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The Effect of Hybrid Task-Based Language Teaching and Critical Thinking on Writing Performance in Indonesia

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Abstract

This study aims to describe the effect of hybrid task-based language teaching and critical thinking skills on writing performance among Indonesian learners. This study employed experimental research with a factorial design. The participants were Indonesian undergraduate learners majoring in an English program. The instruments used were critical thinking questionnaires and writing tests in the genre-based writing course. The results of the study showed that hybrid-task-based language teaching was effective for improving EFL learners' writing performance. Also, it revealed that learners with high critical thinking achieved better writing performance than learners with low critical thinking after being taught by hybrid task-based language teaching. The results indicate that hybrid task-based language teaching and critical thinking have a significant effect on EFL writing performance.

Keywords: *hybrid learning, task-based language teaching, critical thinking, writing performance*

Introduction

Writing is a productive skill in language learning. Writing has an important role in academic success for college students (Silva, 2014). Consequently, several studies concerning strategies for teaching writing in tertiary education were con-

ducted by researchers (Anderson, Anson, Gonyea & Paine, 2015; Lumpkin, 2018). Teaching writing in tertiary education needs to train students to work together, to analyze their errors, and to revise their writing themselves. Furthermore, college teachers may make use of various strategies involving learners in assessment and using new technology to assess their learners' writing products (Escorcia, 2015; McNaught & Benson, 2015).

Despite its importance, many problems arise when learners are assigned to write English texts. These obstacles to writing are related to affective, linguistic, and cognitive factors (Al Mubarak, 2017, Ashraf & Bilal, 2016; Zabihi, 2017). These writing problems are also faced by Indonesian college learners (Ismail, Hussin & Darus, 2012; Rahmatunisa, 2014). Learners suffer from lack of ideas, the inability to be critical in writing, and are poor at grammar and vocabulary.

To counteract poor writing performance among Indonesian learners, an innovative teaching strategy is needed to maximize their language output in the process of teaching writing. Recently, the rapid use of information and communication technology in educational settings has triggered many language teachers to use internet technology for language learning (Aghajani & Adloof, 2018). As regards learners' performance of tasks, language teachers can integrate **task-based language teaching (TBLT)** and technology in writing activities in a hybrid learning environment (Baralt & Gomez, 2017). Hybrid learning integrates online learning and **face-to-face learning** (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004) which represents a real opportunity to create learning experiences by providing appropriate learning in schools and colleges (Hassana, 2014). Therefore, hybrid TBLT is recognized as a solution to the weaknesses perceived in both traditional learning and online learning when giving writing tasks to learners.

Student writers need **to think critically in order to be able to** write texts in English (Abbasi & Izadpanah, 2018) and Indonesian college learners have problems with critical thinking ability (Nasution, 2019). Critical thinking is viewed as cognitive skills or abilities and dispositions or attitude towards those skills (Facione, 2015). The effect of critical thinking on language proficiency has been investigated by many researchers (Ramezani, Larsari, & Kiasi, 2016; Wang & Seepho, 2016). Critical thinking has a strong relationship with language learning achievement. Specifically, the influence of critical thinking toward writing proficiency has been investigated by researchers (Golpour, 2014; Mehta & Al-Mahrooqi, 2014) who showed that critical thinking skills and writing proficiency are positively correlated.

Several researchers (Adams & Nik, 2014; Oskoz & Elola, 2014) have conducted studies on **the effect of task-based language teaching** assisted with technology on

writing performance. Previous studies (Park, 2012; Travakoli, Lotfi, Biria & Wang, 2019) reveal that the use of technology-mediated TBLT with consideration of cognitive factors is under-explored in EFL writing contexts. Furthermore, most hybrid learning studies (Lai & Li, 2011; Chong & Reinders, 2018) are conducted in ESL classrooms, and accounts of integrating TBLT with technology in Indonesia (an EFL context) are still rare (Purnawarman, Susilawati & Suryana, 2016; Tyas, Muam, Sari & Dewantara, 2020). It is, therefore, significant to explore the application of hybrid TBLT in the EFL writing context of Indonesian college learners.

Problem of Research

The present study aims to describe the effect of hybrid TBLT and critical thinking on EFL writing performance. In this research, the hypotheses are as follows:

First, there will be a significant difference in writing performance between EFL learners taking classes through hybrid TBLT and EFL learners taking classes through traditional language teaching.

