

Using Four Types of Narrative in Teaching Writing for University Students in Indonesia

Bobby Octavia Yuskar,
Universitas Bina Sarana Informatika
bobby.boy@bsi.ac.id

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Accepted: January 2021

Approved: June 2021

Published: June 2021

Key Words:

*Narratives, English Language
Teaching, University
Students, Writing Skill*

DOI: 10.35719/jlic.v3i1.48

ABSTRACT

This paper is written in a form of library research and its purpose is to search ideas in giving description of how English lecturer able to develop students' writing skill using narrative writing. The writer selects four types of narrative to improve students' writing skill after reading several theories from scholars and analyzing their ideas on the application of four narratives. By applying four types of narrative, university students in Indonesia will have better understanding in writing good narrative compositions. And they will also learn how to express their ideas and write them smoothly in the form of narrative writing. Furthermore, the variety of passages in these narrative writings can motivate students to create interesting writing since the nature of these narratives are reflecting their experience directly. In this library research, the writer finds out several advantages which can be obtained from these four narratives. The advantages students can get such as, learn to arrange chronological order inside their writing, expressing experience in dramatic ways, showing the dynamic interpersonal relationships, and increasing their possession for new vocabularies relatively help students to make good narrative writing.

INTRODUCTION

In teaching writing in the university, lecturer should avoid paying too much attention on errors. Lecturer asks students to make writing tasks without considering their needs and interest. Therefore, lecturer should look at students' needs and interest as the main priority in teaching writing in the university. Lecturer also makes limitation which can create inhibition toward students'

exploration in writing. This situation is described by Zamel (1987) argued that *“the need to emphasize writing in second and foreign language classrooms as a process of discovery, and that overemphasize on errors and rhetorical forms can inhibit this process”*.

In addition, lecturer to some extent makes limitation specifically in terms of choosing the topic. Writing is a skill in English which is required extensive freedom for students to choose their own topic. The limitation in choosing the topic can lock students' sense of exploration. To solve this situation, lecturer should release students to choose any topic suitable to their interest. In liberating students to choose their own topic in writing, Silva (1997) supporting this situation by saying that, *“It is both reasonable and motivating to allow students to choose their own topic and that when students are exposed to this freedom, their work is more successful.”* Supporting the statement from Silva about granting freedom for students to choose the topic, Hudelson (1989) found that, *“the quality of writing was better when students were allowed to make decisions about their topic.”* From statements given by the two scholars, Silva and Hudelson, it is obvious that they promote freedom for students to choose the topic during their writing task.

Furthermore, writing presumed as a tool for students to express their hidden ideas. Students can explore and express their dreams, obsession, or even their wildest imagination in writing. Writing helps students to release unspoken word inside their mind by placing those words in paragraph and growing their sense of adventure for many new things. In accordance with the above statement, Knefel (1986) said, *“Writing is exploration, because we don't know where it will take us. The beginning of writing is like the beginning of journey; we may have a specific idea where we want to go, but we rarely know ahead of time what will happen along the way. Writing is an attempt to map a new territory, to launch an expedition that will lead us where we have never been before.”* In line with Knefel, Axelrod and Cooper (1986:4), described: *“Writing is a process of discovery. Experienced writers rarely gather and understand immediately all the information they need. They collect miscellaneous facts and concepts, start writing, and let the writing led them to understanding. They know they will be making significant discoveries as they write.”*

Narrative as one of writing activities is quite helpful in reducing students' obstacle during their writing assignments because it consists of flexible elements that can help students to develop their writing efficiently. Not only helps students to reduce their barriers in writing, but narrative also guides them to shape their writing into a concrete condition.

This study aims to expose and explain the four types of narrative in helping university students to write their writing tasks meaningfully. Each type of these four narratives can be given by lecturer for students as options for them to write their own choice of narratives prior to the implementation of their writing assignments. The explanation of this study primarily exposes the nature of the four narratives along with their distinctions and functions in writing. The distinctions that described from each narrative in this study will enhance not only lecturer's teaching ability in teaching writing in the university, but also enrich students' writing skills to complete their writing assignments appropriately.

