

# MAILING LIST BASED FRENCH WRITING WORKSHOP

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## Abstract

The research is geared towards providing students with long term solutions to writing difficulties through internet based French writing workshop.

Broadly speaking, the topic of the research is what writing workshop model can be developed through internet? The research employs descriptive analysis. Using this method the research attempts to describe and analyze writing materials taught for writing, the internet based learning model that best meets students need to practice their writing, and the strengths and weakness of the model.

For the purposes of the research, a mailing list has been created, [production-ecrite@googlegroups.com](mailto:production-ecrite@googlegroups.com), moderated by the researchers. Students are to possess electronic mail to access and become the member of the mailing list.

Key words: writing workshop, mailing list, internet, e-mail, blog.

## Introduction

The role of foreign languages in globalization is very crucial. Responding to this, foreign languages have been taught to students of senior and junior high school in Indonesia in the effort to introduce them as early as possible to the languages. Of many foreign languages, French has always been in the curriculum for Senior High School. As the language used internationally in more than 50 countries, French has a central position in the world. Unlike in Senior High School, the teaching and learning of French in universities is directed towards a higher level of four language skills mastery.

Writing competence (*expression ecrite*) as one of the four language competence students need to master has been given more attention. This is because university students are expected to be able to put forward their ideas in academic writings. Leaning on this, it is then recommended that the teaching and learning of foreign languages in universities is directed towards developing the skill.

Weighting the importance of writing skills in foreign languages, especially in French, for students, it is necessary that studies on writing skills be conducted. The result of these studies may serve as data on which French teaching policy or further study to find and develop teaching model for teaching French can be based on.

Broadly speaking the topic of the research is what writing workshop model can be developed through internet? This question can further be elaborated into the following questions:

1. What teaching materials have been delivered to the students in writing?
2. Which internet based teaching model that meet students' need to practice writing?

3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of internet based writing workshop teaching model?
4. Does internet based writing workshop teaching model improve students writing skills?

The complexity of the questions indicates various different issues involved in the effort to improve student French writing skills.

## **Literature Review**

### **Writing Workshop**

Calkin and Harwayne (1987:329) state that “Writing workshop is the term currently used to describe instruction in which a period of classroom each day is set aside for learners to be immersed in writing.” The followings underlie the teaching model:

- (1). Writers need regular chunks of time;
- (2). Writers need their own topics;
- (3). Writers need response;
- (4). Writers learn mechanics in context;
- (5). Writers need to read;
- (6). Writing teachers need to take responsibility for their knowledge and teaching.

The main point of the six principles is a change; the improvement of teaching learning process and the improvement of students writing skills. This is in line with Goodman (1986:65) who believes that “the writing workshop is a way of learning and teaching that requires students and teachers to think for themselves, and much of that thinking will necessarily, being change.”

To implement writing workshop teaching model, we need to do the following stages:

1. Prewriting.
2. Drafting
3. Revising
4. Editing
5. Sharing
6. Publishing

The structure of writing workshop can be categorized into three activities as follows:

1. mini-lesson (the teacher provides students with the writing instructions)
2. writing time and conference (the teacher directs students to make a writing draft, revise, and edit it).
3. sharing time (students discuss their writing with their friends in a small groups; they read each other writing).

Underlying all these activities is the learning theory proposed by Goodman (1986:26). He proposes that:

Language learning is easy when it’s whole, real, and relevant; when it makes sense and functional; when it’s encountered in the context of its use; when the learner choose to use it. Language is both personal and

from the outside toward norms of the society. Language is learned as learner learns through language and about language. Language development is empowering; the learner owns the process, makes decisions about when to use it, what for and with what result. Language learning is learning how to mean. In a world, language development is holistic personnel social achievement.

Writing workshop is begun by choosing the topic to write. Students are asked to write any topic that crosses their mind. In this process it is common that beginning writers write short writings; short poems, a paragraph, or a long line. The length extends as students gain more confidence in using their experience as their writing source. The first phase of writing workshop is wrapped up with students read their friends' draft. Students need to keep in mind that in this phase they are expected to only respond, not criticize, their friends' draft.

In the second phase of the workshop, students may be encouraged to write about their surrounding. They go outside the class, observe their surrounding, and write what they observe. Like a journalist, they are encouraged to find stories or news of daily life. This phase is ended with students select their best writings after they edit them in small groups and display them on the board that can be read by all students. In this phase correction and revision are done collaboratively.

In the third phase of the workshop, the cycle goes back to the first phase where students once again become the centre of writing activity. Students are encouraged to listen, contemplate, and reflect. These activities direct students to find their 'self' and develop their vision on it.

