

A Comparative Study of the Teaching English Writing in Senior High Schools in Indonesia and Japan

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate Indonesian and Japanese English teachers' perspectives about English writing, to examine current techniques in the teaching of writing used by senior high school teachers in Indonesia and Japan, and how to know whether there are some differences and/or similarities between teaching methodologies of English writing in both countries. This study surveyed 44 Indonesian senior high school teachers and 43 Japanese senior high school teachers through a questionnaire and an interview. The findings indicated that the Indonesian and Japanese senior high school teachers have different teaching methodologies for the improvement of students' abilities in English writing. Lastly, a conclusion is provided, accompanied by limitations of the study and suggestions for further study.

Keywords: Teaching English writing, senior high school, Indonesia, Japan

INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the language skills that English instruction at senior high schools aims to develop. Strong writing skills not only help the students' grades but also prepare them for their academic and professional future. Furthermore, the ability to write well can significantly impact our lives. Although writing can be considered an art form, it is up to the artist to create the masterpiece. Neither proficient works of written art nor any lives can be impacted without the competency and practice of fundamental writing abilities (Currier, 2008). Senior high school students should learn to express and develop their ideas through

writing because it can stimulate their critical thinking and strengthen their writing skills, which will help them with university applications. Therefore, teachers should share their knowledge and experience and train students to write academically, as these writing skills will benefit them later. Although English writing is an essential skill in English education, Indonesian and Japanese senior high school students still face difficulties in mastering it, since there are some structural and grammatical differences between English and Bahasa Indonesia or Japanese language.

In Indonesia and Japan, writing in English is considered a big problem. The Japan Times (2015) reported that according to the MEXT, 86.5 % of 70,000 students who took a writing test in the Eiken test in practical English proficiency were reported to have skills below the level of Grade 3. While in Indonesia, classroom action research conducted by Obisuru and Purbani (2016) with 28 senior high school students in Kalabahi, found in a preliminary study that 29.16% of students could reach the minimum score, 70 out of 100.

One of the problems could be that the teacher has different perspectives or beliefs in viewing English writing. According to Borg (2003), teachers' beliefs, in his terms, is teacher cognition, which refers to "the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching – what teachers know, believe, and think (p.81). Teacher perspectives or beliefs have a more significant impact than teachers' knowledge on planning the lessons and practice in the class. Teachers make decisions about their classroom teaching and learning regarding the beliefs that they have (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2019; Kuzborska, 2011). If teachers could understand their students' abilities, they would be able to choose and modify their attitudes and educational choice appropriately (Li, 2012). Also, she said that teachers' beliefs significantly impact the aims, procedures, roles, and students. In short, teachers' beliefs or perspectives can be defined as teachers' experiences that have been shaped during the process of teaching and learning in the classroom.

Thus, the aims of this study are 1) to recognize Indonesian and Japanese teachers' perspectives on English writing among other skills; 2) to investigate the current techniques applied by senior high school teachers in Indonesia and Japan in teaching English writing, and 3) to identify the differences and similarities of the methodologies for teaching writing in English between the two countries. Both these countries consider English as a foreign language and have low levels of English language proficiency, especially in writing. Thus, comparing both countries' English education will enable teachers to learn from the strengths and weaknesses of each country, apply useful findings to increase their students' ability in English writing, and enrich their teaching techniques

As we know, writing is an essential skill in language production. Its importance increases when it comes to writing in the English language, which is extensively used for global mediation of knowledge (Mahboob, 2014). According to Harmer (2004), writing is the process of joining several signs and symbols of a language together with some rules to understand the meaning.

Kellogg (2001) said that writing is a cognitive process that tests memory, thinking ability and verbal command to successfully express ideas; because good composition indicates successful learning of a second language. Therefore, learning how to write has been considered important in English teaching, as it can be used as an effective instrument for expressing ideas.

