

USING CLUSTERING TECHNIQUE TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' DESCRIPTIVE TEXT WRITING ACHIEVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Writing is a productive skill in learning language. Many students have difficulties in writing a foreign language. Writing needs a long term process and pre activities before paragraph making. This research has a goal to solve the problem above through clustering technique to improve students' writing achievement in descriptive text. CAR (classroom action research) was chosen as method in this research at Islamic senior high school based in Banyuwangi, East Java, Indonesia. The data of the study was obtained by writing test and observation checklist. All collected data were analyzed quantitatively. The result of writing test shows that there is significant improvement from the score before the action was given. There were 69% out of 26 students achieved minimum passing grade. There was significant improvement from 19% to 69%. The improvement in this study indicates that students are able to produce new ideas into a good text and brainstorm idea before they write a draft. Moreover, the use of clustering technique also could improve students' active participation the teaching and learning process. The result of students participation increased from 16 students (62%) to 24 students (92%).

Keywords: writing achievement, clustering technique, descriptive text

INTRODUCTION

Writing is a difficult skill for students who learn English as the second language or foreign language. Writing is a long term process for English language learners to produce a piece of a good written text that writing is one of the most difficult skills (Oxford:1994). Writing in English is not easy to do for students because they are not a native language user of English. Writing has not been a short process because it takes a long to do with. Practicing and a free writing to produce the good written text are needed. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) argue that writing in second language is a challenging and complex process as second language issues can overwhelm the writing process. Supporting these statements, the teacher has to design and implement a strategy or create a media in teaching learning process for reducing the students' boredom.

Before conducting the research, the researcher conducted an observation and interview the English teacher. The researcher found two problems in the class. First, the teacher did not use a strategy which makes students interested. Secondly, the students were asked to write a descriptive text directly meaning that they were not given opportunity to engage in process writing. Based on the interview with the teacher, it is also found out that the teacher never uses clustering technique in teaching learning process. So, the use of clustering technique is chosen in this research.

Confirming to the problem occurred above, the teacher should bring fun and interesting techniques into the classroom that can help students improve their writing achievement. One of them is using clustering technique. Malone (quoted by Inal, 2014) used strategies (drawing and free writing) along with clustering, and recorded that students using these strategies generated more ideas and focused better. So, the clustering technique is presented to overcome the problem of the students when to begin writing a descriptive text. Kellogg (1990) declares that clustering as a visual network of ideas and relation which writer constructs the relations between ideas and clustering, and concentrates only on invention. Through clustering the students more focus on the topic and brainstorming the ideas, words, and phrases that related to the topic. Volk (2000) mentions that the key term word placed in the center guides the writer to create more clustering groups and open new paths for thinking like “beams from a star”.

In Indonesian curriculum, students learn to write writing genres such as narrative, descriptive, report, etc. This study however based on the agreement with the English teacher focuses on the descriptive paragraph. Thus, an investigation of the implementation of clustering technique to improve students’ descriptive writing is conducted.

Writing is a process of someone or students to develop their ideas and knowledge and transform it in written language. Through writing process, they can develop their critical thinking to build a good written text through mindset that they have. María and Francesca (2014) state that writing is a instrument through which people build up knowledge structures that allows human beings the creation and transmission of knowledge. From this, writing is a meaningful process as a builder of knowledge that individual gets. In other words, when someone takes an activity to write something at the same time a person constructs the brainstorming ideas and establishes their minds.

Combining as a part of writing especially to combine word by word that has differences of meaning. Skill to collect the words and also arrange is naturally embodied into writing activity. Farbrain and Winch (1996) state that writing is about deliver meaning by using words that have been selected and put together in a written form. Writing is a process of how people select the words or phrases and what the meaning of them. Likewise, writing is a combining the words collectively to become a sentence, a paragraph, and a text.

Writing as part of communicative media is an attempt to give a message to the readers or receiver of the message. People want to say what they want to other people when they could not meet face to face. Ur (1996) pinpoints that writing is a perform of expressing ideas and deliver a message to the readers, so that the ideas themselves should arguably be seen as the main aspect of writing. It can be concluded that ideas is a part of message what the writer wants to tell to the readers.

