

**ASSESSING STUDENT’S WRITING SKILL BY USING GRAPHS:
A CASE AT THE SECOND SEMESTER OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS
FACULTY STUDENTS, UNISBANK SEMARANG**

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of the use of graphs for assessing writing for the student of the second semester of economics and business faculty, Unisbank Semarang. The method of this study is a mixed method inasmuch as the data were analyzed both in quantitative and qualitative method. The participants are ten students of the second semester of economics and business faculty, Unisbank Semarang. It reveals that the use of graphs can be effective to improve writing skill. However, the biggest obstacle was found when using this kind of method. That is why it is also important to take a look at the students’ background of knowledge because each student has their own characteristics and ability.

Keywords: *assessing writing, graphs, paragraph.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Early in the 21th century, English as a second language has been very important in any field including social, political, and education. One that will be studied deeply here is the education field. As an international language, English has become a very important subject in academic, school, colleges and universities, or anything connected to the field of education. Furthermore, it brings about big influences in daily life; many sectors or the public sectors, for example, requires English as something which must exist and be able to be mastered by every person. It can be seen clearly that English is widely used in mass media and oral communication as means of exchanging information including science, education and technology reasons. In addition to the English as a means of communication, it is the first foreign language used in Indonesia and is commonly known that it is taught in elementary school as an alternative subject and in high school as one of the compulsory subject and even in college or universities as one of the subjects that must be taken by the students in order to fulfill their credits.

One of universities in Semarang that provides English as a subject in each faculty is Stikubank University. There are some faculties existed in this university such as Information Technology, Economy and Business, Language and Culture, Engineering, Hospitality, and Law faculty. All of those faculties supply English as one of the subjects that is generally taken in the first or second semester. As an assistant lecturer, I was assigned to take care of the second semester students of Economic and Business Faculty.

There are four important skills students in general have to master in English such as speaking, reading, listening, and writing. Furthermore, the main English components like vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and pronunciation are also useful in developing those important skill. The focus of my teaching in this class is writing skill. It means that the objective of teaching English here is the ability in writing.

According to the researcher's experience during the teaching training, there are several problems done by the students in writing activities. The first problem is the students writing are not comprehensible, because the content of the composition is not relevant to the topic, the ideas are not clearly stated, the ideas and sentences are not well organized. The second problem is that there are many errors in vocabulary, grammar, and spelling. Another problem is the students have low motivation and are not interested in doing the task since the writing activities are not interesting. Usually, the students are asked to write sentences and paragraphs without being given some clue so that it is difficult for them to express their ideas on a piece of paper.

There are various ways to organize the sentences in a piece of writing. One of them is by using graphs. Usually, the students have difficulty at expressing their idea in the form of writing because they lack vocabulary, spelling, and grammar. The same condition is also found in some second semester students of Economic and Business Faculty. Therefore, the researcher would like to assess the student's writing skill by using graphs for the purpose of finding out to what extend the student's ability in expressing their idea through writing.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Writing

Writing is one of the language skills which is important in our life. Through writing, we can inform others, carry out transaction, persuade, infuriate, and tell what we feel. However, we know that writing or learning to write especially in a second language is not simply a matter of “writing things done”. It is one of the four basic skills (listening, reading, speaking, writing) that are very complex and difficult to learn. There are some characteristics of a good writing. A text or paragraph may these for to be understood as a visible division of the subject method. According to Boardman (2008:18-25) There are three characteristics in writing a good text or paragraph, namely:

1. Coherence

A paragraph has coherence when the supporting sentences are ordered according to a principle. The sentences are put in order so that the reader can understand your ideas easily. The principles for ordering depend on the types of paragraph you are writing. Coherence means stick together, coherence is basically a matter of having the part of a piece of writing in the right with the clear process.

2. Cohesion

Another characteristic of a good paragraph is Cohesion. When a paragraph has cohesion, all the supporting sentences connect to each other in their support of the topic sentence.

3. Unity

The final characteristic of a well-written paragraph is unity. All the supporting sentences should relate to the topic sentence. Order in text or paragraph is like organization easy, but is smaller in space so it may be simpler to consider order as direction. Thus order chronological steps to express the idea the written form.