Teaching English writing in EFL countries, in this case in Indonesia and Japan, is quite challenging. In Indonesia, the objective of teaching English is to develop students' basic communication abilities in the macro skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, deepen their understanding of language and culture, and foster a positive attitude toward communication through foreign languages (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan [Kemendikbud], 2018). It is one of the fundamental abilities that students should grasp. English is taught for grade X in Indonesia for five hours per week. After then, English is offered for six hours per week in grades XI and XII. English is taught as general English in the curriculum, incorporating four language abilities in one session. The teaching methodology for writing integrates both a genre-based and a process-based approach. The genre-based approach highlights the need to delve into the social and cultural context of writing language. Here, the students are encouraged to become accustomed to trying to understand, summarize, and present texts in their language. They are acquainted with organizing systematic, logical, and practical texts through the exercise of text building. In addition, they are introduced to the rules of suitable genres to avoid ambiguity in the process of composing texts. These include text genres like recount, narrative, analytical exposition, explanation, procedure, and news item.

Process writing, on the other hand, is an approach that refers to a broad range of strategies that include pre-writing activities, such as defining the readership, using a variety of resources, planning the writing, as well as drafting and revising (Bhatti, Asif, Akbar, Ismail & Najam, 2020; Gezmiş, 2020; Goldstein & Carr, 1996). Therefore, Kemendikbud (2013), in the National curriculum, said that the purposes of teaching writing in English can be classified into five items: 1) to write in order to learn something, 2) to write in order to express feelings, 3) to write in order to inform, 4) to write in order to persuade, and 5) to write in order to entertain. In short, students must be able to arrange or produce short texts by using the appropriate text structure and linguistic features based on the context.

The Japanese senior high school curriculum focuses on productive communication skills, speaking, and writing in Japan. The Course of Study for foreign language (English) consists of English Communication I, II, and III. Then, there are Logic and Expression I, II, and III (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology [MEXT], 2018). Writing is covered in Logic and Expression I, II, and III, which have goals to make students are

able to write and convey information, thoughts, and feelings about everyday topics using basic words and sentences, paying attention to logic, if lots of support is

utilized in terms of the words and sentences used and prior preparation, and to be able to write and convey information, thoughts, and feelings about social topics using basic words, phrases, and sentences based on what they have heard and read, paying attention to logic, lots of support are utilized in terms of words, phrases, and sentences to use and preparation in advance (p.27-28).

However, teachers are also responsible for making their writing materials more accessible for the students to be learned to increase their self-confidence. Moreover, teachers aim to develop students' abilities to evaluate facts and opinions from multiple perspectives and communicate through reasoning, using a range of expressions (MEXT, 2018).

The use of communicative language teaching (CLT) in secondary schools aims to develop English communication skills and understanding of language and culture (MEXT, 2018). In addition, English teachers need to improve their communication education skills with four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) derived from the concept of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). While CLT helps learners improve their language skills, some critics are discussing how to integrate the CLT approach into language education suitably. As in the guidelines of English, issued by the MEXT (2018), have recognized English as an international language and advocated the implementation of CLT programs in all subjects in hopes of motivating high school students to identify problems and solutions through debate and presentations independently.

The respective methodologies applied in Indonesia and Japan each have some advantages in improving students' abilities in English writing. Therefore, a comparison of both countries is necessary to identify the most effective way of teaching English writing.

Based on the background described previously, this study attempts to address the following three research questions: 1) What are the Indonesian and Japanese teachers' perspectives on English writing among other language skills? 2) What are the current methodologies applied in teaching English writing by senior high school teachers in Indonesia and Japan? and 3) Are there any differences and/or similarities between the teaching English writing methodologies between Indonesia and Japan from teachers' point of view?

METHOD

Participants

The participants of this study were 44 senior high school English teachers from Indonesia and 43 Japanese English senior high school teachers. Based on their work experience, the participants were divided into two groups: experienced teachers and inexperienced teachers. The experienced teachers had been teaching for more than ten years, while the less-experienced teacher had teaching experience of less than ten years. The study represented a proportional sampling as seen from gender, educational background, and working experience. Further, these teachers were from different senior

high schools spread across the top and lower-level schools. Detailed information about the participants is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Data about the participants

Categories	Sub-categories	Indonesian teachers (n=44)	Japanese teachers (n=43)
Gender	Male	11	23
	Female	33	20
Educational Background	Undergraduate	26	30
	Master	18	12
	Doctor	0	1
	Others	0	0
Teaching Experience	1-2 years	2	3
	3-5 years	3	3
	6-10 years	8	5
	11-15 years	12	4
	16-20 years	7	2
	More than 20 years	12	26

Instruments and Procedures

Data were collected through a questionnaire and an interview. The researcher obtained written consent before asking the participants to fill out the questionnaire and before conducting each interview. After the participant read the informed consent document, the researcher reviewed it and asked if they had any questions. Once satisfied that all concerns had been discussed, they were asked to sign the consent form and then provided a copy.

