
Remote Teaching Strategies in Writing Skill Development Due to Covid-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

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Covid-19 pandemic inevitably affects educational practices including in teaching writing. It leads to the unfamiliar challenges for those who are in charge, in this case English instructors. Conducted using descriptive qualitative design, this study aims at describing teaching writing strategies to make high-impact improvement for students' writing performance despite their teaching and learning process has to deal with technological and technical challenges. Thus, the researchers suggested several points to focus on; they were punchy topic selection, meaningful purpose, detailed instruction, excellent feedback, peer review to improve metacognition, and reasonable-targetted grading. The researchers found that teaching strategies that were reasonably effective in virtual classroom were choosing punchy topic to gather the students' interest in developing their writing, delivering meaningful purpose of writing to set the boundaries to make a high quality writing, preparing detailed instruction to minimize any misinterpretation from the students, giving excellent feedback so that the students' writing were thoroughly appreciated and corrected, including peer review section to gain metacognition practice, and setting reasonable-targetted grading to motivate the students without giving burden. Even though the strategies may be particular to remote context, additional research result in face-to-face setting is welcomed to enrich the knowledge development especially in teaching writing.

1. INTRODUCTION

The covid-19 pandemic has shifted the mode of teaching instruction from conventional to remote with a huge assistant of technology. This situation may be just temporary but education instructors are demanded to adapt to the change effectively. The key of success to efficient virtual classroom is that the teaching and learning process leads to high-impact educational practice with minimum disruption of internet connectivity. However, some of high-impact educational practices are quite challenging to be realized remotely, in this case virtually. Previous researchers (Reynolds et al., 2020) supported this statement as they also agree that high-impact practices, such as experiential education and research, are likely to be more difficult to reproduce online, whereas others, such as service-learning projects, internships, and study abroad, may need to be postponed while we are observing physical distancing protocols. Therefore, any possible challenges and disruptions in virtual classroom context should be recognized to be minimized in the next educational practices.

The very first possible disruption in the implementation of virtual teaching and learning practice is the technical problem of internet connectivity. Many studies similarly proposed that

connectivity became a real problem in conducting online classroom. Similar problem was encountered by students in a study conducted by previous researcher (Husniyah, 2018). Even though there was free internet access, it happened that the connectivity was not stable enough and the teachers need to facilitate the learning process into homework where the students did their task without the dependence on internet connectivity. In this study, connectivity equally becomes a significant aid to be prepared to conduct successful online classroom and a major headache if it does not work. The picture of problematic situation was even more real as some of the students in this study were living in areas where the internet connection was limited, not to mention the students' incapability to afford the cost to provide internet connection.

The next problem is technological competence which appears to complete academic proficiency which has to be acquired by education instructors. There was also emphasis that the participants of distance learning need ICT competencies for them to be completely involved in the teaching and learning process (Rosman, 2013). However, the struggle with the technology is not only about the capacity to invest technology to facilitate online learning but also the capability to comprehend and operate it. The teachers are required to acquire pedagogical and technological competence at once and it is not an easy task to do. It will be a greater burden if the teachers have to manage delivering academic teaching and learning process while maintaining a successful online teaching through mastering the technology that becomes the main aid.

During the implementation of virtual classroom during Covid-19 pandemic, students' engagement becomes a significant factor in creating successful online teaching and learning process. Students' engagement leads to success in conducting meaningful learning as the students' participation is the main foundation in the educational process. The result of the previous study found that students' engagement were fundamental aspects that affect students to think cognitively (Mulia, 2020). The study suggested that if the students showed high results in each aspect of engagement, they will get better learning outcomes. Meanwhile, the students' engagement in the context of online classroom does not only include cognitive engagement but also behavioral, participation, and emotional engagement.

Teaching and learning writing skills are, in fact, quite possible to be conducted in virtual setting including the process of engaging the students with complexity of ideas in iterative process of writing, delivering feedback, doing revision, and also proceeding the grading system. If the educational process is successful, teaching writing can help the students in acquiring a lot of competences. Previous researchers suggested that when done well, writing can promote conceptual learning, critical thinking, and communication skills (Dowd et al., 2015; Reynolds et al., 2012). Therefore, the writing skill instructors are encouraged to consider every possible way to create a meaningful teaching and learning process with various efforts to achieve successful high-impact writing prompts.

