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Research paper



The Use of the T-Ex Approach in Indonesian EFL Essay Writing: Feedbacks and Knowledge Exploration

Mister Gidion Maru[1]*, Donal Matheos Ratu[2], Ekawati Marhaenny Dukut[3]

[1]*Universitas Negeri Manado*
[2]*Universitas Negeri Manado*
[3]*Soegijapranata Catholic University*

Abstract

This research paper is aimed at sharing the knowledge exploration occurring in an EFL classroom which becomes the impact of giving corrective feedbacks within the implementation of the T-Ex Approach in teaching essay writing In Indonesia EFL Class. T-Ex approach, which is originally called Jeremiad approach, suggests three aspects namely text explanation which prescribes the identification and presentation of a certain given topic or issue, text examination that underlines the presence of possibly related knowledge toward the topic, and text expectation that proposes the reflection and application of the knowledge-found into the ongoing context. As a qualitative research, this study involves students as the respondents to be interviewed after being taught using the approach and given feedbacks. The data are coded by use of grounded theory. The results reveal that the written corrective feedbacks in the implementation of the T-ex approach has led the students to explore their heuristic intuition in dealing with the challenge of source exploration, challenge of linguistic knowledge, the focus on the comprehensiveness of the topic, and the possibility of interdisciplinary studies. The essay writing itself reflects a process of searching and thinking as well as the sharing of knowledge, language and values.

Keywords: *T-ex approach, knowledge exploration, feedbacks, essay, Indonesian EFL*

1. Introduction

Essay writing involves thinking. The production of an essay indicates the works of thought in reproducing phenomena and realities as knowledge to learn and share by using the proper means of expression, namely language. It defines writing in its central position to measure academic success [1]. Essay writing acts as an instrument for assessing students' competence. It occupies vital role within higher education due to its fundamental purpose: "it is both a tool of assessment and an avenue to learning" [2]. Within this perspective, students' essay may serve as a record of engaged readings and resources, and as picture of learning experiences in particular discipline or more which are communicated in clear and critical expressions. Hence, an essay is viewed as the reflection of students' rhetorical competence and critical thinking [3]. This means that writing an essay is not a matter of merely transferring an idea or response into a certain frame of paragraphs but also negotiating meaning through various linguistic features as well as recalling interpretation and analysis on a certain issue or focus. Meeting a well-planned structure of an essay is not sufficient for an academic essay. It should portray the acquisition of language and the comprehensiveness of knowledge, which summarize both process and product approach to writing. In other words, an essay requires "a number of complex rhetorical and linguistic operation" [4]. The process and product of essay writing depict a critical and accurate competence.

Being a bit different from speaking skills in terms of the demand for the accuracy, essay writing demands comprehensive ways in the sense of the grammatical construction, the choice of the words and the punctuation use as well as the potential of analytical ability [5]. Essay writing undergoes linguistic and thinking process. Within this context, the mastery of language expressions determines the share thinking, the critical thinking process gives the value for the language expression such perspective clarifies the place of essay writing at the heart of education [6]. This is reflected in teacher's assigning students with an essay for measuring their understanding and competence. Thus, students are often judged on their essays. Essays are treated as the indicator of skills for combining the art of presentation with the exploration of language use. The assumption is that in developing and supporting an argument, students experience the challenge of putting ideas into a topic and learn to make it reasonable and acceptable with an appropriate language expression. It may occur through different strategies for prewriting, drafting and rewriting as well as revising. Writing process is "not only as a way to transmit a message but as a way to grow and cook a message" [7]. In other words, a good essay goes beyond its format or structure. It constitutes a successful process and transfer of knowledge on a given topic or discipline(s). Writing in a discipline, besides relying upon language acquisition, requires "a complete, active, struggling engagement with the facts and principles of a discipline (s)" [8]. The discipline content and language expressions interact to make meaning and mark the goal of writing. Thus, there is a balance between improving essay as an ultimate product and process as the means to the end [9]. Commonly, the success in writing an essay leads to the success in academic assessment [10]. However, such success is not a piece of cake. Many students fail to meet this expectation. The difficulties dealing with the usage of grammar, lexis and syntax influence students' ability to share and elaborate argument and synthesizing ideas [11]. It is admitted that many EFL learners remain trapped in the circumstances in which they posses limited language proficiency for critical thinking, genre and social

