IMPROVING ESSAY WRITING USING THE SEMANTIC MAPPING TECHNIQUE

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ABSTRACT

This research inquires whether the semantic mapping technique be used to improve the students' ability in learning essay writing. It was designed in classroom action research which was conducted in two cycles by following the procedure of action research consisting of four steps; planning, implementing, observing and reflecting. Each cycle was carried out in three meeting. The subject of the research was the 4th semester students in unit A of the English Department, Almuslim University. The instruments used were test, observation checklist and questionnaire. The obtained data were presented and analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. The results showed that the implementation of semantic mapping technique could improve the students' ability in learning essay writing. This is proven by the first result found from the test given to the students. The students' average score of the test in cycle 1 was 60 and it increased to 75 in cycle 2. The second result was obtained from the observation of the researcher's performance and students' activities. The percentage of the researcher's performance in the first cycle was 75% in the level good. While, in the second cycle it increased to 88% in level very good. Next, the percentages of the students' activities was 57% or enough in the first cycle and it increased to 79% in the level good in the second cycle. The other finding from the questionnaire was the strongly positive response (4.62) from the students to the use of the semantic mapping technique for learning essay writing.

Keywords: *Semantic Mapping Technique, Essay Writing, Classroom Action Research.*

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INTRODUCTION

Essay writing is a language skill that must be mastered by students of English. Writing is defined as a complex activity where students have to express their ideas, thoughts, or feelings in written form (Lie, 2002, p. 3). Writing is one of the tools of communication used by people to communicate with each other. Through writing, they can give information and/or messages to their readers. So students must be able to write especially able to write an essay.

According to Oshima and Hogue (2006, p. 56), an essay has an introductory paragraph, one or more body paragraphs and a concluding paragraph. Each paragraph can be long and complex; however, they must relate to one topic. Students need to develop the skills to write essays. The competency based curriculum expects students of English to learn to be able to write various genre of essay viz: descriptive, narrative, report, argumentative and so forth.

The teaching-learning in the English Department at Al-muslim University was still not meeting the requirements expected from the curriculum. Based on a preliminary study done by the researcher, it was found that the fourth semester students in unit A of the English Department at Al-muslim University had problems with essay writing. They had difficulty in finding ideas when they started to write. They also had difficulty in arranging their ideas into good paragraphs and did not seem able to combine their paragraphs into a good essay. This was partly caused by the students' lack of vocabulary.

Another problem was that the technique used by the lecturers for teaching essay writing was seemingly not effective. The lecturer just gave the students exercises and corrected the results handed in. This process did not seem to motivate the students who appeared bored with it. Considering these problems, the researcher wanted to try to find a solution to help them and decided to try the semantic mapping technique for teaching-learning essay writing. The semantic mapping technique was developed nearly 40 years ago by Johnson and Pearson (1978). It is a kind of graphic organizer for arrangement of words that shows how words and ideas can be related to each other within a text.

According to Masters, Mori and Mori (1999), semantic mapping is a technique which can be used to motivate students to think about aspects of writing. This technique can help students to develop and find ideas before they start writing. Through the semantic mapping technique the students brainstorm their ideas easily and it makes it easy for students to

develop their writing by combining the ideas they find into good paragraphs. So semantic mapping is an interesting technique for teaching-learning writing. It is a good way to get students to practice and to improve their abilities in essay writing.

Research Problem

The research problems were stated as follows:

1. Can the use of the Semantic Mapping technique improve the essay writing ability of the students?
2. What results will the students get for essay writing after learning to use the Semantic Mapping technique?
3. What will be the response of the students to the use of the Semantic Mapping technique for teaching-learning better essay writing?

Research Objective

In line with the research problems stated above, the objectives of this study were:

1. To describe the process of using the Semantic Mapping technique for improving the ability of students to write essays.
2. To find out what will be the ability of students to write essays after learning to use the semantic mapping technique.
3. To find out what will be the response of the students to the Semantic Mapping technique after learning how to use it for writing essays.

Scope of the Research

The investigation of this research focused on improving the ability of students in essay writing. Here, the researcher limited the research to writing narrative essays using the Semantic Mapping technique. This research was done with the fourth semester students from the English Department at Al-muslim University.

