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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Students' Voices: Poster Session as an Alternative Way of Teaching Writing

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**Abstract:** This study aimed to investigate the students' participation and the students' perceptions of the use of poster sessions in essay writing class. A qualitative method was applied in this study. The study respondents were third-semester English Education Study Program students who took an essay writing class. Sixty-third-semester students from two classes were selected randomly to participate in the study. The participants consisted of 30 students. The reason for choosing the third-semester students was that they have studied Paragraph Writing in the previous semester. In other words, they have basic writing skills. Data was collected using classroom observation notes and semi-structured interviews. The study indicated that students were comfortable, confident, and continuously engaged in learning essay writing. The result further revealed that all students showed positive perceptions of the use of poster sessions. They felt enjoyed and satisfied in learning essay writing by using poster sessions. They thought this was a new way to learn writing using poster sessions. They showed their interest in learning. They not only improved their skills in essay writing but also improved their oral skills. It was recommended that further researchers examine students' writing ability using poster sessions and identify other aspects that foster students' success in a poster session.

**Keywords:** Essay Writing, Poster session, Participations, Perceptions.

## 1. Introduction

Writing in a second or foreign language is the most complex and essential of the four skills. Writing is a crucial skill to acquire in communicating with each other via the written form. Traditional classroom writing practice often takes the form of writing an essay in which a teacher gives a topic and students write based on the topic given. The writing results are then read and assessed by the teacher, and the teacher provides feedback on the writing. In contrast, writing aims to express ideas and convey a message to a reader, so the ideas themselves should be viewed as the essential aspect of writing. On the other hand, the writer also needs to pay some attention to formal elements: neat handwriting, correct spelling, and punctuation, as well as acceptable grammar and careful selection of vocabulary. This is because a much higher language standard is typically demanded in writing (Ur, 1996).

The objective of teaching writing in a foreign language is to get learners to acquire the abilities and skills they need to produce a range of different kinds of written texts similar to those an educated person would be able to make in their language. Suppose the objectives in your teaching situation or as expressed in your syllabus are different (to pass a particular exam, for example, or to write specific kinds of texts). In that case, it is worth defining what they are (Ur, 1996).



According to Hennessey (2015), students appreciate and value both the new skills they learn from creating the poster and how the process positively impacts the quality of their empirical research papers. In this research, a poster is created as a writing assignment.

Nyang'au (2016) revealed standard methods teachers use in teaching essay writing skills are lectures, question and answer, and teacher demonstration. However, group work, peer teaching, and role-play, which have been proven to enhance the learning of writing skills, were the least used. The results further revealed that students' challenges in learning essay writing skills include inadequate content mastery, incorrect use of grammar, first language (L1) interference, limited vocabulary, and inadequate teaching and learning resources.

University students must produce specific writing genres such as paragraphs, essays, summaries, and reports in the academic context. However, learning to write, especially to write an essay in a first (L1), second (L2), or foreign language (FL), seems to be the most challenging skill for language learners to acquire in academic contexts. Similarly, Richards (2008) notes that learning to write in either a first or second language is one of the most challenging tasks students encounter and one that few people can be said to master.

Based on the author's experience, teaching writing to the English Education Study Program students at the State University of Makassar is not an easy task since the students are not used to writing, and it is difficult to express their ideas in writing form and lack vocabulary. They feel such things because they assume that writing is a complicated skill to acquire. They need to get many exercises and practice to write an essay well.

As course developers, lecturers need to use as many ideas and ways in teaching writing. There are some ways to create a successful writing activity that has been applied by teachers all over the world, especially in Indonesia and particularly in Makassar; they are: describing people, place, or an object, book report, personal story, instruction sheet, and so on (Ur, 1996). But in this paper, the author would like to introduce one way that has not yet been applied in some universities, especially at the State University of Makassar, which is the Poster session.

