



Exploring teachers' strategies in teaching writing for young learners

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ABSTRACT

Teaching writing for young learners (YL) needs unique strategies from each teacher. The purpose of this study is to help teachers explore strategies for teaching writing for young learners. The survey was used with a descriptive-qualitative method which was carried out by giving an open-ended questionnaire to five English teachers and tutors from a different institution. Then, the most appropriate strategy could not be generalized because there are different conditions of students' and teachers' qualifications. However, teachers must pay attention to three aspects of teaching such as understanding the characteristics of students, developing fun ways of learning, and peer feedback strategies. Teachers must be able to evaluate whether or not the strategy they provide can produce good results. From this research, with the exploring three different teachers' strategies in teaching writing, most of the students have succeeded in the minimum passing grade in each class. Furthermore, this paper pursued teachers to be able to design teaching writing for young learners in the right ways.

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Introduction

Nowadays, several students in the world have the same difficulties in language learning, particularly in mastering writing skills. It is undeniable that writing skills must be mastered by most students in the world. The reason is that by mastering writing skills, students will get concrete knowledge about literature which is important to support them in every grade of education. Therefore, teachers must always look for the appropriate strategy to teach writing particularly for young learners. Adas and Bakir (2013) argue that most students have problems communicating with their ideas. This case occurs because of the lack of vocabulary, insight and creativity in writing skills. They also said the biggest challenge for many students is writing subjects. In addition, Alkhasawneh (2010) stated that English skills weaknesses exist because there is no support system from the teaching method and the

environment. It could be concluded that teachers have an important role in exploring strategies in teaching writing to support their students with a matter in writing classes.

Young ages are educational subjects who still have enthusiasm and high imagination. At this stage, they will quickly get bored of doing one thing in a monotone. So, teachers must have unlimited creativity and young Learners must learn English in fun ways. The teacher who has competencies in teaching English for young learners will be able to make the materials to teach well, suggest what kind of possible approach, method, and techniques could be used (Cahyati, Parmawati, Atmawidjaja, & Siliwangi, 2019). In addition, Cahyati (2019) revealed that when teaching English teachers have to maximize interaction in the classroom for better results in the learning process. Therefore, teachers who have great teaching skills and competence in English should have extensive knowledge about child development and also could motivate children (Graddol, 2006). Thus, teaching young learners is not easy; here teachers actually must know the best method to teach writing skills for young learners to maximize student competencies, particularly in English writing skills.

Teaching writing is often expected to be a complicated strategy. It was caused by there should be a balancing between theory and practice. Moreover, the teachers should be mastering creative and interactive teaching strategies to make the students have a good circumstance in writing classes particularly for young learners. Many benefits will young age get by writing a subject that enhances insight and organizes the perspective or experience based on many resources in a well-structured sentence. Sayar (2019) emphasized fun tools, language stage, daily routine relationship and the easiness of materials used that should be considered by young learners' teachers in writing class. On the other hand, here the student-centered learning approach has been declared as one of the teaching strategies that should be emphasized in every writing class.

Conducting the habitual student-centered at a young age will make the student more adaptive, creative, and have many comfortable with the writing learning process. Based on that statement, the discussion range of this paper is about strategies which are used in teaching writing for young learners. Moreover, the discussion is around the students' motivation approach, fun strategy, and the reflection of autonomous learning in teaching writing strategy. The discussion is aimed to give the insight to conduct some suitable tricks to be adaptive and innovative teachers in writing classes. Thus, current teachers could omit public opinion about writing as a difficult subject particularly for a young age. Since young learners are children who are still in the range of 6-12 years old, the teacher should pay attention to the appropriate strategies to teach writing for young learners.

This paper explains several strategies in teaching writing for young learners; such as knowing the characteristics of students, creating fun methods during teaching writing for young learners to enhance their interest in learning writing skills, and also peer feedback to conduct autonomous learning at a young age. Those strategies are expected to be applied by teachers in the writing class. The appropriate strategies determine the successful result at the end of this process, proved by the good result from students' performances. Teaching writing to young learners is quite difficult for teachers. Thus, teachers need to implement the right method to improve students' interest in writing classes.

