



**Writing Problems of English Personal Letter
By Subulussalam Islamic Boarding School Students**

Ronald Oktayesya
State University of Padang
ronaldyesya@gmail.com

Ratmanida
State University of Padang
ratmanida@gmail.com

Abstract

The goal of this research is to investigate the ability and to find out the problems and the causes of the problems in writing English personal letters of the senior high school students of Subulussalam Islamic Boarding School in the academic year 2020/2021. The type of the research is descriptive qualitative which the purpose of the research is to gain information about phenomena in order to describe the existed condition in the field. The samples of this research are the whole numbers of students grade XI and XII which has learned about English personal letter. The result from this research showed that 6 students (21,4%) had very good ability in writing English personal letter. There were 16 students (57,1%) who had good ability. 5 students (17,9%) had fair ability. There was 1 student (3,6%) who had poor ability and there was no student had very poor ability in writing English personal letter. There were 6 students of total samples who continued to interview after taking writing test. The data from the interview showed that there were several causes of the problems that made the students had difficulties in writing English personal letters.

Keywords: Ability, Personal letter, Writing Problems

Introduction,

Writing is one of the important skills that have to be mastered besides the other skills in English. Writing is part of communication since language is used to communicate with others. Some people express their feeling, idea, intention, and belief in written form. Some people even capture every event, deed, speculation, or even a mere thing into writing.

In social life, Klimova (2013) said that there are some reasons why writing is needed. He explained the importance of writing since it helps to: express one's personality; foster communication; develop thinking skills; make logical and persuasive arguments; give a person a chance to letter reflect on his/her ideas and re-evaluate them; provide and receive feedback; and many others. Writing can connect one person to another person even though they are separated by millions of miles away by using personal letters.

One of the important aspects of writing which is related to social life is a personal letter. A personal letter is a tool to connect people in written form. Based on the students' textbook, Pathway to English (2017), personal letter is a type of letter (or informal composition) that usually concerns personal matters (rather than professional concerns) and is sent from one individual to another. Both

the addresser and the addressee can be anyone. There is no border to determine the letter is from whom to whom. From that statement, it can be concluded that personal letter is written text in paper which sent from someone to another one and used as communication tool. Personal letter is permitted for to be written by anyone for someone else with vague thoughts. This means in personal letter, the writer is able to write any topic personally with no perimeter.

Because of the social importance of personal letter, curriculum in Indonesia put personal letter into one of skills that must be mastered by students. It can be found in 2013 Curriculum for Senior High School grade XI which is written in Syllabus of Teaching. Basic competence 4.6 in 2013 Curriculum arranges about teaching personal letter. Moreover, in basic competence 4.6.2 is written “arranging special text into personal letter form related to personal activity and other people, orally and written form, by taking notice on social function, and language factor, correctly and in context”. It is also can be found in learning activity in the syllabus, making personal letters for a classmate about something relevant, and then try to reply it.

In writing personal letter, students have to be able to develop the idea, focus on grammar, vocabulary, content, organization and mechanic. All of them are essential aspects in producing a good personal letter. However, there are still many problems when writing personal letters by students. Based on the researcher’s observation at grade eleven and twelve students of senior high school of Subulussalam Islamic Boarding School in academic year 2020/2021 in the classroom, many students still do not able to write a good personal letter in English. Based on the researcher’s interview, there are several problems for students in writing personal letter.

This far, researches related to personal letter only study about the advantages of using personal letter for teaching writing especially in writing recount text. Because of none of the previous researchers which conducted the research about the ability, problems and the causes of the problems in writing English personal letter, the researcher is interested in doing investigation to find out the students’ ability, the problems, and the causes of the problems in writing personal letter made by the senior high school students of Subulussalam Islamic boarding school in academic year 2020/2021.

Research Methodology,

This research was descriptive qualitative research. According to Gay and Airasian (2000: 12) descriptive research is a research that describes the present situation for answering the question. The purpose of the research was to gain information about phenomena in order to describe the existed condition in the field.

The population of this research was the grade XI and XII students of Subulussalam Islamic Boarding School in the academic year 2020/2021. The total numbers of the student’s grade XI and XII were 28. The entire population was selected due to the population is less than 100. Thus, the 28 students or the whole students were used as sample of the research.

To collect the data, this research used two instruments; a writing test and an interview. There were many types of personal letters, but in this test, the type of the letter was limited only to writing a pen pal letter. A pen pal letter was chosen because of some reason. First, writing a pen pal letter stimulated students' creativity in choosing an idea. The last, a pen pal letter was not the same with another type of personal letter which enough written only in one or two sentences, for example, farewell letter and thank you letter. The test was given to all samples once and at the same time in order to avoid cheating. They are asked to write the pen-pal letter for 90 minutes and the letter must be written at least 100 words or more. The students' writing was scored based on the writing test indicators according to Hughes (2005: 104).

