
PROJECT – BASED LEARNING (PJBL) TO IMPROVE STUDENTS’ WRITING CAPABILITY

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ABSTRACT

Writing is considered as a difficult skill in learning English. That’s way the teacher should creative and innovative in teaching writing. One of methods that can be used in teaching writing is PjBL (Project Based Learning). The purpose of this article is to examine the uses of PjBL can improve students’ writing capability. It is based on the classroom action research with the subject is the students of fourth semester of English department of Widya Dharma University. The findings of the research imply that PjBL is very effective. The implementation of PjBL improved the students’ writing capability. PjBL enables the students to be more active to explore their ideas. By doing the project, the students can work together and share their ideas and knowledge with others. It makes the learning activity is not teacher centered but student centered, because most of the activity is done by the students. It can also improve writing class in a better situation in the way that the classroom situation becomes more alive with various interesting activities, and there is a rising of students’ participation.

Keywords: Writing Capability; Project – Based Learning (PjBl); Teaching Method; Classroom Action Research.

INTRODUCTION

In learning English, there are four competences that should be mastered, those are listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Listening and speaking are usually learned early, because those skills can be achieved by immitating and memorizing. So, for early English learners, e.g for children, they are usually taught listening and speaking first. It is because those skills are considered easier than other skills, reading and writing. While, for intermediate or advance learners, they are expected to master all of those skills. But, unfortunatly, most of the studies said that writing is the most difficult skill to be mastered (Hartawan, et.al, 2005), boring activity (Sulistyani, 2010), and is not interesting (Sudilah, 2015). It is based on their research that in writing learning process, there are still many students who are difficult in deciding the topic and exploring their ideas in writing. The students suggest that writing is uninteresting and boring activity.

Besides that the teacher in teaching English used traditional or conventional method of teaching.

According to Richards & Renandya (in Fauziati), writing is the most difficult skill to be mastered for foreign language learners. This is due not only to the need to generate and organize ideas using an appropriate choice of vocabulary, sentence, and paragraph organization but also to turn such ideas into a readable text (2010: 45).

Rokhyati (2014) says that writing is the most difficult language skill, even for the native language users. We need integrated skills to be able to produce a piece of writing, Those skills are understanding grammar, generating ideas (content), organizing ideas (organization), and using mechanics. Rokhyati (2014) adds that many students get difficulty in writing because it is difficult for them to master and integrate the micro skills. Some students may have good ideas and can organize their ideas well, but the grammar and words they use are not correct. On the other hand, some other students have good grammar and master the vocabulary well, but cannot organize their ideas. As a result, the product of their writing is not good.

Writing is also considered the difficult skill for fourth semester students of English Department of Widya Dharma University of Klaten. They understand the theory but difficult to practice it. That's way this article describes based on the research about the usage of Project Based Learning (PjBL) in order to improve students' writing capability. PjBL is effective to improve students' writing capability. By doing the project, the students are hoped to practice more in writing and enjoy in the process to improve their writing.

Writing

Bell and Burnaby in Setyawan *et al.* (2012) state that the writer is required to demonstrate control of a number of variables simultaneously, so it means that writing is an extremely complex cognitive activity. Harris (1993: 10) defines writing as a process that occurs over a period of time, particularly if we take into account sometimes extended periods of thinking that precede creating an initial draft. It is an ongoing process that needs time and energy to think. It also involves all language aspects that have been mastered. Besides, the influence from mother tongue and culture affects the students' comprehension. That's way writing is often called as a complicated skill. Writing as form of thinking can be used to create an initial draft to construct a text. By

developing ways of thinking, people can also express ideas, opinions, or feeling in writing.

Ghaith (2002 in <http://www.GhaziGhaith.com>.) defines writing as a complex process that allows writers to explore thought and ideas, and make them visible and concrete. Writing encourages thinking and learning for it motivates communication and makes thought available for reflection. When thought is written down, ideas can be examined, reconsidered, added to, rearranged, and changed.

The difficulties in writing class becomes problems for the teacher. Teachers of writing have to find ways to overcome the problems, such as using inquiry model (Hartawan, et.al, 2005), think pair and share technique (Sulistiyani, 2010), and online method (Sudilah, 2015). However, finding solution for such problems is not easy. What the teacher can do is maximizing their roles. Harmer (2001: 261) in Rokhyati (2014) explains that the roles of the teacher in writing class are motivator, resource, and feedback provider. Chamot and O'Malley (1994) in Sudilah (2015) mentioned that: ".....in writing, ESL students may not know how to plan and sequence their ideas before writing (organizational planning) or conduct memory searches which include knowledge and experience gain through their first language (elaborating prior knowledge).”