Strategy is a plan to do something that is carefully crafted (Orlich, Harder, Callahan, Trevisan, & Brown, 2009). Based on this understanding, it could be defined that teaching

strategies are the design of teachers in teaching; containing methods and techniques, which are used in the learning process. Suitable teaching strategies should be conducted because many people consider the writing subject as a challenging level of language skills (Widosari, Suwandi, Slamet, & Winarni, 2017). Teachers' strategies have occupied a significant role in teaching writing for young learners, for instance knowing the characteristics of the students. This means teachers should be very attentive toward their students' character particularly in terms of psychological aspects. Another example is, teachers, creating fun methods during teaching writing is the same as being inventive and creative teachers in order to attract students' interest in learning writing. The last one is peer feedback to conduct autonomous learning that allows students to learn writing independently based on their desires and preferences. Therefore, many teachers kindly realize in creating a well-prepared method approach that could support the learning writing process. The paper discusses several strategies or methods conducted by teachers in teaching writing for young learners.

Method

The study is descriptive qualitative research that uses a qualitative method in order to find out the various teachers' strategies in teaching writing for young learners. This research also involved several English tutors and teachers who happen to teach English to young learners by giving a number of questions. The questions were actually related to the effective teaching strategy in order to improve students' writing skills. The evidence was collected by five tutors' responses through the questionnaire. Those five respondents come from different institutions. Moreover, four of five teachers are bachelor of English education and come from several public institutions such, learning center Mima Beji, SD NU Master Sokaraja, SD Alam Cilacap, and Melody English Course Purwokerto. On the other hand, one of them is a private tutor who is a final year English education student. The main data of this research was gained through an online form questionnaire.

The questionnaires consist of five open questions. The questions were concerned with: the best strategy to improve students' writing skills, the main aspect to develop a strategy of knowing students' characteristics, fun learning method, and peer feedback to conduct the autonomous learning in teaching writing for young learners also asking about how many students succeed the minimum passing grade. Then, the questionnaires were distributed to five English tutors with different institution backgrounds. All the questions and explanations were completely in English. Since it used simple questions, it would be easier to understand the instructions. The data from the questionnaire were analyzed by calculating the percentage of English tutors' strategy in teaching writing. In line with this, assembling the data is carried out by collecting and reading by scanning technique then interprets the data through figure or description. Thus, the findings from the questionnaire are presented and discussed in the following chapter.

Findings and discussion

Best way to improve quality of teaching writing for EFL young learners

Writing skill is an ability in a language aspect to create a great idea into words, sentences, or paragraphs. Miftah (2015) argues that writing is one of the intermediate levels of language

skills rather than the other skills. As noticed by Kurniaman, Yuliani, and Mansur (2018), students' struggles with writing skill is conducted because of the teacher-centered approach which does not have enough effort to build the interactive learning process. On the other hand, writing skill is decided as the most important academic aspect because through mastering the writing skill there are many insights will learners find out as emphasized in the study of (Ketonen, Hähkiöniemi, Nieminen, & Viiri, 2020). Thus, mastering writing skill means learners also learn to build an organization and well-structured verbal-linguistic skill.

Many studies decided that maximizing writing skills could be in several ways. The study of Limpo and Alves (2017) based on theoretical analysis states the assessment of writing skill and the teachers' belief could help learners' improvement in mastering writing skill itself. The other perspective stated in the survey of Khatib and Meihami (2015) about the combination in learning activities as a group could help learners to maximize their abilities, improve vocabularies, and have well-structured ideas, particularly in writing classes. Therefore, the various assessments could be conducted such as by making a daily assessment through conducting the habitual writing in the class or making a student-centered learning process. In line with the previous statement, making a group discussion also could make learners have lots of ideas that come from each other. To sum up, having good circumstances in writing classes could be easy to conduct while there is a contribution between learners and teachers.

Current findings the fact about writing is a difficult skill which should be mastered. Further research tends to find the general method to maximize writing skills. Moreover, learners need interactive classes to enhance their understanding of each material of writing subject while learning process (Khatib & Meihami, 2015). An interactive class could be conducted while there are initiative teachers which have a higher awareness about the importance of student-centered writing classes. However, the struggles about writing should be omitted in the future by considering the importance of skill itself.

