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Efforts to Improve Writing Skills of High School Students

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Abstract

Writing in English is one of the language skills that are taught in the context of learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Indonesian senior high schools. According to previous studies, most of the students consider writing is the most difficult of the four skills. This research was aimed at finding out the main difficulties in writing faced by the grade XI students at SMA Negeri 10 Fajar Harapan, Banda Aceh, and the efforts made by their teacher to overcome those problems. The design of this study was a descriptive qualitative study. To obtain the data, the writers used document collection and interviews. The results from the document collection showed that the highest percentages of problems faced by the students were in the aspect of language use and the least problems were in the aspect of content. The results from the interviews showed that the most common correcting efforts made by the teacher were giving written feedback for all aspects of writing i.e. language use, mechanics, vocabulary, organization, and content. Likewise, teachers need to develop systemized forms of feedback and make it clear to students what the feedback means and what they are to do with them to assist students in improving their writing skills.

Keywords: Problems in writing, teacher's efforts, feedback, aspects of writing.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Problem

In Indonesia, writing in English is one of the language skills that are learned in schools both at the junior and the senior high school levels. It is also one of the competencies that must be developed according to the 2013 Curriculum. The

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curriculum expects that students will be able to write or express their ideas in English texts well at the end of the course. The Core Competence 4 in this curriculum requires students to be productive. One of the example as stated in KD 4.13 for Grade XI in the 2013 syllabus is “*constructing oral and written texts to state and ask about conditions followed by giving orders/advice concerning social functions, text structures, and language features, correctly and appropriately within the context*” (Depdiknas, 2013). To achieve these curriculum expectations, the teaching of writing at high school levels introduce a variety of English text types, e.g. recount, narrative, report, and many other functional types of texts used in daily activities.

Writing in English is considered the most difficult skill in English by most students. During our preliminary research on two English teachers at Senior High School (*Sekolah Menengah Atas* or SMA) Number 10, Fajar Harapan, Banda Aceh, they explained to us about their students’ difficulties in writing. These teachers revealed that the students had difficulties in developing writing skills, in particular, problems with lack of vocabulary, grammar, text organization, and mechanics. Amongst those four difficulties, grammar and lack of vocabulary were the most common problems they faced in their English writing.

Several research studies have been conducted to find out students’ writing difficulties. Fhonna (2014) found that the areas in which the students, as a whole, made most errors were in agreement/verb tenses (43.4%), followed by spelling (20.5%) and article/determiners/plurals (18%). Less errors were found in lexical choice (9.2%), preposition/collocation (6.3%) and the least was in use of pronouns (2.4%). Moreover, the questionnaire results from her study revealed that most students found writing was difficult because they were lacking in ideas and organization. In addition, Mousavi and Naeeni (2011) noted that students faced two main categories of writing difficulties: content and form, both of which are related to basic and advanced skills. Grammar and mechanics became the students problems in basic skills, meanwhile expressing ideas, choosing appropriate vocabulary, and organizing information were among the difficulties students faced in advanced skills.

For many English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Indonesia, particularly those in Aceh, we find that writing is considered as a difficult skill to learn due to their limited exposure to English. Based on the 2013 English Syllabus for Grade XI, students only have approximately three hours (2 x 90 minutes in each meeting) for learning English in one week (Depdiknas, 2013). Moreover, they only get exposure during their time in schools. What more, teachers tend to focus mainly on teaching grammar rather than developing students’ writing skills. The students, therefore, struggle with many structural issues including selecting proper words, using correct grammar, generating ideas, and developing ideas about specific topics while writing in English.

Considering the importance of writing skills in the curriculum and the fact that the students faced difficulties in this skill, therefore, in this study we intended to find out the efforts teachers made in order to try to solve the problems faced by their students. Hedge (2005, p. 20) believes that helping students with getting ideas together, planning, and drafting is only a part of the roles of the teacher. Fhonna (2014, p. 27) also mentions that comments or feedback from their teachers influence students ability to produce better writing. It can be concluded that comments from their teachers are one of the most influential inputs for the students in order to develop more and better writing in the future.

