
Building Essay Outline Through Discourse Illustration: Project-Based Learning in Higher Vocational Education

Gusti Nyoman Ayu Sukerti* and Kadek Yogi Susana

Politeknik Negeri Bali, STMIK STIKOM Indonesia

*ayusukerti@pnb.ac.id

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Abstract—Project-based learning is an innovative learning model which emphasizes contextual learning through complex activities. Project-based learning focused on learning the core concepts, involving learners in problem-solving investigations and other meaningful tasks, giving students the opportunity to work autonomously construct their own knowledge and ultimately produce a real product. Project-based learning can be used to achieve a certain competency through a project within a specified period through the steps of planning, execution, reporting, communicating the results and evaluation activities. This research was aimed to analyze the use of discourse illustration in writing essay outlines in order to help students in the stage of constructing ideas. This study focused on the use of discourse illustration in the context of teaching English for vocational students with a framework of project-based learning as a basic model. The goal of this method was to improve students' engagement in writing and ease the obstacles faced when developing ideas. Participants were 28 third semester students enrolled in a three-year undergraduate program in Informatics Management whose English proficiency was lower intermediate. The outlines produced by students were evaluated and discussed in peer review until the drafts were final. The study revealed that students were able to construct a more coherent and cohesive essay and engaged in the completion of the project in a more positive attitude as they could develop their competence in writing and enhance their collaborative skill to work as a team.

Keywords: Constructing outline; discourse illustration; essay writing; project-based learning

I. INTRODUCTION

The problems educators face in practice are complex, diverse, and often difficult to address. These issues range across teaching and learning topics—such as lesson and curriculum development, student motivation and engagement or disciplinary issues—to concerns around school climate, relationships with parents or community, and others (Henriksen, Richardson, & Mehta, 2017). Education is a central factor for social and economic progress and many studies have highlighted various aspects that make education a bridge between economic system and society (Guarini, Laureti, & Garofalo, 2018). Educational programs that

are sensitive to cultural diversity ought to use accessible and relevant materials for students with different cultural backgrounds (Pereira & Marques-Pinto, 2018).

The role of education in promoting human capital and well-being is an enduring issue in development studies (Jordá & Alonso, 2017). Educational environment includes broad aspects in education comprising internal and external parts of sense: student-teacher interaction, physical structures and facilities, and a concern about students' psychosocial and emotional needs (Rochmawati, Rahayu, & Kumara, 2014). Educational sciences programmes, especially in teacher education, are very popular, and there is fierce competition

for the available places (Hyytinen, Toom, & Postareff, 2018). A cyclic model, where teacher knowledge was acquired at the same English school they are currently teaching was proposed as an alternative procedure to calculate the transformity of teachers (Lupinacci & Bonilla, 2018).

Various educational approaches nowadays have shown significant development due to the implementation of different teaching strategies to face current challenges and meet different outcomes. Nevertheless, the fundamental goal of education particularly in vocational level do not seem to undergo any principal changes, that is, to produce qualified output required by industry in terms of professionalism, competitiveness and competency. The work environment has several requirements including individuals with responsibility, self-management, interpersonal and project-management, teamwork and leadership skills.

The scarcity of skilled workers has often been attributed to, among other things, the considerable gap between educational systems and companies' needs, or to the fact that learning and training profiles are not suitable for current industry settings (Hasanefendic, Heitor, & Horta, 2016). Much less research has examined underage drinking in association with adolescents' choice of educational and career paths (Lushin, Jaccard, Ivaniushina, & Alexandrov, 2017). Education for all goals seem to have reached the point of descent; a focus on quantity led to a narrow interpretation of delivery and the implementation has been widely criticized (Blaak, Openjuru, & Zeelen, 2013). It highlights the importance of vocational education beyond labor market outcomes of beneficiaries of that education (Bernal, 2015). Pressure behind it has been the supposed lack of relevance of vocational education (De Bruijn & Leeman, 2011). Vocational educators may also be required to serve on committees and in leadership roles (Hoekstra & Crocker, 2015). No previous research has investigated the effects of welfare reform on vocational education and training, defined broadly as educational training that provides practical experience in a particular occupational field, despite the importance of this type of education for women likely to be on welfare (Dave, Reichman, Corman, & Das, 2011).

