

## AN EFL TEACHER STRATEGY IN WRITING CLASS IN THE MIDST OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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### Abstract

The aimed of this research was to find out what strategy is used by an efl teacher when teaching writing in an international class of English as a foreign language student. The research was conducted at Butterfly English Course in North Jakarta. The writer used narrative inquiry to as the method of study. The participant is a female English course teacher who teach English at international class in an English Course. The instrument used was interview with semi-structured interview to collect data. The research found that using free writing helped the students to find and generate ideas easier in writing paragraph. Using mind mapping strategies which showed videos and image in prewriting stage can also make the student have more imagination and make them more enthusiastic in writing class. The findings also show that the methods employed get positive responses from the students as the improvement of the student writing shows.

**Keywords :** narrative, assessment, imagination, improvement

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### INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the aspects of learning English besides listening, speaking, and reading. Writing is communication that puts all ideas, thoughts, and language into a paper. According to Nunan (2003), writing involves a process of inventing ideas, organising the ideas, and expressing them into paragraphs. Writing is also a means for students to express all their thoughts which trains their creativity. Writing is the most difficult activity, especially for students. Yunus et al. (2013, as cited in Zyoud, 2017) argued that writing is the most demanding competence to be mastered because it requires specific skills and writing rules. Therefore, different strategies are needed by the teacher in the process of teaching writing.

Writing is an ability that everyone must have because this writing ability will be indispensable both academically and non-academically. Writing is a basic language skill that should be possessed by everyone, writing is just as important as Reading Speaking, and Listening, but writing requires consistent and more effort (Harmer, 2002, as cited in Syeda 2016, p. 58). Some people, especially students, think that writing is a very boring and very difficult activity to learn. Therefore, this is a challenge for teachers to try to increase students' interest in learning to write with the various strategies they will use. In addition, Syeda (2016) stated that writing is a multi-faceted process and is demanding the teacher to be creative in the classroom.

Teaching Writing is a challenging activity for teachers because the students always face the problems in the writing class such as: lack of vocabulary, poor grammar, poor spelling, and lack of reading materials, so the teacher need to have good strategies and also giving good motivation in order to improve student's writing ability. Writing is also an important skill to master in the academic field, especially for students because writing activities can improve students' understanding of grammar, spelling and also adding some new vocabularies. However, a few students think that writing is a very boring activity and sometimes students do not have the motivation to learn to write. In line with this, Harmer (2007, as cited in Togatorop, 2015) said writing involves complicated components of syntax, grammar, and use of punctuation including cohesive devices. However, Byrd (2011) experienced that students do not spend most of their time to organise ideas in a second language writing project. They simply focus on aiming at the final product while thinking that proofreading drafts are not so important.

Free writing is an informal writing technique where a person writes freely without paying attention to vocabulary, punctuation, and other writing rules. Baroudy (2008, as cited in Sukaryani, 2018) explained that free-writing a technique which a beginner writer can practice by freely expressing what he/she has in mind.

One of the methods that can be used to reduce boredom in learning free writing for students is the mind mapping method. Mind mapping can be interpreted as a process to describe the concept of a problem by creating branches that will be easily understood by the reader especially the students. According to Buzan (2012), mind mapping is a method focusing on developing the interconnected ideas in the writer's mind. A particular image or shape can be a source of an interesting idea from which the writing process can initiate. In another sense, Mind mapping will make the student feels easy to understand and remember the material because the students will only learn about the keywords of the material which will be displayed in an interactive image. Besides, Syeda (2016) stated that mind mapping is the potential way of

constructing information in the mind and express such information into writing.