Then, each component was categorized whether they were very poor, poor, fair, good, or very good. After that, the researcher used the formula of Sujono (2007: 80):

$$Pi = \frac{F}{N} \times 100\%$$

Pi = Percentage of ability

F = Score gained at a certain level

N = Maximal score at a certain level

To see the students' ability in writing personal letter in general, all scores of each component was counted. The scores were classified to five criteria based on Arikunto (2002: 245).

Table 2: The Classification Level of the Students' Ability in Writing Personal Letter

No.	Score	Criteria/Level of Ability
1.	80 – 100	Very Good
2.	66 – 79	Good
3.	56 – 65	Fair
4.	40 – 55	Poor
5.	30 – 39	Very Poor

The students who had writing test ability score lower than 66 (Good) continued with interview. They were chosen to continue to interview because they were regarded had a serious problems in writing a personal letter.

Findings and Discussion,**Findings**

From the writing test given to the students, the result of the test can be shown into the table below.

Table 3: The Student's Ability in Writing English Personal Letter
In General and in Each Component

No.	Component	C1	C2	Mean	Max Score	Score Percentage	Ability
1	Content	20,86	20,61	20,73	30	69	Good
2	Organization	16,93	17,25	17,09	20	86	Very Good
3	Vocabulary	14,39	14,64	14,52	20	73	Good
4	Grammar	16,57	16,39	16,48	25	66	Good
5	Mechanics	3,54	3,50	3,52	5	70	Good
TOTAL					100	364	GOOD
MEAN OF ABILITY						73	

From the data analysis, it is found that in general, the students have good ability in writing English personal letter. For content, vocabulary, grammar and mechanics, the students grade XI and grade XII of Subulussalam Islamic Boarding School have good ability. Organization is the only one component which got very good ability.

Based on findings, it was found that students of grade eleven and grade twelve students of senior high school of Subulussalam Islamic Boarding School in academic year 2020/2021' had good ability in writing personal letter. However there were several problems found in their letters.

Table 4: The Frequency of Students Based on the Ability
In Writing English Personal Letter

No	Type of Error	Frequency	Percentage
1	Mechanics	17	60,71%
2	Content	15	53,57%
3	Grammar	13	46,43%
4	Vocabulary	9	32,14%
5	Organization	3	10,71%

Based on the data above, it can be seen that the students made errors in all writing components of a personal letter. The most problems were in mechanics (17 students). Content had 15

students who had problems. There were 13 students who had problems in mastering grammar. Next, 9 students got a problem in vocabulary. The last, there were 3 students who had problems in writing parts of personal letter (organization).

To find out the causes, the writer used interview as an instrument. The interview was done to 6 students of grade XI and XII of Subulussalam Islamic Boarding School in academic year 2020/2021 because their ability scores were lower 66 (Good), which mean they had serious problems in writing personal letter. The type of interview was structured interview because the researcher asked based on the interview guide. Based on the interview of 6 students, there were three factors that caused the problems for students in writing English personal letter; they were factors in grammar, factors in vocabulary, and factors in mechanics.

Discussion

Student's Ability in Writing English Personal Letter

Based on the findings of the research, the researcher found that ability of Senior High School students' grade XI and XII of Subulussalam Islamic Boarding School was varied on each component of writing English personal letter. Almost all students who took the writing test were able to place the parts of a letter according to the rules of writing a personal letter. There were 8 students had very good ability and 11 students had good ability in choosing appropriate words. More than half of the students were able to choose and use appropriate words that fit the context in their letter. There were 2 students had very good ability and 13 students had good ability in mastering grammar. In content, there were 12 students had very good ability and 1 student had good ability. This was the same what had been said by William (2005) that writing is a complex process which involves a variety of skills and types of knowledge refer to the grammar and vocabularies.

The last, there were 16 students had fair ability and 1 student had poor ability in mechanics. According to Then, Patel and Jain (2008: 126), there were several abilities in mechanics that the students must had. According to them, the ability of mechanics include: first, making strokes with proper hand movements. Second, the writer should write letter in appropriate size and proper shape. Third, write letter in words with proper space. Fourth, the writer should write words in sentence with proper shape. Fifth, the writer must write correct spelling in words. Sixth, the writer should write capital letters correctly. The last, the writer should write legibility and neatly of his/her writing.

Student's Problems in Writing English Personal Letter

In mechanics, there were 17 students who had problems. Almost of the text had misspelling that made meaning often difficult to be understood. They also made errors in using punctuation, capitalization and paragraphing. The same result was also found in a research conducted by Al-Habry (2007). He reveals common problems which are faced by students in writing; they are lack of

vocabulary, a poor grasp of grammatical structure, the incorrect use of punctuation marks, incorrect spelling, poor paragraph and sentence structure, and illogical sequence. It means that the students had problems in mechanics.

