

READING-WRITING CONNECTION: MAXIMIZING ITS BENEFITS TO STIMULATE EFL STUDENTS' WRITING ABILITY

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**READING-WRITING CONNECTION:
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EFL STUDENTS' WRITING ABILITY**

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Abstract

This study aimed at finding out the benefits of reading-writing connection on the students' writing ability since writing is probably a complex process for college students to master. The study was conducted at Kanjuruhan University of Malang in which 30 students participated as the respondents of the study. The students conducted reading activities before writing an essay. Data were collected from the students' essays, questionnaire, and follow-up interview. The results of the study revealed that reading-writing connection was beneficial to stimulate the students' writing ability, especially dealing with content, organization, and language use. In addition, reading activities also enriched students' prior knowledge (schemata). Based on the findings, it is also suggested that reading and writing should be integrated in EFL classroom since they reinforce each other, and they are just like two sides of a coin which cannot be separated from each other because they are interconnected.

Keywords: Reading-writing connection, EFL, prior knowledge (schemata), and writing ability

Biodata

Teguh Sulistyo was born in Malang. He gained his undergraduate degree in English Department of Teacher Training and Education of Jember University. Then he obtained his master degree from Malang State University. Currently, he is studying in English Language Teaching for a doctorate degree at State University of Malang. Besides, he is teaching English at Kanjuruhan University of Malang.

INTRODUCTION

Reading-writing connection is one of the beneficial activities which can be applied in writing classes. The connection ¹ between reading and writing has been long investigated and most educators suggest that reading and writing share similar kinds of process (Shen, 2009:87). In

addition, Wengelin et al (2010:735) believe that the emerging text could function as a visual external storage, which could be used to decrease the cognitive load of the writer, and it is generally assumed that good writers use this more than poor writers. Also, there is such agreement that reading and writing are inseparable – just like two sides of a coin. Besides, ⁵ reading and writing are essentially similar processes of meaning construction involving the use of cognitive strategies.

Meanwhile, writing skill is regarded as the most complicated skill to be mastered. The students not only have to think of the content and organization of a text but also language use dealing with structure, vocabulary, and mechanics. In addition, English is taught in Indonesia as a foreign language (EFL) in which English is not used widely in Indonesian context resulting on the lack of English exposure. Thus, in some cases, Indonesian students probably get difficulties to use English properly, including writing activities. ⁴

According to Atay and Kurt (2006:103), the focus in writing classes is on the form of the written product rather than on how the learner should approach the process of writing.

Theoretically, based on the philosophy of reading and writing connection, the students need to acquire sufficient schemata before writing a composition, and they can take benefits from reading activities since reading activities also allow them to obtain good models of texts.

Even though there has been realized the connection between reading and writing, there is still a gap to reveal: How is actually the connection between text quality and quantity of reading with regard to student ability in writing? In addition, the second problem to answer is to what extents reading-writing connection helps students to stimulate their writing ability.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Of four English language skills, writing is regarded as the most difficult skill which must be mastered by Indonesian students since it is a very complex process activating students to explore their thoughts, experiences, feelings, schemata, and ideas. According to Kim and Kim (2005:71), most students have been taught grammatical features and a large vocabulary separate from the context, so they fail to carry the grammatical features and vocabulary into real communication and their ability to write. On the other hand, in writing activities, students should bring over their schemata and language features into their mind in order to be able to produce communicative and readable compositions. In addition, Gebhard (2000:222) avows that as

students write, they also take breaks to read the draft, and as they read, they discover whether or not their composition reveals their intended meaning.

Meanwhile, reading is defined in different perspectives by different experts. Yet there is a general agreement that the purpose of reading is to comprehend the contents of the texts. In addition, reading activities are beneficial for students to enrich their schemata related to various topics and develop students' communicative competence. Yang (2007:126) believes that reading indicates the motivation of learners; it increases students' vocabulary and language pattern power. Also, since reading and writing have a close relationship with each other (Grabe, 1991; Reid, 1993), carefully selected reading materials double as effective prompts and models for writing. (Chen, 2006:211). Wengelin et al also add that reading is positively correlated with text quality. Thus, reading activities may serve as a positive stimulus which generates students' ideas related to the topic they are writing. Also, reading may develop students' awareness to apply appropriate structural patterns, vocabulary, and even mechanics. Shen (2009:90) states that there is more evidence indicating students transfer word, content, and structure from their reading activities to use in writing a composition. Thus, reading activities, theoretically, help students to write better as they are able to obtain different kinds of information, ideas, feelings, language patterns, and vocabulary in use which are beneficial for the students when writing a composition. In addition, schema theory also underscores the very close connection between reading and writing (Shen, 2009:89).