Next, the teachers were asked to fill out the anonymous questionnaire that consisted of 17 questions, including two open-ended questions. The questionnaire was about the methodologies applied by the Indonesian and Japanese English teachers in senior high school, along with their opinions on current techniques for teaching writing. The question items were compiled from the previous surveys, which were conducted by Ito (2006) and National Writing Project (2007).

The questionnaires for the Japanese teachers were distributed in January 2021 in Hiroshima, Yamaguchi, and Tokushima prefectures. The questionnaires were distributed in February 2021 in Aceh, West Java, Central Java, East Java, and West Kalimantan provinces for the Indonesian teachers. After that, interviews were held with some teachers through email as well as face to face. The aims were to know in more depth how English writing was taught in their classes and their opinions about improving their students' English writing ability. Among the Indonesian English teachers, five teachers were regarded as representatives of the province. These teachers were chosen because they had been working for more than 20 years. In Japan, three English teachers were chosen as interviewees. They were selected because they were teaching in different prefectures and had more than 20 years of experience.

There were two versions of the questionnaire; the English questionnaire was applied for the Indonesian teachers, and the Japanese language questionnaire was used for the Japanese teachers. The questionnaire adopted the five-point Likert scale. The participants were asked to choose their opinion by selecting the number (5 to 1) which best represented their view (5 for Strongly Agree, 4 for Agree, 3 for Undecided, 2 for Disagree, and 1 for Strongly Disagree). They were asked about mistakes found in writing tasks given to students by choosing a number from 5 to 1 (5 for always, 4 for often, 3 for sometimes, 2 for seldom, and 1 for never). The study investigated the teachers' perceptions about mistakes made by their students and their degree of satisfaction with the students' progress.

Data Analysis

We used Excel 2016 to answer the research questions of this study. Mean deviations, frequencies, and percentages were computed for the demographic data and the participants' answers.

Responses to the questionnaire were sorted into figures to illustrate preference patterns, trends, and comparisons and contrasts in preferences between English teachers in both countries. Then, the data from the questionnaire were analyzed, and the mean score and standard deviation were calculated for each item. Finally, all of the data were analyzed with the help of the percentage to identify the teachers' perceptions of teaching English writing. Finally, the percentages of Indonesian teachers were compared with Japanese teachers to understand whether there were some similarities or not.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study are described and interpreted through the following three research questions.

Research Question 1: What are the Indonesian and Japanese teachers' perspectives on English writing among other language skills?

From Figure 1, we can conclude that the teachers believed that writing is a less vital skill to be mastered by senior high school students in Indonesia and Japan than reading and speaking; moreover, in Japan, writing is believed to be the least important skill. This means that English teachers in Indonesia and Japan considered writing a less critical skill. However, as both countries have below-average scores in writing—1.95 (Indonesia) and 1.93 (Japan)—it seems that writing needs to be given more importance in English teaching classrooms. Notably, learning writing has been proven to provide advantages to the students in enhancing their language learning strategies, which have currently become a great concern of many experts in combining reading-writing instructions. By combining reading and writing, students will acquire a great deal in their literacy skills. Yale (2010) said that practicing in writing will also assist students' reading skills, in a sense in the process of writing their composition, and helps them analyze the writings by reading their

works before submitting them. Thus, learning to write is essential to communicate ideas and enrich their vocabulary and language use.

