An Analysis of Student's Ability in Writing at Riau University Pekanbaru - Indonesia

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Abstract—**This study focused on the analysis of students' writing performance. It aimed to ascertain the students' ability in using grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling, coherence and cohesion. To measure the students' writing ability, they were told to do a writing task to be completed in less than 75 minutes in duration. The task asked them to imagine that they were working for a company in Batam, a fast-growing administrative town in Kepulauan Riau Province. They were told to write a letter to their friends who wanted to know about the companies they were working for, the companies' future prospects, the availability of vacancies in them, and the requirements to be met if their friends wanted to apply for positions there. The findings the study showed that grammatical problems seemed to be the most frequent made by the students ranging from error in using plural forms, articles, verb, forms, clauses, passive voice and prepositions. The findings also indicated that problems in coherence and cohesion stemmed from the absence of cohesive markers in the students' sentences which affected how they put ideas in their letters coherently. However, despite the problems the students faced in writing, on the whole the results of their writing were good enough as they were able to include most of the important information required by their friends.**

Index Terms—**writing, students' ability, Language Center, Riau University, ELT in Indonesia**

I. INTRODUCTION

During the past decade Riau Province has been developing very steadily in many areas particularly in business sector. This development is marked by the increasing number of local and foreign companies operating there especially after the commencement of the Singapore-Johor-Thailand Growth Triangle (SIJORI) and the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT). More companies and industries are concentrating their operations in this province as Riau is commercially strategic in terms of its productions of petroleum, natural gas, and other products such as pulp and paper that contribute much to the national income.

The presence of these companies and industries opens great opportunity for the local people as they need more workers to work for them. Very unfortunately, the quality of human resources in Riau Province is relatively low that inevitably affects people's income. Approximately 70 percent of workers are primary school graduates; as a result, jobs available could not be much utilized by the local people because they do not have professional skills and knowledge. It was said by the Rector of Riau University in a graduation ceremony of 2014 that of every five jobs available only two could be absorbed by the local people whereas the other three were obtained by people from outside Riau Province such as those form Java. Today, more job opportunities are widely open especially in Batam, a small town which is close to Singapore and has become the Centre of business activity in Kepulauan Riau Province ever since the commencement of SIJORI and IMT-GT. It is proved that many local university graduates have not got jobs because they have no qualifications that match the needs of the job market. Even if the qualifications do match the job market, they are unable to compete with those from outside Riau for they do not have other related skills such as the ability to read and write in English

As the only public university in the province, Riau University is expected to produce graduates who are later ready for use after they have completed their studies in various disciplines. In order to make this expectation come to reality for the future development of Riau province and Indonesia as a whole, Riau University has set up a permanent language centre where students and lecturers of all faculties within the university have access to learn English in order to equip themselves with the four language skills. This opportunity is especially given to non-English majors to provide them with the ability to communicate in English so that they can find jobs soon after they graduate. To achieve this, of course takes time as students' ability in the productive skills particularly writing is very low. Although they have been studying English since Junior High School, they are still unable to write a good single paragraph. This may partly be caused by of lack of practice. Moreover, the materials emphasise more on reading so that they have little opportunity to speak and write. Many students actually do take English courses at other places, but the courses concentrate their teaching more on conversation rather than on writing. Consequently, the students' performance in writing until they are sitting at the university is not much improving.

There is no doubt that language plays a key role in many purposes of human comunication where various transactions and social interactions are taking place. Language, in fact, exists to fulfil a range of communicative function, and these functions are reflected in the shape of the language itself. The comunicative language is performed both in spoken and written froms each of which has its own respective functions and boundaries of use. English as an internasioanal language, for example, is widely used all over the world for different pupuses such as in education, politics, business, and so forth.

It is a fact that most people spend their every day life more in speaking rather than writing in order to get in touch and interact with each other. But as the world has been developing in terms of people's need for edequate means of communication in various settings, spoken language seems   insufficient to cover all messages to be conveyed. Therefore, the role of written language in this respect is of great importance (Halliday 1994).

