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Proceedings

THE 3rd INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE AND LANGUAGE TEACHING CONFERENCE (LLTC 2016)

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Preface

The Organizing Committee are delighted to present the proceedings of the Third International Language and Language Teaching Conference (LLTC 2016). The main of the conference is: Pursuing Meanings in English Language Teaching. This year's proceedings contain 64 full papers, covering various topics in language learning-teaching, linguistics and literature.

Editors

LEARNING IN THE SPIRIT OF A DIGITAL ERA 1
Markus Budiraharjo

TEACHER TALKING TIME AND STUDENTS TALKING TIME IN ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES CLASS 14
Dwi Firli Ashari and Christianus I Wayan Eka Budiartha

CRITICAL INCIDENTS AND INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH EDUCATION SETTINGS: A CASE STUDY OF WESTERN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS IN INDONESIA 26
Billy Nathan Setiawan

THE CURRICULUM AND ENGLISH TEACHING-LEARNING TO IMPROVE THE DEAF STUDENT'S LITERACY 34
Yanti Suryanti

USING SOCRATIVE AND SMARTPHONES AS A TOOL TO ASSESS AND EVALUATE STUDENTS' VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE 39
Pauline Widyastuti

46

BLOG EDUCATIONAL WRITING TO ENHANCE STUDENTS' WRITING PRODUCTIVITY
Eko Bagus Panuntun

CONTEXTUAL TRANSLATION EXERCISES IN TEACHING TENSES IN GRAMMAR CLASSES 55
Yohana Veniranda

CONTEXTUAL ENGLISH WITH TECHNOLOGY 61

Yani Fretty H. Panggabean

PROMOTING STUDENTS' AUTONOMY THROUGH WRITING PORTFOLIOS 66

Agnes Siwi Purwaning Tyas, Wahyu Kartika Wienanda and Yohana Ika Harnita Sari

IMPROVING BUSINESS COMMUNICATION BY ASSIGNING A BUSSINESS MEETING PROJECT TO ACCOUNTING STUDENTS OF STATE POLYTECHNIC OF MALANG 71
Lia Agustina

INSTRUCTION AND STUDENTS' INTERACTION IN ONLINE LEARNING CLASSES AT BINUS ONLINE LEARNING 78
Melania Wiannastiti

THE COMPONENTS OF CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS AND STUDENT'S VOICES IN L2 UNDERGRADUATE ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY 84
Athifah Utami

WORLD ENGLISHES: REDEFINING OUR PEDAGOGICAL PERSPECTIVE 92
Ignatius Tri Endarto

LANGUAGE POWER AND STYLE-BASED COMMUNICATION IN JOURNALISM CLASS 98
Antonius Herujiyanto

CRITICAL THINKING IN THE ELT CLASSROOMS: WHY AND HOW 110
Ahimsa Padmanaba Murfi and Lintang Kumalaning Angkasa

ADJUSTING PROJECT BASED LEARNING TO INTERMEDIATE LEARNERS TOWARD WRITING IMPROVEMENT 117
Made Wahyu Mahendra

TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING THROUGH THE LAST THREE BLOOM'S TAXONOMY THINKING LEVELS IN SPEAKING CLASS 124
Woro Kusmaryani and Fitriawati

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INTEGRATED E-LEARNING IN TEACHING SPEECH TRAINING 131
Winarno

MAKE THEM READ: USING LITERATURE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM TO PROMOTE INDEPENDENT READING 139
Lintang Kumalaning Angkasa and Nurul Hidayah Pratama

9GAG'S CAPTION TO PROMOTE STUDENTS' LANGUAGE CREATIVITY 148
Esa Maulisakina Wilma Ariyani and Almas Adibah

DRAMA AND ITS BENEFITS FOR LANGUAGE SKILLS IMPROVEMENT 154
Firima Zona Tanjung

THE IMPACT OF TRANSPOSITION ON GRAMMATICAL METAPHOR: A STUDY OF TRANSLATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SFL THEORY 159
Paulus Subiyanto, Dra Ni Wayan Sadiayani, and Ni Nyoman Yuliantini

ECOLINGUISTIC AND CONSERVATION-BASED DISCOURSE AS THE ENRICHMENT MATERIAL FOR TEACHING GENERAL SUBJECT BAHASA INDONESIA 164
Tommi Yuniawan & Mochamad Rizqi Adhi Pratama