In vocational education, these requirements are expected to be made integral to the courses that the students take during their

study including in English classes. When the students take English course, the ability to composing essays is of great importance because it provides space for teachers to highlight not only students' ability in expressing ideas but also to shape skills needed in completing scheduled task through series of phases. To compose writing using project-based learning method highlights the necessity to work well in a team in order to produce individual result. This would mean a call for acquisition of 'new skills' such as the ability to work as a team, to find and select relevant information, to coordinate with others one's efforts, to network with people thinking and acting ideas in order to produce a comprehensive written output (Markham, T., Larmer, J., & Ravitiz, 2003)

However, writing has been long considered as one of the toughest skill to master, even in source language. The gap between professional need and the obstacles faced by students in writing underlines that teaching methods or strategies should involve more than teacher talk or the usual lecture type technique of teaching in instructional approach. Instructional approach that involves much teacher talk, fewer activities for students and lack of interaction between teacher-student tend to result in passivity in many classrooms. In this classroom setting, the strategies used by teachers hardly provide opportunities for the growth of creative and critical thinking. In fact, one of the most important skills that students should develop and which have been overlooked was writing. Learning to write has been a mounting problem for most students. With the present state of the Indonesian vocational education system, there seemed to be a pressing need to redirect and reassess existing teaching or learning strategies so as to attend and blend with future career demands and world-of-employment tasks that involve skills beyond theories. Project-based learning has been implemented in classroom as an instructional approach that presents learners with problems to solve or products to develop. As is discussed in (Thomas, 2000), project-based learning (PBL) is a model that organizes learning around projects which are complex tasks, based on challenging questions or problems, involving students in design, problem-solving, decision making, or investigative activities; giving students the opportunity to work relatively autonomously over extended periods of time; and culminating in realistic products or presentations. In addition, students developed confidence and

self-direction as they move through both team-based and independent work. Many of the skills developed through PBL are those which employers usually seek: team working spirit, the ability to work well and get along with others, make informed decisions, take initiative, and solve real-world problems.

II. METHODS

The process of data collection in this research was done through observation following (Edwards, A., & Talbot, 1999) on classroom observations by observing the process of the implementation. Information was collected and was interpreted in this study, which is in accordance to the suggestion of (O'Leary, 2004). Furthermore to describe the students' attitude toward the project, the researchers used students' reflections about the process and the use of discourse illustration in building outline. Projects were given in a form of structured tasks and the final outcome was individual essay. After the theme and final outcome of the project are defined, the students and teacher figure out project details that guide students from the opening activity to the completion of the project. At this step, students consider their roles, responsibilities, and collaborative work groups. After negotiating a deadline for project completion, students arrange the timing for gathering, sharing, and compiling information, and then presenting their final project. At the end, students' perceptions towards the stages were used to give highlight of the use of PBL and discourse illustration in this study.

III. DISCUSSION

Students were given instructional guidelines of writing cause and effect essays. In the implementation of PBL with discourse illustration, students were asked to write one cause with multiple effects essay under the topic "Cyber Bullying in Social Media". The outline with the inclusion of discourse illustration was constructed in group discussion and then was reviewed and evaluated by the lecturer through presentation. After students got the result, they developed the outline into a complete essay draft. The draft was evaluated in peer review (in groups) and was evaluated by the lecturer with checklists and rubric of grade. Students then did reflection based on the evaluation.

Students got necessary comments and suggestions in their essay to help them construct a final piece of writing. The students

reflect on the language expressions and the subject matter acquired during the project. They were also asked to make recommendations that could be used to enhance similar projects in the future. The lecturer provided students with feedback on their language and content learning. Students' knowledge and competences were evaluated as a result of project work and adequate assessment was based on the checklist and rubric in three different stages including outlining, drafting and completing final essay; students were supervised during revision. Based on the observations during classroom activities and data collection both in the form of questionnaire and interview, the results of this study elaborates two aspects (1) the implementation of PBL in English II Class and (2) the students' perspectives toward writing project with discourse illustration.

Project-based Learning Implementation

The implementation of PBL in English II Class consisted several steps including brainstorming, outlining, presenting outline and research plan, drafting, peer-review process and final revision with essay as the final product. Students were divided into groups of four with randomly chosen members to work collaboratively and produce individual essays as the final products. Every individual in groups has significant role in the process of writing the essay in each stages.