With the note of the importance of having successful online classroom, the researchers tried to suggest several key strategies to a high-impact writing skill development in online setting through this study. The key strategies were formulated through the help of the Lecturers in this study in delivering their writing lessons.

2. METHOD

This research was conducted using descriptive qualitative design as the aim of the study was to describe remote teaching strategies in writing skill development due to Covid-19 pandemic. The researchers collected the data from conducting interview with two English instructors who taught Writing and elaborated the ideas with library research. The participants involved in this study

were two lecturers working at IKIP Budi Utomo who taught English Paragraph Writing and English Scientific Writing from two different classes. The two Writing lecturers had similar experience in teaching writing skill and equally shared the same strategies in teaching writing as they discussed the course outline and formulated them together. The first lecturer would be mentioned as Lecturer 1 and the second lecturer would be called as Lecturer 2 from here onwards. The study was initiated by the researchers did the interview on the subjects of this study regarding: 1) what problems appear in their online classroom, and 2) how they cope with the appearing problems to make high-impact teaching and learning process. The data collected from the interview were then interpreted matching with the context of online learning and described to answer the research problem by formulating remote teaching strategies to develop writing skill because of Covid-19 pandemic.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected from the interview with two lecturers dealing with online classroom in teaching writing were quite inspiring. Both of them similarly recognized the students' poor engagement because they were not studying in the same classroom with the same ambience. To this, both of the lecturers tried to solve the problem and summarized that their students were more actively engaged in virtual teaching and learning process when both Lecturer 1 and Lecturer 2 offered punchy topic selection. It might be about the newest trend that many people talk about like "*The pros and cons of getting vaccinated*" or when the lecturers offered controversial topic like "*Right differences between men and women*". By offering punchy topic selection, the lecturers scored more as the students felt certain excitement to write their ideas on them, simplified the complexity of the writing, and added knowledge on the certain topic they wrote about. This finding was in line with previous researchers who promoted that writing assignments are particularly appropriate when instructors want students to grapple with topics that are inherently challenging, conceptually complex, include common misconceptions, or are rooted in threshold concepts which, once understood, allow for greater competency in a subject (Loertscher et al., 2014; Meyer & Land, 2005). Besides, punchy topic selection was effective to gather students' interest in developing their writing.

Another aspect found from this study to contribute to create successful online learning in writing skill development was meaningful purpose of writing. As a matter of fact, the goal of writing may vary from pure entertainment, information delivering, to persuasion. Lecturer 1 noted that their students were only imitating the ideas they got from the writings they read to gain information. Furthermore, when they were asked to present their own ideas and voices regarding particular issue, they got difficulties. Therefore, instead of asking the students to summarize certain essay, the lecturer tried to train the students to be able to construct their own voice based on evidence-based data that they collected. That way, the students clearly understood and delivered their voice and did not only re-tell what they read regarding certain topic. This was an example of how to set meaningful purpose of writing so that the students put their best in producing a writing.

The next key strategy to be noted down as English instructors wanted to achieve effective writing prompt was preparing detailed instruction. As the writing process includes various stages, it was important to set not only certain topic and purpose of writing but also detailed instruction about the audience they wanted to present the ideas to, the specific genre they focused on, and the type of assessment expected. This strategy reflects the idea of previous researchers who proposed that to achieve effective writing assignments/prompts, ones should go well beyond assigning a topic;

they include clear expectations about the audience, genre, and modes of assessment (Anderson et al., 2015; Melzer, 2014). Both of the lecturers challenged the students to impersonated experts in certain areas to present their ideas. This way, the students felt the motivation to write to real audiences. The lecturers always made sure that the instruction they give to the students was not a mere 'writing a paper' but the students were asked to writing persuasive essay, cause effect essay, and other specific genres. As a consequence, the students clearly understood the components in their writing and the goal of writing could be accurately achieved. Also, the lecturers explicitly mentioned the assessment standard, what kind of feedback that the students would get, and the due date of the writing to revision process. This is in line with previous researchers who suggested that instructors should be explicit about *how the writing will be assessed*, what modes of feedback they will receive, and the timing of that feedback (Borgman & Mcardle, 2021). That way, the students would be more discipline about how to proceed their writing and what to expect for how their writing would be evaluated. Overall, preparing detailed instruction was making an impact on minimizing students' misinterpretation on the whole process of writing development especially when the teaching and learning process was done remotely.