A CORRELATIONAL STUDY ON METACOGNITIVE LEARNING STRATEGIES TO DEVELOP STUDENTS' WRITING SKILLS IN CLASS 8A OF SMP BOPKRI 1 YOGYAKARTA 170
Agata Nina Puspita

CONTRIBUTION OF CORPORA AND GENRE ANALYSES-BASED ENGLISH MATERIALS FOR STUDENTS' WRITING AND READING SKILLS 178
Dominique Savio Nsengiyumva

CELEBRATING MULTICULTURAL DIFFERENCES: A WAY TO BOOST STUDENT ENGAGEMENT 185
Andreas Winardi

USING INSTAGRAM TO LEARN ENGLISH: THE STUDENTS' POINTS OF VIEW 192
K. M. Widi Hadiyanti and Simona

A STUDY OF ENGLISH VERBS WITH THE PREFIX EN-, THE SUFFIX -EN, AND THEIR COMBINATION 199
Maria Evita Sari

THE RELATIONSHIP OF VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE, READING COMPREHENSION, AND MATH WORD PROBLEM SOLVING FOR GRADE 3 ELEMENTARY YEAR IN BINUS SCHOOL SERPONG 206
Christiana Novitawati

THE IMPACTS OF VISUAL DISPLAYS ON CHILDREN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING 216
A. Rus Winarni, Tinon Hastoririh H, and Endang Purnama

USING *SWAG* IN TEACHING WRITING TO MOTIVATE STUDENTS TO WRITE 223
Tina Priyantin

THE INTERFERENCE OF INDONESIAN TRANSFERRED INTO ENGLISH IN THE ABSTRACTS OF UNNES JOURNAL 229
Najib Khumaidillah, Istiqomah Khoirul Ilmi, and Citra Putri Utami

A NON – CLASSROOM ENGLISH PROGRAM FOR YOUNG LEARNERS: A CASE STUDY 236
Cicilia Dwi Setyorini

ENGLISH FOR INNA GARUDA HOTEL RECEPTIONISTS 241
Supriyani, Theodesia Lady P. and Agatha Lisa

MONU – MONU AS A PROTOTYPE OF FUN ACTIVITIES TO TEACH VOCABULARY IN WRITING PROCEDURE TEXT 250
Pratama Irwin Talenta

DEVELOPING ESP SYLLABUS: ENGLISH FOR ACCOUNTING 257
Bagus Putra Krisdiana and Lestari Budianto

ENGLISH LEARNING NEEDS OF ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSE IN VOCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL 263
Rady Russetia Dewi

MALL IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING: FOSTERING STUDENTS' EXTENSIVE LISTENING AND READING ABILITY 272
Eka Wahjuningsih

METADISCOURSE IN RESEARCH ARTICLE ABSTRACTS 279
Leo Candra Wahyu Utami and Illiyin Zarkasih

BUILDING STUDENTS' CHARACTER BY CONTRASTING ENGLISH AND PAPUAN MALAY LANGUAGE CULTURAL FEATURES IN JAYAPURA PAPUA TEACHING CONTEXT 284
Monika Gultom

DECREASING THE GAP: LINKING AND MATCHING BETWEEN ESP CURRICULUM AND NATIONAL QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORK (KKNI) 290
Fajria Fatmasari

DESIGNING ENGLISH SYLLABUS BASED ON ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES APPROACH FOR NON-EDUCATIONAL FACULTIES OF UNIVERSITAS NEGERI GORONTALO 297
Magvirah El Walidayni Kau, Sri Widyarti Ali, and Helena Badu

ENGLISH LEARNING MODEL IN RURAL JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS A CASE STUDY AT SMP SATU ATAP (SATAP) WARANGAN KECAMATAN PAKIS KABUPATEN MAGELANG 305
Sri Sarwanti

DEVELOPING STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION BY USING COLLABORATIVE STRATEGIC READING 310
Rini Estiyowati Ikaningrum and C. Prima Ferri Karma

CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK AND LEARNER UPTAKE IN AN ADULT EFL CLASSROOM: AN ANALYSIS OF VIDEO DEMO "THE LANGUAGE HOUSE TEFL" PRAGUE 316
Tri O. Ervina, Ida D. Sukmawati, and Yuliana Zakiyah

