

New Students' Skills in Essay Writing on *Productive Written Language Skills* Course at English Education Study Program

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Abstract: This research is based on the need to measure the skills of new students in writing essays. This is needed to analyze teaching materials for the *Productive Written Language Skills* course. This study aims to analyze students' skills in writing essays. The research method used is a quantitative method with a quantitative descriptive research design. The sample of this research is the new semester 1 students of class A in the English Education Study Program, Faculty of Language and Arts, Academic Year 2022/2023, totaling 23 people. The instruments used to collect data were essay writing tests and interviews. After the data was collected, the researcher analyzed the test results using an assessment rubric and a table of value categories. Then, the researcher explained the data obtained from the interviews descriptively. After the data was collected, it was found that the students' ability in writing essays in the *Productive Written Language Skills* course was categorized into low with an average score of 65. Then, from the interviews, information was found that students did not understand and master writing skills. This is because students have not gone through writing courses before. Students think that they have not been able to present a thesis statement, have not mastered the concepts of unity, coherence, cohesion, and logical order in essay writing. In addition, students also have limited vocabulary to develop ideas or inspiration into an essay. In conclusion, the ability of new students to write essays in the *Productive Written Language Skills* course is still low.

Keywords: Writing skill, *Productive Written Language Skills*, Essay

Introduction

Writing skill is one of the skills that must be possessed and mastered by every student in the English Education Study Program, Faculty of Language and Arts, State University of Medan. One of the writing skills that must be possessed by these students is to write paragraphs and essays in English properly and correctly. The better the students' ability to write paragraphs and essays, the better their ability to write other forms of writing. In writing, there are two aspects that must be considered by the writer. First, the writing process, such as: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing (Fachrurrazy, 2011). Second, micro and macro skills in writing such as the ability to use the right choice of words, grammar, and writing mechanisms such as: the use of capital letters, spelling, and punctuation (Brown, 2007). By paying attention to the above aspects, writing activities will be easy and can help improve one's writing skills.

In addition to the aspects above, there are two elements that must be present in a paragraph and an essay. The two elements are unity and coherence. Oshima and Hogue (2006) state that unity is the unity of ideas in a paragraph, while coherence is the connection between one sentence and the next or one paragraph to another. So, a paragraph or essay can be said to be good if the paragraph or essay contains good elements of unity and coherence

In writing activities, there are several forms of writing that can be produced. Examples include paragraphs and essays. Paragraphs consist of several sentences that describe a topic (Hornby, 2010). Paragraph is also a unified sentence that develops a main idea. In a paragraph, there are 3 structures or arrangements that must be contained in it. The 3 paragraph structures are: the topic sentence, the supporting sentence, and the concluding sentence (Oshima and Hogue, 2007). So, a good paragraph is a paragraph in which there are 3 structures or the arrangement of these paragraphs. While the essay is a collection of several paragraphs that explain a particular subject or idea (Hornby, 2010). Good paragraphs and essays must have two elements, namely unity and coherence. Oshima and Hogue (2007) state that unity is the unity of ideas in a paragraph, while

coherence is the connection between one sentence and the next or one paragraph with another. So, a paragraph or essay can be said to be good if the paragraph or essay contains good elements of unity and coherence.

Along with the explanation above, there are several aspects that must be considered in writing paragraphs and essays. These aspects are: Content (topic development), Organization (paragraph arrangement), Vocabulary (use of vocabulary), Grammar (use of grammar), and Mechanics (writing mechanisms such as: use of capital letters, punctuation, and spelling) (Brown, 2007). By paying attention to these aspects, paragraphs and essays written will be good results.

As previously explained, the essay is one form of scientific writing that can be produced by the author. Basically, there are many forms of essays that can be written by the author, one of which is a scientific essay in the form of an argumentative. An argumentative essay is a scientific paper that contains arguments, explanations, proofs, or reasons. Generally, in an argumentative essay there is an objective review or information accompanied by examples, analogies, and causes (wikipedia.org), (Housden, 2008). Furthermore, the argumentative essay can also contain arguments about the pros (supporting ideas) and contra (contradictory ideas) on the issues or topics discussed.

