AUDIENCE AWARENESS IN EFL WRITERS: A PRELIMINARY STUDY AT ENGLISH EDUCATION STUDY PROGRAM UNIVERSITY OF JAMBI

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ABSTRACT

As a mode of communication, writing should be viewed as representing a dialog between the writers and their readers. This view of writing as a social process (e.g. Hyland, 2003) advocates that writers should try to accommodate their readers' interests, needs, expectations, etc., in their writings. This concept called "Audience Awareness", is very crucial to writing instructions, and has been considered as a writing skill that has to be mastered by skilled writers (Clark, 2003; Hyland, 2003). However, apart from somewhat vague instructions for the learners to "consider your readers when writing", this notion is relatively rarely discussed and studied, particularly in Indonesian context. This preliminary study aims at investigating audience awareness as perceived by Indonesian EFL writers. The primary data of this descriptive qualitative study were collected through interviews to 12 students of English Education Study Program, University of Jambi, selected purposively by applying maximum variation sampling strategy. The data were analyzed thematically. Four salient themes emerging from the study, i.e.: (1) Vague awareness of the audience, (2) (in)ability to address the audience, (3) effects of real readers to audience awareness, and (4) lack of instruction in audience awareness, as well as their pedagogical implications are discussed in depth in this paper.
Keywords: *Audience Awareness, EFL Writing, EFL Learners, Writing as a Social Practice*

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the history of mankind, writing has often been considered as secondary to oral communication, i.e. writing as a means of representing and substituting spoken ideas into written ones (see for example Harmer, 2007). Even, in second language learning, writing used to be viewed as a mere "support system" to learning language components: grammar and vocabulary (Harmer, 2007, p. v) rather than to be considered as a skill by itself. However, writing researchers and instructors have come to realize that writing is not merely a substitution or an alternative to speaking. Instead, writing is a different mode of communication bringing with it a set of conventions and rules. Harmer (2007) proposes several differences between writing and speaking, they are: (1) Time and space, (2) Participants, (3) Process, (4)

Organization and language, (5) Signs and symbols, and (6) product (pp. 6-11).

Despite of the these differences, writing and speaking also share some similarities. One of them is the fact that writing, like speaking, should be considered as a representation of a dialog among the participants. In writing, this means a dialog between the writers and their readers. A writing should not be viewed as a mere expressions of ideas, opinions, or feelings from writers to readers, but also a means for writers to have a dialog with their readers, even though this communication typically occurs in "vacuum" as the writers do not communicate with the readers face to face like speaking. As a dialog, a writing should ideally include not only how the writers view the subject matter of their writings, but also how they view, address, and involve the readers in the writing. Thus, it is important for the writers to consider who the target readers will be and what their interests, needs, expectations, and personal backgrounds are, when writing. This view of writing instruction, known as writing as social process (Hyland, 2003) assumes that writing is not only a personal and individual process, but also interactional and social.

A number of writing researchers and pedagogists have highlighted the importance of audience awareness as an aspect of writing instruction. Defined in general as writers' awareness of potential readers of their writing, audience awareness is a very important aspect that should be learned by language learners, including EFL learners, in order to be considered as skillful writers (Hyland, 2003; Oshima & Hogue, 2007).

Considering the importance of this aspect, audience awareness should ideally be a focus of of writing pedagogy, especially in EFL writing where language may also be a barrier. However, in many popular EFL writing textbooks in Indonesia, particularly the ones commonly used in English Education Study Program, University of Jambi, the concept of audience awareness is often neglected, except for a simple, somewhat vague point suggesting readers to imagine their target readers before writing. In addition, studies on this construct are scarcely conducted among Indonesian community of TEFL researchers and practitioners as indicated by the number of publication in this topic.

On the other hand, there is an urgent need to understand this phenomenon with regards to writing instructions for EFL learners. Before an effective instructional intervention can be taken to improve these learners' writing skills, it is important to understand the characteristics of audience awareness as perceived by EFL learners in Indonesian context.

This current study is a preliminary attempt to explore EFL learners' awareness of their target audiences, particularly among the students of English Education Study Program, University of Jambi as a typical example of EFL learners. This research is expected to be a stepping stone for further research on audience awareness in Indonesian context. To guide this research, three questions are formulated as follows: (1) How is the awareness of Indonesian EFL learners of their audience in writing? (2) Who and what are the characteristics of the audience as perceived by these learners?, and (3) How do these learners represent their awareness of the audience in their writing?