Success Indicator

The criteria for success was set up as a guide to assess whether the implementation of the action was successful or not. In other words, it is used to see whether another cycle is needed or not. To assess the students' ability in essay writing after using the Semantic Mapping Technique, the success indicators chosen were as set out below:

1. The researcher's performance in implementing the Semantic Mapping technique for teaching essay writing should reach the criteria very good or 80%.

2. The essay writing by the students after the Semantic Mapping technique was used should meet the criteria for good or be 75% or more.
3. The average score for the essay writing test by the students should achieve the criteria of good or reach the score of 70 out of 100.
4. The mean score of the responses from the students' to the use of the Semantic Mapping technique for learning essay writing skills should reach the criteria of 'agree' or be in the level from 3.01 to 4.00.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of Writing

Writing is one of the four language skills that must be mastered by students of English. Sometimes, it is a difficult for the students to do because it is considered as harder than the other three skills viz: listening, speaking and reading. Students must develop specific abilities to do good writing. The students must think creatively when they express their ideas, thoughts or feelings in written form. Furthermore, when students start writing, they need to not only have accuracy, not also knowledge of grammar, vocabulary and transition signals. There are also many other rules and collocations that need to be mastered. Therefore, students need to study long and hard to develop ability in writing because writing can provide the opportunity for the students to express their thoughts or opinions about events, feelings, and desires in written form.

Wolfe (2007) has stated that writing is an act of discovery, a means of personal growth, and a tool for clarifying knowledge. So, this means that writing is the final product of several separate acts that are hugely challenging to learn simultaneously. It can be claimed that writing is one of the productive skills where the students can express their ideas or new information in the written form and also through writing the students can develop their vocabulary and they can demonstrate the material they have learnt or mastered in writing.

Next, Chandler (1995) has said that writing skills are specific abilities which help writers put their thoughts into words in a meaningful form that mentally interacts with the message. Based on the statements above, this means that through writing, the writer or student can explore her experiences, adventures, feelings or ideas in written form for communication with their readers. In relation to these definitions, writing can be considered a highly complex process because it involves the processes of having ideas to express and having the knowledge to

express them. However, although writing is hard work, students, especially English students must learn to do it because writing is a way of communication.

Based on the definitions above, it can be concluded that writing requires knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, collocations and organization of ideas. It also enables expression of one's thoughts, feelings, or opinions presented in written form.

Definition of Essay Writing

Essay writing is taught at university level. The researcher chose essay writing as her area of research because it is one of the subjects of the English Department which is taught in the fourth semester at Al-muslim University.

According to Oshima and Hogue (2006, p. 56), an essay is a piece of writing which consists of several paragraphs. This means that an essay needs more than one paragraph although it only tells about one topic. The paragraphs can be long and complex. Actually, there are many kinds of essays such as reflective, descriptive, expository, narrative and argumentative essays and so on. Among those types of essays, the narrative essay format is often included in the formal curriculum from junior high school up to university level.

Essay writing is the act of forming reasons, making inductions, drawing conclusions and applying them to the case in discussion; the operation of inferring proposition, not known or admitted as true, from facts or principles known, admitted, or proved to be true (Harmer, 2008, p. 164). It means that writing is the process of one's reasoning from the known or assumed to the unknown. The function of an essay is to show that one's assertions (opinions, theory or hypothesis) about some phenomenon or phenomena is correct or more truthful than others'. This type of essay is assigned in colleges or universities in order to observe how the students can write or produce a good and positive piece of writing. According to Oshima and Hogue (2006, p. 57) generally in an essay there are three main parts: an introduction (introductory paragraph), the body (at least one and usually two or more paragraphs), and a conclusion (the concluding paragraph).

