

EFL student's difficulties toward IELTS writing task 2

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KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT Having assessed the IELTS writing class, the researchers found that the EFL students' IELTS writing task 2 was still below the standard. This problem shows that writing is still a complex skill faced by EFL students. This study aimed to analyze the problems and errors faced by EFL students in writing IELTS task 2. The instrument of this research was archival documents. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed with the total samples were 5 learners. The research focused on finding out the writing problems made by EFL students and finding out the most frequent problems and errors written by them. The problems were divided into some classifications namely: problem in word choice, punctuation, spelling, and language use involving grammatical area: error of verb, noun, pronoun, adjective, adverb, article, preposition, and conjunction. The finding showed that learners encountered some difficulties such as language use 72 (73%), punctuation 8 (8%), spelling 7(7%) and word choice (11%) From the fourth difficulty encountered by EFL Learners language use had the most portion in term of the error made by the learners.

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1. INTRODUCTION

English proficiency has played a significant role in almost all aspects of this globalization era. Not only for communication but English is also used as the main requirement for many purposes, such as applying for a job, international registration, and immigration (Mohammad & Hazarika, 2016). Different case is happening in Indonesia where English is still regarded as a foreign language, so that is why EFL students, especially Indonesian students mainly still act as low achievers in English language proficiency in active and passive aspects. It is especially the passive aspect of English language acquisition, most EFL students should struggle in doing writing tasks especially in writing.

In recent years, there is a growth in the need for recognized English assessment internationally. The test taker should gain a specific standard of band score by taking the official English test to measure and evaluate their English skill to acquire the English qualification. One of the English skills that one should be mastered is academic writing. It is important not only to master the English language but also to be successful in learning other disciplines where English is the medium of instruction. Bjork and Raisanen believe that the essence of writing lies in the fact that it is a thinking tool (Bjork & Raisanen, 1997). It is a tool for language development, for critical thinking and for learning in all disciplines.

The English language proficiency test is prominent in many countries, especially in non-native English speaker countries to measure English ability. The latest official English test is IELTS. IELTS stands for International English Language Test System and has been widely employed as the

language requirement. IELTS is one of the high level tests designed to assess the language proficiency of those who intend to pursue their academic study in native speaker countries. IELTS is divided into two types namely IELTS academic and IELTS general training. Every test taker should decide the types based on their purposes.

Each year, a number of individuals apply for higher education in English native speaker countries with English as the instruction. Globally, Universities both national and international, especially for postgraduate programs, rely on IELTS test results as the partial criteria for acceptance of students. The test taker should gain the high standard of band score for 4 component skills involving speaking, reading, listening and writing and emphasize the need to develop capability in using English. The four criteria specified for the IELTS Writing Band Scores were taken into consideration. The IELTS band result will reflect and evaluate the test takers' academic language ability to begin studying (Ar-iani & Arham, 2020).

Many test takers regard the writing skill test as a complex skill to learn and the most difficult parts of the IELTS test (Mohamed, 2020). In line with the statement, Marashi argued that the writing section on IELTS was commonly considered one of the most difficult parts of the test (Marashi, 2021). The test takers cannot even understand what to do with the tasks provided. They eventually wrote without knowing the expected direction. For that reason, IELTS test takers need to practice more their writing ability to comprehend how to construct the idea and paragraph in the essay.

IELTS Writing test consists of two tasks, they are writing task 1 and writing task 2. In writing part 1, testees must describe, summarise or explain the information in a graph, table, chart or diagram, while in writing task 2, they must write an essay in response to a point of view, argument or problem. In writing task 2, testees must bring in their thoughts, comments, and evaluation or answering a question (Silalahi, 2014). Therefore, writing task 2 seems more challenging because the test taker should gather the idea to construct a good essay.

