



From Sentence to Short Paragraphs : Developing Writing Tasks for Beginner Learners

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Abstract This research explores strategies to support novice learners in developing their writing skills in the English Education Study Program at an Indonesian university, the Islamic Institut of Palangka Raya. Writing is often considered one of the most challenging aspects of language learning, requiring a combination of vocabulary knowledge, grammatical precision and structural coherence. The participants, five beginner learners, were selected using purposive sampling and underwent a writing task that progressed from sentence-level exercises to paragraph construction. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and direct observation, and analyzed thematically. Findings showed that challenges such as limited vocabulary, grammatical errors, and psychological barriers such as low self-confidence hindered students' progress. Effective strategies included guided sentence construction, collaborative writing exercises, and exposure to structured templates and quality reading materials. The participants reported improved confidence and skills through positive feedback and step-by-step writing tasks. The findings suggest that integrating motivating and structured learning methods can significantly improve writing ability among beginners, contributing to their academic and personal growth.

Keywords: novice, learners, writing, skills, structured, methods.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to (SRINIVAS RAO , 2017), writing is the most complex productive skill among the other four language skills. English language learners (ELLs) need to be able to convey their thoughts and ideas in written form, yet many face difficulties due to complex structures and vocabulary. In addition, the English spelling system that does not always match pronunciation is also a challenge, given that there is no one-to-one correspondence between spelling and pronunciation. Besides these technical aspects, coherence and paragraph organization are also very important in effective writing. This is because, in addition to technical aspects, the ability to organize ideas clearly and structurally also affects the quality of writing in English. (Klimova, 2013) explains that writing has a special role in language learning, because to master it, one needs to practice and understand other language skills, such as listening, reading, and speaking. In addition, writing also requires other skills, such as metacognitive ability, which allows individuals to reflect on their thought processes when writing. Thus, writing skills depend not only on language ability, but also on awareness and active management of the thinking process.

Writing, as explained by (Olimovna, 2023), has a very important role in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) because it not only strengthens vocabulary and grammar, but also the skills of thought planning, editing, and revision. This makes writing a well-rounded skill in the learning process. Therefore, developing good writing skills is essential for English learners to improve their ability to communicate effectively. According to Ms. (Chandra et al., 2018), writing aims to convey ideas, thoughts, and information in a clear and understandable way. Good writing skills are essential for students to achieve academic and professional success. Writing skills are needed to fulfill various educational and occupational demands, such as writing technical documents, research papers, and conveying accurate information. In addition, writing skills are also useful for finding jobs, creating reports and presentations, improving communication skills, and stimulating creativity and self-understanding. Therefore, developing effective writing skills is essential to support success in various aspects of life, both academic and professional careers.

Beginner learners often face multiple challenges in developing their writing skills, such as limited vocabulary, grammar issues, and difficulties with sentence structure. (Alkhamra et al., 2012) identified that beginners frequently make errors in basic grammar rules, such as subject-verb agreement, verb tenses, and article usage, which hinder the clarity of their writing. Similarly, (Misbah et al., 2017) highlighted that insufficient vocabulary limits students' ability to effectively convey their ideas, while (Nyang'au 2014) noted that spelling mistakes, such as confusing "freind" with "friend," can damage students' confidence and disrupt fluent reading. (Fareed et al., 2016) also observed that beginners struggle with basic grammar elements, including subject-predicate agreement, pronouns, prepositions, and sentence structure, leading to lower-quality writing.

In addition, many beginners experience difficulty in organizing and planning their ideas. (Hermawan et al., 2023) noted that students often have trouble structuring their paragraphs logically and connecting ideas cohesively. (De Smedt et al., 2018) emphasized that neglecting the planning phase can result in poorly structured writing. Moreover, a lack of exposure to quality reading materials exacerbates these challenges. (Dockrell & Arfé 2020) stressed the importance of exposure to well-written texts to understand different writing styles, while (Foster, 2015) pointed out that reading helps expand vocabulary and provides examples of effective sentence structures. Graham (2020) further supported this by suggesting that integrating reading and writing activities can accelerate literacy development.

Psychological factors, such as low motivation and lack of confidence, also contribute significantly to writing difficulties. (Lin et al., 2007) observed that many students feel unsure about their abilities and fear criticism, which can discourage them from engaging in writing tasks. (Gbollie & Keamu, 2017) emphasized that motivation is crucial to overcoming these challenges, and positive reinforcement, such as praise or rewards, can encourage students to continue improving their writing skills. Additionally, providing constructive feedback, including rubrics and writing samples (Hawthorne et al., 2017), as well as incorporating technology to support writing education (Graham, 2020), can enhance the learning experience. (Goctu, 2017) suggested that metacognitive strategies can help students become more independent in their writing, while combining cognitive and metacognitive approaches (Wischgoll, 2016) has been shown to improve writing quality. These factors collectively contribute to the various challenges faced by beginner learners in developing their writing skills.

The development of writing skills for beginner learners should follow a structured approach, allowing learners to progress from simple sentences to well-organized paragraphs. Gradual, step-by-step writing tasks can help learners build confidence in their writing abilities. As (Lewis & Brown, 2021) states, the ability to write well-organized paragraphs is crucial for academic success, as it enables students to present ideas clearly and logically. Additionally, (Skar et al., 2023) highlight that teaching students to set goals, plan their work, and monitor their progress can significantly improve their writing performance. These self-regulation strategies foster independence, empowering learners to take charge of their writing process and develop a positive attitude toward writing tasks.

