

Students' Writing Project in Vocational Schools in North Sulawesi: Design and Challenges

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Abstract: Writing skill in English can bridge the making of professionalism required in work fields. This study deals with the attempts to figure out the existing condition of the development of writing skill in vocational schools, particularly tourism and hotel class. It is intended to reveal the design of students' writing project both the form(s) and challenge(s). This study is a qualitative one. It obtains its data based upon the interview with teachers from the tourism department of three primary vocational schools in North Sulawesi representing three municipalities, namely Minahasa, Tomohon, and Manado. There are two teachers from each school and treated as respondents. These schools are selected based on the assumption that they allow more English-related subjects in the curriculum and prepare job-related skills today. The data are coded in the way of the grounded theory as it undergoes open, axial; and selective coding. The findings indicate that writing project in the vocational schools is 'attached to the activity of tourism object presentation, destination web-design, and tour promotion. However, the practice of the writing projects is challenged by several factors such as teachers' competence, students' motivation, local government support, and limited collaboration and partnership. These findings recommend the importance of formulating an appropriate writing project design at Vocational school in North Sulawesi and overcoming the obstacles that affect the achieving of objectives of improving the capacity and competence of labour force in Indonesia as well as empowering human capital for sustainable 4.0 Industry.

1 INTRODUCTION

Vocational school is designed to meet the challenge of young job seekers. It is viewed as "the accurate opportunities for job or career"[Samsudi et al. 2016]. In its purpose of establishment, vocational school is targeted to equip students, who are seen as potential youth going into job markets, with the skills and knowledge demanded in the work field. It is within this context that vocational school gains a crucial attribute in educational and labour preparation.

Tushar argued that vocational school could be regarded as "a passport for better employment opportunities"[Agrawal., 2013]. It indicates that the existence of vocational school defines the readiness of young people to enter the need of enterprises and industry. The vocational school is further perceived as an arena for transmitting skills and knowledge, not only for the aim of supplying employment opportunities but also at the efforts to push productivity in the business society. It constitutes

"indispensable instrument for improving labour mobility, adaptability and productivity"[Agrawal., 2013]. In other words, the vocational school determines the quality of the workforce. It shapes the competence to work, to adjust work condition and to accelerate productivity.

Thus, it is not excessive to acknowledge a vocational school as an effective instrument for productivity and sustaining improvement"[Subekti, S. ,2019]. As it is summarized in the following vocational school roles; 1) providing skills required by enterprises and across the national economy, 2) supporting pathways into employment, 3) strengthening mobility between occupations, and 4) supporting the development of new skill. These contributive roles pose indispensable and un-ignorable stance of vocational school in work opportunities and growth. It becomes "a critical driving force"[Subekti, S. 2019]. It generates and energizes the endeavour to prepare and equip new force for labour and technology change as well as a sustainable industry.

In relevance to the current 4.0 industry challenges, It is apparent that vocational schools produce and empower skilled human resources; human capital, to fulfil the requirement of 4.0 industry. It guarantees the availability of human capital facing the rapid development and challenges of technology and commercialization in this era. The vocational school seemingly promises and clears the ways to the creativity and innovation applied in the job market nowadays. One of the prerequisites to be involved in the labor of 4.0 industry is the quality of the human capital in terms of capability and competence suitable with the demand of 4.0 industry [ADB, 2014]. This implies that the vocational school foreshadows the supply and demand of current industry labour. For that reason, the government takes pivotal steps by encouraging vocational schools to act as a primary process capitalized to cope with labour needs amidst fast technology development and competitive 4.0 industry. Hence the vocational school is desired to plan and prioritize education and training to encounter the skill mismatch among job seekers and job markets.

However, this vital role and contribution of vocational schools are distracted by some realities. Economic indicators reflect the irrelevance of vocational school training; misconnection between demands and supply as traced by "employment complaints and low rate employment" [Wibowo, A, et al, 2018]. In addition, it is still found the gap skill and low labour productivity [Subekti, S. 2019]. The other issue is related to the failure of vocational school boost the entrepreneurship character among graduates. Indonesia, as the fourth largest population in the world, has very few entrepreneurs. It remains far from the four percent target of government [Habulembe, S. H. 2007]. In light of Asian economic challenges in recent years, many of which are labour market related[Subekti, S. 2019]. These factors imply that there is a gap between hope and expectation; plan and reality, in revitalizing and emphasizing the role of vocational schools in Indonesia.