METHODS

As this study aims to explore ideas in giving description of how English lecturer develops students' writing skill using narrative writing, it is used library-type of research. All of the collected data were taken from books, journal articles, and any reference related to the topic of four types narrative, and ways to improve students' writing skill.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Definitions of Writing

According to Celce-Murcia and Olshtain (2000), "*writing is a production of the written words that result in a text, but the text must be read and comprehended in order for communication to take place.*" From this definition, we have a clear perspective that writing is the process of making written words arise in a literal text, still the text ought to be understood and read properly so that the communication can run its function. On the other hand, writing is presumed as an essential tool to deliver messages to be communicated in more permanent form. Based on the previous reason, Hartfel (1985) argued that "*writing is the primary means for conveying information, ideas, beliefs and impressions to others when*

the ideas are too complex to express orally, when face to face exchange is not possible, or when a more permanent communication is needed. Written words, unlike spoken words, can be changed. They can be revised until express exactly what you want them to say." Although many difficulties encountered by students in writing, lecturer should pump positive energy to them by making a flexible teaching method. It can be done by allowing them to write their own topics and paragraphs without too much awareness to grammatical rules and other restricted elements such as, contents, organizations, ideas, punctuations, glossary, and so forth. Let students do the explorations to express their ideas freely. By allowing students to express their ideas freely, lecturer can make a precise measurement of students' talent, ability, and knowledge. After allowing students to write their own ideas, lecturer can make an estimation and on stages lead them to pay more attention to grammatical functions and other rules such as, contents, organizations, punctuations, and ideas. This condition is arising strong confidence and good cooperation for both students and lecturer. It happens because lecturer has successfully taught them in a way that considered freedom to express and find out students' needs and interests in writing. On the other hand, students are situated to be less intimidated. Less intimidation can comfort and make a relaxation to their mind to absorb lecturing materials. As a result, they produce several good compositions previously hidden in the bottom of their mind.

The Definition of Narrative Writing

One simple way of making writing more meaningful to students with a basic grasp of language such as university students is to have them write a story that elaborates on their experience. Narrative is a kind of writing that its function is telling a story based on people's experience and does not force students to possessed knowledge of specific matter. Sorenson (1992) informed: "*In simple words, a narration (or narrative) tells a story. Sometimes narration is used as a means of development whereby a writer explains his purpose. Sometimes narration is only part of paragraph or paper developed primarily by some other method.*"

As it has a main role in describing stories, narrative is used for students to identify elements. From several elements available in narrative, one of them is "the time." Time becomes the gate in

designing narrative into an organized writing composition. Concerning with the existence of time in narrative, Scholes and Comley (1981) exposed: *“To narrate is to tell the story of a sequence of events, whether long or short, great or small, real or fictional. The most important element of discourse is time.”* Time in narrative that arranges the sequence of events can help students to manage their narrative writing appropriately. The essence of time in narrative is also help students to set up a chronological order that can be followed by the reader smoothly. Supporting Scholes and Comley’s statement that pay attention to the existence of time as the main element in narrative, Aaron (1986) added: *“To narrate is to tell a story, to relate a sequence of events that are linked in time. We narrate when we tell of a funny experience, report a sport event, or trace a person’s path to success.”* To make an example from Aaron’s statements that use narrative writing to report a sport event, students may narrate the story of a particular football game on a particular Sunday afternoon, at a particular stadium, under a particular weather condition, with a particular result. Then, later, students would produce a historical or journalistic narrative discourse. But students may, on the other hand, produce a general narrative of an unparticular football game. Students, may, for instance, begin by writing, *“Every Sunday afternoon in October, in towns and cities all over Indonesia, a certain ritual is celebrated: the ritual of football game ...”* And then, students would go on to describe this typical event in a narrative discourse employing the present tense (even most narrative employed in past tense). Their finished product would be a process narrative.