The benefit of writing as often as the person to write can be a good performance to exercise their mind to achieve competence. In writing process, writer needs to think carefully on how to produce good collected words. Watkins (2005) states that writing is a practice requiring continues performance to achieve competence. Writing is an activity that need to be done frequently to do if a person wants to get an excellent competence.

In writing activity has a process before someone produce a good of a piece of paper or good written text. Savage & Shafiei (2017) pinpoint that there are some process in writing. They are brainstorming, creating outline, writing a first draft, editing, and writing a final draft and submitting writer’s work. Furthermore, the explanation about all of those will be present as follows:

Generally, writing has some elements of punctuation. Savage & Shafiei (2017:148) argue that there are elements of punctuation. They are:

- a. Commas (,)
- b. Periods (.)

c. Apostrophes (‘)

d. Quotation Marks (“...”)

Heaton (1988:71) stipulates that the aspect of writing achievement has four elements, they are grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, and organization. Furthermore, the aspect of writing achievement is very important in making writing well. In this study, the researcher only focuses on grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, and organization.

In Indonesia, students learn English genre as guided in the curriculum. They learn types of genre including genre of describing, narrating, explaining, instructing, and arguing (Knapp and Watkins, 2005).

Oshima & Hogue (2007) state that in a descriptive text, the writers used words which create an image and support the readers to see, touch, feel, smell, or taste the topic that the paragraph writer is describing. In the other words, a descriptive text is describe a particular thing, person, place that has a purpose to make the readers see, feel, or touch what the thing the writer being describe.

Clustering technique is one of the free-writing processes. It means that the use of clustering technique can help the students to begin to write. Baroudy (2008. p. 7) states that “clustering can be defined as a prewriting technique that enables student- writer choose an encircled nucleic topic around which whatever may be found in relationship with will be chosen to be jotted down in tree-branch like relationship.”

Clustering method presents a way to build up the ideas and then its ideas can be grown up. In addition, Baroudy (2008. p. 7) claims that the student-writer can select the ones that can be found most crucial or potent enough to develop the topic he or she aims at. The meaning of this technique is where the students as learners of writing decide what words will increase or expand related to the topic.

In the course of clustering technique, it allows whoever to produce the words in free base on their critical thinking. It would be a good way how students write the words which are kept in their mind. Ventis (2015) stipulates that clustering technique engaged a person who write down a word or phrase in free association. So, this technique is an effective strategy to assist developing each topic in writing learning process.

The use of clustering technique in teaching language provides myriad of advantages. Adriati (2013) that there are the strengths and the weaknesses of clustering technique. They are: becoming the “savings” of words which are needed in writing the descriptive text, making the plot construction easier, becoming a new alternative to writing with/without other brainstorming technique, empowering imagination, creating fun atmosphere in learning

However, the use of clustering technique also has some weaknesses. They are 1) Making the grammatical aspects ignored; 2) Taking longer time than students’ usual writing routine; and 3) Its tendency to occupy students’ focus so distract them from the task of writing a descriptive text which was the ultimate goal of the learning.

METHOD

Research Design

This research is intended to improve the tenth grade students’ writing achievement through clustering technique. Therefore, a classroom action research (CAR) with the cycle model will be applied in this research. This cycle consisted of four meetings of implementing the action and one meeting for the writing test.

Classroom action research (CAR) is a research through which a particular teaching strategy is employed to solve problem in the classroom. Before doing a research, the teacher should find what kind of problem the students have. Burns (2010:2) states that action research is part of a board movement that has been going on education generally for some time. It is related to the ideas of reflective practice and the teacher as researcher. Action

research involves taking a self reflective, critical, and systematic approach to exploring their own in teaching context. The teacher can make good interaction with the students about material given in the class by engaging students that creates an active learning atmosphere. Besides that, teacher should know what kind of difficulties the students have in class, and then the teacher thinks about how to choose good strategy or media to improve students' motivation in learning process in the class. So, the students can be active and participate well with the technique used in the class. Finally, the reason to conduct the action research is to enhance students' achievement in teaching and learning English especially students' writing achievement.