This suggests the necessity to reevaluate the process and product in the vocational school. It emerges the need to review some relevant aspects such as competence making, measurement, method and strategy of learning, material and system evaluation (ADB, 2014). Hence, this research paper reports the investigation of the learning process at the vocational schools in North Sulawesi by focusing on three leading vocational schools representing three municipalities namely Minahasa, Tomohon and Manado that have tourism

department. The underlying assumption for carrying out this study is that thought if there are still found the mismatch between graduates and job markets, there must be something urgently checked in the learning process. This study concentrates upon writing project assignment in the vocational school due to the reason that writing skill is one of the most used skills in the workplace (Ratna). The writing project refers to students' working as individual and groups to brainstorm, draft, revise until the final product was produced" (Ratnasari, N. et.al. 2018). This study aims at revealing the design of the projects and their possible challenges within the context of equipping students for the job market in the era of sustainable 4.0 industry.

2 METHOD

This study is a qualitative one. It obtains its data based upon the interview with teachers from the tourism department of three leading vocational schools in North Sulawesi representing three municipalities, namely Minahasa, Tomohon, and Manado. There are two teachers from each school and treated as respondents. These schools are selected based on the assumption that they allow more English-related subjects in the curriculum and prepare job-related skills today. The data are coded in the way of the grounded theory as it undergoes open, axial; and selective coding.

3 FINDINGS

Teaching writing is always challenging in the EFL context. It is not plain work to do. Since writing involves grammatical, rhetorical, conceptual and judgemental elements (Lee, H. 2017), its teaching obliges a comprehensive method to be applied. It is not sufficient for teachers only explaining grammatical and structural rules of a text, and then suggesting students to follow it. It was adapting to the trait of the vocational school that is targeting the making of a particular skill relevant to a particular work field. It is found that writing project assignment at the vocational schools in North Sulawesi is designed and implemented in several ways and faces several challenges in acquiring a maximum impact.

3.1 Design

3.1.1 Tourism Object Presentation Project

Writing project is attached to the English subject. It implies that a teacher needs to make use of time allocated for English in an attempt to engage students with writing skill activity. "It is not specifically writing class, but we try to find a hole for it in the schedule" (Teacher 2). These words confirm that the chipping in writing activities entirely depends on teachers' strategy in utilizing time. Assigning students with writing project seems to be an excellent choice to overcome the limited time in the classroom. "With limited time, I ask students to do a project related to their major (Tourism department) and to writing improvement" (Teacher 2). This expression illustrates that writing project linked with tourism object is expected to facilitate students to actively search-relevant knowledge and practice their English skill. "I ask them to work in a group to describe and present tourism object in North Sulawesi" (teacher 1). It can be seen from this information that teachers plan their class activity in consideration of the tourism department major. They design their learning process by promoting a project completion, in this case, local tourism object.

Theoretically, this is a smart effort. According to Habulembe, writing project "educates the whole students because it involves the use of cognitive skill, social skill and independent learning"(Ratnasari, N. et.al. 2018). In other words, doing the writing project on tourism object forces students to research resources connected with the given or chosen object and incorporate to organize the knowledge into a description to present. This is remarkable work and builds communicative skills related to the tourism industry. Such design of writing project is also beneficial for it brings students to the topic they are familiar with. They may grow their motivation in doing the task and enriching their knowledge. If it occurs so, the target of vocational school to link the prospective related jobs for the graduates will be at reach.

