

Improving Students Ability in Writing Essay Through “Free Weekly Writing” Activity

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ABSTRACT

Free weekly writing is designed for students to write in every week using free topic based on students' passion. This action research investigated the effectiveness of implementing free weekly writing in improving students' writing ability. The participants of this study were 35 students at the VI semester of English Department, FKIP UM-Mataram in academic year 2015-2016. The data were collected by four stages of action research; planning, action, observation, and reflection. The finding of the research proved that almost 83% passed the passing grade. Means that only about 17% students failed to reach the passing grade. There are some factors affected the students' ability in writing, they were; (a) a writer is forced to read a lot from many sources and having the knowledge, (b) a writer must have well understanding about content and focus of writing, (c) grammatical competence, (d) comprehending the rules of punctuation of in writing, (e) a professional writer must have own characteristic.

I. Introduction

A. Background

Writing is an activity that is quite difficult to do, not only many skill components are required, but also its takes much time in the writing process. Skill or other skills needed in writing include many things such as; Listening, speaking and reading skills as well as other abilities in English such as grammatical knowledge and vocabulary knowledge. In one of the results of the study showed that the most difficult things found by students in writing are in vocabularies and grammar, Mojica, A.L (2010).

That's why writing skills rank as the most difficult skill then the other skills in teaching English. Besides many components that need to be mastered, writing activities also require intensity and regular routine in order to get maximum results. Moreover for the beginners, means a student. Generally, students face some problems in starting writing. Writing course 1 to writing course VI then academic writing course is an intense effort of English curriculum in teaching English as an effort to improve the willingness and ability of students in writing. Unfortunately, there are many factors hamper this process, both internal and external factors.

That's why writing becomes the most difficult skills of the fours skills in teaching English. In addition, not only because so many components that need to be mastered, writing activities also require intensity and regular drills to get the qualifying results, especially for the beginners or students. Students commonly find some problems to start writing. Subject of Writing 1 to the writing VI and then followed by the academic writing course is an intense effort in the curriculum of English teaching to improve the students' willingness and ability in writing. Therefore, the problems may faced by students can be classify into two factors are; both internal factors and external factors.

Internal factors can arise from students personality who sometimes lazy to start writing, it is due to several indications, including; writing is considered as not most of people's passion/hobby, lack of motivation from students to be able to produce papers. In fact, motivation is the main key in learning many things, including writing. The standard of motivation in question can be presented by various forms of actions, one of the measures of motivation according to Urquhart, V & McIver, M (2005: 70) is when students do what their teachers instruct in writing procedures and strive to develop meaningful and coherent writing.

The external factors comes from atmosphere which is influence students in creating a good climate to start writing, teacher's method and treatment have high correlation with the students' feedback to follow the teachers' instruction to perform writing activities. As a first step, they can write things that they find which is familiar with their daily activities, so that their writing flows and focuses according to the topic that they wonder to discuss about (Freedman, 1998 cited in Urquhart, V & McIver, M, 2005: 71).

B. Research Question and Purposes

The author tries to formulate the problems in this study in form of two research questions; (1) does the free weekly writing technique is effective to improve students ability in writing essay?, (2) what factors are influenced the improvement of student ability in essay writing?. The purposes of the study could be explained in several goals; to simulate the students' writing habits in composing a scientific paper, provide students with the basics concepts of good, systematic and directed writing, help students to develop their creativity, ideas, and pour their concepts and ideas into a good writing.

II. review of literature

A. Teaching Writing in English

Writing can be interpreted as a form of communication for sending and expressing thoughts and ideas through writing, Harmer (2001: 79). In line with that definition, Cahyono (2009: 16) explains that writing is an act of communication, through the process of exchanging information, thoughts, ideas, and things is in someone's mind by using written language. Both definitions show that writing is an act of pouring and expressing thoughts, ideas and paradigms of thinking in the form of writing as a part of communication tool with the purpose to influence, disseminate information and the mindset of the author itself.

