

STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING THROUGH WRITING WORKSHOP

Triubaida Maya Ardianti
triubaidamayaa@gmail.com
SMA Negeri 1 Randublatung
Indonesia

Dwi Anggani L. Bharati
dwi_anggani@yahoo.com
Universitas Negeri Semarang
Indonesia

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Abstract

The present study was a part of a larger research. It aimed at investigating the dynamics of the students' participation in learning argumentative writing through writing workshop. The present study took place in a natural science class consisting of 32 eleventh graders for 6 weeks. I employed questionnaire and observation to gather data, and collected the students' works to strengthen the data analysis. The data yielded a result that the students' participation in establishing oral and written argumentative discourse improved throughout learning cycles. In this circumstance, the students produced more talk in arguing over an issue, and became more active in writing collaboratively with their peers. Consequently, they got better in articulating their thoughts in written argumentation. It was affirmed by the improvements on the mean of the students' argumentative writing and the quality of their argumentation.

Keywords: Students' participation, argumentative writing, writing workshop

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has been experiencing a national curriculum shift since its independence was proclaimed in 1945. The latest curricula implemented in Indonesian education are curriculum 2006 called KTSP 2006 (School-based curriculum), and Curriculum 2013 (Kusuma, 2013). With all the attention to develop the quality of Indonesian education through several changes in curricula, starting with KTSP 2006, teachers have been urged to provide meaningful learning which encouraged students to be active learners in discovering their own knowledge (Hasnawati, 2006; Kwartolo, 2007). Nevertheless, for almost a decade since being implemented, the application of KTSP 2006 which demanded

students' knowledge demonstration has not been in line with a lot of recent teaching practices in Indonesia.

In the case of KTSP 2006, Indonesian teachers were unprepared to implement KTSP 2006 (Sariono, 2013). This circumstance was closely related to the previous educational practices within the implementation of curricula 1984-2004 in English teaching. Lie (2007) claimed that encouraging students to be independent learners in English has emerged since Curriculum 1984. She reviewed previous studies on education policy and EFL curriculum in Indonesia since 1945 to 2005. Then, she indicated that there were shifts in the commitment of English teaching pedagogy from grammar translation method

in 1945 to audio-lingual method in 1968-1975, and then, finally shifting to a communicative approach in 1984-2004. The commitment to implement a communicative approach meant that the teacher's domination in student learning should have been decreased since then. However, Lie pointed out that the practices within the curricula 1984-2004 showed that English was not portrayed as language for active communication. Consequently, learning tended to be teacher-centered. When KTSP 2006 was implemented, they were not ready to step out of teacher-centered learning which tended to be a legacy. Despite not having succeeded yet in achieving the purpose of KTSP 2006, Curriculum 2013 was implemented.

Even though Curriculum 2013 had a different concept than KTSP 2006, both curricula shared a similar purpose in challenging students to demonstrate what they have learned in something tangible (Sariono, 2013). In other words, both curricula had a common purpose to encourage student-centered learning. Related to this concept, the present study encouraged students to demonstrate their knowledge of argumentative discourse by constructing an argumentative piece of writing through an active interaction with their peers. In the subject of English, KTSP 2006 and Curriculum 2013 mentioned that grade 11 students should be able to master expository composition such as argumentative writing. To this extent, teachers should be able to promote student active learning to help students achieve this particular learning goal.

Newell, Beach, Smith, and VanDerHeide (2011) argued that composing argumentative writing engaged students in the complex thinking process which included taking a stance, formulating a claim, giving supporting

evidence, providing warrant, and considering counterarguments. It showed that students should consider multiple points of view to defend their stance in certain issues, and ensuring that each element of the argumentative writing correlated to one another. Similarly, Norris and Ennis (1989) argued that through argumentative writing, students could be able to consciously and deliberately produce compelling evidence which was reasonable and reflective of their ability to prove their position on certain issues.

