

The use of mind mapping to improve writing skill of the eighth grade students of junior high school

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Abstract – There were some problems found in the eighth-grade students' writing skill of SMP90-DB. The students, in general, did not know the way how to generate and organize their own ideas into well-formed work of writing. The researchers aimed to improve their writing skill and tried to investigate the effect of mind mapping in improving writing skill of the eighth-grade students of SMP90-DB. The objective of the study was to figure out whether or not writing skill of the eighth-grade students of SMP90-DB in academic year 2016/2017 could be improved through mind mapping. The participants were 35 students from VII-I class which covered 17 males and 18 females. The mean score of pre-test was 60.44 which implied that the writing skill of the participants was still low with none of the students passed the passing minimum score. The research was conducted in two cycles of the application of mind mapping. The data were collected from post-tests which were taken after applying mind mapping. The result indicates that 21 students passed the minimum score after post-test 1 and 33 students passed the minimum score after post-test 2. It can reveal that there is a significant improvement in the subjects' writing skill after the implementation of mind mapping. Furthermore, the questionnaire results proved that the students' responses to the implementation of mind mapping were positive. It could be concluded that mind mapping is an effective technique in improving writing skill of the eighth-grade students of SMP90-DB in academic year 2016/2017.

Keywords: improving, writing skill, and mind mapping

1. Introduction

Writing is one among four skills in learning English which is regarded as one of the productive skills. Writing is a part of communication which uses written form for sharing ideas, information, opinions, suggestions, etc. In other words, it is used as the way to communicate with others in written form. Langan (2010) states that writing is a skill which can be mastered. Writing skill is a complex skill which is considered to be difficult for the beginner. Like the other skills, writing can be mastered if the writers are ready to work and learn what the writers must know.

Schulten (2010) believes that many students have great difficulties in writing. In other words, putting words into a sentence on paper often seems to mystify young writers. Even the experienced writers sometimes get stuck on where the writers do not know how to start, so do the students. Furthermore, Wyrick (2003) argues that for many writers, getting started is the hardest part. As a result, the writers have to find the way to help the writers in gathering ideas and organizing them into a good arrangement. Then the benefits of mastering writing are coming in directly in line with the writers' development of writing.

In the school life, writing becomes an avoidable part for the students. It is supported by Zemach and Islam (2005) who notice that writing is an important part of a school and university study as the students could be asked to answer the test by writing few sentences, paragraphs, even complete essays. Moreover, writing could be a beneficial skill for the students who get many different forms of writing because the students can exploit it in the real life. Furthermore, writing makes sound worthy skill. That is why young students nowadays should have learned how to write as early as possible to prepare them for the high demand of the writer's usage. Writing in school is done in every lesson every day.

According to Oshima and Hogue (2007), the writing of the students is called academic writing because the writing is done in the classroom where the purpose is to explain or give information about something and the audience are the teacher and the classmates. In addition, good writing involves thinking, planning, writing, and revising. In writing, there are some steps in order to make a well-written work that must be followed by the students. In pre-writing, the students are asked to generate ideas and organize the words well. Those are the crucial steps to produce a well-written work that must be mastered by the students.

Thus, in the classroom, teaching writing is expected to make students improve and master writing skill through those writing process. According to the expectation, in the beginning, the students have to generate ideas to write as easy and fast as possible with creativity in order to produce a whole coherent paragraph. However, in fact, writing still becomes one of the difficult skills to be learned and mastered, since writing requires ideas to produce a product in written form. These ideas affect how the students start to write and the process of writing. Besides, the genre of paragraphs such as descriptive, narrative, recount, report, and so on must be known and could be differentiated by the students as well.

In the present study, based on the observation that was conducted in SMP90-DB in academic year 2016/2017, some problems were found. For the clear picture, the students had learned about a paragraph, but in creating a paragraph the students have difficulties in generating and organizing ideas, so it took a long time to produce a paragraph. Nevertheless, the students found the difficulties to generate and organize ideas into well-formed sentences and paragraph as the first step in writing. Furthermore, the students had a lack of paragraphs' genre knowledge especially in writing descriptive paragraphs such as coherence and unity.

Besides, making the sentence grammatically and the paragraph became coherent and unity were the other problems that occurred. One of the factors from the teacher was the technique that was used in the classroom for teaching writing was monotonous and not interesting for the students. Hence, it affected how the students generated and organized the ideas in pre-writing. Some factors also occurred when the teacher had no certain scoring rubric

for testing the students' skills. Likewise, those reasons above affected the students' willingness and motivation to learn and improve their writing skill.

In order to fix the problems, there were several ways that could be applied to improve students' writing skill. As generating ideas became the prior problem that makes students' willingness to learn went down, especially producing a written product, some techniques could be applied to make them easy in generating ideas in writing. One of the techniques was Mind Mapping. Buzan and Abbott (2005) ascertain that mind map is the easiest way to put information into the writers' brain and take information out of the writers' brain. It saves the students' time in generating and organizing ideas to make a good descriptive paragraph.