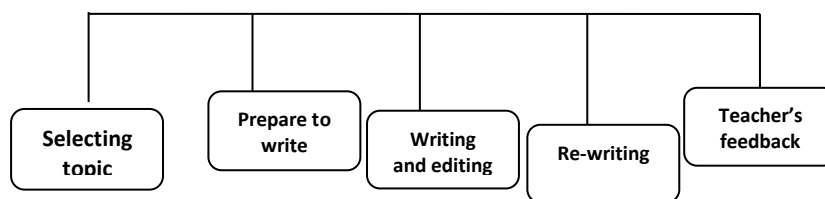
Writing is a deep-rooted act culture all over the world. The culture of the modern world has made the writing activity becomes an important means of disseminating ideas, and even provocation people. Today, writing has become a very effective strategy to influence the society's mindset, smuggle ideology and even manipulate the reality into lies and vice versa. Writing activities cannot be separated from social life. Writing has become a necessity as society's needs to communicate each other. Writing can be learned and done by all people and by all aspects of life, because basically writing is not an action based on genes or talents, but more on willingness and chance to do so.

B. Techniques in Teaching Writing

There are many models and teaching techniques in writing, but the author will only address one of the techniques related to this research i.e, techniques in giving feedback to students' writing project. Giving feedback to the students' writing has strong correlation with the technique of "*free weekly writing*" that have been applied in this research. The results of the student's writing need to be given appreciation, in form of correction and also an assessment for the student's progress in writing.

Those are the simple rules and standards to be followed by students in composing writing activity by following formulation below:

Fig. 1. Steps in student's writing (Adapted from Bailey 2003)



This figure can be explain as followed; a) Selecting and defining topic of writing, (b) preparing writing materials and performing activities before writing such as, making a draft, making a list of material that will be the main idea of every paragraph etc, (c) students start doing writing activities in accordance with the draft and material topics that have been prepared, (d) evaluating, editing, and improving the writing in accordance with the evaluation results, (e) the last step is writing can be collected and reviewed with lecturers.

C. Free Weekly Writing

Free weekly writing can be interpreted as write a project regularly in every week using free topic related to students' passion. In this activity, students were given the task weekly by lecturer to compose an article each week with a free topic according to the desire that the student concern about. In each meeting once a week, the student must submit the results of writing to the lecturer. The lecturer should provide time to give corrections every week with refers to the writing standard based of scientific papers that have been described previously. Providing corrections to student's project is sometimes constrained on time, because it is related to the busyness and schedule of other activities. However, the writing students can be limited by starting from the first few paragraphs to the early weeks, and then can grow over time until the end of the semester, students can collect the writing that has been formed and can be judged as a complete paper, and then the paper is ready to release.

D. Respondents and Research Design

This research was conducted at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education (FKIP) UM-Mataram, English language education program semester VI year in academic 2015-2016. Semester VI consists of 2 classes that are class A and class B. class A amounted to 17 people and class B amounted to 18 people, then the number of all respondents were 35 students.

This study is a Classroom Action Research (CAR). Classroom action research is a research which emphasizes the practical reflection of a problem arises in the teaching and learning process. Classroom action research requires teacher as a researcher in an attempt to accomplish the problems they found in the class. Classroom action research aims to offer alternative ideas to solve learning problems. The alternatives offered can be either material development or changes in teaching strategies in the classroom. Finally, the central idea of research class action is an attempt to increase activity, skill, motivation and students' ability to absorb the subjects concerned with better and indicated by a significant increase in scores or grades (Burns, A, 2010: 03).

III. Findings

A. Result in Pre-cycle

There are some crucial problems that researchers find and become an obstacle for students in writing essays. The first; students find difficulties to find the topic of writing that they understand well. This is motivated by lack of reading references and knowledge of students related to a problem. Students feel difficult in preparing a good sentence to support their main idea. Then, the other issue is the lack of students' motivation in writing was very low. Not only seen from the perspective of passion (talent), but also from their competences. Only a few students who actually have a hobby to write, but most of the students have no tendency to write. Another important thing that affects students' writing skills is grammar. Although basically, students already have pretty good ideas and point of view, they are constrained on the limited grammar of English they have. So, generally, researchers tried to provide a simple topic that is able to reach by the students' ability.

