

The Teaching and Learning of Academic Writing Involving Critical Thinking in Higher Education

Fahmy Imaniar^{1*}, Lies Amin Lestari², Ahmad Munir³

^{1,2,3} State University of Surabaya,

¹fahmyimaniar16070835008[at]mhs[dot]unesa[dot]ac[dot]id

*Corresponding Author

Abstract- Academic writing and critical thinking are two things which strongly deal with higher education context, especially for EFL students. Unfortunately, the process of the teaching and learning which deals with the two aforementioned things was rarely researched. Hence, this current study aimed at revealing the process of teaching and learning of academic writing which involves critical thinking in higher education level. It was carried out through qualitative approach with non-participatory observation and interview as the data collection techniques. The participants were the subject teacher as the one who taught academic writing and also the students in the academic writing class. The result shows that the process of teaching and learning of academic writing consisted of several phases united into a set prevailing for each type of academic writing. Furthermore, critical thinking is engaged within almost all phases with different way of its existence. This study is expected to open eyes towards what occurs in the field, rather than to only value and judge

General Terms- Writing; written composition; teaching and learning

Keywords- Academic writing; critical thinking; higher education

1. INTRODUCTION

To be able to write academically alters to be a weighty competence for students in higher education, not to mention in Indonesia. Along their study, they are tied up with tasks, assignments, and projects insisting them to be able to have the aforementioned ability. The tasks, assignments, and projects are different from what they once performed in high school since the approach of learning is also different. Higher education students are expected to deal with analytical approach in accomplishing the tasks, assignments, and projects they attend to, which comprises the ability to question, think, and present ideas in critical way (Ballard and Clanchy, 1984). They even have to write a thesis so that they are able to graduate (Saville-Troike, 2012; Evans et al., 2014).

Academic writing serves to be not only a competence, but also a course that provide students a milieu to develop their ability to write following the scholarly convention, especially for EFL students. All types of academic writing basically deal with the competence of answering questions as well as overcoming and resolving problems (Vallis, 2010). At the same time, in higher education context, it is served as a compulsory course that students need to take during their studies. A far-reaching challenge experienced by Indonesian higher students studying at English department in which they have to adapt with not only the way of thinking and writing but also the language that contributes to their thesis writing later on. Therefore, having academic writing as a competence and running it as a course are important variables for their studies.

To cope with academic writing, critical thinking performs as an inseparable required aspect that develops simultaneously as students develop their academic writing. A writer cannot leave critical thinking in the process of writing since they are inseparable (Indah, 2017). In the same line, students need critical thinking in order to be able to write academically (Aunurrahman et al., 2016). Academic writing is able to portray students' critical thinking, and at the same time academic writing calls upon critical thinking. Therefore, in developing their academic writing, students at the same time develop their critical thinking. The relation between thinking and writing is undeniable in this context.

Although some say critical thinking cannot be taught, but it actually can within the teaching of academic writing. It is hard to find and conduct any academic course which explicitly teach critical thinking. However, it does not mean that it cannot be taught at all. Critical thinking can be taught within certain courses in which it cannot be left such as academic writing. It supports what Paul and Elder (2002) say that critical thinking is a teachable skill. Although it is taught implicitly, but teachers and students are aware that critical thinking is involved and developed along the way they run the course of academic writing as well as develop their academic writing ability.

As it can be taught, teachers play an important role as the one who directly get to grips with the students' development of academic writing as well as critical thinking. As Asian culture is embedded in them, Indonesian teachers' teaching of academic writing is important to look at. The students are Asian as well as the

teachers. Therefore, the acts of the teachers in their teaching of academic writing automatically affect the students' development of academic writing and critical thinking. That associated connection is undeniable since the variables are actively involved within a contextual condition in the form of class dealing with academic writing.

Actually, there have been some studies dealing with academic writing and critical thinking but no one come down to see the process of the teaching and learning of academic writing which involves critical thinking. Most research that have been done so far focus on the result of the academic writing and critical thinking. It is hard to find any research that focus on the teaching and learning process of academic writing which involves critical thinking.

