A Joint Construction Practice in Academic Writing Course in Indonesian University Context

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Abstract: This research aims to explore the students' writing and critical thinking capacity in a joint construction practice in an academic writing course. The course applied a genre-based approach in teaching academic writing and critical thinking to first-year English as a Foreign Language students of a private university in Pontianak, West Kalimantan, Indonesia. A combination of explicit teaching, group discussion, and online review sessions was employed in the joint construction practice for three meetings. The source for the data collection was a jointly constructed text. The text was selected from thirty-six students who worked in groups. Every group consisted of low achievers, medium achievers, and high achievers in writing. The text was analyzed using functional grammar. The analysis shows that the students had gained a good control of the exposition genre with its linguistic features. Thematic progression and logical connectors at the text level and circumstances (adverbs) at the clause level had realized critical thinking skills and dispositions. Several grammatical mistakes and improper lexical choices were identified but did not interfere with the purpose of the text. The findings suggest that having more classroom meetings will make explicit teaching and group discussion work effectively before the students begin to write independently. Moreover, online review sessions can support the students' learning but with limitations.

Key words: a genre-based approach, joint construction practice, academic writing, critical thinking

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi kapasitas menulis mahasiswa pada tahap latihan konstruksi bersama dalam menulis teks akademik. Pendekatan berbasis genre diterapkan dalam pengajaran menulis teks akademik dan berpikir kritis kepada mahasiswa tahun pertama Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris dari suatu perguruan tinggi swasta di Pontianak, Kalimantan Barat, Indonesia. Kombinasi pengajaran eksplisit, diskusi kelompok, dan sesi reviu daring digunakan dalam latihan konstruksi bersama selama tiga pertemuan. Sumber data penelitian ini adalah teks dari latihan tersebut. Teks tersebut diseleksi dari tiga puluh enam mahasiswa yang bekerja dalam kelompok. Setiap kelompok terdiri dari mahasiswa dengan kategori berprestasi rendah, sedang, dan tinggi dalam menulis. Teks kemudian dianalisis menggunakan tata bahasa fungsional. Analisis teks menunjukkan mahasiswa memiliki kendali yang baik atas genre eksposisi dengan fitur linguistiknya. Progresi tematik dan konektor logis di tingkat teks dan penggunaan fitur sirkumstansial di tingkat klausa merealisasi kemampuan dan disposisi berpikir kritis mahasiswa. Beberapa kesalahan tata bahasa dan ketidaktepatan pilihan kata diidentifikasi namun tidak berpengaruh pada tujuan teks yang dianalisis. Temuan ini menyarankan untuk menambah pertemuan di kelas agar pengajaran eksplisit dan diskusi kelompok dapat bekerja lebih efektif sebelum mahasiswa mulai menulis secara independen. Kemudian, sesi reviu daring mendukung pembelajaran mahasiswa namun terbatas.

Kata kunci: pendekatan berbasis genre, latihan konstruksi bersama, menulis ilmiah, berpikir kritis

INTRODUCTION

University students around the world are required to learn academic writing. It involves a particular set of knowledge and skills that are necessary for the students to master. Apart from the particular set of knowledge and skills, an important feature that is also considered in this research is critical thinking (Emilia, 2005; Widodo, 2012). Critical thinking is more than just skills. It also has dispositions that act as guidance in constructing an academic text (Ennis, 1996; Siegel, 2010).

First-year university students should already have the knowledge and skills in academic writing and critical thinking as many academic assignments are assigned to them, starting with essays, then, term papers or research papers. In order to achieve this particular set of knowledge and skills, an academic writing course should be equipped with a practical approach.

An approach that deals with different text types is a genre-based approach under systemic functional linguistics (Derewianka, 1990, 2012; Emilia, 2012). The genre-based approach has been developed in Australia (Hyland, 2007; Swales, 2012) and has been applied around the world including in Indonesia (Derewianka, 2003; Emilia, 2005).

