

A narrative inquiry of Indonesian EFL students' writing experiences in the morning English talks program

Syarifudin Syarifudin^{1*}, Muhammad Anis Azhar², Miftahul Jannah³, Afif Ikhwanul Muslimin⁴

^{1,3,4}Universitas Islam Negeri Mataram, Indonesia; syarif@uinmataram.ac.id (S.S.) miftahuljannah950@uinmataram.ac.id (M.J.) afifikhwanulm@uinmataram.ac.id (A.I.M.)

²Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia; muhammad.anis.2202216@students.um.ac.id (M.A.A.).

Abstract: This study investigates the writing experience of Indonesian EFL students in the Morning English Talks (METs) activity, a community language learning task that integrates extensive reading with reflective discussion. Implemented at an Islamic State University in West Nusa Tenggara, this qualitative study applied a narrative inquiry approach with three purposively selected participants. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews and complemented by students' reflective journals. Thematic analysis showed that the METs program was significant in the construction of students' writing through the improvement of vocabulary, grammatical awareness, and the ability to organize and express ideas. Reading and dialogic discussion regularly also helped to construct critical thinking and writing confidence. The use of WhatsApp as an online space facilitated continuous learning beyond the classroom and collective meaning-making. While the findings are rich in conceptual insight into the benefits of community-based literacy practice, the small number of participants suggests a need for further studies with larger, more diverse participant groups and qualitative and quantitative designs. The study has practical significance for EFL instructors who desire to combine writing instruction with low-tech, student-mediated approaches that bridge formal and informal learning environments.

Keywords: Community language learning, EFL, METs, Writing, Narrative inquiry.

1. Introduction

This study was driven by one of the authors' experiences in learning English as a foreign language (EFL), which made her cognizant of the importance of mastering the language to communicate and engage with others from distinct cultural backgrounds. The author's English language proficiency level influences the way she lives, socializes, and experiences life. In a nutshell, if both of her speaking and writing skills are low, they certainly hamper her communication and opportunities to socialize with others in a diverse and multicultural communities or institutions, particularly with those coming from native English-speaking countries and universities.

In 2016, she began her undergraduate English program at a State Islamic University in the Province of West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. She was confident that she would not encounter any communication barriers either in writing or speaking in English in that she had learned English for around 9 years since elementary school and participated in some English courses before enrolling at university. However, what she experienced at the beginning of her initial scholarly journey was completely different from what she had imagined, lowering her self-confidence. Nonetheless, in the second term, her English writing lecturer established a community language learning (CLL), a prominent learning approach that emphasizes on the language learner's physiological and cognitive aspects, and engages them in all language skills practices in a less cognitively and linguistically

challenging learning environment [1] called “Morning English Talks” (METs) in 2017, a literacy group-based reading, where the students read interesting news and jotted down some new vocabulary at night shared via a WhatsApp group, one of the mobile-phone Apps allowing the exchanges of messages, creation of groups, and sharing of digital file, such as videos, documents, photos, etc., [2] and engaged in the discussion forum regarding the content using English the following morning usually at 08:00 a.m.

The program was initiated to help the students improve their writing skills by sharing and reading various English texts from a multitude of sources, mainly online newspapers such as BBC, TheJakartaPost, and The Guardian, for example. It was carried out because the writing lecturer believed that reading could contribute to the development of the skills. It is empirically justified by previous studies pertaining to the contribution of reading towards writing enhancement [3]. In addition, Politton and Hadiyanti [4] and Amran, et al. [5] advocate that CLL plays a critical role in promoting English language learners’ skills in a way that engages them in an active dialogic interaction using the learned language. Such interaction provides the writing students with the necessary L2 input and a sufficient amount of exposure to the communicative use of the target language [6] which is significant for their writing skills development [7].

It is generally acknowledged that writing in EFL is painstaking for the learners as it involves an intricate process of composition from planning to the production of the written texts. Hence, learning to write in English in such a learning environment requires sufficient learning hours, real-world use materials and learning beyond the classroom [8].

Although various studies have documented the importance of reading towards writing skills development (e.g., [9-11]) and pedagogical role of the CLL (i.e., [12]) there is a little qualitative evidence of marrying both to facilitate the students’ writing skills development based on the experiences of the participants, particularly within the context of Indonesian Islamic University.

Based on the rationales above, the current study aimed at exploring and making sense of the EFL students’ writing experiences in the METs program at the State Islamic University in the Province of West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. Furthermore, the particular purpose of this study was to explore how METs assisted them to learn writing both inside and beyond the classroom. Therefore, to meet the research objective above, the following research question guides this study: *What stories did the EFL writing students convey about their writing experiences while participating in the METs Program?*

2. Literature Review

2.1. Writing in a Foreign Language

Writing is the combination of numerous arranged words to form sentences or paragraphs [13]. It is also considered as a tool to generate ideas by consolidating various linguistics items to communicate interactively [14]. Further, it requires critical thinking that must be integrated with several components including the theme or topic, lexical grammatical choices, organization, purpose, sequence, and transcription which extremely demanded for students' cognitive, linguistics, affective, and psychomotor capacities [15]. In addition, it sharpened learners' logical argument and how to persuade someone [16]. Moreover, Murcia [17] reveals that writing is the capability of conveying some messages by producing an accurate and coherence written work. It may help students to think logically, establish their creativity, contribute to their success opportunity, develop personal character, and strengthen social practice.