In this study, grounded by the problems above, context analysis and results from previous studies, we aimed at finding out the difficulties the students faced in writing and the efforts that their teacher made to overcome these problems.

1.2 Research Problems

Based on the background described above, this research focuses on the following problems:

- (1) What kinds of problems in writing English are faced by students at Senior High School 10, Fajar Harapan, Banda Aceh?
- (2) What efforts are being made by their teacher to solve the students' problems in writing English?

Therefore, the research objectives in this study are to describe the problems in writing English faced by students at the school under study and to investigate the efforts made by the teacher to solve the problems in writing English of these students.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Writing

Writing is the process of thinking to invent ideas, thinking about how to express them in good writing, and arranging the ideas into clear statements and paragraphs (Nunan, 2003, p. 88). This means that writing is not an instant activity; instead, it is a progressive one which is obtained through several processes. Moreover, Creme and Lea (2003, p. 5) state that writing consists of words and those words are put together in particular formations to make sentences which are then grouped together into paragraphs.

2.2 The Aspects of Writing

In evaluating writing, Heaton (1989, p. 146-147) proposes five aspects:

1. Content

Content is related to the process of generating ideas and providing supporting details. Each paragraph of writing must contain a main idea and supporting details. The main idea in a paragraph can be stated implicitly or explicitly. The content should be knowledgeable, substantive, and relevant to the assigned topic.

2. Organization

Writing is not just putting pen to paper or writing down ideas but it is how these ideas are presented or expressed effectively. The ideas in writing should be stated clearly, well-organized in logical sequence and cohesive. Therefore, good writing is coherent and cohesive.

3. Vocabulary

Writing demands that the writer make careful choices of words. A writer has to be able to use words effectively, masters word formations and uses certain words according to their appropriateness. In addition, a writer is required to master a lot of vocabulary since lack of them can also impede the process of writing. Good writing must have good collocation.

4. *Language Use*

Language use includes the mastery of grammar and sentence construction. A writer is required to use correct grammar, such as, correct agreement, tense, word order, articles, pronouns, and preposition. Moreover, writers are required to have knowledge about the rules for sentence construction.

5. *Mechanics*

Mechanics is the term used to describe the technical aspects of writing. Error-free writing requires the use of correct mechanics which includes spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and paragraphing. Good mechanics makes writing easy to read and attracts more readers.

Therefore, to enable the students write fluently, accurately, and appropriately in English, the teacher should take into account the above aspects when they are assessing students' writing.

2.3 The Learners' Problems in Writing Skill

Writing is one of the difficult skills to be mastered by EFL students. This is due to problems faced by students in writing. Chen (2002, p. 35) mentions four major problems faced by EFL students in writing. Firstly, students have problems with vocabulary. They complain about their lack of vocabulary. It is difficult for students to write their ideas properly when they have limited vocabulary. Secondly, the difficulty in writing is not only in vocabulary and grammar, but also in generating and developing ideas. Students are often frustrated in generating ideas and providing supporting details in writing a paragraph. Thirdly, English grammar is another problem in students' writing. The students often make grammatical errors, including mistakes in tenses, parts of speech, and subject-verb agreement. Lastly, mechanics is one of the most common areas where problems occur in writing. Students often have problems with mechanics which includes punctuation, capitalization and spelling.

In addition, Richards and Renandya (2002, as cited in Khoii, 2011, p. 493) claim that students have problems in expressing ideas in writing. They have problems with complex English vocabularies. They are also not capable of writing well due to poor vocabulary and wrong or poor word choices. According to Crème and Lea (2003, p.12), grammatical errors are common in their writing. They get confused about how to apply complex grammatical rules in their writing.