### **Foreign Languages Distance Learning**

Distance learning is an instructional method between a teacher and a learner which provides learning opportunity, not bordered by time and space as well as limitations a traditional education system oftentimes faces. Using this method students do not need to sit in a classroom listening to a lecture. They can just stay at home, working on their exercises. Interaction between them and their teacher may be facilitated by such media as internet.

Distant learning is not the same as distant education as the former is the result of the latter. Distant learning requires students to be able to learn well without being hindered by space and time, while distant education emphasizes on how a teaching process carried out by a teacher can be received by students without being hindered by distance.

Dwi (2002) believes that there are four differences between distant learning and traditional learning; the different location between teacher and students, the influence of education institution, the use of technology as media to deliver teaching materials, and the availability of two ways means of communication between teacher and students.

In the teaching of French, the distant learning model that is often used is the one that claims can help students to learn the language in a practical and fast way. Its purposes are certainly different from those of the teaching of French in universities where the distant learning model is geared towards producing solutions to deal with the quantity of the students, time, reading pace and its correction system.

## **Foreign Language Web-Based Learning System**

The emergence of web based distant learning serves as beginning for the development of information technology in education. Web based learning is one of the methods and technology used in distant learning.

Using this method, the delivery and access to teaching materials can be done through electronic media such as internet; using web server to deliver the teaching materials, web browser to access them, and TCP/IP (Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol) and HTTP to communicate.

In this research, the characteristics of web based French learning model will be focused on:

- Teaching materials are made in texts, graphics, and multimedia elements and hypermedia such as video, audio, and animation.
- Communication is both synchronous (the teachers and learners are in the same time) through video conference, chat room, discussion forum and asynchronous (the teacher and learners are not in the same time)
- Teaching materials storage, maintenance, and administration are carried out by web server.
- Using TCP/IP as a means of communication facilitating the learners and the teacher and/ or other learning sources.

## **Internet Basic Functions**

The software that supports the internet provides a lot of technical services. This service is the basic function of internet. Sidharta (1996:9) proposes that the basic functions of internet are:

- a. Mail service (SMTP: Simple Mail Transfer Protocol): a service to send and receive messages. Each message is sent from one system to the other. Behind the screen email service makes it sure that the messages are received completely at the targeted address. In the event of any error, the sender will receive a message notifying that their message is not or has not been received by the receiver.
- b. Telnet service (HTTP: Hyper Text Transfer Protocol), a service that enables the users to access a far away system.
- c. FTP service (File Transfer Protocol), a service a service that enables the users to transfer files from one system to another. This process is also known as downloading.
- d. Client/server service, a system supported by server program, i.e. Gopher, white pages, yellow pages, etc.

## **Internet Based Writing Workshop Model**

The workshop is carried out through mailing list, an internet facility used to communicate between group members.

The moderator of the discussion is the lecturer teaching *Ecrire*. His/her responsibility is to send writings made by the students of the group discussions, to edit and to check them. Each member of the group can give their comments on their friends writings.

## **Teaching Model**

### **Definition**

A teaching model may be defined as a plan or pattern used in designing curriculum, managing teaching materials and directing teachers in their class in teaching setting or other settings (Dahlan, 1990: 21).

There is no such thing as a perfect or imperfect teaching model as it is closely related to who the audience is and what goals to achieve. A teaching model is good when it meets the criteria for good teaching. It is, on the contrary, unsuccessful if it does not meet the goal set by the curriculum.

The designing of a teaching model should always refer to students learning achievement, observation on previous teachings, and innovation demand directed to improve the teaching learning achievement..

The success of the model is determined not only by the model itself, but also by other factors directly or indirectly related to a teaching process. For example, a good model and good teacher are nothing when they are not supported by students' good attitude, strong interest and motivation. In other words, a teaching model is just one element out of many other intertwined elements working together towards shared goals.

To design a good model we need to consider its empirical steps, starting from problem identification to empirical testing that makes the design scientific. A model should not be designed only on theoretical bases which do not consider the students need.

Dahlan (1990: 26-27) proposes the following six steps to design a teaching model:

1. Making a scenario of the model designed; it elaborates the strategies used by the teacher in the class.
2. Orientating to the model; goals, assumptions, theories, general concepts and principles of the model.
3. Making an analysis on the model. The procedures are the following:
  - a.) Staging the steps.
  - b.) Social system expected from the model.
  - c.) Principles of students and teacher reaction,
  - d.) Required supporting system.
4. Discussing the application of the model in the class.
5. Drawing conclusions from the model: instructional effect, nurturant effect of the model.
6. Discussing and comparing the model; the strength and weaknesses of the model and adding more information on the model.

In foreign teaching and learning, the use of an innovative teaching model is expected to improve students' motivation. There are two different assumptions on learning. First assumption assumes students as passive party that only response to a stimulus given. They will only learn when there is a deliberate and continuous teaching process carried out by teacher to them, without which they will not learn. Second assumption believes that learners are active human beings who will always think and act in and against their life. Learning will take place when the learners interact with their environment, be it social or natural (Sudjana, 2000:51).

