

INVESTIGATING THE STUDENTS' ABILITY IN MAKING EXPOSITORY ESSAYS THROUGH CLASSIC SHORT STORIES AS AUTHENTIC MATERIALS

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to investigate the 4th semester students' ability in writing expository essays by using classic short stories. The design of the study is content analysis design. The subjects of the study were the fourth semester students of 2016 A batch who joined essay writing course in the academic year 2017-2018. The instrument used was mainly documentation. The students were asked to make an expository essay which discusses the intrinsic elements of short stories. The short stories chosen were Vendetta by Guy de Maupassant and The Gift of the Magi by O'Henry. The students' composition were analyzed based on their ability in making introduction, body of the essay, conclusion, and language used. In their writing, the students were asked to analyze the intrinsic elements of the story, such as the plot, characters, theme, point of view and the message. The result of the study shows that in general, the students were able to make an essay to analyze the short stories in terms of its intrinsic elements, namely characterization, plot, theme and message. In sum, classic short stories can be utilized for teaching writing for EFL classroom.

Keywords: authentic materials, essay, classic short stories, writing

INTRODUCTION

Teaching and learning writing in foreign language like English is quite a challenge, both for the teacher as well as for the students. To begin with, writing teachers need strategies to make teaching writing a challenging and interesting activity. Since writing involves more than just presenting words neatly on a page, many students becomes struggling writers because much of their time are spent in gathering ideas, forming those ideas to become meaningful composition.

To minimize the boring atmosphere in writing classes, the teacher can use teaching materials which are enjoyable and meaningful both for the teacher as well as for the students.

One way of doing this is through the use of authentic materials. Authentic materials are materials which are created not for learning purposes. These materials can be found in everyday lives, such as news on TV and newspaper, books, novels, short stories, job vacancy, invitations, and many others. There are two types of authentic material, namely fictional authentic material (narration), and factual authentic material (non-fiction / text that contains information) (Ciecierski & Bintz, 2015). Previous research shows that the use of authentic material for language learning has proven effective in improving students' writing skills (Arifa, 2011), in reading (Hatimah, Rofiq, & Andayani, 2013), and in increasing vocabulary (Ghanbari, Esmaili & Shamsaddini, 2015). Moreover, previous research also revealed that students who were taught by using literature as authentic material, such as short stories, drama and poetry, had equal reading ability as students who were taught using non-fiction authentic material (Appley, 1988). Literary text as authentic material, basically can be used not only to sharpen students' critical thinking skills, but can also

be used to learn writing essays and sharpen their language skills (Setyowati & Samsu, 2015). Sukmawan, Setyowati & Nurmasyah (2015) found that fiction can be used to help students to write essays. In the study that uses quantitative descriptive design, it is revealed that 96% of the total students are able to express their opinions about the content of the stories as reflected in their thesis sentence, even though many of their compositions do not show adequate development in the body of the essay. Similar research results can also be found in Setyowati (2016). In this study it was found that literary texts were able to help students to make thesis sentence for their essays, but they are unable to develop their topic well and unable to provide relevant details based on the story they read.

Despite the existing research which investigates the use of literature for teaching EFL classroom, the information in what way classic short stories help learners to learn to write an essay remains insufficient. Recent research has not given adequate information concerning how classic short stories can be used to write the introduction of the essay, the body of the essay, and the conclusion. Thus, the problem in this research is formulated as follows “How is the students' ability to write expository essays developed by using classic short stories?”

The main question is sub divided into three questions:

- a) How is the students' ability to write the introductory paragraph of the essay?
- b) How is the students' ability to develop the paragraph through the provision of relevant examples in the body of the essay?
- c) How is the students' ability to make conclusion that reflect the whole essay?.

METHOD

This research uses qualitative and quantitative methods. More specifically, the qualitative design chosen in this study is content analysis because the data mainly are in the form of words and sentences. The data were the students' writing products which were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. The quantitative analysis was used to determine the frequency of the students' writing elements. The subjects of the study were the fourth semester students of English Education Study Program STKIP PGRI Pasuruan in the academic Year 2017-2018. There were 22 students in 2016A batch. The data were collected on April 2018.