Definition of the Semantic Mapping Technique

Actually, semantic mapping is not a new technique used in teaching writing. It is one such activity which done before the students start writing. The Semantic mapping technique can help students in finding

ideas before they begin to write a composition or an essay. In this research, the researcher concentrated on using the Semantic Mapping technique in order to help students to produce good writing more easily. According to Hurford and Heasley (1983, p. 1), Semantic Mapping is a technique which was developed by Johnson and Pearson (1978, p. 37). The term Semantic Mapping consists of two words; '*semantic*' and '*mapping*'. '*Semantic*' is a word meaning '*in a language*', and '*mapping*' here means '*a graphic arrangement of words*'. So, the Semantic Mapping technique is a strategy for visually expanding vocabulary and extending knowledge by displaying categories of words related to one another in a graphic fom. It is also an adaptation of the concept or definition of mapping and builds on students' prior knowledge or schema.

Furthermore, Nyoni (2012) has said that Semantic Mapping is a graphic arrangement of words that shows how new words and ideas can be related to each other within a text. So, it can be claimed that Semantic Mapping is an effective diagnostic tool that used by teachers to help their students who have problems with writing. In addition, Harmer (2007) has said that semantic mapping or word maps are "word maps that are an extremely engaging way of building up vocabulary knowledge as well as provoking students into retrieving, displaying and using what they know". In other words, the Semantic Mapping technique is a prewriting technique drawing a diagram of words using lines, boxes, arrows, circles, words and phrases to show how new words or ideas can be related to the topic.

Hague (1987, p. 10) has said that the Semantic Mapping technique is very interactive process and it should be modelled by the teacher first. The major steps of the Semantic Mapping technique can be elaborated as shown below:

(1) Write the target topic on the white board. First step, before the Semantic Mapping is started, the teacher together with the students must think about and choose the topic. Once the teacher and students have decided on the topic, it can be written on the board. Then, the teacher gets the students to focus on the topic.

(2) Brainstorming words related to the topic. The second step is the teacher asks the students to brainstorm words related to the topic. Then the teacher writes the words given by the students on the white board and this activity is called as 'listing of data'.

(3) Writing the word list by categories in the form of a map. The teacher begins to draw a Semantic Map after listing the data on the board.

Then, the teacher asks the students about the generic structure of a narrative essay. Next the teacher makes the generic structure of a narrative essay into some categories in the Semantic Map.

(4) Asking the students to write sentences using any words on the semantic map. In this step the students are asked to create some sentences by using the words listed in the Semantic Map and the teacher writes the sentences on the white board.

(5) Assigning the students to write an essay. The previous steps are the planning or preparatory steps (planning to write) in order to do the actual writing. The last step which is followed by the students after they create the Semantic Map is to write whole sentences and paragaphs as part of the narrative essay then combining the sentences in chronological order. The last step is the actual writing step to get a good (or bad) product of writing. This step depends very much on the previous planning or preparatory steps.

RESEARCH METHOD

The researcher used Classroom Action Research (CAR) for this research study which was aimed to solve the lecturer's and the students' problems with improving their ability in teaching-learning essay writing. This research was done at the English Department of the Al-muslim University. The subjects for this research were the 34 fourth semester students in class A. The study followed the procedures for CAR proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1998) consisting of four steps; planning, implementing, observing and reflecting. The research was held in two cycles with three meetings for each cycle.

For collecting the data, the researcher used the following research instruments: A test, observation sheets, a questionnaire and fieldnotes. The data obtained were presented after both qualitative and quantitative analysis. Qualitative data were presented in words, explaining the processes for implementing the technique, while the quantitative data or scores were analyzed statistically for assessment.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This research was carried out from April, 1st, 2014 until April, 15th, 2014. After conducting the research, the researcher found some research findings; they are the result of the researcher's performance and the students' activities during the teaching and learning process in

implementing semantic mapping technique in essay writing class. Next, the result of the students' ability in essay writing test. Another finding was the result of the students' responses toward the implementation of semantic mapping technique in learning essay writing. All the findings are described clearly as follows:

The Results of Teaching and Learning Process of Cycle 1 and Cycle 2

This part deals with two results; the researcher's performance and the students' activities. Based on the results of observations done during the teaching-learning processes in cycle 1, the researcher's performance in implementing the Semantic Mapping for teaching essay writing was 75% which is in level *good*, while, in the second cycle her performance increased to 88% in the level very good.

The next result was the students' participation in learning essay writing through the Semantic Mapping technique. The level of the students' activities in the first cycle was 57% in level satisfactory which increased in the second cycle to 79% in level good.

