Utilizing Idea Mapping to Enhance EFL College Students' Writing Performance at Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang

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Abstract

Writing, among the four skills, is clearly a complex process, and being competent in writing is frequently accepted as being competent of last language skill to acquire (Nunan, 1991:91). Idea mapping refers to mind mapping which can help students to generate and organize their ideas in writing. This study attempts to investigate how can idea mapping improve the writing ability of the third semester students of English Department at Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. The classroom action research design employed in this study is a collaborative classroom action research. The design of classroom action research utilized in this study follows that of Kemmis and McTaggart (2000:595) cited in Koshy (2007:4) which

comprises four main steps, namely, planning, implementing the action, observing, and reflecting which are preceded by reconnaissance (preliminary study). The findings of the study are presented based on the result of students' writing, observation checklists, and field notes. All the findings are about the activities done in Cycle 1 and Cycle 2. Based on the results of the students' writing, there was a slight improvement of the students' mean score from the previous score in the preliminary study to Cycle 1. The mean of the previous score was 46.25 and the mean score of the students' writing in Cycle 1 was 59.69. The students' involvement in writing activities was more than what had been stated in the criteria of success. This situation implied that the second criterion of success had not been fulfilled. Better improvement of mean score is gained from the preliminary study to the Cycle 2. The mean of the previous score in the preliminary study was 46.25 and the mean score of the students' writing in Cycle 2 was 69.85. The improvement met the first criteria of success because there was 75% of the students who achieved the target score 65. Further, Idea mapping has revealed improving the writing ability of the third semester EFL college students at Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. Based on the implementation of idea mapping in teaching writing, it is suggested that English teachers apply idea mapping especially in teaching writing. Besides, it is advisable for teacher to give more and various tasks to the students. To the future teacher-researchers, particularly those who are interested in applying idea mapping in their classroom research, it is suggested that they conduct classroom action research on the use of idea mapping in teaching writing related to other text types, such as narrative, procedure or recount.

Keywords: Idea Mapping, Writing Performance, EFL College Students

Introduction

Writing is obviously a complex process among the four skills, and being skilled in writing is often acknowledged as being capable of acquiring last-language skills (Nunan, 1991:91). Writing is the most difficult skill because it requires many components that must be considered while a student is writing (Hartfiel, Jacobs, Zinkgraft, Wormuth, & Hughey, 1985, quoted by Cahyono, 2001:44). It can be described as a system of indirect communication between writers and readers.

The purpose of writing teaching is to enable students to master functional texts and monolog or paragraph texts in the form of descriptive, narrative, recount, procedure, and reporting. The writing work is presented in the form of types of text, usually referred to as genres, which are closely related to each type's purpose. Based on the results of the preliminary study conducted at the Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang on 17-18 September 2018 in the academic year 2018/2019, we found that the objectives of teaching writing as stated above are not achieved. Most of the students have had no ideas to write in a simple descriptive essay and how to make the writing relevant to the subject. They had poor writing skill, especially in choosing the words. We believe these factors are the reason why the result of the paragraph writing task of the students, in which they are assigned to write their own descriptive essays, showed that the mean score was 46.25. This means that in writing a descriptive essay they had urgent problems.

The preliminary study was carried out by providing the students with a questionnaire and a simple descriptive essay writing task. Furthermore, a task was administered in writing descriptive essay to identify the real competence and problems of the students. This was also used as a basis for grouping students into groups of students with heterogeneous ability: students with low, medium and high ability.

The task was in an essay format that asked students to write 5 paragraph descriptive essay. The time allocated to the students was 60 minutes to complete the task. All information from the preliminary study was used to assess the action to be taken as the basic consideration. The outcome of the preliminary study revealed that (1) the teaching of writing was conducted in a conventional and mainly teacher-centered manner, (2) the classroom activities in the writing class were dreary and inhibited the participation of students in the activities, and (3) students had difficulty in writing. We also interviewed the English teacher in terms of the techniques and activities she applied in teaching writing to the students.

Seeing the problems found in writing teaching above, the most crucial issue in our opinion is that students are unable to write well in which they do not have ideas about what to write first and how to make the writing relevant to the subject. They are also lacking in vocabulary. In order for the students to produce attractive paragraphs, an effort should be made to make writing class more interesting.

We are interested in applying idea mapping in teaching concise essays to solve the crucial problem faced by the students. Idea mapping refers to mind mapping that can assist students in writing to generate and organize their ideas. Talebinezhad (2007) states that idea mapping is a learning strategy that can help students perform tasks of writing and more effectively control their learning. It helps students to promote their learning by creating and organizing ideas on the subject they will read.