The students were divided into two groups. The first group was those who were in odd number attendance list, while the other group was those were in even number in the attendance list. The first group analyzed *Vendetta*, while the second group analyzed *The Gift of the Magi*. After they were assigned with the story they had to read, they were grouped in pair to discuss and analyze the intrinsic elements. The students' writing were rated based on the essay structure, namely the ability to state thesis in the introduction, the ability to develop the body of the paragraph by giving at least two examples and details, the ability to give conclusion that restate the thesis and deliver personal judgment. To help the researcher analyze the data, some codification technique was used.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

To analyze the data, the researcher did some document analysis of the students' composition. A table was set up to categorize the data. The students' composition was divided into three broad category, namely the introduction, the body of the essay, and the conclusion. The introductory paragraph was analyzed based on the students' way to introduce the topic and the occurrence of the thesis statement. In the second part, the body of the essay was divided into

three sub divisions, namely the second paragraph, the third paragraph, and the fourth paragraph in which in each paragraph, the students’ ability was seen from the occurrence of main idea in each paragraph, and the development of the main ideas with the provision of details from the text they read. Finally, in the quality of the concluding paragraph was seen from the students’ ability to sufficiently restate the thesis statement and give the final thought about the story they read.

The Introduction

Almost all of the students were able to make a proper introductory paragraph for their essay. In the introduction, the students mostly open their essay by giving their thoughts and feeling about the story they read.

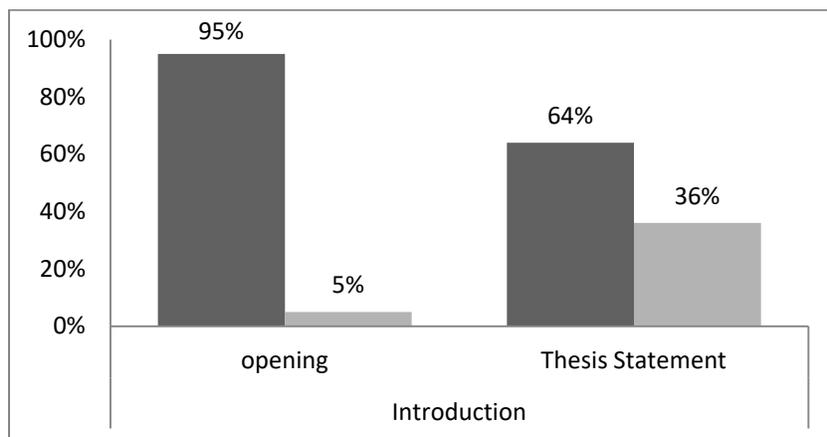


Figure 1. The students’ ability in making introduction

Figure 1 shows that 95% (21) of the students were able to make the opening for their essays, and only 1 student (5%) was not able to open the essay properly. Although almost all of the students were able to open the essay, not all of them were able to state the thesis statement (36%). Only 64% (14) students was able to make thesis statement to control the whole essay.

The following is the example of the introduction written in one of the students’ essay.

A Vendetta is a narrative story wrote by Guy de Maupassant. This story is telling about an old woman’ revenge to another guy who killed her only son. Guy made this story becomes interesting. Although this story tells about a revenge, there are many messages from this story we can take. Moreover, Guy wrote the characters with spesific. In this paper, I want to explain about the plot, characters, theme, and messages from this story. (As, 2016A).

From the example, it can be seen that the essay is opened with the general description of the story, then ended with the thesis statement. Most of the students’ way to open their essays start with the general description of the story or their personal opinion toward the topic. Having a thesis statement, or topic sentence, is very important, because it explains the topic of the discussion briefly (Oshima & Hogue, 2006). As the thesis statement serve as ‘the road map’, it guides the author to structure the composition.