The implementation of this technique could help the students overcome the deadlock on how to start writing, generate ideas, organize ideas, and arrange sentences to be in right order based on the generic structure. Furthermore, mind mapping works just like brain stores information by connecting tree-like branches. Besides, learning is most effective when the connections are made and structured well; mind mapping optimizes the work both of left and right brain of the students. In conclusion, it gives benefits in generating and organizing ideas. As a result, this technique facilitated the students to write a descriptive paragraph as well since the students can see their ideas on a piece of paper.

According to the justification above, the researcher found that it was important to conduct a research. Mind mapping was believed to be an appropriate technique to improve the students' writing skill. In conclusion, the present research was conducted and concerned about the use of mind mapping to improve the writing skill of the eighth-grade students of SMP90-DB in academic year 2016/2017.

2. Method

The present study used a classroom action research design. Mertler (in Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, Walker, & Razavieh, 2010) states action research as a process to improve education by incorporating change and involves educators working together to improve their own practice. Pelton (2010) states that to understand action research takes a look at the term itself and separate its parts. Fraenkel and Wallen (2008) note that action research is conducted by one or more individuals or groups for the purpose of solving a problem or obtaining information in order to inform local practice. Action research has four stages that must be followed, those are planning, action, observation, reflection (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). This study was conducted to the eighth-grade students of SMP90-DB which was located in By Pass Ngurah Rai street number 177, Sanur. Class VIII-I that was selected consisted of 35 students which cover 17 males and 18 females. The class was selected based on the interview with the English teacher and real condition that they were considered to have low ability in writing as their prior knowledge of descriptive paragraph is not enough; they had found difficulties in generating and organizing ideas as well.

In conducting the classroom action research, firstly, the researcher did observation in order to know the problems, which were occurred in eighth-grade students of SMP90-DB, especially in writing skill. In doing the observation, the researcher did an interview by asking some questions related to the problems. Next, the pre-test was administered. The study was conducted in several cycles until the result shows the satisfactory, then the study was stopped. Cycle I might become a continuing or iterative, spiral of cycles, which recur until the action researcher achieved a satisfactory outcome after implementing mind mapping technique.

The instruments which were used for collecting the data in this present study were test and questionnaire. The test both pre-test and post-test that were given was descriptive paragraph construction task. To give a score to subjects' writing product, the researcher used a scoring rubric which was adapted from Oshima and Hogue (2007). There were five aspects that were scored; they were format, punctuation and mechanics, content, organization, and grammar and sentence structure. Besides, the questionnaire was structured questionnaire which was consisted

of ten multiple-choice statements. The questionnaire was analyzed using the Likert scale ranging from five (5) to one (1).

In collecting the data, there were three kinds of data, as follows: data indicating the subjects' pre-existing writing ability; data showing the subjects' progressing achievement in writing a descriptive paragraph; and data showing the subjects' responses on the implementation of mind mapping. The results of pre-test and post-test were analyzed descriptively by counting up the data using the mean score formula. The result of the questionnaire was taken to find out the percentage of the subjects' response to the technique that applied based on the questionnaire given.

3. Results and Discussion

The present classroom action research conducted initial reflection in pre-cycle. The present study took two cycles in which each cycle consisted of two sessions which spent 80 minutes in each session. In each cycle, the researcher used person and place as the topics. The whole process of the present study consisted of three main phases: pre-cycle, the cycle I and cycle II. Cycle I and cycle II consisted of four interconnected activities: planning, action, observation, and reflection.

Pre-Cycle

According to the result of the interview, it was found that the subjects' ability mainly in writing descriptive paragraph was still low; for the clear picture, they were still confused in generating and organizing ideas as pre-writing in well-structured sentences to a paragraph which were grammatically correct. Consequently, the subjects needed a long time in generating and organizing ideas as a part of pre-writing. In the interview, the teacher who taught the subjects also said that the subjects had learned about what the paragraph was, but the subjects had not learned about genres of the paragraph especially descriptive paragraph.

The observation found that the subjects' writing did not score with a certain scoring rubric. The subjects seemed to be bored since the technique which was implemented by the teacher was monotonous and could not get the subjects to write actively and continuously. Hence, it made the subjects' willingness of learning writing a good paragraph went down in line with the subjects' motivation.

The result of the pre-test showed that the mean score of the subjects was 60.44. Furthermore, from 35 subjects who followed the pre-test, none of the subjects passed the minimum passing grade of 75; therefore, the subjects' writing skill needed to be improved. The problems that they faced were difficult to generate and organize ideas into a well descriptive paragraph; as a result, their writing was less unified and coherent. In addition, the subjects' writings were not in a paragraph form and did not mirror vivid detail of descriptive paragraph. The researcher started the implementation of the mind mapping technique in cycle I.

Cycle I

Cycle I, where the technique that was chosen, mind mapping, was implemented, was conducted based on the result of the pre-test. In the present study, the cycle I was conducted because the result of pre-cycle was low. Cycle I was divided into two sessions and each session was arranged into well-interrelated activities. The activities were planning, action, observation, and reflection.