AUDIENCE AWARENESS AND EFL WRITING

Audience is not a new concept, particularly in the field of rhetoric and composition study, from which the field of L2 writing have "borrowed" some important theories and concepts into their body of theories. Clark (2003) for example noted that the concept of audience has been a central issue in composition for more than 25 years (p. 141). Lapp, Shea, and Wolsey (2010) even noted that this concept can be traced back at least to Aristotle (cf. Clark, 2003) referring to "…matching informational details to the needs and interests of the audience" (p. 33). The concept was originally used in speaking to refer to the listeners. However, as they suggest, the term can be extended to refer to readers of a text and much research has been conducted to investigate audience awareness in writing. Interchangeable labels such as audiences, readers, are often used in these studies etc.

This concept was further introduced to the field of L2 writing by several scholars addressing various aspects of audiences or readership. The central assumption of this theory is that whenever writers write, they have particular readers that they target in their writing, either known or unknown, general or specific audiences, real readers that they target, or the readers that they "create" in their writing.

Some scholars introduced several terms related to audiences such as "invoked", "evoked", "fictionalized", "intended", or "general" audience (Clark, 2003), etc. Discussing the role of audience in composition theory and pedagogy, Ede and Lundsford (1984) distinguished 'Audience addressed' from 'Audience invoked'. By the former they referred to the "concrete reality of the writer's audience" (p. 156), meanwhile the latter referred to imagined, writer-constructed audiences. Along this line, Johns (1993), drawing from an extensive literature on audience, discussed two kinds of audiences: hypothetic and known readers. She further proposed that the known audience is of a great importance and writing teachers should focus more on the known readers and inform the students of this type of readers as well as give them opportunities to address variety of readers in their writings. However, in many cases writers are expected to write to the people that are not present as they are writing. So, they have to imagine these readers and anticipate the expectations of these readers

Some investigations indicated that even at early stage, young writers were able to demonstrate their awareness of the audience and suited their writing to meet the expectation of different audience (Frank, 1992), and such awareness were manifested in identifiable patterns across cultures and developed over time (Wollman-Bonilla, 2001). However,as highlighted by Clark (2003), in writing classes, this concept is too difficult for the students and many students are not really aware of their audiences when writing. This, as suggested by Clark (2003), happens because in general students assume that the only readers of their writing are the teacher, and (if at all) their peers. In addition, students often do writing merely for fulfilling tasks from teachers. She further argues that student writers tend to target a real reader, and their main goal is to demonstrate their ability in writing, instead of writing for real purposes such as to inform, persuade, or entertain (p. 142). The type writer-reader relationship is also determined by the class situation rather than the real life situation. The teacher does not only serve as a reader but also as the "know-all" judge who will grade their writing. This theoretically will impoverish

their rhetorics in writing, while in the real life they are supposed to write to more varied audiences who bring with them different personal background, needs, interests, etc.

Many scholars in writing instruction have suggested the importance of audience, especially authentic readers, on learners' writing (Grabe & Kaplan, 1997; Williams, 2007). Some studies indicate that the consideration of audience in writing may influence the language used by a writer (e.g. Johnston, 2007). Bell (1984) for example, stated that variation in audience may contribute to the variation of linguistic styles. Cohen and Riel (1989) comparing the writing produced by Hebrew language learners for the teacher and distant peers, find out that out that the learners scored higher in their writing for distant peers than for the teacher. Nehal's (2004) study also shows similar result. Writing for three kinds of audience (unspecified, familiar, and unfamiliar distant audiences), the participants score the highest in their writing for unfamiliar distant audiences. These studies suggest that audience may influence the way writers write, even improve their writing. In fact, some scholars suggest that the awareness of audience and the ability to address different readers in writing is an important skill to be learned and addressed in language classrooms (Brown, 2007; Williams, 2005) as it is a skill that differentiates skilled writers from beginner writers (Lapp et al, 2010).

To conclude, it can be said that audience awareness is a very essential aspect of writing pedagogy and its knowledge and mastery is significant for writing skills. Therefore it is important to include audience awareness in writing pedagogy.

METHODS

This qualitative study is aimed at exploring the phenomenon of audience awareness as perceived and experienced by EFL learners in writing. In-depth interview was selected as the main data collection technique in this study.

The study was conducted at English Education Study Program, a study program at Faculty of Teacher Training and Education (FKIP), University of Jambi, whose main goal is to prepare prospective English teachers. As a part of the preparation, students at this study program learn English language skills in their first years. This includes writing courses that they learn starting from the second semester. In addition, they also practice their writing skills in various classes requiring them to submit written reports, etc. As such, these students are considered to have an adequate exposure to writing practices, and thus are representatives of EFL writers.

Semi structured interviews were conducted to 12 participants purposively selected for this study by implementing the principle of maximum variation, i.e., by systematically selecting participants representing each academic year, from second to fourth year. These students have completed at least Paragraph Writing class. First year students were excluded from this research as they had not taken any writing classes yet and thus are considered to not having an adequate experience in writing in English.