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knowledge [12]. It tends to be complex whenever rare practice and lack of knowledge take place in essay writing learning [13] not to mention "teachers' insufficient knowledge of essay discourse forms who mainly focus on teaching writing as a means rather than as an end" [14] and also inefficient system of written assignment feedback [15]. Essay writing mostly falls into the act of following the structure of introduction, body and conclusion. Teachers apparently pay less attention in advising students how to put their ideas and transfer their knowledge down on paper in the form of an essay. This indicates the need for more effective approach used to teach essay writing that allows the optimum knowledge transfer and frequency of feedback practices.

In the Indonesian context, the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum designs that English learning is attached with the competences built out of the materials which emphasize on the use of English as a tool of communication for expressing ideas and knowledge; the habit of reading, understanding, summarizing and reproducing a passage; and the habit of composing a text and the awareness to its rules. Within this context, essay writing may serve as one of the most authentic and interactive ways of transferring thoughts and ideas to others [16]. The communication of ideas takes its baseline in the construction of text. The ability to convey meaning proficiently in written text becomes crucial atrribute to learning process in EFL class. For managing such objective, the scientific approach was suggested to be used in language learning process. However, this approach does not seem to be fully accepted and understood by some teachers. They argued that this approach appears to work well with the science subjects but does not really do with the language learning process in Indonesia [17]. It means that an alternative approach for language learning is challenging. There is a need for more effective and applicable approach. Because of this, the writer carries out a study on using T-Ex approach in language particularly for essay writing. The choice of T-ex approach to be implemented in the teaching and in the research is not apart from its potential as a text based approach which allows knowledge exploration and language practices. It is also the reason why English department students are involved as the respondents of the research. They are assumed to be related to both academic writing and language learning process.

2. Literature Review

T-ex approach, which is originally called jeremiad; a rhetorical formula in American literature, [18], [19] prescribes a broader scope to essay structure than that of a traditional structure. The jeremiad approach in fact inspired from a jeremiad tradition which constitutes a type of American Puritan literary genre and rhetoric [20], [21], [22], [23], [24]. deriving from a kind of rhetoric structure, jeremiad is textual analysis relying upon the interdisciplinary contexts and knowledge of the text as the first step of the structure. The analysis becomes comprehensive by the identification of the values that might contribute to the solution and the suggestion for actions or views taken for renewing the decline of the society as the possible road to success in the future. The jeremiadic approach results in the analysis which presents the situation or circumstance grounding the creation of a text, the responses toward it and the frames of the expected actions or thoughts to renew the situation. These structures are then viewed to have pedagogical impact when they are implemented in the classroom particularly in the effort to bring to a text for effective and contextual media of language learning. It is then so-called T-Ex approach due to the enactment of the three phases of teaching which emphasize upon the terminologies such as text explanation, text examination, and text expectation. The T-ex approach suggests that an essay must be commenced with the explanation step which concerns with the identification or presentation of an issue or problem and its possible cause(s), and be followed by the examination step that relates to the attempt to offer solutions to the problem. It is concluded by the expectation which is the hope for betterment or attitudinal changes toward the problem. The solution can be in the forms of reference to the values, figure, historical events, philosophy and even religious teachings. It depends upon the students' knowledge and perspective. This stresses the use of the approach in stimulating, exploring and increasing students' knowledge [25]. The implementation of the T-Ex approach in the teaching of essay writing engages students with the recalling and cultivating of knowledge due to the demand for meeting the pattern of the thinking required. The language competence is certainly involved in formulating and identifying, addressing and resolving an issue or topic of the essay. Within this process, revision is fundamental since students get feedback throughout the composing process either from their teachers or peers. A single essay is considered being finished after having several revisions.