There are several data gained from the open-ended questionnaire about the best way to improve the quality of teaching writing for young learners. In teaching writing for young learners, many best ways could be implemented. Several of these are, set different unique strategies in every meeting, arranging instructional design, and giving new vocabulary. The unique strategy could be shown with some fun games, jumbled letters into a good word, and utilization of appropriate word order. The data indicates, three of five respondents considered vocabulary aspects in teaching writing. Then, this strengthens that vocabulary is the main factor that should be increased through several appropriate strategies. Actually, those strategies that have been mentioned above aim to one core point, which is to enrich vocabulary mastery. Thus, vocabulary mastery is really needed to maximize students' writing skills. Young learners are at the beginning level of English learners.

To make a solid learning foundation, students are introduced to the basic vocabulary also meaning it. This could help English Foreign Language students have an appropriate interpretation of every word meaning and it was related to making great writing skills. On the other hand, the best strategy depends on the teacher's ability in teaching writing in the classes and how the teacher faces the learner's condition. Then, to get the best result in teaching, the creativity and insight of teachers actually should be considered. Based on that survey, every teacher has their own strategies while doing various aspects in teaching writing for young learners.

The appropriate way of teaching writing determines the quality of students' writing skills. Writing skill is one of the skills which determine the students' communicative proficiency in English. Those can be conducted by giving them what they actually needed during teaching writing. According to Brown (2001), teaching writing skills should be well constructed based on the students' level and capacity. Thus, constructs mean everything that relates to those aspects is already in the ripe consideration. However, Astrini, Ratminingsih, & Utami (2020) declare that in writing class, teaching strategies become a very important aspect of the teaching and learning process. Selecting the right strategy enables teachers and students to achieve the learning goals.

In addition, the use of appropriate strategies can motivate students in the learning process of writing. Based on the research, the best way to improve the quality of writing for young learners is to arrange the instructional design. It is important to figure out the teaching-learning process. One of those is through the handout. The handout is one of the essential items in learning English. It can support the learning process for young learners because students face English for the first time. They can do the assignment on the handout. Other than that, the game is an effective way to encourage young learners' participation in a writing class. Therefore, the teacher not only can apply one strategy in their learning process, but also, they are able to combine the strategy above to create harmony in a class.

According to Bakhsh (2016), young learners are determined to be children from five or six to twelve years old in elementary school. However, that is not the measurement of how mature they are. Phillips (1993) stated about there are some factors influencing the young learners' maturity, such as culture, environment, gender, and also their parents. Young learners' development should be taken into serious consideration. Since some children are developing very fast, perhaps others need more time. According to Brown (2001), teachers must take young learners' characteristics and intellectual aspects into consideration in order to aim for successful language learning. Therefore, a good teacher should be aware of the different characteristics of young learners in order to establish the teaching strategy that fits them very well.

Many experts have different thoughts about young learners regarding the research that they have conducted back then. Most of the researchers and writers classified young learners based on their age. For instance, Scott and Ytrebreg (1990) in their book "Teaching English to Children" divided young learners into two main groups, the first group is the children in the range five to seven years old and the second group is eight to ten years old. The characteristic of young learners in the age of five to seven years old according to Scott and Ytrebreg (1990) is they can easily talk about what they are doing including what they have done or heard, they can plan the activity, imagine vividly, they can argue about something, and so forth.

Meanwhile, for young learners between the ages of eight to ten years old, their characteristic has already formed. Since they are able to distinguish between fact and fiction, they ask the questions more often, they can easily make certain about what they like and do not like, they are also able to work with others and learn from others. Generally, based on the exegesis above, the characteristics of young learners can be concluded according to their age classifications such as manner and maturity in order to follow the

learning activities. Meanwhile, teacher consideration in deciding the proper strategy based on students' characteristics is also very crucial in this case of discussion.

Main aspects to develop teaching writing strategies for EFL young learners

Drawing on the study findings, there are several aspects including students' characteristics, fun learning, and peer feedback in the strategy of teaching writing. Before discussing them one by one, we present the data from the questionnaire that we gave to the informants. The first is the main aspect to develop a strategy of knowing students' characteristics in teaching writing. Nowadays, English is considered to be a difficult subject. Students, especially young learners, have a tendency to easily understand the material with fun things. At this age, they will get bored quickly, besides that they also like to move from one activity to another. The teacher should give some assessment for knowing students' understanding of another of their writing skills.