In Indonesia, the genre-based approach used commonly has four teaching stages (Emilia, 2012), which is also has been used in a university context (Aunurrahman, Hamied, & Emilia, 2016, 2017). The stages are building knowledge of the field, modeling, joint construction, and independent construction stages (Emilia, 2012). From the four stages, this research aims to explore the students' capacity in academic writing and critical thinking in the joint construction stage of an academic writing course in an Indonesian university context. The research involved first-year EFL students of a private university in Pontianak, West Kalimantan, Indonesia.

THE CONCEPT OF ACADEMIC WRITING

This section will discuss the concept of academic writing that consists of a particular set of knowledge and skills. The discussion of the concept of academic writing will be related to the concept of critical thinking (hereafter CT) as both concepts share a common ground.

Academic writing consists of a particular set of knowledge and skills. In brief, knowledge is about what to write. It deals with selecting and limiting a topic that the students want to write about. In order to select a topic, the students should grasp ideas and arguments from any relevant references. After searching for ideas and arguments, the students should limit the ideas and arguments that will be used in his or her writing (Irvin, 2010).

Certainly, using relevant reference and selected ideas and arguments involve the application of dispositions of CT that guide the students not only in performing CT but also in constructing an academic text. The relevant references are part of relevance, a disposition of CT, where ideas should be grasped from references that are relevant to the topic that will be written

(Elder & Paul, 2010, 2013). Then, selected ideas and arguments that the students want to use in their writing involve dispositions of CT in terms of clarity, accuracy, and precision where in constructing a text, the students should use clear, accurate, and precise information and evidence (Elder & Paul, 2010, 2013). In this study, dispositions used are also called as intellectual standards. Other dispositions or intellectual standards are depth, breadth, logicalness, and fairness (Elder & Paul, 2010, 2013). This research also considers respect as a disposition of CT (Bailin & Siegel, 2003; Siegel, 2010), which mainly involved in the practice of the ethics of academic writing. The ethics of academic writing fall under the term of how to write that will be elaborated in the following paragraphs.

After considering about what to write, the students should also master the skills of academic writing. In this research, the skills are about how to write (Irvin, 2010) that involves a genre with its linguistic features (Bruce, 2008a, 2013), which is also known as discourse competence (Bruce, 2008b). In university contexts, argumentative writing is considered important (Coffin & Donohue, 2012; Emilia, 2010; Promwinai, 2010; Wingate, 2012) as it can develop the students' critical thinking (DasBender, 2011; Nesi & Gardner, 2006).

Argumentative writing under the systemic functional linguistics genre-based approach (hereafter SFL GBA) consists of two genres. The genres are an exposition genre and a discussion genre. Both genres have 'persuading that' and 'persuading to' functions (see Coffin, 2004; Schulze, 2011). This research, however, will only explore the exposition genre.

An exposition genre, like any genre under systemic functional linguistics (hereafter SFL), has a social function, structure or stages, and its linguistic features (Martin, 1992, 2010). The social function of an exposition genre is "to present arguments in favour of a position that needs to be argued for" (Halliday & Martin, 1993, p. 216). Then, the schematic structure of an exposition genre consists of three elements. The elements are a thesis − a main topic that will be argued; arguments − supporting details of the main topic; and reiteration of thesis − a summary of the topic conveying the arguments and a recommendation if necessary (Martin, 2006). The structure of an exposition genre can be a realization of information-organizing skills of CT (Lipman, 2003).

The latter element that plays an important part in writing an exposition genre is linguistic features. To mention a few, the linguistic features of an exposition genre are: (1) generalized participants that deal with

abstract issues, (2) timeless present tense when communicating a position or a point of an argument; (3) passive voice; (4) nominalization to make an argument sounds more objective; (5) logical connectors to create a logical order of a writing; and (6) a hedged language such as modalities, mental processes, and circumstances, which is a form of a cautious language in communicating a position or a claim (Derewianka, 1990, pp. 76–78; Gillett, 2017).

