THE APPLICATION OF PICTURE SERIES TO IMPROVE WRITING SKILLS

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to investigate the effect of teaching writing by using the picture series technique with second grade students of MTsN Kuta Baro, Aceh Besar. This research was an experimental study. There were two classes selected randomly as the sample of the study, namely the experimental (EG) and the control group (CG). The EG consisted of 26 students whereas, the CG consisted of 24 students. The quantitative data were obtained from the results of the pre-tests and post-tests of the students' writing. To analyze the data, the means, standard deviations and t-tests were used. The results of the data analysis can be seen from the results of the post-test for each group in which the mean of the post-test scores of the experimental group was 72, while the mean of the post-test scores of the control group is 59. The t-test showed that there was a significant improvement in the students' writing achievements of the EG compared to the CG. Thus the students taught by using the picture series technique gave a significantly better writing performance than those who were taught by the traditional technique.

Key words: *Teaching Writing, Picture Series Technique.*

INTRODUCTION

Background of Study

English is one of the compulsory subjects in junior high schools. Some teaching objectives for English in junior high schools are to develop the students' communication competence in oral and writing to

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achieve informational literacy level, to build basic knowledge and to motivate the students to learn English (Depdiknas, 2006). From these objectives, it can be inferred that students are expected to have some abilities in accessing the knowledge using their language competence. Therefore, they are encouraged to communicate in EFL verbally (speaking skills) as well as in writing in order to build their knowledge of EFL.

In the teaching-learning process in the classroom, the four major language skills, namely speaking, writing, reading and listening in English are taught in junior high school to give students opportunities to explore their skills. Writing, as one of the four language skills, has become a valuable tool in junior high school classes for engaging students in communicating and learning EFL. According to the School Based Curriculum as adopted by MTsN Kuta Baro, Aceh Besar, the students are expected to be able to express meaning in functional written texts and short essays in the form of descriptive and recount text in order to interact with their surroundings (Depdiknas, 2006: 287).

Celce-Murcia (2000: 142) defines writing as the production of the written words that result in a text that must be read and comprehended in order for communication to take place. Therefore, the teacher should be able to present an interesting lesson and select a relevant topic based on the knowledge of his students. He needs to motivate his students and increase their curiosity particularly to stimulate their writing skills.

Based on the objectives of teaching English above, it can be said that in junior high school, English is introduced to develop students' skills including communication and discourse competence. Students should be able to use their spoken and written English in daily communications and to provide relevant information to their readers about daily life interactions (Depdiknas, 2006). However, many students seem to encounter some difficulties in implementing written communications. Many English teachers often express their concerns about the weakness of students in writing that often cause them to fail their writing exams (Kalsum, 2007). Some students cannot even write a very short composition well. Leo (2007) states that some students have difficulty in finding the topic and writing about it in a paragraph.

Then, one of the crucial issues related to the current curriculum is the use of genre in teaching writing. There are five genres all together in junior high school – i.e. descriptive, procedural, recount, narrative, and reports. The second year (year VIII) students in junior high school have learned descriptive and procedure texts in the first year (year VII),

and in the second year they learn descriptive, recount and narrative texts. Every genre has a social purpose, generic structure, and language features. Thus, there are many aspects the students have to consider before writing a text. These aspects include organization, content, structure, vocabulary and mechanics.

Furthermore, another problem found is that the teacher focuses on the product of the students' writing. Indeed, there is also little interaction between the students and their teacher in the classroom. In traditional writing classrooms, writing is viewed as a product, not a process because the teacher evaluates the students' finished written texts but not their process or strategies in writing a composition. Writing construction in the classroom stresses correctness in the language and error free compositions. Furthermore, all assessments come from the teacher: he usually assigns a topic to get the students to write about. After the students have completed their compositions, they then hand them in to the teacher and later get grades from the teacher. Students hardly have opportunities to review the compositions of others and they are certainly not asked to make revisions to their own compositions.

