics of writing, so they do the writing more slowly to avoid making mistakes. These two main concerns each approach has attempted to eliminate, and have offered the best possible way to teach ESL/EFL writing.

2 EARLY APPROACHES TO ESL/EFL WRITING

Historically, there have been four existing approaches prominent to the teaching of ESL/EFL writing, and have been simultaneously used by teachers and researchers. Each has its own advantages and weaknesses, and has invited teachers and researchers to extend, modify, develop, or adapt to certain extent to suit to particular contexts.

2.1 Form-Dominated Approach

Form-dominated approach is rooted in oral approach of Charles Fries, the proclaimer of audio-lingual method (Silva, 1990). This approach proposes that language is speech and learning take place through habit formation; therefore, writing is perceived as having subordinate function as oral habit reinforcement. Pincas (1982) extended this view that it is difficult for people to realize that the use of language is the manipulation of fixed patterns; which is learned through imitation. Pincas rejects what Erazmus (1960) believed that written exercises should take the form of free composition. Teaching writing; therefore, takes the form of sentence drills; such as fill-ins, substitutions, transformations, and completions. It is the task of the teachers to prepare the content of writing. The purpose of the exercises themselves is to reinforce the accurate application of grammatical rules.

Form-dominated approach also emphasizes rhetorical form, as in Kaplan's (1966) concept of contrastive rhetoric. Exercises are presented in the form of recognizing and using topic sentences, examples, and illustrations. This exercise focus on imitation of essay form, using writing from outline, paragraph completion, identification of topic sentence and supporting ideas, and reordering scrambled paragraphs. This theory of contrastive rhetoric put the assumption that each culture has its own way of presenting ideas; therefore, writing teachers should determine paragraph patterns typical of English and teach those patterns to students. Subsequently, students imitate the patterns and would be able to transfer these skills to acceptable academic writing. The second paragraph. The design of your study should be clear and consistent with the method.

2.2 Writer-Focused Approach

In the mid-70s, reaction against form-dominated approach came from teachers and researchers. Teachers and researchers started observing what actually students do when they are writing. This kind of attention headed to writer-focused approach, which was later widely known as process approach (Zamel, 1976). Various methods typical to this approach were discovered. 'Process', 'making meaning', and 'invention' replaced 'accuracy', and 'pattern'. Teachers are recommended not to present instruction in the use of topic sentences and outlines until students have begun to explore their own ideas (Zamel, 1983). At this level, language accuracy was downplayed. Teachers began to provide students with ample time to draft and revise their ideas. Related to this argument, McDonough (1985) argued that writing teachers should allow students to set their own writing tasks as to enhance their confidence in order that they can sufficiently use their English to adjust what they know about their chosen topic of writing.

Process approach is expected to provide positive and collaborative workshop atmosphere in which students can work through their writing process; given that they have sufficient time, and minimal intervention. To make this happen, the teachers are expected to help students develop practical strategies for starting, drafting, revising, and editing their writing (Mangelsdorf, 1992; Spack, 1984). Spack categorized 'starting' as finding ideas, focusing, and planning the structure of writing. In 'drafting', students are allowed to employ multiple drafts instead of one draft. 'Revising' is an act of adding, deleting, or modifying certain parts of the writing. 'Editing' is mainly concerned with word choice, sentence structure, and grammatical accuracy.

To some researchers and practitioners, process approach can create problems. Horowitz (1986a), for example, argued that writing about personal experience creates particular problems for some ESL/EFL learners who are not accustomed to write about themselves due to cultural influences. When they are obliged to do that, they would rather fabricate the experiences than talk about themselves. Furthermore, by emphasizing on multiple drafts, process approach is believed to be unable to assist the students prepare for the demands of academic essay writing with its strict regulations.