3.1.2 Destination Web Design

The idea of producing graduates that link with the need of the current 4.0 industry drives the vocational school teachers to think over an assignment that allows students to get closer to their coming job market. Following the tourism object presentation, the notion of enabling students to accustom to the

competitive and global tourism business has encouraged vocational school teachers to assign students with a web design project. "We realize the rapid progress of tourism business today, look at the Chinese tourists in Manado, so we push our student to collaboratively make a web of tourism destination here" (Teacher 4). The recent visit of Chinese tourists to North Sulawesi has inspired and opened the eyes of vocational school teachers particularly those of tourism department about the urgency of upgrading the capacity of their graduates by preparing students with the skill of designing a tourism destination website project. This project combines information technology and writing skills. The writing skill remains necessary for this project since the features and content of the destination description should be in understandable and promoting English words. "The IT knowledge is the main attribute of this project, but the content is writing project"(Teacher 4). The combination of skills defines the working of this project. It allows students to obtain "learning opportunities inside and outside the class" ((Suciati, P. 2018)) in order to develop their skills. The students gains time for sharing and developing their resources. It builds their capacity and competence to meet the increasingly competitive tourism business in particular and 4.0 industries in general.

This project implies that students begin to be aware and literate toward the potential of identification and to take note of specific tourism destinations in the surroundings. Writing the content of the website provides students with the opportunities to explore the information and description of tourism destination, and experience the way to address the online global market. Here lies the difference between doing the tourism object presentation project and destination website. The former proposes the possibility of more individual work and longer content and detail while the latter offers more group works and combining technical skills in its completion.

3.1.3 Tour Promotion Writing Project

The interviews with teachers of the vocational schools also reveal that the other entailing project of the previously mentioned ones is tour promotion projects. " We also give task for students to do tour promotion project as the part of guiding subject, write tour promotion and learn to guide" (teacher 3). These teacher expressions clarify the element of writing in this task. Although the project does not explicitly belong to the English subject, it does use

English for its practice. The exercise of designing a tour promotion includes the process of selecting the correct and proper grammatical structure and accurate vocabularies to attract intended consumers.

Further, this tour promotion should be ended with the activity of guiding, which prescribes the need of speaking skill. Hence, in doing the project, students are building their communicative skills, both written and oral. It characterizes a project work which deals with "mixed abilities and skills activities" (Ratnasari, N. et.al. 2018).

The tour promotion project provides opportunities for students to learn to negotiate a business content of tourism activity and to sustain the continuation of the tourism industry. A tour promotion contains information about the activities, attraction and communication. One of the teacher respondents stated, "By doing so (the project), we hope our students are ready to involve in tourism jobs" (teacher 1). The project introduces students the reality of planning, selecting, describing/composing, organizing and pricing the tourism product. Most of these activities denote a writing skill activity which is concluded by speaking skill. The completion seemingly promises to shape the preparation and readiness of the students to enter the competition within the current tourism industry. It serves to be the expected outcome of the product while the intended output is supposed to be the tour package (s). This means that there is a tendency that such a project is, in fact, helpful in terms of improving students' skill to meet the demand of their intended job today. It indicates the implementation of the vocational school target.

3.2 Challenges

The education process in the vocational school fosters students' capacity and competence to get down into the requirement of work vacancies. It addresses its graduates to directly perform the need of the industry. In 2016, the Indonesian government, as commanded by President Joko Widodo declared the attempt to revitalize the vocational school in order to "increase the relevance of vocational education with industry" (Sudartini, S. et al, 2016). The learning of the vocational school should be qualified and correspond with the skills required in production and economic process in the national and global industry. That reflects the hope that vocational school can assist the attempt to supply the stock of qualified national workers amidst the global job market competition. It may anticipate "the threat of the invasion of the foreign worker" (Sudartini, S.

et al, 2016). It indicates that a good vocational school will contribute to national economic development and reduce poverty since it provides labour force and enriches them with professional skills with high income. However, this sublime target can not be claimed within this time. The interview with teachers of Vocational School in North Sulawesi discovers several challenges that confront the attempt to associate the writing project with the demand of human capital for sustainable 4.0 industry and other global market.