Based on a preliminary study at MTsN Kuta Baro, from an interview with the English teacher, the majority of second year students of MTsN Kuta Baro had difficulties in writing, especially in writing descriptive texts, recount texts and reports. They had difficulties in starting to write, especially in generating ideas and grammar. Their lack of vocabulary made it hard for them to produce sentences. Besides, mistakes in writing aspects such as grammar, punctuation and mechanics also influenced the quality of the students' writings. Applying the picture series technique for studying recount texts was believed could improve the students' ability to write recount texts. This model is one of the effective learning models assumed suitable to apply for writing recount texts and can be related to both the Competency-Based Curriculum of 2004 which is based on interests and contexts and the School-Based Curriculum of 2006 (or *Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan*).

Harmer (2007: 179) has stated that "picture series can also be used for creative language use, whether they are in a book or on cue cards, flashcards or wall pictures." In addition, describing pictures is one of the activities in teaching writing. In this activity, students must describe a picture in front of the class. Every student gets one picture and must

describe it. The purposes of this activity are to train the students' imagination and ability to write a recount text (Salahuddin, 2009).

A study about the use of picture series in teaching writing by Wati (2009) was designed to improve the students' writing ability through the use of the incomplete picture series technique. The sample for that research was the second year students (class A) at MTs. Hikmatusy Syarif, NW Salut, Lombok. This experimental research study found that the use of the incomplete picture series was successful in improving the writing ability of the students as well as increasing their involvement in the teaching-learning activities.

According to Wright (1990), it is important to have a wide range of resources and media including pictures in the classroom so that students will have stimulus for their development. Esomay (2004), as quoted by Cahyono (2009: 35), has stated that by using picture sets, students will become more interested and will enjoy the teaching-learning process more; the topic pictures lead students to focus directly on words or texts.

Based on the previous research findings, the writer concluded that the picture series technique could be a good technique for use in teaching writing.

Research Question

In relation to the discussion on the background of this study above, the problem for this research is stated as follows: Will the use of the picture series technique significantly improve students' writing skills in terms of organization, content, structure and mechanics?

Objective of the Study

In accordance with the problem formulation above, the objective of this study is to find out whether the use of the picture series technique will significantly improve the students' writing skills in terms of organization, content, structure and mechanics.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pictures Series

Pictures series is one of the techniques of co-operative learning. In this technique, students have to arrange a set of pictures in a logical order, in which some steps are identified. Firstly, students are divided into several groups (each group consisting of five to six students), then

the teacher gives a set of pictures to the students in each group, after that the students have to arrange the pictures into a good logical order. Next, the students have to draft sentences to describe each picture; then after presenting their arrangement of the pictures and giving the reason for choosing that order for the pictures they have to write a paragraph of recount text based on the order of the pictures in their group, and finally the teacher asks each student to write an individual recount text.

Picture series, according to Wright (1990), are a series of pictures which show some actions or events in a chronological order. The picture series usually ranges from four to eight pictures. The pictures usually tell some kind of story but pictures may also be used to depict a process, for example, how to make something. Pictures can be utilized in the teaching of writing via: first, pictures can provide a shared experience for students in the classroom. Second, they can stimulate a variety of tasks. Finally, they can provide a focus of interest for the students. Besides, considering the principles of using media, media have to be fun, help students to think and explore their ability to think by themselves, they should be easy to use but challenging. If pictures meet these requirements then, by using a picture series during the teaching of recount texts, the students' writing ability can hopefully be improved.

Related to the explanation above, picture series as media are often used in the teaching-learning process. They can stimulate students in learning language and make it easier for them to understand the material and to memorize words that they get from the pictures. Fason (1991: 146) has stated that the teaching-learning process with pictures as media will succeed if the pictures are related to the learning materials. Pictures should be colorful and varied, as colorful pictures intensify the use of the students' imagination.

Using picture series as teaching aids can be a great help to the teacher in the class. Students will not always be successful in learning English just by listening to explanations from the teacher or by reading many books. Therefore, in this study, the writer chose pictures as teaching aids for teaching writing to junior high school students.

Advantages of Picture Series

The use of pictures in teaching offers a number of advantages. According to Curtis and Bailey (2001), there are four advantages:
1. Students can easily compose a story because there are pictures that will guide them step by step to create a full story.