The writer first learned about Poster sessions when she attended a Summer Institute Program in Honolulu, a program of English Teaching Workshop, in 2009. The participants were about to do a mini-project for around two weeks and present the poster. Based on this experience, the author practiced this way with the students who took Speaking IV in 2010. Then, the author applied the poster session again for students who took Speaking IV in 2012 and Speaking II in 2014. She used this way because she thought it would give new nuance and atmosphere to the teaching and learning process, especially in a speaking classroom. That brings a unique atmosphere and experience to the author as a lecturer and students in speaking classroom activities. However, the author has not applied the poster session in a writing classroom. Therefore, the author conducted a study to investigate the students' participation and perceptions of the use of poster sessions in learning essay writing.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. *Poster Session*

A poster is a large printed image that people use for decoration, and it can also become an advertisement in a public setting. A poster session displays information on a series of posters that may include drawings, images, charts, graphs, and textual material about a particular topic. According to Waquet (2008), poster presentations are becoming a systematic approach for scientists to communicate their findings.

Nowadays, people can find poster sessions in various fields, including in the arts and advertisements and for education. In other words, the poster session is used and implemented in business and academia. According to Aduradola and Ale (2013), posters are an essential instructional tool for communication in academic and commercial settings,

particularly when handling large classes. When optimum attributes are necessary for clear communication and visual impact in the students' work, poster presentations are suitable vehicles for developing communication abilities and the skill of critical assessment.

## 2.2. *Poster Presentation Rationale*

There are some ways to use posters in presentation, just as there are a variety of presentation formats (see Cullen and Pudwill 2003, Furmanovsky and Sheffer 2003; Hammond 2003 in Bayne (2005). The approach described is a concurrent 'conference'-style poster session individualized, i.e., by one student. It can help you encourage and maximize three crucial aspects of the presentations:

### a. The Presenter's and Audience's Positive behaviors

EFL students may get difficulties reading oral presentations. Students are not allowed to read from a script to discourage habits that limit non-verbal parts of presenting. Posters offer the necessary information in an enlarged 'note card' style that students can refer to as needed. Furthermore, due to the fluid nature of the activity, their presentations are impossible to memorize.

### b. Time spent in class and time spent on tasks by students

Using poster sessions in the style of a conference allows many students to present for an extended period in a single class period. This can meet time limits and address the sometimes-contentious issue (among students) of talks split across two or three classes.

### c. Inspire and encourage audience participation

The audience is up and moving during poster sessions, actively participating, experiencing the variety, and communicating aurally, vocally, non-verbally, visually, and, maybe most importantly, meaningfully.

## 2.3. *The Nature of Writing*

According to Ur (1996), writing has a few generalizations: it is permanently fixed and stable, plainly evident in context and allusions, much more densely, typically organized and carefully formed, and universally understood. Students may think of themselves as authors, according to Mylnarczyk and Haber (2005), based on three beliefs: students learn to write by writing, and students respond when they are writing seriously and actively engaged in communicating. Besides that, students will be motivated and successful in writing if they are inspired by their peers and allowed to write about one topic, they like most. According to Clark (2008), writing reflects what has previously been defined in the writer's mind, implying that writing can only take place once the primary ideas have been established.

## 2.4. *Writing Essays*

The act of writing an essay is at the center of education. Students will be required to submit a paper to the university. If they do not write, it is unlikely that they will ever connect the dots between what they have learned. Students in humanities topics such as literature, history, and philosophy are graded on their essays. They will never excel in these areas if they cannot write good articles, especially under exam conditions. Some students fall short of their potential simply because they are unfamiliar with the fundamentals of essay writing. They can be persuasive in a discussion and have a thorough understanding of the subject, but they break apart when it comes to writing an essay. Students must be able to articulate a coherent and well-argued case in writing, based on adequate research. Talking about what they know is not enough (though it is essential to the learning process). This is still the most effective technique to show students' comprehension of their subject and ability to apply what they learned (Nigel, 2006).

Some people appear to have innate writing ability: they can write well without exerting much effort or thought. However, most of us must spend time and effort on this activity.



Almost everyone can make significant changes. Because writing skills are transferable, progress in this area can have a long-term impact on one's academic career. Precise writing abilities and creating and supporting an argument are essential for all non-fiction writing and will almost certainly be helpful in professional life after college.