Action research reflects a process that aims to solve a particular teaching learning problem that has been identified. It involves gathering information, classification analysis, and interpretation of the data. The technique that is used is clustering to help students to improve their writing achievement. Kemmis and Mc Taggart in Burns (2010) state that the action consists of four steps in a cycle of research.

Participants

The participant of the research is the tenth graders of secondary school in Banyuwangi. It consists of 26 students. They are 16 students of female and 10 students of male. There are six classes in the tenth graders. The research participants are taken from the class that has the lowest mean score in writing. Their motivation in writing especially in English was quite low too. They always think that English is a difficult subject to deal with. The lack of vocabulary also affected the students' writing achievement. The minimum criterion of the score in English subject in this school is 75.

Data Collection Method

Test is a tool used for measuring students' participation and achievement. Sometimes it is something that students might be given as an alternative of regular exam to see how much students have learned. Hughes (2003:11) classifies test into four kinds, they are proficiency test, achievement test, diagnostic test, and placement tests.

Hughes (2003:26) claims that a good test should have validity and reliability. If a teacher conducted a test of learning process, he must include the validity and reliability of the test. Latief (2013:212) stipulates that "reliability of the result of language skill assessment refers to the preciseness of the language skill assessment result in representing the actual level of the skill of the examinees." Reliability is a consistency of the students score from the assessment. While, validity is appropriateness and done in right way, reliability is its consistency. Latief (2013:222) adds that "valid means correct, the result of students' writing assessment is valid, if it convinced that the writing assessment result correctly reflects the students' writing skill."

Based on the consideration of the validity test, the researcher will use content validity. The test materials stand with syllabus and school curriculum. In addition, this study will conduct the test in each cycle to measure the achievement. If the result of the writing test in the first cycle have achieved the criteria of success in this study, this action will not be continued. In the other words, the first cycle is considered successful. In this test, the students write a descriptive text about people, place, and thing based on the picture. After that, they write down into a paragraph which consists of 80-100 words (7-10 sentences) and the time allotment is 70 minutes.

Furthermore, the scoring rubric will be used in writing test. The score aspects entail grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, and organization. To measure whether the writing test is reliable or not, this test is scored by two raters (inter-rater reliability).

The researcher also used checklist as guide in observation process because the researcher wants to improve the students' writing in descriptive text by using clustering technique in teaching and learning process. This can be seen from the score of the students. The process was evaluated by conducting observation. The result of evaluation was used to make an evaluation in the end of the activity. The evaluation was used to make a conclusion whether or not teaching descriptive text by using clustering technique meets the target. The observation checklist for students' participation is as follow:

Documentation is defined as finding data related to variables in from books and meeting notes. In this research, documentation method is used to find the data related to the students identify, the English score, the respondent, and the passing grade used for English lesson in this school. In addition, this study, documentation is used to get supporting data about the total number of the tenth grade students, the names of the respondent and previous score in writing of the tenth grade students.

Data Analysis Method

In this study the percentage formula is used to analysis the primary data. The data was from students' result of writing achievement test and the result of observation. The following percentage formula is used to investigate the result of writing achievement test.

To count the percentage of the students who are active in class, the following formula is used.

$$E = \frac{n}{N} \times 100$$

Notes:

E: The percentage of the students who fulfill each indicator of observation stated in the checklist

n: The number of active participants

N: The total number of students

To count the percentage of the students who get score 75 or higher in class, the following formula is used.

$$E = \frac{n}{N} \times 100$$

Notes:

E: The percentage of the students who get score 75 or higher

n: The number of the students who get score 75 or higher

N: The numbers of the studentsm(*Adapted from Ali1989:186*)

Furthermore, the criteria of success in this research are determined in the following statements:

a. If 65 % students out of 26 reach the passing grade 75

b. If 65 % students out of 26 are categorized as the active students

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The result of observation in the first meeting showed that there were only 16 students (62%) actively participated during teaching and learning process. It means that there were 10 students (38%) out of 26 students who were passive in teaching and learning process. Based on the result above, it can be concluded that the improvement of students' participation did not achieve the improvement of the research yet.

