

Reflective Evaluation after Investigating EFL Students' Preferences on the Genres of Essay Writing at Final Examination: A Two Semesters Study

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One of the required tasks of being an English lecturer in Indonesia is to perform assessment and evaluation after teaching in a one-semester course. The learning of English essay writing seems to be important for all majors. After collecting actual data from Indonesian EFL students taking an English essay writing course in the even semester of 2015/2016 and 2016/2017, it was found that the students had a certain pattern of interest to which genre they might prefer to write in their final examination. A convenient sampling technique was applied in this research. In terms of data, 71 students enrolled in the course in 2015/2016 (Group 1) and 75 students enrolled in the 2016/2017 (Group 2) academic year. The highest preferred genre for Group 1 was comparison-contrast with 28% and Descriptive for Group 2 with 33%. Meanwhile, the lowest preferred genre for Group 1 was Argumentative with 11% and Narrative for Group 2 with 9%. By looking at these percentages, a few pedagogical reflective evaluations can be made. Hopefully, one question that may be raised for all English teachers and lecturers in Indonesia: "Have we considered EFL students' interests before evaluating their overall performance on our essay writing course?"

Keywords: Assessment, Essay, Evaluation, Pedagogy, Writing

Salah satu tugas utama menjadi dosen bahasa Inggris di Indonesia adalah melakukan penilaian dan evaluasi setelah mengajar selama satu semester. Pembelajaran menulis esai dengan bahasa Inggris dirasa penting untuk setiap bidang studi. Setelah mengumpulkan data empiris dari mahasiswa EFL Indonesia yang mengambil mata kuliah English Essay Writing (EEW) di semester genap tahun ajaran 2015/2016 dan 2016/2017, ditemukan bahwa peserta didik memiliki pola ketertarikan tertentu terhadap genre yang mereka pilih di saat ujian akhir semester. Teknik convenient sampling dilakukan di penelitian ini. Perihal data, 71 mahasiswa yang terdaftar di mata kuliah EEW tahun ajaran 2015/2016 (Group 1) dan 75 mahasiswa yang terdaftar di mata kuliah EEW tahun ajaran 2016/2017. Genre yang paling banyak dipilih mahasiswa adalah Comparison-Contrast (28%) untuk Group 1 dan Descriptive (33%) untuk Group 2. Sementara itu, genre yang paling sedikit dipilih oleh Group 1 adalah Argumentative (11%) dan Group 2 adalah Narrative (9%). Dengan melihat kepada persentase ini, beberapa evaluasi reflektif berbasis pedagogis bisa diraih. Satu pertanyaan mendasar yang perlu direnungi oleh guru dan dosen bahasa Inggris di Indonesia: "Sudahkah kita mempertimbangkan minat peserta didik kita (EFL students) sebelum mengevaluasi penampilan berbahasa tulis mereka di mata kuliah menulis esai yang kita ampu?"

INTRODUCTION

In the context of EFL English, as that in Indonesia, research findings that inform ideas on writing or composition process as well as its teaching and learning together with its assessment process lead us to rethink what it might be true to believe that writing in the second language and writing in the foreign language seems *difficult* for EFL learners. However, “according to the monolingualist assumption, writing in the second language mimics the process of writing in the first language” (Canagarajah, 2010, p. 158), and it connects to the notion that learning English writing as a foreign language is similar to learning Bahasa Indonesia as the first language for Indonesian EFL learners. In spite of that, is this the case of such difficulty to write in English?

Although the author of this article serves as an English lecturer; essentially, part of his job is to conduct teaching among the notion of Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi in Indonesia. In doing so, the actual strategy needed these days for lecturers or teachers-alike is to perform reflective practice after teaching a course at one semester of one academic year. “Reflective practice has been proved to be a meaningful way of learning about teaching and various aspects of teachers’ work by several studies in different EFL teaching contexts” (Yao, 2019). After teaching for two academic years, the researcher was triggered to see the pattern of genre preference that his students chose in the final examination of the EEW course, especially in the even semester of the academic years. This trigger leads the researcher to conduct this research, a form of action research, to reach the reflective practice, particularly the reflective evaluation on this matter. Besides, this research is considered original research because it uses the “primary source of evidence” from the EFL classroom in Indonesia (Green & Lidinsky, 2012, p. 95).