Some studies on student's performance of the four language skills have been undertaken by the English department teaching staff of the Faculty of Teachers Training and Education, Riau University, but the studies dealt more with students of English department. Given that English is also taught in all faculties and departments within the university and is one of the major subjects to take up, it is worth noting that a study on the writing performance of non- English majors needs to be conducted. The purpose of this study was to find out the student's performance in writing English so that strengths and weaknesses could be discovered in order to take necessary measures for improvement.

II. WRITTEN LANGUAGE

Written language has a number of functions that differ from spoken language. To put these function into operation is not easy since when writing one is engaged in an activity that is usually at the same time both private and public in the sense that the there is no direct cooperation between the writer and the reader. That is why the convetions of writing tend to be less flexible and the language used tends to be standardised (Broughton 1978).

Harmer (1991) reveals that the need for accuracy in writing is very high; sentences must be written in correct grammatical structures. More importantly, there is a greater need for logical organisation compared to speaking. Halliday (1994) strengthens Harmer's idea saying that written language is more complex and its complexity is seen in the way clauses are linked together. Furthermore, in speaking the speaker, on the one hand, can co-operate and negotiate meaning with the listerner, and the listener, on the other hand, can benefit from the speaker's way of delivering the mesasage where he or she could repeat what he or she was saying, simplify the grammar, vary intonation and stress, speed up and slow down, for the listener to undestand. What is more, the speaker can also use facial expression, gesture, and body movement in order to ease the communication. All of these strategies cannot be found in written language. Chase (1983) says, *"The speaker's chief goal is to get across what he has in mind, and he is not likely to be interested in grammar unless there is a good reason to think of it usually there is, ... after someone has spoken ungrammatically' I doubt if the average person would care. But it would be damaging to say 'You did not get across what you had in mind'."*

This statement implies that the main focus in speaking is getting ideas across where mistakes in grammar are somewhat tolerable since the speaker whilst speaking is under time pressure as he does not have much time to think of what to say and how to say it. Writing, on the other hand, is more likely to provide elaborated information that requires sequencing, structure, and stance which are not the characteristics of spoken language. It is argued that speech tends to be socially placed on recording things, completing tasks, buildig ideas or arguments, whereas in speaking more emphasis is put on building relationships. Though speaking and writing have certain things in common, when they are put into functions, the style of language is different because the social activites are different as well. Clearly, in writing there a one-way communication process where the writer sends information to the reader and he or she may not get the reply to what he or she has written. On the contrary, in speaking there is a two-way comunication process in which both speaker and listener are engaged in interaction (Tribble 1996). Leech (1982) views that speaking and writing differ in form as a result of the difference in medium. That is to say, there are features of speech which are absent in writing such as rhythm, intonation, an non-linguistic noises such as signs and laughter. Given that speech is performed in a face-to-face situation, it can also be accompanied by non-verbal communication such as gestures, body language and facial expression. Writing, on the other hand, also has several features that cannot be found in speaking such as punctuation, paragraphing and the capitalization of letters. It would be correct to say, therefore, that the major difference between written language and spoken language lies in the need for more accuracy. Such a demand for more accuracy in writing consequently brings about some problems on the part of ESL/EFL learners.

A. Problems Encountered by Learners of ESL/EFL in Writing

Kaplan (1987) views that lack of differentiation amongst varieties of writing a varieties of audience appears to be one of the problems in acquiring the ability to write in a second language. In reality, writing varies in forms which require composing such as formulations and registers. There are forms which require composing such as theoretical formulation in which the act of writing is used. On the other hand, there are forms which do not require composing such as routine translation in which the translator only transfers the message of a particular language to another.

It should be noted that the message of the written language may be addressed to a large audience whether they are known to the writer or not such as readers of personal letters and readers of books or periodicals. In or she may know

very well and thus the message is usually written in an informal way; whereas in a book or in a report the language must be written in a formal way according to the rules and conventions.

Broughton (1978) observes that other problems that might be confronted by ESL writers deal with the script of English, grammar and lexis, and expressing what to be said. It is the fact that the scripts of many languages are different from that of English which may bring about writing problems on the part of ESL/EFL students. Grammar, as part of discourse, is an integral part of language for sentences without grammar are more likely to cause confusion and misinterpretation. Nevertheless, grammar would not exist without lexis; both of them are interdependent. Batstone (1994) views that grammar does not exist on its own, but it is interdependent on lexis, and in many cases grammatical regularity and acceptability are constrained and conditioned by words. Halliday (1994) strengthens this idea suggesting that the idea of a piece of writing would be easy to grasp if appropriate lexical items are used. Cook (1989) assumes that students' difficulty in writing stems from inadequate lexical items or the complexity of grammatical structure at sentence level.

