

IMPROVING STUDENTS' WRITING SKILL BY USING COMIC STRIPS

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Abstract: This research aims at identifying how the use of Comic Strips can improve students' writing skill on narrative text; and describing the class climate when Comic Strips are implemented in the writing class. The method used in this research is a collaborative action research which was conducted in two cycles at the eighth grade students of SMP Negeri 5 Surakarta from April 15th to May 8th, in which in the first cycle there were 3 meetings and in the second cycle there were 2 meetings. Each cycle consisted of four steps: planning, implementing, evaluation, and reflection. The research data were collected by using observation, questionnaire, interviews, field notes, photographs, and tests. The qualitative data were analyzed through assembling the data, coding, comparing, building interpretations, and reporting the outcomes. The quantitative data were analyzed by comparing the mean scores of the pre-test and the post-tests. The research findings show that Comic Strips could improve students' writing skill and classroom climate of English class. The mean score had the improvement from pretest to the post-test 2, from 64.05 to 79.93.

Keywords: *writing, Comic Strips, narrative text, SMP students*

INTRODUCTION

Writing skill is one of English skills that should be learned by students beside listening, speaking and reading. In writing, students must be able to write sentences using correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, and coherent ideas. By learning writing, students will be able to communicate well not only in spoken language but also in written language. According to the 2006 KTSP for SMP/MTS, the students in the eighth grade are expected to be able to write some text types; narrative, narrative, and recount. They are expected to be able to differentiate the types among the texts taught. They are also expected to be able to arrange certain texts using their own words or create the new ones.

Bell and Burnaby in Nunan (1998:6) say that writing is an extremely complex cognitive activity in which the writer is required to demonstrate control of a number of variables simultaneously. At the sentence level these include control of content, format, sentence structure, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling, and letter formation. Beyond the sentence, the writer must be able to structure and integrate information into cohesive and coherent paragraphs and texts. In writing, there are numbers of aspects that must be considered to make the information inside the paragraphs and text cohesive and coherent. Enre (1988:13) defines that writing is a process of thinking systematically, so that what is being written can be easily understood.

The students' low writing skill is indicated through the following indicators. Seen from the pre-observation, the indicators of problems in writing skill are: (1) students have difficulties in expressing and developing ideas. Students are able to make topic or idea in their writing, but they do not know how to develop their idea; (2) students often make mistakes in word choice in writing narrative text. The limited word choice makes students find difficulties in applying the appropriate word to express their idea especially to write narrative text; (3) sometimes students spell some words incorrectly. Sometimes, they know the words they want to use, but they do not know how to spell the words correctly; (4) students often write sentence in wrong structure (grammatical errors); (5) students ignore capitalization and punctuation.

From the classroom climate, the indicators of problems in classroom are: (1) Some of the students spend much time to have writing class; (2) Some of students talk with other students in order to discuss non-academic things; (3) some students cannot keep their focus on the lesson. They often talk to their friends before they start writing; (4) students need a long time in writing sentence. They get difficulties in exploring and developing ideas; (5) the writing class is too noisy. Students like to speak each other because they are not able to do writing exercise.

Therefore the researcher realizes that the problems should be solved by using appropriate media to in order to improve students' writing skill. One of the appropriate media to solve students' writing problem is Comic strips. The researcher also found that there are so many media can be used to teach writing skill such as *picture series, video, and song*. Based on the

specific problems that faced by students above, the researcher believes that Comic strips are the most appropriate media that can help students to solve the problems.

Brown, et al. (1983: 294) state that chronological order is a way of organizing events in the time order in which they take place. Comic strips contain all the elements of a short story: characters, dialogue, plot, conflict, and climax (Wright, 1979). S. Hornby (1987: 168) states that comic strips are sequence of pictures which containing stories etc, in the form of drawing. Nana Sudjana (2002: 64) defines comic strips as a kind of cartoon form expressing character and playing a story in sequences of closely related drawing and designed to give fun to the readers. It contains several continued stories. The stories are brief and interesting, completed with action. Comic strips also appear in newspaper and book.

