

# Students' Writing through Project-Based Learning at EFL Classroom

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Abstract : This study was intended to explore how the implementation of project-based learning in EFL classrooms and to find out how students' perspectives on the implementation of the project-based learning Model. The subject of the study was a class, consisting of 45 students of the English Education Study Program at one university in North Maluku, who were studying paragraph writing. The qualitative method is used to understand, explain, and interpret data. Observation and interviews were used in collecting multiple data, namely documentation and interview data. The data analysis used content analysis. The result of this study indicates that the use of Project Based Learning can help students to develop their writing paragraph abilities. It can be observed from the students in determining the topic sentence and using references, provided examples, and facts in writing paragraphs. Further, in the concluding sentence, students conclude their elaboration of the entire paragraph from both the topic sentence and supporting sentences. In addition, it is noted that good perceptions of the implementation of the Project Based Learning model in learning paragraph writing are shown by students.

Keywords : *Paragraph, Writing, Teaching, Project Based Learning*

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## 1. Introduction

Learning during the pandemic is carried out online and offline. This has an impact on all learning planning which is usually done offline. However, the learning process must continue to be carried out by adjusting to the current situation and this has been done for three years. At the end of the third year and entering the fourth year of this pandemic, the learning process underwent a very significant change where the learning process was carried out simultaneously offline and online or referred to as hybrid learning. The online and offline learning process or known as hybrid learning has an impact on the writing learning process, starting from planning to learn to write, choosing writing learning methods, to the writing practice that is carried out.

This is a challenge for a writing instructor to design a learning model that can adapt to the existing situation. In addition, writing is a complex process, starting from determining the topic, collecting ideas, and compiling it to become a text, and at this stage students often experience problems.

This shows that the importance of the role of a writing instructor in learning to write is to be able to assist the students in finding and developing and compiling their ideas into a good text. The role of the writing instructor can be divided into three roles, namely the writing instructor as a facilitator, motivator, and evaluator. Therefore, the selection of suitable learning models to accommodate all online and offline writing learning needs can be carried out properly. Thus, this research focuses on the investigation of students' perspectives on the implementation of a project-based learning model in writing classes.

## 2. Literature Review

Hyland (2009) argues that writing is transferring ideas from one mind to another through language (see also Daud, 2016; Taslim et al 2022;). Those ideas can be understood by anyone with encoding and decoding skills. In addition, Graham, A. Macarthur, and Fitzgerald (2007) state that writing is a powerful tool to get things done. They also argue that writing allows us to communicate with others and maintain our relationships between family, friends, and colleagues. When a writer expresses his ideas through writing, a writer works to build a coherent context and enrich the prepositional meaning (Hyland, 2009). Graham, et al. (2007) Writing is a useful tool for students to write what they read and expand their knowledge on a particular topic. It means that writing makes ideas exist for others e to review and evaluate. Writing also serves as self-expression. Swedlow, (1999) asserts that people use writing to explore who they are. They can write down experiences or feelings of others that influence them to reduce depression (Swedlow, (1999) in Graham et al (2007).

Writing, basically not only writing spoken language into written form but also writing a systematic expression of ideas or thoughts of a person or group of people in written form that has accurate grammar, coherence between paragraphs without mechanical errors and shares with others (Alwasilah and Alwasilah, 2005). To have accurate grammar, and coherence between paragraphs without mechanical errors, Grabe and Kaplan (1996:6) argue that students need to be trained and trained to improve their writing skills. Both in school and out of school, continuous practice is needed until students become culturally inherited. Grabe and Kaplan (1996) argue that writing should be practiced and learned through experience. Writing skills do not come naturally but it comes from conscious effort and lots of practice (Zainurrahman, 2021:17).