BUILDING LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL AWARENESS: MOVIES AS POETRY AND CREATIVE PEDAGOGY DISCUSSION RESOURCE 323
Fitri Wijayanti and Avilanofa Bagus budi

ACADEMIC WRITING TASKS SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENT TEACHERS' CRITICAL THINKING SKILL 329
Budi Setyono

STRESS AND SUPPORT IN LEARNING ENGLISH: A COMFORTABLE ATMOSPHERE 334
M. Zakia Rahmawati

THE USE OF *PECHA KUCHA* IN TEXTUAL PRONUNCIATION COURSE 340
Made Frida Yulia and Patricia Angelina Lasut

THE ENJOYABLE WAYS: IMPROVING STUDENT VOCABULARY MASTERY BY USING SCRABBLE GAME 346
Wahyu Hidayat and Anis Nariswari

QUESTIONING STRATEGIES UTILIZED BY PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS 353
Rusiana

TEACHERS' STRATEGY IN MAINTAINING CLASSROOM COMMUNICATION IN PRE SERVICE TEACHING: A FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS 361
Titis Sulistyowati

THE IMPORTANCE OF ELIMINATING MAINSTREAM MATERIAL FOR POETRY SUBJECT TO INCREASE STUDENTS' INTEREST 370
Maria Vincentia Eka Mulatsih

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES OF INDONESIAN ADVANCE ENGLISH LEARNERS IN CASUAL CONVERSATION *375*
Fadhila Yonata and Dewi Amalia Saptani

HAVING LEXICAL AWARENESS IN IMPROVING VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION LEVEL: A STUDY FROM AUTONOMOUS LEARNING PERSPECTIVE 383
C. I Wayan Eka Budiartha

THE EXCLUSIVE BENEFITS: TEACHING SPEAKING USING DEBATE METHOD 389
Karjongko, S. Pd. and Yohanes Bambang Gunawan, S. Pd

INDIRECT WRITTEN FEEDBACK: IS IT EFFECTIVE IN IMPROVING GRADE ELEVEN STUDENTS' WRITING ACCURACY? 396
Vinny Sutriani Raranta

USING *QUIZLET* FOR FACILITATING THE LEARNER AUTONOMY IN MASTERING LEGAL ENGLISH VOCABULARY 404
Supardi

USING CONTRASTING PICTURES TO IMPROVE THE NINTH GRADE STUDENTS OF SMP NEGERI 2 MLATI'S MASTERY IN SYNONYMS 414

Martha Erika Diana, Bernadetha Wahyu Widyaningrum, and Danin Christianto

DIAGNOSING STUDENTS' PROBLEMS, STRATEGIES AND NEEDS TOWARDS CRITICAL READING AND WRITING II (CRW II) THROUGH REFLECTIVE JOURNAL 423
Monica Ella Harendita, Caecilia Tutyandari, and Truly Almendo Pasaribu

DEVELOPING CONTENT KNOWLEDGE THROUGH JIGSAW READING STRATEGY AND COLLABORATIVE CONCEPT MAPS 433

Ista Maharsi

PROMOTING STUDENTS' INDEPENDENT LEARNING TOWARDS ACHIEVING BETTER LEARNING RESULTS 439

Vera Syamsi

FILMMAKING FINAL PROJECT TO ENHANCE ENGLISH SPEAKING COMPETENCE, IDEAS, AND CREATIVITY FOR JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL: A STUDY IN IX B OF SMP N 1 TURI 445
Maria Magdalena Listiyani Darmayanti, S.Pd. and Agatha Lisa, S.Pd

THE IMPACT OF UTILIZING INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) ON PROMOTING AUTONOMOUS LEARNING 460
Diah Norita Rumpaka and Mutiatun Nasihah

DIAGNOSING STUDENTS' PROBLEMS, STRATEGIES AND NEEDS TOWARDS CRITICAL READING AND WRITING II (CRW II) THROUGH REFLECTIVE JOURNAL

