

OPTIMIZING THE USE OF BLOGS TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' WRITING SKILL OF RECOUNT TEXT

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Abstract: This research aims to: (1) identifying whether Blogs improve the writing skill of eighth grade students of SMP N 10 Surakarta, and (2) describing the students' motivation when Blogs are implemented in the writing class of the eighth grade of SMP N 10 Surakarta. The method used in this research is a collaborative action research. The research was conducted in two cycles. The problems faced by the students include the difficulty in exploring idea, using correct spelling, grammar, vocabulary, capitalizations, and arranging their writing in coherent paragraph. 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 mean score had the improvement from pretest to the post-test 2. In the pretest, the students got 58.89, while in the post test 1 they got 69.50 and in the post test 2 they got 74.17.

Keywords: blogs, writing, recount text, motivation

INTRODUCTION

Most students in Indonesia consider English as a difficult subject which makes them frustrated. Many of them failed to graduate from SMP/SMA only because their English mark in national final examination doesn't fulfill the predetermined passing grade. That is why Indonesian government makes efforts to find the solution of those problems. For example, they change the curriculum and introduce new approaches of teaching English. They also have to consider some factors such as quality of the teacher, student interest, motivation, and teaching techniques that play important roles to achieve objective of school learning.

The writer is focusing his research on writing because writing is one of the four language skills that play a very important

role in second language learning. Writing skill is a complex and difficult to teach, and requires the mastery of not only the grammatical devices but also concepts and judgments.

According to Hudelson in Richard (1995: 130), writing is a language process in which an individual creates meaning by using symbol to construct a written text. The writer's language background, personal experience, and cultural framework, as well as by the purpose for writing and the audience for the piece will influence the text that individual constructs. Supporting Richard, Harris (1993: 10) defines writing as a process that occurs over period of time, particularly if we take into account the sometimes extended periods of thinking that precede creating an initial draft. In the

beginning process of writing, initial draft is created; it is influenced by the writer's background knowledge and his culture.

Based on the pre-observation in SMP Negeri 10 Surakarta, there are some problems faced by the students. They are as follows: (1) the students got difficulty in exploring idea for their writing. Many students found it difficult to think actively to found idea to write; (2) the students had difficulty in spelling. They rarely consulted to dictionary and mostly used their interpretation about the spelling; (3) the students were not aware of the use of some grammatical aspects (tense, article, preposition, pronoun, etc.). They frequently made mistake in writing grammatically correct sentences. Some of them made '*I go*' instead of '*I went*', or they made incomplete sentence such as '*My holiday very happy*'; (4) they had low skills in using correct capitalizations. Some of them wrote '*I looked the Mountain*'. There was another student who had similar problems. They were unaware with their own problems; (5) the students had difficulty to arrange their writing in coherent paragraph. Their paragraph was confusing; they also could not organize the idea into recount text. The ideas of the story are not well developed.

Some problems also occur during the process of teaching and learning. The problems are: (1) Students were not active and tended to be passive during the lesson.; (2) Students often lost their focuses to the lesson explained; (3) Students did not listen the teacher's explanation carefully; (4) Students had low motivation in learning English, (5) Students did not have big effort to do the difficult task.

The problems found are related to the material and teaching techniques. From the material, the teacher usually uses textbook or exercise book as the printed material used in teaching writing. The

technique used by the teacher is dominated by teacher centered technique. It made students passive during the teaching and learning process and made them less attractive. Furthermore, there is less interaction between the teacher and students in the classroom. The teacher does not apply varied ways in teaching and prefers to apply explaining (lecturing) technique.

One of the aids that can be used in teaching and learning writing is the blog. The study is aimed at improving the writing ability of the eight grade students of SMP N 10 Surakarta by using blogs, especially in writing recount text. The strategy is chosen since it can guide the students to generate ideas into meaningful compositions. Blogs are usually used to write something or express something in texts. Many features of blog such as attaching picture in writing, also attract students' interest of using it to write. Using blogs surely can help students remember details about people, places and events. In short, they can be powerful sources of text.