3.2.1 Lack of Resources

The revitalization of vocational education does not yet occur in every vocational school. The interviews with teachers carried out at the three main vocational schools in North Sulawesi; particularly those have Tourism department points out that lack of supporting resources to implement their educational and training program. One of the teacher respondents uttered, "We badly need new reference books, ours are old fashioned, maybe the publishers do not longer launch relevant books, not to mention lack of other facilities such as computers" (teacher 1). This portrays the existing condition of the vocational schools. It is true that this interview also reveals that the condition of resources and facilities in the vocational school in Manado is better compared to the other two. Yet, this still portrays that the purpose of vocational school to enrich and improve youth labour seekers with the excellent and proper skill to enter the job market is questioned. Teachers' confessions discarded the potential of providing such skilled labour.

Further, if teachers are considered as a vital resource in the process, then, this is also an obstacle for the production of skilled workers. "In our school, teachers of the tourism department are very few having tourism education background." (teacher 3). This circumstance affects the quality of the graduates. Lew Kuan Yee public and policy School of business confirmed this phenomenon by stating that Indonesia is facing the shortage of vocational teachers and lecturers amidst this rapid increase in the number of job sectors (Ratnasari, N. et.al. 2018). Guiding students to be skilful workers with limited knowledge of the target job denies the expectation of having the competence to compete in the global job market and industry. Teachers whose crucial role is to respond toward students' need and target of quickly acquiring work (Sudartini, S. et al, 2016) perform less qualified duty will influence the employability of the graduates.

3.2.2 Lack of Students' Motivation

This obstacle can be considered being ironic, assuming that vocational schools provide more opportunities to shape the skills required in the industry. "We saw decreasing student intake in the last two years. In the learning process, students show less interest in learning, and they are too busy with gadget", complained one of the teacher respondents. The problem of students' motivation in vocational school has been detected for many years. The low enrollment to the vocational school can be linked to the perspectives among parents in Indonesia toward the vocational school graduates having low salaries, unclear career progress and low academic capabilities compared to those of university graduates (Ratnasari, N. et.al. 2018). It is further worsened by the view that in Indonesia, vocational education is still considered a second-level education (Sudartini, S. et al, 2016).

In terms of the learning process, it is apparent that students are less motivated. As explained earlier, it is possibly related to related resources. Although the possibility of teachers' inability to engage students with the topic close to their need can also be predicted as the reason for having less motivation to learn. Students are usually encouraged and challenged to learn as it adapts the issue and knowledge that deeply influence their lives. Moreover, it is essential to give them spaces to develop themselves both by knowledge sharing and practice collaboration in order to arrive at the expected outcome of vocational education.

3.2.3 Lack of Local Government Attention and Collaboration

The challenge for the development of Vocational school in North Sulawesi is the attention of the local government. "We are rarely involved in local tourism event", admitted one of the respondent teachers. The attention here refers to the willingness of the local government to involve this tourism department of the vocational school to participate in the local tourism event. In Tomohon, for instance, it has TIFF while in Manado, it has Manado fiesta. The students with tourism background are supposed to be part of these events. It requires government's touch to stimulate them to develop their skills relevant to the events. It can also be momentum for vocational school to display their existence in supplying labours for the tourism industry. Students have the session to practice and to exist, including sustaining 4.0 industries.

On the other side, the vocational school also asks for assistance in terms of setting up a collaboration with private sectors and industry. "It will be easier for us (vocational school) if local government facilitates cooperation with related parties with our school" (Teachers 5). This information frames the notion that the attention required is within the context of the attempt to incorporate with other parties that help the learning process of the students and absorbing the graduates. The involvement of government in searching and arranging the collaboration guarantee the credibility and capacity of the vocational school. Governmental supports and policies can be the influential supplement for the bargaining position for vocational schools to initiate collaborations.

4 CONCLUSION

Vocational school is vital in preparing youth for the job market. For the tourism department of Vocational school in North Sulawesi, it is found that writing projects can be utilized as a learning method to equip students with job-related skill. As assignments, the projects are designed to be connected with tourism object presentation, destination web-design, and tour promotion. However, the practice of the writing projects is challenged by several factors such as teachers' competence, students' motivation, local government support, and limited partnership. These findings recommend the importance of formulating an appropriate writing project design at Vocational school in North Sulawesi and overcoming the obstacles that affect the achieving of objectives of improving the capacity and competence of labour force in Indonesia as well as empowering human capital for sustainable 4.0 Industry.

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