For more details, the results of try out can be seen in the table below:

Table 1. students' score in try out

Score	Criteria	Percentage	
		Frequency	%
70-100	Pass	10	29
0-69	Fail	25	71
Total		35	100

B. Result in Cycle 1

The result of cycle 1 shows that students' score didn't meet yet the standards of KKM (Passing Grade Criteria). The total score was 2439 and the average score was 69.68, the highest score was 91 and the lowest score was 47. Means that, there are 16 students or about 45.71% of the students passed the KKM and 19 students or about 54.28% didn't pass the KKM. The detailed data can be seen in the table below:

Table 2. Student's Score in Cycle 1

Score	Criterion	Percentage	
		Frequency	%
70-100	Pass	16	45.71
0-69	Failed	19	54.28
Total		35	100

Meanwhile, the value of each student can be seen in the table below. A total of 16 students were categorized as "high", while 19 students received "enough" scores, and none of the students scored "low". For more details, the ability of individual students can be seen in the following table.

Table 3. Students' Individual Score

No.	Score	Ability	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	66.67 - 100	High	16	45.71
2	33.33 - 66.67	Enough	19	54.28
3	0-33.33	Low	0	0
Total			35	100

The above test shows that it is clear the average grade of the students is 69.68, which means that the Minimum Criterion is not reached, which is have to in grade 70 point. Similarly, for the percentage of class achievement, this indicates that the class's achievement is still is in 69.68% and categorized as "fair", and has not been considered to meet the class achievement standard of 70%. From the explanation, it can be concluded that the learning process in cycle 1 has not been declared successful.

C. Result of Cycle 2

The result of the student's test on cycle 2 showed a significant change compared to cycle 1. The average value of the class in cycle 1 is 69.68 with a total score of 2439, while cycle 2 has increased with a total score of 2712 and an average score of 77.5. This means that Passing Grade Criteria is exceeded as the standard to be achieved. Although in this second cycle, overall there are still some students who have not exceeded the KKM, but the quantity is only view of them. There are 6 students from 35 people who still have not pass based on KKM standards. This means that only 17% of students failed, while 83% of them are graduated and exceeded the KKM. For more details, the percentage of student test results in the second cycle can be seen in the following table;

Table 4. students' Score in Cycle 2

Score	Criteria	Percentage	
		Frequency	%
70-100	Pass	29	83
0-69	Failed	6	17
Total		35	100

The above table shows the students' ability both the average grade and individual values. There were 6 students who did not pass, even though they also changed significantly in motivation, only their value has not fulfilled KKM standard. The table above provides an overview of the individual student's abilities. There are 29 students in the "high-ability" category, and 6 students are categorized as "enough", while none of them are "low". Thus, the grade point average in cycle 2 also increased the grade, from only "fair" in cycle 1 with an average value of 69.68, then in cycle 2 it increased to "high" with value average class 77.5, which means the minimum criteria has been exceeded. So it can be concluded that the learning process in the second cycle is declared successful.

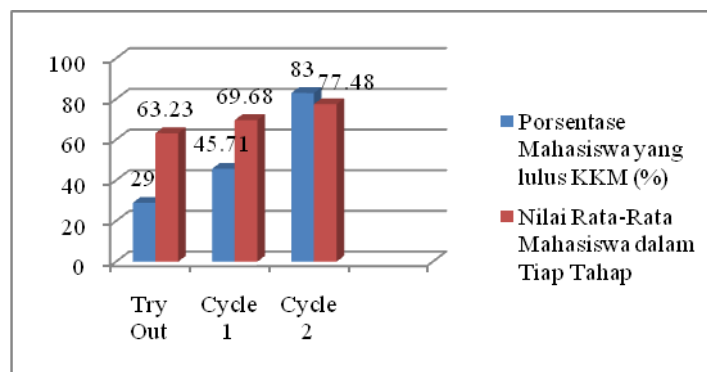
D. Total Score of All Cycle

From the above presentation, we can see the differences of the students score based on the stages, starting from the try out result, cycle 1 and cycle 2. Clearly we can see the improvement experienced by the students. In the try out, only 10 students graduated KKM, while the other 25 were still below standard. Then tested on cycle 1, a good improvement also occurred, although the results are not satisfactory as expected. There are 16 students who passed the KKM, while still 19 people who failed. From the reflection of cycle 1, hence researchers do continuation research in cycle 2.