2.4 The Teacher's Efforts in Improving Writing Skill

Teachers can play an important role in improving the writing skills of students by doing several things, in particular they have to give more attention to the students during the process of writing and guide the students how to do good writing. According to Harmer (2004, p. 109):

There are three steps to be considered by the teachers in teaching writing. First, the teacher should understand the reasons for the students to write. Second, the teachers should provide many opportunities for their students to write. Third, the teacher should give helpful and meaningful feedback. (Harmer, 2004, p. 109)

Giving clear instructions and conveying goals are very important to enable students to have clear reasons to write. Opportunities to write should be given to the students by motivating them and explaining that writing needs to become a good habit. Teachers should create a fun atmosphere to make teaching and learning more fun, implementing appropriate strategies and using interesting media. The ways of giving feedback will depend on the kind of writing task the students have to do, and the effect that the teachers want to create. Thus, Mojica (2010, p. 13) has some suggestions that teachers can do to overcome students' writing problems, which are set out in Table 1.

Table 1. Teacher's efforts (proposed by Mojica, 2010, p. 13).

<i>Content</i>	<i>Organization</i>	<i>Vocabulary</i>	<i>Language Use</i>	<i>Mechanics</i>
Guided brainstorming mind-mapping written feedback	Written feedback	Jotting down new words keeping an English diary reading good materials written feedback	Giving grammar instructions written feedback	Written feedback

Teachers can help students to generate ideas for writing by teaching brainstorming and mind-mapping. Those are powerful ways to help students get ideas related to a given topic in writing. Naturally, they can be as creative as they like since anything goes with brainstorming. Mind-mapping, also called idea webbing is a great way to show relationships between ideas. Mind-mapping is also part idea generation and part organization, so they will know exactly how to group ideas once they are ready to write.

Mojica (2010) also suggests some ways to overcome problems related to vocabulary in writing, for example, teachers can ask students to jot down new words, keep an English diary and read good materials. Growth in vocabulary knowledge is also anticipated with emphasis on learning of words that can be used frequently and effective implementation of a guided pleasure reading scheme.

In building the students' vocabulary, teachers can ask them to make it a habit to jot down unfamiliar words as they come across whilst reading and learn their meaning and usage. There students can see how words are actually used in context when reading. Looking for new words as they read along will help them build their vocabulary. Because writing is a complex and challenging activity for many students, teachers should focus on the grammatical concepts that are essential for the clear communication of meaning. Students will make fewer errors with incorrect verb forms, verb tenses and missing subjects if they have a good grasp of the basic elements essential to English writing. Teachers are the ones who must be responsible for helping the students to master the rules of grammar. As students revise and edit their writing, teachers can provide guidance with proper grammar and help their students in their attempts to identify and correct problems with sentence structure and correct usage or collocation.

To enhance the teaching-learning process for writing, the teachers should consider the principles for teaching writing including understanding the motivation for students to write, they should also provide many opportunities for their students to write, and give them helpful and meaningful feedback. Feedback can be a powerful teaching tool if it is given while students are in the process of writing drafts (Mojica, 2010). The goal of feedback is to help students improve their writing proficiency to the point that is expected from them as student writers so that they are able to produce writing with minimal errors and maximum clarity. Feedback from teachers often takes the form of written comments on the compositions submitted by their students.

Teachers provide feedback to support the development of skills in writing by their students. Given that teachers spend a great deal of time providing written feedback to students, it is important that the feedback have a great influence on the development of the writing skills of their students. When students receive feedback while they are writing, they are more inclined to use it to revise and edit their drafts. They also have an immediate opportunity to try out the suggestions in their writing, allowing for meaningful application of what they have learned from the feedback.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Method

The method applied in this study was qualitative research. In dealing with this research design, we used a descriptive qualitative research model. We provided descriptions about the problems faced by the students in writing texts and the efforts made by their teacher to help try to solve them.

3.2 Technique of Data Collection

To get the data related to the problems faced by the students in writing, we asked their teacher for some samples of writing from the students and later analysed them. They randomly collected five samples of writing of hortatory texts done by students from each class in Grade XI. As there were four classes in Grade XI, so a total of 20 samples of writing done by the students were collected. To get the data related to the efforts made by the teacher, we further conducted an interview with the teacher. Eight questions were asked related to her efforts in improving her students' five aspects of writing (i.e. content, mechanics, vocabulary, language use, and organization). The interview, which lasted 30 minutes, was recorded using a tape recorder.