Furthermore, there are several previous studies that are relevant to this study which can be used as a reference. Abbas and Herdi's research (2017) examined the application of unity and coherence. The results of this study indicate that the students' ability to apply these two elements is in the medium or medium category with an average value of 68.8. Fajri's research (2016) on the use of unity, coherence, and word usage in a paragraph. The results of this study indicate that students are not able to apply unity, coherence, and word usage well in a paragraph. Common errors that occur are influenced by the mother tongue and the difficulty in learning English. So, it can be concluded that the errors that occur are caused by the influence or factors of learning and acquiring a language. Research by Fahim and Rad (2012), which is about the relationship of students who have good thoughts on the ability to write paragraphs. The results of their research show that students who have good thinking greatly affect the ability to write paragraphs. So, the better a person's mindset towards writing, the better his writing ability will be. Research by Ahmed (2010), which is about Cohesion and Coherence in writing essays. From the results of this study, it can be seen that students have difficulties in writing opening paragraphs, topic sentences, and closing sentences or conclusions. This shows that, in writing a paragraph, it is necessary to pay attention to elements in a writing such as Cohesion and Coherence so that the resulting writing becomes a good writing.

Along with the statement above, the researcher is interested in conducting a study to analyze students' ability in writing essays. This study provides an overview of the ability of new students in writing essays which can then be used as material for analyzing teaching materials for the Productive Written Language Skills course.

Research Methodology

The research method used in this study is a quantitative method. Based on the method and background of this research, the appropriate research design is a quantitative descriptive research design. This is because the researcher calculates, processes, and analyzes the data collected quantitatively, namely the processed data in the form of numbers, and describes the data descriptively in the form of explanations in the form of statements. Furthermore, the stages of this research are as follows. First, the researcher prepared a writing test sheet and an interview guide as an instrument/tool to collect data. Second, students were asked to write an essay in English on the writing test sheet and answer questions in the interview session to support the data collected through the test. Third, the researcher provides an assessment and analysis of the results of the tests and interviews. Fourth, the researcher concludes the students' ability in writing essays.

This research was conducted at the English Education Study Program, Faculty of Languages and Arts, Medan State University. Furthermore, the participants in this study were new

semester 1 students in the English Education Study Program, Academic Year 2022/2023, totaling 23 people. Data was collected using research instruments such as: writing tests and interviews. In this study, students were asked to write an essay based on the instructions contained in the writing test sheet. Then, the researchers conducted interviews with students to support the data obtained from the test results. After the data was collected through the research instruments described above, the researchers assessed and analyzed student test results using an assessment rubric and score category table in scientific essay writing (Abbas, 2015). The assessment rubric covers all aspects of writing such as: Content, Organization, Vocabulary, Grammar, and Mechanics. Furthermore, the results of the interviews were explained and analyzed descriptively. Furthermore, the scoring rubric and score category table in scientific essay writing can be seen as follows.

Table 2.1 Rubric for writing essay

Aspects	Criteria
Content: Topic development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thorough development of topic - Relevant to topic but lacks detail - Inadequate development of topic - Does not show knowledge of topic
Organization: Paragraph organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Very good organization - Loosely organized but ideas stand out - Incoherent ideas and lacks logical sequencing - Does not follow generic structures correctly
Vocabulary: Word choice/diction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Employ accurate and effective choice of words/diction - Employ accurate diction, but not effective - Employ lacks accuracy of diction, but meaning not obscured - Errors in applying diction or word form, and meaning obscured
Grammar: Sentence Structure/ construction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use correct grammar (tenses, pronouns, subject-verb agreement, etc) - Several errors of tense, pronouns, subject-verb agreement, etc, but meaning not obscured - Major errors of tense, pronouns, subject-verb agreement, etc, and meaning obscured - No mastery of sentence construction and dominated by errors
Mechanics: Spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Very little errors of mechanics - Few errors of mechanics, but meaning not obscured - Many errors of mechanics, and meaning obscured - Dominated by errors of mechanics