2. Students will feel relaxed in composing the story as they feel that they are playing with the cards (pictures).
3. They are not being forced to build a story and their confidence gradually increases.
4. There is habit formation in this technique (building knowledge, modeling, construction and self-construction)

Components of Writing

Writing is composed of different components required to produce a good piece of writing. It involves creative thinking and an effective expression of one's thoughts. Brown (2007) says a good composition of writing could be created if it measured up against the following criteria: content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanical considerations such as spelling and punctuation. The content is the main message with all the supporting details that enrich and develop the writing topic. Vocabulary is words which are relevant to the topic. Grammar sets the tenses used in developing the sentences. Organization is the internal structure of a piece of writing; the pattern and sequence should be appropriate to the topic. Finally, mechanics are the processes used in writing such as punctuation, capitalization and spelling.

Recount Text

According to Anderson and Comrie (1991), a recount text is speaking or writing about a past event or a piece of text that retells a past event, usually in the order in which it happened. Recount text, as used in the Curriculum of 2004, means that the form of the text tells about the experience of someone or something in the past, e.g. the experience of the reader herself, such as an adventure or a past day's activities. In addition, the purpose of actual recount is to document a series of events and evaluate their significance in some way. The purpose of a literary or story recount is to tell a sequence of events that entertains. A recount story has expressions of attitudes and feelings, usually those felt by the narrator about the event.

Generic Structures of Recount Text

As a type of text, a recount text has its own structure:
(1) Orientation which provides the setting and introduces participants. It gives information about what, who, where and when an event happened.

(2) The event which tells what happened and in what sequence. It gives a report about an event chronologically.
(3) Re-orientation which maps the chronological order of the event.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This was an experimental study categorized as quantitative research. Experimental research can test a hypothesis to establish a cause and effect relationship. This study focuses on finding out the effect of the picture series technique in teaching writing. The purpose of this research is to determine whether students who are taught to use the picture series technique will produce a better writing performance than those who were not. To reach the purpose, an experimental design was used which is referred to as true-experimental design. The aim of experimental research is not only to collect and to describe data but also to find out the cause and effect (Ross, Morrison & Lowther, 2005). Therefore, experimental research must seek to find any interaction between the variables.

In conducting this experimental research five 90-minute meetings were held excluding meetings for the pre-tests and the post-tests. Before the teaching-learning processes, both groups were given a pre-test. For the five teaching learning sessions, the experimental group was taught by using the picture series technique, while the control group learned from the textbook or handbook that had been prepared using the drill technique. The writer prepared the materials related to the syllabus for the second year students at MTsN Kuta Baro. Both the experimental and control groups were given the same materials but were taught using different techniques. After the teaching learning processes, the two groups were given the same post-test.

Population and Sample

According to McMillan (2008: 112), a population is the large group, whether individuals, objects, or events from which a researcher selects the sample. The population of this study was all the second year students at MTsN Kuta Baro, Blang Bintang, Aceh Besar. In 2014, this school had eighteen classes with 630 students consisting of 217 first grade students, 213 second grade students, and 200 third grade students. The sampling technique in this research was random sampling in which two of three second year classes were selected randomly. The

experimental class (EG) had 26 students, and the control class (CG) had 24 students. In consequence, the total sample was 50 second year students from MTsN Kuta Baro.

Research Instruments

The instruments used to collect the data were tests: the pre-test and the post-test. The quantitative data was collected from the analysis of the students' writings from the pre-test and the post-test.

The pre-test was conducted at the first meeting before the teaching processes were started. The pre-test aimed to measure the dependent variables before the treatment started. Here, the researcher tested the students' understanding about types of writing, mechanical writing (writing conventions) and paragraph writing. This test contained three tasks which had different goals. In the first task, the students had to rewrite a short paragraph which did not have punctuation and capital letters in it. They had to use punctuation and capital letters in it. By doing so, the researcher tested their knowledge about mechanics in writing. The second task was writing a recount paragraph based on some given information. They had to combine all the information into a good paragraph by using connectors. The first sentence was given to them to help them start writing. The last task was writing a recount paragraph by using their own words on the given topic or a picture. This task required the students to describe someone or something they know well by steps or picture series based on a logical order. This task was 200-250 words in length and took about 40 minutes.

The post-test was given in the last meeting. This test aimed to find out whether the intervention with the EG gave a significantly different result from that of the CG as the researcher must get evidence to justify the research hypothesis.

