



**THE PROBLEMS OF LIBYAN STUDENTS IN USING  
CORRECT SPELLING, PUNCTUATION AND  
PRESENT TENSE TO WRITE EXPLANATION TEXT**

**A THESIS**

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for Master Degree in English Language Education**

**by**

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## MOTTO AND DEDICATION

”Failure teaches success.”

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

Nelson Mandela

To  
My beloved parents, brothers and sisters  
My beloved brother ‘Tareq’ who passed away while completing my M.A in  
Indonesia

## ABSTRACT

Samer Masoud Ahmed Alrbsh. 2014. *The Problems of Libyan Students In Using Correct Spelling, Punctuation And Present tense To Write Explanation Text*. Thesis, English Education Study program, Graduate Program Semarang State University of Semarang. Advisors: (1) Dr..Dwi Anggani Linggar Bharati M.Pd (2) Prof. Dr. Dwi Rukimini, M.Pd

**Key words:** *punctuation marks, spelling rules, present tense.*

This study aimed at describing Libyan students' writing problems in writing an explanation text. The objectives of this study were: 1) To describe the problems of Libyan students in using punctuation marks in an explanation text; 2) To describe the problems of Libyan students in spelling English words in an explanation text; 3) To describe the problems of Libyan students in using present tense in writing an explanation text, and 4) To explain the reasons for their making mistakes.

The design of this research was a descriptive qualitative method supported by simple quantification. The objects of this study were 25 Libyan students in Semarang city in Indonesia. A questionnaire and test were used to collect the data.

The respondents have responded positively to the items of questionnaire; nevertheless, they have given wrong answers in the test. This is because the test is deeper in examining one's knowledge. First, their responses in the questionnaire about the punctuation marks were positive, however, the test has revealed that 62.13% of the respondents gave wrong answers. The punctuation marks were considered as the most difficult aspect for the students in this study. Second, the minimum number of errors recorded in writing in this study was spelling. The percentage of errors committed in spelling was only 28.07%. The frequency of errors of the structure of explanation text was 28.3%. The percentage of errors committed by the students was in present tense 49.12% to be classified in this research as the second highest percentage of difficulty after punctuation marks.

The recommendations were: teachers should pay more attention to punctuation, spelling, present tense and the structure of explanation text; teachers should motivate and encourage learners; teachers have to use English language for explanation instead of using the mother tongue; more attention has to be paid to teaching strategy; students should get more intensive practice; and the ministry of higher education has to provide good facilities for learning and planning to develop the curriculum.

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Finally, the researcher realizes that there is still a lack at this work. So, all criticisms and suggestions are welcome in order to improve this study.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Communication skills are widely related to literacy in so many ways. Communicators need to be literate so that they can determine what acts of communication could fetch about positive results. Particularly, whether it is oral or written, verbal or non-verbal communication, decoding and encoding skills are very important to any affective communication.

In Libya, English is taught as a foreign language institutionally. Foreign language is defined by (Richards, Platt, & Platt, 1992) in the Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics as a language that is not a native language in a country. Learning different language is sometimes difficult as the non-native language has different elements by comparing it to the native language. These differences make the students make mistakes.

Among the four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing in English language, writing is considered to be the most complicated one but also at the same time it is crucial skill for the graduate students to learn. It is difficult skill because of the influence of mother tongue as there is a difference between the two languages (Arabic and English).

#### **1.1 Background of the Study**

English is an international language which has an important role in communication by all people to have an interaction with another people in the world who have different languages. As an international language, English is always used direct communication, in almost whole world in a lot of countries.

(Budiharso 2004: 4) states “English is the major language that is used by people in some sectors”. In addition to that, (Shahomy 2001: 74) defines English as the worlds’ current lingua franca. It is used for so many different purposes: applying for jobs, asking for promotions, academic function, and also business interactions. Therefore, a lot of people tend to learn English in order to know how to communicate internationally. Consequently, English is taught as the only foreign language in Libya since the primary school up to the college level.

Writing as the productive skill is considered to be more difficult than any another productive skill. (Knapp & Watkins 2005: 15) say that although speaking and writing are both form of communication that use of language as the medium, they are actually slightly different. So both of the skills are alike, but they are used differently.

According to (Rao, Z. 2007) EFL writing is useful in two respects: First, it motivates student writers thinking, organizing ideas, and developing their ability to summarize, analyze and criticize. Second, it strengthens student writers learning, thinking and reflecting on the English language.

Speaking is interaction among people where they can exchange information and ask for something. Writing, on the hand, is a language in spatial medium. Writing in fact holds language out of the discipline and adjacency of time and arranges it hierarchically.

Arab learners of English language face many problems in both speaking and writing. Actually, this fact has been declared by many researchers like (Abdul Haq 1982) and others. The students in Libya learn English in their home country

where the native language is Arabic. The only way to learn English in Libya is through formal instruction, for example: in the classroom where the teachers of English are just native speakers of Arabic language. There is a little opportunity to learn English through natural interaction in the target language. It is so rarely when the Libyan students can meet a native speaker of English to speak with.