Maximum score	= 40
Students' score	= $\frac{\text{Obtained score}}{\text{Score Maximum}} \times 100 = \text{Final Score}$
Example	= $\frac{40}{40} \times 100 = 100$

Table 2.2. Categories of Final Score

Range of Final Scores	Categories
86 – 100	Very Good
71 – 85	Good
56 – 70	Fair
10 – 55	Poor

Findings and Discussion

Based on the data collected through the writing test, it was found that the average score of the students was 65. This average score was categorized into scores with poor writing ability (fair). From these averages, it can be detailed that the scores obtained by students ranged from 60 to 80, but there were also those who scored below that, namely 40 to 55. Based on the category of test scores, the scores ranged from 71 to 80, categorized into good ability (good). Individually, it can be explained that there are 2 students who get 80 points, 2 people get 75. Then, there are 2 people get 71, and 4 people get 70. There are 8 people get 65, and 3 people get 60. The score of 55 was obtained by 1 person, and the score of 40 was obtained by 1 person. Furthermore, the details of the acquisition of this writing value can be seen in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1 Details of writing score achieved

No	Score	Category	Number of Students
1.	80	Good	2
2.	75	Good	2
3.	71	Good	2
4.	70	Fair	4
5.	65	Fair	8
6.	60	Fair	3
7.	55	Poor	1
8.	40	Poor	1
Total of Students			23

Based on the results of interviews with students, additional information was obtained that the overall ability of students in writing essays was still low. This is because students have not completed the Productive Written Language Skills course. Students' understanding of essay writing tips is still very limited so that it can make it difficult for them to write essays. In addition, students also do not understand how to develop ideas, organize ideas into paragraphs, use the right choice of words and grammar, and apply the right writing mechanism. Based on the results of the tests and interviews above, it can be stated that the overall ability of students in writing scientific essays is categorized into poor.

Along with the explanation above, and based on the findings of this study, it can be explained and discussed again that the good ability of students in writing scientific essays is influenced by the good ability of these students to apply theory or elements of writing such as Unity, Coherence, Cohesion, and Word Usage. This is in line with research conducted by Abbas and Herdi (2017), Fajri (2016), Crosthwaite (2011), and Ahmed (2010). Based on the results of their research, it was found that a person's good writing ability is influenced by the person's ability to apply writing elements such as Unity, Coherence, and so on as previously explained.

The writing ability of students in writing essays is still low, which can be seen in two things that become weaknesses or shortcomings of these students. First, less time to practice writing. Second, not all students understand and master essay writing tips well. Based on the results of this analysis, it is necessary to find or make some kind of effort to overcome the weaknesses or shortcomings of students in writing scientific essays.

Conclusion and Suggestion

Based on the findings and discussion in this study, it can be concluded that the overall ability of students in writing essays is still low. This is indicated by the average score of students,

which is 65. The test results are supported by the results of interviews in which the students stated that they were not able to write essays well because the students did not understand how to write the essays.

In line with the conclusions above, there are some suggestions that can be put forward as follows. First, students who are participants in this study are advised to often practice and master the tips for writing essays well, so that students' abilities in writing essays can be maintained or improved to be much better. Second, lecturers who teach the Productive Written Language Skills course are advised to provide more intense guidance and training to students, especially those whose scores are still far from the good category (71), so that the student's abilities can be improved even more. Third, further researchers who wish to conduct research related to essay writing skills can use the results of this study as a reference material and each theory used in this study can also be used as a reference for conducting further research with different research methods and designs.

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