Another problem that may be confronted by ESL/EFL learners in writing is ease and comfort in expressing ideas which are linked with coherence and cohesion. Coherent organization and logical thought are both crucial in writing which are in some ways more difficult than in speaking as the reader is not in a position to clarify points they do not understand with the writer in the same way that the participants in a conversation can negotiate meaning and ask for repetition and clarification. The importance of coherence in a text is revealed by Kathleen Bardovi and Harlig (2001). They say, "*The sentences in well-formed writing are more like pieces in a jigsaw puzzle; the sentences interlock, each sentence building on the preceding ones while at the same time advancing discourse. Coherent writing, then, is dependent on how sentences fit together to form a whole. The fit is achieved by the way the elements are arranged within the sentences and the sentence patterns themselves.*"

This statement implies the close relationship between coherence and cohesion in writing where sentences should fit together in appropriate grammatical structures so that the overall idea of all the sentences are related to each other. Cohesion is very important in writing. This is an area that is relevant to all discourse whether spoken or written. To achieve cohesion in sentences needs the ability to handle grammar and words in sentences which is not easy for students. It has been assumed that the students' difficulties in writing stem from lack of vocabulary or the complexity of grammatical structure at sentence level (Cook 1989). Yet, in many ESL/EFL classrooms it is often discovered that students, whilst writing in English, are much influenced by the way they speak and write in their L1.

B. Effects of a First Language on Writing in English as a Second or Foreign Language

As mentioned previously, the complexity of written language results in some problems for ESL/ EFL learners to operate the functions of the written language. It may be true to say that writing is frequently difficult not only for non-native speakers but also for native speakers themselves. In writing the writer faces much difficulty which stems from a number of constraints. When an ESL/ EFL student is expressing an idea in writing he or she has to consider at least four structural levels, that is, overall text structure. To put these four into a piece of text is not easy at all (Kroll 1990). Very often ESL/ ELF learners manage to find appropriate strategies to help them cope with the problems. A number of studies on the possible effects of a first language on writing in English as a second and foreign language have been undertaken. Kroll (1990) in her study indicates that ESL writers will transfer writing abilities and strategies from their L1. They transfer the structure and vocabulary of L1 to L2 in an incorrect way. Kroll added that time might also be a key factor in other aspects of writing in the sense that the availability of time when completing a task is crucial since writing under pressure may lead to imperfection of the task. Kaplan (1987) also found out that English texts written by ESL learners are greatly different from the texts written by native speakers where the difference is noticeable at the level of syntax and rhetoric, that is, the organization of the whole text.

C. Written Language in the Indonesian Context

In Indonesia English is learned as a foreign language and taught as a major subject from Junior High school to university. Various teaching techniques under the umbrella of the communicative approach which is also called the PKG approach have been applied in an effort to achieve the goals of teaching English as a foreign language in the country. The communicative approach is putting the emphasis on providing students with the ability to use the four language skill in particular to develop the skills of effective reading which is the main objective of the official curriculum.

The teaching techniques at secondary school under the heading of the PKG approach are labeled as TPR (Total Physical Response), EGRA (Experience, Generalisation, Reinforencement and Apllication), PGR (Practice, Generalisation, Reinforcement), and Peer Teaching. These four teaching strategies only differ in the focus of the activities whilst classroom teaching is in progress; they come together to achieve the goal of teaching and learning English, that is, communicative competence, the ability to operate the linguistic forms of language into its functional form in various communication situations (Tomlinson 1990). However, since the aim of teaching English at secondary and university is to enable the students to be able to read English text books, the main focus of teaching prioritises to reading. Consequently, what is really meant by communicative competence as the main goal of learning English is in some respects is neglected as speaking and writing are considered secondary for a number of reasons.

To be honest, the students' speaking and writing performances when they were studying at secondary schools and while they are sitting at the university are not far apart unless they are taking English courses or majoring in English. This is perhaps partly caused by having more reading rather than listening, speaking and writing, apart from the quality of teachers and the real implementation of the teaching strategies mentioned beforehand.

