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Writing Workshop Strategies to Improve Paragraph Writing Skills of English Major Students

Bobby Pramjit Singh Dhillon^{1✉}, Santa R Sihombing², Tria Joys Siburian³, Yenni Adelina Sinaga⁴,
Maria Anjelita Hutauruk⁵, Yona Freftyz Siallagan⁶, Arta Jesika Rajagukguk⁷

Universitas HKBP Nommensen Pematangsiantar

Email: bobby.dhillon@uhn.ac.id^{1✉}

Abstrak

Studi ini mengeksplorasi strategi efektif untuk melaksanakan lokakarya menulis yang bertujuan meningkatkan keterampilan menulis paragraf bagi mahasiswa jurusan Bahasa Inggris. Mengingat peran penting kemampuan menulis yang kuat dalam keberhasilan akademik dan profesional, lokakarya ini menggabungkan berbagai teknik pedagogis, termasuk pelajaran terstruktur tentang struktur paragraf, sesi umpan balik dari teman sejawat, dan penggunaan alat bantu menulis berbasis teknologi. Melalui aktivitas interaktif, para mahasiswa terlibat dalam proses brainstorming, menulis draf, dan merevisi paragraf, yang mendorong terciptanya lingkungan belajar yang kolaboratif. Lokakarya ini menekankan pentingnya umpan balik konstruktif dan refleksi diri, yang memungkinkan mahasiswa mengidentifikasi dan mengatasi tantangan dalam menulis mereka. Hasil awal menunjukkan peningkatan yang signifikan dalam kepercayaan diri dan keterampilan menulis mahasiswa. Makalah ini bertujuan untuk memberikan tinjauan komprehensif tentang desain, pelaksanaan, dan hasil dari lokakarya tersebut, sehingga memberikan wawasan berharga bagi bidang pendidikan bahasa.

Kata Kunci: *Lokakarya Menulis, Pengembangan Paragraf, Tingkat Kemampuan Bahasa Inggris, Umpan Balik Teman*

Abstract

This study explores effective strategies for conducting writing workshops aimed at enhancing the paragraph writing skills of English major students. Given the critical role that strong writing abilities play in academic and professional success, the workshop incorporates a variety of pedagogical techniques, including structured lessons on paragraph structure, peer feedback sessions, and the use of technology-assisted writing tools. Through interactive activities, students engage in brainstorming, drafting, and revising paragraphs, fostering a collaborative learning environment. The workshop emphasizes the importance of constructive feedback and self-reflection, allowing students to identify and address their writing challenges. Preliminary results indicate significant improvements in students' writing confidence and proficiency. This paper aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the workshop's design, implementation, and outcomes, contributing valuable insights to the field of language education.

Keywords: English Language Proficiency, Peer Feedback, Paragraph Development, Writing Workshop

INTRODUCTION

The ability to write coherent and structured paragraphs is a fundamental skill for students majoring in English (Dhillon et al, 2024; Hidayat & Jaenuddin, 2022). Effective paragraph writing not only enhances academic performance but also prepares students for professional communication in their future careers. Despite its importance, many English major students struggle with organizing their thoughts and expressing them clearly in writing (Astiantih & Akfan, 2023; Jusslin & Widlund, 2024). This challenge often stems from a lack of structured guidance and practice. Numerous strategies (Dhillon et al, 2024; Wahyuni, 2000; Goctu, 2017), methods (Saifuddin & Rahayu, 2024), and approaches (Astiantih & Akfan, 2023; Veriza et al, 2023) have been adopted to solve those challenges.

Writing workshops have emerged as an effective pedagogical approach to address these issues (Jusslin & Widlund, 2024; Mulyono et al. 2023; Sarnecka, 2019). For example, Mulyono et al. (2023) evaluated the impact of an online genre analysis-based academic writing workshop on the creativity and self-efficacy of 27 Indonesian TVET instructors. The workshop resulted in a statistically significant improvement in the academic writing self-efficacy of participants. However, it had a limited impact on enhancing their academic writing creativity, particularly in utilizing technology for writing. Overall, while instructors improved their ability to address writing difficulties and respond to feedback, the workshop did not substantially boost their creative writing skills. These workshops provide a supportive environment where students can develop their writing skills through targeted activities, peer feedback, and collaborative learning (Sarnecka, 2019).

Various strategies employed in writing workshops aim to enhance paragraph writing skills among English major students. First, guided brainstorming sessions can help students generate and organize their ideas, fostering creativity and clarity before writing begins (Ogbeiw, 2017). Second, the use of structured templates and graphic organizers allows students to visualize paragraph structure, promoting coherence and logical flow (Hashim et al., 2023; Downing & Billotte, 2023). Third, peer review sessions encourage collaborative learning and critical feedback, enabling students to refine their writing while also developing their analytical skills. Fourth, modeling effective paragraphs through mentor texts exposes students to high-quality writing, providing clear examples of tone, style, and structure (Luukkainen, 2022; Merdekawati, 2020). Lastly, incorporating reflective practices, such as writing journals or feedback forms, helps students identify their strengths and areas for improvement, fostering a growth mindset (Shek et al., 2021; Veriza et al., 2023). By employing these strategies within writing workshops, educators can create a nurturing environment that significantly boosts students' paragraph writing proficiency.