It is important to see how actually, in the real practical field of higher education, the teaching and learning of academic writing and how critical thinking is engaged within. Hence, this study revealed a pattern of the teaching and learning process of academic writing which involves critical thinking within.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Academic Writing

It is already clear that academic writing is different from job-related writing and creative writing or personal writing (Brown, 2004; Hinkel, 2014; Oshima and Hogue, 2007) since it is formal in which completeness and organization are important things to consider and it involves knowledge attainment and knowledge transformation. At the simplest point, academic writing refers to a branch of writing which requires the writer to write academically or in academic way. Brown (2004) states that academic writing copes with the expectation for students to fulfil the academic requirements by performing such writing. Meanwhile, Fulwiler (2002) states that the context including the community where a writer writes is the one determining the writing he produces as academic writing. It is true that the context makes a particular writing becomes academic, but other attributes within the writing itself contributes to shape it into an academic writing.

Academic writing basically is a genre of writing which students in college and university are compelled to do and master. There are some purposes of academic writing which make it different from other writings (Bailey, 2011). It can be used to report the research that the writer has done or to answer questions set up by the writer previously. A particular academic writing can also be used to discuss a particular topic as well as give the writer's personal view or to synthesize the research which have been existed previously. In the context of English Language Teaching, the term 'Academic Writing' signifies the language, features, vocabularies, and specific rules employed. For the students learning English as second or foreign language, they will feel different between carrying out English academic writing and academic writing in their

native language due to the difference in not only the words, but also the grammar as well as the way of organizing the ideas (Oshima and Hogue, 2007).

2.1.1 Academic Writing in Indonesia

In tertiary level, students are required to master English which follows the National Education Law (Depdiknas, 2001c, cited in Emilia, 2005). Many universities oblige their students to have good proficiency of English. In tertiary level or university context, academic writing becomes such a general and even required aspect that every student need to cope. As stated by Fulwiler (2002) that specific condition determines one's writing. At the same time, for English Department students, they have to write a research report in the form of thesis, the type of which belongs to academic writing in English as the main requirement of graduation. Therefore, academic writing plays a very important role for college students, especially English department students in every country, including Indonesia.

In Indonesia, English is taught as foreign language which means that they need to have an extra effort to write their final project of academic writing, which is in the form of thesis, due to the language used throughout the whole thesis. In addition to the language used, a thesis needs to successfully present an idea which is logically accepted, well-structured, and strongly reasoned that can give genuine contribution to the related field of knowledge (Evans et al, 2014:1). As a result, there is a solid importance for ELT practitioners in higher education context, including Indonesia, to concern on this specific area – EFL academic writing.

2.1.2 Types of Academic Writing

Exposition and argumentative writing are types of academic written text which are classified based on their characteristics and content. Despite the different terms and characteristics, expository writing and argumentative writing basically lie in the same domain and genre. Such type of writing does not only belong to academic writing genre (Brown, 2004, Oshima and Hogue, 2007; Kirsznier, 2015) but also analytical and expository writing as the first time it was put into a specific domain (Burrus and Reeves, 1992).

Typically, students are required to write essays in coping with academic writing program that they take or they go through which have particular structure consisting of introduction, main body or sometimes called body paragraph, and conclusion (Zemach and Rumisek, 2005; Kirsznier, 2015). Introduction is the beginning part of an academic writing which contain the topic and thesis statement while conclusion is the latest. It is important also to pay attention to the thesis statement construction as well as the unity and coherence of the whole writing. Between introduction and conclusion, the body of the essay is the one which takes the most words but it is nothing when it is not relevant to the introduction and conclusion.