## **Learning Model Development**

E. Kemp (cited in Sudjana, 200: 184) proposes one organization and development model of teaching program called The Instructional Design process. This model suggests teachers' involvement since teaching learning planning stage. This involvement covers the following steps:

- a. Making assessment on learning needs, designing goals, identifying challenges, and setting priority that will be used to organize teaching programs.
- b. Selecting topics and/or assignments that will be completed in the teaching learning process, and identifying the indicators for the learning achievement.
- c. Identifying and analyzing learners' characteristics to be used as input in the planning and teaching delivery.
- d. Identifying the content/materials and/or analyzing the assignment details that are consistent with the achievement of general teaching goals.
- e. Setting learning goals that are consistent with the teaching content/materials and/or assignments details the students should achieve.
- f. Designing teaching learning activities to achieve the set learning goals.
- g. Selecting instructional aids to support the teaching learning process.
- h. Determining the facilities and other learning sources required for the teaching learning process and teaching materials.
- i. Preparing evaluation process and teaching learning achievement.
- j. Preparing and administering test for students to assess their mastery of the materials learned.

Generally what teachers do is to organize and develop the curriculum (GBPP) into an operational syllabus (SAP). SAP designing should take into account teaching scenarion between the teacher and the students. SAP should cover general and specific teaching goals (TIU), topics, teaching materials, teaching methods, learning sources and evaluation.

## **Writing Ability**

Writing is basically stating our thoughts and feelings about things or condition, both real and expected using written language.

Sadtono, et. all (1976), Syafe'i (1984) and Soewandi (1984) discuss writing ability in their research. Their findings show that the language skills of our university students are not sufficient. To this relation we may pose a question as to how is the language skill of students majoring in French?

Kustaryo (1995), in his research findings, shows that students' ability to write in French is not very good despite the fact that they are at the end of their study. These students confided that they were faced with such challenges as their lack of French lexical and grammatical knowledge that prevents them from being able to articulate their ideas into a complete whole writing. Writing has been considered as the most challenging language skills both in mother tongue and foreign language.

The findings imply that no matter how simple a composition may be it requires a good plan, correct and acceptable grammar, appropriate dictions, well-organized ideas and good writing technique.

### **Written language components**

A text or writing does not stand on its own. It consists of various supporting elements. The followings are the components of written language:

- Spelling which includes letters and punctuation marks. This component is also called writing mechanic or orthography, how the language should be written.
- Words and their meaning which include words, expressions, and their meanings (lexical, structural, denotative, connotative, meaning shift).
- Word structure which includes words forms, words class, words changes.
- Paragraph structure which includes paragraph composition, types of paragraph, and paragraph cohesion and cohesiveness.
- Language style, how we use language to create a certain impression.
- Language variation, formal or informal, oral or written, literary or scientific, etc.

### **Foreign language writing skills**

A native speaker of a language may accept imperfect pronunciation or expressions which are not well acceptable among native speakers, when he/she converses orally with foreign language learners. However, he/she will tend to be more sensitive and critical about grammar and expressions used when reading a text written by the learners.

The issues that need to be identified when teaching writing for a target language learners are:

1. “code skills” (teaching materials) and
2. composition skills acquisition

### **Research Methodology and Approach**

The research employs an analytical descriptive method. The method describes a situation or an event; it does not try to seek for or explain a relation nor test a hypothesis. The method (1) focuses on actual problem solving and (2) on data that are first collected, explained then analyzed.

Using this method, the researchers will describe and analyze teaching materials taught to students in Production Ecrite III, an internet based teaching model that meets the students’ need in writing practice, the weaknesses and strengths of the model, and the students writing skills.

The description then is interpreted to yield comprehensive findings on students’ ability on writing in French.

Data analysis is conducted in three stages: preparation, tabulation, and data application consistent with research approach (Arikunto, 1992). Analysis is data arrangement process so the data can be interpreted. The analysis requires creativity and high intellectual skill. Therefore there are no fixed rules in conducting the analysis. This means, it is the researchers sharp skill that will determines the quality of the analysis.

The data are all the characteristics of the third semester of French students department of FPBS UPI. The students are the population and sample at the same time.

The research is started with literature study, then instrument designing, the instrument testing, and field research in French Department of FPBS UPI. The research uses observation and test as its research techniques.

Each instrument used will be tested using a systematic expert judgment to maintain its validity and reliability. In addition, the instruments are developed based on the already existing instruments.

The data are analyzed based on the prepared guidelines. The components assessed are (1) language structure, (2) spelling, (3) the relevance of theme and content of the writing, (4) writing style, (5) the quality of the writing.