Another main focus of this research is the ethics of academic writing, which has been mentioned earlier under the term what to write. The ethics of academic writing is about how to provide factual evidence or supporting details that are relevant to the arguments and the topic of the students' writing in an ethical way that realizes respect as a disposition of CT. The practice of the ethics of academic writing also can realize the students' academic honesty where the students learn to use someone's ideas in their writing that can build credibility of their writing (Jones, 2011). The ethics of academic writing cover quoting exact words from other texts, paraphrasing and summarizing ideas of other texts or references by using one's own words, and writing a reference list under APA style, which is commonly used in academic writing (Bailey, 2006; Oshima & Hogue, 1999; Paiz et al., 2014).

Up to this point, the concept of academic writing of this study consists of a particular set of knowledge and skills that share a common ground with the concept of CT. The concept would be learned by the students through the application of a genre-based approach under SFL GBA that consists of four stages. This research, however, will only explore the students' capacity in academic writing and CT in a joint construction stage of an academic writing course.

METHODOLOGY

This research aims to explore the students' capacity in academic writing and CT in a joint construction stage in an academic writing course. It involved the first-year EFL students of a private university in Pontianak, West Kalimantan, Indonesia. The students agreed to participate in this research as they had signed a consent form. The academic writing course used four stages of a genre-based approach that has been applied in Indonesia (Emilia, 2012) with the implementation of a combination of explicit teaching, group discussion, and online review sessions.

A diagnostic test was conducted in the first session to see the students' prior performance in academic writing and CT. After the diagnostic test, the students had introductory sessions to CT and SFL GBA as an overview of the concept of CT and academic writing under SFL GBA that has been elaborated in the literature review above. The teaching practice began with building knowledge of the field where the students built their knowledge of a topic (Feez, 2002). The second stage was modeling stage. The researcher acted as a lecturer provided model texts of an exposition genre. Then, the students learned to identify the schematic structure and linguistic features of an exposition text, intellectual standards or dispositions of CT, and in-text citations as part of the ethics of academic writing (adapted from Feez, 2002).

The third stage was a joint construction stage. The students constructed their texts for the first time in groups (Feez, 2002). Each group consisted of low achievers, medium achievers, and high achievers. The categories assigned to the students were based on a diagnostic test conducted before the course. To assist the students, the lecturer guided the students to organize their arguments that had been built in the previous stage. The lecturer also guided the students to practice the ethics of academic writing that included quoting, paraphrasing, summarizing, and writing a reference list under APA style.

The joint construction took three meetings. However, the lecturer realized that the students still had many things to learn before they constructed their own text. Accordingly, the lecturer conducted two online review sessions. The students submitted their texts via e-mail to the lecturer to be given feedback. The online review sessions were necessary to prepare them for more practices that were limited in the independent construction stage as they began to work independently with limited explicit teaching from the lecturer and peer feedback was much encouraged.

In order to achieve the aim of this research, a document or a text was selected from a group of students in the joint construction stage. The group consisted of three students with different levels of writing performance. They were Sari − a low achiever; Erick − a medium achiever; and Rendi − a high achiever (their names are in pseudonym). The functional grammar was used in the text analysis that covered the textual metafunction, ideational metafunction, and interpersonal metafunction of the students' text (Fontaine, 2013; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). The analysis also included the application of intellectual standards or dispositions of CT and in-text citations. The following section will report the results of the text analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section will describe the text analyzed using functional grammar. Before that, this paper will show an example of the lecturer's feedback in the online review sessions. The online review sessions employed by the researcher as the lecturer provided feedback on the students' texts, as the three meetings were not sufficient to cover academic writing along with its ethics and CT. The text selected for the example was jointly constructed by Sari − a low achiever; Erick − a medium achiever; and Rendi − a high achiever (their names are in pseudonym). In order to save space, the example is taken from the first online review session, which was communicated by e-mail. The example of the lecturer's feedback is in Table 1.