In addition, based on observation and interview to the students, all of students are familiar with the using of internet. And one of the ICT teachers has taught the students to set up blogs. Related to this situation, it is obvious that in this IT era, it is a rarity to find students who do not have access to a computer and internet connections. So it is no longer sufficient to use online learning and teaching technologies simply for the delivery of content to students, because in this age the students become more technologically literate. The trends of reading and writing are also shifting from paper-based texts to screen based texts. By this, a new perception in the way of teaching is needed to make learning activity interesting for students. One of the alternative techniques to create a

new perception in the way of teaching English is using blog.

The next reason to apply blog in the classroom is that the students are able to explore and find plenty of information by browsing some sources in the internet such as Google, Wikipedia, Yahoo and so forth while they are working with the internet in the classroom. This will help the students, especially those who cannot afford to buy books, get the materials through the internet. As a result, the problems of owning books can be overcome. In other words, the students can get learning materials through the internet without having to buy the textbooks. The students can download electronic books (e-book) which they use to learn grammar as well as using it to practice writing, for example, by completing the exercises available in the e-book.

Through blog, the teacher can lead the students to correct their friend's written works or do peer correction by asking every student to visit their friends' blog and give comment on their friends' mistakes based on their understanding of the correct elements of the language. To overcome the students' problem on writing, using blog can be an effective way, because they can get new words when they visit their friends' blog. Moreover, they can also use the internet application such as the online dictionary to find the words they will use to write sentences. This is to cope with students' problems in selecting words used in their writing.

The conventional technique used by the teacher might be another cause of their low motivation. The teacher introduced new words and their meaning by writing them on the whiteboard and asked students to note them, read them, and memorize them under guidance of the teacher. Then, the teacher gave examples of how to pronounce the words and asked the students to repeat after

her. This might be good, but if the technique is used continuously without variation, this could cause boredom.

Based on that situation, it is necessary for the teacher to find a new variation of teaching technique in order to make students pay attention to the lesson. The new technique should be able to make them get involved to the teaching learning process. Here, the technique will be used is using blog.

Teeler (2000: 82) states that the internet has advantages of providing up-to-date, authentic material in English, and opportunities for real communication with native and non-native speakers. In the term of writing, the students can take many advantages of using internet as a learning resource. One of the activities that can help the students in improving their writing skill is writing on blogs, since it can be done anytime and it is publicly available on the internet. Campbell (2004) says:

“Because of the relative quickness and ease of publishing this type of software affords, the number of users has grown tremendously since then, and we can now observe blogs being used for personal, educational, journalistic, and commercial purposes.”

Blogs also provide a 'real-world' tool for learners with which to practice their written English, for example when it is used as a means for contacting learners from other parts of the world in an international exchange (Dudeny and Hockly, 2007: 90).

The researcher is convinced that using the internet-based blog in the classroom will become an attractive strategy which is able to improve the motivation of the students to write. The more they have the motivation to practice writing, the better their writing will be, as they can develop

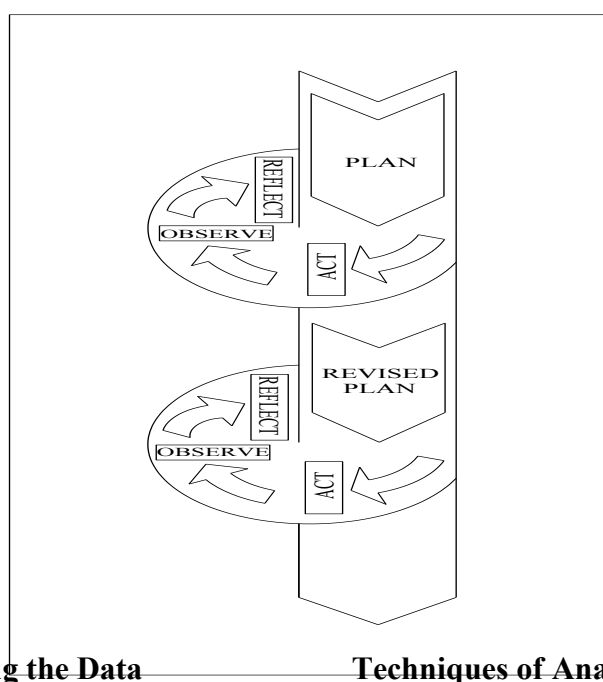
their ideas well. So, teaching writing by using blog will make the skill of the student in writing, especially on recount text, improve. Furthermore, the students who learn English and practice writing skill by using internet-based blog will get better achievement and motivation compared to the other classes which do not apply the blog.