III. METHODS

A. Research Design

The population of the study was non-English students of intermediate level who were taking an English course at Riau University Language Centre, Indonesia. Before the course commenced, approximately 80 participants from different faculties within the university were given a placement test in order to know at what level of English they would be placed in the course. It was found out that some 20 students were enrolled in the intermediate level alone most of whom were fourth year students. They all participated in the course untill the end of the programme. The course ran three days a week regularly. Each session lasted 100 minutes and the materials covered the four language skills taught by three instructors. When the data were gathered, of 20 students only 15 volunteered to do the given task. Therefore, it was decided that all of them became the sample of the study given that the number was not very great. The instrument employed to collect the data was a writing task in the form of a letter to measure the students' performance in writing which was relevant to their needs after they had completed their studies at the university. The task asked them to imagine that they were working for a foreign company in Batam. Then they were asked to do the task and complete it in less than 75 minutes under the supervision of both their instructors and the researcher in order to avoid collaboration among them while doing the task. The results of the task would be used to measure the students' mastery of grammar, the use of punctuation, spelling, coherence, cohesion, and the content of the task itself. The study was carried out at Riau University Language Centre, Indonesia. The study was purposely conducted at the writer's own institution in order to look closely at any problem in students'writing performance so that necessary steps for further improvements could be made in the near future.

B. The Data

The data of the study were obtained from the results of the writing task of 15 students who participated in the intermediate English course at Riau University Language Centre Pekanbaru, Indonesia. In doing the task the student were timed but not restricted to write the exact number of words in a letter in order to give them a feeling of relaxation and at the same time to avoid pressure and nervousness. On average each student wrote 150 words. The following data correspond to the result of the students' writing task and are presented separately in order to be easy to understand and to see clearly the characteristics and students' problems in writing based on the component to be measured. Some parts of the students' letters are intentionally not included here such as dates, inside addresses, salutations, complementary closings, and signatures.

IV. RESULTS

A. Problems in Grammar

It goes without saying that knowledge of grammar is essential for competent users of a language and it is necessary for students to bear in mind the importance of rules of grammar to apply in their writing. Unlike in speaking, words in sentences or paragraphs need to be written grammatically correct in writing. However, there is no doubt that student of L2 usually face grammatical problems in their writing regardless of the purpose. This group of intermediate English students experienced such problems when doing the task. The data shows that the grammatical errors lie in the use of plural forms, articles, verb forms, passive voice, clauses, and prepositions.

Problems in using the plural forms came up in many sentences of the student's letters most of which were regular plural. It seems as though the students made no distinction between countable nouns to indicate the number, the nouns are still written in singular. Such errors can be seen from the following examples:

The are **some big company** operating here such as travel Agency, Lexica company, Batam company; etc. (S2).

For your known, **all company** in Batam need worker who can Speak English (S6).

Product of the company here have distributed at **many Country** in the world (S7).

In terms of using articles, the data proved that the students were not very clear about when to use and not to use them. They misused articles in many words in their letters and they even left them out totally as shown in the examples below:

I am working in **electronic** company (S1).

You know, as manager of **big company** I should work hard and have little time for my own activities (S14).

They are **a** nice children, aren't they? (S6)

I think if you master **the** both above, you are easy to accepted, not only here, even in Singapore or Malaysia (S13).

Misuse of verb forms was another problem discovered in students' letters. The data showed that the students, for example, used the present tense for the past tense or the present perfect tense for the past tense. Disagreement between subject and verb was often noticeable particularly when the subject is the third person singular in the present singular in

the present simple. In addition, the students were unclear about the difference in use between the verb **be** and **full verb**. They often treated adjectives and nouns as verbs or the reverse. The data also indicated that the use of **to infinitive** was often misleading particularly after adjectives, auxiliaries, and the firs verbs. The next examples illustrate the errors made by the students in using verb forms.

You letter **arrive** in one week ago (S1).

I **have received** your letter last week (S10).

Our company **produce** some electric product (S2).

If you **success** as a distributor, later you will send to another branch of the company in the other country (S7).

I **sure** you are diligent boy (S1).

I am **apologize** not write back you letter (S13).