The obstacles faced by IELTS learners probably can decrease their motivation to improve their writing skill. The problem in writing may occur in the aspect of the language use, or choice etc. Abe stated that there are many problems that testees face in writing such as problems in language use, word choice, punctuation and so on that make them unable not pass the test (Abe, 2008). These problems are familiarly faced by IELTS test takers. Moreover, Cheng had done research on teachers and students problems in writing lessons (Cheng, 2007). The students tend to be passive in the class because they do not feel confident enough to be a peer editor for their friend's essay and hardly revise the feedback from the teacher perfectly. In order to figure out many problems faced by EFL students in essay writing, worthy research has also been done. Cheng tried to answer the challenge by applying a new technique to help teachers assess students' essays with Computer Mediated Communication (CMC), so that the process of essay drafting became easier since the drafts were sent through email between teacher and students. It is shown that technology has helped teacher and students in terms of writing process, from drafting, giving feedback, revising, re-revising, until the final result of writing.

Thus, this paper is a modest attempt to find out about the problems and errors in writing IELTS task 2 written by Dandelion English students, a learning centre in Makassar, Indonesia. The students have been practicing writing task 2 for 2 months, however, there are still many problems and errors in their writing. For that reason, this research aims to find out what are the most frequent problems and errors faced by Dandelion English students.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Chen has conducted research regarding CMC to help both teacher and student in writing task 1 (Cheng, 2007). Task 1 prompt is always a type of diagram. It has to be written based on the information shown, describing the main features, trends or differences. It has to refer closely to the diagram and, where relevant, illustrate your main points with figures. It is not required to give any explanation for the data but have to describe only the information given in the task.

Similar research has been done by Abe (2008). He investigated the aspect of language Japanese ESL learners notice by comparing their writing with model essays. In addition, Cotton and Wilson in their research titled An Investigation of Examiner Rating of coherence and cohesion in the IELTS Academic writing task 2 (Cotton & Wilson, 2011), analyzed that whether examiners find the marking of coherence and cohesion (CC) in the IELTS academic writing task 2 more difficult than the marking criteria; what features of CC examiners are looking for marking Academic writing task. Moreover, this researcher investigated a range of dif-

ferent measures related to the three analytic scoring criteria that were identified. The common problems of participants are errors in structure such as pronoun, subject-verb agreement, part of speech, articles, countable and uncountable nouns, active voice and passive voice.

A corpus of Japanese adult learners academic writing Task 2 essays in an Intensive Writing Course were carefully examined to determine the main writing errors following the procedure for Error Analysis proposed by Corder (1967). The research adopted an analytical descriptive approach. The findings revealed that verb tense, article errors, spelling and subject verb agreement were the most common writing errors made by learners. With regards to cohesion, coherence and lexical resource, poor progression in paragraphs, parts of the essay being incomprehensible, vague topic sentences, poor use of transition signals and incorrect use of target lexical items were the most common categories of errors. According to the results it is revealed that male learners made more written errors in comparison to female learners. Based on the findings, recommendations and suggestions that are of significant importance to educators, EFL learners and policy makers are presented in detail.

On the other hand, the three researchers above did not investigate task 1 deeply about task 1, they just compared between task 1 and task 2, while the second researcher identified the coherence and cohesion in writing task 2 and the last researcher investigated scoring criteria of IELTS writing. The previous researchers did not investigate the problems of writing by the applicants which faced in IELTS writing and the reasons for making problems while the fact there are so many participants did error in IELTS writing task 1.

3. METHOD

3.1 Research Design

This research applied a descriptive qualitative approach. The task takes the source of data. The researchers used the design to collect the data by identifying the problem made in writing. In this setting, this research aims to comprehend students' difficulties in essay writing which occurred in natural events, i.e. teaching and learning process in the classroom. Therefore, the researcher administered open-ended questionnaire results in order to reveal students' problems in essay writing. Creswell asserts that the descriptive method of this study is considered relevant to gather information about the existing situation. The emphasis was describing rather than interpreting (Creswell, 1994).

3.2 Research Subject

The participants' data of this research were the IELTS class participants in Dandelion English Course in Makassar with a total of 5 students.

3.3 Research Instrument

Archival descriptives were used to find out the problems and errors made by Dandelion English students in IELTS writing task 2.

3.4 Data Analysis Technique

The procedure of collecting data have several steps, include; (1) Analyzed and identified some problems in the participant's writing, (2) Analyzed the Causes of making error in language use or grammar, (3) Analyzed the problems which is made by the participants, and (4) Categorizing the most frequent problems.