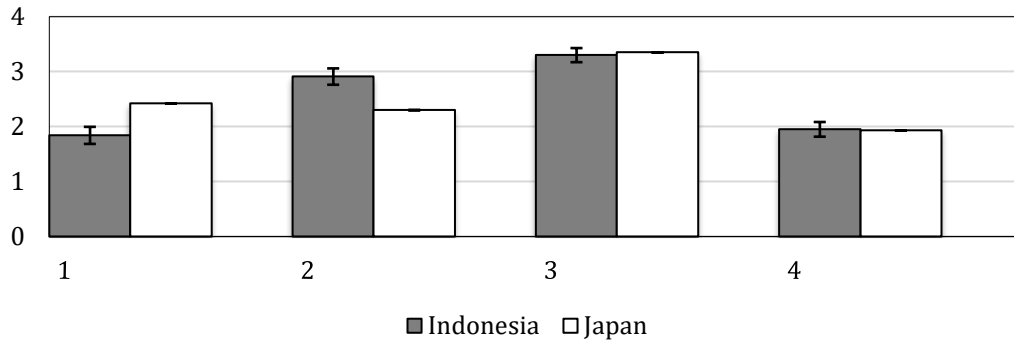


Figure1. The importance of the four language skills

Further, Figure 2 indicates that both the Indonesian and Japanese teachers emphasized reading more than other skills. The Indonesian teachers considered reading the most important, allocating it the highest percentage (29.5%). Following that were speaking (25.9%), writing (23.9%), and listening (20.7%). The Japanese teachers also emphasized reading the most in their classes, allocating it the highest percentage among other skills (39.9%). It was followed by writing (21.8%), listening (20.0%), and speaking (18.3%). According to Iwamoto and Kramer (2020), vocabulary size is needed for senior high school students to pass the university entrance examination. Moreover, the Japanese government also required the students to learn 1.800 words. Thus, reading and writing were necessary for students to face the final examination and university entrance examination as these two skills can enrich their vocabularies.

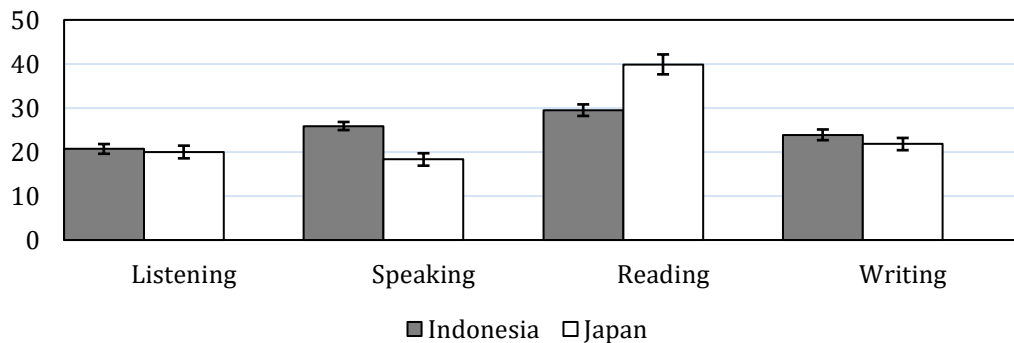


Figure 2. Emphasizing the four languages skills in teaching English (%)

In evaluating students' work, the Indonesian and the Japanese teachers agreed that *content* was the most important criterion. Here, about 28 Indonesian teachers put *content* as their answer, assigning importance of 28.5%. However, based on the interview with the teachers, students tend to focus primarily on grammar. According to them, grammar is needed to make their students able to face the National Examination and the university

entrance test. Then followed *organization* (21.3%), *grammar* (20.7%), *vocabulary* (18.0%) and *punctuation* (11.6%). The Japanese teachers also prioritized *content*, at about 30.7%. This was followed by *grammar* (27.2%), *organization* (19.0%), *vocabulary* (14.1%) and *punctuation* (9.1%). The detailed information can be seen in Figure 3 below. Further, Graham (2018) said that content might be more important for some writing tasks than others.