I am glad **received** your letter (S13)

You must **able** to speak English (S6).

I will **looking** for information (S12).

The next problem in grammar that the students encountered was how to deal with clauses. As shown in the data the students misused relative pronouns in adjective clauses such as using **which** instead of **who** (S13) that corresponds to the noun preceding it. The problem also arose as a result of the absence of a verb after **which** as can be seen from what was written by S4 and S11. The examples below illustrate each of these problems.

I work at PT. Nogoya **which** activities in oil field (S4).

There was many people **which** join it (S13).

My company **which** activity in electronic make television, radio, air condition and etc (S11).

The last grammatical problem the students had in their latters was how to use appropriate prepositions such as in dates, days, years, places and elsewhere in sentences. The data showed that the students used inappropriate prepositions before words in sentences. It seems that there was a tendency the students just followed the way they used prepositions in Indonesia Language and applied it in English. In other words, they were influenced by their L1 in using prepositions that may not always work in English. To make the above explanation clear, the following examples illustrate each of the problems.

Thank you a lot for your letter received **on** early June, 1997 (S14).

I was received your letter **at** July, 20 1997 (S2).

Sometimes I work at night to follow the schedule and **in** Sunday I get holiday (S2).

I am happy **at** Batam because I have my job **at** there (S5).

For addition, you can send other certificate you have (S6).

B. Problems in Vocabulary

It is agreed that vocabulary plays a key role to make meaning of sentences clear and understandable. In English one meaning may be expressed by more than one lexical item that my vary in use according to the context. Therefore, words should be carefully selected especially in writing because misusing words could break down meaning and may result in misunderstanding in communication. Whether or not a piece of writing is good is judged not only from the grammatical point of view but also from its lexical point of view and other factors such as its organization. In fact, the data shows that the students made mistakes in using appropriate words in context that may lead the readers to misunderstand the whole ideas of sentences. Lexical errors also appeared in word formation such as using nouns for verbs and nouns for adjectives or vice-versa. The examples below give a clear picture of students' lexical problems in their latters.

(1) Errors in Using Lexical Items

You can **enter** your application in this company (S2).

This company become more and more increasing **development** and good prospect because Batam is strategic place and many foreigner **pass away** and do business to this city (S8).

If you want to come I will **invite** you in harbor (S2).

Product of the company also **go out** to many provinces in Indonesia, Malaysia & Singapore (S5).

(2) Errors in Using Word Classes

I believe you will **succes** for secretary position because you beautiful and really smart (S3).

You must work hard in this company because it is **growth** and has hard completion (S3).

If you **interesting**, please and your application to my company a/n Personal Manager PT. Surya Mas Jl. Bukit Raya Batam (S11).

If you are **come** from chemistry student you can work at my company (S4).

C. Problems in Punctuation

Punctuation is just like traffic signs in the streets that tell people where to go and where to stop. When the traffic signs are well-organised, the traffic will run smoothly. In contrast, if they are ill-organised, more accidents are likely to take place and more dangers will follow. This situation also applies to the art of writing. When sentences in paragraphs use correct punctuation, ideas will go smoothly and are easy to understand by the readers. On the contrary, when punctuation is ignored, ideas may be difficult to convey; consequently, communication may not run smoothly. In conjunction with the students' writing task the data shows that more errors arise in misuse of punctuation particularly

capitalisation. The students kept using small letters after periods or full-stops. What is more, they used capital letters for words which were not supposed to be capitalised or vice-versa. Misuse of commas was also noticeable in some areas in students letters. They put commas in places where there is no need to put them or they used commas in the positions of periods. Further details of errors made by the students in punctuation can be seen in the following examples:

(1) Errors in Using capitalisation

I work as a field supervisor. **it** is a big company, **it** product are TV, VIDIO, Tape recorder(S2).

Right now I work In foreign company which operate in **C**argo and **F**shing field (S10).

(2) Errors in Using Commas and Apostrophes

It's product is very good. **It's** quality so good (S7).

I work in electric company, our company produce some electronic product (S2).

I am sorry, because I nearly forget to tell you one thing. You must work hard in this company, because it is growth and has hard competition (s3).