The explanation above shows that there are many things to do when you are writing. Labosang & Samsia (2022: 41) stated that for example in writing you should do *"description, analysis, and explanation towards the data or information obtained through observation, interview, field research, which are arranged systematically, objective, and justifiable"*. They need to spend more time on the computer to search for resources, collect idea, organizes, and much more. On the other, students need to be motivated to do the writing. Sudirman (2022) stated using media in teaching writing is to help students to be motivated and it is becoming crucial today. Writing is treated as a process (Emilia, 2010). This writing process focuses on finding ideas, compiling, revising, and working collaboratively, as Grabe and Kaplan (1996) state that writing is a recursive process in which a writer continues to plan, write, revise, and refine. In line with this, Holst and Raimes (1987) in Hyland (2009:) argue that in writing in the classroom, students should be employed in a recursive process of planning, drafting, reviewing, evaluating, and revising. Furthermore, Emilia (2010) explains that pre-writing here means thinking about it and forming ideas into possible writing topics. Drafting here, students think about how to write a paper. Revise and edit here, students receive teacher or peer feedback. In the process of writing, Alwasilah and Alwasilah (2005) argue that various feedback and a supportive environment are suggested to be used.

In this case, a writing instructor who teaches writing subjects in an institution plays an important role to help the students. According to Emilia (2011), writing instructors should explain to students that their sentences in a paragraph can be rearranged (e.g. the first sentence can be placed in the second or third sentence in their paragraph). He believes that teaching students that writing does not directly result in a final draft without proofreading but that writing is a long process that requires several drafts before producing a final draft. This means that students are required to produce several drafts when they want to write a text.

Providing feedback in teaching writing in the classroom is based on the theoretical foundation of writing as a process. In the early 1980s the issue of writing as a product versus writing as a process in composition research was controversial (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996). According to Applebee (1981) in Grabe and Kaplan (1996), one approach to teaching writing is instruction.

Students are required to write very short drafts (texts) based on four majors; description, narration, exposition, and argumentation (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996). Drafts consist of four to five paragraphs. In the instructional approach, students are given a topic by a writing instructor that requires students to write one paragraph. Errors made by students will be corrected by the writing instructor. Regarding the approach to writing as a process, Grabe and Kaplan (1996) state that writing instructors and students are allowed to have more meaningful interactions and purposeful writing.

## **2.1 The role of the writing instructor as a writing instructor**

In providing feedback on student writing, Purnawarman (2011) argues that instructors who teach writing have at least four roles: the instructor acts as a "reader, guiding students to write, grammarian, and judger" (see also Keh, 1990, p. 301; and, Alwasilah C. and Alwasila, S. 2005).

First, the writing teacher acts as a reader to communicate with students. In this role, an instructor provides feedback on the content they get about the idea or content. Providing feedback helps students hone their writing skills (Purnawarman, 2011 & Keh, 1990). Grabe

and Kaplan (1996) also argue that an instructor in learning to write needs to support students to continue writing, and encourage students to feel confident and want to continue writing.

Second, as a guide, at this point, an instructor may focus on a particular student's text or confusing ideas. However, they maintain their position as readers by questioning parts of the text or illogical ideas in student drafts. The instructor's input can be considered for revising his ideas so that his writing ideas are clear, for example by providing examples if possible. In this role, an instructor in learning to write avoids corrective feedback. This gives the student the autonomous right to revise the written draft or not. In addition, a writing instructor plays an important role in helping students through their feedback (Sommer, 1982).

Third, the grammar teacher provides a written correction concerning the grammar rules and explains why some of the grammar is wrong. A writing instructor helps students to find out mistakes by providing corrections. In addition, Alwasilah C. and Alwasilah S. (2005) noted that an instructor in learning has a responsibility to provide correction and positive feedback to build students' confidence in writing. Finally, the writing teacher acts as an evaluator or assesses students' writing drafts (Purnawarman, 2011; Keh, 1990; & Sommer, 1982). They judge the quality of the writing. This role is usually found in the teaching and learning process when teachers write students' writing classes based on their evaluations. The same thing was also stated by Alwasilah C. and Alwasilah S (2005) that a good writing teacher has several characteristics, namely being a motivator, designer, interpreter, and evaluator.

