

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins with outlining the background of the research. It then presents information about the problem of the research, objectives of the research, operational definition of key terms, significances of the research, and scope of the research.

1.1 Background of the Research

The task plays an essential role in second/foreign language (L2) writing pedagogy in that they allow learners to focus on forms and meaning while attempting to address functional demands of given tasks (Rasuki, 2016). Recently researchers began to investigate the effect of task complexity on L2 learners' written performance in terms of three linguistic domains of accuracy, fluency, and complexity. Research into task-based language teaching is mainly conducted because of dealing with the problem of determining the relevant grading and sequencing criteria for designing and classifying tasks for task-based syllabi (M. H. Long & Crookes, 1991; Robinson, 2003, 2006) and has mostly focused on investigating the effects of task design and task characteristics on task performance (Skehan, 1996; Skehan & Foster, 1997a).

In the context L2 writing task, task complexity may be defined as the extent level of the learner contributing to perceived difficulty (exert their minds and reason) in the demands of the task to produce effective writing (achieve communication goals).

For instance, L2 writing tasks which are only demanding learners to narrate one object depicted in a picture assumed to be easy in producing effective writing. This is because such tasks only require the learner to narrate a simple object. Otherwise, L2 writing tasks which are demanding learners to narrate more than one object depicted in a picture assumed to be hard in producing effective writing since these tasks require learners to narrate more complex object in the picture so they are required to use their ideas, thoughts, and reasoning deeply related to the scene depicted in the picture.

One of the objectives of the L2 writing task is learners can clearly deliver information related to the demands of the task. the delivery of such information according to (Grice, 1975) is a cooperative action in which people cooperate with each other by providing sufficient information to build understanding. In the context of L2 writing, learners who are required to write must convey compact information according to instructions in order to achieve understanding and communication goals. On the other hand, conveying wordy information will make the reader hard to grasp the information. For effective communication to take place, the writer must not place too much of an interpretive burden on the reader by forcing the reader to make all the conclusions necessary to understand the discourse.

Based on the influence of the task complexity of L2 learner writing, Robinson (Robinson, 2001, 2005) predicts increasing the complexity along the Resource-directing variables would bring about less fluency and great complexity and accuracy, i.e., -fluency, +accuracy, +complexity. However, (Robinson, 2001) also mentioned increasing task complexity may lead to more breakdowns in communication and

potentially more interactional modifications, like clarification requests, confirmation checks, and comprehension checks.

Various empirical investigations revealed the effect of task complexity with varying dimensions especially on learners' writing performance. From several studies are in line with Robinson's theoretical perspective that task complexity can increase learners' writing performance in terms of fluency, complexity, and accuracy (Mohammadzadeh Mohammad Abadi et al., 2012; Nariman-Jahan & Rahimpour, 2011; Piri et al., 2012). However, so far in the last ten years research on the effect of task complexity on writing effectiveness in L2 learners' writing performance has been very rare or even non-existent. has investigated the relationship between task complexity (operationalized as prior knowledge and few elements) and interactional modifications, specifically, the presence of comprehension checks, confirmation checks, and clarification requests. Robinson, (2001) only found evidence for the production of more confirmation checks in the more complex task. This is related to the effectiveness of communication produced by L2 learners which is still an area of research to be explored

Based on the description above, it seems reasonable that there is a continuity between complexity and the effectiveness of communication in writing. Therefore, this issue is needed to investigate further. This current study seeks to explore the theoretical gap by examining how tasks with different levels of complexity may affect on writing performance, particularly in effective writing.

1.2 Problem of the Research

To achieve the objective of the study, this study addressed the following research question:

1. Is there any significant difference on undergraduate EFL learners' writing effectiveness that is affected by task complexity (+/- Few Element)?

1.3 Objective of the Research

Following the research question formulated above, the current study aims to investigate whether task complexity affects learners' English writing performance in terms of its effective qualities.

1.4 Operational Definition

To help gain insight and minimize misinterpretation of this study, the following are definition operational of it:

1. Task Complexity: it is related to simple and complex writing task that involving +/- few elements. In this context, the -few elements are a reduction object (simpler form) that must be narrated through writing task. However, +few elements are an addition object (more complex form) that must be narrated through writing task. Learners were required to narrate a simple, medium and complex object in the picture in writing test.
2. Effective writing: the written text which produced by L2 learners is aligned with the communicative goals specified in the written task instruction.

1.5 Significances of the Research

1. Theoretical benefits:

The theoretical benefits of this research will contribute and make empirical evidence that the theory of task complexity influences L2 writing performance of learners in terms communicative effectiveness.

2. Practical benefits:

Giving teacher overview of the task criteria and assessment in task-based language and syllabus design.

1.6 Scope of the Research

The scope of this research has limits starting from participants, location, and variables studied. The research participants in this study are 2th, 4th, 6th semester undergraduate who have passed guided writing course in the English Language Education Program at University of Muhammadiyah Jember. The variables studied in this research is the effect of task complexity on effective second/foreign language writing in which there is one independent variable at three levels (simple, medium, and complex on +/- few elements) and one dependent variable effective writing (communicative effectiveness) as the writing performance.