

OUTDOOR EDUCATION: A CONTEXTUAL ENGLISH LEARNING ACTIVITY TO IMPROVE WRITING ABILITY OF YOUNG ADOLESCENTS (A CLASSROOM ACTION RESEARCH)

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Abstract: This study describes an implementation of *Outdoor Education* as a contextual learning activity to improve writing ability of young adolescents. It aims at (1) investigating how *Outdoor Education* is implemented in teaching English to young adolescents to improve their writing ability; (2) identifying the challenges faced by the teacher in the implementation of this learning activity; (3) finding the strategies to overcome the challenges faced by the teacher. *A Classroom Action Research* was employed as a research design which was divided into four phases namely *Planning, Acting, Observing, and Reflecting*. Moreover, data were collected through several instruments, namely observation, students' writings (documentation), and interview with the students. The collected data in the form of students' writing were analyzed by using the scoring rubric suggested by Brown (2007) and referred to qualitative data analysis proposed by Hamied and Malik (2016). The result of the study revealed that *Outdoor Education* has successfully improved students' writing ability because the students may understand the content of the lesson and new vocabulary contextually. In addition, the improvement found because the students enjoyed and were excited in their learning in such an informal and interesting context (Berns&Errickson, 2001). Comparing the result of *Pre-writing* and *Second Cycle Writing* may reveal the better students' writing ability (from 56.16 to 80.17). However, the teacher found some challenges to implement it since the adolescents seemed to spend the time inefficiently thus to deal with those the teacher provided clear briefings before doing the activity and asked them to open the dictionary if they got difficult words in writing their descriptive text.

Keywords: Contextual learning activity, Education, Students' writing ability, Young adolescents

INTRODUCTION

Teaching English to young adolescents requires specific strategies because they have different characteristics from the adults. Cameron (2001) stated that young adolescents will lose their interest in the middle of learning process if it is conducted in monotonous ways without involving students actively in the learning activity. This is also supported by Harmer (2007) who claimed that young adolescents generally display an enthusiasm for learning and curiosity about the world around them. Regarding the intellectual characteristics of young adolescents, Caskey and Anfara (2007) explained that young adolescents tend to be highly curious and display a broad array of interest. They are

typically eager to learn about topics, they find interesting and useful, favor active over passive learning experiences, and prefer interaction with peers during educational activities.

In terms of cognitive development, young adolescents also develop the capacity for abstract thought process (Elkind, 1974 as cited in Caskey &Anfara, 2007). They typically progress from concrete to logical operations and problem solving to acquire the ability to develop and test hypotheses, analyze and synthesize data, grapple with complex concepts, and think reflectively (Manning, 2002 cited in Caskey &Anfara, 2007).

Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) may be one innovative learning model implemented by English teacher in the classroom, especially for teaching young adolescents (Berns&Errickson, 2001). Sears (2003) stated that CTL motivates learners to take charge of their own learning and to make connection between knowledge and its application to the various contexts of their lives. In addition, Zahorik (1995) also stated that CTL can be used as an alternative of learning approach where the students are directed into “experiencing” not “memorizing”. As one of learning activities which categorized into contextual approach, *Outdoor Education* can be implemented by the teacher to teach young adolescents.

Outdoor Education as one of the learning activities found in CTL refers to a learning activity purposes to foster learning through the interplay between experience and reflection, based on practical observation in authentic situation. This kind of learning activity also facilitates students to connect the material they are learning to the contexts that they find in their daily life (Berns&Errickson, 2001).

There are some benefits that can be gained by the students through *Outdoor Education*. According to Rickinson, et al (2004), *Outdoor Education* gives depth to the curriculum and makes an important contribution to students’ physical, personal and social education. This is also repeated by Ofsted (2008) as cited in Rickinson, et al (2004) who stated that in first-hand experiences of learning outside of the classroom can help students to make objects more vivid and interesting for pupils and enhance their understanding.

Since the research related to the implementation of *Outdoor Education* as *contextual learning* activity in teaching writing especially in lower classes of EFL context has not been conducted, so that this study attempts to investigate the implementation of *Outdoor Education* as a *contextual English learning activity* to improve writing ability of young adolescents.

METHODS

This Classroom Action *Research* (CAR) was conducted through two cycles in which one of them covered four phases *Planning, Acting, Observing, and Evaluating* (Kemmis& McTaggart, 1992). CAR within two cycles was done in order to identify changes that should be done in the teacher’s teaching practices by providing the teacher framework to build a specific classroom project. The subject of this study was seventh graders of one private Junior High School in Northern Bandung. The seventh graders

categorized as young adolescent (Pinter, 2006) were chosen since they were considered to be able to think logically when they identified the objects around them. Data were collected through students' activity observation, written works (documents) and interview with the students. The collected data in the form of students' writing were analyzed using scoring rubrics of writing proposed by Brown (2007). Meanwhile, observation and interview were described referring to the principles of Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) which consists of five elements: *Relating, Experiencing, Applying, Cooperating* and *Transferring* (Crawford, 2001). Regarding the data gained from the interview, Halliwel (1992) theory was used to investigate the students' enthusiasm in participating in their learning outside their classroom.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings were taken from three data resources namely observation, students' writing, and students' interview.