The subjects' result of post-test 1 was 74.67. Moreover, from the mean score, it was found that 21 of the 35 subjects could reach the minimum passing grade compared to the pre-test. It could be noticed that there was a significant improvement in the subjects' ability in writing descriptive paragraph after implementing mind mapping. However, the study needed to be continued since

the total number of subjects who passed the minimum passing grade were lesser than the success indicator. Hence, the researcher should continue the research to cycle II.

Cycle II

The result of the cycle I showed that the research should be continued to the next cycle. Cycle II was supposed to give more improvement towards the writing skill of the subjects. In other words, cycle II was conducted to get the better result. The researcher then must make some changes as the strengths and weaknesses in the previous cycle were identified. The strengths were kept while the weaknesses were revised.

The result of the post-test 2 in cycle II showed that the mean score of the subjects was a figure of 81.33. Furthermore, it was found that 32 of 35 of the subjects could pass the minimum passing grade. Moreover, the data disclosed that the writing skill of the subjects was significantly improved through the application of mind mapping. In addition, since the study had already reached the success indicator that was at least 80% or 28 of the subjects should pass the minimum passing grade, the present study could be ended.

Based on the analysis of the data of the questionnaire, it could be found that the responses of the subjects towards the application of the techniques were positive. The percentage of the subjects who strongly agreed was 76.18%, agreed 17.41%, undecided 6.16%, disagreed 0.25%, and strongly disagreed 0.00%. Therefore, it could be concluded that more than 90% of the subject obviously agreed that mind mapping was an effective technique to improve their writing skill. Furthermore, the data automatically disclosed that the subjects found that mind mapping was effective to improve their writing skill.

To collect the pre-existing ability of the subjects in writing skill primarily writing a descriptive paragraph, the researcher conducted the interview with the English teacher who taught the subjects in SMP90-DB. It was found that the subjects had problems in writing especially in generating and organizing ideas. Moreover, the teaching technique that was implemented was monotonous and cannot motivate the subjects to write actively. Based on the observation in the classroom, it was found that the subjects had learned about what a paragraph was, but the subjects had a lack of knowledge of genres of paragraph, mainly descriptive paragraph. Additionally, the pre-test was administered in order to know their prior ability in writing. Therefore, the researcher applied the mind mapping technique to improve the subjects' skill in writing a descriptive paragraph.

In the cycle, I, the subjects' ability in writing was seemed to improve. The mean score of the post-test 1 was 74.67 and there were 21 subjects who could pass the minimum passing grade. The subjects have made improvement of their writing skill such as starting to be able to write the identification, description, and conclusion in the correct and acceptable order. Therefore, most of their paragraphs had been unified and coherent enough. However, some of the subjects still struggled to develop and generate the ideas in the correct order and some of them also still could not vary their sentences even they had been given some useful vocabularies. Furthermore, some subjects still chatted with their friends during class. Moreover, there were also subjects who drew on their notebook. As the result, the study could not be ended as the study did not yet achieve the success indicator. Therefore, the study should be continued to cycle II.

In cycle II, the researcher made some revision over the weaknesses. The researcher revised the lesson plan and also used the different topic to be the material. The result showed a significant improvement in the subjects' writing ability. The result of the post-test 2 disclosed that the mean score of the subjects was 81.33 with 33 of the subjects passed the minimum passing grade. The result of post-test 2 gave way greater improvement of the subjects rather than the cycle I's result on pre-test and post-test 1. Most of the subjects had been able to write a descriptive paragraph based on the criteria given. In addition, the subjects' writing was unified and coherent; therefore, it was interesting to be read. The subjects tended to be more focus and enjoy the learning process. As a result of administering post-test 2 which already achieved the

minimum passing grade; therefore, the present study could be ended and it could be regarded successful.

In addition, the result data of the questionnaire disclosed that most of the subjects gave positive responses about the implementation of the mind mapping technique in improving subjects' writing skill. The subjects' responses proved that mind mapping could make the subject develop and generate ideas easier in which they could classify their ideas from general into specific detail. Mind mapping technique also had proven that the subjects could practice more actively rather than forcing them to receive and understand more theories of writing.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this strategy was accepted by the subjects. According to the crystal-clear description of the data from pre-test, post-test 1 and post-test 2 as well as the questionnaire that have been elaborated above, it could be concluded that writing skill of the eighth-grade students of SMP90-DB in academic year 2016/2017 could be improved through mind mapping technique.

The English teachers who teach the eighth-grade students of SMP90-DB are suggested to implement mind mapping technique as one of the alternatives in teaching writing. Furthermore, the teachers should create many activities to avoid monotonous activity in the classroom to make the students want to share their knowledge and create comfortable learning in teaching and learning process because the students need more practice writing rather than the theory; thus, the students were motivated to learn writing in order to improve their ability to pass the minimum passing grade. In other words, coherence and unity of the students' writing could be improved as well. The teachers are also suggested to give more attention on the students' condition, like giving more interactive materials and media as well as encouraging the passive students to get involved in the class and avoid focus-less students.

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