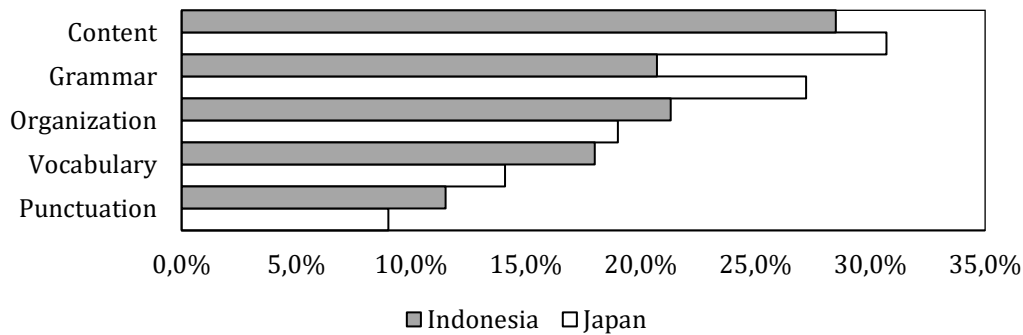


Figure 3. Criteria for evaluating students' works

Table 2. Giving an easy topic and letting the students choose it

Items	Participants	n	5 (A)	4 (O)	3 (S)	2 (R)	1 (N)	M	SD
Give the students an easy topic to start with	Indonesian	44	18	19	6	1	0	4.23	0.77
	Japanese	43	8	15	12	6	2	3.49	1.10
Let the students choose their own topic	Indonesian	44	7	17	19	1	0	3.68	0.77
	Japanese	43	0	3	16	17	7	2.35	0.84

Table 2 shows that most of the Indonesian and Japanese teachers preferred to give an easy topic to start with. They thought that by providing easy topics, the students would be more motivated to write, and it would be easier for them to understand the topics. The Indonesian teachers mostly let students choose their own topics in writing class. This can be seen in the average (3.68), which is higher than the median. Conversely, 17 Japanese teachers chose *rarely*, and 7 other teachers selected *never* as their answer. As a result, the average (2.35) is below the median.

Table 3. Emphasize teaching writing

Participants	n	Volume		Idea/topic		Organization		Vocabulary		Grammar		Punctuation	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Indonesian	44	2.64	0.81	4.18	0.75	4.02	0.73	3.47	0.63	3.61	0.65	3.00	0.89
Japanese	43	3.23	0.90	3.63	0.90	3.42	0.85	3.12	0.73	3.93	0.55	2.74	0.93

Table 3 reveals that the Indonesian teachers emphasized *idea/topic* (4.18) and *organization* (4.02) in their teaching of writing, but the *volume* (2.64) was given less

attention. For the Japanese teachers, on the other hand, *grammar* (3.93) and *idea/topic* (3.63) were essential features to be emphasized, while *punctuation* (2.74) was the least important. Here, the teachers of both countries have different points of view related to these features that need to be given more attention.

Table 4. The frequency and the seriousness of students' mistakes

Items	Participants	n	Grammar		Spelling		Vocabulary		Punctuation	
			M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
The frequency of mistakes	Indonesian	44	4.18	0.79	3.25	0.87	3.34	0.68	2.98	0.90
	Japanese	43	4.44	0.63	4.00	0.79	3.98	0.77	3.33	1.08
The seriousness of the mistakes	Indonesian	44	3.75	0.92	2.75	0.87	2.91	0.96	2.45	0.85
	Japanese	43	4.26	0.63	3.72	0.77	3.84	0.69	3.19	0.79

Table 4 exposes that *grammar* was the most frequent mistake that both the Indonesian and Japanese teachers found in their students' work, compared to *spelling*, *vocabulary*, and *punctuation*. It is consistent with their belief that *grammar* is an essential feature in English writing and needs more attention since mistakes often happen. Consequently, *grammar* was rated as the most severe problem. Especially in Indonesia, this mistake had an average of 3.75 out of 5, followed by *vocabulary* (2.91), *spelling* (2.75), and *punctuation* (2.45). In Japan, *grammar* ranked highest among the mistakes made by students (4.26) and was followed by *vocabulary* (3.84), *spelling* (3.72), and *punctuation* (3.19). According to the table above, *grammar* seems to be the only serious mistake from the point of view of the Indonesian teachers. In contrast, among the Japanese teachers, the averages of all the elements of good writing were more than the median (3.00), showing that their students' mistakes in writing were severe. This finding was supported by Budiharto (2018), who also found that grammar is still the most thoughtful mistake found in Indonesian students.