In academic writing, exposition is a type of written text attending to informative writing (Kirsznier, 2015) but still

belongs to analytical writing as the most complex writing domain (Burrus and Reeves, 1992). It is a bit overlap between the disposition of exposition essay to informative writing or to analytical writing which enable readers' thinking. Despite the vagueness, it is possible for a writer to have specific and multiple purposes in his writing. For instance, when a writer writes a report about handicapped children bullying in his area. His general purpose might be to inform readers of the situation of those handicapped children, but it is also possible that the writer wants to analyze and evaluate the problem and persuade readers to think and instruct them to find a solution on how to solve them or to treat those children appropriately. There were multiple purposes in such kind of writing, yet still it belongs to academic writing. The variance of expository essay writing comprises exemplification, cause and effect, and comparison and contrast essays.

If expository writing is more informative, argumentative essay is more persuasive as it has more convincing elements. To convince others, a writer of argumentative essay needs to have strong evidence which requires him to do research and analysis before writing (Kirsznar, 2015). An important thing of argumentative writing is that the thesis statement needs to be debatable. In addition, all the ideas presented in argumentative writing must be logical and convincing.

2.2 Critical Thinking

It is actually difficult to find an exact definition of critical thinking. However, some experts dealing with the notion of critical thinking are the one who shaped it although few differences lightly appear. Those various definitions of critical thinking emerged since there have been various perspectives dealing with critical thinking which are also influenced by cultural background and some other variables.

At first, critical thinking is defined as a part of process achieving objective which turns out a plausible judgement related to what one has to believe and what he has to do (Ennis, 1985). As the one echoing critical thinking, Ennis emphasized on individual's perspective and actions which actually becomes what he called as 'reasonable reflective thinking'. This definition of critical thinking directs to both skills and disposition. Differ some years after Ennis' definition, Fisher (2001) emphasizes the same definition of critical thinking as Ennis, thinking for "deciding what to do or what to believe".

Unlike Ennis, Fisher, and Hunter; Atkinson (1997) defines critical thinking as a part of social practice that has origins in which cultures play an important and inseparable role to the behaviors of the thinkers. The involvement of culture here provides an area where critical thinking can be explored according to the background and perspective attached to the culture. The word social practice here opens up another dimension dealing with not only thinking or what is in mind, but also practice or actions.

Another expert, in addition, delineates critical thinking as a kind of task which is well-organized, in order to give

critical evaluation as well as to decide the truth value of some certain judgement or claim and give suggestion whether to accept, deny, or suspend it (Chaffee et al, 2002; Reichenbach, 2001). This definition has actually been very close to the involvement of critical thinking in particular pedagogical context in which pupils are required to be able to do aforementioned activity.

Different from the previous definitions, Brookfield (2007) defines critical thinking as skill of argument analysis including the abilities dealing with possible faulty assumptions. While the others see critical as process (Ennis, 1985), social practice (Atkinson, 1997), duty (Chaffee et al, 2002; Reichenbach, 2001); and argument analysis (Brookfield, 2007), Paul and Elder (2007) position the definition of critical thinking into a thinking which specifically aims at constructing a good judgement so that there will be suitable standards to do critical evaluation in order to decide a particular claim's value, significance or trustworthiness.

Despite of the different definitions of critical thinking (Ennis, 1985; Atkinson, 1997; Chaffee et al, 2002:364; Reichenbach, 2001; Brookfield, 2007; Paul and Elder, 2007), they all agree that critical thinking attends to personal point of view. McDonald (2013) moreover regards the process of critical thinking as a personal habit of mind involving a wide area of information, views, and assumptions before drawing conclusion. To support the conclusion, in critical thinking, certain argument is needed. The collaboration of critical thinking and agreement sometimes viewed the same as disagreement (Cottrell, 2005). Substantively, the argument needed in critical thinking performs as a means of pointing out rationales in strengthening a conclusion as well as to urge others to a certain point of view. In addition to argument, claims and reasons are the foundational elements of critical thinking that contributes one another to build a valuable judgment.

2.3 The Role of Critical Thinking in Academic Writing

In bringing into EFL context, another dimension of discussion about critical thinking opens, coping with a new variable called second language (L2) proficiency. Consciously or unconsciously, the language a L2 writer use to deliver ideas takes a role as an essential variable which possess his writing at the same time. In using the L2 in academic writing, students embed their accustomed way of thinking and writing which also cannot be separated from cultural context and background. As a result, the way L2 students think and write is diverse from L1 students.