Second, there will be a significant difference in writing performance between EFL learners who have high critical thinking and EFL learners who have low critical thinking skills.

Methodology of Research

Research Sample

This study was experimental research with a 2x2 factorial design. This research was conducted in a private college in Central Java Province, Indonesia. Ninety undergraduate learners majoring in the English program were selected for the research sample through a purposive sampling technique. They were taking a genre-based writing course in the fall semester. The learners (two intake classes) were assigned into two groups, namely the experimental group taught by hybrid TBLT and the control group taught by traditional language teaching. The learners were also grouped into those with high and low critical thinking skills. The research variables, thus, were independent variables (hybrid TBLT and traditional language teaching strategies), a dependent variable (writing performance), and moderator variables (high critical thinking and low critical thinking).

Instruments and Procedures

Critical thinking questionnaires and writing tests were employed as search instruments. The Critical thinking questionnaire was adapted from Facione's (2015) Critical Thinking Disposition Self-Rating Form (CTDSRF). The writing-embedded critical thinking self-rating form used a five-point (1–5) Likert scale, namely *always* (1), *often* (2), *sometimes* (3), *seldom* (4), and *never* (5). The 20-item critical thinking questionnaire measured learners' critical thinking, which consisted of truth-seeking, open-mindedness, analyticity, systematicity, confidence, inquisitiveness, and cognitive maturity in their writing process. Meanwhile, writing tests were used to reveal students' writing proficiency before and after getting interventions of hybrid TBLT strategy. Students' expository texts in the pre-test and post-test were then scored based on Brown and Abeywickrama's (2010) five-criteria scoring: organization, logical development of ideas (content), grammar, punctuation, spelling, and mechanics, and style and quality of expression (vocabulary).

The data were collected in sixteen meetings for one semester. In the first meeting, both groups were assigned critical thinking questionnaires to answer for fifteen minutes. After that, the learners were assigned an expository text to write for sixty minutes with the topic: "Single-sex education". In the experimental group, the learners then practiced writing in small groups with a Google Classroom tool in a hybrid learning environment. Learning activities contained three teaching phases in both face-to-face and online learning situations. In the pre-task, the teacher provided the learners with prior activities before the tasks were performed such as introducing interesting topics, essential vocabulary and grammatical structures. Afterwards, learners were asked to compose a text in online learning assisted by Google Classroom on the given writing prompts in the during-task phase. Groups of learners wrote drafts, and their peers responded by giving online feedback. In the post-task phase, the learners rewrote the expository text for face-to-face task discussion.

In the control group, EFL learners experienced the writing activities through traditional language teaching in the classroom setting. Learning activities comprised writing task cycles: presentation, practice, and production in face-to-face learning. In the presentation phase, the teacher explained the grammar and vocabulary needed by introducing samples of writing. In the practice phase, the learners worked together to accomplish the tasks. Teacher finally revised and discussed learners' writing products in a whole classroom discussion. In the last meeting, the writing prompt with the topic: "Death penalty for drug dealers" was given to both groups.

Data Analysis

For data analysis, learners' critical thinking skills were initially grouped into high and low levels based on the results of the questionnaires. Descriptive analysis was conducted to measure the means and standard deviation of the writing scores. Also, inferential analysis was conducted on the post-test scores of the experimental and control groups for learners with high and low critical thinking skills by employing a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test. The parametric statistics analysis program, SPSS 22, was employed.

Research Results

All the data obtained from the critical thinking (CT) questionnaires and writing tests were analyzed by statistical tests assisted by the SPSS 22 program. The test results can be seen in the following tables.

Table 1. Post-test results comparing hybrid TBLT and traditional language teaching groups

Groups	Mean	SD	F	Sig.
Hybrid TBLT	78.39	10.31	4.79	.031
Traditional language teaching	72.29	15.63		

Table 1 reveals that the mean scores of hybrid TBLT and traditional language teaching groups were 78.39 and 72.29. It shows that there was a significant difference in the post-test writing results between hybrid TBLT and traditional language teaching since the F-value was higher than the F-table ($4.79 > 2.76$) and the significance value (0.031) was lower than 0.05.