The Results of the Students' Achievements in Essay Writing Tests from Cycle 1 and Cycle 2

In the first cycle, the students' mean score for the essay writing test was 59 in level fair. Then in cycle 2, their mean score improved to 75 in level good. Thus there was a significant improvement in the students' achievements in essay writing after using the Semantic Mapping technique.

The Students' Responses toward the Implementation of the Semantic Mapping Technique for Learning Essay Writing

The students' response was a consideration to state that the implementation of semantic mapping technique was successful or not. The result of the students' response was obtained from questionnaire given to the students at the last meeting in cycle 2. The questionnaire covered five items the results of which ae set out below:

Table 1. Results fom questionaire.

Item	Mean score	Criterion
(1) studying happily in writing class	4.82	strongly agree
(2) easy to comprehend the lesson	4.52	strongly agree
(3) respected and brave to give opinion	4.25	strongly agree
(4) interested to the activities	4.79	strongly agree

(5) working in group	4.75	strongly agree
Mean Score	4.62	strongly agree

Based on the results above, the students gave positive responses toward the implementation of semantic mapping technique in learning essay writing as the overall mean score of the five items measured was 4.62 which means that the students' responses toward the implementation of semantic mapping technique in learning essay writing reached the success indicator of 3.00-4.00 in the stongly agree criterion.

Discussion

Considering the results described above, the researcher found some improvements. The first improvement was the great increase in the results from the students' writing test in the second cycle which was 75 and reached the success indicator; thus the use of semantic mapping improved the students' ability in essay writing.

The second improvement showed in the researcher's performance in cycle 2 which reached 88% in level very good and reached the criteria of success. Also, the students' activities showed improvement in the second cycle getting to 79% or nearly in level very good. This also reached the success indicator.

The last improvement could be seen from the result of the students' responses toward the implementation of the Semantic Mapping technique for learning essay writing. The mean score from the questionnaire was 4.62 in the strongly agree criterion. Hence the students gave very good positive responses. They also studied happily and actively during the learning process.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusions

Based on the results above, some conclusions are as follows:

The implementation of the Semantic Mapping technique in the essay writing class improved the researcher's performance and also the students' activities. The researcher's performance in the first cycle was 75% in the criteria "good", while in the second cycle it was 89% in the criteria "excellent". This means that the teaching process was a success. Furthermore, the implementation of semantic mapping technique in teaching essay writing also increased the students' activities. The result showed that the percentage score of the students' activities in cycle 1 was

57% in level "fair", while in cycle 2 it was 79% in level "good". Thus the use of the Semantic Mapping technique in the essay writing class could make the students learn essay writing easily.

The teaching and learning process in essay writing through the implementation of semantic mapping technique was successful and it improved the students' writing ability especially in essay writing. The evidence could be seen based on the result of the students' test. The result showed the mean score of the students' achievement in cycle 1 was 60. Meanwhile, in cycle 2, the mean score of the students' achievement improved to become 72. This means that the implementation of semantic mapping could improve the students' ability in learning essay writing.

The last result was found concerning the students' responses toward the implementation of semantic mapping technique in learning essay writing. The results from the questionnaire showed that the students gave very good, positive responses toward the implementation of semantic mapping technique in learning essay writing. It was proved by the average score for the students' responses was 4.61 in the strongly agree-criterion. Thus it can be claimed that the use of the semantic mapping technique for teaching essay writing could make the students more active and more enthusiastic.

Suggestions

Considering the results presented above, the researcher has some suggestions for other lecturers, students and other researchers as follows:

The researcher suggests that other lecturers teaching writing especially essay writing should use appropriate, interesting techniques in the classroom such as the semantic mapping technique because this technique can help students to develop their ideas so they can create good essay writing.

Students should increase their activities and enrich their vocabulary through semantic mapping technique, so they can improve their ability in learning writing especially in essay writing and make their activities more enjoyable.

The researcher also suggests that other researchers who want to conduct research in the same field should find interesting techniques when conducting research. Here, the researcher suggests using semantic mapping as a teaching technique in the classroom for the other language skills such as in reading because this technique is not only suitable for use in writing but can also be used for reading.

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