(Abdul Haq 1982: 1) says: “One of the linguistic areas in which students in the secondary cycle commit errors in the writing skill”. And also he says: “There are general outcries about the continuous deterioration of the standards of English proficiency of students among school teachers, university instructors and all who are concerned with English language teaching”. Based on the quotations from Abdul Haq, students commit mistakes in writing field while communicating in English. (Tahaineh 2010, p. 79) claims that the writing skill “..... is needed for taking notes, describing objects or devices and writing essays, answering written questions, writing their compositions, writing experimental reports, etc”.

Writing is a crucial skill; in higher education, so much success depends on the ability to clarify one’s ideas through writing to communicate clearly. Beyond the graduate and post graduate program, strong writing skills are sought after in the job market regardless the profession. However, English language learners face many difficulties while learning to write in a second language beyond mastering punctuation marks, spelling rules and tense. ELLs (English language learners) must know how to differentiate between academic and conversational English with regards to the conversational words, phrases and sentence structures (register knowledge; Biber and Conrad, 2009, Chapelle, 1998, Gardner, 2012). They must

learn the requirements for writing in a variety of genres, including the appropriate information to include and in which order to include it (genre knowledge; Swales, 1990; Biber and Conrad, 2009; Martin & Rose, 2008). Finally, they must understand the differences between academic writing and non-academic writing.

Writing is a complicated activity as it requires students' comprehensive abilities such as mastering grammar, vocabulary, punctuation and spelling. Moreover, to write well, the students are expected to be able to show their thoughts, ideas and information in the written form. As this research deals with graduate and postgraduate sample, explanation text is the suitable for this level. However, some think that writing is not only showing of ideas, thoughts and information, but also filmy energy to complete the writing process: thinking the ideas, getting the outline ready, moving from the outline into the draft, having a review on the draft and proofreading the draft to be ready for the final outcome of the writing.

(Fawwaz & Ahmed 2007) identified some problems related to students' thinking in managing some tests to improve their academic texts such as the use of cohesion aspects, weak connection among the words, and the lack in producing certain types of disciplines in academic writing.

(Fegerson & Mickerson 1992: 7) inform that writing is a skill that is learnt throughout study. Writing is one of English skills that has to be taught integratedly ,however, it is considered as the most difficult skill among the four skills of the language for learners to be learnt. It is often recognized as the most difficult language skill as it requires a higher level of productive language control

than the other three skills. Actually, the students are unable to write well in English. The reasons that make them unable to write well are caused by poor knowledge of punctuation and difficulty in grasping spelling and understanding the correct tense.

Libyan students have difficulties in learning and they face certain problems in writing. As many teachers and doctors of those students noted that they have difficulties in learning how to write well. Based on (Zheng, Y, 1999) acquiring the writing skill seems to be more laborious and demanding than acquiring the other language skills. Actually, writing well in one's own language is difficult enough, so it will be more difficult to write well in one's second language. This is magnified by the fact that the rhetorical conventions of English texts the structure style, proper use of punctuation, spelling and present simple tense often differ from those in other languages (Leki, I, 1991) as they require a great effort to recognize and manage the difference. This is especially true the rhetorical convention of the Arabic language as it is Libyan students' mother tongue.

Writing has many types namely: descriptive, report, explanation, exposition, discussion, procedure, review, narrative, spoof, recount, anecdote and new item. Based on (Djuharie 2009: 158) "Explanation text is a presence process or discuss a theory, phenomenon, definition, ideology and matter relating to the natural. Explanation text has structure: *general statement*, general statement such as those of the author or the phenomenon that occur in this nature or a thing generally known". It explains the process how and why things happen.

## **1.2 Reasons of Choosing the Topic**

The background of the study was chosen because of the following reasons:

- 1) It is expected the result of this study can solve Libyan students' writing problems.
- 2) Among the four skills, Libyans face difficulties in the writing field especially in writing an explanation text.
- 3) I got reinforcement and guidance of conducting this research in the field.
- 4) I observed that the majority of Libyan students lack the skills of the features of writing good paragraphs.
- 5) The outcomes of this research are expected to improve Libyan students writing skills.
- 6) This research is expected to provide some recommendations based on the research result for both: students and teachers.

## **1.3 Problem Statement**

Writing has always been a difficult task for students. "Writing is such an important learning tool because it helps students to understand ideas and concepts better" (Voon Foo, 2007, p. 4). Lack of English proficiency, in fact, is one of the main causes of lots of difficulties that ESL learners have in their writing task. Moreover, all the students of ESL encounter more complicated problems, which might be cultural or linguistic ones (Musa, Lie, & Azman, 2012).

Many Libyan students suffer from problems in writing an excellent English explanation text with good quality and these problems are due to the

influence of mother tongue, lack of knowledge and the lack of information sources such as: libraries and good internet with good quality.