### 3. Research Method

This study took place in the English Education Study Program at the State University of Makassar, located in Makassar, South Sulawesi. A total of 60 third-semester students in the same major from two classes were selected randomly to participate in the study. The participants consisted of 30 students. The reason for choosing the third-semester students was that they have studied Paragraph Writing in the previous semester. In other words, they have basic writing skills. Besides, they do not have any experience learning English through poster sessions at the university level.

This study applied a qualitative method. This study used two kinds of instruments; classroom observation notes and interviews. This study implemented classroom observation notes to investigate the students' participation in Essay Writing class using poster sessions. The writer noted and wrote everything that happened during the writing class activities. A semi-structured interview was used to represent methods of collecting data between an interviewee and the researcher through direct interaction. The study also used the semi-structured interview conducted after implementing poster sessions in essay writing class. It investigated the students' perceptions of poster sessions.

The procedures of this study were as follows:

The writer conducted this activity during the 12th-15th meeting of an Essay Writing class. The lecturer informed the students that they would have a mini-project. The writer adapted Silberman (1996)'s steps; the details of the steps are as follows:

- a. The lecturer explains the poster session. What it is and why is essential and inform them that this is a kind of Mini Project. The students are then divided into groups of five. The lecturer will give one type of essay (descriptive essay, cause and effect essay, problem-solving essay, classification essay, process essay, and compare and contrast essay). The students must discuss and decide on one topic related to their writing. The topics are numerous and can be from other disciplines. After determining a subject, they must create or make questions or decide what they will do. They are asked to observe, interview, and collect data based on their topic. The lecturer revises their questions or other preparation that students plan to do, and students must conduct their project with their group members.
- b. At the next meeting, the groups informed the progress of their projects. Do they have a problem or not? What is their progress so far? Then the students are asked to come back to the place where they do the observation if they still need to get additional data and start writing their draft.
- c. The third meeting is submitting the written report of their mini-project. The groups are interviewed based on their written statement. After interviewing each group, the lecturer asks the students to prepare their poster session based on their mini-project, and they must prepare for the poster presentation. The students are free to decide the size of their poster and the materials they will use. The lecturer does not give them the specific format usually given in conferences for the poster session.
- d. The time is for presenting the poster. Groups posted their work on the wall, and everyone/every group walked around the room discussing and identifying posters.

Qualitative data was collected through classroom observation and semi-structured interviews analyzing the data. The students were observed for four weeks. Each activity each week was observed. Besides, the interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed for analysis. The interview transcripts were analyzed qualitatively in nature and hence subjectively. The interview transcripts were then analyzed using coding advocated by

Charmaz (2006). After doing the coding, the data were categorized into the appropriate units or segments simultaneously. Then the analysis and interpretation of qualitative data were made.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. *Students' Participation in Essay Writing Class*

In the first meeting, the lecturer explained the poster session, what it is, and why it is crucial, and told them that this is a Mini Project. Students would do a mini-project related to their essay writing subject. The researcher divided the students into six groups. The researcher prepared six kinds of essays, and each group must pick one of the essays. After all, the groups got their essays, and the researcher explained what they had to do. They discuss one topic related to their writing. The topics were numerous and could be from other disciplines. The issues given by the groups were littering, how to make tahu isi, the effect of smoking, describing cats, public and private universities, and kinds of movies. The topics rely on problem-solving essays, process essays, cause-and-effect essays, descriptive essays, compare-and-contrast essays, and classification essays. After deciding on a topic, they would create or make questions or determine what they would do. They have to observe, interview and collect data based on their issues. The lecturer revised their questions or other preparation that students planned to do, and students conducted their project with their group members. In this meeting, students showed their surprise and enthusiasm because this was a new way to learn essay writing. Firstly, in working with the group, they were confused about what to choose or discuss. Then the researcher tried to assist them one by one, and finally, they could show their active participation by giving and sharing ideas, thinking critically, and writing their project.