In a nutshell, the theoretical discussion above supports the existence of reading-writing connection in which reading activities are truly advantageous to stimulate students' writing ability.

METHODOLOGY

PARTICIPANTS

The participants were 30 students of English Department of Education and Pedagogic Faculty of Kanjuruhan University of Malang who were joining Writing IV course. The students got some problems in writing activities, especially dealing with organization and language use even though they had taken Writing 1- 3 classes.

During informal interview in the first meeting of writing class (the students had 16 meetings in writing class in one semester), it was found that they were not satisfied with their

performance in Writing III class since they did not know well how to obtain ideas, or how to organize their ideas into a good composition. Furthermore, they were not really sure with their language, especially dealing with appropriate vocabulary items or word choice and grammar. For them, writing activities made them work very hard but poor products. So, writing was considered as the most complicated skill to master, and it required painful pursuits.

The students were divided into groups of three to read, discuss, and brainstorm before writing an essay. Somehow, they had to write an argumentative essay individually through process of writing.

PROCEDURES

MODELING OF TEXT

This stage dealt with the use of some texts in writing activities. The lecturer chose a specific text (approximately 511 words) entitled “My Best Friend’s Name is Mr. Know All” (Appendix 1) to introduce parts of an essay (argumentative); introduction, body, and conclusion. The class discussed in detail the contents of introduction (general statements and thesis statement), the body (topic sentence, supporting details, and concluding sentence (if any)), and conclusion (restatement, summary, or personal/final comment). This stage was conducted in the second meeting and the students worked in group of three.

Then, in the third meeting, the students had to practice identifying parts of an essay using an outline given (Appendix 2) based on a text entitled “Cell Phones”. This activity was intended to sharpen the students’ ability to analyze the content, the organization, and even word choice and language pattern of an argumentative essay. The students also got an experience of how to expand ideas into a readable argumentative essay.

After discussing parts of an essay, in the fourth meeting, the students practiced writing some thesis statements based on the topics selected by the whole class based on the agreement between the lecturer and the students. So, there was a negotiation between the lecturer and the students in selecting the topics. Thesis statement took the greatest portion among the other parts since it is usually considered as the soul or the most important part of an essay. Even thesis statement leads a writer how to expand his or her ideas and also it introduces the topic of the essay.

STIMULATING STUDENTS' SCHEMATA

Having enough practice on parts of an essay including its organization, the students were facilitated to stimulate their schemata by reading different kinds of texts. In addition, since there was Wi-Fi connection in the classroom, all groups maximized the facility by browsing texts related to the topic of the day – “smoking in public”. They also discussed their findings, made some notes, and decided whether they were in pro or contra side against “smoking in public”.

The main purpose of this activity was providing the students to develop their ideas by reading a lot of materials related to the topic. Also, the students had a good chance to exchange their opinions related to the topic with their peers. It was no matter whether they belonged to pro or contra side, but the most important thing was that they had sufficient schemata to support their opinions. They had to relate their previous schemata to new information they had obtained from reading activities of the day. In other words, they practiced how to frame their ideas into a good concept. Each student finally obtained enough experience related to the topic. In addition, the notes that they had made were beneficial to help the students recall when they started to write. Meanwhile, the role of the lecturer was mostly as a facilitator since he facilitated the students to obtain enough materials through reading-writing connection activities. The activity of stimulating students' schemata was conducted in the fifth meeting, and it belonged to prewriting activity in the process of writing.