This research paper is aimed at sharing the knowledge exploration occurring in an EFL classroom as the impact of giving feedbacks in the implementation of the T-Ex Approach particularly in the teaching of essay writing. The feedbacks in this context refer to the comprehensive written corrective feedback. For the purpose of obtaining a good essay in accordance with the formula of the T-Ex approach and framing the exploration and discovery of related knowledge of the given issue(s), the teacher plays a crucial role in helping students to improve their essays by giving written corrective feedbacks. This confirms that an essay is a result of a process until it comes to a final product which negotiates an intended content and message. The written corrective feedbacks bridge the expectation to increase the students' language competence, in one side, and knowledge on the other side. Written corrective feedback can be more beneficial for students as learners have greater processing time to compare their output with the corrections they received [26].

Written corrective feedback is "a complex construct due to the multiple options available for correcting students' writing, as well as the different ways in which learners can respond to it" [27]. It implies that teachers may suggest all of relevant aspects in terms of the betterment of the essay; whether it is related to the structural aspects or content aspects. In light of this, the students may enjoy the improvement in their linguistic knowledge and the comprehensive understanding of an issue as well as the personal development. Admitting the importance of various strategies of written corrective feedbacks such as indirect-direct written feedback, focused-unfocused written feedback and metalinguistic feedback, this research mainly employs the comprehensive written corrective feedbacks. It involves "correcting a wide range of errors in students' written work. This type of feedback is also considered 'extensive' as it treats multiple errors at once" [28]. Such characteristics of the feedback is appropriate for attaining the purpose of this research since it does not merely concentrate on giving feedbacks on the linguistics matters but also allows more spaces for teachers to suggests the exploration and addition of content as well as draw the enrichment of more knowledge for the perfection of an essay. In so doing, it is in line with the frame of the T-Ex approach in its implementation.

3. Method

As a qualitative research, this study obtained the data in the forms of words taken from the students' commentaries and notes. A total of 26 students of the advance writing class voluntarily agreed to take part in the study. The students were volunteers who responded to recruitment to participate in this research The students were interviewed in natural setting. The students were required to respond to the main question: (1) what was your experience with the implementation of the T-Ex approach in essay writing and (2) what was the impact of the written correction feedback in your essay writing process in the frame of T-ex approach? In addition, the notes in the forms of diaries were also examined to support the

analysis. Their essays were also regarded to be a complimentary data.

In the implementation of the approach, the students were assigned with the given topic namely the corruption issue. They were, then, considered as the informants. The data were then coded in the frame of Thorberg' the informed Grounded Theory prescribing "a product of a research process as well as to the research process itself, in which both the process and the product have been thoroughly grounded in data by Grounded Theory methods while being informed by existing research literature and theoretical frameworks" [29]. This implies that the data both obtained from the process and product were analyzed and interpreted in the way of open, axial and selective coding by the support of the available and relevant theoretical perspectives.

4. Findings and Discussion

Good academic writing actually creates new knowledge and new meaning [30]. This proposition underlines that writing involves more than the exhibition of language competence or linguistics knowledge. It capitalizes knowledge as the ingredient to elaborate a certain topic or issue. At the same time, it marks the contribution of a writing product including an essay to highlight the presentation and discovery of knowledge. The knowledge gains and shares through writing process is a result of series of collaborating works among teachers and students. One of which is implemented in this research. The implementation of the T-Ex approach has framed students with several activities connected with the enhancement of knowledge. The steps of the approach suggest the involvement of series of comprehensive written corrective feedback in order to obtain an essay which meets the required outline and content. Since the acquisition and distribution of knowledge color the essay, the analysis carried out by coding of the students' perspective toward the implication of the written corrective feedbacks during the implementation of the T-Ex approach frames to several findings.

