



Assessing Students' Ability in Writing Argumentative Essay at an Indonesian Senior High School

Yanpitherszon Liunokas

yanpithers69@gmail.com

Nusa Cendana University, Kupang, NTT, Indonesia

Received: 16 May 2020 Accepted: 16 June 2020

DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v8i1.1344

Abstract

This research aims at finding out the students' ability in writing argumentative essay at SMAN 1 Soe Kab. Timur Tengah Selatan NTT. The researcher will focus on evaluating the students' writing ability in one aspect of writing namely mechanics. The researcher applied quantitative method and descriptive analysis design. The research was conducted in August 2017. This research was conducted at SMAN 1 Soe Kabupaten Timur Tengah Selatan NTT. The population of this research was the eleventh grade students at SMAN 1 Soe Kabupaten Timur Tengah Selatan NTT in the 2018/2019 academic year. The number of population is 142 in four classes. The researcher took 5 students from each class as the sample of the research. Therefore, there were 20 students as sample. The test was used to find out the students' ability in writing argumentative essay. In collecting data, the researcher asked the students to write an argumentative essay by choosing one of the give topics. To analyze the data, the researcher focused on evaluating the students' writing in mechanics criteria. The result of the research shows that the students still have low ability in using mechanics in writing argumentative essay. The mean score of students is 2.45. In the students' writing, most of the students got problem in: (1) The use of capital in the beginning of a sentence. Many of students still use small letter when they write the first letter in the beginning of a paragraph. (2)The students still use some capital letter in the middle of sentences. They write with capital letter in not appropriate position. (3) Some students still do not understand about the use of comma and point in a sentence.

Keywords: argumentative essay, writing

Introduction

Writing is an essential component in written communication. We cannot express our ideas or opinion on a piece of paper if we do not have good writing ability. Kern (2000: 172) states that writing is functional communication, making learners possible to create imagined worlds of their own design. Writing as one of four language skills is considered as a difficult skill because the writer should make some aspects in writing such as content, organization, purpose, vocabulary, punctuation, and spelling in a balance way. Writing is one of English language skills that has an important role, either in formal communication or in informal communication. Writing is an instrument of both communication and self-expression.

Writing is one way to express our ideas, opinions, and feelings. When we are difficult or shy to say our ideas, opinions, or feelings to other people, we can do it by writing. In writing, we can express our mind freely, but writing is not an easy work because we have to pay attention to the language use, content, organization, vocabulary and mechanic.

There are some kinds of writing, one of them is essay. Essay is writing that explain what a term means. Some terms have definite concrete meanings, such as glass, book or tree. Terms such as honesty, honor, or love are abstract and depend more on person's point of view.

Essays are the most common academic paper that might seem easy for essay writer. In SMA, essay writing had been taught to the second year students. But in fact, some students still face some difficulties in writing essay. They could not make good writing. In addition, Kiefer (2016), writes that essay is writing that explains what a term means. In a way, all essays represent what you think, what you feel, about a given topic. Essays represent your effort to communicate those thoughts and feelings to others.

One of the essay forms is argumentative essay. The argumentative essay is a genre of writing that requires the student to investigate a topic; collect, generate, and evaluate evidence; and establish a position on the topic in a concise manner

In Senior High School, one of the skills that should be mastered by students is writing an argumentative essay. The curriculum requires the students to master it. In addition, they need to prepare their skill in writing to face national examination and competence examination. When the students do not have enough skill in writing include writing, they will face some difficulties to compete in the global era. In addition, the students should be ready to work with many types of challenges included skills in writing.