In fact, both argumentative writing and narrative transferred discourse from oral to written mode; however, it was more difficult to transfer argumentative discourse from oral to written mode since it required feedback from interlocutors (Reznitskaya et al., 2007). Additionally, Reznitskaya et al. (2007) elaborated that there was no model of argumentation within oral mode since argumentative discourse was produced in the response of an immediate preceding point within conversation. On the contrary, she emphasized that written mode demanded "a new solitary ability" to produce written discourse since there was particular structure for it (Freedman, & Pringle, 1984: 79 as cited in Reznitskaya et al., 2007). Hence, students have difficulty composing argumentative writing because the particular structure for argumentative written discourse is not learned naturally in everyday lives.

Pre-observation in the research site indicated that the students tended to work in solitude to complete their argumentative writing project. Even though I encouraged them to discuss their writing ideas with their peers, they appeared to hesitate doing it. During the whole-class debate which I used to help them generate arguments, the students produced very little talk. The debate was not

engaging at all, and it did not optimally help the students to produce solid oral argumentative discourse. Consequently, the students faced greater challenge in writing argumentation. This affected the quality of the students' final products. As much as 68.75% of the students failed to achieve or surpass the minimum requirement in constructing argumentative writing. To this extent, I inferred that the students needed a learning method which could enable them actively participate in the learning process. So that, they could feel motivated to establish oral and written argumentative discourse collaboratively.

To overcome this problem, I employed writing workshop to help students learn argumentative writing. Atwell (1998) defined writing workshop as an approach consisting of a series of meaningful tasks from three big sections of reading territory, mini-lessons, and writing territory. Writing workshop has been implemented for decades to support students in writing. Numerous studies indicated that writing workshop could help students write in various genres (Whitney, Ridgeman, & Masquelier, 2011) such as creative writing (Atwell, 1998; Graves, 2004), report (Moore-Hart, 2006), and argumentative writing (Felton & Herko, 2004; VanDerHeide & Newell, 2013). The practicality of writing workshop to teach argumentative writing (Felton & Herko, 2004; VanDerHeide & Newell, 2013) became the reason for choosing writing workshop as the strategy to help students construct argumentative writing in the present study. Further, I formulated the research question as follows. How did the students' participation improve during the implementation of writing workshop across cycles?

Theoretical framework

Socio-cultural theory which includes the concepts of zone proximal development, and internalization by Vygotsky (1978), and guided participation by Rogoff (1990) became the theoretical framework of the present study. First, writing workshop encourages students to interact with their peers and teacher through social activities portrayed in the meaningful tasks. In this circumstance, Rogoff (1990) asserted that socio-cultural theory believed that cognitive development, in this case, students' thinking development, happened through the guided participation in social activities. In this case, students engage in activities provided by teachers throughout the writing workshop to learn collaboratively with their peers and teacher. Further, the internalization of knowledge formed from writing workshop impacts student cognitive development which can be monitored through their argumentative writing.

Second, within socio-cultural theory, there was a concept called zone proximal development which positioned the teacher to be a mentor (Lake, 2012). In this case, students and teachers co-constructed knowledge in which students played a major role of inventing their own knowledge. It fit the concept of the writing workshop which placed the teacher, an adult who was more proficient than the students, as a facilitator throughout writing process (Atwell, 1998). It means that the teacher, who is the more proficient participant, facilitates students in their efforts to explore argumentative writing skills through subsequent meaningful activities throughout the writing workshop. In addition, the teacher accommodates students' needs to solve their writing problems through communication. In short, the role of the teacher, as the more knowledgeable person in the writing workshop environment, is to provide subsequent meaningful activities for

students to independently construct argumentative writing.

