STUDENTS’ DIFFICULTIES IN FACING ENGLISH WRITTEN TEST: A CASE STUDY AT SMKN 1 NARMADA

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STUDENTS’ DIFFICULTIES IN FACING ENGLISH WRITTEN TEST:
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ABSTRACT

This study entitled ‘Students’ Difficulties in Facing English Written Test: A Case Study at SMKN 1 Narmada’ is aimed to analyze the students’ difficulties in completing an English written test and also find out the factors that contribute to the difficulties that the students faced. The sample of this study was class XII ADM (A) in academic year 2018/2019 which consist of 30 students. The writer used questionnaire and interview as the instruments to collect the data. The data analyzed using index formulation. The calculated data which has more than 50% of the respondent’s response is considered as the findings. From the result, it was found that the difficulties faced by the students in completing an English written test are 59.99% of the students found it difficult to answer multiple choice, 53.32% of them found cloze is difficult, and 56.66% of the students cannot decide the topic to use when answering essay question and cannot write their thought into the paper properly. According to the findings, the factors that contribute to the difficulties faced by the students in completing an English written test are divided into internal factor and external factor. The external factors are 1) the students’ educational background and 2) the demand of the curriculum and 3) the negative washback effect. The internal factors are 1) the students’ negative attitude toward English, 2) the student reliance on their mother tongue, 3) the lack of vocabulary, and 4) the lack of English learning resources.

Keywords: difficulties, English written test

INTRODUCTION

Answering the test correctly in an exam is one of the important duties that has to be mastered by the students in order to meet the requirement of the curriculum (Westwood, 2008). According to the rules, a process of teaching and learning will be categorized as successful if 80% of the students in the class pass the Minimum Standard of the Test. The problem is, nowadays students found it difficult to achieve good mark in English written test. In answering English written test, students usually face at least two kinds of test such as
multiple choice or essay. Most of the students fail to answer the question in the test whether it is in the form of multiple choice, cloze, or essay. Their answer also often look so similar to their classmate’s and end up copying their classmate’s mistakes with the lack of knowledge in English. The writer is eager to find out more about this matter. There are several reasons why the writer wants to conduct this study. The reasons involve the students’ learning outcomes, parallel form test, and students’ main activity in the class.

First, the students’ learning outcomes do not meet the requirement of the standard. Learning outcomes state what the students should know and be able to do at the end of a course, as a result of all of our actions such as from the lessons, assignments, feedback, and tests (Cheng and Fox, 2017:36). According to English Lesson Syllabus at SMKN 1 Narmada, the third year of SMK students is expected to be able to write in English in the level of intermediate. Moreover, in the Revitalization book series of SMK 2017 state that, the Ministry of Education has determined that SMK students must have a TOEIC certificate with a minimum score of 405 in order to have SMK students get the opportunity to work in the International level (Direktorat Pembinaan SMK 2017). However, this level is still far beyond the level of the students in SMKN 1 Narmada. This problem can be seen from the students’ result of the study from their daily test. The evidence that has been collected before to support the opinion of the writer comes directly from the result of the test designed by the teacher that we drew on during the internship. For instance, TKR (Teknik Kendaraan Ringan) class in SMKN 1 Narmada, only have 2 students out of 27 students pass the standard of the test (KKM > 75) and the other 25 students failed the test. In Administration A class, only 9 out of 31 students pass the test.

Second, the teacher spoils their students too much. So many materials related to the lesson that was being tested in the class have already given to the students. Before conducting a test, the teacher even gave the students several parallel form tests to habituate them with it. In the end, the students still fail to answer it in the exam. It is the proof that they are spoiled too much by the teacher. The students' mindset is already corrupted by the teacher who always spoils them. They think it is okay to make mistakes and it is okay to fail the test because they will graduate eventually. They have zero interest to improve their English skills and seem to live in a pity of the teacher. The students also do not really care about their grade. Only several students in a class do.

Lastly, the students’ English class activities are mainly focused on answering questions on the paper. Based on the writer’s observation during the internship in SMKN 1
Narmada, the oral or spoken test is rarely conducted during the English class activity. The reason behind this is probably because, in the third grade, the students are prepared to face the National Examination which does not use an oral or spoken test. In UAS (Ujian Akhir Sekolah) test, the form of the test is also a written test which consists of objective and subjective test such as multiple choices and essay. However, even if the students used to answer English paper test day by day, in the actual processes their grade does not seem to increase.

