TEACHING THROUGH EXAMPLES:
A MEANINGFUL WAY TO TEACH ACADEMIC WRITING

Istiqlaliah Nurul Hidayati
Pakuan University Bogor

Abstract: Students of undergraduate program have an obligation of writing a paper as the prerequisite of their graduation. Unfortunately, many of them were still puzzled to write the paper. Not only were they confused with the idea to be conveyed, but also with the methodology and the approach of the research. Many of them did not have any idea of why they chose qualitative approach instead of quantitative one. Explaining the theory was proven to be ineffective since most of the students still made mistakes when they started writing. Therefore providing examples of various research papers was believed to be helpful and meaningful for the students. The research papers selected as examples were various so that the students could see the reason why a particular title had to employ a particular approach and method of research. This paper presentation will focus on the use of examples i.e. research papers as the media to teach academic writing which is considered difficult but important since the subject aims at guiding the students to write their final paper. To investigate this issue, document analysis, in-depth interviewing and participant classroom observation were deployed as data collection methods. The advantage of this paper presentation is to help the teacher teaches difficult subject meaningfully and to enhance students’ understanding in writing their academic or final paper.

Keywords: research paper, academic writing, quantitative, qualitative, research method

Introduction
Improving students’ ability to write in the second language has been a concern of the lecturers at universities or higher education (Belcher & Braine, 1995; Jordan, 1997). Since English is not the students’ native language, the difficulties the students face is not only about the idea to write but also the grammar of the language. Moreover, in writing the final paper, students also have to master the theory of research methodology. Thus, writing an academic paper is a great problem for students, especially dealing with research methodology.

The Teaching of Academic Writing
Academic writing continues to be at the centre of teaching and learning in higher education, but is often an invisible dimension of the curriculum. Therefore, it is hard to determine the quality that the students have to achieve in a particular level. The process of academic writing helps to develop students’ cognitive skills in acquiring the necessary strategies such as analysis, synthesis, inference and so forth, instrumental in the learning process (Bacha, 2000).

In university level, there are many kinds of academic writing learned and composed by the students. Among them are reflective journals, essays of various kinds, research paper, book review, synthesis, review of the literature, annotated bibliography, etc. In this research, the students were asked to write a research proposal. A research proposal was chosen since they would enter semester seven, where the real research proposal will be demanded.

Research paper writing is taught in the sixth semester. The material is mostly about how to conduct research and how to write it. There are at least two approaches in teaching writing that can also be used in teaching academic writing. They are process approaches and text approaches (Bacha, 2000).

Process approaches mean that the attention is to the steps or the stages of writing that an individual writer might work through (Delpit, 1995) in Bacha (2002). Text approach is that the teaching-learning process uses models to guide the students to write well. In this approach, it is expected that the products of the writing composed by the students will be almost similar with the model. On the other hand, process approach pays more attention to the steps and the stages of writing that an individual writer might work through. In this research, I employed text approach since I gave each student a journal to be referred to and to be reviewed at the end of the semester.

In the university where I conducted the research, the subject of Research is studied by the students of the sixth semester. At the end of the semester, they are required to compose a research proposal. That is why they are given materials supporting the research proposal and the research itself later. The book used for guiding the students was not determined. The students could choose themselves from the nine books recommended.

The recommended books were: Statistics for Linguists” written by Anshen (1978); “Research Design and Statistics for Applied Linguistics” (Hatch and Farhady, 1982); “Statistics in Linguistics” (Butler, 1985); “Statistics in Language Studies” (Woods et al, 1986); Second Language Research Methods (Seliger and
The use of these various books was aimed at enhancing students’ knowledge on research. Since I assume that when the students know how to do research, they will do it easily. In other words, I believe that after knowing, there is doing. When somebody does something without knowing it, then the possibility of making errors is great, while knowing something without doing it, in the case of research, is a waste of time. In this research, not everybody had to buy all of the books. The students could share the books. The materials being covered were: the structure of a research paper (the title, the abstract, the introduction, the method, the discussion, the reference), research design (how to select a research design, survey research design, experimental research design, case study design, and action research design), data (data from questionnaires, data from interviews, and data from observations), The materials had been determined, while the book was not. The students could choose any of the nine books that they think was helpful to them.