Tomlinson (1983) proposed an approach aimed at enhancing learners' exposure to authentic writing; dealing with problems learners may have with written discourses they are required to participate beyond English lessons. This approach was the combination between of 'writing to learn' and 'learning to write' aimed at lessening the limitations of form-dominated approach, and process approach. Tomlinson saw that the combination of exposure to real language, and the opportunity to apply it facilitate essential process of generalization. The teaching procedures were then the combination of modified teaching procedures of the two approaches. This enables the learners to communicate in writing from the very beginning of the lesson despite having to wait until they have learned to write.

Despites many debates, the nature of process approach is that the students are the center of attention (student centeredness). Students are engaged in the process of discovery, and expression of meaning without any restriction to particular contexts. They are responsible to identify, and address particular tasks, situations, and sociocultural settings in which they are involved.

2.3 Content-Based Approach

When Shih (1986) established a so-called content-based approach, process approach was then identified as a traditional approach. Content-based approach is believed to have more effects on the form of curriculum compared with the two previously described. Team-teaching, linked courses, topic-centered modules, sheltered instruction, and composition of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) are among teaching strategies that replace independent class.

Johnston (1985) argued that by giving students an area of knowledge, they would get involved and motivated because they are 'expert' in that area. They will focus on content rather practicing language structures. In addition, they will learn necessary vocabulary and grammar as they go along. Since they have an instant context for their use of English, language learning is believed to take place at a faster rate. Teachers should encourage students to narrow their subject to a smaller and smaller aspect of the topic, and remind the students to be aware of mushroom effect in which the tendency of subjects to become bigger and bigger when we are studying them.The procedure should be in a line with the method and design of the study.

2.4 Reader-Oriented Approach

Following content-based approach were English for Academic Purposes (EAP), and English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The concern of this approach is that it focuses on the expectation of academic readers (Horowitz, 1986b). Certain realities of ESL/EFL learners are reflected here. Horowitz asserts two reasons at this stage. First, unlike native learners, many ESL/EFL learners will find very little need to write in English, hence little need to write self-reflective or self-exploratory essay typical of process approach. Second, the role of self-reflection taught in process approach is to socialize the native learners into their own society that is nothing to do with ESL/EFL students. To certain extent, EAP or ESP is a form of criticism against process approach; that it does not adequately address some important issues in ESL/EFL writing. For example, it does not consider variations in writing process due to individual differences, writing tasks, and situations (Silva, 1990). In addition, there is an inquest whether prepares students for academic works.

According to Horowitz (1986a), process approach exaggerates the individual's existence and fails to consider the sociocultural context. EAP or ESP is supposed to involve a primary focus on academic discourse genres and the range of academic writing tasks for the purpose of helping students socialize themselves into academic context. Simply, from the orientation of EAP or ESP, writing is the production of prose that will be acceptable to academic situation. Learning to write is a part of socializing to an academic community. With this regard, Silva asserts that "the writer is pragmatic and oriented towards academic success and the reader is a seasoned member or the hosting academic community who has well-developed schemata for academic discourse and has stable views of what is appropriate" (1990, p. 22).

3 Collaborative Writing

The four approaches discussed in the previous section are still widely used by teachers. Each has its own characteristics. In form-dominated approach, the teachers assign topic. Process approach lets the students determine their own topic of writing. In content-based approach, topic is expanded from subject matter of either particular discipline, whereas in EAP or ESP the topic will refer to what other disciplines assign for students. However, as part of continual development in ESL/EFL pedagogy, teachers and researchers began to reconsider the strengths and weaknesses of those approaches. The central issue of the study is not only around the topics that students write about, but also the dichotomy of process. Wong-Kam et.al (1995), for instance, questioned the process approach to teaching writing. These researchers argued that educators need to look back at where they have been to expose why they teach writing, then reflect on the effectiveness of their practices in attaining our goals. Process approach, as they suggest, should be extended to writing on more personal

level. The power of the pen should be put back into the hands of the students, and reconsider whether the piece of writing that the students produce is worthy for readers.