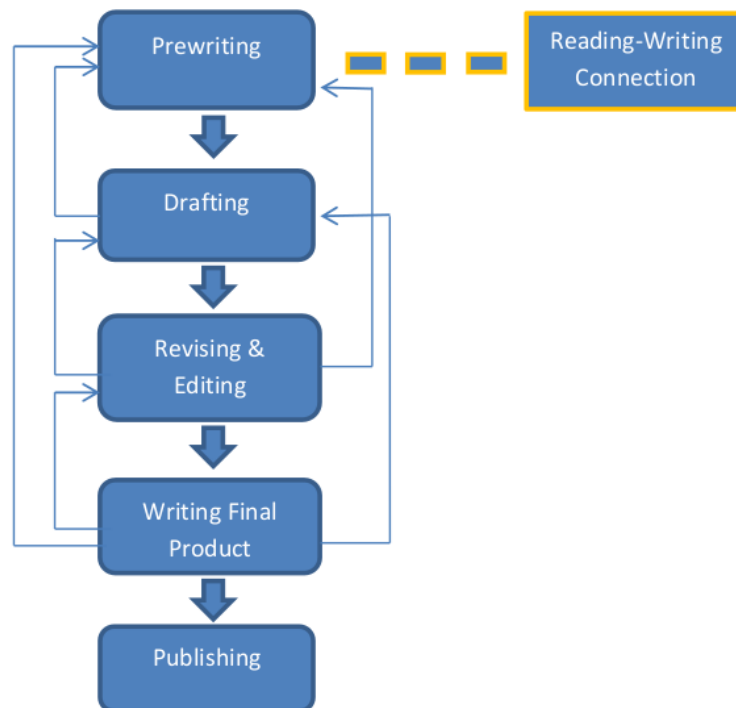
WRITING AN ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY

The students began to write an argumentative essay from the sixth meeting. After doing reading-writing connection activities in the stage of prewriting, the students were managed to write an outline about “smoking in public”. The notes they had made were maximized to guide them to start writing an outline. It seemed easier for them to construct their outline since they had got sufficient schemata. Shen (2009:88) says that ¹ a writer constructs meaning by using his/her own background experience to generate ideas. So, in this context, reading-writing connection played an important role to supply the students with enough schemata based on the materials they had read.

After finishing their outline, the students wrote their first rough draft. Some of them had to be back to their notes just to make sure that they had written all ideas in their draft. During this activity, the lecturer was ready to give a hand when needed. What the students did ¹ was a process

of moving back and forth from a paragraph to the next paragraph and from paragraphs to be back to outline and notes. The lecturer also checked whether or not the students were on the right track of process of writing. Then at the end of the class, the students had to show their draft to their peers and the lecturer.

At the seventh meeting, the students revised and edited their draft. They had to be sure with the content, organization, and language use. In this step, they were allowed to conduct a peer assessment. A student might need a classmate to read and give his/her opinion on the draft. Some students discussed feedbacks given by their peers just to make their draft better. The feedbacks not only dealt with content or organization but it was about language use. Then they revised again their draft before finishing their final product and submitting it to the lecturer at the end of the class. In revising step some students needed to be back to the outline again and notes just to make sure they had written their ideas. So, in the process of writing they not only flew from step 1 into step 2 and etc., but they might also be back to the previous step (see Picture1).



Picture 1. Process of Writing

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The study aimed at investigating reading-writing connection on the EFL students' writing ability. The data were taken from questionnaire conducted with the whole students (30), informal follow-up interview with 5 students representing the whole class, and the argumentative essays of the students.

All of the students were required to answer 5 items of questions (see Appendix 3) related to the implementation of reading-writing connection in writing class using Likert Scale (Burns, 2010:82). In addition, they also commented freely on the activities they had done. Meanwhile, based on the results of questionnaire, the follow-up interview was conducted to obtain their comments which could not be found on the questionnaire. Last but not least, the students' argumentative essays were used to examine whether the implementation of reading activities were able to stimulate the students' writing ability or not. Besides, the compositions were investigated to find out to what extents reading activities helped students to stimulate their writing ability.

THE RESULTS OF QUESTIONNAIRE

The results of questionnaire revealed that most students believed that reading activities before writing helped them to write an essay better. All of the students chose their own choices which represented their comments on the implementation of reading-writing connection activities.

Somehow, relating to question No. 1 which stated that "reading activities before writing should be given longer" only 10 students chose strongly agree (scale 5), 18 students chose agree (scale 4), and 2 students chose neutral (scale 3). Meanwhile, 30 students chose strongly agree (scale 5) to answer questions No. 2 and No 4 which stated "reading activities help me enrich my background knowledge" and "modeling of text makes me easier to write an essay".