To guide the interview, an interview protocol consisting of 16 items was developed (Appendix 1). The protocol was piloted prior to the actual interview sessions, and some revisions were made accordingly. Each interview session lasted for approximately 15 – 20 minutes and the respondents were given an option to be interviewed in English or Bahasa Indonesia. The inter-

views were recorded and the data were transcribed for the analysis. These data were further analyzed thematically by following the procedures proposed by Dornyei (2007).

To establish trustworthiness of this study, some techniques were implemented. The first is researcher triangulation, i.e. the researchers independently analyzed the interview data and established a coding system. The coding was further compared and discrepancies found in the data were settled. The second is member checking, where the transcribed interview data were presented to the respondents for confirmation of the accuracy. Furthermore, all records and transcription data were documented systematically for reviews and further analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS
Vague Awareness of the Audience

One important finding of this study is that these respondents indeed had an awareness of their audience. They realized that their writings would be read by somebody. However, most of them could not visualize these potential readers any further, and only identified them as readers having general characteristics and interests. They admitted that their main target readers were the lecturers, while a few also included their peers as readers as they serve as the proofreaders of their writings. One interesting phenomenon was that a few students have wider and more varied audiences than the others as they practiced writing online. One of the respondents, Martha (a pseudonym), is a writer of fan fictions. She often posted her writing online. She admitted that she had specific target readers, her fan readers. She further stated that these readers shared some similarities in that they were mostly teenagers having an interest in reading teen literatures. Beyond that, she admitted she never imagined more varied target audiences. Therefore, her writing is determined by specific and real target audiences. Another respondent, Arya, had a hobby of creating videos in English and posting them online. As a preparation, he often wrote online discussing his ideas on the projects. He also stated that he had an awareness of his audiences when writing. He even stated that "why do we write if it is not read by others", emphasizing his view that he always writes with specific target audiences in mind. Some of the respondents, however, admitted that they were not really aware of their target audiences or had problems in visualizing their readers. A respondent, Marie, usually visualized that her target readers were general readers with relatively homogeneous interests, needs, and expectations. She even chose general vocabularies to express her ideas in writing as she believed that these vocabularies could be understood by any readers.

These findings may indicate that there is a relationship between writing practices and audience awareness. Those who practice writing outside of the classroom's assignment seems to be more aware of their audiences, while those who don't write, except for completing assignments from the lecturers, seem to not have such an awareness. Nevertheless, these learners seem to have either general readers or specific ones. Those who did not like writing tend to have general and vague kinds of readers. They did not really realize who their readers would be and tended to be more focused on their writing but not on their audiences. On the other hand, those who like writing and practice it beyond the classroom such as writing online show an awareness of the audience, even though the awareness is also limited to the known audience,

i.e. they already have a specific group of target readers, that is, what experts defined as audience addressed (Ede & Lundsford, 1984) or known audience (John, 1993). However, these respondents seem to not show an awareness of the invoked/hypothetical readers yet.

(In)ability to Address the Audience

The second theme emerging from the study is related to the ability of the respondents to address the audience. As discussed in the previous section, some of these students had an awareness of the audience, while the others not. This is also reflected in their ability in addressing the audience. Those who do not practice writing outside of the classroom and thus do not have clear audience awareness seem to lack the ability to address the audience. Diva, for example, stated that she used most of her energy struggling with writing the text and using language, so she could hardly focus on the audience and thus stated that she was unable to address her audience. This also happened to others who have vague awareness the audience as they stated they did not know how to communicate with their audiences through writing. At most, what they could do, as they admitted, was to use general, simple vocabularies in order to ensure that everyone was able to understand what they mean, as admitted for example by Marie. However, we can also argue that the use of these vocabularies may indicate their own lack of vocabulary.

On the other hands, the learners with audience awareness admitted that they implemented several techniques in addressing the audience, for example by using varied language styles and vocabulary suited to the needs of their readers. They also provided explanations, details, etc. in their writing so as to guide the readers in their writing. Apart from these, their repertoire of techniques in addressing the audiences is quite limited as the researchers did not find any other common techniques in addressing the audiences such as using discursive features that explicitly indicates writer-reader dialogs (See for example, Hyland, 2003).