Attempt to extend process approach also came from Koda (1993), in his study on American college students composing in Japanese. He suggested that vocabulary exercises should be incorporated in composition instruction to provide linguistic scaffolding. Similar to this, Fennick et.al (1993) suggested that teachers should teach writing for the real world. The emphasis is that the writers need to be able to adapt both text products and text production processes for specific purposes, and understand their roles in shaping communication and social relationship.

Later, Downing (1995) proposed a so-called 'demand writing'. Basically, demand writing is any required writing on an assigned topic completed in a fixed time period. It is exemplified that students engage in demand writing when answering essay test questions, writing persuasive letters, reporting on field trips, presenting finding from enquiry-based studies, and composing on personal narratives. In a demand-writing situation, the teachers provide the topic of writing, and students develop the 'piece' themselves. Teaching demand writing "fosters active learning, forces students to take direct responsibility for their academic performance and growth, and allow them to demonstrate what they know" (Downing, 1995, p.200).

Simultaneously, other researchers experimented collaborative writing as an alternative in teaching writing (e.g. Hillerbrand, 1994; Battersby, 1995). Both researchers see collaborative method can help students creatively produce informative, thoughtful, and analytical essay. The students work together as a team to produce writing within an organized framework that encourages them to use a wider range of time linkers, attitude words, contrast clauses, set phrases, and discourse markers. Storytelling, letter writing, and discursive composition are among practical enactments of this type of writing.

Collaborative writing is also reflected in summary writing (Greaney, 1997). Summary writing is an in-class activity that involves students in a collaborative exercise in which teachers play along with the students. A game of competition is introduced to stimulate students to try to use their linguistic and analytical abilities to communicate their thoughts for the purpose of creating, for instance, a one-sentence summary. If a student fails to achieve the goal, it is only a game. Additionally, the process of rewriting can take place many times because each draft is only one sentence long, so that the students can do revision two or three times within a class session. In this process, the study of paragraph as a discourse unit is managed by focusing on the sentence as the building block of a paragraph. It is easier to see what is wrong with one sentence than to see what is wrong with a group of sentences. Students should be guided to focus on the idea of completeness in smaller unit, and this process may later be applied in the development of a good paragraph. Sentence is best suited to writing an outline of an essay. Outlining exercises can be followed by summary exercises, and students can move back and forth between these units. As they write a paragraph, the students may summarize it, and vice versa.

4 Computer-Assisted Writing

Advances in technology and rapid pace of change in communication industry have pedagogical implication. Revolution in computer technology, for instance, affects the way teachers treat their students, including English language teachers. Wider use of information technology has generated Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) in ESL/EFL teaching, including writing. We have been informed that there are two waves in CALL implementation. The first one started in 1980s and early 1990s, which was related to using word processors and improvement in writing quality. The second one was the generation of computer-mediated communication (CMC) that appeared with the arrival of Internet or World Wide Web (Slattery & Kowalski, 1998).

Li (2000) who studied the influence of word processing on the writing of ESL students found that by engaging in computer, students paid more attention to higher order thinking activities while evaluating their written texts. Besides that, the students were able to revise significantly more at most levels on the computer. In addition, their computer-generated essays received higher scores in argumentation than the hand-written ones. Therefore, he recommended that educators should contemplate on the impact of computers on writing. Fox (1998) argued that the use of Internet in ESL classes displays great potentials. If we carefully take into account the students' needs and tailor an interactive and supportive environment that integrates Internet activities, such as email and web browsing into writing curriculum, the students will find English as an important part of their lives.

Another example of Internet utilization in ESL/EFL writing is the use of email application to help students in their writing class (Belisle, 1998). Belisle argued that writing teachers have an abundant work to do to help students improve their writing. Using email with its features like 'filtering' and ''stationery'' can be a big help to take away manual activities, such as organizing, filing, retrieving, and replying to a student's writing which is very time consuming. In 'filtering', messages can be automatically sorted, organized, and replied based on teacher-defined criteria. For example, if a teacher wants to track students' assignment, she or he simply sets up filtering criteria, and the software will automatically organize and sort all the incoming, or outgoing mail related to the assignment into the teacher-defined mailbox. The teacher can scroll up and down this mailbox that lists the name of all students who have completed the assignment. In addition, the filter will not only put the assignment into an assignment mailbox, but also can put a copy into the students' mailbox. In 'stationary', the teacher is allowed to create predesigned messages that can be used frequently without having to recreate them. These messages can work with the filter and be automatically sent back to the student as automated replies. A message can be automatically sent when a particular assignment is received from a student. This automated reply will let the student know that his/her assignment has successfully hit the teacher's mailbox.