The student has to complete the test in order to graduate. However, if their bad performance in completing the test on the paper still continues, the student will fail the test again and again without any solution to fix it. This condition will lead to mass production of failed generation in English lesson in the future. There should be a factor which is involved in their failure in the test, especially in the written test. The writer is eager to find out the problem that is faced by the student when completing English test in the form of written test by conducting a study entitled “Students’ Difficulties in Facing English Written Test: A Case Study at SMKN 1 Narmada”

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE
The Definition of Written Test

A written test is any kind of test that is printed in order to assess someone’s ability by making them write, mark the multiple-choice option on the paper, or fill an answer in the blank (Brown 2003:51). A written test is usually related to testing items such as Multiple Choice, Cloze test, and Essay. It does not involve any oral activities such as speaking or listening. The written test usually found in the daily test, mid-term test, or semester tests.

Types of Written Test

There are two types of test item that is Direct and Indirect test item. A test item is direct if it asks candidates to perform the communicative skill which is being tested. Indirect test items, on the other hand, try to measure a student's knowledge and ability by getting at what lies beneath their receptive and productive skills (Cerezo, 2008:3).

a. Direct item test : commonly associated with the productive skills. Because in assessing the productive skills, there’s an observable output

(speech/writing by the student) that can be heard or seen.
b. Indirect item test: try to measure students’ knowledge and ability by getting at what lies beneath their receptive and productive skills. For example: Multiple Choice Question, Cloze test, Sentence re-ordering, etc.

The Students’ Difficulties

Developing clear and accurate answer in a test presents major problems for most students with learning difficulties. For some students, written test is perhaps the most difficult task to answer because its involves the effective coordination of many different cognitive, linguistic and psycho-motor processes.

Students’ Difficulties in Written Exam

In written exam, there are some difficulties that are faced by the students during the process of completing the exam, the students are likely to have difficulties as follow:

1. Attention Management
2. Time-Management
3. Vocabulary Mastery
4. The Demand of Curriculum

Students’ Difficulties in Answering Multiple Choice Questions

As one of the indirect test items, multiple choices is a very popular test item used for academic purposes. When struggling with the multiple choice questions the students seems to have some problems with it. According to a study in answering multiple choice questions in narrative text conducted by Padminingsih (2013), the students’ difficulties are stated as follow:

- Students found it difficult in understanding the main idea of a passage. The students then cannot answer the questions about the main idea in a paragraph.
- The students did not know the meaning of some words in a passage. In other words, the students have bad vocabulary mastering. So, the students could not answer questions about the meaning of a word.
- In generic structure, students’ difficulties are divided into two five parts. The difficulties are in orientation, complication, resolution, reorientation, and coda. There are some problems faced by the students in answering multiple choice questions of a narrative text. Those problems are stated as follows:
a. Students’ less interest in following the lesson  
b. The lack of vocabulary mastery  
c. The limitation of time  
d. Length of paragraph is too long  
e. Too many choices that similar to each other in multiple choice questions which confused the students.

Students’ Difficulties in Answering Essay Question

Essay assignments demand an enormous amount of time and effort from both the students and the examiner. However, they are essential in helping tutors measure the level of each individual’s performance. According to Williams (2003), essays provide students with some difficulties when they attempt to demonstrate to the tutor their ability. The difficulties mentioned such as:

a. Recall the pertinent facts of a subject  
b. Select and organize information  
c. Understand the relationship between ideas  
d. Express ideas in a coherent and logical manner  
e. Formulate opinions and convey convincing arguments to support their view  
f. Discuss the practical application of theories.

Factors Influencing the Assessment of English Language Learners

There are several factors that may contribute to the students’ difficulties when answering question in English.  

a. Language Factors  
b. Educational Background Factors  
c. The Role of Students’ Attitudes in English Lesson  
d. The Washback Effect

DESIGN OF THE RESEARCH

This research is a case study research in which the study is an in-depth examination in a form of qualitative research (DeMatteo et.al, 2005:17). By using the case study method, this research tends to find out the difficulties that are faced by students when completing an English written test. The Cluster sampling technique was used in this research. One class
was used as the sample of this study that is ADM /Administration (A) Class. ADM (A) class was selected as the sample because this class was recommended by the teacher and available at that moment. Arikunto (2013) states that “if the number of population is less than one hundred, it is better to take all of population as the subject of the research. If the number of population is more than one hundred, it is suggested to take 10-15% or 20-25% as the sample of the study”. The number of students in ADM (A) class is 30 students and it was suitable as the sample.