It is generally acknowledged that L2 learners find the ability to write as the most difficult language skill to acquire due its complexities from planning to the production of the texts [18], not to mention for EFL learners [8]. In the Indonesian educational landscape, English has been a compulsory subject to learn across all levels of education [19]. Nevertheless, there have been a myriad of barriers circumventing the target language mastery, specifically with respect to writing skill. In addition, becoming a benchmark, writing is often claimed as a crucial indicator in determining the quality of students, particularly for those who are majoring in English and education program in that their

academic achievements are often measured by a plethora of English papers they produce [20]. However, numerous findings indicate that EFL students and graduates in the country still have low writing proficiency [21]. This happens due to several challenges confronted by both the writing students and instructors [22]. These include inadequacy of learning hours, practices, and exposure into the target language [8].

Unlike in ESL context where learners have a lot of opportunities for experiencing and practicing English in their daily communication, such as reading and writing which facilitate them to learn the target language, EFL learners are not adequately exposed to the use of English compared to their counterparts in the inner-circle countries, where the language is used as a means of daily encounter, such as Australia, USA, England [23]. As a result, they are frequently confronting difficulties in utilizing the language [24] making the learners find it most challenging to acquire the language, particularly writing skill [8, 25].

Despite its complexities, writing is regarded as the most crucial invention in human history. It has become the most elaborate skill to be acquired by language learners due to its significant roles in communication, particularly in this information era. It is also considered as a tool to generate ideas by consolidating various linguistics items to communicate interactively [14].

2.2. Recent Studies on English Language Writing

Writing plays a prominent role in language learning [26]. Nonetheless, it is still deemed as the most daunting and complex skill among the four English competences [7, 25]. Thus, a plethora reported studies have explored numerous issues of writing in a foreign language (e.g., [27-31]). Ariyanti and Fitriana [27] for instance, drew on qualitative descriptive study to explore the Indonesian EFL students' learning barriers and needs to learn writing. Based on the data elicited from the open-ended questionnaire and interview, the study unveiled that the students's challenges related to lexicogrammatical choices, coherence and cohesion, and structure. Another finding also showed that the writing lecturers found that inadequate learning hours and big-size classes remained their primary barriers. Similarly, [31] drawing on several studies on EFL writing in the Indonesian context, found that grammatical accuracy and unauthentic contents were instructional drawbacks, and big-size and low learning hours were the challenges of the writing instructors. Drew on qualitative research method, Rahmatunisa [28] examined the difficulties faced by the students in composing argumentative essay writing at an Indonesian university. The study unveiled that the difficulties ranged from grammatical accuracy, ideas organization, and psychological matters, such as low motivation and boredom. The study suggests the collaborative writing and frequent use of dictionaries and peer correction.. In addition, Toba and Noor [29] using mixed research method investigating the essay writing quality and challenges the Indonesian EFL encounter at an Indonesian university. Based on the results of the writing test, open-ended questionnaire, and interview, it was found that the students' writing quality was overall good given the Mean score 77.83. The study also unveiled that the writing mechanic subsequently followed by grammar, content, and organization were respectively their prominent problems.

Although various studies have been adequately carried out with regard to learning English language writing, little evidence has been documented on how an English language learning community, particularly the Morning English Talks as depicted in this study through a narrative inquiry research, contribute to the development of English writing skills through their shared experiences. For that reason, this narrative inquiry study is of paramount importance to fill the void.

3. Methodology

3.1. Study Context

The study took place at the English Education Program of an Indonesian State Islamic University situated in the Province of West Nusa Tenggara, where the METs were carried out. The program was an add-on to the writing classes. There were more than twenty students who participated in the

program sitting in the fourth semester. The program was aimed to help the students improve their writing skills. I, the first author, as the lecturer, shared the readings, usually taken from the Internet via WhatsApp group for the students to read at night and shared what they had read the following day, in the morning mediated by the lecturer himself (see Figure 1). I, along with the two remaining authors, found that this morning-based reading program could enhance the students' writing skills as it is theoretically justified that reading has significant affordances toward the writing skills development (e.g., [9-11]). The second author was the co-researcher in this project who was assigned as a co-teacher in the METs program. The third author in this paper was involved in polishing the academic language used in this paper.