3.3 Technique of Data Analysis

We firstly analysed the data from the documents (e.g. students' essays) collected. Then, we classified the data into the different types of writing difficulties that the students had and calculated percentages for each type of problem to find out the most common to the least difficulties in writing. Secondly, the data from the interview with the teacher about the efforts made to help the students with their writing problems was also classified and described.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Results from Document Collection

The following figure shows the percentage of students' problems in writing a hortatory text:

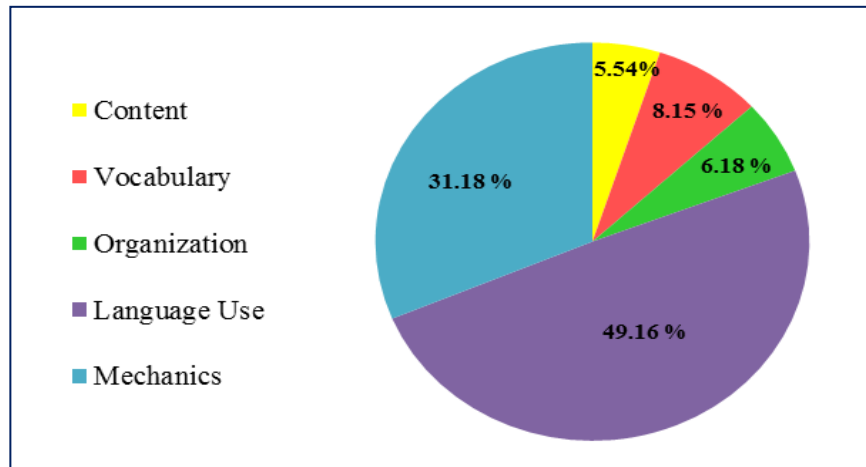


Figure 1. The percentages of problems in writing hortatory texts by students.

The diagram above shows that the students had problems in all aspects of writing. It clearly shows that the biggest problem in writing this type of text was in the aspect of language use (49 %) which counted 175 out of 356 total errors. The aspect of language use also included errors of grammar made by the students in their texts. The second major problem area was the aspect of mechanics. This included 31% (111 errors) out of the total errors in the students' writing. This aspect is divided into three sub-categories: punctuation, spelling, and capitalization. The percentage of problems in mechanics in each of these three categories is presented in Figure 2.



Figure 2. The percentage of students' problems in mechanics.

The diagram above showed that punctuation was the major problem in mechanics, it accounted for 54 (49%) out of 111 total errors. This was followed by 30 errors (27%) in spelling and 27 problems (24 %) in capitalization. Vocabulary with 29 (8%) errors was the third source of errors in the writing done by the students. The vocabulary problems included inappropriate words chosen by the students in the context of their writing. Next, the fourth problem was organization with 22 (6%) of errors. This aspect deals with the use of transition signals and cohesive devices in the writing by the students. Lastly, content with 19 (5%) errors was the lowest area of problems in the

writing done by the students. Problems in content included problems with main idea and supporting details. Figure 3 shows the percentage of the sub-problems in content.

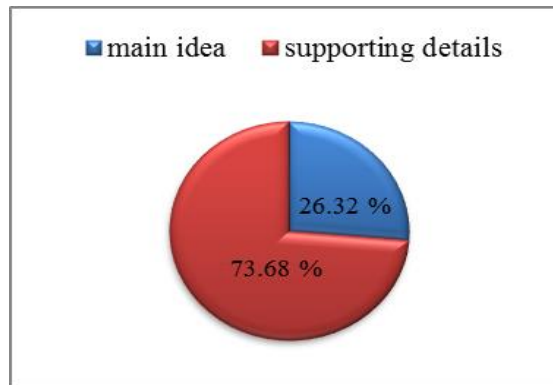


Figure 3. The percentage of students' problems in content aspect.

From Figure 3, we found that the total amount of students' problems percentage in content are 73% (14 out of 19 problems) of supporting details and 26.32% (5 out of 19 problems) of main idea. It showed that the students' problem in supporting details was higher than in main idea.