In addition, 15 students chose scale 5 (strongly agree) when answering question No. 3 "reading activities help me understand English in use". Then 8 students chose scale 4 (agree) and 7 students answered scale 3 (neutral). Last but not least, 25 students chose scale 5 (strongly agree) and 5 students chose scale 4 (agree) when answering question No. 5 "reading-writing connection help me write better.

On the other hand, there were different comments given by the students related to the open questionnaire provided. Most of students enjoyed reading activities before writing. Also, modeling of text helped them to organize their ideas since they had models to write an argumentative essay. Somehow, some students said that they still got difficulties related to grammar.

To sum up, reading -writing connection, based on the results of questionnaire, played a beneficial role to stimulate students to write better.

THE RESULTS OF INTERVIEW

The follow-up interview was conducted after questionnaire session by involving 5 students representing the whole students to find out additional information related to the implementation of reading-writing connection in writing class.

Basically, they commented that reading-writing connection helped them to enrich their background knowledge. Also, they understood parts of an essay better because the lecturer provided models of texts to be analyzed. Somehow, one of them stated that he was not so sure with his language performance since grammar made him work harder than thinking about the content and organization of the essay. They also wanted to have similar activities for the next topic they would write. When they were asked "Are you satisfied with your product?", all of them responded that basically they could improve their ability in writing after being treated with reading-writing connection. Somehow, according to them, they still needed to read more and make reading habits as a part of their daily activities.

In short, they strongly agreed that reading-writing connection helped them organize their ideas into a good essay, but it did not work so well with their grammatical performance.

THE RESULTS OF WRITING ESSAY ACTIVITIES

Each student composed an argumentative essay based on the topic "smoking in public" individually. The essays were scored using Analytical Scoring Rubrics adapted from Cohen (1994:328).

The products of the students showed that there was evidence of transfer of content from reading activities into the essay. Some of them demonstrated the dangers of smoking by providing facts in the form of statistics they had got in internet. For example, a student who was

in the contra side wrote ² “People who never smoke but live with a smoker have a 30% greater risk of developing lung cancer than people who never smoke and live with a non-smoker”. In addition, the transfer of organization could be found in the products of the students. The students arranged the organization of their essay based on the modeling of texts by providing introduction, body, and conclusion.

Somehow, some students still made some errors in grammatical patterns. A student wrote “Smoking in public should be banned **because three reasons**”. He should have added “**of**”, so the sentence would be “Smoking in public should be banned **because of three reasons**”. Another example of error is “The government **should can** provide more smoking areas in public places”. The sentence consists of double modals, and it cannot be accepted in English. The student should have written “The government **should be able to** provide more smoking areas in public places”. In this case, the error is caused by intralingual transfer in which learners have just begun to acquire parts of L2 system, more and more intralingual transfer overgeneralization within L2 commonly happens (Brown, 1987:178).

Despite the students’ grammatical errors, the students’ writing ability increased significantly after having reading activities before writing. Some of them also benefited from vocabulary items besides content and organization when writing their products.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The process of writing and students’ products showed that reading activities stimulated students to write much better. It showed that reading played a beneficial role in providing students with sufficient rules and characteristics of good writing. It is similar to the results of a research conducted by Parodi who concluded that the positive correlations between comprehension and production with an important degree of commonality are proofs of the benefits of reading-writing connection (2007:239). This fact answered the first question “How is actually the connection between text quality and quantity of reading with regard to student ability in writing? In short, reading activities provided positive stimulus on students’ writing ability since the students got not only sufficient background knowledge but also models of texts. In other words, it may be said that the more students read the better they write.

It should be noticed also that when answering the second question of the study “to what extents reading-writing connection helps students to stimulate their writing ability”, the students

made good progress in terms of content and organization of their essays as well as the language use. They, somehow, still made grammatical errors as a result of intralingual transfer from L1 into L2. Furthermore, Parodi's research (2007:240) proved that it is important to emphasize the fact that... teaching practices currently in use do not seem to lead to the expected levels of language performance.

Apart from the errors made by the students, it could be concluded that reading-writing connection was beneficial to improve the students' writing ability. As a result, it is suggested that this activity may be an alternative technique in teaching writing. The results of the study implied that reading habits should be a part of EFL students' daily activities as reading allowed them to enrich their background knowledge in order that they would be able to maximize their communicative competence.