The Body of the essay

The researcher analyzed each paragraph in the body of the essay and look for the main ideas on second, third, and fourth paragraph. The data shows that almost all of the students were able to state main ideas in each paragraph in the body of the essay.

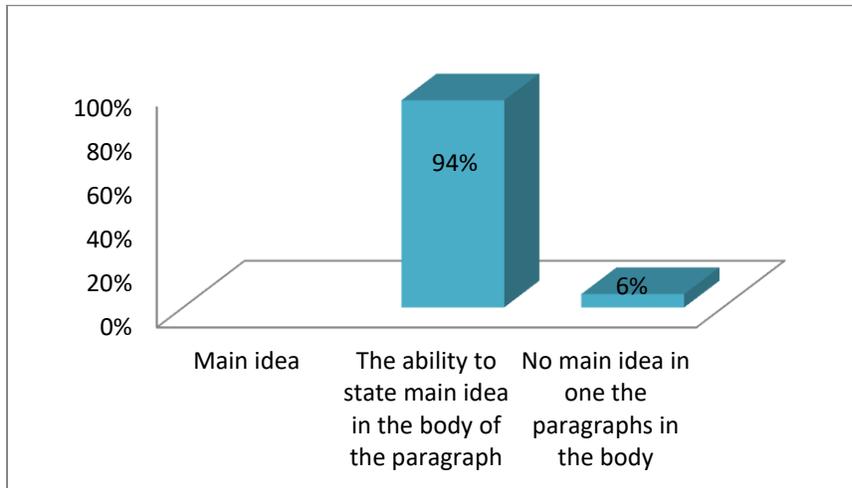


Figure 2. The students’ ability to state main ideas in the body of the essay

However, there were still some students (5) who were not able to state the main ideas in one of the paragraph in the body. The data shows that there were 3 students who were not able to state the main idea in the second paragraph, and 2 students who were not able to state the main ideas in the third paragraph.

This story has two characters which must be reviewed. First, there are the major and minor characters in the story based on their roles. Della and Jim are the major characters. Della is considered to be the major character since she is the one who appears from the beginning until the end of the story. It seems that the beginning of the story is telling about Della's confusion to buy present for Jim, her husband until she finally did a sacrifice in order to be able to buy a nice present. (No, 2016A)

The excerpt from the student’s work above appears in the body of the essay, more specifically, it appears in the second paragraph. The first sentence shows the main idea in the second paragraph.

The Details

Most of the students were able to give details and examples from the story. For example, when they discussed characterization, they can show who the major and minor character of the story are. Similarly, when they discussed the setting, they can mention the setting of the story clearly.

The plot of this story starts with an exposition when an old woman, Paolo Saverini’s Widow, lived alone with her son in poor little house on the ramparts of Bonifacio. For the raising action begin when Antoine Saverini was murdered by a knife

thrust from Nicholas Ravolati and he got away to Sardinia at the same time. The complication begins when Paolo Saverini’s Widow received her son’s body, and she swore vendetta to kill someone who killed her son, after that she got an idea how to get a revenge, that was by training her dog to kill him. The climax begins when she trained her dog for three months and her dog became fierce. After that in one Sunday morning, she launched vendetta. The falling action begins when her dog became mad and attacked Nicolas Ravolati. The resolution begins when in the evening the old woman returned home and she slept well. (As, 2016A).

Even though half of the students found no problems in giving details, there were still some of them who had difficulties in giving details for their essays.