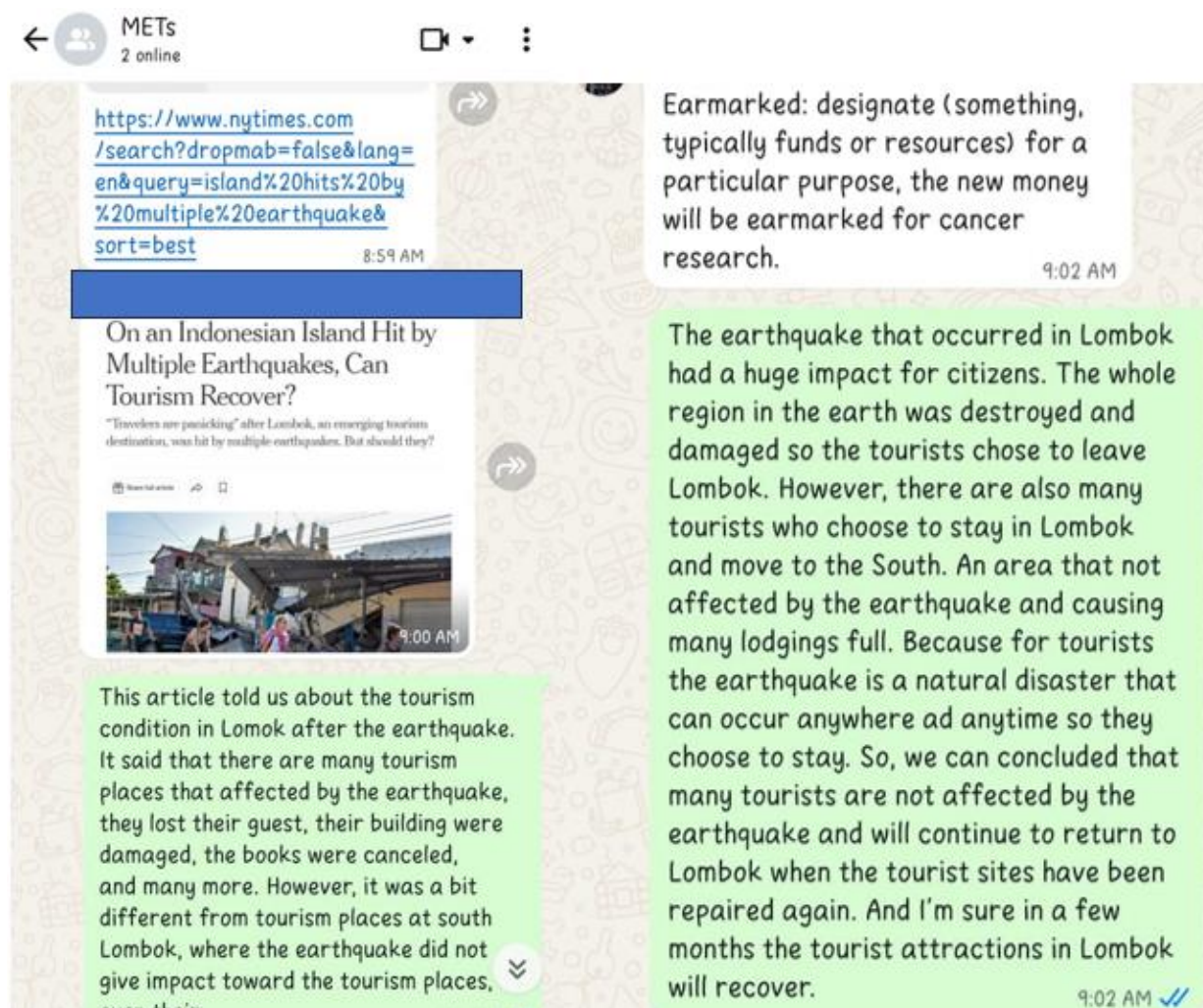


Figure 1.
Group shared reading via WhatsApp.

3.2. Narrative Inquiry

Some qualitative studies on EFL writing have documented EFL teachers' writing experiences Lin [32]. Lin [32] attempted to re-story the existing of context-model-based instruction in teaching EFL writing, particularly on students' learning development of the context model. As reported by Connelly and Clandinin [33] narrative inquiry, a research method that employs stories as both the data and a means of analyzing or presenting the research findings [34] is considered a developing approach to

teacher education concerning personal storytelling. Also, it claims education appeared by sharing, analyzing, and criticizing the told stories of educational experiences. We make sense of our life experiences and choose parts of our lives to gain value and useful information from the stories. These ideas imply that our own experience is the most fascinating science in the field of teaching and learning research [35]. By proposing narrative inquiry, it seems that we probe human-centeredness as the nature of learning and address associated issues faced by many researchers and educational developers in a wide range of teaching and learning settings. Thus, the value and utility of employing this kind of research method ideally confronts the complexities of human experience in teaching and learning.

In this study, we employed a narrative inquiry research method because it was relevant to the nature of this study in that it helped fathom out the participants' mental state and their pedagogical experiences within the socio-educational contexts by documenting and looking into their experiences or stories either as a source of data [34]. It was aimed to make sense of participants' experiences in learning English writing by documenting and subjectively examining their stories and establishing a strong relationship with them in the METs program to gain richer data. Therefore, this study drew on the participants' stories regarding their personal experiences to uncover certain research queries by looking at human experiences involving both personal and social stories. In this study, the data were subjectively examined by the researchers and established a good connection with the participants socially and personally to gain more in-depth data Clandinin [36]. Haydon, et al. [37] state that narrative inquiry is an appropriate research method to apply due to its advantages in providing the answers of research question/puzzle, data collection, analysis and presentation techniques, and determines whether the results generate beneficial insights. Furthermore, it offers retentive data to respond research questions significantly [38]. Hence, this investigation did not only focus on the participants' experiences but also on their social and cultural circles which affect and configure their impressions.

3.3. Participants

We purposively selected the students who actively participated in METs. We used the purposive sampling strategy, a qualitative research sampling strategy that selected participants based on certain reasons, because this was the ideal strategy for determining sample in qualitative research as this study did not aim to generalize the findings [39]. This was crucial because the research goal was to explore and make sense of the participants' writing experiences in the extracurricular program with respect to their learning writing. We chose the participants based on their willingness to partake in this investigation and their higher rate of participation during the program. We reached out the three participants personally and asked for their willingness or agreement for this investigation. For confidentiality, this study used pseudo names of the participants, namely Vee, Jei, and Pi. All the three participants were female, who were at their mid-20s enrolling in the English Language Education at the Islamic University. This study did not require any institutional approval as it was a part of our joint initiatives as a scholar in the institution.

