INVESTIGATING PARAGRAPH OF INDONESIAN EFL STUDENTS' ESSAY: EFFECTIVE OR INEFFECTIVE

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Abstract

The term 'effective paragraph' refers to the presence of its four building elements i.e. unity, coherence, topic sentence, and sufficient development. Related to that, this study investigates students' essays whether they consist of effective paragraphs or dominated by the ineffective ones and whether those building elements consistently present in every paragraph. To answer those two questions, this study employs the content analysis method in which it is a particular method to analyze the texts. As the samples are the students' essays of English major. The result shows that 36 of 76 (47 %) are effective paragraphs and the rest 41 (53 %) are ineffective which means that more than a half of paragraphs are ineffective. Then it is also revealed there are 62 paragraphs have topic sentence (33%), 49 have proper sufficient developments (26%), 41 of them have unity (23 %), and 30 paragraph are written with coherence (16 %). From the result it can be inferred that most of students' paragraph are ineffective.
Keywords: *Effective Paragraph, Ineffective Paragaraph, EFL, Essay.*

Abstrak

Istilah 'effective paragraph' merujuk pada hadirnya empat element pembentuk paragraph yang efektif yaitu unity, coherence, topic sentence, and sufficient development. Berkaitan dengan hal tersebut, Studi ini menyelidiki apakah essay mahasiswa dibentuk oleh paragraph yang efektif ataukah sebaliknya essay mahasiswa tersusun oleh paragraph- paragraph yang tidak efektif. Kemudian apakah elemen-elemen pembentuk paragraph yang efektif tersebut hadir secara konsisten dalam setiap paragraph. Untuk menjawab kedua pertanyaan tersebut maka studi menggunakan konten analisis prosedur. Metode ini lazim digunakan untuk meneliti teks. Sedangkan sample adalah para essay mahasiswa program studi bahasa inggris. Hasil yang diperoleh mengungkapkan bahwa 36 dari 76 (47 %) adalah efektif paragraph dan sisanya sebanyak 41 (53 %) adalah tidak efektif. Kemudian terungkap bahwa elemen-elemen efektif paragraph seperti topik sentence hadir sebanyak 62 (33%), diikuti oleh supporting details 49 (26%), unity 41(23 %), dan coherence 30 (16 %). Dari hasil tersebut dapat disimpulkan bahwa sebagian besar paragraf adalah tidak efektif.
Katakunci: Paragraph Efektif, Paragraph tidak Efektif, EFL, Essay.

I. INTRODUCTION

Writing an effective paragraph in academic writing has been a challenging task for almost all EFL learners. The challenges come from the fact writing as a productive skill involves many sub-skills a student needs to master i.e. relevant content, use of original materials, content organization, cohesion and coherence, language accuracy, presentation, and mechanical precision of writing (Trzeciak, 2003). With those complexities, teaching writing especially how to produce effective paragraph should be the focus in the academic writing since the success of learning depends on the student's understanding of this matter. By comprehending the elements of effective paragraph, the students would have adequate linguistics knowledge which could provide guidance how to produce effective paragraph. In addition, by understanding the concept, the students know what should do and avoid making mistakes.

Several studies has been done in paragraph development including effective paragraph as a main part of research and the influential one is Lee & Tajino (2008). They have done a research of paragraph development which include the elements of effective paragraph in academic writing. They analyzed students' academic writing in English which involved 95 Japanese university students as samples. The results showed that the students tended to perceive academic writing to be difficult. In particular, they perceived language-related components of academic writing to be more difficult than structure/content-related components.

Another author like Oshima & Hogue (2006) also confirms that many novice writers tends to make simple and compound sentence with repeated use of coordinating conjunction. This type of sentence if used too often will make the essay immature which lead to under-develop essay. This fact has also been stated by McMillan (1984) who said that immature (novice) writer uses too many simple and compound sentences since this types of sentences don't force them to weigh the values of ideas. At the same time according to her, mature writer will review and ovoid using too many repeated simple and compound sentence since the monotony for most experienced writer is a sin. Both of those facts supports that, developing paragraph is a strive for most novice writers.