Construction of *context* in this research is shaped by incorporating recent related research topics on EFL learners’ writing skills, essay genre, and academic writing. In the theory of English writing, for instance, “the purpose of a piece of writing determines the rhetorical forms chosen for it” (Oshima & Hogue, 2009, p. 2). This determination provokes us to see that one genre of essay writing might need certain rhetorical forms compared to the other genre. Additionally, a piece of writing needs to be “appropriate in specific circumstances” (Hartley, 2008, p. 4). It leads to the condition of where writing in the EFL context is problematic. Not only an individual EFL student needs to compose a piece of writing within the convention of English grammatically, but the same student also needs to shape his/her writing to meet such specific circumstances. At this point, Logan briefly explained that factors affecting textual differences are purpose, context, and audience (Canagarajah, 2010, p. 183). These three factors become a huge challenge for EFL students if they need to reach the ‘standards’ set by English native speakers.

Research on EFL learners’ writing skills shows interesting insights for us to reevaluate what we know and consider writing skills for EFL students. Aghayani and Hajmohammadi (2019) researched project-based learning to see male EFL students' writing skills in Iran. Their research highlighted the idea that the “project-based learning approach does aid learners to enhance and promote their writing ability in a collaborative environment”. Similar to this research, the EEW course requires students to make sure that they submit their final essay writing project on-time.

Ahmed in Soran University found that writing challenges that EFL students encounter when they write in English are "the capacity to achieve communicative competence in writing skills" (2019). Reaching the point where an individual EFL student who might never travel overseas or rare to communicate with native English speakers can have low communicative competence. Basher, Elmenfi, and Gaibani (2019) at Universiti Utara Malaysia figured out that the first language interferes the process of acquiring the second language and that mainly deal with errors in writing, such as "the errors of the articles, missing words, incorrect words, punctuation, capitalization, and prepositions". Errors are common problems emerging in EFL learners' writings because to them, writing is indeed a process. Interestingly, the process of learning English writing might require "work in [person] with their teacher" as Fitriani & Sabarniati (2019) investigated on their research about feedback in the writing process among novice EFL students-writers. Each EFL student needs certain writing feedback from the teacher or lecturer, so being aware of this matter is a must.

Furthermore, Hanjani performed research on collective peer scaffolding, self-revision, and writing progress. Her research presents a conclusion that such "[activities] improved learners' self-revision skill and the experience [were] favoured by the participants" understudy (2019). Under different circumstances, EFL students who are raised in communities that adhere to the concept of group-based learning activity are informed that such collective peer scaffolding might be necessary. In another country, Chinese students consider English as a foreign language. In the context of research in China, Jie (2019) conducted research that investigated common problems emerging on students' writings are "the misunderstood topic, the lexical mistakes, the phrase mistakes, and the coherence and unity errors". Jie stated that to overcome these problems by "emphasizing the elements" of writing, such as "deciding on a genre of composition, unity, and coherence for each paragraph and a whole text, the controlling idea in a paragraph and composition and the logic realization in writing" (2019). Problems such as those are common as well to be found in EFL students' writings. Moreover, Levrai and Bolster conducted research in Macau about English for Academic Purposes in 2019. Their research provided clues to see that "even though writing in a group may take more time and effort, it is viewed favorably by the majority of students due to the additional learning gains to be made by writing collaboratively, including the increased quality of ideas and the social interactions (face-to-face and online) required to come to agreement" (2019). Levrai and Bolster's research might present similar conception as that conducted by Hanjani, but the terms are different: the former used the notion of *collective peer scaffolding*, while the latter used *writing in a group*.