This article explores various strategies employed in writing workshops designed to improve the paragraph writing skills of English major students. By examining the effectiveness of these strategies, the study aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on enhancing writing instruction in higher education.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative design with a sociolinguistic approach to investigate the use and perception of the slang word "anjay" among students. The research focuses on identifying how "anjay" functions within the digital discourse and daily communication of the selected participants, including its social, cultural, and linguistic implications. The participants are third-semester students (PI.A1 and PU.A2) of the English Education Department at the University of HKBP Nommensen, Pematangsiantar. This study employs a mixed-methods research design to assess the effectiveness of writing workshop strategies in enhancing paragraph writing skills among English major students. The research was conducted in two phases: a quantitative phase and a qualitative phase. The questionnaire was distributed to participants through a digital platform, and responses were collected from students reflecting their opinions and usage in various contexts. Data for this study were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to assess students' writing skills and experiences with writing workshops. The questionnaire was distributed digitally via a secure online platform, ensuring easy access for participants.

The questionnaire was sent out through email and shared on learning management systems to maximize reach. Participants were given two weeks to complete the questionnaire, with reminders sent periodically to encourage participation. To ensure honest responses, all data were collected anonymously. Participants were informed that their responses would be kept confidential and used solely for research purposes. The responses were compiled and analyzed using statistical methods to identify trends and correlations related to students' writing experiences and the effectiveness of writing workshops. By utilizing this structured approach, the study aimed to gather comprehensive insights into the participants' perceptions and challenges related to paragraph writing.

Data analysis followed several systematic steps. First, data cleaning was performed to review responses for completeness and to remove any irrelevant entries. Next, key themes such as usage of frequency, social perception, and cultural intervention were identified and categorized. Thematic analysis was then conducted on qualitative responses to uncover patterns and participants attitudes toward the slang word "anjay". Finally, for close-ended questions, percentages and frequencies were calculated to summarize the findings. This structured approach aims to provide comprehensive insights into participants' perceptions and challenges related to both slang usage and writing.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings from the questionnaire suggested that the most significant factor in determining students' writing paragraphs (90%) was their ability to organize and understand their strengths and weaknesses in learning new information. It indicated that students were aware of their ability to regularly engage with writing tasks. This awareness was crucial in developing paragraphs writing, particularly in developing effective learning strategies and improving writing competence (Siahaan et al., 2021; Rogers et al., 2024).

In terms of levels of confidence among students in their paragraph writing abilities, approximately 13.8% reported feeling very confident, indicating a significant yet a small proportion with high-level of self-confidence. This confidence can boost a positive learning environment and promote ongoing skill development. Furthermore, approximately 27.6% students expressed confidence, showing a notable portion feeling assured in their abilities. This situation can lead students to become more proficient writers. However, around 58.6% expressed lack of confidence in their writing abilities, showing that students had barriers (past academic experiences and/or syntax issues). This gap in understanding aligned with the theory of cognitive load, which suggested that students might not always fully

comprehend of underlying principles or benefits of the strategies they used (Demir, 2018). Providing additional guidance and educational interventions could help students better understand the advantages of their chosen methods, leading to more efficient and effective learning in paragraph writing.

Finally, around 75.50% of respondents found the workshops to be beneficial, particularly in enhancing their understanding of paragraph structure and clarity. The relatively high participation rate indicated that students were seeking additional support outside of regular coursework, which was a positive sign of their commitment to improving their writing skills. The perceived benefits highlighted the effectiveness of these workshops in addressing specific areas of need. However, it would be valuable to look for what aspects of the workshops were most helpful and whether there were any areas for improvement to maximize the impact.

Discussion

The results of this study revealed several important insights into the writing experiences of university students. The high frequency of writing assignments indicated that students were frequently engaged in writing tasks, which was essential for developing their skills. However, the reported challenges suggested that students might benefit from more targeted instruction in specific areas.

The positive feedback regarding writing workshops underscored their potential impact on student learning. These workshops appeared to enhance students' understanding of effective writing practices, particularly in structuring paragraphs and improving clarity. However, the gap in confidence levels among some participants indicated that workshops might need to be more inclusive and address a wider range of writing skills.

Furthermore, the challenges identified, particularly in organizing ideas and grammatical accuracy, highlighted the need for ongoing support and resources for students. It might be beneficial to incorporate additional writing resources, such as one-on-one mentoring or online writing tools, to further assist students in overcoming these obstacles.

In conclusion, while students were actively engaged in writing, the findings suggested a need for enhanced support mechanisms to build their confidence and improve their writing skills. Future research could explore the long-term impact of writing workshops and identify best practices for teaching writing in higher education.

CONCLUSION

This study had provided valuable insights into the writing experiences of university students, particularly for all the students in 3rd semester students at Nommensen HKBP University Pematangsiantar, revealing both their engagement in paragraph writing and the challenges they encountered in the process. The findings suggested that while students frequently participate in writing tasks, there was a pressing need for targeted support to enhance their writing skills and boost their confidence.

The high frequency of writing assignments reported by participants indicated that writing was a central component of their academic experience. However, despite this engagement, many students struggled with fundamental aspects of writing, such as organizing their thoughts and ensuring grammatical accuracy. This discrepancy highlighted the need for educational programs to not only assign writing tasks but also to provide the necessary guidance and resources to help students succeed.

Moreover, the positive feedback regarding writing workshops underscored their potential impact on student learning. Participants who attended these workshops reported improvements in their understanding of paragraph structure and clarity. However, the study also revealed that not all students felt confident in their writing abilities, suggesting that workshops might require further refinement to address a broader range of writing skills and cater to diverse learning needs.

Also, the challenges identified in this study, particularly in organizing ideas and addressing grammatical issues, were common among students and indicated a critical area for intervention. These challenges could hinder students' ability to express their ideas effectively, which was essential for academic success. Addressing these issues through more focused writing instruction and support can help bridge the gap between students' writing experiences and their academic performance.

Finally, the researchers recommended having ongoing workshops, peer mentoring programs, and integrating digital tools and resources, to have better support students in their writing endeavors.

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