Amal (2004) researched idea mapping implementation to improve the ability of second year students to write Halong school descriptive essay. His analysis used the model of cooperative classroom action research where he collaborated as a research team with the teacher in the classroom. He shows that the students were unable to write descriptive essay correctly and properly as the curriculum targets it. The paragraphs of the students were not

complete with details, the ideas expressed were not clear, and errors in grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics crowded the paragraphs.

Wilujeng (2005) used SMA Negeri Bojonegoro's second-year student mind mapping to write activities. She shows that cognitive mapping implementation can improve the ability of students to write in terms of generating and organizing ideas. In addition, mind mapping provides ideas for students to write.

Despite the similar concern, in terms of the media used in teaching and learning, as well as aspects of writing investigated in scoring the writing of the students, our present study will differ from the previous ones. Amal (2004) used pictures of people and musical instruments when communicating with news, while Wilujeng (2005) did not use media to enforce the strategy. In this study, using media like various interesting pictures in pre-writing activity, we will apply idea mapping. As far as writing aspects are concerned, Amal (2004) examined the writing of the students concerning the identification of error in which incorrect choice of word, lack of auxiliary as well as lack of article and auxiliary. Wilujeng (2005) scored only in terms of content and organization for the writing of the students. In the meantime, the writing factors to be graded in this analysis are material, structure, grammar and vocabulary.

Methods

The model in this study is an action work in the classroom. The classroom action research model was chosen for a reason that this study's main objective is to enhance the writing ability of Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang's English Department Students via idea mapping. Kemmis and McTaggart (1998:5) state that action research is experimenting with ideas as a means of improving and increasing knowledge in practice about curriculum, teaching, and learning.

The model of classroom action research used in this study resembles that of Kemmis and McTaggart (2000:595) cited in Koshy (2007:4), which consists of four key stages, namely the preparation, execution, evaluation and reflection followed by acknowledgement (preliminary analysis). Figure 3.1 displays them. Preliminary study covers the identification of problems, the analysis of problems and the problem formulation. Kemmis points out that planning involves determining the answer to the question and the strategy to be used to answer it. Implementation refers to the techniques used in the actual classroom practices to execute the technique. The observation stage includes recording data of the results of the strategy. During the reflection stage, conclusions were drawn and the original plan revised based upon the conclusions whether success or failures so that a new cycle could begin.
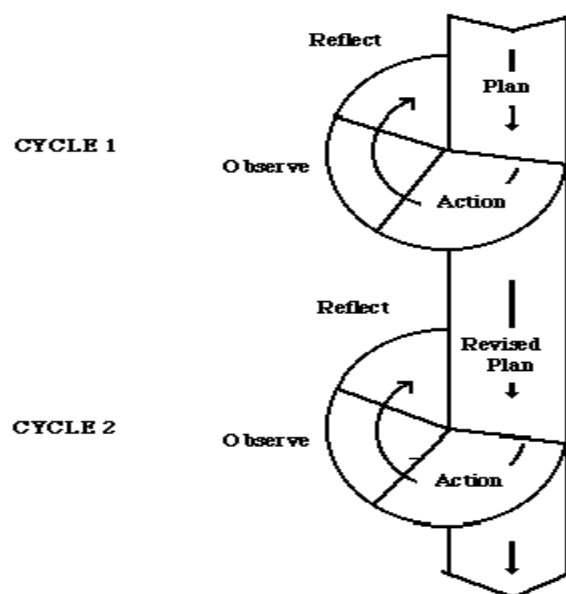

Figure 1 Kemmis and McTaggart Cyclical Action Research Process cited in Koshy (2007:4)

This action research is carried out using the following procedures: a preliminary study or recognition before analyzing and identifying problems as preparation (more detailed in Chapter 1), followed by action planning, implementation, observation and reflection as a real cycling action. We start the analysis by conducting a preliminary study to define and examine the real issues that students face in writing that need to be addressed. The problems are analyzed

in order to find a suitable strategy to solve the problems. We then made a general plan design that was implemented and observed. Finally, a reflection is carried out so as to identify all facts including the success and the failure in the implementation as well as the effects of the implementation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study are presented based on the result of students' writing, observation checklists, and field notes. All the findings are about the activities done in Cycle 1 and Cycle 2.

Findings of Cycle 1

It includes the outcome of writing by the students and the outcome of observation to the students who are actively involved in writing activities during the three meetings, focusing on the first meeting to generate ideas through idea mapping.