From the various definitions above, it can be concluded that comic strips are art work which use a series of pictures in deliberate sequence to give fun the reader by containing all elements of short story; character, dialogue, conflicts, and climax. The teaching activities of how to use Comic Strips in teaching language are identical to Barker's (2009) statement that the best way to keep our students' interest and engaged in lesson is by making them interactive. The design of using comic strips and cartoon can be described into: (a) *Pre-teaching*, the activity engaged was addressed to prepare the students with the topic taught. Some questions were asked to the students to investigate their background knowledge; (b) *Whilst Teaching* that some activities applied in the whilst-teaching were purposed to dig-up students' understanding on the implicit meaning within the comic strips shown; (c)

Post-Teaching was employed to look into the students' product of writing the text by using comic strips.

Based on the background of the study above the researcher formulates the problem statements as follow: 1) Can Comic Strips improve writing skill of eighth grade students at SMP Negeri 5 Surakarta in 2012/2013 academic year? If yes to what extent is its improvement? ; 2) What happens with the classroom climate when Comic Strips implemented in the writing class?

RESEARCH METHODS

The method used in this research was action research. This classroom research was conducted in SMP Negeri 5 Surakarta that is located at Diponegoro street 45, Surakarta, 57131, phone number (0271) 634930. SMP N 5 Surakarta uses 2006 curriculum as the basis of teaching and learning processes. This junior high school has been a national standard school. It means that SMP N 5 Surakarta has implemented the standard of education service as the government's rule.

The writer used Action research because she wanted to know whether or not and to what extent Comic Strips can improve students' writing skill. Action research consists of five fundamental steps. Those steps are planning, implementing, observing, reflecting and revising. In this research, the qualitative data were collected using some techniques, namely: interview, observation, and questionnaire. The quantitative data of the research were collected by tests: pretest and post test. To know the instrument used in pre-test and post-test is valid and reliable, the researcher tried out the test. After the data have been collected, they have to be analyzed. Related

to the technique of analysis data in action research, Burns (1999: 156-160) proposes 5 steps in analyzing qualitative data. The process of analysis data are assembling the data, coding the data, comparing the data, building the data, reporting the outcomes.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

From the class observation showed that the control from the teacher to the class condition was considered low. The writer found some problems dealing with the first grade students' writing skill:

First, the students had difficulties in developing the idea. The result of pre research showed that most of the first grade students in class VIII of SMP Negeri 5 Surakarta had the problem in developing the main idea and supporting idea. Most of students needed longer time to start their writing since they are hard to develop the idea about what they are going to write.

Second, the students had difficulties in organizing the idea; the text the students produced was still in unwell-organized text. It was difficult for them to write down their ideas in a well-organized written work. Their ideas were not coherent, sometimes lost their idea and got stuck, so they could not continue their writing. When students made a narrative text, they did not use appropriate generic structure.

Third, the students had difficulties in using appropriate grammar. Most of students made ungrammatical sentences and they did not understand how to use grammar correctly, especially in using tenses in sentences. Fourth, students lacked of vocabulary. Most of students had lack of vocabulary. The students did not really understand what the writer said and what the text meant. Therefore, they sometimes use

Indonesian-English word to overcome the vocabulary that they did not know.

Fifth, the students had difficulties in using correct spelling and punctuation. Students had problem in mechanics. They wrote some words incorrectly. They thought lightly in applying correct spelling. The students were unaware with their problems.

Besides, the questionnaires and interview result showed that the students' attitude and motivation toward the English lesson especially writing was still low. They did not seem interested in joining the class; the problems might be caused by some factors. The researcher knew that giving writing was done as take home activity. It can make the students have low motivation to develop their writing. In teaching learning process, the teacher used technique to teach students that often makes students feel bored to join English lesson and didn't use any media to gain the students' interest.

Therefore, the action research was carried out in four meetings in cycle 1 including the post-test-1, and three meetings in cycle 2 including the post-test 2. The

objectives of the research are: (1) to describe whether or not and to what extent comic strips can improve writing skill of eighth grade students at SMP N 5 Surakarta in 2012/2013 Academic Year; (2) to identify what happens with the classroom climate when comic strips is implemented in the writing classes.