In Indonesian pedagogical EFL context, analysing the student's essay and then identify

whether their paragraph is effective is important to determine their understanding regarding academic writing subject. The result could tell the level of student's comprehension and will decide what should do next. If the essay still contains many mistakes then the teacher can set up a set of pedagogical action to deal with the problems. By focusing on the problems, consequently, the students difficulty in academic writing can be reduced and the teacher can achieve the objective of the teaching.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptually, Graham (1997) proposed four holistic areas in the writing process need to be mastered: (1) knowledge of writing and writing topics, (2) skill for producing and crafting text,(3) processes for energizing and motivating participants to write with enthusiasm, (4) and directing thought and actions through strategies to archive writing goals.

On the other hand, Byrne (1988) has different classification of writing process into psychological, linguistic and cognitive process. It is obvious that he mixes other disciplines of knowledge into account. Though, the concept of 'psychological' is rather equal with point number 3 from Graham, and point number 4 of Graham refer to cognitive concept of

what Bryne said. So that conceptually, there is an agreement from those two scholars that writing process involve those elements to play with.

Based on those concepts, There are four important elements an effective paragraph should have: unity, coherence, a topic sentence, and sufficient development. This idea has been supported by Nunan (1991) who said that paragraph should contain three main elements i.e. unity, coherence and adequate development. The other authors Oshima & Hogue (2006) add another element; topic sentence. They said that every effective paragraph should have a topic sentence which contain a topic and the controlling ideas. These two elements in paragraph will decide the focus of the paragraph and their presence will help reader to know easily what is being discussed in the essay.

As the first element to achieve effective paragraph, The core idea of unity in paragraph is oneness of the idea. It means the entire paragraph should focus on a single topic and discusses only the major point from the begining to the end. Thus it should avoid wander with different ideas in the paragraph. Therefore if a paragraph discusses about a disadvantages of buying a new house, it

shouldn't discuss the advantages of buying one. The unity should also contain supporting sentences which directly explain or prove the main idea. For example, in paragraph about the high tax of new car in Indonesia, the paragraph could mention the possibility of buying the second-hand car, but if it discusses several sentences about buying the second-hand car, it is getting off the topic.

Coherence, The second element, is the feature which makes the paragraph easily comprehensible to readers. The idea of coherence in writing is the movement of one sentence to the next must be logical. There must be no sudden jumps and it should flow smoothly. To achieve coherence, a writer could use cohesive ties (devices) and logical order. By mixing those devices in a paragraph, the writer could maintain the flowing of idea among sentences. The following is the tools to achieve coherence:

1. The repeatation of key nouns.
2. The use of synonymous words.
3. The consistency of pronouns usage.
4. Use transition signals to link ideas.
5. Arrange ideas in logical orders.

Topic sentence as the next element of effective paragraph is a sentence that indicates in a general way what idea the paragraph is going to discuss. It generally consists of a topic and controlling ideas of the paragraph. By using the topic sentence, the writer can easily identify what information should be included in paragraph. It also helps the writer to focus on one idea and by the help of controlling idea, the writer has a limit what topic should be discussed in paragraph.

The last element is sufficient development which means that topic sentence should be discussed adequately. In academic writing, it should present the facts not opinion though sometimes the writer could expose their opinion but it must be supported by the facts. The facts include examples or illustrations, data (statistics, eveidence, etc), and testimony.

III. METHOD OF RESEARCH

The research employs the qualitative approach by using content-analysis method. According to Klaus (2004) content analysis method is designed to study the document and communication artifact, and in this research is text. Content analysis also involve all systematic reading or observation of text and then labels them into the resercher need. In short, content analysis involve six steps: 1) Formulate the research question 2) decide on unit of analysis 3.) develop a sampling plan 4) Construct coding categories 5) coding and
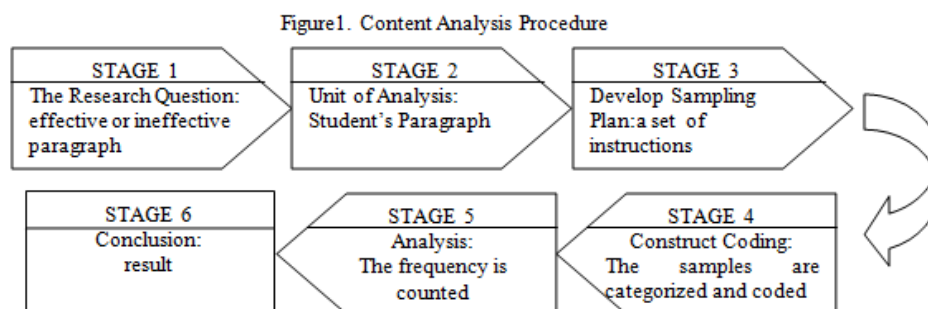
intercoder reliability check 6) data collection and draw conclusion (Neuman, 2011).