The writing skills of many Libyan students need improvement. Many of the non-proficient writers are students who are considered of academic failure due to their low academic performance, test scores, poverty level, or family situations. Instructional strategies are needed which will improve Libyan students' writing abilities.

The main problem of this study was to describe Libyan students' problems in writing field. This study suggested that Libyan students have many problems related to writing a good explanation text, especially in using punctuation marks, using good spelling and tense.

The research questions were as the following:

- 1) What punctuation mark problems are encountered by Libyan students in writing an explanation text?
- 2) What spelling problems are faced by Libyan students in writing an explanation text?
- 3) What tense problems are faced by Libyan students in present tense in writing an explanation text?
- 4) Why do the Libyan students have those problems in writing?

#### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

The aims of this study were:

- 1) To describe the problems of Libyan students in using punctuation marks in an explanation text.
- 2) To describe the problems of Libyan students in spelling English words in an explanation text.
- 3) To describe the problems of Libyan students in using present tense in writing an explanation text.
- 4) To explain the reasons for their making mistakes.

#### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study can be viewed from theoretical, practical and pedagogical aspects, as describe below:

Theoretically, it is expected that this research can be used as emphasis to determine an approach to improve the students' ability to write perfectly. In this case, the teacher used writing competence approach in teaching writing skills to improve the ability to use punctuation marks, spelling rules, present tense complex sentence ...etc.

Practically, this research is expected to give positive input to the English learner in the learning of writing skills. Based on this research, the English teachers are able to choose appropriate teaching approach especially in teaching punctuation marks, spelling rules and tense.

Pedagogically, this study gave the contribution for students in English skills, especially in writing field. The findings of this study are expected to give useful insights to Libyan students in order to get better understanding.

### **1.6 Scope of the Study**

It was necessary to limit the topic of this study in order to avoid the misinterpretation in this research. This study was limited for Libyan students in Indonesia in Semarang city. The researcher limited the study as follows:

- 1) The research is focused on describing the errors of the use of punctuation marks, spelling and present tense in an English text (explanation text).

The research also described the failure of the students in using the structure of the explanation text.

### **1.7 Definition of Key Terms**

There are some key terms that were used frequently in this study that would be useful to provide their definitions in this chapter. The definitions are mostly the operational definitions; the ones which are based on the context of this study. Operational definition is usually defined as functional definition too.

- 1) Based on (Daniels, P. T., & Bright, W. 1996). Writing is a method of representing language in visual or tactile form. Writing systems use sets of symbols to represent the sounds of speech, and may also have symbols for such things as punctuation and numerals.

2) **Punctuation marks:** According to (Michael Alley. 1996) Punctuation marks are the “traffic signals” of a language. When correctly used, they guide the reader through the text and makes comprehension easier. However, when incorrectly placed, they can also change the meaning of a sentence.

3) **Spelling:** Based on (NSW. 1998) spelling is functional. That is, it is a system for making meaning. Spelling is also social, its purpose being to enable readers to construct meaning. Correct or standard spelling assists the reader. Language communities determine what the correct spelling is.

4) **Explanation Text:** according to (Anderson, M., & Anderson, K. 1997) explanation is a text which tells processes relating to forming of natural, social, scientific, and cultural phenomena. The purpose of an explanation is to tell each step of the process (the how) and to give reasons (the why).

5) **Error:** According to (Norrish 1983) errors are " systematic deviation when a learner has not learnt something and consistently gets it wrong."

6) **Grammar:** (general grammar (philosophical grammar), which is not concerned with details of one special language or family of languages, but with the general principles which underlie the grammatical phenomena of all languages. In dealing with such a phenomenon as reduplication, general grammar asks (a) what are the facts about reduplication in those languages in which we can observe it clearly? And (b) what is the explanation of those facts—what are the general principles on which they depend? Thus general grammar first of all tells us that reduplication is widely used in primitive words in various ways, as when *man-man* is used to

express 'more than one man' or 'many men', *big-big* is used to express 'very big', and so on. Hence it infers that in Parent Arian past time in verbs was regarded as more emphatic because more definite than present time, and so was expressed by reduplication. (Sweet, H. 2014.)

### **1.8 Outline of the Report**

The report of this study is outlined as follows:

Chapter 1 presents an introduction. It has seven sub sections: background of the study, reasons for choosing the topic, research problems, objectives of the study, the significance of the study, definitions of key terms and outline of the report.

Chapter 2 presents a review of related literature. It discusses some information about previous studies, theoretical background, and framework of the present study.

Chapter 3 presents the research methodology. This chapter deals with the research design, subject of the study, objects of the study, roles of the study, instruments for obtaining data, method of collecting data, a method of analysing data, and try-out.

Chapter 4 presents findings and discussion. This part gives research activity, analysis, discussion and triangulation.

Chapter 5 presents conclusion and recommendations of the study. In this chapter, the researcher concludes the findings and gives recommendations related to the study.