Brainstorming

In this phase, students were given model and explanation of essay with multiple causes including the characteristics, the structure and the organization of ideas. Students were given time to have discussion on criteria of well-organized essay by analyzing the structures of a sample essay and giving evaluation based on an author's check lists. A model of essay with multiple effects was given to be used as the basis of analysis. By doing analysis, students could get insight on criteria of good essay including how to build coherent arguments from the introductory paragraph, body paragraph and concluding paragraph.

Outlining

Once the students agreed on the topic that they were assigned to write and the deadline to finish the essay, they started to build the outline in one group for a topic "The Cause of Cyber bullying in Social Media". Students built their outline based on the discourse illustration given by lecturer. This was an important step as students often feel

discouraged to start writing and are worried that they will not be able to produce essay with

good organization. The excerpt of discourse illustration can be seen as following.

You are going to be given illustrations for the controlling ideas to be developed in your body paragraph

Each illustration is a basis for you to form controlling ideas with your own words.

Topic : The causes of cyber bullying in social media

Illustration 1 : Teenagers who had experienced being a victim of bullying in real life may have a tendency to think that harassment is something natural. To be a bully will give them satisfaction because they feel good to know that they have the power to make other people feel what it is like to be a victim. When they can find other weaker persons to be bullied, they will enjoy it as a part of depression release. They refuse to stay in a position of being a victim, so they seek other victim to be in their shoes.

Hint 1 : Now, you want your readers to know that cyber bullying may be caused by something related to the motivation to move from a position of being a victim to a position of being a bully. Based on the illustration, what is the main point you want to share to your readers?

Controlling idea 1:

Topic sentence 1:

Illustration 2 : Some teenagers grow up to be bullies because they need a room to boost their ego. By bullying weaker persons, they feel entertained and strong. They constantly feed their ego because they really love to get recognition as powerful member of social networking. By doing constant bullying, other teenagers will see them with admiration and this situation makes the bullies feel content.

Hint 2 : Now, you want your readers to know that cyber bullying may be caused by something related to eagerness to be recognized by other people. Based on the illustration, what is the main point you want to share to your readers?

Controlling idea 2:

Topic sentence 2:

Illustration 3: Peer pressure may invite teenagers to copy their friends' behavior even when it is totally wrong. Some of them will think it is cool to bully others because many of their friends do the same thing. If they do not do it, the bullies will see them as being incompatible with them or they are not part of the 'powerful cycle'. Thus, teenagers try to fit in the social life by copying what is done by other teenagers of their age.

Hint 3 : Now, you want your readers to know that cyber bullying may be caused by something related to willingness to fit in by following the crowd or what is done by the majority. Based on the illustration, what is the main point you want to share to your readers?

Controlling idea 3:

Topic sentence 3:

Presenting Outline and Research Plan

The outline and plans for necessary researches were presented in front of the classroom to get feedbacks and evaluation from other groups and the lecturer. Participation in conversations, discussions, observation and investigation strengthens students' understandings on the areas from which the topics are drawn (Katz, L.G., & Chard, 2000) and (Stoller, 2006). They learn to learn from each other and view their peers as links in a chain via exchange of information and negotiation of meanings to achieve the agreed goals. In the outlining process, students produced the controlling ideas and topic sentences for each body paragraphs. They then developed a thesis statement which covers the controlling ideas in the introductory paragraph. Based on the observation, students had a positive engagement in giving feedbacks to other groups as they could reflect on their own outline by giving suggestions or comments. They also got necessary feedback from the lecturer to improve the quality of their outline and research plan. Most of the students chose to have literature research and interview with friends to collect the data.

Drafting

Students continued to develop the outline into individual drafts and use the result of their research to support the arguments. Students were encouraged to use appropriate citation based on the article research. They also process the data they got during interview to be part of supporting sentences. These two steps helped to reduce the possibility of practicing plagiarism as lecturer could monitor the originality of students' writing by the citation and data collection that they submitted together with the final essay. This sequence of activities is viewed as creative tasks, involving combinations of task types: reading, ordering and sorting information, comparing and problem solving (Willis, 1996) and (Hedge, 2000). Students are involved in seeking answers to questions they have formulated by themselves, or in cooperation with their teachers, and proceed with investigation of an in-depth study on a selected topic.