The Implementation of Outdoor Education to Improve Writing Ability of Young Adolescents

First Cycle

The first cycle of the research was divided into four phases namely *Planning, Acting, Observing,* and *Reflecting* (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1992). In *Planning phase*, there were some activities done by the teacher such as designing lesson plan and research instruments, choosing the topic for the students' writing, and determining the Minimum Mastery Criteria for the students. In *Acting phase*, there were two meetings to conduct the activities. The first meeting was begun by assigning the students to write a descriptive text without getting any explanation and assistance from the teacher. According to the result of their writings assessed by using scoring rubric of Brown (2007), it showed that most students did not get good results, it was indicated from the vocabularies, organization of the text, and mechanics used in the text. The result of the students' writing revealed that they did not have a good ability to write a descriptive text. The second meeting of this phase was started by distributing the worksheets, giving the instruction to the students, inviting them to conduct *Outdoor Education* and asking them to write a descriptive text. From the result of their writing, there were some improvements in their writing. In *Observing phase*, the students were observed while doing *Outdoor Education*. As the result, most of the students still did not pay attention to the explanation given. In *Reflecting phase*, the first cycle of the research was reflected. As the result, most of the students were already enthusiastic during the implementation of this learning activity. There was also a slight improvement to the students' writing which can be seen from their mean score in Pre-writing and writing in first cycle (56.16; 69.08).

Second Cycle

As the first cycle of this research did not investigate what the objectives of this study, the second cycle was necessarily conducted through revising and improving some constraints or weaknesses occurred in the previous one. The process of this second cycle included the same four phases done in the first cycle. In *Planning phase*, the lesson plan and research instruments were created. The process of creating the lesson plan and instruments was considering some weaknesses found in the previous cycle. In *Acting phase*, there were some activities done by the teacher such as distributing students' worksheets, explaining the students about the learning activity, inviting the students to do *Outdoor Education* as some steps mentioned, and assigning the students to write another descriptive text. In *Observing phase*, the students were observed while doing *Outdoor Education* using observation guide. In the *Reflecting phase*, the researcher evaluated the students' writing, comparing their scores from the previous scores, and considered the result of observation. Those two resources were supported by the result of the interview with the students. Overall, from all activities done in the second cycle demonstrated that the students obtained better score in their writing which were indicated from the more appropriate and various vocabulary they put in their writing and the more detail the description given in the text.

The Challenges Faced While Implementing the Outdoor Education

During the implementation of *Outdoor Education*, there were some challenges found by the teacher such as the students seemed not to be clear about instruction given before doing *Outdoor Education*; they enjoyed so much observing the objects without considering the time allotment so that they run out the time to do the task. Moreover, the teacher also found some constraints in guiding the students to learn new vocabulary and how to use it in their writing.

The Strategies Done to Overcome the Challenges Faced

Considering the teachers' challenges faced in conducting *Outdoor Education*, the teacher took some strategies to cope them. First, the teacher tried to explain the procedures in doing *Outdoor Education* clearly by showing what the students had to fulfill their task as instructed. Second, the teacher guided the students to manage the time efficiently by distributing the time allotment in each step of their activity. By doing so, they could cover the task well as the time given by the teachers. Third, the students were advised to look up the dictionary if they found some difficult vocabularies and its meaning. Hence, they could understand the meaning of vocabulary and use them properly in their writing.

RESEARCH DISCUSSIONS

Based on the result of data analysis, it is clearly seen that *Outdoor Education* as a part of *Contextual Teaching and Learning* activity helps students improve their writingskills for some reasons. First, from the students' writings assessed by scoring

rubric proposed by Brown (2007), it shows that the students improved their writing quality. It is indicated from the vocabulary, organization of the text, content, and the use of grammar. In terms of vocabulary, most students put more colorful vocabulary in their descriptive text even they put new vocabulary that they did not use before such as *dump*, *tighten*, and *dispose*. Regarding the organization of the text, most students still faced problems because they did not arrange their writing in a good order. It is found in the way they put their idea and their sentence in appropriate schematic structures.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the result of data analysis, some points can be concluded: First, the result from observation showed that *Outdoor Education* may improve the students' writing, particularly related to more various vocabulary and better writing organization found in their texts. Such improvement may be affected by their enthusiasm and enjoyment while joining *Outdoor Education* so that it gave them good learning atmosphere. Second, *Outdoor Education* likely enabled the students to understand how to write descriptive text more easily as they claimed that they could put their idea clearly based on what they wrote in the observation guide. Third, the result of observation analysis also indicated that the students spent their learning experience because they found more objects that can be described than they did before- not limited to the objects they found in the classroom. Lastly, in the interview, the students stated that *Outdoor Education* offered a good opportunity to the students in learning how to write descriptive text through enjoyable learning activity as if they were learning while playing (Dillon, 2006). By doing so, they were opinionated to write a descriptive text with more variety. Besides, the students also commented that they were happy to learn in new experience in which they can release from their routines and monotonous activity. However, during the implementation, the teacher faced some problems related to time management and unfamiliar words. To cover such problems, the teacher gave clear information about what the students have to do in their *Outdoor Education* activity. To cover the problems, the teacher instructed the students to look up the dictionary to find the meaning of unfamiliar words and how to use them contextual appropriately in their descriptive text.

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