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Abstract

Reading and writing are two complex skills for language learners. Acquiring these two skills needs great effort, especially when dealing with a non-native language. One course in the English Language Education Study Program, named Critical Reading and Writing II, requires the students to deal with a lot of reading and writing. The students might face problems in dealing with these two skills due to the complexities. This study aims at diagnosing students' problems, strategies, and needs towards *Critical Reading and Writing II* through reflective journal written by the students. The questions addressed in this study are: 1) What are students' problems in CRW II?, 2) What are students' strategies in facing problems in CRW II?, 3) What are students' needs in CRW II? Content analysis on the students' reflection was employed in order to answer the research questions. The documents analyzed were the students' reflective journals which were written at the end of every meeting. The participants of this study were 95 students taking CRW II in the second semester of 2013/2014 academic year. The results of study show that the students found problems which are categorized into academic and non-academic problems. Other findings are related to strategies and needs. There are three categories of strategies found in the students' reflective journals, namely self-support, others' support and undecided while students need more experiences to develop their reading and writing skills. These needs can be met by providing students with examples and models of academic essays so that they can inductively learn the features of academic essay as well as enrich their vocabulary.

Keywords: needs, problems, strategies, reflection

Introduction

Studies have documented how researching students' problem, strategies and needs is central to successful second language learning. First, in regard to students' problems in writing, Gilmore (2009) maintains that writing in the mother tongue is generally painful, and writing in the second language worsens the pain and hardship. Secondly, strategies in facing those problems have also been an interesting topic to study. As proposed by Chambers and Pettman (1986), feelings and information are critical factors in the formation of attitudes and strategies, which become essential components of understanding. Third, analyzing students' problems is imperative before embarking on a certain course. Ismail, Darul, and Hussin (2012) have established the significance of analyzing needs to discover students' opinions on their strengths and weaknesses in writing.

Understanding is one of the main objectives in learning. Learning as defined by Savin-Baden (2000: 9) is 'cyclical process', in which students develop understandings of themselves and their contexts, as well as the ways and situations in which they learn effectively. In this regard, some studies have shown how reflective journal plays an

integral role in learning process. Ong (2000) has argued that reflection journal "enables students to demonstrate an increasing awareness of their own learning and an enhanced ability to handle and process concepts" (p. 1). She further argues that reflection journal will assist the learners in relating new knowledge to prior knowledge.

Considering that reflection tends to be personal and diverse from one person to another, students may write what they personally feel and the challenges they undergo in the class. In this respect, reflective journal can be a useful tool to identify what problems they may face, their strategies in facing the problems and their needs for learning

In this study, reflection was employed in *Critical Reading and Writing II* (CRW II), a course which integrates reading and writing skills. Before the 2010 curriculum was introduced, each of the skills was taught in two different courses, namely *Extensive Reading II* and *Writing IV*. The underlying reason why the skills are finally integrated in one course is because in reality the learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) do not acquire each skill separately. Instead, there tends to be concurrent acquisition of the skills. CRW II is offered in the fourth semester and the prerequisite is CRW I.

Despite the significance in diagnosing students' problems, strategies and needs, a study of those variables in CRW II has not been conducted yet. Furthermore, initial studies have underlined the fundamental use of reflection in teaching and learning. Therefore, the aforementioned bases become the rationale why this study aims at diagnosing students' problems, strategies, and needs towards *Critical Reading and Writing II* through reflective journal written by the students. The questions addressed in this study are: 1) What are students' problems in CRW II?, 2) What are students' strategies in facing problems in CRW II?, 3) What are students' needs in CRW II?

Theoretical Review

Reflection

In the learning process, students do not only gain information, but they also integrate their background knowledge. Studies have documented the nature of students' reflections and their benefits. Ramsden (1992) argues that the role of reflection transform the way people understand their surroundings. He notes that it is a long process of "changes in understanding." (1992, p. 16) Learning creates meaning when the students are able to integrate knowledge by questioning, interpreting and analyzing them. This is in line with Marlowe's (1988) definition of learning, that is using processed information to integrate the current and the past knowledge as well as experience. Reflection is a meaningful activity because it reflects new information that students have learned and their prior knowledge and diverse background. In other words, reflection involves cognitive activity where students relate their living experience to the learning activity.