Table 2. Post-test results comparing high critical thinking and low critical thinking student groups in the hybrid TBLT group

Groups	Mean	SD	F	Sig.
High CT	79.72	10.77	4.01	.045
Low CT	74.93	14.42		

Table 2 reveals that the mean scores of high critical thinking and low critical thinking groups were 79.72 and 74.93. It shows that there was a significant difference in the post-test writing results between the high critical thinking and low

critical thinking groups since the F-value was higher than the F-table ($4.01 > 2.76$) and significance value (0.045) was lower than 0.05.

Discussion

The results of statistical analysis revealed that learners taking classes using a hybrid TBLT approach had better writing scores than learners taking classes using traditional language teaching approach. The first finding was shown by the descriptive test results where the mean score of the hybrid TBLT group was higher than that of traditional language teaching group ($78.39 > 72.29$). Also, the two-way ANOVA test showed that there was a significant difference in writing performance between learners taught by the hybrid TBLT approach and learners taught by traditional language teaching approach because the F-value (4.79) was higher than the F-table (2.76). It meant that there was a significant effect of the hybrid TBLT approach on writing performance. This finding is supported by previous literature (Adams, Amani, Newton & Alwi, 2014) exploring the effect of the use of hybrid TBLT on writing skills. Their studies also found that a hybrid TBLT approach was effective for enhancing writing performance.

Learners taking classes with a hybrid TBLT approach could have got better writing performance for several reasons.. First, using Google Classroom increased learners' motivation and participation in the language classroom. Most learners took an active part and were motivated in writing processes assisted with the Google Classroom tool. This finding is supported by other findings (Heggart & Yoo, 2018; Jafarian, Soori, & Kafipour, 2012) explaining that the use of Google Classroom in language learning correlated with improved learner participation and classroom dynamics. Google Classroom functions provided the possibility for private comments or feedback from the teacher which meant that learners could directly revise errors made in their writing.

Second, English learners were engaged in the hybrid learning process. College teacher-learners and learner-learner classroom discussions were alive both when collaborating face-to-face and in online discussions. This finding was in line with a previous study (Purnawarman, Susilawati & Sundayana, 2016) exploring the effect of hybrid learning on learner engagement. The studies showed that hybrid learning facilitated learner engagement during classroom sessions. The learners' writing performance will be better if they were engaged in the learning processes. Peer drafts and revisions in online writing promoted learner engagement since these conditions motivated them to discuss their writing.

The second finding of the study revealed that the learners with high **critical thinking skills** achieved better **writing performance** than learners **with low critical thinking skills** after taking classes with hybrid TBLT. The descriptive analysis showed that the mean score of the high critical thinking group (79.72) was higher than that of the low critical thinking group (74.93). This finding was consistent with a prior study (Golphour, 2014) which explained that critical thinking and writing skills were correlated in language learning. The results of the F-value computation (4.01) showed that there was a significant difference in writing performance between learners who have high critical thinking skills and learners who have low critical thinking skills. This meant that there was a significant effect of critical thinking on writing performance.

The high critical thinking group could have achieved better writing performance for several reasons. First, EFL learners were asked to write some arguments related to the topic in the expository texts. Critical thinking skills were correlated with the abilities to write arguments. This was in agreement with previous literature (Nejmaouni, 2018) which investigated the effect of critical thinking on argumentative writing. This finding clearly indicates that critical thinking is associated with learners' ability to write arguments or opinions related to writing tasks.

Second, learners' critical thinking skills developed better due to face-to-face and online small group discussions. The two modes of discussion were effective for improving learners' critical thinking in writing classes. Consistent with previous studies (Iman, & Angraini, 2019; Jones, 2014), the results illustrated that group discussion in hybrid settings could promote learners' critical thinking. This meant that the teaching strategy used was successful for developing both writing performance and critical thinking skills.

Conclusions

The findings of this study highlight that organizing learners' tasks in small group discussions during both face-to-face and online activities can promote EFL learners' writing performance. It also illustrates that learners with high **critical thinking skills** achieve better **writing performance** than learners **with low critical thinking skills**. The results indicate that hybrid task-based language teaching and **critical thinking have a significant effect on EFL writing performance**. The results of this study suggest college teachers should set up language learning facilitated with the Google Classroom tool. Similarly, it provides information for Indonesian learners showing how to apply Google Classroom in writing English texts. Learners need

to motivate themselves to take part actively during both face-to-face and online discussions in order to enhance the quality of their writing. Further studies need to be conducted to allow deeper investigation of other variables such as motivation, anxiety, self-efficacy, and self-esteem involving larger samples.

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