Free writing is a writing technique in which a person writes continuously for a period of time without paying attention to spelling, grammar, or topic. Free writing can be a method used for students so that students will not feel bored because in the writing process students don't have to use the rules or grammar that exist in writing and this method is usually done in relaxed conditions. Free writing aims at bringing up ideas in the writer's mind without fear of feeling wrong with the grammar. In line with this, Elbow (1998, as cited in Isni, 2018) explained that free writing is worry-free as students can think of an interesting topic they like and are familiar to write. Thus, with this method of writing, they can start a writing draft with anything they can think of. Free writing also made the writer especially the students feel comfortable in the process of writing, this also supported by Clarkson (2009, as cited in Sagita, 2018) who supports the use of free writing because it can help student to write comfortably and release writing anxiety.

Free writing can also become an activity for brainstorming that makes it easier for writers or students to express their ideas and thoughts on a piece of paper this also supported by Ozhima and Ann H (1998, as cited in Sagita, 2018) which explained that "Free writing is a brainstorming activity in which you write freely about the topic. Free writing is a prewriting technique in which a person writes continuously for a set period of time without referring to spelling, grammar, or topic" (p. 32), Fawcett (2018, as cited in Asraf, 2018) also found that free writing is a powerful method of expressing ideas in writing. Further, Elbow (1998, as cited in John, 2019) claimed that free writing as a method because it enables a smooth flow of written expressions. The author also stated that it is one best method to start to practice writing. In line with this, Belanoff (1991, as cited in John, 2019) also explained that free writing enables student to produce a rich and rough first draft of writing.

During a pandemic situation, online media is one of the main media for the teaching and learning process in educational institutions, several applications that support online learning

such as Zoom, Google Classroom, WhatsApp, and others, by doing online learning, a teacher must find how to effectively teach students. Romli (2013) explained that online media involves use of computer and Internet.

This study was designed to answer the research question “How does the EFL teacher encounter the Chinese students in her teaching free writing at English Course?” The purpose of this research was to explore the teacher's experience in encountering the Chinese students in her teaching free writing at the English Course. To answer the research question, the author designed this research with the Narrative method so that the author obtains detailed data based on her experience and story.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

The writer used qualitative method for the research and the writer focused more on exploring someone's experience. Therefore, narrative inquiry is suitable to use by the writer. According to Creswell (2012), qualitative research is an option when variables are unknown while existing literature presents little information about the topic being investigated. Thus, exploration is the only possible choice done by the researcher. The writer also used Narrative Inquiry because this research design is suitable with the topic of the research where the writer focused to explore more about the strategy and experience of an English teacher in encountering Chinese students in teaching free writing. This also supported by Connelly & Clandinin (1990, as cited in Creswell, 2012). They stated that narrative research requires the researcher to describe the individual life, collect and interpret individual story of lived experience, and rewrite narrative of such individual experiences. In addition, when the participant tell her story and experience to the writer, the writer believe that it will be important for the research. This also support by McEwan & Egan (1995, as cited in Creswell, 2012) they stated that when retelling a story, it helps a researcher understand topics appearing in the narrative that he needs to interpret. This method used by the writer to explore more about teacher's experience and

strategy in encountering Chinese students in teaching free writing.

Narrative inquiry is a research method where participants tell their life and experiences that became data for the writer. Pavlenko (2007, as cited in Barkhuizen, 2014) stated that researchers should remember that context is the most important variable in narrative research. Understanding the context will lead the researchers better interpret their data collected. The data for the finding got from the participant's story, this also supported by Polkinghorne (1995, as cited in Barkhuizen et al., 2014) which explained analysing narratives means that story is the main source of data from which interpretation takes place and findings are presented. Likewise, Wette and Barkhuizen (2009) explained further that narrative writing method enables researchers to change nonnarrative data into stories in order to better understand the data collected. The main data collection method used is interview. Use of interview enables researchers to collect comprehensive data from research respondents. Besides interview, use of multiple methods of data collection is common in narrative inquiry (Barkhuizen et al., 2014).