Developing Paragraph

Paragraph is a group of sentences containing a single topic (Rumisek, 2005: 11). The sentences of the paragraph explain the writer’s *main idea* about the topic. In academic writing, a paragraph often consists of five and ten sentences long, but it can be longer or shorter, depending on the topic. Another definition of paragraph is stated by Ardriyati (2013), a paragraph is a series of sentences that develop one main idea (Ardriyati, 2013: 31). It has three major structural parts like topic sentence, supporting

sentences, and concluding sentences. A good topic sentence has two parts: the topic and the controlling idea (Ardriyati, 2013: 31). The controlling idea can be useful to limit the topic of the paragraph.

There are some variety of types of tasks which are commonly used to assess a person's ability to produce written letters and developing paragraph. One of them is called *picture-cued task* (Brown, 2004). In *picture-cued task*, familiar pictures are displayed, and test-takers are told to write the word that the picture represents. Assuming no ambiguity in identifying the picture (cat, hat, chair, table, etc.)

Graphs

One of the example of picture-cued tasks is graphs. There are three types of graphs: line graph, bar graph, and pie chart. One that will be used for assessing students' writing is a bar graph. Bar graphs are used to compare things between different groups or track changes over time. The researcher chose bar graph rather than other type of graph because when trying to measure change over time, bar graphs are best when the changes are larger. So it is probably easier for the students.

Assessing Writing

Assessing Writing According to Brown (2004: 241-246), there are three scoring methods for intensive writing. They are, holistic scoring, primary trait scoring, and analytic scoring. In holistic scoring, each point on a holistic scale is given a systematic set of descriptors, and the reader-evaluator matches an overall impression with the descriptors to arrive at a score. It means that the teacher makes a table of scores with the description.

In primary trait scoring, the type of scoring emphasizes the task at hand and assigns a score based on the effectiveness of achieving a text with one goal. For example, if the purpose of an essay is to persuade the reader to do something, the score for the writing would be on the accomplishment of the function. In this scoring method, there are four point scale ranging from zero (no response or fragmented response) to 4 (the purpose is accomplished).

In analytic scoring, Brown and Bailey in Brown (2004: 243-246) offer five major categories (organization, logical development of ideas (content), grammar,

mechanics (punctuation and spelling), and style and quality of expression (vocabulary)) and five different levels in each category ranging from “low” to “high”. In summary, the categories and levels will be scored in total as follows.

Table 1
Analytic Scoring
(Language Assessment: Principles and Classroom Practices)

Score / Categories	18-20	15-17	12-14	6-11	1-5
Organization: Introduction, body, and conclusion	Good to Excellent	Adequate to Good	Fair to adequate	Unacceptable	Not college-level work
Content: Logical development of idea					
Grammar					
Style: Vocabulary					
Mechanic: punctuation and spelling					

3. METHOD

This research employs mixed method in which the researcher explains and describes the phenomena in the data by using both qualitative and quantitative method. Quantitative measurement technique is a technique of measurement that uses some score formula to score the students' achievement. It is done by giving the scores based on five categories proposed by Brown and Bailey (1984). This kind of measurement can be useful in order to find out the average score of all the students being tested. Qualitative is a kind of technique of measurement, which, in this paper, measures the process of students' writing by describing the errors, weaknesses, and also the strength in the form of comments. Furthermore, the qualitative measurement is aimed at finding out and see the accuracy in organizing the main idea and topic sentence in one paragraph.

The researcher took class A1 which consists of 35 students as the sample of research. However, only 10 students chosen randomly as the sample of research to be analyzed. As mentioned earlier, this paper employs mixed method, the data will be analyzed in qualitative and quantitative. The instruments of the data are essay written test and field note check list. By using notes, it can be seen to what extent the contribution of graphs for students' writing ability. Meanwhile, the method of data collection is by giving the essay written test to the students and instruct them to take a look at the graph given in the test and write a paragraph that describe the illustration of the graph.