Table 1:
Lecturer's Feedback on the Jointly-constructed Text

Line	First draft of the jointly constructed text
1	A GOOD TEACHER
	A good teacher is not difficult to find. However, it does not mean everyone can be a teacher and not all teachers ~~is~~ **are** good teachers. **At this point, it is better to say that a good teacher should have at least three**
5	**important criteria.**
	First, a good teacher inspires his/her students. An inspiring teacher means that a teacher is not only teaching, but also motivates his/her students to be better. A good teacher also means that a teacher who can make a difference in the lives of his/her students by making the students to
10	see things differently (Gonchar, 2015).
	Second, a good teacher is an entertainer in the positive sense not the negative sense. It means that a good teacher is not only giving his/her students knowledge seriously during the class but also make them comfortable in the class, although in the serious learning situation
15	(Harmer, 2001).
	Third, a good teacher has good classroom management skills. It means that a teacher should keep the balance of his/her students' performance in the class (Harmer, 2001). **For example**, **a** quite student should be given the opportunity to answer the question and speak up in
20	the class as the attractive one does.
	In conclusion, a good teacher should be able to inspire his/her students, ~~also~~ an entertainer ~~classroom~~ in ~~the~~ **a** positive sense, and must have an effective classroom management skills. However, a good teacher should not be limited by these criteria. A teacher must find more criteria to

become not only a good teacher but **also** a better teacher to make a better student.

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Harmer, Jeremy. (2001). How to Teach English (1ˢᵗ Ed). New York: ~~CNN~~Longman.

Notes:

- Bold words or expressions show suggestion from the lecturer
- Strikethrough words or expressions show words or expressions that are considered to be omitted in the text

Table 1 shows that the lecturer informed explicitly any missing information or parts as indicated in line 4 where the lecturer suggested a thesis statement. Suggestions for proper grammar, spelling, lexical choices, and a reference list under APA style as part of dispositions of CT and ethics of academic writing were also communicated in the text. The function of explicit teaching is to provide clear guidance to the students. It should also enable the students to focus on any parts of the text that have not been well developed (Feez, 2002; Hyland, 2007; Martin & Rose, 2008). Still, there are limitations. First, the lecturer did not show every mistake in the text as the lecturer expected the students to find out on his or her own. However, it did not happen. Later, in the text analysis, the text still has a few mistakes that the students were not aware of. It seemed that the students took the lecturer's feedback for granted without developing it any further. Second, the lecturer was unable to monitor every group work until they submitted their texts. After the second online review session, the students submitted their final texts by e-mail. A jointly constructed text was selected from a group of students for the text analysis. The students were Sari – a low achiever; Erick – a medium achiever; and Rendi – a high achiever (their names are in pseudonym). The text is in Table 2. In the analysis, the text consists of three elements of an exposition text with each clause numbered.

Table 2:
Final Draft of the Jointly Constructed Text

A GOOD TEACHER

Thesis element
1. A good teacher is not difficult to find.
2. However, it does not mean everyone can be a teacher a
3. and not all teachers are good teachers.
4. It can be said that a good teacher should have at least three important criteria.

Argument element
5. First, a good teacher inspires his/her students.
6. An inspiring teacher means that a teacher is not only teaching
7. but also **motivates** (motivating) his/her students to be better.
8. A good teacher also means that a teacher who can make a difference in the lives of his/her students by making the students **to** see things differently (Gonchar, 2015).
9. Second, a good teacher is an entertainer in the positive sense not the negative sense.
10. It means that a good teacher is not only giving his/her students knowledge seriously during the class
11. but also **make** (making) them comfortable in the class including in a serious learning situation (Harmer, 2001).
12. Third, a good teacher has good classroom management skills.
13. It means that a teacher should keep a balance of his/her students' performance in the class (Harmer, 2001).
14. For example, a quite (quiet) student should be given the opportunity to answer a question and speak up in the class.