Thinking process is not easy to pin down, but when they are written in the reflection journals, we can see how far the students show their progress. Moreover, writing can even help to facilitate reflection. According to Luidens (1997, p. 141) "writing is a manifestation of thinking, and the written piece is the artifact that reveals the thinking". Writing invites students to brainstorm their ideas and put them in systematic orders. Writing involves a process that requires learners to gather information, process, organize and relate it to their own background. When they are able to integrate and make connection between new and prior knowledge they are able to make meaning out of learning. Through reflection process, we can explore students' needs, learning problems and attitude towards Critical Reading and Writing.

Students' Problems in Reading and Writing

The current study aims at exploring the academic and social problems in the process of reading and writing. Writing in the mother tongue is painful for many students, but when it comes to writing in the second language the students' hardship and pain are worsen (Gilmore, 2009). The challenges may make students feel anxious when doing the writing activities. This writing anxiety can pose problems in the learning process.

One of the most common problems faced by the students is putting their ideas in writings which are suitable for particular situations and conform to the target language conventions. For instance, students will know when to use formal and informal style of writing to meet the formality of the context. The role of the language teachers is challenging because they are not only to teach his students to master not only the language skills but also to make them aware of the communicative competence in written language. In academic writing, we encourage students to use standard language which refers to the language which is standardized and accepted for use in formal communication. Furthermore, problems might appear not only because of the academic reasons, but also because of non-academic reasons, for example personal problems, like being unmotivated or being not confident (Pajares, 2003; Lo and Hyland; 2007).

When taking an academic writing course, students' main purpose is to learn to write effectively within their particular discipline and to succeed in their academic studies. Hence, students' needs and problems should be sought first in order to offer them the required assistance. Research on students' beliefs has revealed that knowing students' perceptions and beliefs can play a crucial role in developing the right program to meet their needs. One way to know the students' needs is to let the students take notes about the expectation and problems that they are considering. When they identifies the problems or challenges they faces, they can put down what they should do about the challenges in the journals.

Research Method

To solve the research problems of this study, the research method employed is content analysis. Content Analysis is defined as "a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of manifest content of communications". Content analysis is a research tool focused on the actual content and internal features of media. It is used to determine the presence of certain words, concepts, themes, phrases, characters, or sentences within texts or sets of texts and to quantify this presence in an objective manner. Texts can be defined broadly as books, book chapters, essays, interviews, discussions, newspaper headlines and articles, historical documents, speeches, conversations, advertising, theater, informal conversation, or really any occurrence of communicative language. To conduct a content analysis on a text, the text is coded, or broken down, into manageable categories on a variety of levels--word, word sense, phrase, sentence, or theme--and then examined using one of content analysis' basic methods: conceptual analysis or relational analysis. The results are then used to make inferences about the messages within the text(s), the writer(s), the audience, and even the culture and time of which these are a part. For example, Content Analysis can indicate pertinent features such as comprehensiveness of coverage or the intentions, biases, prejudices, and oversights of authors, publishers, as well as all other persons responsible for the content of materials.

This research was conducted in the English Language Education of Sanata Dharma University in the even semester of 2013/2014 academic year. The participants involved in this research were the students of Critical Reading and Writing II. There were 95 students from 3 classses in the even semester of 2013/2014 academic year.

There were 2 main instruments employed in this research, namely: (1) Reflective Journals, and (2) peer evaluation and self-reflection. The documents analyzed were the reflective journals written by the students of Critical Reading and Writing II course. The reflective journal is designed to record the students' experiences (1) What have I learned from today's class?, 2. What challenges do I face?, 3. What strategies will I face to deal with those challenges?, and 4) special questions for today) when taking this course. The following is the sample of the reflective journal. The second part of the reflective journal contains peer evaluation and self reflection. These two forms aim to see the students' progress when dealing with group projects of the course.

Findings and Discussion

The researchers already recorded some of the students' reflective journals to answer the research questions about (1) students' problems, (2) strategies to tackle those problems, (3) students' needs in the course. The findings and the discussion are elaborated in this section.

Problems

The students' reflective journals have shown that the students faced a number of problems in CRW II class. After looking at and analysing the problems, the authors categorised them into several categoris. First, there are two major categories of problems, namely academic and non-academic. While academic problems directly refer to difficulties in subject matter, non-academic ones refer to challenges that in a way do not directly relate to academic matters. The data show that academic problem surpassed the non-academic ones. When put in percentage, academic-related problems comprised 89% and non-academic ones were only 11% of the total number of problems as shown in the following pie chart (Figure 1).