### **3. Method**

This study was intended to investigate teaching paragraph writing through project-based learning and to find out how students' perspectives on the implementation of project-based learning. The subject of the study were forty-five students of English education at a university in North Maluku, who participated in the study. This study uses qualitative methods because this study explores phenomena in learning. Qualitative methods are used to understand, explain, and interpret data. This study uses observations (Anderson and Arsenault, 2015). Observation and interviews were used in collecting multiple data resources, namely observation notes and interview data (Aderson and Arsenault, 2005). The data were analyzed to find out the strengths of implementation the of project-based learning and students' perspectives on the implementation of project-based learning.

To analyze document data and student interviews in this study, five approaches were used to analyze data from interviews, namely: categorization of meaning, reduction, arrangement, interpretation of meaning through narration, and interpretation of meaning (Kvale, 1996) quoted in Emilia (2005).

### **4. Finding and Discussion**

Data were obtained from observation and interviews. Observations were conducted during the teaching and learning process. Students' and writing instructors' activities were noted. The interview was conducted with 30 students to get more information about the implementation of project-based learning.

#### **4.1 Observation**

The observation was conducted in this study to observe the teaching and learning process using project-based learning models in paragraph writing classrooms. The observation was

carried out to observe how the writing instructor implements project-based learning in teaching paragraph writing. The result of the research observation shows that the writing instructor used project-based learning in teaching paragraph writing. The learning process is carried out by following the steps of project-based learning. Therefore, the observation data are categorized according to the project-based learning syntax.

First, start with the big question, in this stage, the writing instructor assisted the students discuss the topic that will be written by providing questions to students at the beginning of the lesson. The students and writing instructor agree to have a project to write. They agree to write several topics as their project, such as "Nukila Park". On this topic, the writing instructor assisted students to write a descriptive paragraph. It can be seen from the observation note in the first meeting below: *"Lecturer and students are having an agreement to write a "Nukila Park" and it is their project. The students will work in groups"*.

Another topic is *"The Effect of Using Smartphone for Children"*. The writing instructor assisted the students to write in argumentative paragraphs. They focused on the introduction paragraph of the argumentative paragraph. It can be seen from the observation note in the third meeting below: *"Another topic you have to write is" the effect of Using Smartphone for Children"*.

Further, the writing instructor also provided assignments for individuals and groups. In the first syntax of the project-based learning model, the writing instructor starts learning paragraph writing by presenting a paragraph and asking the students to explore the idea in that paragraph to the topic sentence. The writing instructor said that "Please find out the topic sentence". Balqis answered or explained the questions given by the writing instructor regarding the topic sentence. Balqis said that *"the topic sentence is cooking dinner"*.

Several topics are displayed by the writing instructor to foster students' critical thinking and analysis skills. Firda *"topic sentence in the second sentence is "Married is when she is at least 30 years old"*. The topic given by the writing instructor will build students' abilities in connecting the events that occur around them with the topic discussed.

The second step of implementing Project Based Learning is to design a plan for the project. The results of this observation are following the second syntax of project-based learning which is designed as a plan for the project. In the first meeting, learning was carried out collaboratively by grouping students into 7 work groups. Observation note: *"Learning is carried out collaboratively by grouping students into 7 working groups... Each person in the group has their part in working on the project from the lecturer"*

Students work on the project following the directions that have been explained by the writing instructor. Everyone in the group has their part in working on projects from the writing instructor.

In doing their project, the writing instructor always assisted them in how to work in groups. Project work was carried out collaboratively between students and the writing instructor. The writing instructor assisted with individual and group assignments. First, "pay attention to the full stop and comma (.,) Punctuation for each quoted journal quote". Second, directions group tasks *"Your paragraph should be related to the given topic. The elaboration should focus on "smartphone for children"*.



Further, each group is directed to write paragraphs by making lists and mind mapping. The writing instructor said that *"organized your idea based on mind mapping format and write it in paragraph"*. Do list and mind mapping would like easier for students if they write a paragraph. After creating a list and mind mapping, students began to develop the topic into paragraphs according to their respective sections. Students will have the task to develop their ideas into an argumentative paragraph.