In terms of research that views writing as an entity, further relevant findings provide further insights. By researching EFL college writing accuracy, Liou found out that "although most participants appreciated the assistance of corpus tools [...] two student cases with average writing performance point to learners' engagement with corpora as one crucial factor interacting with perceptions and outcomes of lookups" (2019). In terms of writing performance, such as that in the TOEFL iBT, Llosa and Malone stated that from 103 students considered as EFL test-takers, "the TOEFL scores were most highly correlated with cohesive and grammatical control and had the lowest correlations with rhetorical organization" (2019). They also briefly stated that "the quality

of the writing on the TOEFL tasks was comparable to that of the first drafts of course assignment but not the final drafts” (2019). These two research findings show us that writing performance is the most assessed item in an EFL classroom and a language proficiency test, such as the TOEFL iBT.

In support to Llosa and Malone’s research, from 537 active EFL students at Islamic University in Sumatera, Indonesia, Marzulina, Pitaloka and Yolanda through their research stated that “no significant correlation between kinaesthetic learning style and English proficiency of EFL students” and “there was also a significant influence of visual learning style on English proficiency” (2019). Because the TOEFL iBT has a Writing test section in it, the fact shows that sadly, the writing that was assessed in the test was only drafts, not the actual product that shows a test-taker’s writing ability. IELTS may also have this downside toward EFL students and learners.

In relation to reflective evaluation that this article highlights, research that focused on reflective teaching in an EFL writing instruction course for Thai pre-service teachers found out that performing reflective teaching is believed to be “a meaningful way of learning about teaching and various aspects of teachers’ work by several studies in different EFL teaching contexts” (2019). For example, according to data that includes 28 advanced Korean EFL writers’ argumentative writing, as these data were reported in research by Min, Paek, and Kang, “hedging played a significant positive role in only content quality of writing” (2019). It shows us that assessing one item of writing may also lead to only one aspect of writing that we paid attention to it. Interestingly, Mohsen and Abdulaziz researched EFL students’ writing with the Hybrid mode on the Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE) program. They stated that “under the hybrid condition students significantly outscored the learners with the AWE program” (2019). Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE) program provides “the benefits [...] in the improvement of the writing skill” (Parra, 2019). Such a program can be used in the evaluation of EFL students’ writings, but this program needs to be evaluated further to be used in the context of teaching English essay writing for Indonesian EFL students.

Additionally, research about essay writing conducted by Nguyen in Thailand revealed that “the students’ active engagement in responding to the teacher feedback [...] assert the crucial roles of teacher’s knowledge of students’ learning experiences, English proficiency levels, feedback preferences and classroom settings on the success of written corrective feedback” (2019). The process of teaching and learning English essay writing in Indonesia has never been far from requesting students to have such active engagement in the classroom. As an example, in a mixed-method study by Rashtchi, Porkar, and Saeed, “no significant differences were found between the product-based and process-based groups” in terms of learning expository writing by applying think-aloud protocols (2019). Surprisingly, being active per se does not guarantee the expected results of the English essay writing classroom. A medium of writing is needed to support the students to express their writing in a real-life fashion. For instance, Indonesian EFL students might gain benefits when they learn how to write by employing blog-assisted language learning (Sulistyo, Mukminatien, Cahyono & Saukah, 2019). However, the fact of the matter is that “distraction, wrong relation, and semantic incompleteness are respectively the most frequently

committed [conjunction] errors" that are found in Indonesian EFL university students' written compositions (Wibawati & Musthafa, 2019). To solve this case, formative peer feedback performed in a writing classroom is useful to increase EFL students' English writing performance, such as that in China (Zhang & McEneany, 2019).