Harris also explains that language in general allows us to construct representations of experience, writing, in particular, allows us the futher option of working on the representation. When writing, we are able to work through a process of assembling ideas, drafting, and revising (1993: 11). It's clear that we need assembling ideas, drafting, revising in writing, and should do reflection to make our next writing better. The students should reread their writing to get sure that their writing are good enough. They can discuss their writing together with their friends and teacher.

According Brown (2001: 357), there are six categories or aspects of writing evaluation:

- a. Content: thesis statement, related ideas, development of ideas through personal experience, illustration, facts, opinions, use of description, cause/effect, comparison/contrast, and consistent focus.
- b. Organization: effectiveness of introducing, logical sequence of ideas, conclusion, and appropriate length.

- c. Discourse/cohesion: topic sentences, paragraph unity, transitions, discourse markers, cohesion, rhetorical conventions, reference, fluency, and variation.
- d. Syntax
- e. Vocabulary: using meaningful words or phrases
- f. Mechanics: spelling, punctuation, citation of references (if applicable), and neatness and appearance.

Then Brown (2001: 358) states that if the teachers still need to assign a single grade or score to each paper, then consider weighting the first few categories more heavily.

Project – Based Learning (PjBl)

Project-Based Learning (PjBL) is a model that organizes learning around projects (retrieved from, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project-based-learning>). Railsback (2002: 4) states that using projects as part of the curriculum is certainly not a new concept; teachers often incorporate projects into their lesson plans. According to Railsback (2002: 9-10), there are some benefits of Project Based Learning (PjBL):

- a. Preparing children for the workplace.

Children are exposed to a wide range of skills and competencies such as collaboration project planning, decision making, and time management (Blank, 1997; Dickinson, et al, 1998).

- b. Increasing motivation.

Teachers often note improvement in attendance, more class participation, and greater willingness to do homework (Bottoms & Webb, 1998; Moursund, Bielefeldt, & Underwood, 1997).

- c. Connecting learning at school with reality.

Students retain more knowledge and skills when they are engaged in stimulating projects. With projects, kids use higher order thinking skills rather than memorizing facts in an isolated context without a connection to how and where they are used in the real world (Blank, 1997; Bottoms & Webb, 1998; Reyes, 1998).

- d. Providing collaborative opportunities to construct knowledge.

Collaborative learning allows kids to bounce ideas off each other, voice their own opinions, and negotiate solutions, all skills that will be necessary in the workplace (Bryson, 1994; Reyes, 1998).

- e. Increasing social and communication skills.

Students will learn how to communicate with other people in their group when they are doing a certain project. It will automatically increase their social and communication skills because they have to interact with different people which of course, have different ideas and point of view.

- f. Increasing problem-solving skills.

There could be some problems or misunderstandings among members of the group. They are demanded to solve their own problem (Moursund & Bielefeldt).

- g. Enabling students to make and see connections between discipline.

Each student has their own responsibility in finishing a project. It means that they have to do what group has told them to do.

- h. Providing opportunities to contribute to their school or community.

One kind of contributions is the product they have made.

- i. Increasing self-esteem.

Children take pride in accomplishing something that has value outside the classroom.

j. Allowing children to use their individual learning strengths and diverse approaches to learning (Thomas, 1998) and providing a practical, real world way to learn to use technology (Kadel, 1999; Moursund, Bielefeldt & Underwood, 1997).

METHOD

This research is an action research method to solve the students' problems on writing skill. Classroom action research can be conducted through four stages: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Arikunto, 2006: 16). This research consists of three cycles, each cycle consists of four meetings. The subject of the research is the students of fourth semester of English department of Widya Dharma University.

The Technique of Collecting the Data

The data in this classroom action research consists of qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data were taken from document of questionnaires, interviews, and observation. While quantitative data were taken from the writing test, including the students' score on pre-test and post-test each cycle.