D. Problems in spelling

Spelling also needs to be taken into account in writing for misspelling may create miss understanding. If one letter is misplaced or missing in a word the meaning may be different and cause confusion. The data proves that students seemed to be unaware of spelling mistakes. They sometimes missed a letters in a word, added a letters in it or they spelled words in their L1. The following examples illustrate each of the problems.

We plan to built the **bigest** chemistry industry in Batam area (S14).

I work at marke**tt**ing manager here (S15).

Furthermore, I just have returned from singapore for **neogosiation** and made contract with Singapore Ltd.(S14).

In the company where I'm work, the work is making radio, televisi and other **electronica** instrument and the **electronica** instrument to **eksport** to Asian and Eropan (S1).

E. Problems In Coherence and Cohesion

Coherence and cohesion are both dealing with the relationship of sentences with one another. Cohesion on the hand is grammatical; showing formal syntactic links between sentences, and coherence on the other hand is rhetorical where the relationship are not between forms but between speech acts. Cohesion in a sentence or an utterance can be seen from the relationship between different parts of the sentence itself. For instance, students A asks student B, **"Did John attend the lecture in room G.18 Yesterday?"**. students B answers "**yes, he did**". In this example there is a link between **John** and **He**. In addition, in the sentence, "When you go to England some day, do not forget to see football matches there". There is a link between **England** and **there.**

On the other hand, coherence deals with the relationships that link the meanings of sentences in a text or an utterance in a discourse in the sense that the meaning of a sentence or an utterance should not always be interpreted on the basis of its grammatical structure or vocabulary, but also from the meaning of its context. In others words, there is a pragmatic meaning behind the sentence or utterance. For example, student A says to student B "**could you give me a ride as far as Leeds Coach station?**" the student B replies **"I am sorry, I m going to Skipton"**. In this example there is no grammatical relationship between student A's request and student B's answer at all, but there is a coherence in communication since both of them know that Leeds Coach station and Skipton have different direction. Nevertheless, both coherence and cohesion go hand in hand to make ideas of sentence flow smoothly. the movement from one sentence to another should be logical and smooth, meaning that the idea of one sentence to another must be related to each other without sudden jumps and should be in correct grammatical and lexis links.

The data showed that on the whole the student faced difficulty to put sentences into good coherence and logical order. Ideas from one sentence to another did flow very smoothly partly because of the absence of cohesive markers in most of the students writing tasks .In some student letters it was discovered that ideas that was supposed to come first later. The links between grammatical components were sometimes absents. Furthermore, in some sentences adverb of place take the position of the subjects. The examples below show the problems in coherence and cohesion confronted by the students.

In one day I must work for 9 hours, sometimes I work at night to follow the schedule I get holiday.

I work as a field supervisor. it is a big company. it product are TV , Video, Tape recorder (S2)

The idea of the first example (S2) is not arranged in good logical order. S2 should have first begun from telling what company he was working for, what the company produced, and then what position he had in the company. In the above example there is no grammatical link between the work **I** in "**I** work as field supervisor" and the word **It** in " **It** is a big company".

And...... for your known, all companyin Batam need worker who can speak English **beside our programme in university** (S6)

In the second example (S6) it is found out that the idea of the main clause and the dependent clause is not relevant. Though the idea is interpereted pragmatically, it is still difficult to grasp.

For going to work place the company prepare Bus transportation and **there** are always in the protocol streetall time, and this company also have medical facility (S2).

In the third example it is discovered that the word **there** has no reference to any word preceding it. The reader might be able to interpret that **there** might refer to transportation which is always available in the street.

I think there are job for you to be an accountant, because **in my company still need an accountant** (S11).

Unlike the third example, the fourth one (S11) misses the subject in the second clause. S11 treated adverb of place as the subject (in my company still need an accountant). He wrote this sentence according to the way he was speaking and writing in Bahasa Indonesia which is grammatically wrong and unacceptable in writing in English

The company become more and more increasing development and good prospect in this city because Batam is strategic place, and **many foreginer pass away and dobusiness to this city**.(S8)

The idea of this sentence (S8) is completely destroyed by the reason that Batam is developing rapidly because it is strategic and many foreigners **pass away** there. Perhaps S8 meant that many foreigners visit Batam instead of **passing away** there. Although it is only a matter of word choice, the sentence change the meaning and damages the coherence of the sentences as a whole.