Peer-review process

The drafts were evaluated in the stage of peer-review in which students in one group exchange their drafts to get comments and suggestions and lecturer's evaluation. The feedbacks may in the form of essay structure, grammar or mechanical errors. Students and lecturer were equipped with checklist and

rubric score as a guide to their assessment. This process played an important role as students were encouraged to give comments based on their background knowledge in terms of writing essay and the topic being discussed. Hence, this process could help students to reflect on their own writing while assessing other friend's work. Students were then allowed to discuss and work on the feedbacks in group in order to give necessary explanation on the peer-review process. (Coleman, 1992) stated making students perform concrete tasks in pairs and groups is common for foreign languages training; this practice stimulates cooperation and knowledge exchange amongst students and it encourages individual students to talk more. Collaborative skills and emotional quotient were being involved in this process because students were required to give and receive feedbacks in groups.

Final Revision

After the process of evaluation, students did some necessary revisions to their drafts and were allowed to have discussion with their group members. The final essay was submitted according to due date that the students and lecturer agreed on. Three best essays were chosen to be read out loud in front of the classroom. Based on the observation, most of the students were able to work well in groups although some significant revisions were done to improve the structure of the essays.

Students' Perception towards the Implementation of Discourse Illustration in Project-Based Learning

Students who were used to have writing tasks instead of writing project showed a various perceptions towards the implementation of project-based learning particularly on the use of discourse illustration in outlining phase. This section elaborates students' perception on the phases of project-based learning

Communicative Skills

Project-based learning provides opportunity for students to use language in a natural context based on the need of students in group discussion. Thus, students were encouraged to actively participate in an activity which leads students to use their practical language skills in an authentic context. Class observation, the results of questionnaire and interview showed that students felt more confident and had a better focus in group discussion when they finished developing outline based on the discourse illustration.

Students gained confidence they were sure that they had started it in a right track. The study revealed that discourse illustration aided students in brainstorming phase and gave a clear overview of the topic to be developed. Hence, while they had to give contribution in groups, they were already equipped with the same background knowledge and boosted their confidence in delivering ideas or feedbacks.

(Data 1) Group discussion helps me to find various kinds of ideas and references so I can write good essay

(Data 2) With the use of discourse illustration, my group has better discussion and we have clues on what we are going to discuss. Usually we are confused of finding ideas.

Data (1) highlights that student find some benefits from group discussion because it provides various kind of references to improve the quality of the essay. Student could communicate and share ideas with their friends in order to ensure that they could produce essay with high readability. Data (2) shows that student also find that by group discussion, they could check whether the content of their essay was already based on the given topic. The advantages that the students got during group discussion proved that they could develop their communicative skill well. This resulted in a positive attitude towards learning as students including those who seldom talked during class discussion engaged in a more active participation. It increased social, cooperative skills, and group cohesiveness. Project-based learning is said to motivate students as they are wholly engaged in the learning task. Students showed progress on the practice of using English during the group discussion because they had already equipped with enough knowledge on the topic being discussed. Enjoyment and motivation also derive from the fact that classroom language is not predetermined, but depends on the nature of the project (Lee, 2002). This also helped to encourage the development of personal growth as students had to incorporate several areas of skills in group discussion including responsibility in solving problem, meeting the deadline and improving self-management. In group discussion, students had a chance to improve the quality of their work by helping other members in one group particularly in the phase of peer-review. They were responsible to give enough contribution so that they could enhance their individual proficiency as well as provide benefits to other members in their group. Most students took advantage of the

opportunity to share ideas with their group members. According to students' reflections, they appreciated other members' sharing because they learned more about other fields. They also learned how to engage in conversation with friends having different mastery of English. Some specific comments that were written by students were as follows:

(Data 3) I like to help my friends because I can help them to correct errors in their writing even though there will be revision from lecturer

(Data 4) I put myself in a position where I always respect my friends' opinion to be discussed further to get an agreement. I am ready to get criticism and suggestions from my friends.