The first and second procedures of the method are obvious. This study is going to find out whether Indonesian EFL Students' paragraph effective or ineffective and the unit of analysis is paragraph in students' essay. The third category involves 15 essay samples of EFL students of English department. The students themselves are UBSI students of sixth and seventh semester and the samples were taken in november 2019. They had taken the academic writing course for a semester and then the final assigments are writing articles with ten titles set by the researcher.

The fourth procedure involved the pre-collection of samples which included the instruction to the students how to write an essay; these included: 1) the set of instruction 2) the title options 3) time range of comp-letion. In procedure number 5, to identify whether students' paragraph in writing is effective or ineffective, the researcher analyze the students' essay based on four categories or parameters: unity, coherence, a topic sentence, and sufficient development. Their presence and approprite use in paragraph will determine a paragraph quality. If one or more element is absent within a paragraph, it means the para-graph is relatively ineffective. The scoring system includes: 4 : all the elements unity, coherence, topic sentence, and sufficient deve-lopment present. 3, 2, 1: one, two, or three elements are absent.

The final procedure is collecting the data and draw the conclusion. In this stage, the researcher will collect the data and will put them into matrix. From the frequency of the elements, the research can conclude whether a paragraph effective or ineffective. It will also decide what elements of effective paragraph lack of in a paragraph. The following flow-chart depicts the analysis procedure.

Figure1. Content Analysis Procedure

STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3
The Research Question: effective or ineffective paragraph	Unit of Analysis: Student's Paragraph	Develop Sampling Plan:a set of instructions

STAGE 6	STAGE 5	STAGE 4
Conclusion: result	Analysis: The frequency is counted	Construct Coding: The samples are categorized and coded

To gain a better understanding, the following is the content analysis process of a paragraph. This process includes step 1,2,3 which is considered has been through. The following sample is taken from a students'

paragraph. Step 4 Coding: Unity: U, Coherence: C, Topic Sentence: T, Sufficient Development: S, Yes = 1, 0No= 1, 0, Score of Effective: 4, score of Ineffective: 1,2,3

Table 1. Content Analysis			
Paragraph	Elements	Yes	No
Second is avoiding smoking triggers. As much as possible avoid the factors to trigger your smoking habits. Like smoking after eating can be replaced by chewing candy. You have also to avoid friends or anyone who offers you cigarette. You must firmly say not to smoke anymore	U	1	0
	C	0	1
	T	1	0
	S	0	1
Total		2	2
Step 5, Remark: This paragraph is ineffective since it has score 2. It lacks of coherence and sufficient development.			

In the step number 4, the parameters and other supporting parameters are coded. This coding is helpful to simplify the analysis and the scoring system and number 1 and 0 indicate the presence of the element. If one element like unity presents then the scoring is 1. Otherwise, if it is absent the score is 0. The perfect score 4 indicates that a paragraph contains all element of effective paragraph. The score 1, 2, 3 or 3 indicates that a paragraph is ineffective since it lacks one of the element of effective paragraph.

IV. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Of 15 samples of essay, there are 76 paragraphs has been analyzied. These paragraphs contains 100 until 300 words. It ranges from 5 sentences to 12 sentences in each paragraph. The elements which are analyzed are the unity of the paragraphs, coherence in them, topic sentence, and its sufficient

development. The following is the table containing the samples:

Table 2. Number of Paragraph		
Sample No	Title	Number of Paragraph
1	How to Quit Smoking	6
2	Childhood Vs Adulthood	5
3	Childhood Vs Adulthood	4
4	Fruit Vs Vegetables	4
5	The Effects Of Broken Marriage On Children	6
6	How to Lose Weight Without Losing Your Mind	5
7	How to Quit Smoking	6
8	Broken Home Children	5
9	Negative Effects of Broken Marriage on Children's Psychology	4
10	How to Achieve Academic Success in College	3
11	How to Quit Smoking	6
12	Why Some Students Cheat	3
13	The Effects of Broken Marriage on Children	8
14	Why Some Students Cheats	6
15	How to End Relationship	5
Total		76

Of the total 76 paragraphs, the researcher has found 41 paragraph that contains unity. The rest, 35 paragraphs, has partial unity which means the paragraph is off the

topic. Some of them even just wander around without focusing to the topic and controlling idea, if any. This causes many paragraphs is absent of unity.