Table 5. The difficulty and the necessity of English writing for students

Items	Participants	n	5	4	3	2	1	M	SD
			(SA)	(A)	(UD)	(D)	(SD)		
English writing is the most difficult skill	Indonesian	44	11	25	4	3	1	3.95	0.91
	Japanese	43	7	15	9	11	1	3.37	1.11
English writing is needed for the future	Indonesian	44	18	18	8	0	0	4.23	0.74
	Japanese	43	11	26	4	2	0	4.07	0.74

Note. SA: Strongly Agree; A: Agree; UD: Undecided; D: Disagree; SD: Strongly Disagree

According to Table 5, most English teachers in Indonesia and Japan thought that English writing was a difficult skill for their students. The Indonesian and Japanese teachers agreed that writing was essential for their students' careers in the future since most of them chose strongly agree and agree. Thus, the mean scores from both countries were higher than the median (3.00). The Indonesian and Japanese English teachers believed that writing skills would be beneficial for their students since most of them will continue to the university level, for which writing skills are needed to write a report or

thesis. Moreover, for the Japanese students, it will help them pass the Eiken test and fulfill the MEXT (2014) requirement of Grade 2 or Pre-2 proficiency for senior high school students.

Table 6. Feel satisfied with the progress of the students in English writing

Participants	n	5(SA)	4(A)	3(UD)	2(D)	1(SD)	M	SD
Indonesian	44	4	22	17	1	0	3.66	0.67
Japanese	43	0	11	19	11	2	2.91	0.84

Referring to Table 6, different points of view related to this question are evident. The Indonesian teachers were satisfied with their student's progress in English writing, as shown by the mean score of 3.66. On the other hand, the Japanese teachers thought that they were not satisfied with their students' progress in English writing since the mean score (2.91) was below the median. However, according to the interview, it took at least one year to be able to see the progress of their students. Also, they said that most of their students could not compose a good piece of writing since they had difficulties with grammar. Thus, their writing might not always meet the teachers' expectations.

Research Question 2: *What are the current methodologies applied in teaching English writing by senior high school teachers in Indonesia and Japan?*

In terms of writing methodologies, Figure 4 shows that the Indonesian teachers chose free easy writing (3.80) and paragraph writing (3.59) to improve their students' ability in learning English writing. They said that these techniques could improve students' imagination and enhance their vocabulary. Moreover, it was in line with the students' competency that had to be achieved. On the other hand, the Japanese teachers primarily used translation into English (3.79) and scrambling words/sentences (3.67) as methodologies to improve their students' ability. Translation into English or the *yakudoku* method, a word-by-word translation of written English into Japanese, was widespread and dominant in Japan since this method was believed to be able to boost their students' vocabulary (Gorsuch, 1998). The results are consistent with several academics (Cook, 2012; Gorsuch, 1998; Hirata, 2018) who mentioned that Japanese teachers tend to apply translation in the way they teach writing. Therefore, according to Kelly and Bruen (2015), most Japanese instructors set up translation sections in a Japanese curriculum according to students' language levels.

Furthermore, Nowlan and Samuell (2019) claim that using the translation method makes it easier for teachers to explain what represents "right" and "wrong" answers. It will not help them pass the entrance exam unless there is a fundamental rethinking of how Japanese students' English ability is evaluated. In conclusion, most of the teachers thought that applying translation could minimize the gaps in learners' knowledge, particularly concerning vocabulary.

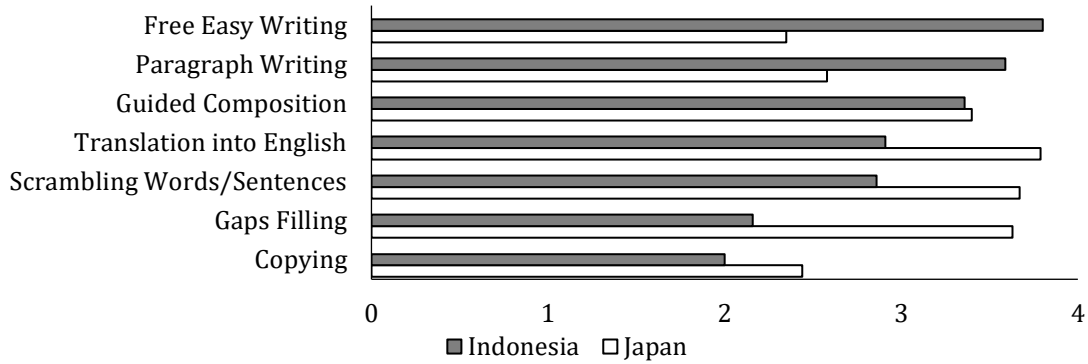


Figure 4. Methodologies used in writing lessons

Research Questions 3: Are there any differences and/or similarities between the teaching English writing methodologies between Indonesia and Japan from teachers’ point of view?