In this research, I involved 25 students of the sixth semester as the participants. They were chosen because I taught research method in the class. Last year, I also taught the same subject and what I found was though all of the materials needed to start writing a paper had been delivered, the students still made mistakes in writing the proposal (which was the product of the class). They were still puzzled about what method to employ, what kind of sampling to use, and even they made mistakes in writing the abstract. Not only did I find mistakes related to their understanding on research method, I also found technical mistakes, such as: passives and actives, ellipsis, tenses, etc. The students found confusion, too, in deciding the approach that they would like to use. Seeing this phenomenon, I reflected to myself about what went wrong. Talking to other lecturers was also done and they also said that the students seemed to view the subject as a burden. I thought it over and I finally found that I myself did not learn much from the classroom and recalled that I began writing my paper after reading others’. Thus, the idea of using research journals in the classroom appeared.

**Students’ Difficulties in Academic Writing**

This research was conducted because I always found research proposals written by the students still need improvement. I assume that the students still found it difficult to: determine the objectives of the paper, decide the title, present a clear problem, choose an appropriate method, choose the sampling, and to compose the hypothesis. REPOA (2007) found almost similar list of students’ difficulties. In the research done by REPOA in 2007, it was found that students’ research proposal had unsatisfactory sampling procedure (58%), stating of hypotheses that could not be tested (53%), using inappropriate methodology (51%) and inadequate literature review (50%). It can also be noted here that aspects such as appropriate methodology, hypotheses testability, data analysis techniques and sampling procedure are problematic aspects for the students.

**Students’ Common Mistakes**

There are some students’ common mistakes in writing a research proposal according to Kikula and Qorro in REPOA (2007). Those are in writing the title which is not focused, the introduction which sometimes still irrelevant, problem statements which are not clear, the objectives which are not stated, and the research method which is inappropriate.

**The Method**

Classroom observation, questionnaire, and documentation were employed in this research. From the classroom observation, I could note that the class of Academic Writing is conducted to the six semester students. There are fourteen meetings altogether in a semester. There is no midterm or final term. At the end of the semester, the students are required to write a research proposal. From my observation for two academic years, I found that students still found difficulties in understanding several aspects of writing a research proposal. It could be seen from the research proposals they composed. Hence, I tried a new method of teaching research methodology, which was by using examples: research journals.

I collected research journals from many sources. There were 25 different journals. Each of the journals employed different approach and method for the students to reflect on. After finding the journals, I distributed the journals to my students. One student got one journal. These journals were given to the students and they had to keep them for the whole semester. They had to reflect on the journals after listening to the teacher’s explanation. I told them that by the end of the semester, they would have to review the journals, putting comments on them and finally write their own journals.

The questionnaires were distributed to the students. They were closed questionnaires. There were ten questions that the students were required to answer. The answers could be: Agree (A), Disagree (D), and
Undecided (U). The questions were: 1) Writing a research proposal is easy; 2) I know how to relate the title to the research method; 3) I put some quotations in the introduction; 4) I have more than two research questions; 5) The research questions have to go along with the aims of the research; 6) I know the difference between qualitative and quantitative approaches; 7) Using journals as examples help me build my understanding on writing a research proposal; 8) I always reflect what my teacher explains on the journal I have; 9) After reading the journal, I found it easier to write a research proposal; 10) I learn the language features of a research proposal from the journal I have. To clarify the answers, in-depth interview was also conducted.

The in-depth interview was carried out to the students. There were five questions to answer. The questions were: 1) what do you think is the most difficult part of writing a research proposal? 2) Do you find the journal helpful? 3) Can you describe what the journal is about? 4) What is the title of your research proposal? 5) Do you find the research journal inspiring? After all of the data was gained, it was then analyzed. The analysis of the questionnaire was done by using Likert Scale whereas the data from interview was transcribed and rechecked to the sources.