In addition, the approach in narrative offers students an opportunity to think and write about themselves. Students have experiences lodged in their memory worthy of sharing with their friends. Sometimes they are disturbed with other memories with a lot of time spent in writing the narrative is the prewriting stage. In this stage, students first need to select an incident worthy of writing about, and second to find relevancy in that incident. To do this, students can ask themselves about the incident that provide new insights or awareness. Finally, students should make close involvement to the audience in the story. It is more interesting to recreate an incident for audience than to simply talk about it. Second, students should find a generalization the story supports. This is the only way students’ personal experience will take on

meaning for their audience. And the last, students should remember that although the main component of narrative writing is the story, details must be carefully selected to support, explain, and enhance the story.

Moreover, during the early stage of practicing, students may find it quite difficult. But through repeated practices they will get used to narrative writing they made and come to know exactly what they mean in making their narrative. And, during the making process of narrative writing, students must loosen up. If they do not loosen themselves up, they are just telling a story to someone or a crowd of people, something they probably do every single day in casual conversations. Not only giving the huge amount of freedom, but narrative also provides an opportunity for students to practice using grammar meaningfully in a context so that the lecturing of writing is not simply a grammar course in the medium of writing as practiced in many colleges in Indonesia. By giving students several practices in writing utilizing narrative, lecturer will find lecturing writing more purposive as well as communicative since each activity requires a close interaction between lecturer and students to arrive to the final writing product. With sufficient practices, students will find writing easier to learn and have more involvement in learning process as they all writing something based on their own experience or imagination. Consequently, writing is more interesting, and communicative ability in this narrative writing skill becomes achievable. Eventually, narrative writing provides students not only with the linguistic aspect, but also the cultural aspect of that language.

Four Types of Narrative

The writer offers four types of narrative to students to enrich their options. These four types of narrative can make an adjustment for them in setting up kinds of narrative writing that suitable with their purposes. They are process narrative writing, first person narrative writing, flashback narrative writing, and narrative writing using dialogues.

The first type of narrative writing, process narrative is a writing that pay attention to the sequence of events recorded in chronological order. Process narrative can help students to be more organized in setting up their writing. Students are guided to focus on a sequence of time rather than a space. Inside the process

narrative, students allowed to present the sequence of events more than once. In certain situation, the sequence of events happens repeatedly in a repetitive pattern. The repetitive pattern that appeared is a common thing in process narrative. Students must concentrate upon time. Because time is the guidance in setting up a good narrative writing. Scholes and Comley (1981) stated: *“Process narration is related to directive discourse as well as to narration of events. All these forms stress time and chronological sequence.”* Of its nature that tends to be direct on its discourses, process narrative teaches students to be more organized in making their piece of writing.

Furthermore, the second type, first person narrative is a kind of writing that applied to narrate action in which students for instance, involve in full participation. Students writing themselves as “The First Person,” and telling the story as the “I” narrator. Students also openly acknowledge their subjectivity toward their story in first person point of view. Telling the story in first person narrative does not release the students from responsibility to be accurate, precise, and careful in designing their writing. Even though they can be more flexible in setting up their writing, still they must pay attention to several narrative writing conventions. To find out what the first-person narrative looks like, Knefel (1986) states: *“First person narration includes as part of the story the writer who may or may not be the story’s subject. We can write about others from a subjective point of view, or we can write about ourselves. A first-person narrative does not need to dwell on its being subjective, whichever point of view seems most appropriate, the story remains the focus of narrative.”* It is obvious that through first person narrative, students not only write their point of view, but also, they can write about others through their subjective point of views. Their subjective point of views can stimulate them to express their writing to be more alive and interesting. But in general, whether told in the form of others’ point of view or their own point of views, first person narrative writing gives them confidence to identify themselves.