There were 15 students who could not develop the content of the personal letter well. Their writings were not unity and coherence. They did not know how to develop their ideas. It was also found in the research that there was a student who was confused with the idea that he wanted to write. So it was difficult to recognize what the idea was. It is supported by a research conducted by Gusnilasari (2015). In her research was found that the students made some errors in content and the use of language features of the text. They could not write controlling ideas that should support main idea of the text.

The next problem was grammar. The students found difficulties on the language features. The same result can also be found in a research conducted by Herlina (2011). She did a research about student's errors in writing focused on tenses. The result of her research were errors in using simple present tense, errors in using present continuous tense, errors in using past tense, and errors in using past continuous tense. There were 10 students who had serious problems in choosing appropriate words. They often used different word/phrase to explain their mind. Another problem was that they wrote a word that has no meaning. The last, based on the findings, there were 3 students who had serious problems in applying parts of personal letter. The problem was the student was not complete her letter by the whole parts of personal letter.

Cause of the Problems in Writing English Personal Letter

Based on the interview of 6 students, there were several factors that caused the problems for students in writing English personal letter. The first factor was grammar. The students felt that there were many rules in constructing sentence. The rules included tenses, conjunctions, to be, and also rules in constructing sentence. It was hard for them to follow and memorize all the rules while they were writing. According to Richard and Renandya (2002), grammar is too important to be ignored, and without a good knowledge of grammar, learners' language development would be severely constrained. It means that without mastering grammar the students' writing will be poor.

In spelling there were several causes of problems. The first problem, they sometimes did not focus while they were writing. Sometimes they were in a hurry to quickly finish their writing. Likewise with the problem of punctuation, because they are in a hurry they often forget to put the right punctuation marks in sentences. In capitalization, the thing that causes errors in writing capital letters was a problem of writing habits. They were used to and comfortable with their wrong writing style and this has been going on for a long time.

The students were also lack of vocabulary. It is supported by Farooq, et al., he states that lack of vocabulary made students could not express their ideas. They did not know what words they had to

use in their writing. In mastering vocabulary, they didn't have enough time to practice new vocabularies because of many activities which they had to be joined. Those activities spent much their time. Another factor was the way of teaching given by the teacher. The dislike toward the teacher's way of teaching made them less motivated to learn English especially vocabulary.

Conclusion and Suggestion

Based on the findings in chapter 4, it can be concluded that the ability of grade XI and XII students of Subulussalam Islamic Boarding School in academic year 2020/2021 in writing English personal letter was good. It was proved by the final average of the whole components of personal letter, where the average was 73. It was based on the classification level of ability proposed by Arikunto (2002: 245).

However, there were several problems found based on the writing test analysis. The most problem experienced by students in writing English personal letters was in mechanics. The second problem most experienced by students in writing English personal letters was in the content. The next problem was in the applying correct grammar. The fourth problem was in vocabulary. The last problem was in organization.

Based on the findings, there were several factors affecting students' problem in writing English personal letter. The first factor was in grammar. Students had lack of grammar knowledge that made them did many errors in their letter. The next factor was in mechanics. They did not master at the rule of spelling, punctuation, capitalization and paragraphing. The last factor of problems for student in writing English personal letter was lack of vocabulary. Based on the students' writing, it was found that students used some inappropriate vocabulary to express their ideas.

References

- Al Habry, Abdullah Muhammed. 2007. The Problems of Secondary Studies in Written English at 10th Grade Students in Aljoun School. *International Journal of Learning and Development*. 2. (2). 280 – 299
- Arikunto, S. 2002. *Prosedur Penelitian Suatu Pendekatan Praktik* (5th edition). Jakarta: PT. Rineka Cipta.
- Gay, L.R, E. Mills, Geoffrey, and Airasian, Peter. 2000. *Educational research: Competencies for Analysis and Application* (6th edition). Ohio: Merrill Publishing Company.
- Herlina. 2011. *An Analysis of Students' Errors in Writing Focused on Tenses at the Second Grade Students of SMP Cendrawasih 1 Cipete*. Skripsi. English Education Department. Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teachers' Training. State Islamic University Syarif Hidayatullah. Jakarta
- Hughes, Arthur. 2005. *Testing for Language Teachers*. United Kingdom. Cambridge University Press

- Klimova, Blanka Frydrychova. 2013. The Importance of Writing. Paripex-Indian Journal of Research. Vol.1, Issue: 1. January 2013
- Patel, Dr. M.F. and Jain, Praveen M. 2008. English Language Teaching: Methods, Tools, and Techniques. Jaipur: Sunrise Publishers & Distributors.
- Richards, Jack C and Renandya, Willy A. 2002. Methodology in Language Teaching. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sudarwati, Theresia. 2017. *Pathway to English untuk SMA/MA Kelas XI*. Jakarta Selatan. Erlangga
- Sudjono, Anas. 2007. Pengantar Statistik Pendidikan. Jakarta: PT. Raja Grafindo Persada
- William, Jessica. 2005. Teaching Writing in Second and Foreign Language Classroom. USA: The McGraw – Hill Companies, Inc.