The students' writing skill must be improved and overcome by implementing the teaching media. Therefore, the researcher used Comic strips as media to improve the students' writing skill and the students' motivation toward English lesson especially in writing narrative text. The improvement of students' writing skill involved some aspects of writing, namely content, organization, vocabulary, language use/grammar, and mechanism.

After analyzing the observation result and the test result in the second cycle, the researcher found the students' progress in writing skill. The observation result showed that there were some improvements achieved after doing the action.

Table 1. The Mean Score of Students' Writing

Aspect	C	O	V	LU	M	Total	Improvement
Pre Test	18.21	14.00	13.50	15.12	3.22	64.05	
Post Test 1	21.12	16.90	16.14	17.66	3.22	75.03	7.5
Post Test 2	23.78	17.38	16.71	18.79	3.28	79.93	7.18

C: Content O: Organization V: Vocabulary LU: Language Use M: Mechanics

Dealing with the improvement of students writing skill, Comic strips stimulated the students to make narrative text easier because they can organize about the topic then writes it down in a paper with their group. The students were able to use simple present tense in sentences correctly and use appropriate vocabulary. It was shown by the students' exercises in their

worksheet which had only fewer mistakes. The students' writing skill got improvement from the cycle 1. The test scores in cycle 2 showed the improvement result. The mean score of the pre-test was 64.05, while the mean score of the post-test in cycle 1 was 75.03 and the mean score of the post-test in cycle 2 was 79.93.

In the discussion, the researcher discusses those two results. Based on the students' scores from all tests, the content aspect had improved. It was shown by the ability students in developing the idea. Their idea was relevant with the title. The students' writing was understandable, showed knowledge of subject. The students were able to explore the idea easily. There was good elaboration in their writing. By using Comic strips, students were able to develop the idea easily. They could discuss the topic being developed with other students in online way. This was because Comic strips contain all the elements of a short story: characters, dialogue, plot, conflict, and climax (Wright, 1979). By reading the comic strips before writing the narrative text, students could develop the idea easily. They could find the information to develop the idea from comic strips.

In the content aspect, the students' writing showed the idea clearly stated, supported each paragraph and logical sequencing. Most of students were able to develop the idea using appropriate generic structure of narrative text. Comic strips helped students to make their writing well organized. After reading the comic strips, they knew what they want to write and they expectedly wrote the story based on the appropriate generic structure of narrative text. Students also had to connect the paragraphs with cohesive and coherent sentences. So the text they wrote became a good narrative text. The researcher also gave jumbled text to the students. This activities helped students to be able to rearrange the jumbled text become coherent narrative text. Meanwhile, the students' improvement on organization was obtained through the order of the comic strips that already represented the chronological order of the story which

is considered as a significant part of narrative texts. This is in line with Brown, et al. (1983:294) who state that chronological order is a way of organizing events in the time order in which they take place. Reflecting on the findings and Brown, et al's statement, this study shows that comic strips are helpful for students in writing story with appropriate organization since every event or generic structure of narrative text was set in the correct order.

Then, students were able to use appropriate word in their sentence. The meaning was clear. They mastered more vocabularies. They made fewer mistakes in spelling. Comic strips provided images and vocabularies to present the story. Brocka (1979 ; p.27) provides a strong argument in favor of comic strips. He said that comic strips are a dynamic combination of visual image and written word, of narrative and dialogue. They have just the cohesive and choreographed imagery we need to reach our students.

Then in the aspect of language use, most of students were able to write sentence grammatically correct. They did not ignore the tense anymore. By using Comic strips, the researcher could explain about grammar easily through direct speech and indirect speech. The students' improvement on grammar was obtained through grammar task given in modeling stage in which the students were assigned to change the form of verbs into past tense and to change the direct speech sentence into indirect speech sentence. The sentences used in the explanation session were related to the dialog in the comic strips presented.