To analyze the students' written test, the researcher use Analytical Scoring Rubric. Reid (1993: 243) explains that for classroom instruction, holistic scoring provides little washback into the writers' further stages of learning. Classroom evaluation of learning is best served through analytic scoring, in which as many as six major elements of writing are scored. Analytic scoring may be more appropriately called analytic assessment in order to capture its closer association with classroom language instruction than with formal testing. The following is the table of analytical scale:

Table 1. Analytic scale for rating composition task (Brown & Bailey, 1984, pp. 39-41)in Brown (2004: 244 – 245)

Writing elements	Score				
	5	4	3	2	1
I. Organization: Introduction, Body, and Conclusion	Appropriate title, effective introductory paragraph, topic is stated, leads to body; transitional expression used; arrangement of material shows plan (could be outlined by reader); supporting evidence given for	Adequate title, introduction, and conclusion; body of essay is acceptable, but some evidence may be lacking, some ideas aren't fully developed; sequence is logical but transitional expression s may be absent or misused	Meagre or scant introduction or conclusion; problem with the order or ideas in body; the generalizations may not be fully supported by the evidence given; problem of organization interfere	Shaky or minimally recognizable introduction; organization can barely be seen; severe problems with ordering of ideas; lack of supporting evidence; conclusion weak or illogical; inadequate effort at organization	Absence of introduction or conclusion; no apparent organization of body; severe lack of supporting evidence; writer has no made any effort to organize the composition (could not be outlined by reader)

	generalizations; conclusion logical and complete				
II. Content: Logical development of ideas.	Ess ay addresses the assigned topic; the ideas are concrete and thoroughly developed; no extraneous material; essay reflects thought	Ess ay addressed the issue but misses some points; ideas could be more fully developed; some extraneous material is present	Dev elopment of ideas not complete or essay is somewhat off the topic; paragraphs aren't divided exactly right	Ideas incomplete; essay doesn't reflect careful thinking or was hurriedly written; inadequate effort in area of content	Essay is completely inadequate and doesn't reflect college – level work; no apparent effort to consider the topic carefully
III. Syntax: Gramm ar	Nati ve – like fluency in English grammar; correct use of relative clauses, preposition s, modals, articles, verb forms, and tense sequencing ; no	Adv anced proficiency in English grammar; some grammar problems don't influence communic ation, although the reader is aware of them; no	Idea s are getting through to the reader, but grammar problems are apparent and have a negative effect on communic ation; run –on	Num erous serious grammar problems interfere with communicati on of the writer's ideas; grammar review of some areas clearly needed; difficult to	Sever e grammar problem interfere greatly with the message; reader can't understand what the writer was trying to say; unintelligibl e sentence structure

	fragments or run – on sentences	fragments or run – on sentences	sentences or fragments present	read sentences	
IV. Mechanics: Punctuation and spelling.	Correct use of English writing convention s: left and right margins, all needed capitals, paragraphs indented, punctuation and spelling; very neat	Some problems with writing convention s or punctuation; occasional spelling errors; left margin correct; paper is neat and legible	Uses general writing convention but has errors; spelling problems distract reader; punctuation errors interfere with ideas	Serious problems with format of paper; part of essay not legible; errors in sentence punctuation and final punctuation; unacceptable to educated readers	Complete disregard for English writing conventions; paper illegible; obvious capitals missing, no margins, severe spelling problem
V. vocabularies: Style and quality of expression	Precise vocabulary usage; use of parallel structures; concise; register good	Attempts variety; good vocabulary ; not wordy; register OK; style fairly concise	Some vocabulary misused; lacks awareness of register; may be too wordy	Poor expression of ideas; problems in vocabulary; lacks variety of structure	Inappropriate use of vocabulary; no concept of register or sentence variety

The Technique of Analyzing the Data

There are two types of data in the research. First is numerical data or quantitative data. The numerical data are in the form of the writing scores. The writing scores as the result of pre – test or post – test in this research were analyzed by comparing the means of each test to find out the improvement of students’ achievement in writing.

The formula to find out Mean:

$$\bar{X} = \frac{\sum X}{n}$$

$$\bar{X} = \text{mean}$$

$\sum X$ = Number of scores

n = number of students

The second types of data are in the form of non – numerical data. In analyzing non – numerical data or qualitative data, the researcher made use of interactive model proposed by Miles & Huberman (1984: 21 – 23), they are data reduction, data display, and data verification.

THE RESULT OF THE STUDY

The aims of the research are to find out whether the use of Project Based Learning (PjBL) improves students' writing capability.

In the process of the research, it is divided into the condition before the research, the implementation of the research consisting of Cycle 1, Cycle 2, Cycle 3 and research findings.

The Condition before the Research.

The condition before the research was identified in pre-research stage. The pre-research was held to gain base-line data of the research.