3.4. Data Collection and Analysis

A semi-structured in-depth narrative interview, the interview data collection method that aims to garner intended information from the target interviewees through a set of prepared questions carried out in a flexible manner [40] was employed to gain the stories in relation to students' writing experiences in the METs program. The interview primarily concerned with the participants' writing experiences in the METs program face-to-face (FTF) in the language by which they were most convenient. They were allowed to speak either in Indonesian or English when narrating their stories. The questions included the experiences the students underwent throughout their participation in the METs program, their overall thoughts and feelings of the program, the extent to which the program helps them improve their writing skills, and the challenges they encountered. Despite this, the students were allowed to respond freely, and possible follow-up questions were also proposed when necessary,

the interview was carried out until the intended data were elicited for each participant. In order to avoid personal influences on the stories, the researcher tried to minimize personal reaction during the interview. Moreover, the interviews were by agreement verbally recorded via a digital voice recorder to achieve stories from participants completely. Finally, the researcher noted the observation during the activity in the form of memos to understand the context of their stories.

To analyze the data, we employed “analysis of narrative” as one of the approaches to the data analysis of narrative inquiry research in that the study constituted stories or narratives from which certain categories were thematically formed [34]. Hence, we used thematic data analysis because it involved multiple cases, in which we garnered the data from three different individuals. Barkhuizen, et al. [34] advocated that thematic data analysis best fitted the studies that involved more than one participant in that it enabled the researchers to compare the data, establish similar themes, and highlight the dissimilarities within the data. For this reason, we drew on Braun and Clarke [41] thematic data analysis procedures that comprise self-familiarization with the data, initial code generation, figuring out themes, review of themes, definition and naming of themes, and reporting (see Braun and Clarke [41] for more details). In the first phase, we transcribed the data, (re)read them iteratively, and jotted down critical ideas relevant to the purpose of the study. In the second phase, we manually coded the relevant narratives with numbers (see Table 1), from which we proceeded to figure out themes in the following stage by mapping the code (see Figure 2).

Table 1.
Coding the narrative data.

Actually I participated in Morning English Talks from the third semester. The program really helped me improve my writing skill because it broadened my vocabulary and my language use. I found various idioms and it made my writing better or looks better and since its reading activities, the reading requires me to think and process more information and it also helped me to build my critical thinking.	Improve writing Enrich vocabularies/ idioms Promote language use Develop critical thinking
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Then, we collaboratively reviewed the emerging themes by carefully looking into its relevance to the objective of the study. Subsequently, we defined and named the themes, from which upon our satisfaction with the emerging themes, we presented the data extracted and compared from the narratives of the three participants in this study and justified by relevant findings in the current literature. In presenting the narrative findings, Barkhuizen, et al. [34] opined that the themes should be presented along with the narratives or told stories selected or extracted from the interviewees by the researcher.

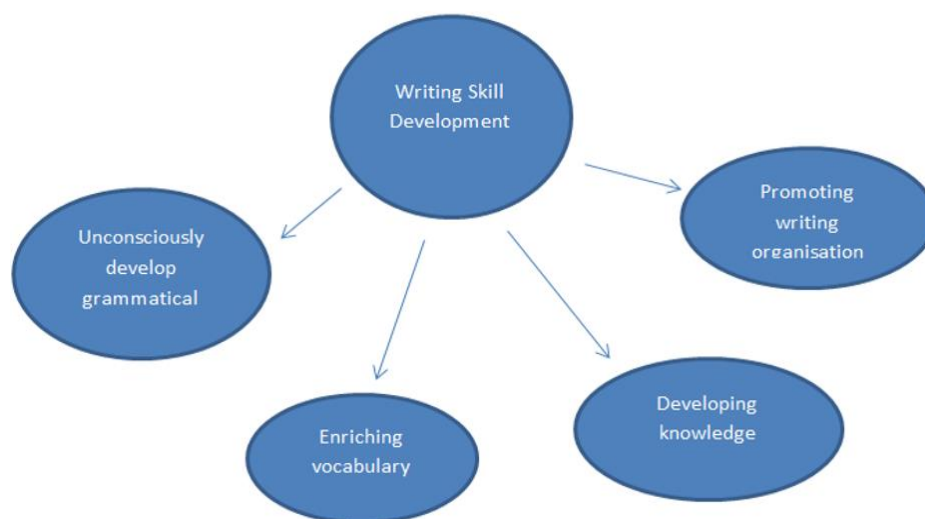


Figure 2.
Sample Ideas Mapping for themes.

This study was done with human participants and adhered to ethical standards for human subject research. Ethical clearance was not required according to the policy of Universitas Islam Negeri Mataram, since the research was undertaken as part of an internal academic assignment. However, all participants were informed of the purpose of the study, and verbal informed consent was provided prior to participation. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained through the use of pseudonyms.

4. Findings

4.1. The Told Stories

This section presents the findings of the study that seeks to answer the kinds of learning activities of METs, carried out to improve the students' writing skills. In detail, it presents the stories of three participants from whom the findings were extracted according to the purpose of the study. Overall, the students' narratives as evidenced in the following narrative excerpts showed that participants perceived that this community language learning program contributed to their English writing skills development.

Within this section, the researchers first began by retelling the stories shared during the interviews by the participants regarding their English-writing experiences when joining the METs program at English Language Education of an Indonesian State Islamic University in West Nusa Tenggara. For the sake of confidentiality, this study used pseudonyms for the participants, namely Vee, Jei, and Pi. The narratives of each participant including their past writing experiences both in the METs and classroom were separately presented.