From the theoretical, linguistic, and pedagogical perspectives, being able to write an argumentative essay, for example, signifies the notion that such genre is "central to academic discourse for their complex and challenging nature" (Ahmad, 2019). Ahmad also stated that the ability to write argumentative genre "[reflects] the extent of discourse competence student writers have achieved as members of their academic discourse community" (2019). Research shows that "skilled writers demonstrate linguistic flexibility across the argumentative essays that they produce" (Allen, Likens & McNamara, 2019). Additionally, in the context of Thailand, learning English writing with the genre-based approach is important (Chaisiri, 2018). Besides, it is interesting to realize that genre influenced the process of writing narrative and expository genre (El Mortaji, 2019). Unfortunately, addressing these research findings into the notion of *writing assessment*, in Vietnam, Evans found out that "genres at lower levels of education had been heavily standardized" and "many students felt unprepared to write the genres expected of them, including the need for academic vocabulary and critical thinking" (2019). Such an unfair situation to see and realize that EFL students coming from junior high school or senior high school receive similar assessment standards to those coming from university levels when they write the same genre of writing. The good thing is that after conducting quasi-experimental research about L2 learners' performance on writing, Huang and Jun Zhang mentioned that the process-genre approach, as it was treated to the intervention group, received feedback significantly (2019). The process-genre approach might be good at this point; however, the aspect of assessment still needs further investigation.

Data from students in Istanbul, Turkey, shown that in the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) context, factors influencing undergraduate students' academic writing performances involved "interrelating educational and contextual factors" (Altınmakas & Bayyurt, 2019). Awareness regarding these factors invites critical discussion for all of us to consider how to help the undergraduate students achieve better writing performance. In the process of learning English essay writing utilizing technology apparatus, research highlighting online peer-review activities, for example, presents findings that such activities improved the students' academic writing performance (Aydawati, Rukmini, Barati & Fitriati, 2019). Perhaps, one technique that works in EFL writing classroom is the jigsaw technique. The use of the jigsaw technique indicates that it can increase EFL students' English academic writing ability (Baron, 2019). In spite of that, feedback is considered important for EFL students. Common feedback given to students in the writing classroom is Written Corrective Feedback (WCF). Research, on this matter, shows that "students and teachers cooperate to achieve the ultimate goals of written feedback" (Mao & Crosthwaite, 2019). In other words, this cooperation also brings a similar notion of the active engagement from the students. When EFL students wrote argumentative writing, for example, research shown that "epistemic belief on argumentation-based learning" does not always exist

(Noroozi & Hatami, 2019). It might be true that writing an argumentative essay requires a lot of background readings from the EFL students, but “[providing] specific descriptions of linguistic aspects in writing skill to be designed by the writing lecturers [can] improve students’ writing” (Sholeha, Ghazali & Mahbub, 2019). Therefore, writing an essay within one particular genre needs certain linguistic aspects to bear by the EFL students.

In brief, the above research findings address issues on EFL students' writing skills, essay genre, and academic writing problems. However, the problem with genre preference by the EFL students does not seem to receive much attention from scholars in the field of English studies, particularly English language teaching in the EFL context. This research, in particular, addresses such a missing gap to be investigated and discussed.

The purpose of this research is "to make a unique contribution to a conversation of ideas" (Green & Lidinsky, 2012, p. 95) about EFL writing and composition not only in the Indonesian context but also in many EFL contexts in the world. Two critical questions that this research raises to the conversation of ideas about EFL writing and genre-based approach:

1. Which genre that Indonesian EFL students most preferred and less preferred to write for their English Essay Writing final examination?
2. What can we *learn* as EFL English lecturer or teacher from such different on genre preference among Indonesian EFL students?

METHODS

Research Design

Research design follows the notion of research families, approaches, and techniques (Blaxter, Hughes, & Tight, 2006, p. 63). This research is classified as quantitative research with a combination of fieldwork and deskwork method. In terms of approaches, this research belongs to action research in the field of EFL English writing. It took place in the context of Indonesian EFL students who enrolled in an English essay writing course at a private college in the country.