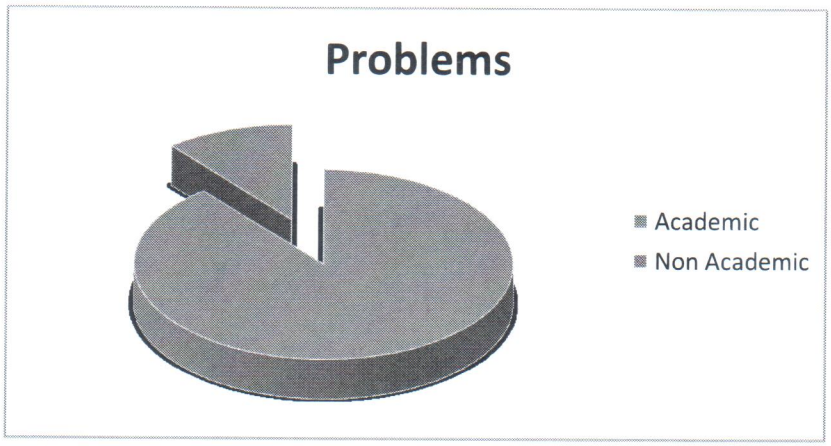

Figure 1. Academic and Non Academic

In this class, as the name 'Critical Reading and Writing' suggests, the students mainly deal with two macro skills: reading and writing. Thus, the academic problems can be further broken down into problems related to reading skills, and problems with regard to writing skills. From the data, reading problems were not as varied as writing problems. There are eight labels under the category of reading problems. The biggest problem lay on the difficulty in comprehending the main ideas of the text and in understanding some

vocabulary in the text. These two problems seemed interconnected as new vocabulary that the students had not known before may interfere with their understanding of the ideas. The other problems were questioning, intertextuality, supporting details, understanding sentences, and thesis statement.

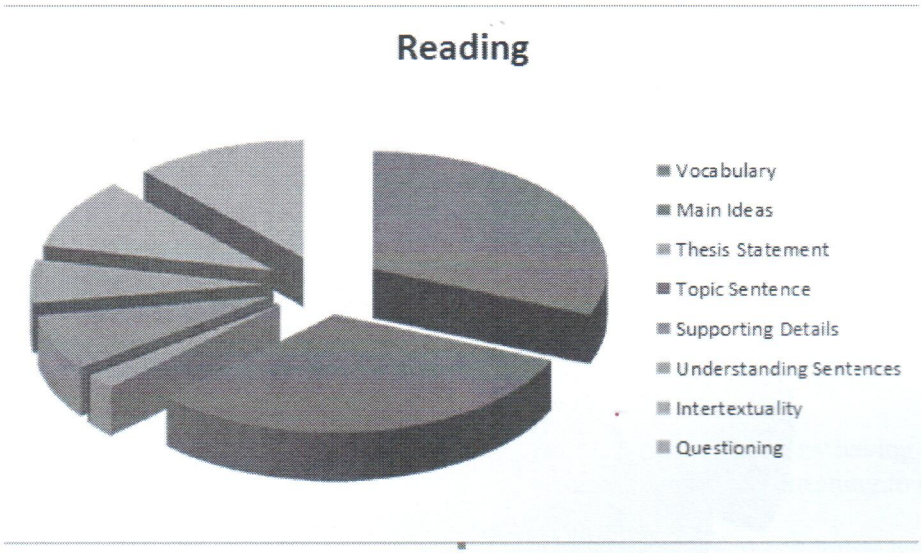

Figure 2. Problems in Reading

Compared to the problems in reading, the problems in writing were more varied. As seen in figure 3, there were numerous problems that the students found with regards to writing skills. Sorted by the significance, those problems were writing thesis statements, determining topics, conducting peer-editing, writing up supporting details, and referencing. Other minor problems include writing topic sentences, self-editing, ensuring the cohesion of the text, composing texts based on the given text genre, checking grammar, and writing conclusion.