Teaching and learning argumentative writing as a set of social practices

On one hand, VanDerHeide and Newell argued that engaging students in a set of social practices to learn argumentative writing helped students foster their argumentative writing skills in a procedural way. On the other hand, Crowhurst (1998) asserted that students needed real audiences or readers to write about real issues. In this case, without being involved to interact within social practice, students had no understanding about audience' or readers' "actual beliefs, attitudes, or experiences to gain audiences' identification" (Newell et al., 2011: 289). Consequently, although assertions were worth arguing, argument needs opposition points of view including qualifications and rebuttals (Fulkerson, 1996) to make the argument rational (Toulmin, 2003), so that it would be persuasive (Crowhurst, 1988; Stay, 1999). Joining the idea of VanDerHeide et al. and Crowhurst, viewing the study of argumentation as a set of social practices means engaging students in episodes within a socially mediated setting to provide opportunities for direct interaction with their peers in order to establish argumentative discourse. Not only can students establish their argumentative discourse in oral mode, but the episodes of social practices also help students develop their writing over time as the impact of the establishment of argumentative discourse in oral mode, and episodes within the writing stage itself such as peer-engagement through peer-evaluation (Felton & Herko, 2004).

The study of argumentative writing is also viewed from a dialogic/discourse analysis theory which emphasized the dialogic

interaction within social practices to establish a relationship with audiences to create persuasive discourse (Evensen, 2002; Felton, 2004; Felton, & Herko, 2004). For example, Felton and Herko (2004) conducted a case study to engage 11th graders in learning argumentative writing through workshop structured reading, oral debate, reflection, and revision. Oral debate was an example of the dialogic approach. Felton and Herko argued that oral debates engaged students in double-voicing in the degree that they established their own claims; at the same time, shifting their focus to attend opponents' claims through refutations. In this case, Felton and Herko indicated that during oral debate, students were positioned as a speaker of their own argument, at the same time, "a live critical audience" (p. 680) who provided rebuttals to opponents' claims. Therefore, oral debate gave students a real picture of two-sided arguments which they could then arrange in a written argument.

Besides debate in the writing workshop, Felton and Herko provided a chain of instruction throughout the writing workshop to engage students in social practices as a means to shape their argumentation skills. In this case, Felton and Herko gave students multiple opportunities to elaborate their argument in oral mode through debates, and in written mode through argumentative writing. Furthermore, revision as part of instruction in writing workshop helped students get direct feedback from their peers to analyze their writing strengths and weaknesses in constructing written argumentative discourse. It shows that episodes of social practices support students in fostering their argumentation skills.

In sum, there are several theories operating under the study of argumentation within social paradigmatic notion such as

classical theory, new rhetorical theory, social genre theory, and dialogic/discourse theory (Newell et al., 2011; Fulkerson, 1996; Sheehy, 2003; Stay, 1999). These theories reveal the same pattern showing that learning to create argumentation in a socially mediated setting (Newell et al., 2011; VanDerHeide & Newell, 2013) enables students to consider audience (Stay, 1997) in constructing their argumentative writing to the degree that it is sufficiently persuasive (Fulkerson, 1996).

Writing workshop

In early 1970s through late 1990s, writing workshop had been initially employed to teach students creative writing (Atwell, 1998; Strout, 1970). Nevertheless, recently, writing workshop has been used to teach students various genres (Whitney, Ridgeman, & Masquelier, 2011) such as narrative (Atwell, 1989, 1998; Street, 2005; Kesler, 2012; Strout, 1970), report (Moore-Hart 2006), and argumentative writing (Felton, & Herko, 2004; Morgan, 2010; Singer & Shagoury, 2006). It shows that writing workshop has functioned as a practicable approach that was applicable for any genre.

Since the early 1970s to the late 1980s, the study of writing workshop has primarily focused on the first language classroom (Manion, 1988; Strout 1970). In the early 1990s, one qualitative case study examined the effectiveness of writing workshop in the ESL classroom. Peyton et al. (1994) conducted a qualitative case study including 16 teachers in applying writing workshop to teach English Language Learners (ELLs) in The Book Projects in Washington, DC. Peyton et al. found that as ESL students, among individuals, they spoke different languages as their mother tongues. Some spoke Arabic, others spoke Spanish. At the same time, they had to deal with their English

proficiency. From her survey and observations, Peyton et al. indicated that although it used to be employed in the first language classroom, writing workshop could be adapted to teach writing for ESL students. In case, Peyton et al. emphasized that teachers should provide more instructional support to reduce students' language barriers due to their English deficiency. However, since students spoke different languages, teachers did not stress the use of the first language to help students understand the English instruction.