F. Problems in Relevance

Relevance in this context refers to the content of the task. That is to say the content of students' letters must be relevant to the task demanded. It appears that most of the students included the required information requested by their friends. However, the data showed that 12 students all except S8, S10 and S13 did not include in their letters other information required that was about the possibility of being placed to work in Batam, Malaysia or Singapore if their friends were succesful applicants. In addition, 2 students (S1 and S2) did not include information about vacancies available in the companies where they were working. It was also discovered that 3 students (S1, S2, and S7) did not inform their friends about the requirements to be met if they wanted to apply for any positions in the company where they themselves were working.

However, there are some good points to note here. Among others, the students were well-motivated to study English in order to equip themeselves with the ability to communicate in English. In fact, most of them put the ability to use English as the main requirement to be accepted to work for companies in various vacancies. Also, from the contents of their letters it was apparent that the students have positive attitudes towards English in order that they would find jobs easily after they complete their studies at the university. There was an indication that the students, if they really got jobs later, would be keen to inform their colleagues about vacancies available in their respective jobs.

Due to lack of knowledge about letter writing and the interference of the students' L1, of 15 students, 5 of them (S2, S4, S6, S8 and S12) tended to begin their letters in a typically Indonesian way. For example, S2 and S12 respectively wrote, **"I hope you are in fine when this letter come to you", "I hope you are in fine and face life happily. And I am here fine too".** On the other hand, 5 other students (S9, S10, S11, S12, S13, and S14) began their letters in a business–like way which is not appropriate in writing a personal letter. For instance, S9 and S14 wrote, **"I received your letter last week", "Thanks a lot for your letter"**.

V. DISCUSSION

As the students wrote the task in the form of a letter, problems arose in grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling, coherence, cohesion, and relevance. Problems in the students' letters may vary to some extent according to the level of difficulty every individual student encountered. The findings provided the evidence that grammatical problems seem to be the most frequent made by the students in their letters ranging from errors in plural forms, articles, verb forms, clauses, passive voice, and proposition. These errors may have occurred for a number of reasons. Firstly, the students had inadequate knowledge of the linguistic forms of language as a period of three months in the course seemed to be insufficient for them to be able to write in correct grammatical structures in a foreign language such as English. Although they had studied English since Junior High School, it could not be taken for granted that the students were able to write English properly.

The second reason could be that the English lessons at the university apart from those at the Language Centre focused more on reading and translation in order to enable them to understand text book which are mostly written in English. Thirdly, the students were not used writing in English. They wrote in English only when they had semester examinations so that the rules of grammar may have been forgotten when they were doing the task.

Errors in using verb **be** or auxiliaries, infinitive, and full verb were believed to be caused by inadequate knowledge of grammar and also partly because of lack of practice in the productive skills. If we take a look at the students' letter, we could discover that the students made many mistakes for example, S2, S4,S6, S10, S12 ans S13. However, given that verbs vary in form and use, it is not surprising that the students experienced difficulties in using them since language acquasition undergoes certain process, stages and developments.

In terms of vocabulary it appeared that lexical errors were discovered in the choice of words and word formation such as forming verbs to nouns, adjectives to nouns, or vice-versa. However, it should be acknowledge that using appropriate words in writing is not easy since similar meaning may be expressed by several words which in some contexts may be the same in use and in other contexts may be different. For example, an idea that a thing, an animal, or a human being ends its or his life can be expressed by using the word **to be dead, to die,** and **to pass away.** The words dead (adjective) and **die** (verb) can be used for a thing, an animal, and a human being when they ends their lives, but the

word **pas away** is normally used for human being when he ends his life. Very often ESL/EFL students misuse these words in speaking and writing. Therefore, it was difficult for the students to choose words that really suited the meaning in context. Nevertheless, none of the students abandoned any lexical items they wanted to write in their letters but managed to find words they thought suitable. For example, S5 wrote. "Product of the company **go out** to many provinces in Indonesia, Malaysia & Singapore." S5 might have forgotten to use word **export** instead of the word **go out** in this sentence, but he managed to find a word which is close the meaning of **export.**