1) Students' Ability in Writing

To identify the students' ability in writing, the pre-test was conducted in the form of written test. The result of the pre-test showed that the students had low ability in writing. The low ability in writing could be seen from the low achievement of writing test. The mean of the writing test scores in pre-test was low, namely 65.31. The low ability in writing could also be identified from the following indicators. First, the students could not write using appropriate vocabulary. Second, students made mistakes of grammar in writing sentences. Students did not know the English words and how to apply them in various grammatical forms. Third, the students could not express their ideas because they are afraid of making mistakes. Forth, the students made some mistakes of punctuation. Fifth, the students could not arrange a good paragraph because they did not know well about organization in writing, namely introduction, body, and conclusion.

2) Classroom situation

Before conducting the research, the teaching and learning process was not alive. The students just listened the lecturer explanation, and when they are asked to make a sentence or paragraph, most of them did mistakes. They are stressed in writing class because they could not enjoy the lesson and did not attract to do the exercises.

Research Implementation

Having identified students' problem in writing, the researcher chose Project Based Learning (PjBL) to be the solution of the problems. The implementation of teaching writing using Project Based Learning (PjBL) through Action Research was consisted of three cycles.

The result of the first cycle became the consideration of the planning of the second cycle. And the result of the second cycle became a consideration in deciding and planning of the third cycle. Every cycle consisted of four meeting, three meeting were for presenting the material and one meeting for writing test. Every meeting lasted for ninety minutes each.

1) Cycle 1

- Planning:

Giving a project of short functional text in meeting 1-3: meeting 1 (making announcement and publish it), meeting 2 (making memo and deliver it), meeting 3 (making advertisement and present it). Meeting 4 is for post-test.

- Action:

First meeting – third meeting: Exploring vocabulary and phrases, doing a project about the topic, discussing the project.

Fourth Meeting: having a test

- Observation:

Students: Active in doing a project, interesting in learning, could perform in writing but they made mistakes in vocabulary and grammar.

Lecturer: prepare the work sheets, the project is little confusing for some students, did not give written model and grammar discussion, lack of monitoring in group work.

Classroom situation: alive, crowded in conducting the group work, enjoyable for various types of activities.

- Reflection:

Strength: Using Project Based Learning (PjBL) can increase students' participation in writing class, there was an improvement of students' writing ability, Project Based Learning (PjBL) can accommodate various types of activities which are motivating the students to write, group work in PjBL is beneficial for eliminating psychological barriers in writing such as the fear of making mistakes and lack of self-confident.

Weaknesses: less control of the teacher in group work, lack discussion about grammar, lack activity in vocabulary exploration, lack modeling from lecturer in writing.

2) Cycle 2

- Planning:

Giving a project of long functional text (class is divided into four groups: group 1: making descriptive text, group 2: making narrative text, group 3: making recount text, group 4: making procedure text). All group have to send their project in social media, e.g. facebook, online news, newspaper, or conference, or journal.

Using M1 for doing a project, M2 for discussing the project, M3 for review and explanation.

- Action:

M1: doing a project, M2: Discussing the project, M3: review and explanation, M4: Post test.

- Observation:

Students: Active in doing a project, interesting in learning, could perform in writing with fewer mistakes in vocabulary and grammar.

Lecturer: give sufficient model in written forms, sufficient vocabulary building and grammar practice, give reasonable project in the available time.

Classroom situation: more alive, fun, enjoyable for students.

- Reflection:

Strength: students' participation was increased, the enjoyment of conducting the activity could reduce the tension in writing class.

Weaknesses: the students were still had difficulty in punctuation, organization and selecting appropriate vocabularies. All of the group send their project in facebook.

3) Cycle 3

- Planning:

Giving a project of long functional text (class is divided into four groups: group 1: making report text, group 2: making explanation text, group 3: making hortatory text, group 4: making analytical exposition text). All group have to send their project in social media, e.g. facebook, online news, newspaper, or conference, or journal.

Using M1 for vocabulary building, M2 for doing a project, M3 for discussing the project, review, and explanation.

- Action:

M1: vocabulary building, M2: doing a project, M3: discussing the project, review, and explanation, M4: Post test.

- Observation:

Students: Active in doing a project, interesting in learning, improvement in writing ability, were not afraid in making mistakes.

Lecturer: give sufficient model in written forms, sufficient vocabulary building and grammar practice, give reasonable project in the available time, and give enough explanation in discussion.

