

Students' Ability in Developing the Paragraphs of Argumentative Essay

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Abstract: *Writing is an important skill to be mastered by students especially at university since they are required to produce an academic paper. This article aimed to find out students' ability in developing the paragraphs of argumentative essay. The data were taken from the argumentative essays written by the third year students. Based on the analysis results, this study reveals that the students' ability in developing the paragraphs of argumentative essay is categorized as fair (62.5%). The most frequent problem the students had in developing the paragraphs of argumentative essay was related to the use of evidence. The students did not add sufficient sources to support their arguments. Then, most of the students did not have a thesis statement in their essay. This study concludes that students should improve their ability in developing the paragraphs of argumentative essay.*

Keywords: students' ability, developing paragraph, argumentative essay

1. Introduction

Writing is an essential skill to be mastered by students in order to gain success at schools and universities. It is crucial for students since writing leads the students to the academic success at schools. By developing the writing skill, students will gain benefit in writing their paper or essay assignments from a single paragraph and building multi-paragraphs essay.

However, many students find writing more difficult than other skills. As Meyers (2004) says, it is more difficult to learn writing both for native and non native speakers. It is because they have to demonstrate the mastery of all writing elements such as content, organization, purposes, vocabulary, and the proper mechanic. In line with Meyers, Stephen and Vygotsky (1986) also say that writing is more difficult to learn than others since it should cover the topic more clearly and in great detail. At this point, the students need to integrate all language elements in order to produce a good writing.

Considering about the difficulties of writing, English Department at STKIP PGRI Sumbar has made writing as a compulsory subject to be mastered by students. There are several series of writing courses provided in this department. They are: Paragraph Writing, Essay Writing, and Academic Writing, which cover the knowledge about how to write English texts from various types (start from paragraphs, essay, and papers). Among all of these essays, argumentative essay has become the most important task as they need to use it in exams and papers (Connor, 1987; Ferris, 1994; McCann, 1989; Anker, 2005; and Intraprawat, 2002).

However, writing argumentative essay is not an easy task for students. Argumentative writing is a complex activity in which the writer takes position on a controversial issue and gives reasons and supporting evidence to convince the reader to accept his or her position. Moreover, argumentative writing is difficult due to conflict between the

need for self-expression and the need to comply with a set of external constraints; in an attempt to meet with the external constraints, the writer tends to lose sight of what he wants to say. Thus, it is not easy for unskilled writers to write the essay which requires an integration of content, rhetorical pattern of argumentation, and critical thinking in the writer's part.

Based on the phenomena above, it seems that the students still have problems in producing an effective argumentative essay. This article attempts to find out the students' ability in developing the paragraphs of argumentative essay at English Department of STKIP PGRI Sumbar.

2. Related Theories

1) Argumentative Essay

Argumentative essay is a form of writing in which the writer argue for a certain idea and try to persuade readers to adopt the writer's point of view. Several experts say that an argumentative essay is a written text that makes the writer claim on an issue which there is a disagreement, provides clear evidence to support arguments or thesis, and summarizes and refutes evidence in opposition to the claim or thesis (Clouse, 2004; Oshima, 2004; and Soles, 2010). A writer writes an argumentative essay to convince readers about the writer's opinion and move the readers to accept her position on an issue, but that is often a very difficult challenge. The writer must prove the assertions or the theories on an argumentative essay through proper reasoning, inducting and making conclusion (Kies, 1995: 15). Moreover, Langan (2004: 326) states that the main purpose in writing an argumentative essay is to convince the readers that the writer's opinion on a controversial issue is correct.

In order to convince the readers, it is important to provide them with a clear main point and plenty of logical evidence to support the main point. The evidence point should link to the topic clearly and supports the main point that tries to get across to the readers. Hence, it can be concluded that the

purpose of argumentative essay is to convince readers about the writer's argument of a controversial topic by using some evidence or data in order to avoid readers' hesitancy about the topic discussed in the writer's essay. In short, argumentative essays present one side of an issue using evidence to convince the readers to draw the same conclusions as the writer.