On the contrary, there is no empirical research in EFL contexts which investigates the effectiveness of writing workshop. Nevertheless, there is significant potential in writing workshop to be applied in this context. Likewise students in the ESL classroom, in the EFL classroom, students were dealing with English proficiency and the development of writing skills (Bacha, 2012; Yi, 2010). However, in the EFL classroom, teacher and students speak the same language, and students also communicate using the same language as their peers. Therefore, even though there may be language barriers to communicate in English, teachers may be able to find ways to avoid and solve misunderstanding using the same language as the students use throughout the practice.

Several case studies indicated that because of the notion of independent learning, and subsequent meaningful activities, writing workshop motivated reluctant writers (Moore-Hart, 2006; Street, 2005); struggling adolescent readers and writers (Casey, 2009), and students in general to discover their identity (Singer, & Shagoury, 2006) through writing practices. For instance, Street (2005) conducted a case study involving a class consisting of reluctant writers (participants were not specified). Street applied shared-authority between teacher and students in the

writing process including choosing the writing topic, and developing their ideas. This shared-authority made students feel trusted; therefore, they were motivated to develop their writing responsibly.

Atwell (1998) introduced a series of tasks or social activities within writing workshop to scaffold students in producing writing products. Those activities include reading territories, mini-lesson, and writing territories (Atwell, 1998). Atwell elaborated that on one hand, reading territories could be considered when designing independent reading; on the other hand, writing territories could become part of student-teacher conferences as a means for students to communicate their writing problems to the teacher, and peer-evaluation to get feedback on their writing. Nevertheless, previous empirical research indicated that they can adapt the series of activities within writing workshop (Felton, & Herko, 2004; Kesler, 2012; Whitney et al., 2011; Moore-hart, 2006; Singer, & Shagoury, 2006).

METHODOLOGY

The present study took place in a senior high school in Blora, Central Java. It was joined by 32 eleventh grade students. I applied a classroom action research design which includes three learning cycles conducted in 3 weeks of participant-observation and data collection. Accordingly, I integrated the use of qualitative-quantitative “convergent parallel mixed methods” following Creswell (2014: 219) in both data collection and analysis. I attained qualitative data from observation and open-ended questionnaire; whereas, I collected quantitative data from closed questionnaires and writing scores.

I analyzed qualitative data qualitatively. I transcribed the videotapes, and decoded the transcription using Reflective and Analytical

Observation Notes following Burns (1999, 2010). I decoded open-ended questionnaire into yes and no answer options, and categorized the students’ responses based on their answers. Whereas, I analyzed quantitative data quantitatively, I employed simple calculation on the closed questionnaires by calculating the students’ responses according to the Likert scale. I used an indicator to assess the students’ argumentation skill based on Toulmin model. I analyzed the students’ writing scores using T-Test. After analyzing qualitative and quantitative data separately, I merged both data analysis results to answer the research questions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results

Questionnaire. Newell et al. (2011) asserted that students may engage in a set of social practices to learn argumentative writing. In the questionnaire, the students expressed concern upon their participation in building oral argumentative discourse and writing collaboratively with their peers. All students in the class admitted challenges in writing argumentation. It was hard for them to exchange thoughts in discussion because they were not used to actively participating in the teaching and learning process. It was hard for them to build oral argumentative discourse as they produced little talk during the discussions. Consequently, they faced greater challenge in writing argumentation.

As the students got familiar with the implementation of writing workshop to help them learn argumentative writing, all students felt more motivated and interested in reshaping their prior knowledge on the topic, and actively participating in both whole-class discussion and small-group discussions. During the writing activities, the students’

participation in writing collaboratively including giving peer-evaluation had dramatically improved as they became more familiar with it. We may take a look at the following figure 1 to find out the students'

positive response to the subsequent activities employed within writing workshop to improve their participation in learning argumentative writing.