### **Research Findings**

The goal of production Ecrite III is to help students to have sufficient skills to express their ideas in writing using correct and acceptable French. The teaching materials used are based on the syllabus for the subject.

The followings are the readings students need to do

- Boiron, Michel et Christian Rodier. (1998). *Documents authentiques ecrits*. Paris : CLE International.
- Leroy-Miquel, Claire et Anne Goliot-Lete. (1997). *Vocabulaire progressif du francais*. Paris : CLE International.

On-line reference: Germain-Rutherford, Aline. (2005). *Echanges on line*. Available at <http://courseweb.edteched.uottawa.ca/Echange/ecrire>. (9 November 2005).

Based on theoretical analysis, the lecturer teaching the subject uses internet based writing workshop teaching model as an innovative teaching model alternative to increase the students writing skills.

The followings are the stages the students need to go through in writing workshop teaching model:

1. Prewriting. In this stage students decide their own topic. The lecturer only provides them with themes.
2. Drafting. Students make a rough draft of their writing.
3. Revising. Students have to revise their writing after they completed their draft.
4. Editing. Using French Spelling and Grammar Tools on Word in their computer, students edit their own writing.
5. Sharing. Students share their writing with their friends. They send their writing to the mailing list. Each member of the mailing list checks and corrects the writing.
6. Rewriting and publishing. This is the last stage of writing workshop. After their writing being checked and corrected, students rewrite and publish it in the mailing list and blog.

The writing workshop structure is carried out in three activities:

1. *mini lesson* (the lecturer provides the students with instructions).
2. *writing time and conference* (the lecturer directs the students to write a rough draft, revise and edit their writing).
3. *sharing time* (students discuss their writing with their friends in a small group; students read their friends' writing).

From the class observation, it is found that the weaknesses of internet based writing workshop teaching model are:

1. Students should have the ability to access the internet.
2. Students personal computer specification influences the speed to access the internet.

3. Some students need to hire computer. That means a cost.

The teaching model strengths are:

1. If students have a persona computer equipped with internet facility, they can access the internet and complete their assignments without having to leave their room.
2. Students can complete their assignment whenever and wherever.
3. Students have an email address.
4. With the help of Tools: Spelling and grammars in their computer Words, students can edit their writing on their own.

Based on students writings that have been assessed based on Test Assessment Guidelines, sent to the mailing list, it was found that the average score for structure is 7.1. This translates that structurally speaking students did not make too many mistakes. The average score for spelling is 6.8, which means that some students still use imperfect French spelling. In the area of the relevance between theme and content, the average score is 8.6. This means that almost all students were able to make their theme relevant to the content of their writing. In writing style, the average score is 8. This means students were able to use words and expression appropriately. The average score for the last component is 6.4. This score indicates that despite the weaknesses, the quality of the students writing was sufficient.

## **Discussion**

For the purpose of the research, the lecturer teaching the subject who is also the researcher has made mailing list: [production-ecrite@googlegroups.com](mailto:production-ecrite@googlegroups.com). The lecturer also moderates the mailing list. To become the member, students should have an email address. Not any student can be the member of mailing list. They have to be invited by the moderator and follow the steps set by the moderator.

To be the member students should be computer literate; they have to be able to access the internet. In response to this, the lecturer provides the students with basic internet training.

The research finds some weaknesses of the model and proposes the following to improve them:

1. The lecturer teaching the subject who also functions as the moderator of the mailing list should provide basic internet training.
2. Students should be able to use the computers provided. The computer specification supports the access to the internet.

Using the mailing list, students can make correction on their friends' work right away and publish their work. Correction is also made by the moderators on the errors and mistakes made by students. The corrected writings are then published for other students to learn.

## **Conclusions and Suggestion**

### **Conclusions**

Based on the analysis and hypothesis testing, it can be concluded that:

1. The teaching materials are consistent with the goals of the subject. All the materials can be given delivered through internet based writing workshop teaching model.
2. The internet-based teaching model that meets students needs in writing practice should follow the following stages:
  - Prewriting.
  - Drafting
  - Revising
  - Editing
  - Sharing
  - Publishing
3. The internet-based writing workshop teaching model still has some limitations. However, the researcher could overcome them with the help of the students as the respondents. On the other hand the strengths of the model are that it could help students to improve their French writing skill and it enables students to be computer literate.
4. Students French writing skill test indicates that the students are able to compose a text that uses reasonably good French.

### **Recommendations**

The followings are the suggestion suggested by the research:

1. In this globalization era, it is necessary for the lecturers to improve their teaching quality by using latest information technology to avoid boredom.
2. The model can also be used for the teaching-learning of other foreign languages.
3. As the research is at the development stage, further similar research is highly recommended.

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