One's culture influences his thinking, while his thinking possesses his writing (Ha, 2011). There exists a belief that Asian writers performs thinking differently from English writers in which Asians are L2 writers while Englishmen are L1 writers. Looking back to the analysis done by Ballard and Clanchy (1984) discussing how Asian students deal with the difficulties when they have to study abroad, Australia. It revealed that Asian students have different

purposes in relation to their approach in carrying out a particular writing.

3 METHODOLOGY

This study employed qualitative approach in order to explore the process of teaching and learning of academic writing which involved critical thinking. It was conducted in an academic writing class of English Department at one state university in Surabaya. There were two types of participants involved, the teacher teaching the academic writing class and the students taught by her. The teacher has been teaching academic writing for more than 2 years while the students were fourth semester students in which they had to take academic writing as a compulsory subject for their study.

The data were collected through non-participatory observation and interview by using field notes and interview guideline as the research instruments and camera recorder as the research tool. The observation was done in 12 meetings while the interview with the teacher was done after the observation. The data then were analyzed through interactive model of qualitative research. Furthermore, the results were presented points by points based on the phases occurring in the teaching and learning process dealing with academic class in the aforementioned setting.

4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Through the analysis of the data taken, it was revealed a set of phases that teachers did in teaching academic writing involving critical thinking. Such set of phases appeared in each different kind of essay writing – based on its pattern, that she taught encompassing exemplification essay, cause and effect essay, comparison and contrast essay, and argumentative essay. The teacher also elaborated the writing stages into the sets of phases she carried out. One type of essay academic writing took around 3 meetings and there was only one meeting in a week.

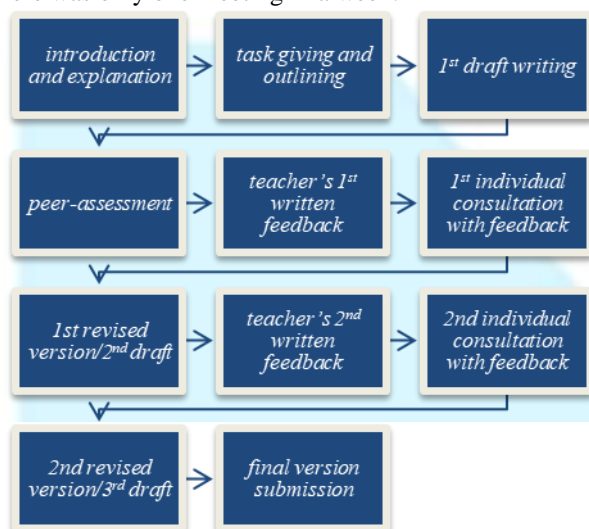


Figure 1 The Phases of Teaching and Learning of Academic Writing

In short, the set of phases comprised introduction and explanation which was continued by giving the task to write the first draft. After the students wrote their first draft, they did peer-assessment or peer-correction. The teacher gave her feedback and did individual consultation which then the students need to revise their work. After it was done, the teacher gave another feedback and individual consultation. Then, the students revised again their written composition to be submitted as the final version of their work. The following meeting would be accounted for another type of essay writing. It goes until the last type of essay writing, argumentative essay writing. In other word, one set for one type of essay writing. The following diagram illustrates all the patterned process in one single set. The details of each phase are given subsequently.

4.1 Introduction and explanation

At this phase, the teacher introduces they the type of essay writing that would be discussed and the students needed to carry out. She instructed them to read first their handbook in order to get the idea of the material. After that, the teacher and the students discussed it together.

In order to get the students better understanding of how to think about a topic dealing with the type of essay and to jot it down later on, the teacher stimulated them and brought them into a general phenomenon which can be told using they type of essay writing. After that, she explained the details using the examples of essay provided in the handbook and from some other sources sometimes. The explanation was not limited to the characteristics or organization of the essay, but also how to find a good topic and how to build the thesis statement which led to the development of the introduction and the whole essay plan.