The process of argumentative writing involves a number of activities, such as setting topics, generating ideas, organizing information, selecting appropriate supporting sentence and details and setting language and mechanics. Because of its complexity, writing argumentative essay becomes one of the most difficult skills to be mastered in both first and second language. This is in line with Oshima (1998) who also asserts that argumentative writing is not an easy task; it takes studies and practices to develop this essay. In writing argumentative essay, the writer must be able to structure and integrate information into cohesive and coherent paragraphs and texts. It is always possible to review and revise the writing product. The result is a production of a careful and organized thinking materialized on paper. It can be said that every process of learning how to write is an active and selective thinking process.

2) Developing the Paragraphs of Argumentative Essay

Similar to the other essay, argumentative essay also has three main parts: the introductory paragraph, body paragraphs, and concluding paragraph. As stated by Jordan (1990) and Ozagac (2004), an argumentative essay, has three essential parts.

The introductory paragraph functions to get the readers attention. It consists of general to specific statements and a thesis statement. Meyers (2004: 3) states that the introduction is the first paragraph of an essay which attracts the reader's interest; it makes the primary claim of the essay in a thesis statement and may introduce the ideas of the body paragraph. An introduction consists of two parts: a few general statements to attract readers' attention and a thesis statement to state the main idea of the essay. Then, the body paragraphs is the longest part of the essay which discuss the subtopics in details and explain the controlling idea in the thesis statement. The body paragraphs are composed by some paragraphs that support the thesis statement. Finally, the last paragraph of the essay is a concluding paragraph which gives the readers the conclusion or the summary of the essay and the writer's final comments. Wyrick (2005: 88) states that a good essay should not stop in the middle. It should have a satisfying conclusion, one that gives the readers a sense of completion on the subject. In other words, the concluding paragraph summarizes or restates the thesis and the supporting ideas of the essay. It reminds the readers of what the writer have said and should leave the readers with a clear understanding of what the essay is about. In a conclusion of the essay, the writer summarizes the main ideas or paraphrase thesis statement.

Writing argumentative essay generally has been divided into the several patterns of development (Langan, 2004: 163). In argumentative, the writer attempts to support a controversial point or defend a position on which there is a difference of opinion. The main purpose of this essay is to convince the

readers that the writer's opinion or view on the controversial issue is correct. Therefore, it is important for the writer to provide the readers with a clear main point and plenty of logical evidence to support her argument. The evidence used in an argumentative essay can be formed as facts, data, statistics, examples, observations, and so on. It functions to support the writer's claim about one topic in order to convince the readers that the argument is correct. At last, the writer should write argumentative essay in good sentences. Every sentence in argumentative essay should be written by using formal language. The sentences should be complete, accurate, and clear.

In conclusion, there are several steps done by the writer in order to write an essay. The steps explained previously need to be considered before writing an essay in order to make the essay well-organized and the message can deliver to the readers so that the purpose of the essay can be achieved.

3) Research Method

This study was a descriptive research since its purpose was to describe the students' ability in developing the paragraphs of argumentative essay. The data were taken from the essay written by the third year English Department students at STKIP PGRI Sumbar. 24 students were assigned to write an argumentative essay based on the topics given: Online Shopping, Gadget for Children and President Election. After collecting the data, the researcher analyzed and scored their writing by using the scoring rubric proposed by Karen (2007). There were five indicators and they are scored with the range from 1 to 4. Then, the score was classified into five categories, namely Excellent (18 – 20), Good (15 – 17), Adequate (12 – 14), Fair (6 – 11), and Poor (1 – 5).

3. Findings and Discussion

Based on the result of data analysis, it was found that the students' ability in developing argumentative essay at English Department of STKIP PGRI Sumbar is displayed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Students' Ability in Developing Argumentative Essay at English Department of STKIP PGRI Sumbar

No.	Students' Score	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	20 – 18	Excellent	0	0
2.	17 – 15	Good	0	0
3.	14 – 12	Adequate	6	25%
4.	11 – 6	Fair	15	62.5%
5.	5 – 1	Poor	3	12.5%
Total			24	100%
Average Score			8.96	

The table shows that the students' ability in developing the paragraphs of argumentative essay is generally categorized as Fair. The results of this study reveals that the students' writing score lies from the category of Adequate to Poor. In general, the average score of students' ability in developing the paragraphs of argumentative essay is 8.96. The minimum score is 5 while the maximum score is 14. Besides, the table shows that most of the students (15 of 24) got a score in the category of Fair. Then, 6 students got a score in the category of Adequate while three of them got a score between 1 to 5 which is categorized as Poor. The study also reveals that no

student got good and even excellent score in developing the paragraphs of argumentative essay. This results indicates that the students do not yet have sufficient abilities in developing the paragraphs of an effective argumentative essay.