Therefore, the researcher is interested to see the ability of students in writing argumentative essay at SMAN 1 Soe Kabupaten Timur Tengah Selatan NTT. This research will be entitled " Assesing Students' Ability in Writing Argumentative Essay at SMAN 1 Soe Kabupaten Timur Tengah Selatan NTT". Based on the background above, the researcher formulates the problem statement as: How is the students' ability in writing argumentative essay at SMAN 1 Soe Kab. Timur Tengah

Selatan NTT?. Based on the problem statements, the researcher states that the objectives of this research is to find out the students' ability in writing argumentative essay at SMAN 1 Soe Kabupaten Timur Tengah Selatan NTT. There are two kinds of significances of the research, namely ; 1. Theoretically, the result of this research is expected to give contribution to the development theory of writing especially in writing argumentative essay for learner of English as foreign language. 2. Practically, the research of the research is expected to be a reference for teachers to develop learning methods or other methods or looking for a more effective. The result of the research can be a reference for the teacher and lecturers in teaching writing based on the students' ability. So that, they can use the proper method to teach their students. This research will be focused on the writing argumentative essay. The researcher will focus on evaluating the students' writing ability in one aspect of writing namely mechanics. The researcher will assess the students' mechanics in writing by following the Heaton's rubric.

Kiefer (2016), writes that essay is writing that explains what a term means. In a way, all essays represent what you think, what you feel, about a given topic. Essays represent your effort to communicate those thoughts and feelings to others.

Kiefer (2016) states that there are three steps to make an effective essay writing: 1. Tell reads what term is being defined. 2. Present clear and basic information. 3. Use facts, example, or anecdotes that readers will understand.

According to Twain (2009) there are five steps in writing : 1. For the introduction, write the thesis statement and give some background information. 2. Develop each supporting paragraph and make sure to follow the correct paragraph format. 3. Write clear and simple sentences to express your meaning. 4. Focus on the main idea of your essay. 5. Use a dictionary to help you find additional words to express your meaning.

Based on the explanations above, to make a good and effective essay writing, we have to know about the topic we want to write, focus on the mine idea and present clear and basic information by using facts, example, or anecdotes that readers will understand.

According to Twain (2009) there are some ways to organize a good essay writing: 1) Introduction. The introduction of an essay proceeds from general to specific ideas. Thesis statement is put in introduction. 2) Body paragraph. The body gives support for the opinion or idea in thesis statements; consist of explanations, examples, statistics, and facts. 3) Conclusion. A conclusion is necessary because it brings an essay to an end.

Baker at al (2013) state that the argumentative essay is a genre of writing that requires the student to investigate a topic; collect, generate, and evaluate evidence; and establish a position on the topic in a concise manner. Some confusion may occur between the argumentative essay and the expository essay. These two genres are similar, but the argumentative essay differs from the expository essay in the

amount of pre-writing (invention) and research involved. The argumentative essay is commonly assigned as a capstone or final project in first year writing or advanced composition courses and involves lengthy, detailed research. Expository essays involve less research and are shorter in length. Expository essays are often used for in-class writing exercises or tests, such as the GED or GRE.

Furthermore, argumentative essay assignments generally call for extensive research of literature or previously published material. Argumentative assignments may also require empirical research where the student collects data through interviews, surveys, observations, or experiments. Detailed research allows the student to learn about the topic and to understand different points of view regarding the topic so that she/he may choose a position and support it with the evidence collected during research. Regardless of the amount or type of research involved, argumentative essays must establish a clear thesis and follow sound reasoning.

In addition, Baker et al (2013) state that the structure of the argumentative essay is held together by the following.

a. A clear, concise, and defined thesis statement that occurs in the first paragraph of the essay.

In the first paragraph of an argument essay, students should set the context by reviewing the topic in a general way. Next the author should explain why the topic is important (exigency) or why readers should care about the issue. Lastly, students should present the thesis statement. It is essential that this thesis statement be appropriately narrowed to follow the guidelines set forth in the assignment. If the student does not master this portion of the essay, it will be quite difficult to compose an effective or persuasive essay.

b. Clear and logical transitions between the introduction, body, and conclusion.