4.1. The Challenge of Source Exploration

The comprehensive written corrective feedbacks given during the attempts to the betterment of the final product of the essay have driven students to engage with more activities related the search and exploration of resources that answers the feedbacks. One of the students' words can summarize several other responses to the questions of how they deal with the given feedbacks during the process of essay writing;

"At first I just imagined that this writing is going to be easy. It was only a way of composing words into the structure of introduction, body and conclusion as usually taught for the structure of an essay. But, the demand of T-Ex approach to share topic identification and explanation, followed by the presentation of relevant hope or solution, forced me to find information relevant to the given essay topic. The feedbacks given to my essay in several meetings until my essay was considered being done really drove me to active searching of information from many sources both printed and online. It was not fun until I realized the joy of knowing many things related to my topic, not to mention the effort to learn English more for better expressions for my ideas" (Student 7).

This comment implies that the need to treat the subject matter as comprehensively and as precisely as the essay topic demands in the frame of T-ex approach led students to the efforts of gaining information from various sources. They build their knowledge from the range of information and ideas found in their readings as suggested. The feedbacks seem to act as the guide for students for their browsing and digging of topic-related knowledge. This is, of course, followed by the ability to gather and select most relevant information for the subject matter. At this point, students develop and perform their heuristic intuition. Thus, in their writing of the essay, they actually perform data collection and categorization for elaborating the topic which constitute the gain of knowledge of scientific methodology for writing. It points out that the written corrective feedbacks have challenged students to create their adventure of browsing for information and knowledge for the purpose of enriching the content and sharing the required knowledge.

4.2. The Challenge of Source Exploration

The demand for the clarity of the message of an essay required the clarity of language expression used and other related linguistics features. The comprehensive written corrective feedbacks helped to remind students to recall their language knowledge. The students admitted this circumstance as follows:

"My essay was revised for several times. Every time I submit my essay, I have some notes from the teacher. He comments on the words and grammar that I use. The comments, besides asking for more detail definition or explanation of my topic, suggest some grammatical inputs that help me to recognize my mistakes. It brings me to learn more." (Student 17)

This comment informs that the use of the feedbacks in the context of the T-Ex approach draws student to the importance of language in clarifying the information and ideas of the various sources. The attempts to state writers' standpoint, to argue using examples, or to conclude and to define the subject matter shape students' need for higher competence of English. In other words, the challenge of establishing point of view on the given topic, making the subject matter understood and expressed well emphasize the use of language in setting up a line of communication of the essay with readers.

The students transfer the feedbacks into the advantage of overcoming the hindrance rooting from the nature of the language. They are imposed to learn something of the language forms and structures. It is pivotal in making the language work for negotiating meaning and conveying message, as it means the accumulation of language knowledge becomes a must. Therefore, more efforts to enrich knowledge serve to be inseparable actions during the writing of the essay.

4.3. The Focus on Comprehensiveness of the Topic

T-Ex approach is designed to lead students to be able to identify a problem and its cause(s), resolution and hope into the classroom. Within the context of essay writing, the comprehensive written corrective feedbacks function to endorse the aim of the approach. The feedbacks allow students to improve not only the form but also to improve deep understanding of the subject matter as admitted by the following student:

"I think, revisions make me to look more focus on the topic, teacher's feedback, for example, need more elaboration. It leads me to search for more relevant information concerning with the topic. The information then enables me to comprehend the topic or the given subject matter, the focus on the subject matter guides my search and broaden my knowledge on it, I get the substance of the matter, for example, once I just knew that corruption is not only about money, the essay writing informed more than that simple understanding" Student 3)

The students' comment implies that the written corrective feedbacks draw students to the activities to improve the quality of the content of their essay. Following the feedbacks, students are engaged with combining all of the gathered information and knowledge into more detail and focus explanation of the issue or subject matter. For instance, the feedbacks in the phase of text explanation of the T-Ex drive students to know what actually corruption is. At this point, the students gain many definition of corruption and finally they have to make certain definition and explanation. Since essay is not long enough as a paper, the variety of insights on corruption has to be summarized into several sentences without losing the complexity of the meaning. This tests students' ability to select and express an idea out of much available information. It can be said that the students' elaborating the subject

matter requires complex knowledge in order to send a clear and complete content of an essay.