Students are asked to write an argumentative paragraph according to the topic. The writing instructor assisted students to determine a topic that will be written in the form of argumentative paragraphs. The writing instructor also given assisted each group member to correct the writing of their respective group.

The third step is to create the schedule, in this stage, the writing instructor and students set the project schedule to work on their project. Students are asked to identify the given topic and find information related to the topic. The project work is carried out in a group and the project must be completed according to the schedule that has been set out. It can be seen in the observation note: *"The lecturer assigned the students a topic. The topic is **"smartphone for children"**. The students work in groups related to the topic. The students were given time in the class to discuss the topic and organized their ideas in mapping and list format. They also should write the topic and get them done in two weeks"*.

In the fourth step, the writing instructor monitors the student's progress in doing their project. When the students got difficulties, the writing instructor assisted students how to work in a group to write their paragraphs. The given project can also develop communication skills between students and writing instructors.

The writing instructor monitor students and assisted them to write the topic *"**smartphone for children**"*. Students are asked to write two pages long and each page consists of 4 or more paragraphs. Paragraph writing focuses on the positive and negative impacts on children. The writing instructor present *"Using smart phone gives many impacts. It can be positive and negative"* The writing instructor also gave an example of writing a good paragraph.

The writing instructor provided reinforcement related to the task given. *"each paragraph consists of five to ten sentences"*. Writing instructors monitor the course of learning activities in the classroom. The writing instructor explained the main idea in the second topic sentence to make it easier for students to understand. Every activity carried out by students in the classroom is always monitored by the writing instructor.

In the fifth step, the outcome, writing instructors conduct assessments to measure the achievement of student learning outcomes. The assessment is carried out on the result of students' writing related to the topic given earlier. Further, to conducting assessments writing instructors also provide feedback on the results of student writing. Feedback is given by the writing instructor to students directly after the learning process in the paragraph writing classroom. Based on observation note can be seen below: *"The lecturer gave feedback on the given task. Feedback was given directly to the class and also using the computer. In the class, feedback was given through computer and LCD then the lecturer showed the students what should fix it"*.

At the beginning of the lesson, the writing instructor asked students to collect assignments related to the topics given at the previous meeting. The writing instructor provides feedback regarding the tasks given. The writing instructor asked each group to bring a laptop to the

following meeting. Furthermore, the writing instructor again gave feedback regarding the tasks that had been done. Feedback is given directly in the classroom so that it can be learned together.

Giving feedback is by displaying student assignments on LCD, the writing instructor immediately gives feedback on the displayed assignment. Giving feedback directly to two groups, the other group will be given feedback from the writing instructor outside the classroom.

The last step is the evaluation, in the last project-based learning model syntax is evaluated, and there are observation results. Before ending the learning process, the writing instructor teaches how to write the correct paragraph and how to quote references from journals easily.

Furthermore, students and writing instructors reflect on the material that has been displayed before. The writing instructor explained how to find a journal article quickly and easily. The writing instructor said that *"one paragraph is one idea"*. *"Another idea can be written in the next paragraphs as a supporting paragraph"*.

#### **4.2 Interview**

The interview was conducted based on the syntax project-based learning model from the start with the big question to evaluate the experience.

##### **a. Start with the big question**

In the research conducted, it was found that writing instructors started learning by asking questions to foster students' critical thinking skills. Providing questions will build the ability of students to connect the events that occur around them with the topic discussed during the learning process. Hamzah said that *"the lecturer to develop our critical thinking by posing questions related to the discussion topic"*. Teaching and learning paragraph writing started with choosing a topic and developing the topic to be a paragraph. Ana commented, *"The lecturer start lecturing by giving us instructions to choose the topic and develop the topic to be a paragraph"*.

The ability to develop ideas and analyze will be present when students are given questions by the writing instructor.

##### **b. Design a plan for the project**

In this syntax, writing instructors and students collaboratively design the project to be worked on. The writing instructor will organize students in groups to work on the project and write a paragraph. The provision of group projects will build cooperation between students so that they can convey their ideas. *"I choose to work on the group than individual ... there are many ideas that come from the member of the group"* (Ari).