Setting and Participants

The population of data in this research was students who took English essay writing subjects in the even semester of 2016/2017 and 2017/2018 academic year. To provide a balanced mode of data collection, two classes of each semester were selected. In other words, this research used non-probability sampling with a convenience sampling technique. The form of data in this research is displayed through descriptive statistics mode. It concentrates on displaying the frequencies of data appearing in the documents under study within nominal forms.

Data Collection Method and Analysis

The research technique applied for data collection in this research is in the form of documents (Blaxter, Hughes, & Tight, 2006, p. 165). Documents studied are students' essay writing in the final examination of the English Essay Writing course in the 2015/2016 and 2016/2017 academic year. Secondary data, in the form of related research findings, may also be displayed in the

discussion section of this paper to provide a stronger analysis. Meanwhile, as Blaxter, Hughes, & Tight (2008) mentioned, the process of analysis in this research employed the act of *understanding* the issue of genre preference and how the genre preference provides reflective evaluation for English lecturers reading the teaching and learning of English essay writing in an EFL setting, such as that in Indonesia.

Research Procedures

This research is action research that was conducted after teaching the English Essay Writing course at the even semester of two academic years: 2015/2016 and 2016/2017. The focus of this research was geared toward EFL students' preference for a genre to write in their final examination (see *Figure 1*). Which genre that the student preferred to write determines data for this research.

Figure 1. The English Essay Writing (EEW) Final Examination Test Instruction

Description: This final examination is designed to measure your ability to express your ideas in writing by using English academically. In this final examination, you are asked to write an essay on a topic that is interesting for you. Five topics have been provided. You need to select one topic among five topics that are provided in this examination. After you select one topic, you need to write an essay about the topic within one type of genre among five types of genres that had been studied in the classroom.

Please read the following five topics. Then, choose **one topic** among the following five topics.

Five Topics Available:

1. Your Individual Response on Indonesian Television Program in General;
2. Your Personal Description on Travelling to Other Cities in Indonesia;
3. Your Perspective on Writing Essay in English;
4. Your Ideas on Good or Bad Things of Minangkabau Society in West Sumatera Province;
5. Your Memorable Moments when you were a Child in Your Hometown or Village.

Then, select One Type of Genres from Five Types of Genres as in the following:

1. Descriptive
2. Argumentative
3. Narrative
4. Cause-Effect
5. Comparison-Contrast

Now, you are ready to write your essay on the Answer Sheet that has been provided for you.

Remember to write the thesis statement in the introductory paragraph, supporting details (facts or statistics), and concluding paragraph in your essay.

Good Luck!

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

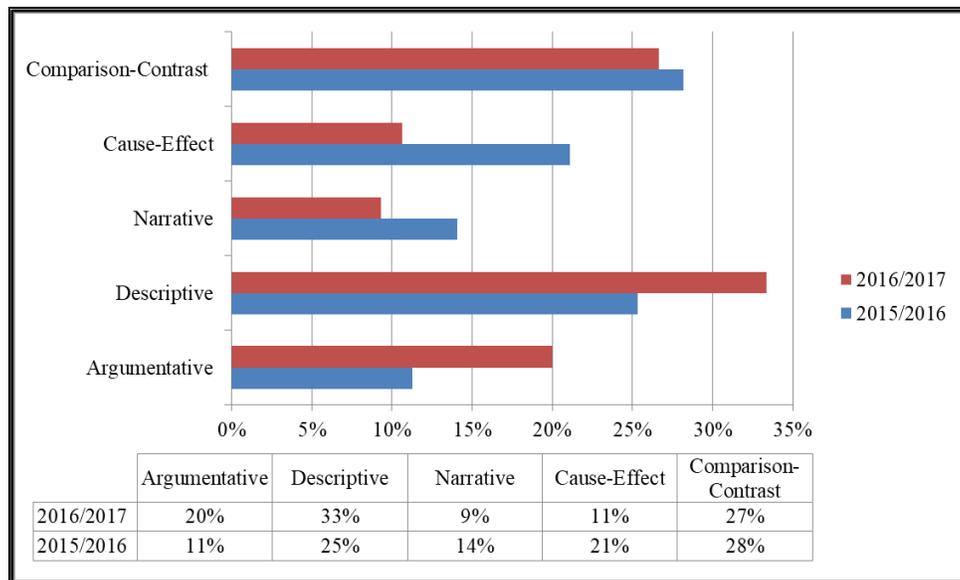
After investigating Indonesian EFL students' final examination answer sheet on every even semester since the 2015/2016 academic year up to the 2016/2017 academic year, the researcher found out a different percentage of genre preference as shown in *Table 1*.