As the very first phase, introduction and explanation of the type of essay was very important since they provided students with sufficient knowledge of writing. As a type of writing which different from creative or personal writing (Brown, 2004), knowing the characteristics of the essay writing type taught becomes an important thing. For example, exemplification essay writing is used in any kind of writing situation which aims at explaining and clarifying, adding interest, and or even persuading (Kirsner and Mandell, 2015). It has difference with the other kinds of academic writing. Without knowing the basic knowledge, the students will find it difficult to carry out the task of academic writing.

4.2 Task giving and outlining

At this stage, the teacher gave instructed them to find a topic for their first draft of the current essay. They had to not only find a good topic but also build an argument along with the reasons. Handbook, internet, and any kind of sources were allowed and suggested in order to help the students to do so. Mostly, the students wrote their ideas into a piece of paper, on their notebook, or on their laptop. In other words, they started making an outline. After that, the teacher asked the students one by one confirming their

topic as well as their argument and reasons. She gave questions which could reveal the depth and concord of the topic as well as their understanding. In addition, she also provided a brief suggestion both for the topics that she thought good and the other topics she thought need to be directed. For the topics which were not suitable, she asked the students to change their topic for a better one.

After having confirmation with all the students, the teacher instructed them to start writing their first draft. Furthermore, she asked them to find have peer-assessment. The partners were decided by the teacher who understands their initial competencies in order to get each of them benefitted from the peer-assessment activity. After all the students understood what to do, they could start writing their first draft.

Stimulation was important to bring the students into the thinking framework where they build, arrange, and develop their ideas. Once they got their ideas, they could put it into an outline, whether formal or informal outline (Kirzner and Mandell, 2015). Outlining helped students to keep their writing on track. Therefore, the purpose and the attributes of the composition they wrote would not be out of the track.

4.3 First draft writing

In writing their first draft, the students carried it out outside the class or the scheduled meeting since writing took a great deal of time. They took this task home and finished it some days before the due date since they needed to send it to their partner to be peer-assessed.

The teacher explained that the first draft required subsequent process in order to make it be better later. The students were given time to finish their writing outside the class since writing took a long time. Furthermore, the teacher allowed the students to explore by themselves in terms of sources and always reminded them to stay to the logic and keep on track based on the outline that they have shown to the teacher and given suggestion.

4.4 Peer-assessment

Peer-assessment was a stage that students have to go through before they sent their written composition to the teacher. Right after they finished writing their first draft, they sent their work to their given partner that, at the same time, they also needed to proofread and assess their partner's work. Since the written composition were typed in the form of Microsoft word, the reviewer could give track changes or comments on their partner's work which dealt with not only the language, but also the content and ideas. After giving it back to the original writer, the writer might decide to consider the comments and suggestions given by the reviewer partner or leave them. Afterwards, they send their first draft to the teacher through email to be later on given feedback.

According to Swales and Feak (2012), peer feedback or peer assessment is part to teach academic writing although it is rarely discussed. In fact, this phase of peer assessment played an important role for students both the reviewee and the reviewer. The obstacle was that the students'

competences are different which made some partners did not always have mutual symbolism in terms of their composition revision.

4.5 Teacher's 1st written feedback

Before the next meeting, the teacher had downloaded all the students' written works sent through email. She read them all one by one and gave written feedback on their work. She did not really come to the detail in giving written feedback because there were things she need to confirm to the students as the writers of the composition. Hence, individual consultation dealing with the feedback given was conducted in the next meeting.

This phase was very important as Hattie and Temperley (2007) stated that feedback is the most important part of learning although it is rarely implemented. In the teaching and learning of academic writing, feedback becomes an element which strongly contributes to the students' performances and development. Written feedback is one type of feedback (Ellis, 2009) that is suitable for this writing context. Written feedback focus on the detail of the writing so that the students know which parts that need to be revised.