In this research, the writer focused to explore more about the participant's experience in encountering Chinese students in teaching free writing, so, narrative inquiry is suitable to used, this also supported by Barkhuizen (2008) which explained that narrative inquiry is to understand the teacher experiences about a particular context where the teaching takes place. Additionally, Barkhuizen (2014) also stated that narrative study in language instruction deals with teacher story about his or her professional life. The story of professional life is typically close to professional development and teaching practices.

### **Research Site**

The writer conducted the research at Butterfly English Course in North Jakarta The writer chose this English Course because of two reasons, namely, feasibility and accessibility. In terms of feasibility, the teacher used mind mapping to teach free writing as the strategy to encounter Chinese students which is very

reliable with the topic and she has taught there since 2018 so she had a lot of experience which could be explored by the writer. In terms of accessibility, the writer got the data from the participant by interviewing through mobile phone so this makes the writer easier to conduct the research in the midsts of covid-19 pandemic.

### **Research Participant**

The Writer used purposive sampling for the research. The writer chose one of the female teachers who taught at one of the English courses in Jakarta where most of the students are Chinese students.

### **Data Collection**

The interview is a data collection technique used by the writer. The writer will use the cellphone as a tool in the interviewing process. Sapsford & Jupp (2006, as cited in showkat, 2017) explained that data collection is a way of piling up necessary information in order to get to answers of the research questions being investigated.

The writer chose interview for Data Collecting Technique because this is very reliable with Narrative Inquiry Research Design. The writer used Interview with semi structured interview to gain rich information from the participant. Burgess (1984, as cited in Heigham and Croker, 2009) stated that interview is a purposeful conversation. Additionally, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, as cited in Barkhuizen et al., 2014) stated that an interview is an attempt to grasp the world from the eye of the subjects, to uncover the meaning of their lived experiences, to unmask their lived world.

Semi Structured Interview is chosen by the writer because the writer prepared the open-ended question and the interview's schedule. Semi Structured Interview helped the writer in exploring the data from the participant. This is also supported by Dörnyei. Dörnyei (2007, as cited in Heigham and Croker 2009) stated the researcher knows beforehand topics to be included in the interview and to a large extent what questions need to be addressed. Further, the interviewer also needs to allow some flexibility to investigate some aspects in depth. In other words, Richards (2003, as cited in

Barkhuizen et al., 2014 ) emphasised that use of semi-structured interview provides flexibility that the interviewer still has a chance to follow up questions to the interviewee to get some clarification at a particular point during the interview. Barkhuizen (2014) also explained interview guide is possible to use in a semi-structured interview for the sake of directing the interviewee to answer to a particular topic and yet at the same time the type of questions addressed is in the open-ended format.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

In analyzing the data, the writer transcribed all the interview activities that the writer has done so the data analysis process runs smoothly. Miles and Huberman (1994, as cited in Berg, 2001) explained that data analysis consists of three types, namely: interpretative, socio-anthropological, and socio-collaborative analyses. In line with, further six steps are commonly used in analyzing qualitative data such as Organizing, Analyze by hand or computer, explore and code data, representing finding, making interpretation and validating the accuracy of the finding (Creswell, 2012, p. 237).

After conducting the interview, the writer transcribed the data by the computer. The writer also re read and explored the data to ensure that the data obtained could answer the research question. Because this is narrative inquiry research, the writer represented the finding in form of paragraph. In validating the accuracy of the data, the writer used member checking which the writer let the participant know the result of interview transcribe and the paragraph in the finding.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Findings**

After being accepted into the Butterfly English Course, she was very excited and nervous, because she had never taught and handled Chinese students before, at first, the owner of the course told her to accompany one of the teachers who were there as an initial adaptation process for 3- 5 days because the owner wanted her to adapt quickly to start teaching at the course. After that, the owner immediately gave her a class to handle, at first

she handled elementary school children, some of them studying at International Schools. With approximately 4 years of teaching experience in previous courses, to a lesser extent, she already knew how to teach someone in a course but still she encountered many difficulties. The difficulties she faced included: each course had a different curriculum so she had to adapt to the curriculum applied by the Butterfly English Course, she had to be able to learn the teaching methods which used in the Butterfly English Course quickly, the most difficult thing she experienced was learning the characters of Chinese students and their approach to being accepted by them.