Transitions are the mortar that holds the foundation of the essay together. Without logical progression of thought, the reader is unable to follow the essay's argument, and the structure will collapse. Transitions should wrap up the idea from the previous section and introduce the idea that is to follow in the next section.

c. Body paragraphs that include evidential support.

Each paragraph should be limited to the discussion of one general idea. This will allow for clarity and direction throughout the essay. In addition, such conciseness creates an ease of readability for one's audience. It is important to note that each paragraph in the body of the essay must have some logical connection to the thesis statement in the opening paragraph. Some paragraphs will directly support the thesis statement with evidence collected during research. It is also important to explain how and why the evidence supports the thesis (warrant).

However, argumentative essays should also consider and explain differing points of view regarding the topic. Depending on the length of the assignment, students should dedicate one or two paragraphs of an argumentative essay to

Assessing Students' Ability in Writing Argumentative Essay at an Indonesian Senior High School

discussing conflicting opinions on the topic. Rather than explaining how these differing opinions are wrong outright, students should note how opinions that do not align with their thesis might not be well informed or how they might be out of date.

d. Evidential support (whether factual, logical, statistical, or anecdotal).

The argumentative essay requires well-researched, accurate, detailed, and current information to support the thesis statement and consider other points of view. Some factual, logical, statistical, or anecdotal evidence should support the thesis. However, students must consider multiple points of view when collecting evidence. As noted in the paragraph above, a successful and well-rounded argumentative essay will also discuss opinions not aligning with the thesis. It is unethical to exclude evidence that may not support the thesis. It is not the student's job to point out how other positions are wrong outright, but rather to explain how other positions may not be well informed or up to date on the topic.

e. A conclusion that does not simply restate the thesis, but readdresses it in light of the evidence provided.

It is at this point of the essay that students may begin to struggle. This is the portion of the essay that will leave the most immediate impression on the mind of the reader. Therefore, it must be effective and logical. Do not introduce any new information into the conclusion; rather, synthesize the information presented in the body of the essay. Restate why the topic is important, review the main points, and review your thesis. You may also want to include a short discussion of more research that should be completed in light of your work.

f. A complete argument

Perhaps it is helpful to think of an essay in terms of a conversation or debate with a classmate. If I were to discuss the cause of World War II and its current effect on those who lived through the tumultuous time, there would be a beginning, middle, and end to the conversation. In fact, if I were to end the argument in the middle of my second point, questions would arise concerning the current effects on those who lived through the conflict. Therefore, the argumentative essay must be complete, and logically so, leaving no doubt as to its intent or argument.

g. The five-paragraph essay

A common method for writing an argumentative essay is the five-paragraph approach. This is, however, by no means the only formula for writing such essays. If it sounds straightforward, that is because it is; in fact, the method consists of (a) an introductory paragraph (b) three evidentiary body paragraphs that may include discussion of opposing views and (c) a conclusion.

Complex issues and detailed research call for complex and detailed essays. Argumentative essays discussing a number of research sources or empirical research will most certainly be longer than five paragraphs. Authors may have to discuss the context surrounding the topic, sources of information and their credibility, as well as a number of different opinions on the issue before concluding the essay. Many of these factors will be determined by the assignment.

some previous studies related to this research: Rahmawati (2013), in her research entitled "Analysis of coherence in Argumentative Essay written by the sixth semester students of English Study Program of Bengkulu University. It is found that there are 2 essays were classified as very good essays, 16 as good essays, and 10 essays as poor essays. It is recommended to keep training the students to write coherence in an essay.

Hini et.al. (2013) in their study entitled "An analysis of students' ability in building cohesion and coherence in Argumentative essays written by the fourth year students of English Department at University of Bengkulu. It is found that the ability of students in building cohesion and coherence in Argumentative essays was low average (3-3.5). It means that the students have low understanding towards some cohesion and coherence. Sari (2011), in her thesis entitled "Sex difference in learning Writing English" reported that there are several differences and similarities of male and female in learning narrative text. These similarities and differences come because there are any different characteristics at male and female as basic aspect of term "sex difference".