4. RESULT & DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

The data displayed in this research were obtained from the result of the participants' IELTS writing task 2. It has chosen five topics which are advantage and disadvantage, cause and effect, both views, agree and disagree and two parts. After analyzing the researchers, many problems appear for instance in word choice, punctuation, and spelling. It could be seen in the Table 1.

The table presented the errors made by the learners which categorized them into 4 categories such as word choice with total number of Language use 72 (73%) punctuation problems about 8 (8%), spelling with total problems 7 (7%) and word choice problems 11 (11%).

After analyzing the error in language use the researcher found out that error in part of speech verb has the major error 59 (57%) and then followed by noun 23 (22%) and then adjective 6 (6%) after that pronoun 5 (5%) while article adverb and conjunction has 2 (2%) and preposition has 1 (1%) (Tabel 2

4.2 Discussion

This section focuses on discussing the result of the finding that involved the difficulty of the learners when encountered with IELTS task 2. There are four difficulties

TABLE 1. The Problems Faced by EFL Students in Writing Task 2

No	Problems	Total problems	Percentage
1	Language use	72	73%
2	Punctuation	8	8%
3	Spelling	7	7%
4	Word choice	11%	11%
Total		98	100%

TABLE 2. The Problems Faced by EFL Students in Writing Task 2

No	Error in language use	Total error	Percentage
1	Noun	23	22%
2	Pronoun	5	5%
3	Adjective	6	6%
4	Verb	59%	58%
5	Article	2	2%
6	Adverb	2	2%
7	Preposition	1	1%
8	Coniunction	2	2%
Total		102	100%

that emerge in learners when they take IELTS writing task two, for instance, Language use, punctuation, spelling, word choice. 98 times the learners were making an error. Most of the students encountered the problem in language use which was about 72 (73%) while the least appeared in spelling 7 (7%) the second place was word choice and punctuation in the third place.

Language use becomes the major problem of learners. This major problem referred to the part of speech which was noun, pronoun, adjective, verb, adverb, preposition, and conjunction. Error in verbs has the highest position of error about 58 errors or 73%. It also found the error in using nouns about 23 or 22% the next was adjective and pronoun while article, adverb, and conjunction has the same portion of error and then for preposition it's got 1 error.

It has been stated by Ariyanti and Fitriana in their research that most of the students have poor quality essays (Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017). The situation showed the fact that writing was a complex skill to learn in the English language. The findings showed that learners had major difficulties in grammatical, cohesion and coherence terms. Moreover, minor aspects also had been revealed regarding learners writing, namely paragraph organization, dictions, and vocabulary misspelling. Compared to the finding that was found in this research, grammatical problems also became the major difficulty of the learners. The language use that was included in the speech gave a big impact on learners; 72 errors or 73%.

5. CONCLUSION

Referring to the difficulty toward EFL learners in IELTS writing task 2. The researcher found out there were four categories that influence in learner's difficulty. These categories were language use, punctuation, spelling, and word choice. Particularly in language use which was containing part of speech had the highest portion of the error. To sum up, many learners encounter difficulty when they take IELTS particularly in writing task 2 due to the difficulty faced by learners. The researcher offered some suggestions to deal with language use. Learners should concern about a verb in the sentence. They should study more about how to use the verb in English. Furthermore, the errors in spelling punctuation as well as word choice. Although they did not make many errors they also should put more attention on producing a good result in IELTS writing task 2.

Therefore, based on the above research findings and discussion toward the students' difficulties in writing, as well as considering the problem which somehow gives impacts to the process of writing in the task, several suggestions are offered to be applied by teachers and institutions. Firstly, the students can have brand new techniques and strategies to learn writing in writing tasks. Secondly, additional credits for English writing and grammar courses should be added to have deep understanding from the students.

In consequence, this study is important to educators and study material developers who should become aware of the kind of errors that their target learners make, so that they are in a better position to put appropriate intervention strategies into place. For learners, error analysis is important as it illustrates the areas of difficulty in their writing. The data trail that is eventually generated by each student

will allow prefectures and Boards of Education (BOE) to acquire a better understanding of the individual behavior of students (test takers) therefore giving insight into how students learn.

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