4.2. Students' Participation in METs Contributes to their Writing Skills Development

Vee, the first participant in this study, participated in METs for quite short time about a month when she was in the third semester. She revealed that participating in METs did help her improve her writing skill in that it enriched her vocabulary, and idioms, and facilitated the language use. Moreover, reading activities in the program broadened her insights that built critical thinking. She also admitted that it promoted her understanding as she was engaged more frequently in the reading activities:

"Morning English Talks really helps me improve my writing skill because it enriches my vocabulary and language use. I found various idioms, and they make my writing better or look better; and since it involves reading activities, it requires me to think and process more information, and it also helps me build my critical thinking skill."

So, I think when I was joining METs, I felt like the more I read, the more and the deeper my understanding was". [Vee, July 15, 2020]

Furthermore, she told about her experience since the first time joining METs. She was given an article a night before the discussion and expected to read and elaborate the content of the article. There were more than five participants involved in this program, and she delivered her arguments with regard to the issues that she has read before logically. At the end of the discussion, the presenter or the moderator provided conclusion based on the arguments from each of participants. Hence, it did not only build her writing skill, but also her confidence since she had to talk in front of many people. She gave this explanation when asked to recall her experiences when joining the METs program.

"...I maybe gave little explanation about my experience since the first time joining METs. I was given an article a night before the discussion and expected to read and elaborate the content. Then, I discussed with more other participants who also had the same opportunity. So, I should convey my ideas with regard to the issues logically. To close the discussion, a mediator summarized all of arguments and provided clear explanation and conclusion. For this reason, I feel METs not only built my writing skills, but also my confidence...". [Vee, July 15, 2020]

Similarly, Jei, the second participant, participated in the METs program from fourth semester for about two years. She stated that METs really assisted her in learning writing where she could utilize new vocabulary and theory of writing due to the explanation of the instructor related to the structure of sentences which helped her to write academically. Besides, METs enhanced lexical grammatical choices and the organization of writing with reflect on the reading that she has discussed in the community. Furthermore, Jei elaborated several advantages that she achieved during her participation in the program including vocabulary repertoire, the understanding of writing organization, and knowledge. She revealed,

"...Actually METs really helped me in learning writing especially when Mr. Husnawadi [One of English lecturers at TBI UIN Mataram who established the METs program] explained us about what we are discussing at the time. Convincingly, the merit of reading has boosted my understanding to use some theories and new vocabulary in my writing. As a mediator, Mr. Husnawadi explained us about the organization and structure of sentences that I could apply on my own writing, specifically, in academic purpose. Hence, METs assisted me to organize my own writing and enriched vocabulary with reflect on the reading that we have discussed in the program ...". [Jei, July 15, 2020]

Likewise, Pi, the third participant, told that in the METs program, she has a lot of activities, such as reading numerous articles related to various recent issues which were written by experts. Hence, she knew numerous information that she possibly could not achieve outside the community. Furthermore, with respect to writing, she argued that the program is really helpful and effective due to its reading activities where she obtained a lot of academic vocabulary everyday which assisted her to enhance writing capability considering writing requires a lot of vocabulary. Pi narrated,

"...In relation with writing, I think METs is a helpful and effective program due to its reading activities. We read and discussed various articles consisting of numerous academic vocabularies. Therefore, reading regularly enriches vocabulary and improves writing skills because this productive skill requires adequate vocabulary repertoire". [Pi, July 15, 2020]

4.3. Their Writing Experiences in the Classroom While Participating in the Mets Program also Depict the Findings Above

Several activities in the METs program, such as jotting down and translating vocabularies, reading various articles, comprehending the meaning of the texts, dialogic discussion, asking and answering various questions related to topics discussed, writing numerous examples of sentences and reflective summary have provided students' opportunity to practice their writing and support them in writing classroom.

Besides enhancing writing capability, Vee' participation in the METs also has a significant influence on her writing in the classroom. She is able to express her ideas appropriately by using numerous vocabularies in her writing. She said,

"... When joining METs, there is a significant influence on my writing in the classroom. I feel more capable of expressing my ideas appropriately by using various vocabularies when executing writing tasks in the class" [Vee, July 15, 2020]

By actively participating in the community, Jei obtained numerous current insights which assisted her when she has to write about tourism in her writing classroom, for instance, the word 'ecotourism'. At the time, she thought that ecotourism defined as economy and tourism, however, the actual meaning of the word is ecosystem and tourism. Moreover, she not only became a listener or student, but also an active presenter. Jei detailed,

"...I still remember when Mr. Husnawadi explained about ecotourism at the time. I thought that ecotourism referred to economy and tourism, but it implied ecosystem and tourism. This novel insights helped me when my lecturer asked me to write about tourism in the classroom. Furthermore, METs also created us to become active presenters..." [Jei, July 15, 2020]

Apparently, participating in the METs was a new experience for Jei where she has to understand the reading in order to convey her ideas in front of her junior and others. The program provided English environment which assisted her to practice the language mastery and express ideas both in writing and presentation in the classroom. Jei admitted that she felt grateful for joining the community due to her improvement not only in writing, but also the other aspects, such as speaking and reading competences. Moreover, after joining the program, she is no longer overwhelmed with the use of vocabulary in writing because she already gained a lot of additional vocabulary. Besides, the structure that she read and discussed assists her in writing classroom. Jei explained,

"...it was a new experience for me when I have to understand and deliver my ideas based on the texts to my juniors. It helped me in doing my presentation in classroom. I felt grateful for joining METs. It not only enhanced my writing, but also reading and speaking skills" [Jei, July 15, 2020]

Pi argued that METs is an effective program to enrich vocabulary that enhanced writing skill. Prior to participate in the program she really confused about lexical grammatical choices to write sentences correctly. However, after joining the program, her writing is getting better which made her happy. She could utilize the words and sentences appropriately based on the context. Therefore, she believed that METs is the best way to enhance writing skill.