Students are also asked to prepare media for writing such as computers, books, pens, and media to present the results of the written paragraph. Students are also asked to make a list and mind mapping before writing paragraphs to facilitate the process of preparing paragraphs. Thus, collaborative project planning will be formed so that students' communication skills will be increased.

Further, one of the students, Eko, stated that *"the project was given, it is related to the argumentative paragraph, writing a paragraph, arrange your ideas in a paragraph,..."*

*consists of the introduction paragraph, argument for and argument against*". This comment indicates that the writing instructor has given the task of writing argumentative paragraphs to students.

c. Create a schedule

The project processing time is determined in collaboration with students before the project is carried out. After the schedule is determined, students will identify the topic that has been given by the writing instructor to be done in paragraph form. *"The way I arrange the schedule in completing the project is depending on the schedule given by the lecturer"* (Ana).

d. Monitor the students and the progress of the project

During the project process, writing instructors always monitor student activities in the classroom. The writing instructor also teaches students how to work together in groups to facilitate the process of working on projects. Writing activities in the classroom are monitored by writing instructors. In this process, the writing instructor gives feedback using Word View and sent to the students again. Further, the lecturer also cross-checks group discussions in the class. Wawan said that *"The lecturer always checks it when in class he always monitors and asks what problems we have. Then when the lecturer is outside the classroom, we always ask about it, maybe we will meet at home or in the lecturer's room when we ask where the problem is"*. Furthermore, with the monitoring process carried out by the lecturer, it can improve students' communication skills. Project work carried out by students can develop analytical skills and build an attitude of sharing ideas between students. By writing paragraphs frequently, students' writing ability will increase. In addition, the ability to float ideas will be better because it has been done in class.

The writing instructor also assisted students to find sources of information related to the topic. Uli stated that *"Ya kalau sumber informasi paling kita sebagai mahasiswa kebanyakan mencari informasi di google artikel-atikel yang berkaitan dengan topic yang diberikan oleh dosen"*. the most information for students mostly searching on Google, such as articles related to the topic given by the writing instructor." It can be said that the source of information is not only through friends or writing instructors but other media can be used to find sources of information related to the topic provided by the writing instructor.

e. Assess the outcome

In the syntax related to assessing the outcome, writing instructors conduct an assessment to measure the achievement of student learning outcomes and provide feedback on the level of understanding that has been achieved by students. That was given to students to be able to correct existing writing errors so that the writing results will be better.

Further, Ari stated that *"at the end of the lesson, the writing instructor is always asked to the students to express what you don't understand, the writing instructor can give feedback again. This can decrease the obstacles in this writing course"*

Students are also asked to present the results of writings that have been made collaboratively to develop the ability to display project results. *"using media to display project results can improve my abilities"*(Hamzah). Based on these findings, it can be explained that providing feedback and using media in paragraph writing using project-based learning models can improve students' writing ability and the ability to display project results.



f. Evaluate the experience

At the end of the lesson, the writing instructor also gave a reflection about the material that has been studied to memorize student knowledge related to the topic that has been done. *"After working on the project, the lecturer usually also reflects on the results of the project we are working on"* (Ana). The reflection process is carried out to help students understand how to write paragraphs and how to cite the correct references. The process of material reflection is carried out in collaboration in the classroom.

One of the students, Wawan, stated that *"my experience join the project based learning model in paragraph writing has further improved my writing skills. Then I was more careful in working on the project given by the lecturer. Then when in a group we are required to work together and complete the project given"*. So at the end of learning, students are asked to express their feelings or obstacles faced during the paragraph writing learning process.

## 5. Conclusion

This study indicates that the use of project-based Learning can help students in writing paragraphs. It can be seen from the changes in writing developed by students. This is observed by the students in determining the topic sentence and using references, provided examples, and facts in writing supporting sentences. Further, in the concluding sentence, students conclude their elaboration of the entire paragraph from both the topic sentence and supporting sentences. In addition, it can be that good perceptions of the implementation of the Project Based Learning model in learning paragraph writing are shown by students.

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