In conducting this research, the researcher used a classroom action research. Kemmis and McTaggart in Cohen et al. (2005: 227) argue that the action plan of classroom action research has four stages, planning, and implementation of action, observation and reflection.

1. Planning: arranging the lesson plan, equipment, and appropriate technique to solve the students' problem in writing skill. The technique should be appropriate and can be helpful for the teaching and learning process and to solve the problem.
2. Acting: doing the research with special technique and it has cycles to complete the classroom action research.
3. Observing: to monitor the process of learning in cycle by employing the collaborator.
4. Reflecting: to see whether the processes have been done based on the procedures or not and to see how well the students' progress in learning of the cycle. From this analysis, the researcher can recommend whether she should conduct the next cycle or not.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This paper is aimed to examine the use of graphs to assess students' writing ability. Graph is selected because it is appropriate for students at university level. Since English is not the main subject in their faculty and is not usually applied in their daily college activities, most students have low ability of language competence. They often experience difficulties in organizing good paragraph. Therefore the use of picture-cued of graph would seem to be ideal activity to engage them doing the task. As a result students can write paragraph in English easily.

As mentioned earlier, the test result will be analyzed using five categories proposed by Brown (2004). The test was given by teacher after giving them treatment about how to read graph. This test was to measure the students' writing ability. The result of test can be seen in the following table.

Table 2
Result

Student Identity	Organization	Content	Grammar	Style	Mechanic	Total
1	18	15	12	12	15	72
2	17	15	10	12	18	72
3	17	16	10	13	18	74
4	17	16	11	14	17	75
5	18	17	12	14	18	79
6	16	17	12	13	17	75
7	16	16	11	13	17	73
8	15	14	10	11	16	66
9	15	15	11	10	16	67
10	16	15	10	12	16	69

The table above shows the result of assessing writing test. Based on the table, there is no student who has got a perfect score. The average score of all is 72,2 (obtained from the total score divided by the number of students equals 72,2). It can be seen that the highest score is obtained by one student (student 5), that is 79, while another student (student 8) has got the lowest score, that is 66. Student 5 has got the highest score because she could develop the paragraph in good organization which is including introduction, body, and conclusion. She also elaborated her main idea into a good content. The use of conjunction is applied in her writing corectly. One that makes her writing weak is the grammar. The other students who have got score 72 up to 75 have averagely the same weaknesses at some points. For instance ,student 1 (72) in comparison with the student 6 (75), have a quite different score but at the grammar scoring they have the same score which is quite poor. The same case also occurs in student 2 compared by student 3 who have got some mistakes in grammar. On the other hand, the organization are not complete and the choices of words or vocab are often not suitable.

The results provided in the table are clearly obvious that all students have made the same error categories, those are grammar and the second is style. Style

includes vocabulary or dictation. These weaknesses make the researcher consider whether using graphs is helpful for students in developing paragraphs or writing. Therefore, it could be assumed that the teacher or the researcher have to find the appropriate way or improvement to make students get better scores using picture-cued tasks.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the result of the test, it can be concluded that graph or chart, one of the picture-cued tasks, is effective for students to express their ideas through writing. Some of them were able to decide the main idea of the paragraph they made and wrote the topic sentence correctly. However, the others found it difficult in developing their idea or the topic sentence. The choice of words or vocabulary were sometimes not suitable and the grammar was still weak overall. So, the researcher would say that using graph is actually good and effective for students to improve their writing skill but it sometimes could not help much. This is because each student has different characteristics, background, and ability in catching knowledge. In here, the teacher has responsibility in teaching more and more about grammatical rules in order to help the students in writing good sentences and paragraphs.