"...METs is really effective to enhance writing skill. Prior to participate in the community, I confused in choosing vocabulary to write sentences appropriately. However, after joining the program, my writing is better than before that made me really happy. I believe that METs is the best way to improve writing skill..." [Pi, July 15, 2020]

4.4. Several Challenges When Joining the METs Program

4.4.1. Lack Confidence

Vee initially confronted various challenges when she participated in the program. She conveyed that delivering her ideas in front of many people was the most difficult task that she faced at the time. She tried to build her confidence. Furthermore, she did not understand numerous complex words in the articles, which made her harder to understand the meaning of the texts.

"I find delivering my ideas in front of many people is the most challenging task in the METs as I stated before. I need to build my confidence in front of someone else to talk. Furthermore, I don't understand all of the words in the article..." [Vee, July 15, 2020]

In order to comprehend the overall meaning of the texts, she tried to translate those difficult words at the night prior to discussion by using online dictionaries. Finally, she could overcome the difficulty. Moreover, she becomes more confident to speak in public and improve her writing ability. She shared her experiences to confront the barriers by saying,

“...To comprehend the texts, I tried to figure out the words meaning by goggling the words and jotting down the meaning, and making another sentence sample. As the time goes by, I could understand those difficult words to overcome my difficulties. Moreover, my writing and my confidence to talk in front of many people are increased”. [Vee, July 15, 2020]

At the same time, Jei claimed that organizing and explaining the topic of the discussion to her juniors and others were several challenges that she faced when participating in the community. Moreover, the lack reading interest lead her hard to comprehend the meaning of sentences in some articles, particularly those that were taken from the Jakarta Post and BBC News. In order to deal with her difficulty in reading, Jei read and translated the given materials every night before the discussion. Therefore, METs helped her to establish the reading interest which created writing schemata.

“Delivering the topic of the discussion is the most challenging part for me. I found it difficult to recognize the meaning of sentences. Admittedly, the use of unfamiliar words and complicated organization of sentences in several articles, such as in Jakarta Post or BBC News are quiet hard for me to understand due to my lack interest of reading. For this reason, I joined METs to establish my reading interest, but still found it difficult when I have to state my opinion in front of audiences. To cope with my difficulties in reading, I translated all of complicated vocabulary at night to make me understand about the topic. [Jei, July 15, 2020]

In similar vein, Pi admitted that she felt nervous to convey her ideas during the discussion due to her speaking ability. She was also afraid of making mistakes and getting bad judgment from the other members, especially her seniors. Thus, she preferred to keep her ideas instead of delivering them at the first time joining the program.

“...Initially, I felt shy to speak in front of the members, particularly my seniors. I thought they would judge me if I made some mistakes when conveying my ideas. For that reason, I kept silent and did not speak during the discussion...” [Pi, July 15, 2020].

However, she realized that the program was continuously boosted her self-confidence in public speaking.

“...I established my self-confidence in public speaking in the METs program”. [Pi, July 15, 2020].

4.4.2. The Internet Connection

Vee said that she needed to spend more money to buy data plan to access the reading text and discuss via WhatsApp group.

“....As we required to access the articles every day, I spent more money to buy data plan regularly”. [Vee, July 15, 2020]

However, she was willing to spend her money to buy the data plan as the program is of importance to enhance her English skills.

“....eventually, spending more money to buy the data plan is not big problem for me as the program helped me to improve my reading, speaking, listening and writing skills”. [Vee, July 15, 2020]

Similarly, Jei conveyed that she was unable to read the articles when her data plan was suddenly ran out so that she could not actively involved in the discussion as she did not read the article at the night.

“...I could not search and read articles when my quota was suddenly ran out. It made me inactive during the discussion as I did not understand the reading”. [Jei, July 15, 2020]

In addition, Pi also revealed that her first difficulty is the lack of data plan to read the article online because in the second semester she assumed that it is not that crucial. Therefore, she has to go to college in the morning to be able to use Wi-Fi to download or access the reading for the discussion. She also found it difficult to to understand vocabulary and the meaning of the texts.

“...In correlation with several challenges, quota has become the first hindrance in joining METs because at second semester having quota was not really crucial for me. Therefore, when we implement the program I have to go to college in the morning to use Wi-Fi to access journals or articles to be discussed.

Moreover, less understanding of several vocabulary in the articles lead me difficult to comprehend the meaning of the text.” [Pi, July 15, 2020]

Moreover, Vee, Jei and Pi conveyed several activities in the METs program. They mentioned these seven enterprises: reading several texts, jotting down and translating some difficult vocabulary, providing new knowledge and establishing dialogic discussion and critical thinking. A participant said:

“...I found various idioms, and they make my writing better or look better; and since its reading activities, it requires me to think and process more information and it also helps me build my critical thinking.” [Vee, July 15, 2020]

In addition, the other participant stated that METs assisted her in order to convey ideas and argumentations related to texts, increase reading interest and strengthen relationship with others.

“...So when I met them, I don't say hey, I can mention their name. Therefore, it helped me in recognizing my junior and increased my friend too”. [Vee, July 15, 2020]

5. Discussion

The findings of this study revealed numerous benefits of reading activities in the METs program with respect to learning to writing in English as a foreign language based on participants' experiences, such as enriching vocabulary and idiom, improving language use, lexico-grammatical choices, broadening new insights to comprehend topics and contents, and enhancing understanding related to spelling, punctuation, transition, grammatical construction and organization of sentences.