Just like students in general, at first, not all of them immediately accepted S to teach them to replace the previous teacher, there were even some children who did not want to be taught by the teacher because they were used to the previous teacher. This was the first challenge that she experienced, but she never gave up trying. She always consulted a lot with other teachers who had taught there for a long time and she always consulted with the owner about the approach to being accepted by Chinese Students. After she put in some effort and approaches, she was finally accepted by all the students in her class that she taught. The next challenge she faced was regarding the character of the Chinese Student which she had never dealt with before. Chinese students are actually more active and a little more difficult to manage.

The students in the previous course, when the class was about to start, she just said "come on, everyone, sit on the chairs and tables because class is about to start" then the students will immediately shut up and follow the lessons that will be given but in the Butterfly English Course there are some children who when the lesson would start, there are children who were still running in the classroom and there were some students who disturb other students.

At first, she used a subtle way of telling the children to be quiet gently when the lesson was about to start but it was not entirely effective at keeping them quiet when the lesson was about to begin. Finally, she found a way to catch their attention when the lesson was about to start, namely by playing a video on the screen relating

the lesson to be explained to her students. Sometimes she also likes to give a small punishment to children who are still difficult to manage and to children who disturb other students such as: telling them to face the wall when learning is about to start so as not to disturb other participants. Sometimes she has to be a firm teacher so that the children would follow what the teacher told them to do. such as doing tasks and reading because when they always use a subtle way, children would get used to not paying attention and in the end they would not understand what the teacher explained to them.

Most Chinese students are very active with high curiosity, so they often ask about everything when learning takes place such as about what they hear, about things around them and about the subject matter. This was a new challenge for her because she had to prepare the material very well so that she could answer all the questions asked by her students. She had many responsibilities in handling international class. One of the responsibilities she holds is about the grades of the students in their respective schools. Most Chinese students in her courses study in international schools, so her job is to review their lessons at their respective schools so that they can understand the material. She also always tries her best so that none of her students get red marks from their respective schools. In addition, she also became a second parent to her students, where she and other teachers always provide motivation, teach manners and tell children what they can and cannot do. When the teaching and learning process in the classroom was over, she also made sure all his students didn't go anywhere before their parents called or picked up by the driver because the students are still children and when they went out without his knowledge, she was worried that something wrong would happen.

Teaching Chinese students is one of the big challenges for her because some of the Chinese students she teaches also attend international schools so their parents' expectations are high on them and they really expect their children to be able to do the assignments given by their school, sometimes she also feels under pressure when teaching there but that couldn't be a reason to

give up. Another different thing that she felt, most Chinese students could speak English and are accustomed to speaking English with their parents, they are also used to speak English when the class is in progress. The aspects that she often taught to Chinese students were Writing and Reading because they often had difficulty in answering the questions given by their respective schools. She always uses Free Writing in the teaching and learning process in her class because they have not studied Academic Writing. When the lesson starts, she always prepares several videos and pictures as learning media for her students, the videos are usually related to the material to be taught, for example: when she would discuss free writing about daily activities and holidays, she would show videos that contain it. After that he would go around to the children one by one to explain what is in the video while explaining the material.

This is done by her so that it would make the students easier for them to find ideas and they would feel easier to compose sentences because the main problem for them when learning Free Writing is finding an idea. She always praises and motivates each of her students to make them happy, this she always does at every meeting. To motivate them even more, she always prepares small gifts for her students and unique prizes every month that will be given to the best students who always take part in teaching and learning activities in class and behave well in class. This can reduce students' bad attitude in class and can also make them more active in learning because the students she teaches have a good competitive spirit so each individual wants a unique gift that the teacher would give each month. Finding an idea in the Free writing class is the main problem faced by students at Butterfly English Course, especially for those who are still studying in elementary school, often they find it difficult to determine the title and content. Sometimes they only write one sentence, even though at least in the Butterfly English course, in the free writing class, they must be able to write about 80 words.