The result of observation in second meeting was better than that of the first meeting. In the second meeting there were 23 students (88%) actively participated during teaching and

learning process. It means that there were 3 students (12%) out of 26 students who were passive in teaching and learning process. Based on the result of second meeting above students' participation improved.

The result of observation in third meeting was constant. It means that in the third meeting the students' participation there were 23 students (88%) actively participated during teaching and learning process. It funds that there were 3 students (12%) out of 26 students who were passive in teaching and learning process.

Meanwhile, the result of observation in fourth meeting was better than that of third meeting. In the fourth meeting there were 24 students (92%) actively participated during teaching and learning process. It means that there were 2 students (8%) out of 26 students who were passive in teaching and learning process. Based on the result of fourth meeting above students' participation improved. The improvement of the research was achieved.

On the other hand, the writing test was to measure the students' writing achievement through clustering technique. The test was conducted by giving the student a sheet of paper with some pictures. The students had to choose one of the pictures. The students did the test in 70 minutes individually. They used clustering technique to develop their paragraph. In scoring the result of writing achievement test, the researcher used four aspects, they are grammar, vocabulary, mechanic, and organization. Based on the result of the students' writing test, it showed that students achieved the target.

Table 1. The Result of Students' Writing Test

Total Number of Students (N)	26
The number of students who got score 75 or higher (n)	18
Percentage of the students who got score 75 or more (E)	$\frac{18}{26} \times 100 = 69\%$

Based on the figure 1 above, it was known that, the number of students who got score 75 or more was 18 students (69%). It means that it achieved the improvement of the research.

Discussion

Based on the result of the research, the researcher was able to recognize how relevant writing and clustering technique is. The basic target in learning clustering technique was to collect some information from the topic, which was the most important thing in writing descriptive text. Clustering technique is a good strategy in teaching writing. This technique could help the students to produce new ideas into a good text.

Oshima and Hogue (2007) stipulate that clustering technique is one of the prewriting activity to gain the ideas. It means that, using clustering technique can help the students to brainstorm and gain those ideas before they write a draft and a paragraph. When the students used clustering technique it solved the problem faced by students such as the difficulties in contributing words or phrases related to the topic. In addition, the students have other problems like combining word into a good sentence and in good grammar. The students could improve their self confidence especially when they answered the questions from the researcher and brainstormed their ideas in contributing to the cluster. The students were usually confused to start writing paragraph. While by using clustering technique they could look up the branch that had been written before.

Moreover, Sundem (2007) pinpoints that clustering is a excellent way to turn break the subject into manageable topic. Clustering technique is also called mind mapping. It is another useful way to get information in writing a paragraph, a text, or an essay. The students begin with a blank sheet of paper. In the center, they write and make a circle the word that expresses the branch of subject. They think of ideas and details related to this subject. This

technique will help the students to organize their ideas before they develop paragraph of descriptive writing. In clustering, writers can use lines, boxes, and circle to show relationship among the ideas and details that occur to them.

Teaching learning process using clustering technique could help students to finish their writing or complete all the sentences by looking up the branch rather than having to think about place, people, and thing they want to write. All the strategy used in teaching writing through clustering technique is able to work since it was combined with the material based on the activities in the English class. In using clustering technique, it needs not only creativity to create well-planned material but also time allotment consideration. By doing so, the teaching learning process will run interestingly to reach the goal of the study especially to improve students' writing achievement. Based on the result in cycle I there was significant improvement from 19% to 69%. The improvement was 50%.

Moreover, result of the students active participation in learning process also improved. Based on the result in cycle I, there was significant improvement from the first meeting to the last meeting, (62% to 92%). The improvement was 30%. It can be concluded that, the result of the students active participation was better than before.

In conclusion, clustering technique is an effective strategy which helps the students produce a good descriptive text.

CONCLUSION

Based on the result of writing test and observation checklist, it can be concluded that the use of clustering technique could improve the tenth graders writing achievement. The improvement could be seen from the writing test result. Moreover, the use of clustering technique also could improve students' active participation in the teaching and learning process of writing achievement.

The improvement in this study is indicated by the students who are able to produce new ideas into a good text and brainstorm idea before they write a draft. In addition, through clustering technique students' active participation can be improved.

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