Both of data (3) and (4) emphasizes that students enjoyed the process of sharing ideas and helping to solve problems faced by their friends. The class observation also showed that students with better competence play a significant role in motivating their friends to write good essay through peer-review process. Data (5) shows that student's cooperative skill developed through the process of negotiation in solving problems and the stage of having a face-to-face discussion after completing peer-review process.

Writing Performance

The process of constructing outline with a basis of discourse illustration facilitated students with guideline in developing ideas. Most of the students stated that the guideline helped them to have a better focus in writing the topic sentences. They usually had difficulty in writing topic sentences as they failed to organize their ideas into proper context. The implementation of project-based learning with structured activities provides opportunity for students to examine the task from different perspectives. At the same time, it allowed students to construct a smooth flow of ideas and students were able to arrange an essay with better coherency and cohesiveness because the use of discourse illustration aided to construct clear outline.

(Data 5) When there was no discourse illustration, we searched the information online first, and then we talked about it, and then we discussed what idea would be easy to develop, and then we tried to make an outline out of it, and finally, we tried to develop the essay. In conclusion, it was quite a long journey. But when there was discourse illustration for us, we just needed to read the discourse illustration

and looked for the points in each paragraph and made the thesis, and from that we could start to make the outline and develop the essay.

Data (5) illustrated that discourse illustration could ease the students' difficulty of constructing ideas into an outline. Discourse illustration also helped them to arrange their research plans because the points in each illustration lead to keywords of topics to be developed. Thus, it helped to improve students' motivation in completing the writing projects and enjoyed each stage in a more positive attitude. To ensure that students had a good outline to develop is a crucial thing because the results of the questionnaire indicated that most of them felt reluctant and anxious when dealing with writing task because they were confused of where to start and how to develop ideas into a well-structured piece of writing (Sukerti, G.N.A., & Yuliantini, 2018). At the beginning, most of the students admitted that they faced some obstacles when they had to write in English including the process of constructing ideas into good arguments.

(Data 6) Writing in English is something complicated because writing depends on someone's mood and the background knowledge of a given topic

(Data 7) The problem in writing is to connect one paragraph with the following paragraph and I sometimes feel not confident to write new sentences as I'm afraid that it won't have good coherency

(Data 8) Writing in English is a challenging thing because I need to think of appropriate grammar to use in order to make good writing

As stated in the above data, students found some problems in writing because it requires not only a sound knowledge of sentence organization but also background knowledge of the topic. Students also felt a degree of hesitation when they had to consider how to keep good flow of ideas and some grammatical aspects. However, as stated by the following data, project-based learning gave benefit for students in the process of develop their essay because they could get insights from other friends in one group.

(Data 9) PBL (project-based learning) gave a huge impact on my process in completing assignment because I could discuss it with my other friends in one group before I develop essay on my own. The point is that I could get a 'big picture' of what I was going to write

Data (9) emphasized that students could improve their writing skill as they manage to overcome the problems in the phases of writing. They gained more confidence in writing because they got necessary guideline from the beginning such as the example of appropriate grammar, vocabulary and sentence structure to use.

(Data 10) Using discourse illustration is more beneficial because I have some sentences to use as comparison even though the sentences are short. All of our ideas get more focused and have better structure.

(Data 11) We have guidelines when we are making the outline, know how to connect ideas and it can be used as example for the next project in the future.

(Data 12) By using discourse illustration, I can write better sentences and my writing has good flow and focus.

(Data 13) Discourse illustration helps me to get ideas in writing outline and my group can understand the topic better and continue to write the paragraph

As described in the data above, students felt more confident in developing ideas because they are sure that the outline are well-structured, and have a cohesive sentences. Discourse illustration also helped students to brainstorm ideas to be developed because they have clues on topic sentences and foster their comprehension on writing structures.

Mastery of Grammar and Vocabulary

The use of discourse illustration not only helped students to write outline with better structure but also gave hints to some vocabularies (terms) and tense to use. This process aided to ease the difficulties with ideas and language use.

Project-Based Learning (PBL) approach lends itself to the integration of language- and content-learning objectives because language use and explicit attention to language related features (e.g., forms, vocabulary, skills) are needed at various points in the exploration of themes. In project work, a sequence of activities is introduced in multiple stages of development for the success of project (Stoller, 2006). These activities are combined in working towards an agreed goal and centered on a theme, or topics, relevant to the specific content being studied. Thus, students' reflection showed that in addition to the improvement in collaborative skills and writing competence, students also gained some

improvement in the areas of grammar and vocabulary.