Akbar (2009) in his thesis which written under title "Improving Student's writing skill through pair interview at eleventh year students of SMAN 2 Palopo", found that there was significant score of students before and after joining treatment with pair interview. It means that through pair interview can improve student's English writing skill at SMAN 2 Palopo. Pahira (2010) in her thesis which written under title "Improving Students' Writing Skill through Grammar Translation Method. It is found that it is effective to use GTM in developing students' writing skill.

Those three researches above the researcher found the similar with this research, where researchers studied about writing. The special one that makes this research is difference than the previous researches is the objective of this research focused on evaluating the students' performance in writing argumentative essay in mechanics. It is expected to bring this research as a new one especially for the beginner researchers in English teaching and learning development issue.

Method

The researcher applied quantitative method and descriptive analysis design. The researcher find out the students' ability in writing argumentative essay. The researcher get the data to be analyzed by collecting students' writing assignment. The research was conducted in August 2017. This research was conducted at *SMAN 1 Soe Kab. Timur Tengah Selatan NTT*.

The population of this research was the eleventh grade students at *SMAN 1 Soe Kab. Timur Tengah Selatan NTT*. The number of population is 150 in four classes. To determine the sample, the researcher used random sampling. The researcher took 5 students from each class as the sample of the research. Therefore, there were 20 students as sample.

In this research, the researcher used writing test as the instrument. The test

Assessing Students' Ability in Writing Argumentative Essay at an Indonesian Senior High School

was used to find out the students' ability in writing argumentative essay. The test namely was an argumentative essay. The students' had to make an argumentative essay. In collecting data, the researcher did the following procedures: (1). The researcher determined the sample (2). The researcher came to the class explain to the students about the test. (3). The researcher asked the students to write an argumentative essay by choosing one of the give topics. In conducting the test, the researcher will give them 60 minutes to finish the test. (4). The researcher collected the result of the test. (5). The researcher evaluated the students' writing

To analyze the data, the researcher focused on evaluating the students' writing in mechanics criteria. The scoring that was used is ELS composition profile of Heaton JB as follows:

Mechanic

Score	Classification	Criteria
5	Very Good	Demonstration mastery of convention, not problem of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraph.
4	Good	Few error of spelling, capitalization, paragraphing but not observed.
3	Fair	Some error spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing.
2	Poor	Many errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization.
1	Very Poor	Illegible writing.

(Heaton,1988:100)

Finding out mean score of students for each criteria and individually. The researcher used the formula as follows:

$$X = \frac{\sum X}{N}$$

Notation:

X = Mean score

Σx = Total sum of the score

N = Total number of sample. (Depdikbud, 2009)

3. Classifying the students score into some classification below:

No	Classification	Score
1	Excellent	96-100
2	Very Good	86-95
3	Good	76-85
4	Fairly Good	66-75
5	Fairly	56-65
6	Poor	36-55
7	Very poor	0-35

Source: Depdikbud (2009:22)

Results

This part deals with finding about the result of research that is obtained from the data analysis. The finding is based on the research the question that have been formulated this research. This research applied descriptive research method. The method was used to describe the students' ability in writing argumentative essay especially in mechanics part.

The students score in writing argumentative essay test can be seen in the table 4.1 as follows:

Table 4.1. Student's scores in mechanic part:

Student	Mechanics
1	3
2	3
3	3
4	2
5	3
6	3
7	2
8	2
9	3
10	2
11	2
12	1
13	3
14	2
15	2
16	3
17	3
18	3
19	2
20	2
Means	2.45

Table 4.1 shows that most of the students has some mistakes in mechanics when they write an argumentative essay. The highest score was 3 while the

lowest score was 1. Then, the mean score of students' score in writing argumentative essay was 2.45. It is classified as poor. The students still need to improve their ability in using mechanics in writing argumentative essay.