In the second cycle, students' ability to write essays shows more encouraging change. It can be seen from the final score of the students that is 29 people or nearly 83% of students graduated based on the passing grade standards, and only 6 people or about 17% of students are still considered failed, although they are essentially still changing from the side of the score and motivation. Similarly, for the total average score of the overall assessment, the average grade as a whole meets the pass criteria of 70.2, which means the passing grade standard has also been achieved.

In order to facilitate the reader to understand the research easily, the graph of improvement experienced by students in essay writing can be seen as follows:

Fig. 2. Stages of Students' Improvement



The graph showed the students' improvement in each test stage, the blue color is the percentage of students who passed the passing grade from the try out only 29%, then in cycle 1 increased to 45.71%, and in cycle 2 significantly increased to 83%. While the red color chart is the average value of the students' ability in the classroom obtained from 3 different stages. The average grade of the students in the try out stage was 63.23, then increased to 69.68 in cycle 1 and in cycle 2, the average grade for new students meet passing grade standards, which is 77.48.

E. Discussion

From two cycles that have been done, comprehensive reflection needs to be done, although in cycle 1 has been reflected, but in general, the researcher needs to explore some general reflections on learning process, especially in teaching Academic Writing at the University. The first reflection is practice to write is difficult to do especially for the beginner writers. However, this condition can be changed by designing an atmosphere and a supportive environment in improving students' motivation in writing, by creating a comfortable, conducive and academic space in the classroom. The results of this study showed the students' attitudes have been changed based on the treatment given.

The second reflection is that the lecturer did not need to restrict the students' writing theme, because each student has a different expression in looking at things. A simple example is, one student in this study is very fond of fashion as a lifestyle, so she tended to examine about fashion and make-up. So, wisely let them express their thoughts and views in a positive way, the lecturers' duty is to ensure that their writing did not publish some violation issues and racism act, and did not infringe the human rights and violate the law.

The third reflection is, as an instructor, researcher need to realize that each student has different talents and passion, the teaching task is only providing support for their talents and direct them in a positive context. Therefore, in this case the researcher cannot impose that the result of the student's scientific writing should be as perfect as the professional writers. All that can be done is to ensure that students want to write, learn to write in the right way and procedure and not accustomed to plagiarism when they learn to write. By understanding how difficult the process of writing is, then students will consciously truly appreciate the work of writers everywhere and appreciate the writings that they read.

F. Conclusions

From the results of the research that has been done before and based on the issues raised in this study, the researcher needs to give some conclusions, are;

The results of this study indicate that the use of free weekly writing technique is declared effective to improve students' ability in essay writing. It proved by differences in student scores from several stages performed, ranging from the value of try out, cycle 1 and cycle 2. Clearly, we can see the increase experienced by students. In the try out, only 10 students graduated the passing grade, while the other 25 were still below standard. Then tested on cycle 1, a good improvement also occurred,

although the results are not satisfactory as expected. There are 16 students who passed the passing grade, while still 19 students were failed. In second cycle, ability of student in writing essay show progressive change. It can be seen from the final score of the students is 29 people or nearly 83% of students graduated based on passing standards, and only 6 people or about 17% of students are still considered failed, although they are essentially still changing from the view of score and motivation. Similarly, the total average score of the overall assessment as a whole meets the pass criteria of 70.2, which means the passing standard has also been achieved.

There are several factors greatly affected the improvement of the student's ability and people who want to start writing in general. Those factors include: a) an author is required to read a lot, reading is an entrance of inspiration, get a new knowledge, updated information, and comparative literature in enriching the author's writings in order to produce the quality, the recently, and interesting writing products, b) ability to understand the content and focus on writing. An interesting writing is a concrete writing and not long-winded. The writer is required to present a paper that is not widened and discusses various issues that are irrelevant to the context; c) Mastering of grammatical is absolutely needed. It is important to remember that writing is an activity that explores language and culture in the form of written text, d) the placement of good and right punctuation is the main attraction for a written product. We often assume that the grammar is not substantive; in fact, punctuation gives the reader impression that the paper is seriously written, e) writing style. A professional writer must have personal characteristics. Language style and characteristic of writer is very important to support the popularity of a writer.

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