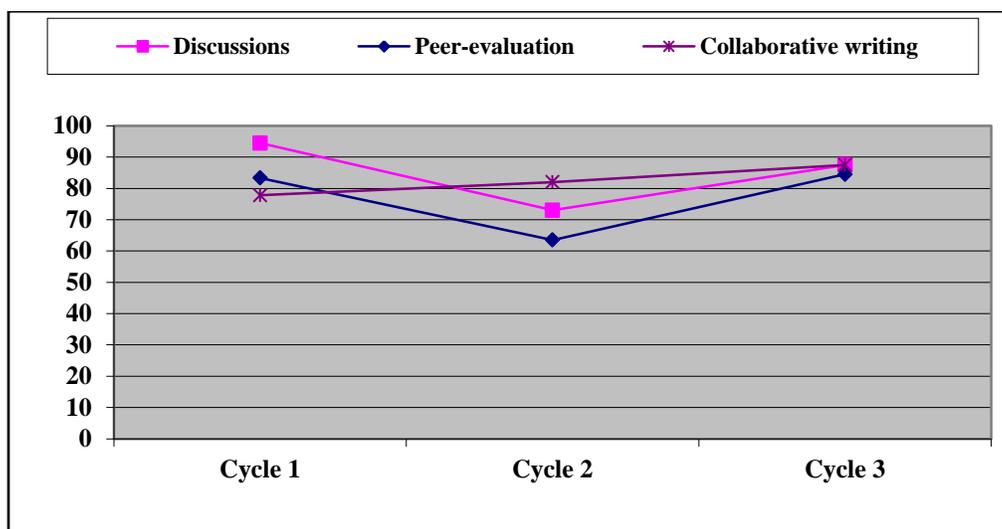


Figure 4.9 Students' Response to the Subsequent activities Employed within Writing Workshop

Figure 1 above showed that the majority of the students affirmed the helpfulness of the subsequent activities employed within writing workshop to improve their participation in the process of learning argumentative writing.

Observation. The students' participation dramatically improved across cycles. In cycle 1, the students barely produced talk during the discussions. I found out that the students concerned about using English to express their argumentative ideas. Further, range of writing topics was very large in cycle 1; thus, it was hard for the students to engage with their peers discussing their argumentative ideas from different writing topics. As in cycle 2 and cycle 3 I gained a control over their writing topic and reading text, and

allowed them to use their native languages to deliver their thoughts when they got stuck in finding out the English vocabulary to define their ideas, the students became more relaxed exchanging thoughts with their peers and the teacher. We may take a look at the following conversation.

Student 30: I think that the Customer C is the murderer.

Student 8 : Kok dirimu isa yakin banget? (How could you be so sure?)

Student 30: *Lihat ini, kebiasaan makannya beda* (Look, they had different eating habits). Customer C itu left-handed (Customer C was left-handed). *Dilihat dari letak sendoknya* (Seen from the spoon position).

Student 2 : *Aku setuju* (I agree). *Yang bikin bingung itu jejak kaki mereka itu lho..* (What makes confused were their footprints..)

Student 30: *Jangan – jangan ini pembunuhan berencana* (It might be a planned murder). *Dan Ernie juga turut membantu* (And, Ernie was the accomplice). *Mungkin aja kan* (It could be, couldn't it)? *Jejak kaki ini kaki Ernie yang ambil air dari keran dapur* (These footprints belonged to Ernie who took water from the kitchen sink)? *Lihat, ini ada air* (Look, there was water here).

Student 2 : Nah, lha jejak kaki sing iki (What about these footprints)? (Pointing at the other footprints)

The conversation above showed the students became more active participating in small-group discussions. Across cycles, they demonstrated more active participation in the subsequent activities of completing their argumentative writing project.

Students' works. We may take a look at the following figure 2 to see the improvements on the mean of the students' argumentative writing scores and the quality of the students' argumentation.