Research Procedures and Data Analysis

The writer analyzed the data such as questionnaire, interview recordings, and students’ result document. The collected data cover some aspects of factors that contribute to the cause of the problem. The writer analyzed and identified the students’ difficulties in facing English written test based on their daily activity in the class, mid-term test result, and also other tests that related to the research question. The research was conducted in several steps as follows:

1. First, gave the questionnaires consist of 22 questions to ADM (A) class in the first day. The number of time that the to answer the questionnaires was 45 minutes. Asking or copying their classmates’ answer is absolutely not allowed.

2. Second, giving interview to the students after they answered the questionnaire. The writer interviewed the students and teachers with several questions from the interview guide and some questions that drawn according to their answer on the questionnaire.

3. Then after the research was conducted, the writer gathered the data such as questionnaire sheets, interview sheets and recordings.

4. Analyze the students’ questionnaire sheets. The writer calculated the number of respond by the respondent in each items using index formulation.

   The index formulation stated as follow:
P = \frac{f}{n} \times 100

P = Percentage
f = Frequency of questionnaire answer
n = Number of respondent

Sugiyono 2008 (in Saputra 2015)

After calculating the questionnaire, the result accumulated in the form of percentage. The percentages of the questionnaires then categorized into high, medium, and low to differentiate the result. Here are the category of the percentage:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>76-100%</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-75%</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-50%</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-25%</td>
<td>Very Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If the result of the questionnaire in the respond of ‘agree’ and ‘very agree’ reach the high or medium category, it is mean that the item on the questionnaire is proved as the difficulties or the factor of the students’ difficulties in English written test. However, if the result of ‘agree’ and ‘very agree’ respond only reach the low or very low category, then the item of the questionnaire is not the part of either difficulties or the factor that contribute to the students’ difficulties in facing English written test.

5. The next step is analyzed the interview recordings. There are several steps in analyzing the qualitative reseach result such as interview (Raco, 2010 p.116):
   - First, collect the data such as recordings and interview sheets
   - Second, prepare to analyze the data by transcribing the students and teacher’s interview recording in the form of table to make it easier to analyze.
Third read the data several times in order to clarify the meaning of the data.

Lastly, made the coding (data classification). Unite the recur informations and then made a labeling. From those data, the information which has the most number of recur is considered as the difficulties or the factors that influence the students’ difficulties in facing English written test.

### Students’ Difficulties in English Written Test

From the questionnaires, several difficulties was found because the result show more than 50% responses. After the writer analyzed and merged the data from the questionnaire and interview into one, the writer found out several difficulties that the students faced in completing an English written test. From the questionnaire result, it was found that most of the students found it difficult to learn English (79.99%). From the data in the table, more than half of the students admitted that the objective test is difficult. The question type that most of the students found difficult in English written test is Multiple Choice questions. There are 59.99% of the students found it difficult to answer multiple choice because the lack of vocabulary mastery and 66.66% of the students think that multiple choice is difficult because of the options (the choices are tricky).

The second difficulties in objective test that the students faced in answering English written test is cloze. According to data, 53.33% of the students found cloze question was difficult to answer. The main reason why they could not answer cloze question is because they
lack of vocabulary. The students admitted in their interviews that they usually at a loss to what to do when it comes to answering cloze question because they do not know the vocabulary of the word.

Also, another difficulties that the students’ faced when answering English written test is answering a subjective test such as essay question. From the questionnaire and interview with the students, 56.66% of the students cannot decide the topic to use when answering essay question, and 56.66% of the students cannot write their thought into the paper properly even if they know what the answer is.

Lastly, the students faced difficulties in answering English written test when they lost focus and their attention is split into several parts in their conscious mind, proven by the result that show 53.33% of the students often lost their focus when answering the question in English written test.

In conclusion, there are four difficulties that the students face when completing an English written test that is; 1. multiple choice question, 2. cloze question 3. essay question and 4. attention management. The main reason for the most difficulties in the written test is the students’ poor vocabulary mastery.

The Factors That Contribute to the Students’ Difficulties in Completing an English Written Test

The writer split the factors that contribute to the studnets’ difficulties into external and internal factors. The result of the interview and questionnaire data attempt to find out the factors that contribute to the students’ difficulties in completing an English written test. From the interview result, the writer found the external factors that contribute to the students’ difficulties in completing an English written test includes the students’ educational background and the demand of the current curriculum in SMKN 1 Narmada.
The first factor that influences the students’ difficulties is their educational factors. According to the interviews, there are several students who learn English in Junior High School for the first time and the others started from Elementary school. Only two students have ever joined a course to improve their English, when the others have never thought of joining one.