4.6 First individual consultation with feedback

In the next meeting, the teacher conducted individual consultation and gave the feedback. So, she called the students one by one individually and spent about 10 minutes for each of them to have consultation. During the consultation, the teacher gave her view and feedback as well as suggestion based on the student's work. She mostly asked the things which were not clear and some other things that needed to be directed. At the same time, the student could clarify what was on their minds or their writing development plan.

Critical thinking was developed at this stage in which students were triggered by some questions given by the teacher. Furthermore, their exploration of critical thinking can be seen by the teacher as the one whom they have consultation with. Although the subject is writing, interaction is an important point which can affect the flow of the ideas of a writer.

4.7 First revised version/2nd draft

At this stage, the students revised their work based on the feedback that the teacher gave both the written one and the one that they got from the individual consultation. The result was the second draft which mostly different from the first draft despite the same topic. After finished revising their work, they submitted it again to the teacher via email. The teacher explained that through this phase, there was a high expectation that the writing would be much better than the first draft. The students explored their thinking in order to fix the things that did not contribute to the flow of ideas in their composition.

4.8 Teacher's 2nd written feedback

After the teacher got all the students works that had been sent through her email, she read their revised draft and gave another feedback when it was needed. For

exemplification essay as well as cause and effect essay, their second draft after the teacher's feedback had already appropriate that the teacher only gave some additional comments and correction which did not require too many revisions.

4.9 Second individual consultation with feedback

The second individual consultation confirming the second feedback given by the teacher was conducted in the subsequent meeting. The implementation was almost the same like the first one. Sometimes, the teacher gave general feedback for the class when the case or the point dealt with many of the class members' written works.

4.10 Second revised version/3rd draft

Right after getting the feedback and suggestion from the individual consultation, the students could start revising their work. They might revise their writing in the class or outside the class after the meeting dismissed. The deadline was usually 2-3 days after the meeting.

4.11 Final version submission

Just like the other draft, the final version, which was the one after the second revision, was submitted through email to the teacher. The final version resulted the final score obtained by each student. This phase covered also the scoring done by the teacher for the students' writing. Therefore, this final version in this phase could be considered as a source to see the students' overall performances and progress.

4.12 Discussion on the cycle of writing process during the teaching and learning process

The finding shows that the cycle of writing embedded in the process of teaching and learning of academic writing was in line with the writing cycle process proposed by Harmer (2012). The cycle of writing which consists of planning, drafting, editing, and final version; is not rigid that it might come back to the previous part when it is needed. It happened in the teaching and learning process of academic writing found in during this study which needed double revision or editing phase since it was needed. Moreover, critical thinking was involved in almost all the phases since the students would not make progress and not be able to carry out the writings tasks without its existence.

5 CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Seen from the process, the teaching and learning of academic writing which involved critical thinking in higher education context comprised a set of several phases. Respectively, the phases were introduction and explanation, task giving and outlining, first draft writing, peer-assessment, teacher's first written feedback, first individual consultation with feedback, first revised version/ second draft, teacher's second written feedback, second individual consultation with feedback, second revised version/third draft, and final version submission. The set of phases prevailed for each type of academic writing taught and learned in the class including exemplification essay, cause and effect essay, comparison

and contrast essay, and argumentative essay. In addition, the involvement of critical thinking was mostly available all the phases except the last one.

Based on the result of this study, it is expected that those, who so far focus with valuing students' writing, start to see the real process of teaching and learning of academic writing. For academic writing teachers, the phases found in this study can be a reference for their own teaching implementation. Furthermore, it contributes to the knowledge dealing with academic writing and critical thinking in English language teaching and EFL students at higher education context. Meanwhile, future researchers are suggested to follow up the result of this study by doing further exploration and investigate the effectiveness when academic writing is taught that way. Future researcher may also evaluate the students' written compositions which were resulted after the whole process of the teaching and learning. The description of the process is important, but it will be better if it has also evaluation.

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