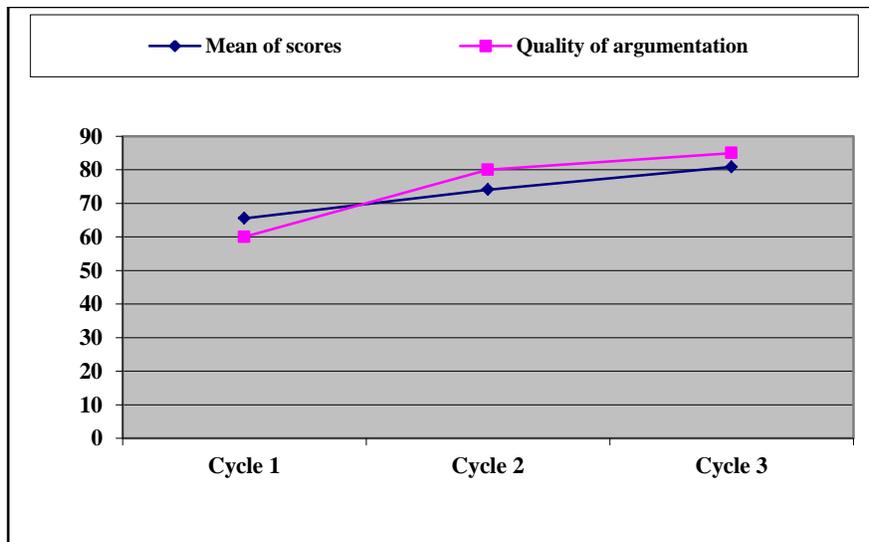


Figure 2. The Students' Improvements on the Writing Scores and Quality of Argumentation

In terms of mean of the students' scores, the students could successfully improve their argumentative writing scores from 65.55 in cycle 1 which was below the minimum requirement to be 80.86 in cycle 3 which surpassed the minimum requirement. In terms of the quality of the students' argumentation,

the students could dramatically improve their quality from the level of poor in cycle 1 to good in cycle 3.

Discussion

There were two patterns of analysis I could infer from the analysis of the databases. First,

language barriers became one of the major factors which obstructed the students' active participation in learning argumentative writing. The students should go back and forth in the continuum of Indonesian, Javanese, and English languages to comprehend the reading text and write argumentation. Considering their background as EFL students who did not use English in everyday interaction, it was very hard for them to articulate their thoughts in oral and written modes. In this case, teacher should be culturally responsive (Pacino, 2008) in understanding the social contexts of language learning (Shin, 2013) in order to provide comfortable class atmosphere in learning second or foreign language. Consequently, as I allowed the students to use their native languages when they got stuck finding vocabulary to define their ideas, the students became more relaxed delivering their thoughts. Further, the discussions became more dynamic and fluid.

Secondly, the nature of argumentative writing which was more challenging than the other genres became a bigger challenge for the students to write better quality of argumentation. Like the other genres, argumentative writing also required transfer from oral to written discourse. However, comparing to other genres, argumentative writing was challenging for the students because there was no model for oral argumentative discourse and written argumentative discourse was not learned naturally in everyday lives (Reznitskaya et al.,

2007). As a result of minimum interactions in building oral argumentative discourse, the students as novice writers faced greater barrier in writing argumentation. Nevertheless, as I diminished the students' language barrier, it helped the students to more actively participate in establishing oral argumentative discourse. After they became more knowledgeable about their topic and could build more solid oral argumentative discourse, it helped the students lessen their challenge in writing argumentation. Consequently, they could dramatically increase the mean of their argumentative writing scores across cycles from 65.55 to 80.86 and improved the quality of their argumentation from poor to good.

CONCLUSION

Students' participation in learning argumentative writing had dramatically improved across cycles. By lessening the students' language barriers (Shin, 2013), the students could be more confident to exchange thoughts and ideas. Their argumentation skill in establishing oral argumentative discourse with their peers was improving along the cycles. Further, as the students became more familiar with the application of writing workshop, they became more relaxed to engage in collaborative writing throughout the teaching and learning process across the cycles. Dramatically, discussing ideas, communicating writing difficulties, and giving peer-evaluation became common activities to help them accomplish their writing project.

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