The results show that there were many similarities and differences between the two countries in teaching English writing. In particular, both Indonesian and Japanese teachers thought that writing skills were not as significant as reading, speaking, and listening. Therefore, an effort is needed to make writing as important as other skills.

Regarding the current methodology, the Indonesian teachers tended to apply free essay writing and paragraph writing in teaching English writing; and they often gave students the chance to select their own topics. The Japanese teachers, on the other hand, preferred using translation into English and scrambling words/sentences as their favorite ways; moreover, they rarely allowed students to choose their topics since they said that the topics were stated in the textbooks.

The differences between both countries could be influenced by the different approaches applied in the curriculum and the goals of learning English. In Indonesia, the genre-based approach is applied, which requires students to be able to write many kinds of texts. Here, grammar is not emphasized much in the teaching of writing; however, this study revealed that Indonesian teachers still focused on grammar. On the other hand, communicative language teaching (CLT) is used in Japan. However, regarding the teachers in the interview, they emphasize grammar translations and memorization of grammatical rules for the sake of university entrance examinations.

Grammar was the most dominant factor in teaching English writing because the Indonesian and Japanese teachers agreed that grammar needed more attention because of the many mistakes made by their students. This result is in line with the findings of Latuperisa and Sayd (2019). Moreover, they advocated that English teachers must be more focused on using the verbs since the use of verbs was in the highest percentage of errors made by students.

Furthermore, grammar was required for students to continue their education to the next level. It seems that the goal of learning English is just for test and exam preparation;

therefore, grammar becomes the focus of teaching English. As Faridi, Saleh, and Fitriani (2020) said, Indonesian students, are lack ideas and poor at grammar and vocabulary.

In optional open-ended questions related to the features in choosing English writing textbooks, they suggested that the textbook had to have *interesting topics, relevant to students' future needs, many kinds of exercises and activities, and clear instructions.*

CONCLUSION

This study revealed several similarities and differences between Indonesia and Japan from the perspective of the teachers. After examining the data, it was found that the Indonesian teachers tended to use free essay writing and paragraph writing in teaching English writing. In contrast, the Japanese teachers preferred using a translation into English and scrambling words/sentences. In addition, from both the Indonesian and Japanese English teachers' perspectives, writing was less important than other skills; therefore, teachers and governments should emphasize teaching this skill. Further, Japanese teachers should consider letting their students practice free essay writing in which they can choose their own topics and sometimes allow them to assess their friends' and fellow students' works.

On the other hand, Indonesian teachers could use writing exercises like translation into English and scrambled words or sentences to enrich their teaching methodology. Also, both the Indonesian and Japanese teachers could incorporate peer feedback and self-feedback, instead of only teacher feedback, to enhance students' experience of English writing practice. Moreover, some researchers (Al-Shehab, 2020; Le, 2021; Sangeetha, 2020) displayed that writing teachers could encourage their students to perform self-editing in their writing lessons, as it improves students' writing skills and allows them to develop independently. They should give their students a regular opportunity for self-assessment and encourage them to monitor their writing during the revision process independently. Furthermore, teachers could provide more time to doing writing practice since they felt that they only had a few times to do it. Elfiyanto and Fukazawa (2021) suggested that giving students the time and opportunity to read and revise their own and classmates' writings could help them become improved writers. The previous statement is also corresponding to some scholars (Graham, Capizzi, Harris, Hebert, and Morphy, 2014; Heggart and Yoo, 2018; Huisman, Saab, van den Broek, and van Driel, 2019; Kim, 2020), who expressed that many teachers considered their students very little time writing or learning how to write. While most teachers employed a range of evidence-based writing approaches and made adaptations for struggling writers, they were rarely implemented.

One of the interesting findings was that the teachers from both countries felt that mastering grammar was their main problem. Thus, they should integrate grammar lessons into writing practice to accustom students to the patterns of grammar. Additionally, an excellent writing textbook is needed to support the effectiveness of teaching English writing.

However, the researchers are aware that this was a small-scale study and a more in-depth review of related literature needs to be conducted. In the future, the teaching methodologies used to develop English writing skills should be examined using more prominent participants.

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