RESEARCH METHODS

Burns (1998: 30) states that action research is the application of fact finding to practical problem solving in social situation with view to improve the quality of action within involving the collaborative and cooperation of researchers, practitioners and laymen.

This action research uses the model developed by Kemmis and McTaggart in Burns (1999: 32). There are four steps in action research: plan, action, observation, and reflection.

Figure 1. The Scheme of Action Research



Techniques of Collecting the Data

In this classroom action research, the researcher collected the data using qualitative and quantitative methods. Wallace (1998: 38) defines that quantitative method is broadly used to describe what can be counted or measured and can therefore be considered 'objective', while qualitative is used to describe data which are not amenable to being counted or measured in an objective way, and are therefore 'subjective'. For the qualitative data, researcher used observation, questionnaire, interview, and photograph taking.

Techniques of Analyzing Data

The data collected in this research is qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data is analyzed based on Burns' theory of analyzing process, while quantitative data is analyzed using descriptive statistic technique.

In analyzing the qualitative data, the researcher used Burns' theory. The data analysis process included assembling the data, coding the data, comparing the data, building interpretations, and reporting the outcomes.

To analyze the quantitative data collected through test, the researcher used quantitative technique of analysis. To get

quantitative data, the researcher conducted the practical test in the end of each cycle. In computing the students' test score, the writer uses the rubric for evaluating writing. There are also two independent scorers to diminish scoring subjectivity.

There are two basic types of grading, analytic and holistic. Each of them has different purposes, though both of them can be useful for evaluating students' writing. When the teacher uses the analytic scoring, it means that the scoring separates various factors and skills, so that it can be used to diagnose writing strengths and weaknesses by both of the teacher and the students. Meanwhile, using the basic type of grading, that is holistic scoring; the teacher can neither diagnose problems nor prescribe remedies for writing (Reid, 1993: 235). In this research, the researcher uses the analytic scoring in evaluating students' writing. The researcher adapted scoring of writing from Brown.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The implementation of blog in teaching and learning process of writing class brought satisfying result in terms of improving students' English writing skill that covering five aspects of writing skill: content, organization, vocabulary mastery, language use, and mechanics. The findings show that those aspects had a higher final achievement after the research.

The students' improvement of writing recount by using blog can be seen in the text produced that meaningful, well organized and communicative text. This result is in line with Bram (1995: 25) who states that the purpose of writing is communication. Messages are sent through written form between the writer and the reader. In addition, Harris (1993:3) states that the purpose of writing considers the

purpose of the text, that is, its communicative function. Texts can be grouped, for example, according to whether there are intended to entertain, inform, instruct, persuade, explain, argue, case, resent argument, and so on.

Students also get some advantages of blog. It can be seen from the findings, the improvement of scores that the students got from the pre-test, post test1, and post test 2. The discussion on comment page that is facilitated by blog can help students into an active one. Peer corrections from the other students also help students to get better understanding in writing. This finding is supported by Warschauer (2010) who states "blogs thus represent a particularly effective tool to combine the publishing and discussion of student writing in a single medium".

The use of blog in teaching learning process also help teacher in giving models to students in order to make students easier to learn the material given by the teacher. The students need as simple as possible examples so that they can learn the materials given. It is supported by Cranmer in Matthews, Spratt, and Dangerfield (1989: 94) says that learning writing without reading examples of written communications which provide a model or guide is not easy. The students need to have a plenty of models to differentiate and write certain text types.

So, based on the elaboration above, it is very obvious that the students' writing skill was improved by using blog. The findings of the research showed that blog can improve students writing skill. The improvement can also be found in the result's table of pre-test and post-test scores.

In this research, Blogs are also able to improve the students' motivation. The findings showed that blog can improve students' motivation in writing class. Blog

stimulates the writing class to be livelier by applying various activities during the teaching learning process.

The researcher found that by using blog students were happy and highly motivated in doing so. Brophy (1998: 3) states that motivation is students' subjective experiences, especially their willingness to engage in lessons and learning activities and their reason for doing so. This statement is supported by Weiner (in Elliot et al, 2000: 332) defines motivation as an internal state that arouses us to action, pushes us in particular direction, and keeps us engaged in certain activities. Then, Brown (in Harmer, 2001: 51) states that a cognitive view of motivation includes factors such as the need for exploration, activity, stimulation, new knowledge and ego enhancement.