The following is 3rd paragraph of sample number 6 supplies the paragraph that contains unity in student's essay: " *Don't consider diet as a burden, but a healthy lifestyle. Don't make the diet a burden because no matter how strong your intentions are, you will still find it difficult to carry out. Try to start seeing the positive side of the diet, don't just think of a torturous diet because you cannot eat freely. Think of your diet as a lifestyle that will make you healthier, avoid disease, and have an ideal body weight.''* In the previous paragraph it is seen that the topic is diet and the controlling idea is diet as a healthy lifestyle and the following discussion is just discuss about it.

The following is the 4th paragraph of sample number 5 supplies how a paragraph doesn't contain unity. " *Divorce is the most serious problem. Not only for Married couple, but also for their child. They feel like no parents. Yes. Their parents always think about themselves after divorce. Sometimes they blame each other. Without thinking the causes for their lovely children.''* In the previous

paragraph, the topic is divorce and the controlling idea is the problem caused by the divorce. However, the following sentences discuss how the parents handle the divorce which is off the topic.

The next step of analysis falls on the presence of coherence in paragraphs. There are 30 paragraphs among 76 that contains coherence. As the idea of coherence is the flowing of idea of one sentence to the next must be logical and smooth, so that the analysis based on those two qualities. The absent of those two means that the paragraph lacks of coherence. The following is 2nd paragraph of sample number 1 supplies the example of effective paragraph: " *Childhood and adulthood contrast in few different ways. The first difference is childhood proves to be much more relaxing than adulthood. Children do not have to worry about many things that adults do, because mostly depend on their parents or legal guardians for for their necessity. Children also do not worry much about things because they have simple and naive ways of thinking. On the other hand, adults have a much more complex and stressful lifestyle. They must take care other people who become their responsibility like family member, spouse or their children. They*

must be independent financially to pay the bills and other social obligation. It is obvious the use of conjunction 'the first', 'on the other hand' makes the sentences flow from the previous to the next. Thus the logical organization which show the difference between childhood and adulthood is written in sequence.

The following is the 1st paragraph of sample number 9 which shows the absent of coherence in the paragraph: " *According to Longman Dictionary, broken marriage is a marriage that has ended because the husband and wife do not live together anymore. Many countries have divorce laws and usually settled in court. Broken Marriage is often considered as a way out of various household problems. Primary school-age children may think that divorce is their fault. In adolescence, divorce can make a child very angry. They may blame and hate parents for this incident. For some children, the actual separation of parents is not the most difficult part. They can be stress because moving schools, living in a new home, being in a new environment, and only living with one parent. Divorce also often causes financial problems. Many families have to move to smaller homes, change lifestyles, and have less income.*" It is obvious

the previous paragraph is jumping around of ideas since the topic sentence discusses the cause of broken marriage but the following sentence tells about the effect of broken marriage, which is off the topic.

The third analysis discusses the presence of topic sentence which shows of 62 paragraphs contains topic sentence in which the rest, 14 paragraphs, is absent of topic sentence . the following is third paragraph of sample number 15 as the example of paragraph that conntains topic sentence: "*Secondly, make your decision with a clear head. Don't decide to break up with your partner in the momen of heat, in unstable mood, or in bad situation. Before you make this important decision, take your time to get suggestion from trusted friends and your parents. They may be wiser and more expereienced than you when dealing such events.*" in the previous paragraph the topic sentence is about making decision to end relationship. And it is just the only topic sentence discussed in the paragraph.

The following 2nd paragraph of sample number number 10 is the example of the paragraph which is absent of topic senetnce: " *Very busy college times sometimes overwhelm you to make use of college time as best they can try to take lessons well, improve ability*

through extracurricular activities, and prepare yourself to be best student besides that many ways more important to be successful students or achieve academic success in college that they are unaware of such as taking notes, review your notes often, and don't always study alone." It can be read that the whole paragraph contain one sentence which is difficult to spot what is main topic of discussion.