4.2 Results from Interview with the Teacher

The result of the interview revealed that the teacher had assisted the students to cope with their writing problems with some efforts as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Efforts made by the teacher.

<i>Aspects</i>	<i>Efforts</i>
Content	Brainstorming Giving feedback
Organization	Written feedback Teaching use of conjunctions
Vocabulary	Introducing new words Asking students to search for words related to the writing topic Asking students to look up the meaning of words in a dictionary Written feedback
Language Use	Teaching grammar separately from writing Written feedback
Mechanics	Teaching capitalization and punctuation Giving vocabulary lessons to emphasize spelling Written feedback

Table 2 shows that the teacher asked the students to do brainstorming before starting to write. She got the students to brainstorm to help them develop ideas about the writing topic they had been given. As a result, the students were able to write down a lot of good ideas related to the topic. She also gave feedback to the students when she found problems about the content in their paragraphs. She taught them how to use conjunctions and transition signals to overcome problems with organization in their writings. She also gave written feedback on their writing when they did not put in appropriate transition signals or cohesive devices.

To cope with problems in vocabulary, the teacher usually introduced the students to new vocabulary. Before writing, she would ask her students to look for words related to the topic they were going to write about. She also asked her students to bring dictionaries to their writing lessons so that they could look up words they wanted to know the meaning of. Thus, they learnt to understand the meaning of words according to their context. She also taught grammar intensively to her students to help cope with their problems in language use. She taught grammar separately in every English class meeting. She also wrote comments on the papers written by her students where they had made errors in grammar. Finally, for the problems in mechanics, she taught about punctuation and capitalization. For spelling problems in mechanics, she had a special treatment. She gave words to the students and they had to memorize the spelling of the words.

The teacher gave written feedback, with comments and corrections for all errors she found in the papers written by her students. After that, she returned the papers to the students without further explanation about her feedback. She only explained in further detail about her written feedback if there were students who asked her for further explanation.

4.2.1 Content

In the aspect of content, we found that the students faced few problems. Nevertheless, some of them still experienced difficulties in including supporting details and ideas in their writing. The following example is taken from the data (SW is for Student's Writing):

SW 1: *On the other hand, smartphone help us as a student to know news update about education, economic, kurs, politic, electronic, etc. Otherwise, smartphone can help student to make study group or other organization by social media that available inside.*

The paragraph above consisted of two sentences with different ideas without supporting sentences. This means that the student had difficulties in developing his ideas. He was unable to elaborate the main idea by using supporting details in one paragraph. The students not only had problems with supporting details but also with the main ideas as shown in the paragraph below:

SW 2: *Third, it'll help keep their social life active. If students have their cell phones at school they could continue talking to their friends and in an emergency, text or call their parents or the paramedics. Also, they could research stuff if needed if all the computers are in use. They could also take easier on cell phones or smartphone.*

The paragraph above contains a few ideas. The student did not stick with one idea. There are sentences which are not relevant to the main idea. In that paragraph, the main idea was "Smartphones will keep students have an active social live". However, the student did not only write about how smartphones can keep an active social life, it is shown that in the last two sentences of the paragraph that she also brought new ideas about 'how to use smartphone in an emergency' and 'smartphones are easier to be used

than a computer'. She is supposed to put those last two sentences in different paragraphs because they have different idea from the main idea of that paragraph.

To overcome this problem, the teacher asked students to brainstorm before writing. Moreover, she also commented on students' writing. It is shown by the teacher's response in the interview as follows (TE is for Teacher's Excerpt):

TE 1: *Usually before beginning to write, I ask students to brainstorm. They have to list anything they need to write. That is the first, and then at the end I give feedback.*

From the teacher's statement above, we know that she asked her students to brainstorm first before writing. As a result, they can list down whatever comes into their mind and later eliminate those things irrelevant to the given topic. Besides, the teacher can also give feedback if there was any problem with the content in the writing. This is similar to Mojica (2010) who also claims that brainstorming and written feedback are helpful ways to deal with problems that students have in the content of their writing.