Regarding the scoring rubric used to measure the students' writing assignments, they were organization, content, structure, and mechanics as adapted from Brown (2007). The scoring rubric was presented in the form of a tabulation in which each of the aspects was described either in a range score or in a recount.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

After analyzing the instruments of the research and the students' writing, it was necessary to discuss the results of this study. The first

discussion starts with explaining the results of the quantitative data obtained from the pre-tests and the post-tests from both groups.

The first discussion concerns the results of the qualitative data obtained from the t-test analysis. Having calculated the mean scores of the pre-test results for both the experimental and the control groups, the difference between these mean scores was compared by employing the normal distribution. Based on the means of the pre-test scores of each group, it was found that the mean of the pre-test score of the experimental group was $8.9 < 12.59$ and that of the control group was $3.99 < 11.1$. After the mean score of these two groups were compared through an independent sample t-test, the result of the t-test was 0.14 and the result of the t-table at the confidence level of 0.05 was 2.021. This meant that the t-test result was lower than the t-table result. Thus it can be inferred that the difference between the two means was not significant since the t-table exceeded the t-test. This result indicates that there was no significant difference between the data from both groups. In other words, the EG and the CG were similar in terms of their initial ability in writing in the pre-tests.

The same procedure was used for the post-test scores. For each group, the mean score of the post-test result was calculated. The difference between the mean scores of the EG and the CG post-tests was compared by employing an independent sample t-test. Based on the mean of the post test scores of each group, the mean of the post-test score of the experimental group was 48.6 while that of the control group was 49.1. When the two means were compared through the independent sample t-test the differences between the two means was significant. Therefore the students taught by using the picture series technique had a significantly better achievement in writing compared to those who were taught by using the conventional method.

Additionally, a paired t-test was also conducted to discover differences in the CG and the EG scores before and after the treatment. This showed that the treatment that was applied successfully enhanced the writing ability of the EG.

The next discussion concerns the improvement in the aspects of writing – i.e. organization, content, structure and mechanics. In the aspects of organization and content/idea, the EG had considerable increases by more than 30% from the pre-test to the post-test, while the percentage scores of the CG on these two aspects only increased by 3% in the post test. This means that there was a significant improvement of the EG students in organizing and generating ideas after the

implementation of the picture series technique in the treatment. With regard to the aspect of structure, the EG got 51% in the pre-test and 76% in the post-test, with the progression from the pre-test to the post-test being 25%. As for the CG, the progression of the structure aspect was 16%, (47% in the pre-test and 63% in the post-test). This finding suggests that there was more improvement in structure in the EG compared to that in the CG. Concerning the aspect of mechanics, there was a rise in the scores of the EG of just under 20% from the pre-test to the post-test, while the scores of the CG only increased by slightly more than 5% in the post test. This indicates that the students' performance in the mechanics of writing was much improved after the picture series treatment, while there was no substantial improvement in the CG.

From the discussions above, it can be concluded that teaching writing using the picture series technique greatly improved the students' skills in writing, especially for recount texts. The research findings also confirm Cahyono's (2009) previous statement that the picture series technique can build and improve students' writing skills, particularly in the aspects of content, organization and grammar.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusions

The conclusions basically cover the answer to the question raised in the problem of the study. Based on the findings and the discussion presented above, the students taught by using the picture series technique achieved a better performance in writing compared to those who were taught by using the traditional technique. This means that the students who were taught using the picture series technique got significantly better results than those who were taught by using the traditional technique for teaching writing.

Suggestions

From the results of this study, some suggestions are made for the teaching of writing using the picture series technique as a contribution for teachers and further studies. Based on the results of this research, students taught using the picture series technique got better results than those taught using the conventional method. So, the researcher would like to make the following suggestions:

First, for English teachers, besides using various strategies, it is suggested that they also use the picture series for teaching writing, especially for teaching writing of recount texts. It is important to note that the teachers' ability in using the picture series technique to teach writing is an important factor in the success of the learning process.

Second, it is suggested that future researchers focus on writing strategies to enhance the writing skills of students in other areas of writing.

From this research, it is hoped that the results will enrich and update teachers of writing in English with a new teaching strategy.

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