The demand for presenting the possible cause(s) of the rise of the issue or subject matter widens the parameter of the search of knowledge. Identifying the topic itself has been a challenging work considering the feedbacks. The addition of presenting the causes of the problem and later trying to find a resolution becomes the main menu of the revision process, because it frames the additional understanding of the subject. The opportunity to re-write after the written corrective feedbacks becomes the opportunity to reveal afresh what is trying to convey. This is detected in the students' comment below:

"Every week we have different feedbacks from the lecturer, it is like a new challenge coming every week. At the beginning it was hard, but later, it made me think in every revision. My resources were needed to be used to enrich my essay" (Student 24)

The above words illustrate that the feedbacks in the implementation of the T-Ex approach train students to focus in elaborating the issue. The complexity of topic is answered by the process of the information searching within which the selection of the most relevant knowledge shapes students critical thinking. They act as an instrument in active inquirer of certain research. They seek for information, select, categorize, interpret and transfer it into their essay. It is obvious that at the moment the students see themselves not as simply receiving an assignment of writing or receiving teachers' knowledge transfer but also exposing themselves to the core activities of learning as they enrich themselves with variety of knowledge. It becomes complete by considering the involvement of language knowledge in completing the project because their language competence contributes to their finalizing of the essay as the product.

4.4. The Possibility of Interdisciplinary Studies

In relation to the previous point, the demand for comprehensiveness of the topic discussion leads to the intensive and extensive search of relevant knowledge. The second phase of the T-Ex approach suggests the inclusion of the solution to the given issues through exploring the values, figures, events, and any related knowledge and information. This frames students to encounter with more than one discipline. Students picture such circumstances in the following expressions,

"My essay, after the corrections and revisions, is not only about language but also about some other subjects. Since this essay is about corruption, sometime I get information related to law. When I try to search in the religious teaching or verses, it adds me knowledge on that matters, not to mention the search for similar information in politics news, even old cultural values". (Student 9)

The expressions portray the situation of the students as the approach applied. Following the outline suggested by the T-ex approach especially in the presentation of the solutions has given students the chance to explore other knowledge from different disciplines as they said, "some other subjects". It means that the corrective feedbacks during the implementation of the approach make student to develop their awareness of the involvement of interdisciplinary studies for the betterment of their essay project. The second phase of the approach namely the examination of the text which actually the adaption of "the evocation of the past" [31], evoking the relevant knowledge, brings students to the learning activities that drive them to interact with the variety of sources. The students are taken to concentrate upon a particular topic by developing it using ingredients from several disciplines.

In addition, the familiarity with the socio-cultural and religious values becomes the other advantage to the implementation of the T-Ex approach. The evocation of values as the alternative solutions for the issue of the essay defines students' attempts to dig out the existing values that may be useful as the reference toward the proper attitude and perspective in dealing the current issue. It is by now clear that the values are regarded as the guidance. The written corrective feedbacks serve as the reminder for such purpose. In other words, the essay project constitutes the process of managing and negotiating information of multi-discipline knowledge and values. Thus, essay writing turns out to be an interdisciplinary project, which forces students to make their essay qualified by using their ability to explore, elaborate, and synthesize with a multi-disciplinary knowledge in order to form a focused essay topic.

5. Conclusion

This article has shown that written corrective feedbacks have contributed to the implementation of the T-Ex approach particularly to the betterment of the essay writing process. The feedbacks help to frame the exploration and elaboration of knowledge within the implementation of the phases of the approach such as text explanation, text examination and text expectation. Through the feedbacks, students follow the phases by encountering and experiencing the challenge of source exploration, challenge of linguistic knowledge, the focus on the comprehensiveness of the topic, and the possibility of interdisciplinary studies. It can be synthesized that the corrective feedbacks in the context of the implementation of T-ex approach define students to involve in the work of exploring knowledge and values from variety of sources to the betterment of the essay project. The essay writing itself reflects a process of searching and thinking as well as sharing of knowledge, language and values. For further research, however, it would be challenging to know how the approach is applicable in other language skill teaching.

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