4.2.2 Organization

Students also have problems with organization. They get confused on how to organize ideas properly and to link ideas between paragraphs. An example is below:

SW 3: *In this era, almost all school not allowed the students bring smartphone to school. ... We agree if the students bring smartphones to school. Smartphone is an important thing for students to help them to making homework ... Smartphone can make the students more smart and update ... So, depend on the arguments we agree if ...*

The problem in organization with the above paragraph is that there were no transition signals to clearly connect the sentences. The student should have put connective words such as "*...however, firstly, secondly, or next...*" to link the sentences. To deal with this problem, the teacher claimed that she gave feedback and taught conjunctions. Her response during the interview is:

TE 2: *I frequently give feedback ... then we also learn about conjunctions.*

The efforts of the teacher to give written feedback are also relevant to the efforts suggested by Mojica (2010). She declares that feedback is effective to overcome problems of organization faced by students. In this study the organization aspect was the second lowest writing problem faced by the students. In addition to written feedback, the teacher also taught the students about conjunctions and introduced her students to other cohesive devices. She explained the function of cohesive devices so that the students would know where and how to use them properly.

4.2.3 Vocabulary

In the aspect of vocabulary, the students tended to choose words which were not suitable for the context they were writing about; this is a classic problem of poor collocation. It can be seen in the example below:

SW 4: *So, depend on the arguments above we agree ...*

From the above examples, we can see that the student had difficulty in choosing appropriate words to complete the sentence. The use of the word 'depend on' before the argument seems awkward. The words 'based on' could be used instead of 'depend on'. One correct form of the sentence is "*So, based on the arguments above we agree...*". Another correct form is "*So, if we depend on the arguments above we agree...*".

Therefore, the teacher needed to make efforts to help her students with their vocabulary for writing. From the interview, she stated that efforts she made were as follows:

TE 3: *Related to vocabulary I usually give separate vocabulary, eee, I give new vocabularies. After that, I also ordered them to find vocabulary related to their writing topic. And also I always reminded them to bring and use a dictionary. So for every writing lesson they have to bring a dictionary. Thus if there was a word that they did not know they could directly look it up in their dictionary.*

From the teacher's statement, it can be concluded that she usually introduced new vocabulary to her students. Before writing, she also asked them to look for words related to the topic they were going to write about. Therefore, they could prepare a list of words to be used in their writing. For all writing classes, she asked them to each bring a dictionary so that when writing they can look up words they want to know about. The efforts she made are in line with those efforts suggested by Mojica (2010) who found that asking students to jot down new words and to read good books and other material were effective ways to help students who had problems with vocabulary in writing.

4.2.4 Language Use

We found that the students made a lot of errors in grammar in their writing. Most students had difficulties to arrange sentences correctly based on the rules of grammar. Here are some examples of grammatical errors found in their writing:

SW 5: *But we are not agree.*

The student's sentence above shows that he had a problem with agreement. The sentence could read "*But we do not agree*". Since 'agree' is a verb, where the auxiliary needed is 'do'. However it could also be written "*But we are not able to agree*".

To overcome these problems in language use, the teacher said that she also taught the students about grammar to help them with their grammar problems. This is shown by the statement from the interview with the teacher set out below:

TE 4: *We learn grammar separately although for example, aaa, what, today's curriculum prohibits teaching grammar separately. But I will check first, if the chapter is about narrative texts as in grade two. That means we have to learn about conditionals first, and learn about how to write in the past tense. But if what we are learning is explanatory texts or report texts, we must first learn about how to write in the passive voice. So I teach grammar separately.*

From the teacher's statements above, we know that she taught grammar related to the text she would give in the next writing class. In other words, she taught grammar by integrating it into the actual writing process. Chin (2000) suggested that the most beneficial way of helping students improve their command of grammar in writing is to use students' writing as the basis for discussing grammatical concepts. Therefore, the teacher needs to integrate writing and grammar instruction by giving mini-grammar lessons using documents written by the students.