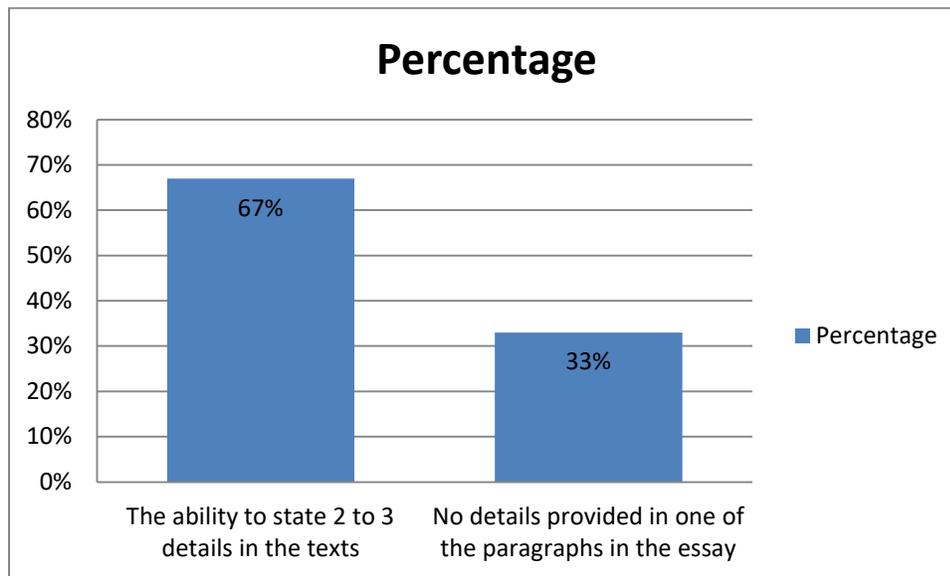


Figure 3. The ability to give details in the Body of the essay

Figure 3 shows that more than half of the students were able to provide details and examples in the body of the essay properly (67%), while the rest of them (33%) were unable to give relevant details from the text they read.

The Paragraph Development

The data shows that although the students were able to give details for their composition in the body of the essay, many of them were unable to develop the paragraph well. The details were given, but no further elaboration or explanation was given. Figure 4 shows that almost two thirds of the students were unable to develop the paragraphs in the body of the essay well (72%), and only 38 % of them were able to develop the paragraph properly.

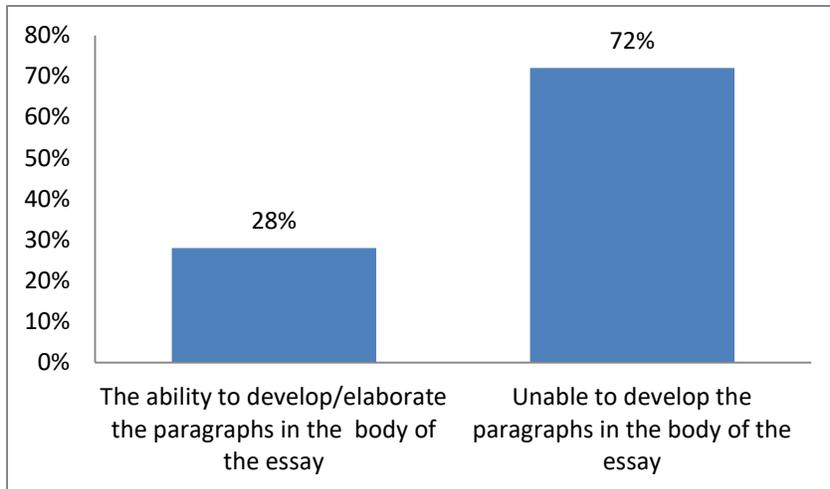


Figure 4. The development in the body of the essay

Despite the the students’ ability to give details, they could not elaborate and give further explanation of the details they wrote. Take for example the excerpt from one of the students’ work who was unable to develop the body of the essay well.

The character in this story is Paolo Saverini’s widow. She is the main character. She has two sides, at the first she is kind but after her son was killed, she became cruel and an avenger. The story theme is the promise to avenge for her son’s death. The moral value which we can get from this story is about revenge. Revenge is bad, revenge can change a kind person into a cruel person.(Da, 2016A).

The example shows that the student only state details of the characterization of the main character without giving further explanation and evidence from the story they read. The students who were able to develop the body of the essay would write something as the example shown below.