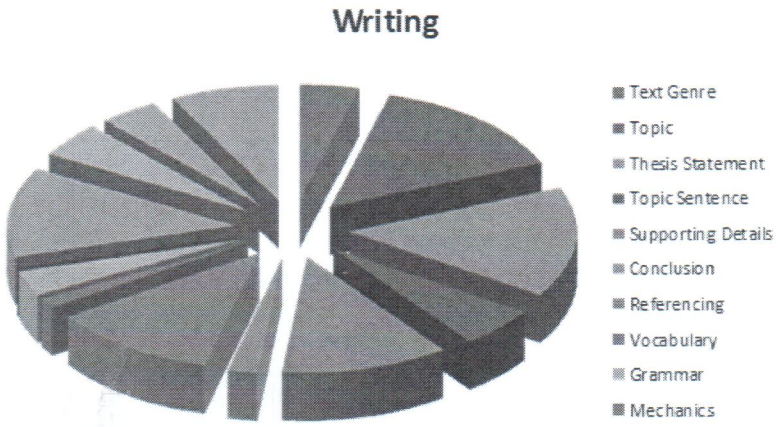

Figure 3 Problems in Writing

In addition to problems related to skills, external problems were also identi

fied. The most significant one was physical problems. The students were in the fourth semester. Thus, their academic activities and tasks were quite demanding and affected their physical condition. As a result, in class, some of the students looked exhausted when joining Critical and Writing Class. Confidence and motivation were also considered problematic. Lack of confidence and motivation that the students faced gave an influence on their performance. Lastly, influence from peers and classroom were deemed as external problems by the students.

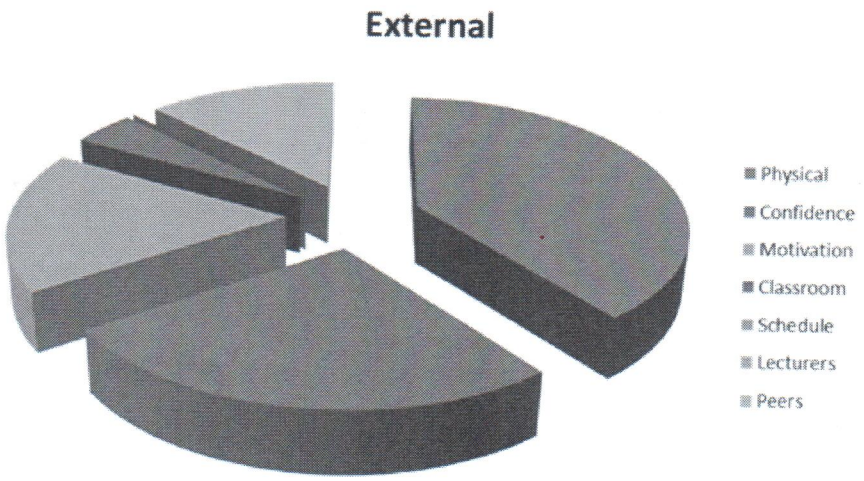

Figure 4. External Problems

Strategies

From the written journals, there are 151 statements referring to the students' strategies. In this research, those statements are classified into 3 categories, namely (1) self-support which refers to the students' own strategies to solve their problems, (2) others' support which refers to asking/being helped by other people, and (3) undecided which refers to unclear strategies.

Most of the students tended to have self-support when dealing with problems they found in CRW 2 class. There are 132 statements (78.1%) mentioning the students' own strategies in solving the problems. The following are the examples of their statements:

1) "I will spend a few minutes. Let's say 15 minute to learn new words from dictionary."
2) "Take a note for the vocabulary. Make some questions related to the article."

Statements (1) and (2) are examples which were written by 2 different students. Those statements mentioned clearly that the students were aware of what their strategies were when they found problems on vocabulary. Another example is from a student who solved the problem on how to make a good thesis statement:

3) "Have a lot of references and learn how to make a good thesis statement."

Statement (3) implies that the student realized that in order to be able to have a good thesis statement he/she should have sufficient knowledge on a particular topic. Then, he/she decided to read several books/articles to help her write a good thesis statement.

4) "Find more sources so we can find more ideas to make a good presentation"

Statement (4) is a statement from a student who was preparing a presentation in CRW 2 class. He/she thought that having more references could help him/her to present better.

The second category of the strategies is others' support. Some students (20.7%) stated that they involved other people (their friends or lecturers) in handling their problems in CRW 2 class. They asked friends more frequently than lecturers.

5) "Discuss with my friend, open dictionary, make underline in every important part."