Findings and Discussions
From the observation, I found out that students actively referred to the journal after listening to my explanation on a particular topic, as I asked them to do so. The followings are my summary taken from the result of the research.

Writing with Less Stress
By having the model of the end product which they can always refer to, the students found writing a research proposal not quite difficult. The same finding was also found by Chow (2011). Before the use of research journals in the classroom, it seemed that writing a research proposal was a big burden. The students had learned the theory but still found it hard to start writing their own research proposal. However, by having the example of a research journal and getting familiar with it, the students had clear picture of what to write for their own research proposal.

It is shown by the answer of questionnaire items number 7, 8, and 9. 78% of the students answered agree with the statement number 7, 20% disagreed and 2% answered undecided. It means that mostly students find it easier to write the research proposal after they were familiar to it. For question number 8, 73% agreed, 18% disagreed. It can be inferred that almost all of the students checked the journals after they listened to the explanation of a particular theory. For question number 9, only 9% disagreed and the rest agreed that after reading the journals, the students found writing a research proposal easy.

When the students thought that it was easy to write a research proposal, it can be inferred that they did not feel stressful when they wrote the research proposal. They found it easy to write a research proposal because they had read the real journal. It means that they could read something which was meaningful to them. They could relate what they had read to what they were going to write. In other words, they read for writing.

Reading for Writing
Another advantage resulted from this activity is that the students were ‘forced’ to read critically. One of the problems found in students is that students are reluctant to read. Since there was a requirement to compose a research proposal, the students would have an intrinsic motivation of being able to make it. Thus, they did an effort which was reading the research journal. Frasson (1984) states that the students would do the reading with more intrinsic motivation to satisfy their own curiosity or with more extrinsic motivation to accomplish the writing assignment, and henceforth with higher levels of comprehension.

Reading for writing was also shown by the answer of question number 10. 82% agreed that they could write a good research proposal after reading at least an example of a research journal. Another proof is from the students’ answers to number 1 until number 5. The answers ranged from 70%-90%. It means that the students could write a good research proposal when they had interacted with the research journal. They read the journal carefully and tried to compose one.

Being a Critical Reader and Writer
From the beginning, I have told the students that there might be some irrelevance found in the journals. So, instead of fully imitating what it is in the journal, the students had to evaluate it. They had to compare or contrast the knowledge they got from the teacher about research methodology and what they found in the journal. Even though not quite significant, there were only 53% of the students having the same research design with the journal they had. The rest of them (47%) had different research design from the journal they had. For example, Yuni’s title of research proposal was, “An Analysis Study of English Needed by the Students of Tourism,” whereas the journal she got had the title of “Improving Students’ Ability in Writing Recount Text Using Reflective Journal Writing.” It shows that the students did not follow the journal right away; they were
still being critical when they read the journal and when they wrote their own research proposal. The same finding was also stated by Chow (2001).

**Increasing Students’ Self Confidence in Writing an Academic Paper**

Compared to the number of research proposals approved last year, this year’s number is higher. It is evidence that after being made familiar to research journals, students found it easier to write their own research proposal. The same belief is also mentioned in REPOA (2007).

**Conclusion**

The use of examples, in this case are research journals, is found to be effective in teaching academic writing. The academic writing taught here is a research proposal. The research journals acted as the models of good writing. So that, the students had to always reflect on the journals after listening to the teacher’s explanation on a particular topic. At the end of the semester, the students were required to write their own research proposals and it was found that the number of the students using these assignments as their real proposals was quite high. Consequently, the number of the students submitting their research proposal increased. From the above facts, it can be inferred that the use of research journals in academic writing class is advantageous. The advantages are: students could write with less stress; students read for the sake of writing; students became critical readers and writers; and the last is that students’ self confidence increased.

**References**