Based on the result of this study, the students have low ability in developing the paragraphs of argumentative essay. It is shown by the result score of students' essay which is mostly in the category of fair. The finding of this study is supported by the results of several previous studies related to students' ability in writing argumentative essay. Those studies found that students still have low ability in developing and writing argumentative essay (Erma, 2008; Jumariati, 2009; Auliyatuz, 2018; Mubarak, et.al., 2013; and Anita, 2012). More specifically, Erma (2008) and Jumiarti (2009) found that university students still have low ability in writing argumentative essay because they lack of vocabulary and fail to represent the textual criteria into the essay. The finding of this research and other researches imply that writing argumentative essay is not an easy task even for university students. Although they have learned about how to write an argumentative text from high school, they still have problems in writing and developing an effective argumentative essay. These findings and findings from other research support the statement from Ferris (1994) and McCann (1989) who assert that writing an argumentative essay is not an easy task due to its nature as the most difficult type writing. This means that argumentative essay still becomes the most difficult writing although it has been learned for several times. It is nature that argumentative writing is complex since the writer has to take position on controversial issue and gives reasons and supporting evidence to convince the reader.

Having deeper analysis, the most common problem the students have in writing argumentative essay is that they do not get enough understanding about how to develop an effective argumentative essay. The result of data analysis found that in most cases, the students did not write a thesis statement in their essay while a thesis statement is an important part in writing an argumentative essay. Besides, they also lack of vocabulary and lack of using appropriate tenses. The results of this study conclude that students have low ability in developing argumentative essay because they have some problems in grammar especially related to the sentence patterns and word order.

These findings support the theories proposed by some experts. For example, Flower (1999) and Bereiter & Scardamalia (1987) state that argumentative writing is difficult because it involves a complex process. Integrating the content, rhetorical patterns of argumentation, and critical thinking is not easy for unskilled writers. Similarly, Connor (1987) asserts that writing argumentative essay is a complex cognitive process in which the readers' expectation, the writer's purpose, the rhetorical patterns and the contextual situation are engaged. In line with Connor, Galbraith and Rijlaarsdam (1999) also argue that argumentative writing is difficult even for expert writers due to conflict between the need for self-expression and the need to comply with a set of external constraints; in an attempt to meet with the external

constraints, the writer tends to lose sight of what he wants to say.

In conclusion, the findings of this research reveal that students still have low ability in developing argumentative essay because of several aspects that comes from the students themselves. However, it cannot be judged that this low ability occurs only because the faults in learning process. The experts state that it is the nature of argumentative essay as the most difficult writing. Actually the institution has made efforts to help students in writing argumentative essay. Hence, the students need to get more and more practice and guide from the teachers and lecturers in order to produce an effective argumentative essay.

4. Conclusions and Suggestions

This study reveals that students' ability in developing the paragraphs of argumentative essay is categorized as *Fair*. It is proved by the results of students' writing score displayed in the orevious section. Almost in all indicators of the paragraphs development of argumentative essay, the students could not include all elements of argumentative essay in their writing. The category of *fair* of the students' ability in developing the paragraphs of argumentative essay signals that the students have low ability in writing argumentative essay. In short, it can be asserted that the third year English students at STKIP PGRI Sumbar still have insufficient knowledge about the development of the paragraphs in arguentative essay. The implication of this research is that students should get more practice in writing an argumentative essay. They should improve their knowledge on how to develop the paragraphs of argumentative essay.

Moreover, the lecturers need to give more attention as well as lead and assist the students in developing the paragraphs of arguemntative essay. They should train students how to write good writing which includes all elements of argumentative essay. Besides, they should train students to read more references so that it will be easier for the students to develop their paragraphs with stronger and more interesting arguments to suport their thesis. Then, the lecturers should encourage the students to enrich their vocabulary knowledge.

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