This was a big challenge for her to be able to make them think creatively and easily find ideas in free writing. Then she used a method that can make it easy for her students to find

ideas and think more creatively in free writing classes, namely the mind mapping method. Mind Mapping is a learning method by placing keywords that are usually complemented by visual images so that students can better understand and generate ideas from the core material that they read. Mind mapping can be used as a method to support writing learning, using mind mapping in writing activities will be very interesting for students to do because this mind mapping method is usually equipped with images and colors that will not make students bored.

Ahangari & Behzady (2011, as cited in Zyoud, 2017) explained that, "Mind mapping strategy is related to enabling students to think while using pictures and images demonstrated to them. Mind mapping can develop students learning English in general and the writing skills in particular in different settings worldwide" (p. 282) in addition to Buzan (1994, as cited in Kamelia, 2018) stated that "Mind mapping is a diagram used to represent words, ideas, tasks, or other items linked to and arranged around a central key word or idea". In the implementation of his mind mapping method, she would prepare some pictures as a media to help children find an idea in the free writing class. If the theme is holidays she would prepare pictures related to the holidays.

Covid-19 has a negative impact on every sector in Indonesia, especially in the education sector where the government recommends online teaching and learning activities. Not only in formal schools, online teaching and learning activities also occur in one of the English courses that is the Butterfly English Course. In the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, She also used online media for her teaching activities. The application she used was zoom, with this application, she could deliver material and interact with her students. Online media / digital media have become the current trend for everyone, especially, in a pandemic situation where most people's activities are carried out online such as office affairs and education. In education, this digital media provides many benefits for teachers and students. Applications such as Zoom can be used as learning media effectively. Romli (2013) explained that, "online media is

telecommunication and multimedia-based media (computer and internet)” (p. 35). Recently, Zoom has become a popular application for people. Especially in a pandemic situation, a lot of people use this application as a teaching and learning media. “Zoom is a collaborative, cloud-based videoconferencing service offering features including online meetings, group messaging services, and secure recording of sessions” (Zoom Video Communications Inc., 2016, p. 2.). According to Tillman (2020) “Zoom is a cloud-based video conferencing service you can use to virtually meet with others - either by video or audio-only or both, all while conducting live chats - and it lets you record those sessions to view later”

The teaching and learning process through online media is very different from face-to-face learning, in online learning, especially in the free writing class, Miss S still used the mind mapping method to teach free writing, but in a different way, she used Microsoft Word as a medium to teach free writing. She showed the picture to the children before the class started, she showed a video related to the material which explained. The aim of this activity was for capturing their attention and as a source of ideas for students so that they had an idea of what they wanted to write. After that she prepared several pictures to be inserted into the Microsoft word. She also added some vocabulary and phrases related to pictures to help them. Afterwards, she showed the picture and explained the meaning of the picture to the students. She also helped them in determining the title, setting, characters, story content and ending of the story.

The teaching and learning process through online media does not always run smoothly, she often encounters obstacles including: internet signals that are not always good, the character of the child who suddenly in the middle of learning didn't want to continue the lesson, because when learning is still face-to-face, she will persuade the child in various ways and approaches to make them to continue learning but when learning online, it was difficult to do, therefore, parents have a big role in assisting their students when online learning is taking place. Based on her experience, the implementation of the use of mind mapping

through online media for children at the Butterfly English course was quite successful because day by day their ideas and writing results in free writing made good progress, mind mapping could also make them enthusiastic when learning was taking place.