Even though the study proved that reading activities allowed EFL university students to write better, especially in terms of the content and organization of their essays as well as the language use, it is hoped that there will be further researchers who intend to conduct more comprehensible studies on reading-writing connection.

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Appendix 1. The Essay Model

My Best Friend's Name is Mr. Know All

I absolutely have no doubt to avow that my best friend is Mr. Know All. Mr. Know All knows everything, and it is also pretty generous. Actually, it is called internet - one of the idols of people in the modern era. I love it a lot as it always provides anything I look forward to obtaining. Even I cannot imagine how the life will be without its presence. For these reasons, I believe that internet is also your best friend because of its beneficial impacts in the modern lives.

The first beneficial impact that Mr. Know All has is its ability to deliver very fast information. For instance, people who are searching information about hot news such as flood in Jakarta are extremely sure to find such this news fast through internet. Also, internet never rejects your necessities to find other kinds of information as there is a motto which declares that "O ye who possess a great deal of information will conquer the world." In short, Mr. Know All is truly helpful for anybody who needs its service.

Second, internet is the media of education. Education cannot be separated from technology. In this respect, I would like to state that modern education has been really much influenced by the rapid development of technology, and internet takes place in this field. Maybe, the blending "EDUTECH" (education +technology) represents the internet role in education. For example, in teaching-learning process of speaking class, a tutor may use videos to facilitate students to acquire English better. In fact, he or she can obtain English Learning videos such as Offering Helps, Conversations in a Restaurant or Say What You are Thinking from YouTube.

Last but not least, internet serves a variety of entertainment. Entertainment is badly needed by those who intend to get rid of boring daily routines. After working hard from Sundays till Saturdays, people may feel bored with their monotonous activities. It is time for them to have something new and fresh. It should not be expensive as internet provides many kinds of entertainment. For example, one may be interested in funny actions of babies, so he or she just needs to click You Tube by typing "Funny babies", and Mr. Know All will offer him or her a variety of choices which interests him or her. It is very easy, isn't it?

In a nutshell, if you need a quick access in information, education, and entertainment, I believe that internet is the best answer to your necessities. In addition, Internet or Mr. Know All is antiracism because it will be a friend of any kind of people or race. Even it doesn't care whether you are men or women, or you are children, teenagers or even elderly persons as it will happily serve you with the quick access. In short, there is no reason for you to stay away from internet, which has become my best friend for multiple years. I extremely believe that Mr. Know All is your best fellow, too.

Appendix 2. The Outline of the Essay

Work in group and identify the outline of the essay below based on the essay entitled
Cell Phones

1. Introduction:

Thesis statement =

2. Body

7

Topic Sentence 1

Topic sentence =

.....

Supports =

.....

.....

Topic Sentence 2

Topic sentence =

.....

Supports =

.....

.....

Topic Sentence 3

Topic sentence =

.....

Supports =

.....

.....

3. Conclusion =

.....

Appendix 3. Questionnaire

Please take a moment to respond to the following questions. Put a tick (✓) in the box most represents your comment for the statement (1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral; 4= agree; 5 = strongly agree). Your comments are very important for the improvement of Writing Class. Thank you.

NO	DESCRIPTION	1	2	3	4	5
1	Reading activities before writing should be given longer					
2	Reading activities help me enrich my background knowledge					
3	Reading activities help me understand English in use					
4	Modeling of text makes me easier to write an essay					
5	Reading-writing connection helps me write better					

Please comment freely on the morning reading sessions below:

.....

.....

.....

.....

Thank you for answering the questionnaire.

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ORIGINALITY REPORT

4%

SIMILARITY INDEX

%

INTERNET SOURCES

%

PUBLICATIONS

4%

STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1

Submitted to University of Sunderland

Student Paper

1%

2

Submitted to University of Queensland

Student Paper

1%

3

Submitted to Higher Education Commission
Pakistan

Student Paper

1%

4

Submitted to The University of Manchester

Student Paper

1%

5

Submitted to University of Central Florida

Student Paper

<1%

6

Submitted to nsbm

Student Paper

<1%

7

Submitted to CSU, Long Beach

Student Paper

<1%

Exclude quotes Off

Exclude matches Off

Exclude bibliography On