The students' scores in writing argumentative essay test are classified into some criteria and percentage of the student score are presented as follows:

Table 4.2. The criteria and percentage of the student's vocabulary in pre test

Classification	Score	Frequency	Percentage
Very Good	5	0	0 %
Good	4	0	0 %
Fair	3	10	50 %
Poor	2	9	45 %
Very Poor	1	1	5 %
Total		20	100%

Table 4.2 shows that the criteria and percentage of the student's vocabulary in the writing argumentative essay shows that there was no student got 'very good' and 'good' scores, and 50% students (10) got 'fair', 45% students (9) got poor and 5% students (1) got very poor. This indicates that students at SMAN 1 Soe Kab. Timur Tengah Selatan NTT still have low ability in using mechanics in writing argumentative essay.

Discussion

Based on the result of data analysis, the researcher found out that most of the students still make some mistakes in mechanics part when they write an argumentative essay. It can be stated that the students has low competence in mechanics in writing at the eleventh grade students at SMAN 1 Soe Kabupaten Timur Tengah Selatan NTT. From the result data analysis, shows that the mean score of the students in test was 26. It shows that it is needed for teacher to make some effort in increasing the students' ability in mechanics.

From the analysis of students' argumentative essay writing, it is found that they got some difficulties especially the mechanics. In fact, a students should have a good ability in mechanics especially in writing an essay. It is known that an essay is something represents our thinking. As Kiefer (2016), writes that essay is writing that explains what a term means. In a way, all essays represent what you think, what you feel, about a given topic. Essays represent your effort to communicate those thoughts and feelings to others. In addition, Pardiyono (2006) states that writing is one way to express our ideas, opinions, and feelings. When we are difficult or shy to say our ideas, opinions, or feelings to other people, we can do

it by writing. In writing, we can express our mind freely, but writing is not an easy work because we have to pay attention to the language use, content, organization, vocabulary and mechanic. In addition, Writing English is a skill which so compulsory. So we have to study how to write something. Sometimes, we cannot express our idea orally but we can do freely through writing. Actually, there are still some other parts in writing assessment, namely content, organization, grammar and vocabulary. but the writer just focus on the students' mechanics in writing argumentative essay

In students' writing, most of the students got problem in: (1) The use of capital in the beginning of a sentence. Many of students still use small letter when they write the first letter in the beginning of a paragraph. (2) The students still use some capital letter in the middle of sentences. They write with capital letter in not appropriate position. (3) Some students still do not understand about the of comma and point in a sentence. Based on the data, it can be said that the students the eleventh grade students at SMAN 1 Soe Kab. Timur Tengah Selatan NTT need some help to solve their problem in mechanics. They should be aware with the capital letter use. They should understand about when they need to use capital letter and when it is forbidden to use the capital letter. In addition, the English teacher should give focus on improving the students ability in writing, especially in the mechanics part.

Furthermore. The students seems do not really understand about a good essay. They do not care about the rule of argumentative essay as Kiefer (2016) states that there are three steps to make an effective essay writing: (1) Tell reads what term is being defined. (2) Present clear and basic information. (3) Use facts, example, or anecdotes that readers will understand. According to Mark Twain (2009) there are five steps in writing: (1) For the introduction, write the thesis statement and give some background information. (2) Develop each supporting paragraph and make sure to follow the correct paragraph format. (3) Write clear and simple sentences to express your meaning. (4) Focus on the main idea of your essay. (5) Use a dictionary to help you find additional words to express your meaning.

Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion at the previous chapter, the researcher can conclude that the students still have low ability in using mechanics in writing argumentative essay. The mean score of students is 2.45 In students' writing, most of the students got problem in: (1) The use of capital in the beginning of a sentence. Many of students still use small letter when they write the first letter in the beginning of a paragraph. (2)The students still use some capital letter in the middle of sentences. They write with capital letter in not appropriate position. (3) Some students still do not understand about the use of comma and point in a sentence.