There are 49 paragraphs which has a sufficient development in their supporting details. They includes examples and data to support their claim the following 3rd paragraph of sample number 12 gives the example how a paragrph has a sufficient development: " There are few *factors that causes students to cheat. The most common one is the pressure given by parents to get a good score. Sometimes some parents will get really mad if the know their children get a bad score. Some punishment await the children. This push often make the children to do a shotcut, to cheat......"* In the paragraph, the student put the causes and explain why that happens. The following is the recapitulation table of the four elements of effective paragraph:

| Table 3. Recapitulation of Effective Paragraph Elements				
Sample No	Unity	Coherence	Topic Sentence	Sufficient Development
1	6	6	6	6
2	5	5	5	5
3	0	0	0	1
4	0	0	4	3
5	0	0	6	0
6	0	0	4	3
7	6	6	6	6
8	1	1	4	1
9	4	4	4	4
10	1	1	2	2
11	0	0	0	0
12	3	3	3	3
13	4	4	7	4
14	6	6	6	6
15	5	5	5	5
Total	41	30	62	49

Figure 2. Elements of Effective Paragraph
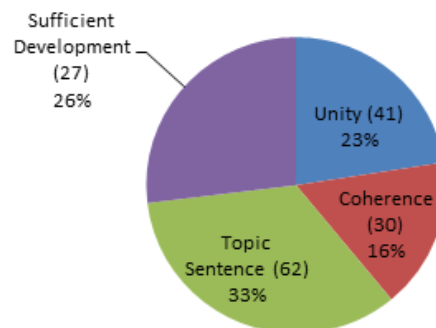
The accumulation of effective paragraph elements above determines whether a paragraph is effective or ineffective. The effectiveness of a paragraph is determined by the fulfillment of all elements in one paragraph: unity, coherence, topic sentence, and sufficient development. When all these elements are fulfilled, each element represents the score 1, the accumulation of all four is a perfect score 4. Then if there is 1, 2,3 elements absent

in the paragraph, it causes the paragraph ineffective. As a result, the score is defect: 1, 2, or 3. Consequently values does not make the paragraph considered ineffective. The content analysis process of the paragraph is referred to table 1. In the table, the paragraph doesn't get a perfect score which means the paragraph is ineffective. The following is the accumulation of effective and ineffective paragraph of 76 sample paragraphs.

Table 4. the amount of Effective and Ineffective		
Sample No	Paragraph	
	Effective	Ineffective
1	1	5
2	0	5
3	4	0
4	4	0
5	6	0
6	5	0
7	0	6
8	4	1
9	0	4
10	3	1
11	6	0
12	0	3
13	4	4
14	0	6
15	0	5
Total	36	40

Figure 3. Effective and Ineffective Paragraph
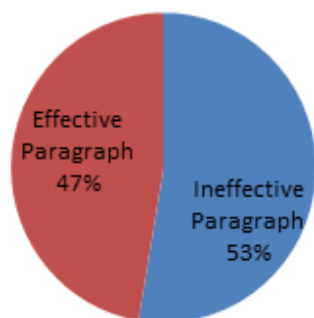
V. CONCLUSION

From the foregoing analysis, it is overt that topic sentence is most frequent element which appear 62 times or 33 % in the 76 paragraphs. It is followed by sufficient development with 49 or 26 %, unity 41 or 23 %, and coherence 30 or 16 %. From these results it can be concluded that Indonesian EFL learners have the most difficulty in applying coherence in paragraphs. This implies that they still have weak skills in applying coherence in the paragraph so the focus of learning should be on this subject. In addition, the teaching of other elements of effective paragraph i.e. unity, sufficient development, and topic sentence should be taught comprehensively to make sure the students understand how to apply them appropriately in paragraph.

The accumulation of the previous elements shows that there are more ineffective paragraph (40 or 53 %) than the effective ones (36 or 47 %) of overall paragraph (76). This result shows that the students comprehension and skill to write effective paragraph is still low. This also indicates that another alternative approach to teach effective paragraph in academic writing is necessary.

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