Classroom situation: more alive, fun, enjoyable for students.

- Reflection:

Strength: PjBL can improve students' writing ability, working in group increased students' participation in writing class, made the classroom situation more alive, could encourage students to write more.

Weaknesses: group work in doing PjBl made some students depend their friends. All of the group send their project in facebook.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1) Findings

a) Improvement of students' writing ability

The findings of the study showed that the use of PjBL in writing class improve students' writing ability. The improvement of the students' writing ability could be recognized from the improvement of writing in a good organization, the ability to express ideas using appropriate vocabulary and grammatical forms, and using correct punctuation.

Before the study, the researcher found that the students had low writing ability. The improvement of writing ability could be seen from the improvement of students' writing cycle to cycle. The mean of scores in pre-test is 65.31, the mean of score in Cycle 1 is 68.5, the mean of Cycle 2 is 71.6, and the mean score in Cycle 3 is 75.50.

b) Improvement of classroom situation

The findings of teaching and learning process showed that there was a change of classroom situation before and after PjBL was implemented in writing class. The teaching and learning process using PjBL was more alive. Most of the activities were student-centred. Lecturer applied various interesting activities.

Students showed high participations in writing class. they were eager to conduct the tasks with high spirit. They were not afraid of making mistakes, because the class was far away of humiliating the students and tolerating the students with various level of ability. Lecturer was appreciated all of the students' effort in doing a project. The writing class was full of enjoyment, the group work was coloured with students' laugh. It showed the eagerness of the students in learning writing in relax situation.

2) Discussion

a) PjBL can improve students' writing ability

The findings of the research showed that PjBL can improve students' writing ability. PjBL shares much in common with Process Writing. The roots of Process Writing as taught in the United States are often traced back to the Bay Area Writers Project circa 1975. Six steps version of Process Writing, namely Brainstorming, Organizing the brainstorming ideas, Developing a draft, Obtaining Feedback, Revising, and Publishing can improve students' writing ability.

b) The improvement of classroom situation

- The teaching and learning process using PjBL was more alive.

It is suitable with the theory is stated by Bottoms & Webb, 1998; Moursund, Bielefeldt, & Underwood, 1997, that PjBL increases motivation. Teachers often note improvement in attendance, more class participation, and greater willingness to do homework.

- Most of the activities were student-centred.

By doing the project, the students are more active to finish the project and the teacher is just as consultant. It means that the learning activity is student-centered.

- Students showed high participations in writing class. They were eager to conduct the tasks with high spirit.

- Make students can work in group. It increases social and communication skills. Students learn how to communicate with other people in their group when they are doing a certain project. It will automatically increase their social and communication skills because they have to interact with different people which of course, have different ideas and point of view. It also increases problem-solving skills. There could be some problems or misunderstandings among members of the group. They are demanded to solve their own problem (Moursund & Bielefeldt). By working in group, it Enables students to make and see connections between discipline. Each student has their own responsibility in finishing a project. It means that they have to do what group has told them to do

- This activity also can also increase self-esteem. Children take pride in accomplishing something that has value outside the classroom. They were not afraid of making mistakes, because the class was far away of humiliating the students and tolerating the students with various level of ability. Allowing children to use their individual learning strengths and diverse approaches to learning (Thomas, 1998) and providing a practical, real world way to learn to use technology (Kadel, 1999; Moursund, Bielefeldt & Underwood, 1997).

- Lecturer applied various interesting activities.

It provides collaborative opportunities to construct knowledge. Collaborative learning allows kids to bounce ideas off each other, voice their own opinions, and negotiate solutions, all skills that will be necessary in the workplace (Bryson, 1994; Reyes, 1998).

Lecturer was appreciated all of the students' effort in doing a project.

- The writing class was full of enjoyment, the group work was coloured with students' laugh. It showed the eagerness of the students in learning writing in relax situation.

CONCLUSION

From the result of the research of applying Project Based Learning (PjBL) to improve students' writing capability, it can be drawn three conclusion as follow:

- a. Project Based Learning (PjBL) can improve students' writing capability.

b. Project Based Learning (PjBL) can improve writing class in a better situation in the way that the classroom situation becomes more alive with various interesting activities, and there is a rising of students' participation.

c. The strength of the implementation of PjBL in writing class is that it can raise students' participation in writing class and it can enhance students' writing capability. However, the implementation of PjBL needs some preparation, especially in desinging the project which are suitable to the students' and curriculum need.

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