Errors in word formation came up in many sentences in the students' letters. Such error seemed to be an on going problem encountered by L2 students in writing given that the formation of words may vary accordingly. For instance, there are words that can be used as nouns but others cannot be treated as such unless certain suffixes are used. For instance, forming verbs to nouns may be done by adding suffixes such as **–ment (agree-agreement), -ion (promote-promotion), -ation (pronounce-pronunciation), -ssion (permit-permission), -al (approve-approval), -age (leak-leakage),** and so on. The inconsistency of the form in word formation, therefore, might have led the students to make lexical errors in writing as they were also pressured by the time to finish their tasks under their instructor's and the writer's supervision. Lack of practice in writing and in speaking could be one of the causes why the students had difficulty in using suitable lexical items. However, the students attempted to find words to write even though the words might not be very appropriate such as in the letters of S1 (I am **positions** manager in there), and S3 (I believe you will **success** for secretary position) apart from appropriateness what they meant to write in their letters could clearly be interpreted and understood by the readers.

The findings also revealed that misuse of punctuation was the second most frequent category of errors made by the students particularly capitalization. It is likely that the students often began the first word of every sentence with small letters. Such a mistake was assumed to have arisen partly because the students were running out of time and partly because of their carelessness in writing.

Spelling mistakes often occur in the students' letters and varied in form. The data showed that the students seemed to be uncertain of the exact spelling of words and wrote them as they could. The reason could be that the students may have been confused by the complication and irregularities in the English writing system that eventually led them to make spelling errors. Experience has proved that teachers of English may sometimes make mistakes in spelling for the above reason. For example, the word **believe** may be misspelled **beleive**, the word **necessary** may be misspelled **nessecary**, and may other possible misspelling in the English writing system may also be experienced by native speakers of English.

Problems arising in spelling may also occur as a result of the interference of the students' L1 spelling and pronunciation where some words appear to be spelled and pronounced closely to Bahasa Indonesia spelling and pronunciation as in the words **electronica** and **export** (S1), and the word **neogosiation** (S14). Besides, misspelling could also occur as a result of the students' inadequate knowledge of the rules of English pronunciation which may effect spelling as well. Students doubled consonant sounds after being preceded b vowel before the consonants end with a morpheme such as –ing as in the word **marketing** (S15) where the stress is placed on the first syllable and there is no need to double the consonant sound /**t**/.

Problems in coherence and cohesion may have emerged because of the students' inadequate knowledge of how to relate one sentence to another using grammatical links in sentences and transition signals. At the same time, they may have meant of time as 75 minutes might not have been enough for them to complete the task. It is understood that L2 students of intermediate level after taking the course for only three months might not be able to organize their ideas properly in a piece of writing. But since the task was only writing a letter to the students' friends where the most important point was to deliver the required information which was in some respect different from writing an essay, the students had gradually managed to do their task better.

In terms of relevance or content it was found out that most of the students could deliver the message to their friends although some of them did not include some information such as the availability to be assigned to work in Batam, Malaysia, or Singapore. Nevertheless, it was assumed that the absence of the message may have been caused by the students' forgetfulness to include them in their letters or because of being pressured by the time to finish the task.

VI. Conclusion

Having analysed the data within the whole range of the students' problems in doing the writing task, the findings provided the evidence that grammar seemed to be the major problem encountered by the students in writing. In fact, errors in using verbs and plural forms were more noticeable compared to other grammatical components in the students' letter. However, the students had gradually shown good effort to build sentences correctly.

Problems in using punctuation ranked the second most frequent type of errors made by the students even though the use of punctuation in their letters seemed to be restricted to the use of capitalization an commas. The results also proved that the students founds it difficult to choose appropriate words in context as well as word formation as a result of lack of vocabulary and linguistic knowledge of the language.

Numerous problems in spelling were found ranging from misplacing letters in words, adding letters in them, mixing English and Indonesian spelling. In the case of coherence and cohesion, the findings lead us to believe that the students' difficulty had to do with the organization of ideas in sentences in paragraphs where the absence of cohesive markers

was often noticeable. Yet, all the weaknesses and strengths discovered in the students' letters imply that more improvements need to be made in all aspects of writing. However, the study indicated that the students' writing performance on the whole was good enough since the important messages required by the readers could be delivered by the students.

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