Beside teaching grammar separately, the teacher also gave written feedback on the grammar in the writing done by her students. This is supported by the statements of the teacher from the interview as below:

TE 5: *Yes. I also gave written feedback.*

Although the teacher stated that she also provided written feedback on the writing done by her students to correct their errors in grammar, it was still their main problem in this study. This was contrary to Mojica's study (2010) which found that feedback was helpful to deal with errors in language use made by students (see Table 1). In giving her feedback, she wrote the correct form on the students' papers. Then, she returned the papers to the students without further explanation about the errors to be corrected. According to Cohen and Cavalcanti (1990, as cited in Williams, 2003) there are several faults that lie with this method of correcting grammar. The given feedback has been found to be unclear. Students for the most part simply copy the corrections into their subsequent drafts or final copies. The vast majority of them do not record nor study the mistakes noted in the feedback. Having them merely copy corrections from teachers is a passive action that does not teach students how to recognize or correct errors on their own. Thus, teachers are supposed to explain about the feedback given.

4.2.5 Mechanics

The writers found that the students made a lot of errors in spelling. Most students failed to use correct spelling, correct punctuation, and correct capitalization. There were a lot of errors found in mechanics.

SW 6: *The technology can be laptop, television, and other but the most usefull ...*

The above excerpt clearly shows that the student made mistakes in the spelling of the words 'useful' and 'television'. He spelt the word 'usefull' with double 'l' while actually it only has one. Furthermore, he made an error in spelling the letter 'e' in the word 'telivision'. The correct sentence should be "*The technology can be a laptop, television, and others, but the most usefull...*". To overcome the problems in mechanics, the teacher made several efforts. From the interview, she stated that:

TE 6: *... before writing, we learn about the use of capitalization separately even though only a short explanation; about where we should put uppercase and lowercase. We also learn punctuation. Then for spelling, I often give them vocabularies, too. Vocabulary that focus on spelling words that have double "l" at the end; to let them know there are words with double "l" and there are not.*

Looking at the teacher's response above, to anticipate the problem in the use of punctuation and capitalization, she argued that she had briefly taught the students about where to put capital letters and also explained how to use several functions of punctuation. Asking students to memorize vocabulary that was given seemed to be effective in helping students to overcome some of their problems with spelling.

4.3 Discussion

From all the efforts made by the teacher, written feedback appears to be the most common effort that she made to help her students. She gave written feedback on all aspects of writing problems faced by the students. Unfortunately, the written feedback did not work for all aspects, particularly for language use and mechanics. This can be seen from the results, where language use and mechanics were the two major problems in writing faced by her students in this study.

Every teacher must have a clear definition of feedback. Effective feedback is feedback which has an impact on student achievement (Harmer, 2004, p. 109). This kind of feedback not only gives students an idea of how their performance aligns with the standards set by the teacher, but gives them information about how to improve to better meet those standards.

Leki (1990, p. 128) reports that when presented with written feedback on content, students react in three ways: (1) the students may not read the annotations at all, (2) they may read them but not understand them, or (3) they may understand them but not know how to respond to them. Teacher comments on content are of little use if students do not know what they mean or how to use them productively to improve their skills as writers. Furthermore, Fathman and Walley report that teacher feedback in the form of teacher comments is often vague and unclear (1990, as cited in Williams, 2003, p. 2). This leads to various reactions by the students including confusion, frustration and neglect to follow the comments. Therefore, teachers need to be clear with their written feedback given to the students by giving further face-to-face discussions in class on her comments towards their students' writing.

5. CONCLUSION

The aims of this research were to find out the problems were faced by the students in writing and also the efforts made by their teacher to cope with these problems. Based on the research findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the students had some problems with their writing skills, particularly in content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. Among those problems, grammatical errors in language use were the major writing problem that they had. On the other hand, problems with content were found the least from these students.

In order to overcome these writing problems, the teacher made many efforts, which were found to be useful to the students, except the effort of providing written feedback. The study revealed that it could not solve the problems face by the students in some aspects particularly in language use and mechanics because further discussion was not done to discuss the errors directly with the students in class. Therefore, it is suggested that teachers need to develop more systemized forms of feedback and make it clear to students what the feedback means and what they are to do with it.

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