Ho (2000), in collaboration with British Council, initiated the use of email exchange between elementary school students in Singapore and United Kingdom to develop students' writing. She found that through electronic exchange of

information, the students from both countries explored different writing tasks for various purposes and types of audiences. This strategy enhanced students' confidence, awareness, and understanding of both cultures. The study offered insights into how information technology can be used as a tool to develop students' language skills as well as their sense of awareness of intercultural concerns and being part of global community. This project also shifted teachers' traditional roles and responsibilities as the project developed.

5 Social Media Approach to ESL/EFL Writing

Educational system changes rapidly, and technology has invaded our life. Everyone uses mobile phones nowadays, including students. They interact one another using social media, such Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Telegram, WhatsApp, just to mention a few popular applications. It is not exaggerating if we say that they have become addicted to these applications. Some see this as a threat since these applications may distract students' learning. However, we cannot deny that we cannot stop them from these applications. Therefore, some teachers and researchers try to think how to make a compromise between these two enterprises: social media and learning.

Social media as the products of technology advancement have converted teaching approaches, including the teaching of writing. New forms and genres of writing emerge. Studies indicate that the use of social media has pedagogical prospective, such as mounting students' motivation in writing, and enhance students' writing development in classroom settings. Wil et.al (2019), for example, found from their study that students have positive acceptances and responses towards using social media in improving their skills in writing. Social media convey positive effects to promote enjoyment and facilitates the writing process where most of students use social media to learn English language, and believed that social media is the best platform to develop better writing skills in English.

Sun and Chang (2012) exemplified blogging as a tool for teaching writing. As a genre of informal writing, blogging can aid ESL/EFL learners bridging the gap between their mother tongue and academic English through interaction with peers and teachers. Furthermore, Sun and Chang asserted that blogging served as a forum for L2 writers to practice different forms of academic writing, to co-construct knowledge about academic writing, to reflect on language learning skills, and to establish a learning community through multiple methods of online social support. Zheng (2013) supported this study by examining how micro-blogging was used in classrooms to facilitate writing activities among diverse students. The result of the study showed that students increased their participation in the online writing activities over time. Students' participation in the online discussion also positively affected their writing test score, increased their language complexity, and generated deeper thinking and higher-level thinking skills when writing about what they had read. Furthermore, student interactions with teachers and peers became more dynamic and intensive through the blogging activity.

Research also suggested that Facebook is effective when used to teach writing. A study by Ismail et.al (2018) showed that there is a significant effect using Facebook Groups as a medium discussion on the students' ability in writing. Learning by using Facebook eliminates the burden on the students as they do everything by themselves without any worry and interference. The characteristics of Facebook, such as participation, openness, conversation, community, and connectedness (Mayfield, 2008) has made it gained popularity among people in which most of them are teenagers, and almost all teenagers have a Facebook account and spend most of their hours facebooking (Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008).

Facebook comments is a feature of Facebook that are commonly used to teach writing. The procedure can be several steps, such as pre-writing, drafting, revising, and editing (Ramadhani, 2018). In pre-writing, the students get idea for getting started. They explore ideas related to the assigned topic. In drafting, the students are jotting down ideas that they have got in the form of draft. In revision step, the students are asked to fix their draft before they submit on the Facebook group. After they submit on the Facebook group, the students have opportunity to give comments to their friends' writing. Each student can give comments to their friends before continuing to the last stage, editing. The students' editing form depends on their friends' comments.