Furthermore, writing development is influenced by motivation and exposure to reading. (Fareed et al., 2021) explains that limited access to reading materials and low motivation are key factors contributing to slow progress among beginner learners. Incorporating engaging reading activities can help motivate students, expand their vocabulary, generate ideas, and maintain motivation. This approach not only makes learning more enjoyable but also enhances writing skills. Therefore, the transition from sentences to paragraphs requires a combination of clear instructional steps, self-regulation strategies, and motivational support. Successfully integrating these elements will help learners develop essential writing skills and build the confidence needed for academic and personal growth.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach with the aim of exploring writing task strategies used to support the learning of writing among beginning students in the English Education Study Program at one university in Indonesia, the Islamic Institut of Palangka Raya. The research participants were 5 beginning students who were selected using purposive sampling method. This selection was made based on their experience in participating in writing task sessions from sentences to paragraphs.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the participants to explore their perceptions regarding their experiences, challenges, and strategies that they consider effective in learning to write, as well as through direct observation during writing sessions to understand their dynamics and interactions in doing writing tasks. Data collected from interviews and observation notes were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach, which includes the process of identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns or themes that emerge from the data. This process was carried out by coding the interview transcripts and observation notes to identify key themes relating to challenges and effective strategies in improving writing skills.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. **Challenges in Writing :** The main challenges faced by participants in writing activities include limited vocabulary and grammar, difficulties in building sentence structures, and psychological factors that inhibit their self-confidence. The following is an explanation:

- a) Limited Vocabulary and Grammar

Most participants experienced difficulties in conveying ideas with limited vocabulary and frequent grammatical errors. These errors included the use of incorrect tenses, inappropriate word choice, and errors in the use of subject-predicate. One participant revealed:

“I am often confused about choosing the right words, especially when I have to make long sentences. Sometimes, the grammar is also wrong.” (P1)

- b) Difficulty in Creating Coherent Sentence Structure

Participants revealed that despite having ideas, they had difficulty organizing and connecting the ideas into coherent and well-structured sentences. One participant said:

“I know the idea in my head, but it's very difficult to write it into an organized sentence.” (P2)

c) Lack of Confidence

Psychological factors also played an important role in inhibiting participants from trying to write. The fear of criticism and anxiety in the writing process made them hesitate to start the task. One participant stated:

“I often feel that my writing will be criticized, so I hesitate to start.” (P3)

2. **Strategies Applied:** The strategies used in the writing process showed a positive impact in helping participants overcome their barriers. Here are some of the strategies revealed in the interviews:

a) Guided Sentence Construction

This approach proved effective in helping participants understand basic grammar and how to construct correct sentences. One participant stated:

“The sentence completion exercise really helped me understand tenses and how to construct correct sentences.” (P4)

b) Collaborative Writing Exercise

Group activities create an environment that supports confidence and makes it easier for participants to share their ideas. One participant said:

“During group work, I am more confident because my friends also provide ideas.” (P5)

c) Use of Examples and Templates

Writing samples and templates served as guides that helped participants understand the structure of coherent writing. One participant commented:

“By looking at examples, I know how to write paragraphs with a clear flow.” (P2)

3. **The role of structured writing tasks:** Tasks that start from the sentence level to paragraph construction have a significant impact on participants' writing skills. This is supported by one of the participants' comments:

“It was difficult at first, but after practicing from sentences to paragraphs, I began to understand how to connect ideas.” (P4)

This finding supports Graham's (2020) view that a gradual approach to learning to write can improve students' confidence and skills.

4. **Psychological and Motivational Factors:** The results showed that fear of criticism and lack of motivation affected students' writing ability. However, their motivation

increased when they received positive feedback, such as praise and appreciation. One participant stated:

"When I get positive feedback, I feel more confident to write more. "(P3)

5. **Exposure to Reading Material:** Quality reading materials help students understand effective writing structures and expand their vocabulary. A participant mentioned:

"By reading sample texts, I know how to make coherent paragraphs. "(P2)

6. **Collaborative Learning:** Group work facilitates social interactions that support students to share ideas and reduce anxiety in writing. One of the participants expressed her experience:

"During group discussions, I often get new ideas that I hadn't thought of before. "(P5)

This view is in line with the research of De Smedt et al. (2018) that social interaction in learning can improve students' creativity and understanding.

7. **Implications for Teaching:** Based on these findings, a gradual and supportive approach can help beginning learners overcome barriers in writing. Recommended strategies include:

- a) Integration of collaborative tasks that allow students to support each other.
- b) Providing constructive and positive feedback.
- c) Provision of quality reading materials that can serve as writing references.
- d) Metacognitive approaches, such as self-evaluation and writing planning.

One participant made a relevant suggestion: *"If possible, more exercises that involve group work because that really helps. "(P1)*

The findings underscore the importance of a supportive and structured approach to writing instruction. Strategies such as group exercises, provision of examples, and utilization of a stepwise method had a positive influence on participants' confidence and writing skills. With consistent application of these strategies, it is expected that participants can overcome their barriers and develop more effective writing skills.

4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The study concludes that the main obstacles in developing beginners' writing skills are limited vocabulary, grammatical errors, and lack of confidence. Strategies such as gradual learning from sentences to paragraphs, collaborative work, and the use of quality reading materials were successful in helping participants overcome these barriers. The importance of

positive feedback in increasing motivation was also a key finding. To support the improvement of writing skills, it is recommended that teachers prioritize structured approaches involving group work, provision of writing samples, and integrated reading activities. Consistent implementation of these strategies can help novice learners master writing skills effectively.

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