Statement (5) shows two kinds of strategies: self-support and others' support. This student did not only rely on his/her friend when facing problems, but he/she also made an effort to solve the problem by looking up a new word in a dictionary and underlining important parts of the text.

6) "I discuss it with my friends, and we share our ideas to make us understand about the material."

Statement (6) is an example of how the student solved a problem by having a discussion in group. He/she tried to understand the learning material by listening to others and giving opinions in group discussion.

One strategy used by the students is asking the lecturer directly. Another help comes from the lecturer as shown in statement (7).

7) "I asked my lecturer to evaluate my draft and I do what I have to for my draft."

This student asked help from the lecturer when he/she faced a problem in writing his/her draft. Evaluation or comments from the lecturer were to improve his/her writing.

The third category is undecided. Only few statements were found in the reflective journals. There is only about 2% (there are only 2 statements out of 151). Some statements did not really show the students' strategies. They are:

8) "It depends on the topic that I want to write."

9) "We try to conclude that the best topic which we have is bilingual. Because bilingual has included all topic that we have."

This study shows that there are three strategies used by the students to overcome the problem. It is also revealed that the most dominant strategy is the self-support strategy which indicates that the students are independent learners. Through reflection, the students do not only try to find the problems but they also have their initiative to tackle the problems.

Needs

Writing argumentative essay is an important yet challenging academic activity for undergraduate students. Previous section has focused on the problems and the strategies to face both internal and external challenges in Critical Reading and Writing II Course. This section analyzes the needs implied from the problems appeared in their reflective journals. It is vital to study these needs to know what can be done in the future to enhance students' argumentative writing skills.

Referring to the section discussing about students' problems, this study found out that the biggest problem the student faced when writing argumentative essay was

generating a thesis statement. A thesis statement is an important aspect in writing thesis. A thesis statement expresses an opinion, attitude, or area in a complete sentence. It does not simply announce the topic the essay will develop. It also expresses the supporting or controlling ideas for the entire essay (Smalley and Ruetten, 1990). Due to its importance, the students felt that they needed to have both theoretical and practical knowledge about thesis statements.

The students also faced major difficulties in finding argumentative topics related to language and education. To deal with this problem, teachers should provide adequate materials related to trends and issues in both language and education. Moreover, due to the insufficient knowledge on these topics, the students found it hard to generate supporting details and supporting references that could strengthen their essay. In the future, we need to introduce citing and referencing bibliography to our students.

To meet students' need in developing their writing skills, it is suggested that they are given examples of argumentative essays elaborating issues surrounding language or education. It is necessary for teachers to provide suitable materials for the class. In discussing the materials, it is also vital that the facilitators give examples of good thesis statements and also bad thesis statements. Teachers do not only explain the theory and definition of a thesis statement, but they can give examples by analyzing how thesis statements express the controlling ideas in argumentative essays.

This study revealed that the students found difficulties not only in writing activities, but also in reading activities. They had a hard time understanding the main ideas of the essays. They had difficulties in comprehending main ideas mainly due to a lack of vocabulary. Having limited vocabulary hindered students' comprehension of the texts and slowed them down. Further studies on students' vocabulary levels are needed then so that teachers can prepare suitable reading materials to enhance students' vocabulary as well as comprehension in finding the main ideas of texts.

Conclusion

Reading and writing are two important skills required for learners to develop their critical thinking. For these two skills are complex, problems might appear during the process of acquiring them. Critical Reading and Writing 2 (CRW 2) is one course in the English Language Education Study Program of Sanata Dharma University that requires the two important skills.

This article discusses the result of research investigating the students' problems, needs, and strategies in CRW 2 class. The results show that the academic problems, such as grammatical problems, how to write references, mechanics and non-academic problems, such as confidence, motivation, and physical problems, appeared.

The second aspect is strategies. Three categories are revealed, namely self-support, others' support, and undecided. Most of the statements (78.1%) in the reflective journals are about the students' own strategies. They mentioned some ways to solve their problems in CRW 2 class. The rest of the students involved others' participation (friends and lecturers) to solve their problems and did not mention clear strategies. Those results imply that the students have some needs in acquiring reading and writing skills. Some students admitted that they still need to improve their ability to comprehend reading texts and to write well. They need more experiences in reading and writing. These needs can be met by providing students with examples and models of academic essays so that they can inductively learn the features of academic essay as well as enrich their vocabulary.

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