Moreover, the third type, flashback narrative encourages students to present past events in dramatic ways or contrasting their experience toward the present. One simple way to introduce flashback narrative writing is to break the chronological order by submitting the vivid memories intrude on students’ mind. These

vivid memories are the journey of reflection of students' experience that becomes a pattern in making the flashback narrative writing. According to Ruggiero (1985), "*Professional writers sometimes break the chronological order in their narratives with flashback movements backward in time. Such moves, however, depend on their effectiveness on how well the writer signals the flashback and later resumes the narratives' forward progression.*" It was clearly mentioned that students may break the sequential order in their writing by using flashback narrative. Inside the flashback narrative, students can rearrange past moments. But students' rearrangement is totally depending on their effectiveness in recognizing the sign of flashback narrative, which is marked by certain pointed words that indicate past situation. Furthermore, after reflecting experience, students can make forward movements to make connection between their past and present inside the flashback narrative. However, students should make a straight line that separates the past moments from the present. This separation helps them to maintain clear incidents in flashback narrative. Clear separation on the two incidents can avoid unnecessary confusion for them in exposing their flashback narrative writing.

In addition, in the fourth type, that is narrative writing using dialogues can be used as a tool for students to reveal a person's character and show the dynamic of interpersonal relationships. According to Axelrod and Cooper (1985), "*Another way of dramatizing narrative action is dialogue. Writers use it to reveal conflict directly, without the narrator's intruding commentary. Dialogues are not mere recordings of conversation but pointed representations of conversation. Through dialogues, readers can gain insight into the personality and motives of the characters.*"

From the statement above, it is obvious that the function of dialogues in narrative are to dramatize the situation created by students. Students can apply the dialogues inside the narrative writing to expose the moments of conflict as dramatize as possible. Besides, the existence of dialogues is not only keeping up the conversations but also, making meaningful representations inside the conversations. Students should know that dialogues do not have the free take and give conversations. It is a series of questions possessed several evasive answers such as, "he said" ... "I lied" ... "he asked me" ... and so forth.

All in all, narrative writing can be used as a tool in lecturing writing for college students. Narrative writing also offers several choices for students to choose kinds of narrative that suitable with their writing purposes. Students can get several advantages from those choices. One of the advantages which students can get is, they can express themselves freely and independently if they write in the form of first-person narrative, for instance. They can also retell their experience about their childhood memories or the good old days in the form of flashback narrative is totally depend on lecturer's way of lecture to deliver a good writing presentation for students.

Furthermore, students should know that a good selection of narrative may lead them to success of their writing task in general. Lecturer must foster his students based on their chosen narratives. If those chosen narratives can attract them, they will be motivated to make a process narrative writing, for example. Above all, after students finish their narrative writing tasks, lecturer can stimulate students by suggesting group work. It means that their piece of narrative writing can be analyzed and discussed together transparently.

Students are given four types of narrative as writing activities. Those narrative writing activities should be adjusted with their interest and needs. Because without proper adjustment, it is impossible for lecturer to deliver a good lecture about narrative writing and able to achieve the main objective that is equipped students with adequate writing ability to make appropriate narrative writing activities. In conducting the narrative writing activities, lecturer is suggested to bring numerous learning materials that can motivate and reduce students' writing inhibitions so that they can accomplish their narrative writing activities properly. As for obtaining the learning materials, a lecturer must have a wealth of sources to be given to students. Reliable sources such as: samples of narrative from internet, random pictures from many literal texts, or other additional aids such as, students' personal photographs. Those photographs are the most intimate things that can be used for students to write their narrative writing activities based on their impressive moments in those photographs. To present narrative writing, lecturer explains the details about four types of narrative of narrative writing. The goal of this explanation is trying to give students a description what are these four types of