Inadequate Instructions in Addressing Audience in Writing

Despite of the differences among these respondents in terms of the audience awareness, they gave unanimous responses with regards to instructions on audience awareness. They admitted that the instructions in audience awareness, particularly in writing class was very limited. Despite of somewhat vague notion that they had to consider their target readers before writing, they received no other training in addressing the audiences in writing. Even, the idea that they had to adjust their language to their interlocutors was taught in other classes, but not writing classes. They also admitted that the writing instructors rarely provided them with opportunities to write for different real audiences. Most of their writings were submitted "merely" for class assignment and addressed the instructors. That is, they wrote in order to be evaluated by these instructors. They also did not receive special instructions on how to address these audiences, how to use the language, the vocabulary, the discursive features, or special rhetorical features for different readers.

This lack of instruction can explain why these learners did not build adequate awareness of their audiences, and it indicates that even if they have audience awareness it is not due to the instructions, but rather from their own writing experience.

CONCLUSION AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study is a preliminary attempt to understand the concept of audience awareness in relation to writing as perceived by EFL learners. Through in-depth interviews the researcher investigated the phenomenon and found out that the respondents indeed are aware of their audiences, in the sense that they realize that when they write they have potential readers. However, this awareness seems too vague and unclear. Most of them only recognize their readers as general readers having homogenous characteristics. These learners do not really consider their readers' specific interests, needs, expectations, or personal background, and accomodate them in their writing. These learners also in general do not have adequate abilities in addressing their potential readers. Using general vocabularies suitable for general readers is the most that they can do.

However some of the learners admitted that they are relatively more aware of their target readers. This is the group of students who enjoy writing outside of the their classes' demands. This group of students practice writing offline and online using various media such as newspaper, blogging websites, fanfiction websites, etc. These writers have real audiences whose characteristics are generally predicatable as they come from homogeneous groups of readers. These known audiences are defined by Ede and Lundsford (1984) as reader addressed. This indicates that audience awareness is associated with writing practices. This is in line with Hyland (2003)'s proposal that writing is a social process which means that writing is only meaningful in social contexts where writers have dialogs with the readers.

The study also found that the learners ability in addressing audiences is quite limited to the language use, i.e. grammar and vocabulary, while they did not have any ideas on how to use discursive features or rhetoric features to communicate with the readers.

Lack of instructions seem to be the source of their low of awareness and ability to address the audience. The study found that the writing instructors provide very limited information on how to deal with audiences in writing so that their main source of such awareness is the intuition developed from their writing practices.

Furthermore this study indicates the needs of incorporating the concepts of audience in writing classess as a vast number of reseach has shown that audience awareness is instrumental in improving the EFL learners' writing ability. Thus, the researchers suggest that it is important to consider some steps to integrate audience awareness in our EFL writing pedagogy in order to prepare our students to be skillful writers who can have a dialog with their readers, not only focusing themselves in the writing but also with the audiences. By doing so, it is hoped that we can prepare more skilled EFL writers in the future.

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Appendix 1:
Interview Protocol

NO	ASPECTS	Q#	QUESTIONS
A			**GENERAL ASPECTS OF WRITING**
1	View of Writing	1	▪ In your opinion, what is writing? What do you think about writing in general?
2	Writing Habit	2-3	● Do you like writing? Why or why not? ● How often do you write? What kind of writings do you usually do? What medium do you use?
3	Writing Skills	4	● How good are you at writing? What difficulties do you usually encounter in writing?
4	Experience in Learning Writing	5	● How did you learn to write in English? Explain your experience in learning writing in high schools ○ Did your teachers specifically provide a session for learning writing? ○ What kind of writing activities did you do? ○ Did your teacher specifically teach you the techniques in writing?
B			**AUDIENCE AWARENESS**
1	General awareness	6-7	● Before writing, do you usually think about/imagine your prospective readers? Who will be the readers of your writing? ● Do you have a vision of what kind of readers your writing will have?
2	Characteristics of Targeted Audience	8-9	● What characteristics do you think your readers have? ● What aspects do you usually consider from your prospective readers? Their needs? Their interests? Their expectations? Educational and Personal background?
4	Capability in Addressing Audience	10-11	● Do you have a capability to show this awareness in your writing? What capabilities do you think you need to be able to do so? ● How do you usually represent your awareness of your prospective readers? ○ Write about things that meet their needs etc? ○ Adjust your language to their level? ○ Create a dialog between you and your readers in your writing?
5	Instruction on Audience Awareness	12-14	● Have your teachers/lecturers ever discussed about the needs to be aware of your prospective readers in your writing? What did they explain? ● Have your teachers/lecturers specifically provided a practice where you write for a specific audience? Who? What kind of writing? ● Have your teachers/lecturers specifically taught you how to address the different prospective readers you will have? How? What techniques were you taught?
6	The Importance of Audience Awareness	15-16	● Do you think it is important to learn to be aware of our prospective readers when writing? ● How should we improve this awareness in writing? What should the teachers/lecturers do in their writing classes?