After the researcher had done the first cycle, the researcher still found many mistakes in students' mechanics. In the

cycle 2 the researcher tried to give more attention in their mechanics aspect. Actually, students had known how to use punctuation and capitalization correctly. The problem was only in their awareness in using punctuation and capitalization. They often forgot punctuation and capitalization in their writing. To solve this problem, she reminded the students about the punctuation and the capitalization frequently to the students. For the part of paragraphing and capitalization, the role of researcher was highly needed.

Comic strips improve writing class condition. The student's activeness was shown by their attitude in the class during the lesson. They did not need long time to write narrative text since they knew what to write in their text. In relation to the stage of process writing, it was noted that comic strips played an important role in prewriting activities. In this stage, the students were equipped with a topic in the form of story to get ideas which later on were put in a narrative scaffold as the outline in developing their narrative composition. Reflecting on the fact that prewriting stage was the first step to encourage the generation of ideas, comic strips strategy in this present study successfully showed that it was very influential in assisting the students to write appropriately in terms of content and organization. This was in line with Brown (2007:404) who states that brainstorming is the frame of writing process before the students face the core of process writing, namely drafting and revising. This means that the students with clear ideas or concept before writing have a lot of opportunities to write well since they know what they have to tell in their composition.

When Comic strips were implemented in teaching and learning process, the students were enthusiast and motivated. They had big motivation to join the lesson. They were enthusiast in doing all activities related to writing class. The use of comic strips made the students give full attention to the learning process. This affected their motivation and their learning of writing English well. What happened during the teaching and learning process dealing with the use of comic strips was in line with Csabay (2006:24) and Yang (2003) who state that one of the strongest benefits of using comic strips to teach is the ability to motivate students since it brings a cheerful atmosphere into the class. If the classroom is enjoyable and attractive, the students will learn preferably. Thus, appropriate strategy combined with attractive instructional media is strongly recommended to create this condition.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that Comic strips can improve the students' writing skill of narrative text. First, the use of Comic strips improved the students' writing skill of narrative text. The mean score got improved from the pre-test to the cycle 2 test, compared to the mean score of pre-test which is 64.05, the mean score of post-test 1 increased up to 75.03. Then, the mean score of post-test 2 increased up to 79.93. Using Comic strips, the students were able to improve their skill in writing narrative text. They could easily generate the idea and develop their writing. They also improved their sentence structure, organized the text structure properly, chose appropriate vocabularies and used the correct capitalization and punctuation.

Besides, Comic strips can improve the classroom climate during teaching and learning process. Comic strips brought positive atmosphere to the class of VIII A. The students showed better attitude towards the writing lesson. They joined writing class with enthusiastic. There was no student coming late in writing class. The students also paid more attention to the lesson. Then, they were more active in the writing class. And they also answered teacher's question actively.

From the statements, it can be concluded that Comic strips is able to improve the students' writing skill of narrative text and the classroom climate during the teaching and learning process. Based on the research findings, the researcher would like to give some suggestions related to the teaching of writing. For the teachers, writing for most students is considered to be a difficult subject. The students often complain that they get difficulties in writing. It deals with the way of the teachers in teaching writing. The teachers should create the interesting situation in teaching learning process. It can be done by use the suitable media in teaching learning process. That is why the teachers should apply Comic strips in teaching writing. In implementing Comic strips to teach writing, teacher should understand clearly about how to read and find entertaining Comic strips. By using Comic strips, the student will be attracted to join writing class. Automatically the teaching and learning process can run well and the objectives can be achieved.

For both teacher and students, they will have great influence in the teaching and learning process. Whatever the media and whoever the teacher if there is no participation inside the class, there will no

improvement in students' skill. The students must be active in teaching learning process. Students should motivate themselves to learn English. They should follow all the activities in teaching and learning process in groups or individually. Students must keep their attitude in writing class. They should not disturb other friends. For institution, For SMPN 5 Surakarta, it is necessary to optimize any facilities and media to support the teaching and learning process. The complete facilities and media will help the students and teachers in improving the language skill especially for writing. And for the other researcher, This study discusses the use of Comic strips as a teaching media to improve students' writing skill of narrative text in Junior High School. It is expected for the other researcher that the result of this study can be used as a starting point for further research conducted in the future in order to create a better teaching learning process.

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