Reiteration of thesis element
15. In conclusion, a good teacher should be able to provide inspirations, entertainment in a positive sense, and must have effective classroom management skills.
16. However, a good teacher should not be limited by these criteria.
17. Instead, a teacher must find more criteria to become not only a good teacher but also a better teacher for his/her students.

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Harmer, Jeremy. (2001). How to Teach English (1st Ed). New York: Longman.

Note:
- **Bold** words or expressions show grammatical mistakes and improper lexical choices followed by suggestions in parentheses.

Table 2 shows that the final draft of the jointly constructed text is

currently much better than the first draft (see Table 1). Still, several grammatical mistakes were identified in the text but did not interfere with the purpose of the text. A further text analysis will cover textual metafunction, ideational metafunction, interpersonal metafunction, and identifications of dispositions of CT and ethics of academic writing.

Textual metafunction describes the organization of the text realized by Theme system. This also involves logical metafunction realized by conjunctions, which is a part of ideational metafunction, that describes how language provides a connection in a sentence to a text (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). The description will begin with Thematic progression. The text used derived Themes that commonly utilized in an exposition text (Emilia, 2014). The Thematic progression of the text is presented in Table 3.

Table 3:
The Thematic Progression of the Jointly Constructed Text

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macroTheme:
It can be said that a good teacher should have at least three important criteria.

hyperThemes:
<u>First</u>, a good teacher inspires his/her students.

<u>Second</u>, a good teacher is an entertainer in the positive sense not the negative sense.
<u>Third</u>, a good teacher has good classroom management skills.
macroNew:

<u>In conclusion</u>, a good teacher should be able to provide inspirations, entertainment in a positive sense, and must have effective classroom management skills.

Note:

- The underlined expressions are logical conjunctions which introduce the hyperThemes or arguments

Table 3 shows that the macroTheme or main idea of the text is three criteria of a good teacher. In relation to dispositions of CT, the main idea reflects clear, accurate, and precise information where the students limited the arguments into three arguments. The hyperThemes are considered as arguments as logical connectors precede the hyperThemes: *First*, *Second*, and *Third* realize textual Theme and logical metafunction. The hyperThemes, in relation to intellectual standard or disposition of CT, reflect relevant

arguments as the hyperThemes used topical Themes that are pertinent to the macroNew, which is, *a good teacher*. The latter part is macroNew. This is a summary of the text signaled by a logical connector with a summative function: *In conclusion*. The macroNew is also relevant to the thesis and argument elements as it uses a relevant topical Theme as well.

At the clause level, the argument element will be presented to see arguments with their elaborations. An example of the argument with its elaboration is presented in Table 4.

Table 4:
An Example of an Argument from the Jointly Constructed Text

1.	First, a good teacher inspires his/her students.
2.	An inspiring teacher means that a teacher is not only teaching
3.	but also **motivates** (motivating) his/her students to be better.
4.	A good teacher also means that a teacher who can make a difference in the lives of his/her students by making the students **to** see things differently (Gonchar, 2015).

Note:
- **Bold** words or expressions show grammatical mistakes and improper lexical choices followed by the suggestion in parentheses.

Table 4 presents an argument that a good teacher inspires his/her students. There is no textual Theme or logical connector that signals an elaboration (see Clause No. 2). Instead, a topical Theme is used as a point of elaboration: *An inspiring teacher*. The topical Theme itself derived from the Rheme in the earlier clause: *inspires his/her students*. This, concerning dispositions of CT, reflects relevance between the argument with its elaborations. At the end of the elaboration, there is a citation that indicates the elaboration is based on a reference, which makes the argument credible. Another function of the citation is to signal a realization of the ethics of academic writing and a form of respect under CT dispositions. The citation is followed by a reference list (see Table 2) in APA style (2010) that had been introduced by the lecturer. Having a reference list strengthens the credibility of the argument as long as the reference is a valid one (Jones, 2011).