All of the participants agreed that their writing had significantly improved after participated in METs program which engaged them actively in the shared reading activities. This qualitative evidence echoed that of theoretical and empirical studies. The students' perceived writing gained as depicted by their narratives and excerpts can be theoretically associated to the amount of input afforded by the routine or extensive reading that the students were assigned. Tudor and Hafiz [42] and Ellis [6] assert that L2 learners will not acquire the target language if they are not extensively exposed into the communicative use of the language. In this regard, the students were actively engaged in the language use in and beyond the classroom facilitated by the WhatsApp at night, during which they jotted down some unfamiliar words. The morning reading in the METs program where the students negotiated meaning strengthened their cognitive function in memorizing words through language use as they interacted. These findings also echo those of previous studies examining the impacts of extensive reading on writing development. Day and Robb [43] discussed the implication of extensive reading beyond the classroom by drawing on a Japanese learner's experiences and relevant theories. They concluded that the self-initiated extensive reading activities promoted the learner's lexico-grammatical knowledge, attitude, motivation and confidence. Mason and Krashen [44] also unveiled that even reluctant or failed EFL students had better gains than their successful counterparts. They also uncovered that the students who were assigned to read extensively outperformed their counterparts who were taught comprehension on writing (see Mason and Krashen [44] for more details). Plakans and Gebril [45] for instance, assert that reading highly contributes to writing competence. Moreover, some experts [3, 9, 46] have uncovered similar interconnections and discovered the efficacy of reading, mainly on EFL students' academic writing. Similarly, a meta-analysis study by Graham, et al. [11] of the effect of reading on students' writing skills discovered that the reading intervention significantly contributed to the students' writing performance in terms of writing quality, spelling, lexical choices, and performance.

Furthermore, students' literacy and language proficiency sharpened by social interactions provide their understanding of an array of books, newspaper, stories, and electronic multimodal texts [47]. As a central key considering learning as social construction, dialogic talk in the METs program encouraged the students to clarify and organize ideas that preceded the writing enterprises [48]. Talking is a vital underpinning for developing critical thinking in writing skills. Similarly, dialogues create essential schemata for performance tasks in drawing logical structures, arguments, evidences and conclusions [49]. Dialogic arguments have been proven to help the students to transfer their ideas in well-written

papers compared to those who received extended writing class [50]. Subsequently, collective, reciprocal, supportive, cumulative, and purposeful principles are five prominent principles in dialogic talk. Collective means teachers and students as participants address learning tasks together. In reciprocal principle, participants listen to each other, share ideas and consider alternative viewpoints. Meanwhile, participants help each other to comprehend general insights and have opportunities to articulate ideas freely without fear of embarrassment of wrong answer are considered as supportive proposition. Another dialogic teaching framework is cumulative where participants value and link all of answers and contributions during the discussion into coherent lines of thinking and understanding. And the last is in purposeful setting where mediators structure and steer the discussion with specific educational goals [51]. Equally important, Textual, social and individual are three dialogue sources that should be considered by learners in learning writing. In textual dimension, texts are considered as dialogic that boost students' criticism, consideration and appropriation of the existing literature. In social dimension, texts are used to provide opportunities for discussion between students. Moreover, Jesson and Rosedale [52] contend that in individual dimension, educators invite students' consideration to link their existing insights and inter-textual histories. The existence of students' proficiency and textual histories are the most crucial aspects of writing in a dialogic conception. As authors, students need to negotiate voices and meanings found in texts, interact and utilize prior experiences [53]. Students' experiences are primary means for establishing their academic expertise. The process of learning can only occur by making sense of human's experiences [54]. On the other hand, Rose [55] found that texts analysis is the key technique for increasing students' awareness when composing papers. However, writing instructions promoting students' prior knowledge and textual histories remained absent in classroom setting [56]. Hence, reading activities followed by dialogic discussion in the METs program fulfilled all aspects and principles in dialogic talk as an alternative to the students' difficulties in writing that assist them to produce readable texts in English.

In fact, the findings of the present research are in line with the early writing studies embarking on writing over community language learning. The results of this current study are congruent with Adam's investigation, *"Think, Read, React, Plan, Write, Rewrite," which indicated that exploring ideas by reading various articles or books and discussing with friends to practice English is required in the process of writing.* In addition, the demands of English for daily communication in METs dealing with a statement in Aziz "Indonesian English: What's Det Tuh?", which detailed numerous differences between both Indonesian and English in terms of structural, grammatical terms, and styles have confused Indonesian EFL learners. They often simplify the verb form of tenses. In overcoming crucial issues, students need to comprehend English as a tool for communication in order to understand various meanings and expressions of language and their context as key components in writing. Moreover, Bartholomae [57] asserted that to cope with numerous factors hindering writing and disciplinary knowledge, writers should be concerned with the importance of criticism. This statement can be regarded as another approving evidence for this present study.

According to Vee, reading followed by dialogic discussion had significantly developed her English skills, mainly in writing.

"Reading and discussing numerous topics enhanced my English ability, particularly writing. I obtained new vocabulary and information to write from the text. Moreover, my speaking ability was also increased due to the discussion session". [Vee, July 15, 2020]

Furthermore, Jei admitted that she did not like reading that made her difficult to understand certain words in the text.