By using blog students were motivated to finish the task as quickly as possible. They were able to express their ideas well. The students showed well progress from time to time. They could produce the text well based on time allocated. Ur (2007: 275) says that motivated learner is someone who is willing or even eager to invest effort in learning activities and to progress. Moreover, this learner motivation makes teaching and learning easier and more pleasant as well as productive. Naiman (in Ur, 2007: 275) also adds that the most successful learners are not necessarily those whose language comes very easily; they are those who display certain typical characteristics, most of them clearly associated with motivation. It supported with Campbell (2003) who states "an individual can continuously update the blog with his or her own words, ideas, and thoughts through software that enables one to easily do so".

It is also supported by Brooks, Nichols and Priebe, (2004) who state "the use of blogs in the classroom is motivating

for the learners". It can enhance effective instructional approaches that emphasize writing for meaningful social purposes, mastery of relevant genres, and development of students' academic language proficiency (Warschauer, 2010). Blogs also encourage the learners about ownership and responsibility since it is publicly available to read (Lowe and Williams, 2004; Mynard, 2007).

Because of the advantages of the implementation of blogs, the students gave good response toward the action of the research. They expected that in the next teaching and learning process especially in writing class, the implementation of blogs would be applied. They were obsessed to improve their writing skill continually.

Based on the explanations above, the researcher concluded that Blogs are an effective technique to teach writing skill. After the implementation of the Blogs in teaching learning process, the students' mean score of writing skill and the students' motivation were increased. So, technique by using blogs is appropriate and useful to improve students' writing skill, actually for the eighth grade students of SMP N 10 Surakarta.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The implementations of Blogs as the teaching technique in teaching learning activity showed that: 1) the use of Blogs is able to improve the students' writing skill of recount text; 2) the use of Blogs is able to improve the students' motivation on learning English.

The improvement of students' writing skill is shown by the improvement of students' mean scores through pre-test and post-tests. The mean score got improved from the pre-test to the cycle 2 test, compared to the mean score of pre-test which is 59.16, the mean score of post-test 1

increased up to 68.26. Then, the mean score of post-test 2 increased up to 73.28. They were able to write less mistakes of spelling, punctuation, vocabulary, word orders, tenses, pronouns, sentence pattern and other grammatical forms. They also wrote more and longer sentences in better content. Moreover, students' writing achievements are also improved from pre-test and post-tests.

Besides, Blogs can improve the students' motivation during teaching and learning process. Blogs brought positive atmosphere to the class of VIII A. The situation of the classroom becomes lively and attractive. The students showed better attitude towards the writing lesson by active in writing, they are also active in discussing like commenting the mistakes on their friends' work. They were motivated to be the most valuable commentators. They joined writing class with enthusiastic. Students focused with their own works. The students also paid more attention to the lesson. In this research, the teacher is more innovative in planning, teaching, conducting the lesson, evaluating and doing reflection.

The success of this study will be helpfull in the larger teaching-learning world, for that reason it can be drawn some useful suggestion not only for the teachers but also for the students, for the school and the other researchers.

For the teacher, the teacher needs to know that writing for most students is considered to be a difficult subject. It commonly seems not that interesting for the students. The teachers should create the interesting situation in teaching learning

process. It can be done by use the suitable media in teaching learning process. The teachers also need to develop the teaching technique to create interesting teaching activities that stimulate students in learning. The creativity in developing the use of teaching technique will be helpful to achieve the teaching-learning goals. That is why the teachers should be able to apply their teaching learning process by using blog. Especially for English teachers, they should be able to apply blog to teach writing.

For the students, as language learner, the students should be aware that writing is important. They do not need to write as much as possible in a single text, but they can practice frequently. They can use blogs in practice writing to share their experiences, opinions, or everything they want to write.

For the school, the school should support English teachers to improve their teaching quality. Besides, it is suggested that the school should motivate the teachers to do action research in order to solve the problems. The institution should also give an opportunity to the teachers to express a new idea in teaching English. By supporting and giving the teacher opportunity to express their ideas, the teaching learning process will run well.

For the other researchers, The result of the study can be used as an additional reference for other researcher to improve other language skill. The result of this study is also hoped to be initial point to conduct further research in the same field in order to create a better teaching and learning process.

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