The first is about characterization. There are four characters in this story such as, Saverini, Antonia, Semillante and Nicolas. Based on the types of characterization, Saverini has a round character because in the beginning she is quiet and tough. The evidence is shown in the sentence “when his old mother received his body, carried home by standers, she didn’t weep, but for a long time stayed motionless, looking at it”. But in the end of the story, she became cruel. The evidence can be seen in the sentence “off, off, bite him, bite him!” (AR, 2016A)

CONCLUSIONS

The students’ ability in making a concluding paragraph is not quite good. The data shows that two thirds (77%) of the students were not able to give concluding paragraph for their essay. Only 23% of the students were able to sufficiently give concluding remarks that reflect the thesis statement with final thoughts.

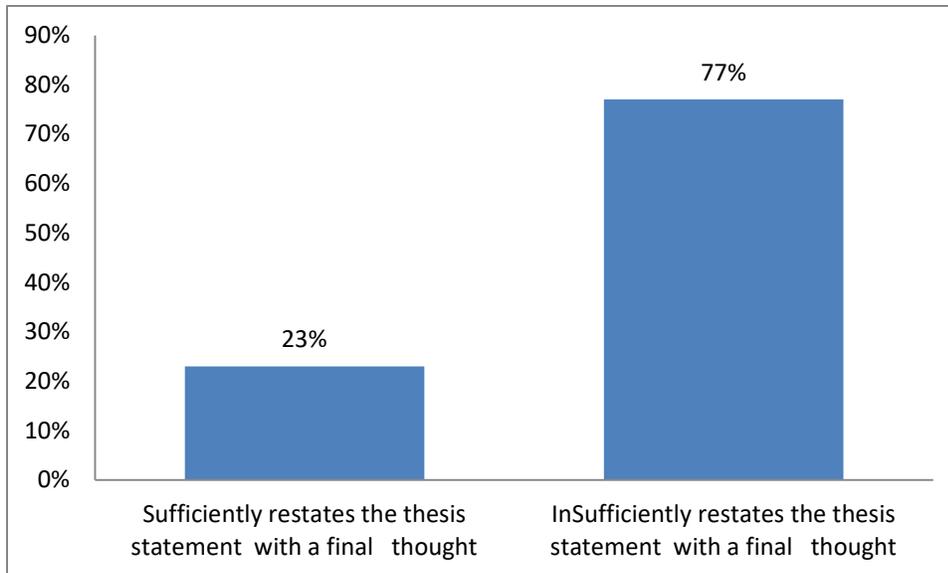


Figure 5. The students’ ability to give conclusion

The data shows that only five students from the total number of the subjects who were able to make a decent concluding paragraph for their essays. Reading through the data, it seems that the students were ‘in a hurry’ to close the essay, as many of the closings were written only in three to five sentences, which is very inadequate.

DISCUSSION

An essay has its own structure which consists of three main elements, namely the introduction, the body of the essay, and the conclusion. For EFL learners, writing the introductory paragraph is not always easy. But, there are some strategies to start an essay. Firstly, the introduction of the essay can be written like a funnel (Oshima & Hogue, 2006) which means that the introduction starts with something general, then it goes down to specific idea (thesis statement). It is suggested that an essay should start with “attention grabber” which can talk about facts and evidences, a quote, a question, an anecdote, and a description of an image (Kain, 1999). In this study, the data reveal that most of the students’ introductory paragraph start with the students’ opinion and thoughts about the story. Some students also used general background information about the story to open their essay.

There are some possible causes why some students were not able to develop the essay well. Firstly, the students seemed to have difficulties to understand the details of the story line of the classics they read. The length of *Vendetta* by Guy the Maupassant consists of approximately 1764 words , while *The Gift of the Magi* by O Henry consist of approximately 2163 words. Basically, these short stories were not too long, but at the same time, they were not ‘short’ either. As suggested by Setyowati & Sukmawan (2015) and Setyowati (2016), the appropriate length of short stories that are applicable for writing classes is around 1000 words. ‘Long’ short stories usually contains complicated details in terms of its plot, characterization, and setting. Being unable to comprehend the specific details in the story would results in shallow analysis. Secondly, the students seemed to be struggling with the vocabulary used in the story. *Vendetta* written by Guy de Maupassant consist mostly with the description of the events and the condition of the mother after her son was killed. Many of the vocabularies used by the author were unfamiliar for