Instagram was also found in the literature of teaching ESL/EFL writing. Rinda et.al (2017) studied students' perception on the strengths and challenges of the implementation of Instagram in the teaching of writing within an EFL classroom. They found that most students believed that the process of writing with different teaching strategies on Instagram helped them to construct writing, and raise awareness to check final writing. The above benefits were achieved with the help of social interaction nurtured by the students, knowledge of technology of the students, and teacher's role to administer and control the classroom activity. In addition, negative comments and exaggerated correction from peers force the students to read and to check more on their writing to avoid being commented negatively. The use of Instagram in teaching writing in EFL classroom is strongly recommended despites challenges that may occur.

Handayani, et.al (2018) assert that students get better writing ability after the implementation of Instagram in their writing classroom. Their study found that the correlation testing showed positive correlation. Students who got higher score in pretest also achieve higher score in posttest. Students who experienced lower score in the pre-test score also had lower score in the post-test. From the questionnaire distributed, the result shows that the students had positive response toward the implementation of the Instagram. The students perceive that Instagram is meaningful and fun to be implemented in class. However, the study suggests that feedback should be given offline to avoid negative responses from some students. The advantage of implementing Instagram was also shown in a study on Instagram as a flatform to develop students' writing ability (Shazali, Shamsudin, & Yunus, 2019). This study suggested that Instagram can be used a pedagogical tool to teach writing. The students are able to use various words to express their feelings and opinions. Through Instagram, students are able to learn different type of writing styles among users and they accordingly develop their own writing style.

The development of WhatsApp application added up the number of social media application utilized in teaching and learning, including writing. Aicha (2014) in her study on the impact of WhatsApp towards the achievement and attitudes of females students and compared with face to face learning in the classroom, found that there are differences in the achievements and attitudes of the experimental group that is based on WhatsApp mobile learning activities compared with the control group without WhatsApp mobile learning activities and receives only face-to-face learning in the classroom. Another study, BasmaIssa (2013) investigated the effect of WhatsApp journaling on improving writing vocabulary word choice and voice of EFL undergraduate Saudi students. BasmaIssa found that there is a significant difference between the overall writing scores of the pretest and posttest of the students who are journaling. In addition, examination of individual item scores reveals that there are statistically significant improvements in vocabulary word choice and voice as two critically important writing factors. The study can raise a positive social change by helping teachers understand the prospective benefits of WhatsApp electronic dialogue journaling to improve the vocabulary word choice and voice writing skills of their students.

6 Conclusion

When a new approach emerges, the existing approaches have been said to be traditional approaches, yet it does not mean they are not used or applied anymore. Most approaches discussed here are still used in ESL/EFL context simultaneously with other new emerging approaches. Which approach is to be used depend on the teacher's choice, students' condition, and types of text? For instance, when a teacher teaches business writing report, product-oriented or reader-oriented approach is considered suitable because the task will consist of a fixed layout, style, and organization. On the other hand, when students are assigned to make a narrative or argumentative essay, process approach may be best applicable. Process approach can assist students organize their thought and ideas in a systematic way which enables them to write fluently in foreign language, while product approach helps students realize the competence level required. Teachers then may apply collaborative approach to adapt these two writing orientations.

Technology advancement has shifted traditional teaching approaches especially traditional face-to-face classroom interaction. Today, most educational institutions have provided social media platform, such as Moodle, Kelase, and Learning Management System (LMS), to be used by teachers to accommodate preferred learning styles of millennial generation who are longing for the informality and relaxing atmosphere of teaching situation. Teachers nowadays can assign their classroom interaction with social media-based activities. This enables the students to have fun while learning. They can use social media to make comments on related topics, and share them with their friends. Additionally, social media can enhance collaborative learning, and can make learning more efficient, particularly in terms of managing their study, and finding new learning resources. But, one thing is certain; technology on its own cannot enable the students to learn. It is the teachers with innovative ideas that will always be the leading figure in the students' learning experience.

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