### Discussion

Writing is one of the important skills that must be possessed by students besides Speaking, Reading and Listening. But unfortunately, most students have difficulty in writing activities in class because they find it difficult to find ideas in writing and do not know exactly what they should write. They also sometimes don't have high enthusiasm in writing class because this activity often makes them bored. Therefore, a teacher must have good techniques and strategies in the teaching and learning process in the classroom so that students do not feel bored, feel motivated and can understand the material presented by the teacher easily.

This study aims to answer the Research Question "How does the EFL teacher encounter the Chinese students in her teaching free writing at English Course?" after the writer conducted research with several interviews and obtained qualitative data based on experience and stories. The writer found that there were many improvements experienced by the students when the participants applied free writing in the writing class. By using this technique, participants allow their students to write whatever they want according to the given theme. Using mind mapping strategies in its implementation by stimulating students to use pictures and videos before they write. It aims to generate ideas from students so that they are not confused about what they should write.

In accordance with the experience of the participants, this activity can also be carried out in the midst of the covid-19 pandemic where teaching and learning activities are carried out online. Use video call-based applications such as zoom, Microsoft word to insert pictures, vocabulary, and playing videos before writing activities. Activities like these can trigger students to develop ideas. Step by step, they can also make good paragraphs according to the theme given by the participants. They can also

determine the title for their writing, create a story with a structured sequence of events and students can write more sentences than before.

Based on the experience of participants, this activity can be done in online or offline classes. This can also attract the attention of students because in its implementation it is assisted by using pictures and videos to stimulate their ideas before the writing activity takes place. It can be said that this activity was successful in improving students' writing skills, especially in developing ideas, making stories with a structured sequence of events and making them interested in its implementation. It can be said that this activity can be implemented in the classroom because it can improve students' writing skills in writing a paragraph.

#### CONCLUSIONS

This study discusses "An Efl Teacher's Strategies to Encounter Chinese Students in Teaching Free Writing in The Midst Of Covid-19 Pandemic: A Narrative Inquiry at International English Course in Jakarta". This study is also designed to answer the research question "How does the EFL teacher encounter the Chinese students in her teaching free writing at English Course?" The purpose of this research is to explore the teacher's experience in encountering the Chinese students in her teaching free writing at the English Course. To answer the research question, the author designed this research with the Narrative method so that the author obtains detailed data based on her experience and story.

Based on the results of qualitative data analysis from participants using computers, the authors conclude that the use of free writing is believed to improve students' writing skills and get a good response from them in the implementation process. This is in accordance with research conducted by Sagita (2018), entitled "Improving Students Writing Skills By Using Free Writing Techniques" and Isni (2018), entitled "Free Writing Techniques in Teaching Writing Skills in EFL Classroom" the results of their research, namely techniques free writing can significantly improve students' writing skills. Assist with the mind mapping method by displaying pictures and videos in pre-writing that can stimulate students' ideas in writing. The application of mind mapping in pre-writing can

also increase their enthusiasm and interest because the teaching and learning process in writing classes is not boring.

Before implementing the free writing technique with the mind mapping method, students find it difficult to find ideas in making a paragraph. Some of them even struggle to determine a title. They are always confused about what they should write and they are sometimes bored when the teaching and learning process is taking place in the writing class.

After implementing the free writing technique with the mind mapping method, students can write paragraphs more easily because in the pre-writing process pictures and videos will be displayed to stimulate students' ideas in writing paragraphs and make the teaching and learning process in the classroom interesting and not boring. .

To answer the first Research question regarding "How does the EFL teacher encounter the Chinese students in her teaching free writing at English Course?" it can be concluded that, it needs a good approach from the teacher so that adaptation between students and teachers can run well, the teacher must have broad insight about the material that she teaches to balance Chinese students who actively ask questions in class, creating an interesting atmosphere so that students do not feel bored and do not forget to give motivation, appreciation, praise to them so that the teaching and learning process can run well and fun.

Based on the qualitative data that the writer got from the participants, it can be concluded that the implementation of the free writing technique with online media received a positive response and was effective.

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