On the other hand, from the teachers’ interview, the other factor that influence the students’ result in English written test is the demand of the curriculum 2013. The teacher states that the curriculum is very influential in the students’ result in test. They think that it is difficult for their students to follow the current curriculum because the current curriculum requires the students to be more active than the teacher. However, the students at SMKN 1 Narmada are mostly passive. So it is quite troublesome for the teacher too. All teachers agreed that the demand of curriculum 2013 is too high for the students. The curriculum’s expectation is contradict with the real situation in the class.

The internal factor that contribute to the students’ difficulties in completing an English written test include the students’ attitude, the use of native language, students’ vocabulary mastery, students’ learning resources, and students’ wasback effect in SMKN 1 Narmada.
Students’ attitude toward English lesson is the first factor that influences the students. The data shows that 63.33% of the students in the class does not like English. Also, the table on item number fifteen shows that the students used their mother tongue too often, 80.00% of the students use their mother tongue in their daily activity at home and at school. Several of them even used mother tongue in English class activity and 60.00% of the students cannot use other language than their mother tongue. Moreover, 56.66% of them have never tried to use, speak or to write in English outside English class (showed in the table percentage on item number seventeen).

The factor that has the biggest effect to students at SMKN 1 Narmada is the lack of vocabulary. The data from the students and the teachers interview shows the fact that vocabulary mastery level of students is low and they found the English written test difficult because of it. The students from the interview confessed that the number of difficult words included in the texts of test was very big. They said “English is so complicated. I do not understand. The words is so difficult”. The students had to dealt with it in the test without any source that they can lean on in which waste their time to guess over the answer.

According to the interview results, the writer found out that the students of SMKN 1 Narmada lack of English learning resources. From the interview, the writer found the students do not really have learning resources. Only several of them have dictionary, two students own textbook and one person own a LKS (Lembar Kerja Siswa) as their learning resources. While from the teacher’s interview, each of the students in the first grade should have a dictionary and bring it to English lesson. It is possible that the students only temporarily borrow the dictionary from other class’ students only for formality.

In the analysis of the data, the writer slightly found some negative washback effect from the data. Several students said that “Even if our grade is not too good, in the end we will
graduate anyway so I take it easy.” More than half of the students in class admitted that they thought getting bad scores in the test is not a problem because they definitely will graduate. The school has a tendency to eventually let their students graduate. The students then take advantage of this tendency to be relaxed at any test given by the teacher, which is lead to a negative washback effect.

Based on the questionnaire and interviews findings from the students and teachers, those are the difficulties and factors that influence the students’ difficulties in completing an English written test at SMKN 1 Narmada.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the data, the writer can draw some conclusions as follows:

1. The students’ difficulties in completing English written test in SMKN 1 Narmada are:
   a. Multiple choice question difficult because of the distractors
   b. Essay question difficult because of the topic selection
   c. Cloze question difficult because of the lack of vocabulary mastery
   d. Attention management because of the disturbance of the classmates or other personal matters

2. There are several factors that contribute to the students’ difficulties when completing English written test in SMKN 1 Narmada that are divided into external and internal factors:

   External Factor:
   a. The different educational background of the students
   b. The high demand of the curriculum 2013
Internal Factor:

a. The negative attitude toward English lesson
b. The frequent use of mother tongue or their native language in the English class
c. The low vocabulary mastery
d. The limited English learning resources
e. The negative washback effect from the test

SUGGESTIONS

According to several problems above, there are some suggestions from the writer that might help to overcome the difficulties faced by the students when completing an English written test.

First, the teachers should pay more attention to their students in the classroom activity and it is suggested to conduct an interesting teaching method for example Joyful Teaching and use scaffolding teaching method to help the students to learn more by working with them to achieve their learning goals. Also, in teaching the students, the teacher should show some excitement and get passionate to draw the attention of passive students so they can enjoy the teaching and learning process as the curriculum demanded.

Second, it is also suggested to use English as the main language in the class. The language used in the class must be English (50-75%) if possible, so that the students can at least be familiar with common words in English. The students need a rich vocabulary environment, and the teacher should provide them by teaching vocabulary explicitly. The teacher can start by making some rules to bind the students in using English in the English class activity.

Lastly, the writer suggested that the teacher should give the students professionalism principles. As the students would likely to get a job after graduating, they do need some basic
professionalism principle to differentiate between the personal matter and their study so that they can overcome difficulties when dealing with school matter or job matter in the future.
REFERENCES