narrative writing activities about. In addition, lecturer also explains the interesting elements inside those four narrative writing activities so that students have sufficient motivation to conduct the assignments. Meanwhile, in the presentation session, students can ask any question if their questions have relevancy to the four narrative writing activities. The answers to their questions might strengthen and sharpened their writing skill adequately so that they have clear description to write a good narrative writing. In giving practice to students, lecturer graded the level of difficulties to find out which activity should come first as the easiest and which one is difficult and to be given later after the easiest successfully accomplished. First person and flashback narrative appeared as the easiest because both are talking about students' personal experience. Later, narrative using dialogues (medium difficult) and process narrative (difficult) need additional explanations since both required specific criterions. Finally, to get a clear result from lecturing the narrative, lecturer arranges a written test. The aim of the test is to find out how far the students understand the lecture and put it into practice.

CONCLUSION

According to opinions from previous scholars, the use of narrative activities can help students to improve their writing skill properly. They stated the flexible characters of narrative writing are helping students to express themselves in their own ways. They also added, in narrative writing students can elaborate on their experience such as their childhood experience, their good old days with somebody special, and so forth. Other things in narrative that make them enthusiastic such as, an opportunity to make some process of events which can give them an excitement, and create their own dialogues with their friends, performing the dynamics of interpersonal relationships, are relatively motivate them to do these activities. In addition, these four types of narrative writing activities offer options to students to select types of narrative writing that suitable with their writing purposes. In general, these four types of narrative writing activities can motivate students to make meaningful narrative writing product. Because the nature of each these four narrative writing activities are simple, flexible, and give clear understanding to students. This conclusion can be concluded after the researcher analyzed several opinions and ideas from

several scholars which have already stated their theories in this library research. Furthermore, by applying these four narrative writing activities, students will be given an opportunity to pull out imaginative features inside their mind as their personal expressions and write them all in the form of good narrative writing activities. In short, the use of these four narratives in writing may strengthen not only student's writing skill, but also arising their inspiration in expressing their ideas in writing. From this research, the writer gives three suggestions to fellow lecturers and other researchers to utilize these four narratives in teaching writing in the university. First, they can use these four narratives as one of the options to provide students with challenging and interesting writing task. Second, they may incorporate these four narratives in the various writing subjects in the university such as: academic writing, creative writing, composition, and free writing. Third, they can use all of them or a half of them and it is all depend on the writing purposes from the syllabus. In addition, there are four main advantages perceived by students from these four narratives. First, they learn to arrange chronological order. Second, they express their experience in dramatic ways. Third, they can show the dynamic interpersonal relationship. And the fourth, they increase their vocabulary deposits.

REFERENCES

- Aaron, Jane E. (1986). *The Compact Reader, Subjects, Styles, and Strategies. A Bedford Book*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Axelrod, Rise B and Cooper, Charles, R. (1985). *The St. Martin's writing Guidance*. New York : St. Martin's Press.
- Celce – Murcia Olshtain, Elite & Marianne. (2000). *Discourse & Context in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hartfel, Faye V and friends. (1985). English Composition Program Learning ESL Composition. Newbury House Publishers Inc. Rowley, Boston USA .
- Hudelson, S. (1989). *Write on: Children Writing in ESL*. New Jersey: Center for Applied Linguistics and Prentice Hall.
- Knefel, D. (1986). *Writing & Life. A Rhetoric for Nonfiction with Readings*. New York: CBS College Publishing.

- Ruggerio, V. R. (1985). *Composition: The Creative Response*. California: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Scholes, Robert & Nancy R. C. (1981). *The Practice of Writing*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Silva, T. (1997). On the Ethical Treatment of ESL Writers. *TESOL quarterly* 31.2
- Sorenson, S. (1992). *Webster New World. Students' Writing Handbook*, New York: Prentice Hall General Reference
- Zamel, V. (1983). The Composing Processes of Advanced ESL Students: Six Case Studies. *TESOL Quarterly* 31.2