Table 1. Numerical Data of Group 1 and Group 2

Essay Genre	Group 1			Group 2		
	2015/2016			2016/2017		
	2014 C & 2014 D			2015 A & 2015 B		
	#	%	Rank	#	%	Rank
Argumentative	8	11%	5	15	20%	3
Descriptive	18	25%	2	25	33%	1
Narrative	10	14%	4	7	9%	5
Cause-Effect	15	21%	3	8	11%	4
Comparison-Contrast	20	28%	1	20	27%	2
Total Documents	71	100%		75	100%	

If the numerical data displayed in **Table 1** above are displayed in the form of a graph, as shown in **Graph 1**, then we can see the big range of percentage range of each genre from one academic year to the next academic year.

Graph 1. Percentage Data from Even Semesters in Two Different Academic Years



Numerical data displayed in **Graph 1** shows that the Comparison-Contrast genre has a 1% increase from Group 1 to Group 2. The argumentative genre has a 9% decline from Group 1 to Group 2. For the descriptive genre, the data in **Graph 1** shows that there was an 8% decline from Group 1 to Group 2. In terms of the Cause-Effect genre, EFL students in Group 1 preferred it more.

Discussion

Data that had been collected and analyzed in this research show us that indeed, genre preference exists among Indonesian EFL students. One generation to another generation tends to have

different genre preferences. This aspect is only about genre preference, but how about the students' writing scores after selecting the genre? Before we proceed to answer this question, we should be aware that if we need to judge quality of students' writings as "good", then we need to realize and acknowledge that the notion of "*good*" is a rhetorical term whose application and definition depends on its context" (Hindman, 2002, p. 405). The process of teaching and learning English essay writing, as a form of andragogy in higher education level, for instance, demands the use of exemplars (Chong, 2019). An example of academic writing is the one that we can see in the IELTS writing module. Chong (2019) emphasized that using exemplars in the writing classroom can provide ways "to develop students' understanding of assessment standards". Unfortunately, though, the IELTS writing test might have one genre only to be tested and that is argumentative, usually with the form of agree-or-disagree mode. From data in this research, we can come across that *perhaps* Indonesian EFL students may not prefer argumentative genre to write if their writing ability is tested. They might prefer another type of genre, which might have a bigger chance for them to be assessed holistically. Hypothetically speaking, they might prefer one genre over another genre because of background knowledge that they have or simply because they do not have anything to argue at the time of the final examination. Other reasons and factors are open to debates.

When we discuss which essay genre that is better, then we can come across to a debatable argument. Argumentative is one of the genres that EFL students learn in the essay writing course. Research shows that being able to compose argumentative writing is crucial in the academia for students to develop because, as Ferretti addressed, "high quality of argumentative writing is expected throughout the curriculum and needed in an increasingly competitive workplace" (2019). Conversely, part of the problem is that there are many other types of essay genres that EFL students need to compose other than the argumentative genre. All of these genres require the ability of critical thinking. Theoretically, critical thinking may be applicable to be used as an approach to university essays (Bruce, 2019). Recent ignition from scholars in the field of writing indicates that traditional views on academic writing are being re-evaluated and analyzed by scholars in the field (Davidson, 2019). Thus, taking into account the argumentative genre as the sole genre to be assessed seem to create another loss in the writing classroom.