In addition, the teacher also can understand the students' characteristics with cognitive aspects. Therefore, the other main aspect is enthusiasm. To increase students' enthusiasm in learning English, the teacher should make writing class fun. It is supported by Jančiauskas (2018), who explained that most children like physical education in the learning process because the physical learning process is easy, useful, and very interesting. When the students enjoy another learning process, they can be more interested in English. English instruction is a difficult subject, and can vanish. Another important thing is to make a fun writing class. The teacher should give clear instructions and examples. Make sure that students understand the materials or the topic to write. To summarize, when the teacher knows the students' strengths and weaknesses in writing, they have to know the right strategy to apply in writing classes.

A good teacher is someone who is good at arranging strategies in teaching so that students can understand the explanation well. There are several strategies that can be used in teaching, as suggested by Orlich et al. (2009), there are several instructional models that must be emphasized by teachers such as psychological models, organizational models, and classroom management models. In addition, talking about teaching strategy will certainly lead us to other aspects that teachers must pay attention to, including social context, emotional context, the curricular context, the collegial context (Orlich et al., 2009). Therefore, in relation to teaching strategies to young learners, a teacher must be good at understanding their students, what their characteristics are, what they like, and what can motivate them. In this way, the teacher can find out and analyze what strategies are appropriate to teach students.

There are some interesting methods to teaching writing for young learners, including; learning by watching movies, flashcards, and storybooks. Ruusunen (2011) explained that movies can increase student motivation for learning a language. In addition, research from Kusumawardhani (2020) stated that flashcards are one of the media that can improve English skills, not only for speaking, listening, reading, and writing, but also can improve grammar, pronunciation, and spelling. Therefore, storybooks have positive effects on improving reading and writing skills (Shin & Crandall, 2019). All of the above methods are some of the strategies that can be used in teaching writing to young learners.

The strategy in teaching writing to young learners is to help students explore their ideas; here the teacher's role is as a role model (Hertiki, 2018). In addition, Brown (2001) explained there are two techniques of teaching writing to young learners, including; controlled techniques and semi-controlled techniques. Brown (2001) also stated that techniques of teaching writing are the things that teachers do in the classroom. Because of that, teachers should have the best strategies.

According to previous research, there are a lot of strategies that teachers can provide to students, but another important thing that we must not forget is that each student has their own characteristics with different bits of intelligence. So that, in determining the right strategy the students must analyze what strategies are most appropriate for a particular class with each child's different conditions. This article will discuss the appropriate strategies for teaching writing to young learners with a psychological approach and student characteristics.

Here, a few researchers emphasize several teaching strategies such, increasing students' motivation and developing fun strategies. In this research, writers have mentioned both strategies with one new innovation namely peer- feedback to conduct autonomous learning in teaching writing for young learners also asking about how many students succeed the minimum passing grade. Therefore, this research aims to give some new insight into several teaching writing strategies and also suggest teachers become qualified by exploring those strategies in every writing class.

This research also found several points to develop a strategy of fun learning in teaching writing for young learners such grouping and discussion, considering effective aspects with the approach of the learners' characters, providing feedback from a teacher is one point to know if the strategy is working or not for students, combining writing activity with an interesting thing like a picture to avoid a monotone and strict learning process, and using the appropriate media used in the teaching process to catch students' attention and enthusiasm.

One of the successful tips for teaching writing for young learners is the fun method. Babiarz and Zapała-Kraj (2019) agree with this point, He explains that learning writing skills should be done with pleasure; make it a matter of pride and do not make it frustrating. Therefore, the teacher can combine writing activities with interesting things like pictures or other media like audiovisuals. The media that teachers use can make students more interested in learning. In addition, the teacher can give some interesting topics and make simple explanations. Give some assignments and make group and discussion, because it is important to help students to learn in teamwork. They can help each other. Then finally, give feedback to our students. Feedback is one of the points to know if the strategy is working or not. For example, the teacher gives some assignments and they submit their work, after that the teacher gives corrections. This way can help students to know their weaknesses in writing. Lastly, the teacher can ask the students about writing practice. With interactive learning processes like this, students and teachers can help each other to achieve learning goals.