Concerning ideational metafunction, as logical metafunction has been delineated along with textual metafunction, only experiential metafunction will be presented. Experiential metafunction describes a process or experience along with its participants and circumstances that occur in the text and realized by Transitivity system (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). The

text uses several types of processes along with their participants and circumstances effectively. For example, in Table 4, a clause (No. 4) realizes an identifying relational process followed by a causal relational process: *A good teacher [Token] also means [Pr: Identifying] that a teacher [[who [Token] can make [Pr: Causal] a difference [Value] in the lives of his/her students [Circumstance: Location: Place] by making the students **to** see things differently [Circumstance: Manner: Means]] [Value].* The participants in the text are mainly *a good teacher* with different roles as the main idea of the text is a good teacher. The circumstances also have several functions. In the passage provided, two circumstances have location and manner functions. These circumstances reflect dispositions of CT in terms of clarity, accuracy, and precision of information in a clause.

The next metafunction is interpersonal metafunction. It describes the language used in interaction with the reader realized by mood system (Thompson, 2014). The text mainly uses declarative mood in elaborating arguments of the issue under discussion (see Emilia & Hamied, 2015). Then, the text employed epistemic modality and deontic modality. An epistemic modality signals a probability (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). For example, it is realized by *can* in *A good teacher also means that a teacher who <u>can</u> make a difference in the lives of his/her students by making the students to see things differently <u>(Gonchar, 2015)</u>.* The level of *can* is medium and as the clause supplies a citation, it creates a stronger possibility of the meaning of the clause. Then, a deontic modality functions as an obligation (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014) is realized by, for example, *should* in *It means that a teacher <u>should</u> keep a balance of his/her students' performance in the class <u>(Harmer, 2001)</u>. Should* signals a suggestion with a medium level of modality with a paraphrase projected in the clause to strengthen the suggestion. Another feature identified in the text is an impersonal passive voice in the thesis element: *It is said* (see clause No. 4 in Table 2). Impersonal passive voice, which is a form of academic language, helps the text to focus on the issue as it removes agency and it signals an objective statement (Pullum, 2014; Schleppegrell, 2009).

Up to this point, the jointly constructed text shows the students had gained a good control of the schematic structure of an exposition text with various linguistic features. Dispositions of CT such as clarity, accuracy, precision, and relevance were identified in the text. Respect was also identified in the text in the form of in-text citations with a reference list under APA style. Grammatical mistakes and improper lexical choices were identified but they did not interfere with the purpose of the text. This finding is in line with several previous research on a genre-based approach in

teaching academic writing and CT to tertiary EFL students in Indonesia (Emilia, 2005; Emilia & Hamied, 2015). Moreover, the finding also shows that explicit teaching and group discussion were not in maximum performance. Limitations of the online review sessions should be addressed to improve explicit teaching and group discussion practices ensuring a better preparation before the students construct their writing independently.

CONCLUSION

This research aims to explore a joint construction stage of an academic writing course that involved EFL students of a private university in Pontianak, West Kalimantan, Indonesia. The research confirms the previous research that a genre-based approach can develop tertiary EFL students' academic writing and CT in Indonesia. Still, the text analysis found a limitation, that is, several grammatical mistakes and limited lexical choices were identified in the jointly constructed text, but they did not interfere with the purpose of the text.

Online review sessions can support the students' learning. However, it cannot replace classroom meetings. Having more classroom meeting for the joint construction practice is necessary especially when the academic course is for the first-year EFL students. Certainly, explicit teaching and group discussion should be improved by addressing the students' difficulties in academic writing and CT. It will provide a better preparation for the students before they work independently. Future research should seek another combination of teaching strategies for a joint construction practice of an academic writing course.

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