On the individual basis, research informs us that "students learning style on their writing achievement did not differ between the visual learners, the auditory learners, and the kinaesthetic learners" (Hanafi, 2019). There is no significant difference if we consider individual differences regarding how they learn; however, in terms of genre preference to be written on that once spot—at the final examination—is a different story. It seems that there is certain reasoning that needs to be investigated further to know why one particular student preferred one particular genre among other types of genres available for them. An alternative solution regarding this problem for the Indonesian EFL context is that "discovery learning-based writing assessment activities help students' creativity and critical thinking" in the context of the 2013 curriculum (Kusumawardhani, Mulya & Faizah, 2019). However, in terms of the *writing scores*, after the learning process, many rhetorical questions can be raised afterward. Even though it is undeniable to accept the notion that

the assessment process plays an important role in the process of teaching and learning English writing (Thomas, et. al., 2019). One of the rhetorical questions is: "Have we considered EFL students' interests before evaluating their overall performance on our essay writing course?" This question is, indeed, not suitable if we post it to the sense of writing performance as the test of language proficiency, such as TOEFL iBT or IELTS. This question is, indeed, worthy of attention from EFL teachers and lecturers in Indonesia. Many aspects that we need to consider to assess from an individual EFL student. Writing ability is more than just being able to write in the test. Writing ability should be seen throughout the life of an individual EFL student. Then, can a writing score represent this? We can judge an individual EFL student as being incapable to write if he or she never writes anything in their life other than merely being a text reproducer.

Writing in the second language / foreign language has different nuances from writing in the first language, especially if the writer is regarded as a novice writer / student-writer. Research has shown that "novice writers may have difficulty understanding source text information, paraphrasing and summarizing source information, and incorporating that information into a coherent piece of writing" (Uludag, Lindberg, McDonough & Payant, 2019). Students who took the EEW course as indicated in this research data shows that their preference toward one genre signifies their holistic interests toward the genre. Can we judge that they cannot write other types of genres? We simply cannot judge in that way. Briefly, "university teachers find it difficult to take action without an understanding of students' *perceptions* and *needs*" (Zhou, Zhao & Dawson, 2019). Taking action without performing holistic evaluation toward the students may lead us into performing an unfair process of assessment to them. Concerning the scholarly discussion on Second Language Writing, we should notice that "individual differences influence how students learn, how they respond to instruction, and the progress they make to improve their writing" (Hyland, 1996, p. 50). Thus, the data shown in this research highlights and shows that the way students respond to instruction by choosing the genre they prefer is indeed different. As such, we should need to consider EFL students' interests before evaluating their overall performance on our essay writing course, so that we are not trapped into our own justified belief or epistemic belief about what *good writing* is, pedagogically or andragogically in the long run.

CONCLUSIONS

Indonesian EFL students mostly preferred comparison-contrast genre (Group 1) and Descriptive genre (Group 2) to be written in their final examination test; meanwhile, less preferred genre to be written for their English Essay Writing final examination is Argumentative genre (Group 1) and Narrative genre (Group 2). What we, as EFL English lecturer or teacher, can *learn* from such different on genre preference is that we should avoid constructing a certain belief in our mind that one genre illustrates a better genre compared to other types of genres in the English Essay Writing (EEW) course in assessing EFL students' writing ability.

This research, in particular, addresses the issue of genre preference from documents in the form of EFL students' final examination answer sheet. It certainly limits some other aspects of this research. It is suggested to practitioners that the reasons why individual EFL students preferred

one type of genre over another type of genre should be investigated. For policymakers, it is suggested that using scores to measure EFL students' ability to write should be addressed properly through a holistic process in the classroom. One test of language proficiency, such as TOEFL iBT and IELTS, does not guarantee entirely all aspects of the writing skill of EFL students. Indeed, for EFL students, and even perhaps EFL scholars, writing in English academically or popularly is needed to be driven within the sense of a genre-process approach.

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