Based on the conclusion above, the researcher would like to present some suggestions below:

1. The English teacher the eleventh grade students at *SMAN 1 Soe Kab. Timur Tengah Selatan NTT* should have effort to improve the students' writing argumentative essay. Especially in mechanics. A teacher should give example to the students in order to make them aware about the mechanics use in writing.
2. There are many techniques that can be used by the teacher in teaching writing, the teacher should choose the most appropriate to their students in order to increase the students' ability and their motivation can be developed.

References

- Akbar. (2009). *Improving Students' Writing Skill through Pair Interview at the Eleventh Year Students of SMAN 2 Palopo*. Unpublished Thesis. Palopo: Department of English Education Study program STAIN Palopo
- Bram, Barli. (1995). *Write Well Improving Writing Skills*, Yogyakarta: Penerbit Kanisius.
- Depdikbud. (2009). *Penilaian Pembelajaran*. Jakarta: Depdikbud
- Fon, Janice. (2011). *Writing System*. The Ohio State University.
- Gay, Mills and Airasian, L.R. (2006). *Educational Research: Competencies for Analysis and Applications*. 8th Edition. Pearson Education. Inc. New Jersey.
- Hart. (2010). *Write Well Improving Writing Skills*, Yogyakarta: Penerbit Kanisius.
- Harmer, Jeremy. (2009). *How to Teach English*. England: Pearson Education Ltd
- Heaton, J. B. (1975). *Writing English Language*. London: Longman.
- Hardy, J and Damien K. (1990). *Written Genres in the secondary school*, Brisbane: Departement of Education Queensland.
- Hisni, Mubarak Zia et.al. (2013). *An analysis of students ' ability in building cohesion and coherence in Argumentative essays written by the fourth year students of English Department at University of Bengkulu*. Journal UNP
- Hornby. (1995). *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*. 5th Edition. Oxford University Press, New York.
- Kern. (2000). *Writing English Language*. London: Longman
- Kiefer. (2016). *How to Teach Writing*. England: Pearson Education Ltd
- Masruddin, M. (2019). Omission: Common Simple Present Tense Errors in Students' Writing of Descriptive Text. *Ethical Lingua: Journal of Language Teaching and Literature*, 6(1), 30-39. <https://doi.org/10.30605/ethicallingua.v6i1.1114>
- Masruddin, M., Karmila, K. (2018). Constructing WH-Questions through An Error Analysis at Junior High School of Indonesia. *Langkawi: Journal of The Association for Arabic and English* 4 (2), 123-137. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.31332/lkw.v4i2.852>

Yanpitherszon Liunokas

Assessing Students' Ability in Writing Argumentative Essay at an Indonesian Senior High School

Munawir, A. (2019). Online Game and Children's Language Behavior. *IDEAS: Journal on English Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature*, 7(2). doi:<https://doi.org/10.24256/ideas.v7i2.1050>

Nurul, A. (2019). Anderson Taxonomy-Based Intensive Test Evaluation Tool for Senior High School. *IDEAS: Journal on English Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature*, 7(1). doi:<https://doi.org/10.24256/ideas.v7i1.725>

Pahira. 2010. *Writing Skill through Grammar Translation Method at the Tenth Class of MAN Palopo*.

Rahmawati, N. (2013). *Analysis of coherence in Argumentative Essay written by the sixth semester students of English Study Program of Bengkulu University*. Thesis S1, Bengkulu University

Richard, Renadya. (2000). *Principle of Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rusdiansyah, R. (2019). Note-Taking as a Technique in Teaching Reading Comprehension. *IDEAS: Journal on English Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature*, 7(2). doi:<https://doi.org/10.24256/ideas.v7i2.1033>

Sugiono. (2014). *Metode Penelitian, Kuantitatif dan R&D*. Bandung: Alfabeta.

Twain, M (2009). *Writing in English*. London: Longman