At the next meeting, the groups would inform their progress of projects. Do they have a problem or not? What is their progress so far? Then the students were asked to write their draft. Students then wrote their drafts and discussed whether their writings were correct. The lecturer then checked their writing drafts and gave a suggestion. After that, they return to the place where they conducted the observation if they still need to get additional data. In doing the observation, the students did not get any difficulties because they worked with the group so that they could divide their roles. In writing the draft, some of the groups took time to write. It was difficult for them to begin their writing, so the lecturer guided them on what to do. Besides, they usually did not know the appropriate word choice for their writing.

The third meeting is submitting the written report of their mini-project. The groups were interviewed based on their written statement. After interviewing each group and correcting their writing, students revise their essays. The lecturer then gave them feedback about their writing. After that, the lecturer asked them to prepare their poster session based on their mini-project, and they must prepare for the poster presentation. The students were free to decide the size of their posters and the materials they would use. The lecturer did not give them the specific format usually given in conferences for the poster session. When the lecturer asked the students about their written projects, some groups could explain well the kinds of essays they wrote based on their observations and interview. Correcting students' written papers usually made mistakes in transition words, misspellings, and inappropriate word choices.

The last meeting was for presenting the poster. Groups posted their work on the wall, and everyone/every group walked around the room discussing and identifying posters. After that, the students gathered to hear their feedback. Each student showed enthusiasm in delivering their poster and essay in this activity. They shared the kinds of essays, and some groups could give arguments on the other group's writings. They were not shy to explain their reports because they experienced them directly, so it was easy to formulate ideas and put them in a written essay.

While observing the activity, the writer, as a lecturer, could see that students were comfortable, confident, and continuously engaged. For instance, students who were usually quiet in the entire class are much more active as they gather around the poster in small groups. These are supported by Bayne (2005) that poster sessions can actively engage the students to learn their academic content, think critically and creatively, improve their writing skills and oral communication skills, practice working with groups, and raise their confidence.

#### *4.2. Students' Perceptions of the Use of Poster Session*

Fifteen students were interviewed to investigate their perceptions of the use of poster sessions in essay writing classes. The students gave different perceptions varying from positive perceptions to negative perceptions. The majority of participants perceived poster sessions as a new way of teaching and learning essay writing. For example, Student A said:

"I think poster session activity is a new way to improve our essay writing because by learning kinds of essays by using poster session, it can help me understand the material easily and make the student more interesting to learn about essay writing. Besides, we also learned how to correct the essay passage carefully."

A second positive perception of using poster sessions in learning essay writing showed that it is an exciting and fun activity. For example, Students B and C said:

"I think it's enjoyable since I can give questions, critics, and suggestions to each other."

"I'm interested to learn using poster session, and poster session is a fun learning activity. I enjoy the activity".

Another positive perception was that the students could improve their critical and creative thinking in learning essay writing. For example, Student D stated:

"I think poster session activity can increase our critical thinking. I can think creatively to do the assignment because we need to find the fact of the topic given then we need to be a creative student to make poster interesting."

Another positive perception showed that students improve their essay writing skills and their oral communication. For example, Students E and F remarked:

"I learn about types of essays. I can learn how to analyze the essay. I learn how to organize the essay. I also improve my speaking skill."

"Poster session activity is good for me because I can observe the object and write the essay. I can also improve my speaking in presentation sessions."

To sum up, all of the students felt enjoyed and satisfied learning essay writing using poster sessions. They showed their interest in learning, and they do not only improve their skills in essay writing but also improved their oral skills. Those perceptions line up with what Hennessey (2015), Waquet (2008), and Bayne (2005) found.

## **5. Conclusions**

Teaching writing, particularly essay writing, is essential for acquiring a second or foreign language learning. The capacity to communicate correctly and efficiently in written form in a second language helps a learner's performance in school and college and later in life. As a result, language instructors must devote special attention to teaching writing, particularly essay writing. The lecturers must establish a stimulating setting where students can feel comfortable writing essays. With this goal in mind, an essay writing exercise like a poster session can help students strengthen their writing skills, particularly in essay writing,

increase their critical and creative thinking skills, and improve their spoken communication skills. This new approach engages students more actively in the learning process while also making learning more relevant and enjoyable.

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