After the students' part of developing writing prompt was done, both of the lecturers took part on the next step that was giving excellent feedback on the students' writing. Apparently, it was important to make sure that the students' work received not only feedback for revision but also the points that students were good at. By doing so, the students' writing was not only thoroughly corrected but also properly appreciated. The feedback could become a 'conversation' between the lecturers and the students and communicate about the students' writing development. This finding matches to the previous statement who concluded her study on developing teacher that feedback was in dialogue with the students' writing and the students shaped them and the feedback as much as shaped their revisions (Feuerherm, 2012). This way, feedback became a fundamental aspect to include in writing skill development as it shaped the students' knowledge which was poured into their writing. In the online classroom setting, feedback was the option of how the lecturers conversed with the students.

The next thing noted to be a strategy to make high-impact writing skill development was including peer review to gain metacognition practice. As a matter of fact, peer review was a terrific option of assessment in writing practice. First of all, the lecturers often needed a big lot of time to give feedback to the students' writing prompt especially when they were only meeting online. By having peer review once in a while, both the lecturers and students gained beneficial advantages. For the lecturers, they could save their precious time. For the students, it contributed to learning process. Previous researchers agreed to this statement as they also suggested integrating peer review into writing assignments to address the barrier of time commitment required by instructors to grade or provide feedback on student writing (Li et al., 2010; Lundstrom & Baker, 2009). They added that peer review was known to promote learning for both the one giving the feedback as well as the one receiving it. Moreover, many researchers proposed that peer review offered both pedagogical value and time savings for instructors (Cho, K., MacArthur, 2010; Cho, Y.H., Cho, 2010; Finkenstaedt-Quinn, S. A., Synder-White, E. P., Connor, M. C., Gere, A. R., Shultz, 2019; Halim et al., 2018). Reynolds et al. (2020) mentioned that some of the most effective assignments will naturally involve metacognitive process such as planning what to write, monitoring the development of the narrative and evaluating the clarity of one's own writing. Peer review in this study reflected the metacognitive process by evaluating their friend's writing which could be done from wherever they were due to Covid-19 pandemic.

Last but not least, setting reasonable-targeted grading was important to improve the students' motivation without giving them burden about the assessment according to Lecturer 2. To proceed effective teaching, the lecturers should limit their workload by disciplining about what and how to grade. In the context of online classroom, the grading system needed to be reasonable to target by the students and to proceed by the instructor. One realistic alternative was to design their own grading rubrics based on the students' purpose of writing and competence. Another thing was to grading final drafts of the students using rubrics that have limited number of aspects that the lecturers need to attend to. Depending on the students' competence, 5 items were a reasonable target to proceed.

From the combination of findings came from the two Lecturers, high-impact writing skill development were possible to be done through punchy topic selection, meaningful purpose, detailed instruction, excellent feedback, peer review to improve metacognition, and reasonable-targeted grading. This study was conducted in the case of writing classes of English Department students at IKIP Budi Utomo where the teaching and learning process was done remotely and the classroom was online. The findings may be different from different subject and setting as the students' characters and class situation varied. However, some of the findings of this study reflected similar ideas from the previous study which took American College and University context (Reynolds et al., 2020). The study concluded some other points such as collaborating with experts, reducing incentives for cheating, and being flexible to make more impact on the writing educational practice. This study limited the strategies to the six aspects as the lecturers felt enough to integrate those aspects to conduct high-impact writing educational practice even if the teaching and learning practice was done virtually.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the six key strategists formulated together by the subjects of this study, it was possible to improve students' writing skill development effectively even though the teaching and learning process needed to be conducted virtually. teaching strategies that were reasonably effective in virtual classroom were choosing punchy topic to gather the students' interest in developing their writing, delivering meaningful purpose of writing to set the boundaries to make a high quality writing, preparing detailed instruction to minimize any misinterpretation from the students, giving excellent feedback so that the students' writing were thoroughly appreciated and corrected, including peer review section to gain metacognition practice, and setting reasonable-targeted grading to motivate the students without giving burden. Lecturers, especially who teach writing skills, are suggested to adopt or adapt these key strategies in order to achieve high-impact writing development in the context of remote teaching and learning process. Also, high-impact educational practice reflected in this study may be different to other cases and other subjects so future researches were expected to add theoretical and practical benefits.

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