The last aspect is to develop a strategy of peer feedback to conduct autonomous learning in teaching writing to young learners. Autonomous learning is an important thing teachers should be considered because it could encourage students' learning awareness. This strategy is mostly utilized in higher education specifically in a university. However,

autonomous learning habitual is possible to accustom from an early age. The aim of that statement is to conduct independent students in the learning process. Being independent learners could emerge good self-regulation in the learning process. Then, one strategy to conduct autonomous learning is by peer feedback to each student. The most important thing for peer feedback is giving assignments. Every student gets a different assignment with the same principles. In addition, peer feedback can be done by cross-correcting, so that each student can know and learn from his mistakes and those of others. The teacher also can give some examples of good writing. With those few points, the students can be independent in studying with their friends.

Percentage of students exceed minimum passing grade of classes

Every institution including elementary school, courses, and private lessons have their own result assessment at the end of each semester. There are five institutions that show the percentage of students while exceeding minimum passing grades in classes. The highest percentage obtained by the Melody English Course which gained 90% of students exceeds the passing grade. It means that the course institution has an appropriate strategy in teaching writing for young learners. On the other hand, learning center Mima Beji gets the lowest result percentage. With this data, the teachers should do the re-analysis such classroom action research of teaching strategies in the writing classes. Then, SD NU Master Sokaraja and SD Alam Cilacap almost have the same result percentage which is in the range of 70% to 75%. It shows that those schools' teaching strategy is in the upper-middle class. For the last, the data show about the private lesson which actually has no semester evaluation. Thus, each institution generates a different amount of data in one subject through three strategies; understanding the characteristics of students, developing fun ways of learning, and peer feedback strategies as depicted in Figure 1.

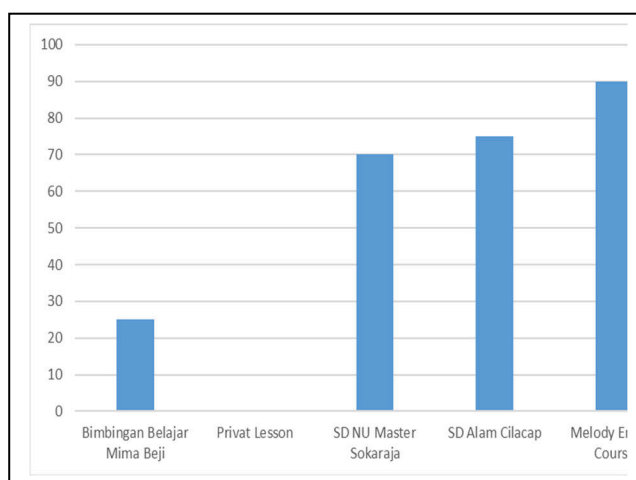


Figure 1. Students' percentage of passing grade

To improve students' writing skills, peer feedback is needed. This is very important for students to be able to practice and study independently. Planar and Moya (2016) as cited in Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2016) emphasize that feedback is very useful for the students, both of students who write and those who provide feedback. In addition, not only formal assessment but peer-feedback could also be used to find strengths and weaknesses in writing skills (Dippold, 2009). As stated by the experts above, peer feedback really helps

students in their writing projects; it could be done with a cross-correcting method. Peer feedback could conduct critical thinking, autonomous learning and increase writing style insight (Bijami et al., 2013). It was related to the survey result which shows the main aspect that could be implemented to conduct peer feedback such as, giving different assignments with the same principle, giving a good example of good writing, and doing cross-correcting in every assignment. Furthermore, peer feedback should be conducted to enhance the capability of students in writing skills.

Conclusion

The strategies of teaching writing to young learners should be to pay attention to several things. First, teachers must know the best way to improve the quality of writing skills in the young learners' classes. Second, there are three aspects that the teacher must understand when teaching young learners, such as students' characteristics, how to develop fun learning strategies, and strategies for peer feedback. Third, the teacher should know if their strategies are successful and can help students to get maximum learning results or not. By understanding all these aspects, teachers could easily find the right strategy to teach writing to their students. Talking about young learners means that nowadays teachers must really understand their students' interest in something particularly their interest in learning writing, which is commonly known as a lesson that is quite hard to teach for young learners. Instead of creating a lot of strategies that would make the students feel confused to follow, it is better to focus on one strategy and develop it to become more effective. However, teachers are also able to combine more than one strategy in the writing learning process when it could support each other to the same purpose. This indicates that each institution has its own criteria for success to determine whether or not its strategy is applicable.

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