6. REFERENCES

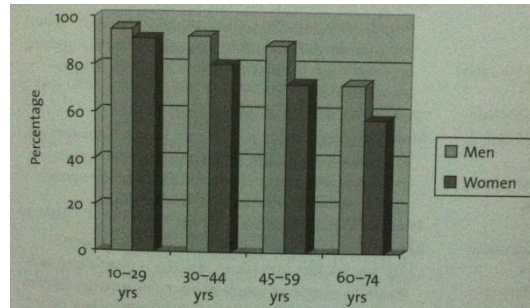
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APPENDIX

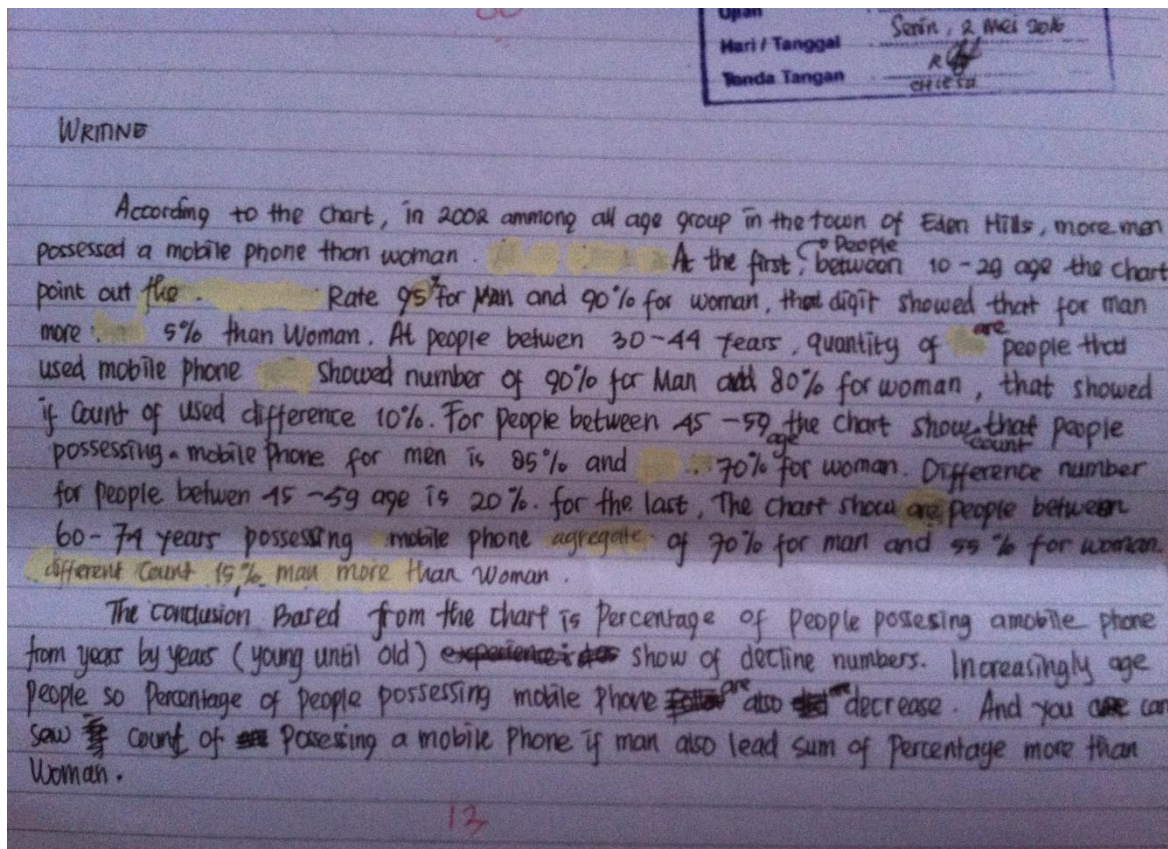
WRITING

Look at the chart below. Summarise the information at least 100 words.

Percentage of people possessing a mobile phone by sex and age in Eden Hills (2002)



Students' Writing



WRITING

The chart shows the information about mobile phone possession in the town of Eden Hills in 2002, the man at the age chart 20-29 years has a number 90 man and that women has ^{number} 85. At the age 30-49 years the number of men has decreased from the previous years to reach 85 man, while women 80. Later at the age 45-59 years decreased slightly, totaling ~~80~~⁸⁷ man and 70 women. And at the age of 60-70 years charts at the number of men is stable as last year, namely 70 and decreased for the number of women 75.

On the table percentage of people possessing a mobile phone by sex and age in Eden Hills (2002) the number of aged men and women in these tables has decreased in every age.

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