foreign language learners. Sidek & Rahim (2015) states that the most important element that play role in the text comprehension is the level of vocabulary knowledge. One of the solutions that they normally do to solve their vocabulary problem was to find its meaning in the dictionary. Many difficult vocabulary may result in demotivation to continue reading for specific information. Thus, it is suggested that if the writing lecturer has desires to use classic short stories for teaching writing, he/she should encourage students to guess the meaning of difficult vocabulary from the context, instead of searching the meaning in the dictionary most of the time. The second solution proposed dealing with the vocabulary problem was to choose short stories which are already simplified. The purpose of using classic short stories in writing class was not to deeply analyze its intrinsic and extrinsic elements, like in prose subjects, but the main goal is to use it to express their ideas in written communication for the purpose of giving information about the story they have read. Thus, simplified stories for writing class seem to be acceptable to use.

The third problem is putting down ideas on the paper to develop the essay. Looking at the data, most of the students were able to state the topic sentence for each paragraph, but they fail to develop the idea. The paragraphs which suffer most from the development are the third and fourth paragraph in the body of the essay. They might have a lot of ideas in their mind, but when they have to translate their ideas on the paper, they have problems of expressing it. One of the problem that they face is insufficient vocabulary to express ideas. This is in line with the research conducted by Setyowati (2016) in which she states that the lack of vocabulary hinder the students to state their feeling, opinion, and ideas in written form. To solve this problem, the writing lecturer is suggested to conduct a prewriting activities, by using brain storming. During the brain storming activity, the students can write down their ideas provided with details and examples taken from the stories they read. The second solution was to give student-teacher conference to give feedback. The feedback should focus not only in the language, but also on the idea development.

In the conclusion part, the students seemed to be 'in haste' to close the essay. It probably because they have no more ideas to talk, or they still have ideas but they do not know how to express it. As stated by Zemach & Islam (2004) and Oshima & Hogue (2006), theoretically, the number of the sentences in a paragraph should consists of six to twelve sentences in which each of these sentences are related to one another as they talk about one single idea. But the data shows that almost two thirds of the students' concluding paragraph were written poorly. To solve this problem, the writing teacher needs to teach the students how to close their essay properly. As stated by Zemach & Islam (2004: 29), there are several ways to make a paragraph or an essay, namely by restating the thesis, summarizing, making prediction, and making suggestion or advice for the reader. If the students were trained to make a proper concluding paragraph, the problem found in this study probably would not exist.

CONCLUSION

Based on the interpretation of the data, it can be concluded that classic short stories can be utilized for teaching writing for efl classroom. In general, the students were able to make an essay to analyze the short stories in terms of its intrinsic elements, namely characterization, plot, theme and message. The students were able to state the thesis statement to control the whole idea of the essay, state the topic sentence in each paragraph in the body of the essay, and give details for the body of the essay. The students, however, fail to develop particular part of the body of the essay, and insufficiently make the concluding paragraph.

this study, however, has some weaknesses. This research does not reveal the exact cause why the students were unable to reach their maximum ability to develop the paragraph well even though they already had the topic sentence and the details. Thus, if this study should be replicated, future researcher needs to use interview as the instrument to elicit the students' reasons and causes. Having more information in relation to the causes of the students' difficulty to develop the essay may help the writing teacher to decide the strategies to help them solve the problem. Secondly, since most of data used in this study is qualitative data, the research cannot reveal the cause and effect relationship between short story and writing performance. Thus, more research needs to be conducted to find out whether literature, as authentic materials, does give effect on the students' writing performance by using different research design. All in all, the use of literature for language learning, more specifically the teaching of writing, benefits learners. It helps the efl learners not only to learn to write in foreign language, but also to train their critical thinking ability.

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