"I did not really into reading. That is why it was hard for me to understand academic and unfamiliar words in the texts". [Jei, July 15, 2020]

Nonetheless, she found reading is interesting when participated in the program as she learned various new words, lexico-grammatical choices, sentence structures and insights across the globe. Additionally, I obtained new words during the discussion.

“...During my participation in the METs program, I felt reading is an attractive activity that expanded my knowledge regarding various trending topics worldwide, enriched my vocabulary, and improved my understanding about lexico-grammatical choices and sentence structures. Moreover, I got several words during the discussion that enabled me to write better”. [Jei, July 15, 2020]

In the same case, the lack interest of reading also made it difficult for Pi to understand some texts. Yet, her participation in the METs program encouraged her to read and discuss the reading. At last, reading and discussing had become her favorite activities in learning English.

“...I found it difficult to understand numerous texts due to my lack interest of reading. However, by routinely followed the program, it made me love reading and discussing both beyond and in the classroom activities”. [Pi, July 15, 2020]

The findings in this study can also be attributed to the technological affordances of WhatsApp. Recently, pairing educators with technological aids has been the best approach in providing high-quality education and developing achievement gaps between learners [14]. For instance, the use of WhatsApp as a popular social media network created a social atmosphere, dialogic conversation, and sharing that met individual needs toward socialization [58]. Besides encouraging and motivating low achievers in collaborative learning, several features in the application also support cooperation, interaction, discussion, feedback, learning interest, and motivation between teachers and students by sending texts, recordings, and pictures without place and time boundaries. In particular, it is considered as a potential virtual learning platform for enhancing students' writing proficiency where students' vocabulary, grammar, insights, and critical thinking were increased during the discussion via WhatsApp group [59, 60]. Therefore, employing technology, mainly WhatsApp, in the process of learning writing is important, as the participants narrated:

“When I was joining METs, I was given an article a night prior to the discussion day via WhatsApp, and I was expected to read and elaborate the content of the article during FTF discussion”. [Vee, July 15, 2020]

“The articles sent via WhatsApp group a night before the discussion. We should read them, try to find and translate some difficult vocabularies. That was my strategy to deal with difficulties in Reading in order to comprehend the topics”. [Jei, July 15, 2020]

“We were given materials at night via WhatsApp then we expressed our opinions in written form related to the texts”. [Pi, July 15, 2020]

Participants detailed, *“We need to discuss the materials via WhatsApp a night prior to discussion. Subsequently, they admitted, Due to the discussion activities in WhatsApp group, I can deal with my difficulties in reading which helps me improve my writing skill”*. These excerpts signified that METs have numerous positive effects on writing. Apparently, the participants had opportunities to practice and experience English in and outside the classroom, which was helpful for creating writing schemata to establish reading interest and critical thinking, enhance transitions, punctuation, spelling, style, language use, grammatical and structural understanding, enrich vocabulary, and new insights. Hence, the results of the current study illuminate that EFL learners, particularly in the Indonesian education landscape as portrayed by this study, can improve their writing skills through their active engagement in the METs program.

This narrative inquiry study provides ample empirical evidence on how the METs program, as an add-on to the English writing classes, significantly contributed to the students' writing skills. It was through the students' active engagement in the shared reading activities, followed by critically dialogic discussion mediated by the lecturer in the site and via WhatsApp group. Interestingly, unlike previous studies on reading programs [61] the METs program in the current study engaged the students in the morning reading that afforded the negotiation of meaning through group discussion and dialogic talks. This could enhance their memorization of the content and vocabulary as morning reading is better at enabling the students to memorize the two components of writing. The role of the technology, the WhatsApp group, also plays an essential role in that it mediates their interaction beyond the classroom [62].

Although this study has qualitatively provided evidence on the efficacy of the METs program, it has some weaknesses, particularly in terms of the number of participants involved in the study and the lack of quantitative data that show the efficacy of the learning program. For that reason, the following are the possible future research agendas that may further investigate the nature of this kind of learning community. Other quantitative studies, such as experimental designs, quasi-experiments, and quantitative action research, are of paramount importance to generate statistical evidence to justify the effect of METs-like programs on the students' writing skills. Other qualitative or mixed-methods studies involving more participants through open- and closed-ended are also critical for future researchers to generate more robust data from a larger number of participants. Nevertheless, this study provides theoretical and practical insights for English writing instructors on how to effectively support the students' writing skills, particularly in the EFL writing landscape, through a community language learning as depicted in the METs program, which can be adopted in their language schooling environment.

6. Conclusion

This narrative study highlights how the Morning English Talks (METs) program supported the writing development of Indonesian EFL students through its unique integration of reading, discussion, and digital engagement. Participants reported that consistent exposure to authentic texts, vocabulary acquisition, and dialogic interactions fostered not only improved writing performance but also greater confidence and motivation. WhatsApp-mediated discussions enabled learning beyond the classroom, making writing a collaborative and socially meaningful activity.

Despite its insights, the study's limited participant pool and qualitative nature restrict broader generalization. Future research should consider mixed-method or quantitative designs to validate the impact of similar programs across diverse learner populations. Longitudinal studies could also provide deeper insight into the sustained effects of such initiatives.

Practically, this study emphasizes the value of incorporating extensive reading and peer discussion into EFL writing instruction. It encourages educators to adopt low-cost digital tools to extend language practice outside the classroom. Institutions should consider supporting similar programs by improving access to digital resources and integrating community-based learning into curriculum planning. Overall, the METs experience demonstrates how community language learning, when meaningfully mediated by technology and interaction, can create rich, learner-centered pathways for developing writing proficiency in EFL contexts.

Transparency:

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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