(Sukerti, G.N.A., & Yuliantini, 2018) elaborated that participation in PBL projects aids to fully develop students' skills in decision-making and improve their initiative as they have to make many important decisions on their own throughout the completion of the project: from selecting topic, designing plan, discussing the deadline, outlining, drafting, evaluating their works, and finishing the task. In brief, the positive attitude exhibited by the students towards collaborative learning and learning autonomy development suggests that PBL may produce better results compared to the monotonous teacher-led language education which still dominates the English language teaching in Indonesia. The stages of project-based learning especially the stages of outlining and peer-review gave some benefits for students as they could get examples of appropriate use of grammar and vocabulary from discourse illustration and feedbacks as illustrated by the comments below:

(Data 14) PBL helped me to understand grammar better and helped to improve my skill to work in a team

(Data 15) Discourse illustration helped to reduce errors in writing because it helped to improve competence in using correct grammar so the readers won't get confused

(Data 16) PBL helped me to solve problems on grammar better because I could discuss it with my group

The data showed that working under project-based learning helped students to have better understanding of grammar through solving real problems that they faced during writing the essay. Students were directed to be involved in a context of specific language use including vocabularies and tense based on the given topic. This study showed that problem solving has led students to develop learning autonomy and helped to increase students' awareness on their limitations and how these weaknesses could be overcome. (Sukerti, G.N.A., & Yuliantini, 2018) highlighted that participation in PBL projects also helped to maximize student decision-making and initiative as they would have to make many important decisions on their own throughout the project. (Kettanun, 2015) further mentioned that enjoyment and motivation may also derive from the fact that classroom language is not predetermined, but depends on the nature of the project. The purposeful and meaningful use of

language will make language learning more fruitful as it encourages authentic learning experience that will help to motivate students to independently seek knowledge and continuously improve their language ability; it stimulates autonomy and life-long learning in addition to increasing English language competency.

(Data 17) By the use of discourse illustration, I can see the examples of vocabularies to use and learn some new vocabularies

(Data 18) I learn how my lecturer actually writes sentences using the right tense and grammar

(Data 19) When using the discourse illustration, our discussion has better direction because we have the illustration for the outline and we have the example of sentences to write in the essay

Students could use discourse illustration to get insight or examples of sentence patterns and kinds of vocabularies to use according to the topic. Students also use language in a natural context within every phase involved in project based learning. Thus, language usage evolves from the series of tasks and develops naturally inside the group discussion as a response to the students' needs. According to the above data, students use language expressions as a means to accommodate smooth communication and functions as a tool in acquiring knowledge. As also stated by (Hedge, 2000), language is used at various points in a project as students negotiate plans, analyze and collect information as well as discuss ideas. These prominent characteristics (e.g., processing and making sense of knowledge, use of language as communication, learning a language via content, collaboration with peers and teachers) make PBL the natural language learning context, in which students have opportunities to recycle known language while focusing on topics or themes, rather than on specific language features (Thitivesa, D., & Essien, 2013). Learning grammar and vocabulary based on the context of situation allows students to become fully engaged with learning through activities that immerse students in meaningful ways for language use for real communication in both written and spoken areas.

IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the result of the study, it can be concluded that the use of discourse illustration

in constructing outline gave positive impacts in improving students' abilities particularly in the areas of collaborative skill, writing competence and the mastery of grammar and vocabulary. Discourse illustration made students' discussion have a better focus, the ideas are more organized and coherent, students were able to learn new vocabularies (know what terms to use), learn how to organize sentence with appropriate grammar from examples (illustrations) as they had a proper guideline to be used as comparison. Using discourse illustration in project-based learning gave positive impacts towards students' attitude and helped them to gain improvement in terms of skills to write, language mastery and practical skills. Students experienced improvement in the areas of communicative skills, writing competence and mastery of grammar and vocabularies. The positive attitude exhibited by the students towards those three aspects suggests that the implementation of project-based learning might contribute innovation to the monotonous teacher-led language education which characterizes the English language learning in most of higher vocational education.

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