Results of the Students' Writing

Based on the students ' writing tests, there was a slight improvement in the preliminary study to Cycle 1 in the mean score of the students from the previous test. The previous score averaged 46.25 and the mean student writing score in Cycle 1 was 59.69. Furthermore, the data obtained from the writing of the students shows that the achievement of Cycle 1 among the students is between 46.50 and 75.00. 8 out of 20 students (40%) achieved the score of 65.63 – 75.00 and 12 out of 20 students (60%) achieved the score of 46.88 – 62.50. That means that there was 40% of the students who achieved the score equal or greater than 65. The improvement did not meet the first criteria of success yet because there was only 40% of the students who achieved the target score 65. Despite the improvement, the mean score was still below the stated criteria of success, which requires 65 improvements of the students' mean score.

From Cycle 1 analysis, it was found that some mistakes were still made by the students. Most of the students ' writing contents provided some detailed information, but it wasn't easy to understand. Organizing the thoughts is difficult for most students. They arranged their writing thoughts, but there was no clear order. Besides, they still made some grammatical errors and they still had limited vocabulary, so it was not easy for them to find words related to the idea. In addition to improving the average score, eight students reached the minimum standard (65) and twelve students reached below 65. It indicates that those who had not met the minimum standard were more numerous than those who had achieved the minimum standard. The score of some students is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 The Result of the Students' Writing

Group	Ss' Initial	Score	
		Preliminary Study	Cycle 1
1	M.W.I	59.38	75.00
	S.R.N	40.63	62.50
	N.I	40.63	62.50
	P.S	40.63	46.88
2	E.K	56.25	71.88
	A.A.I	56.25	68.75
	N.P	46.88	62.50
	A.L	37.50	50.00
3	M.F.R	59.38	71.88
	S.B	40.63	62.50
	M.I.G	40.63	50.00

B.C	34.38	46.88

The Students' Involvement in Writing Activities

The involvement of the students in writing activities was more than stated in the success criteria. At Meeting 1, 13 out of 20 students (65%) generated their ideas during the pre-writing exercises, and 7 out of 20 students (35%) were unable to generate their ideas enough. In Meeting 2, 11 out of 20 (55 percent) could properly organize their ideas and 9 out of 20 (45 percent) could not properly organize their ideas. The students were also actively involved in revising their writing. At Meeting 3 14out of 20 (70%) could be actively involved in editing their reading. In addition, 63% students were involved in writing activity in Cycle 1. This is assessed by adding the percentage of the students' involvement in all meetings (Meeting 1 + Meeting 2 + Meeting 3) divided by 3. This situation implied that the second criterion of success had not been fulfilled.

Revision of Cycle 1

There has been a minor analysis of the teaching writing stage and the way the researcher has done to test the writing of the students. In Cycle 1, I as the researcher did not perform the concept of how to organize the ideas of students in writing descriptive paragraph. We asked the students to generate their ideas cooperatively through idea mapping, but we did not give further detail as to how their ideas should be organized. In addition we asked the students to write descriptive paragraphs without giving them an example about how to decide what the main idea and which points to include in order to support the main idea. That is why most students found it difficult to organize their ideas.

Another revision, as mentioned above, was the way to check the writing of the students. The two Cycle 1 meetings (Meeting 1 and Meeting 2) revealed that the success criterion had

not been met; therefore, other cycles were needed. Based on the outcome of the previous cycle, we found that each member's individual accountability in the groups was not really evident. Furthermore, the students designed idea mapping, especially in generating ideas, in cooperation with their group members.

We led the students in groups in the pre-writing activity stage to be more interested in developing idea mapping. The community students did not need to go to the other classes in this event to see the progress of their peers. They would cooperatively produce their ideas on their group's paper plate. We gave different pictures, different color markers and paper (A4) to each group in this activity, so they were able to do their work independently.

We used the example of descriptive paragraphs in which we prepared it before we came to the class as paragraph models in the whilst writing activity. We explained how to use this simple present tense and gave an example of how to decide what the main idea is and how to support the main idea. The clarification helped the students understand how their thoughts can be organized into their concise paragraphs. We gave less time to each group to discuss their own idea mapping. Each group discussed the idea mapping to find out the description of the paragraphs. We gave more time and made the students write their first drafts, revise and edit their first drafts, write their final drafts, and proofread their final drafts. And in the post activity, we asked the students to submit the final drafts.

It was noticed that the students still made mistakes in arranging the descriptive paragraphs; many students provided some detailed information about their writing material, but it was not easy to understand. The concepts of their writing were arranged by most students, but there was no systematic order. They also made some grammatical mistakes and still had limited vocabulary.

Findings of Cycle 2

It consists of the results of the students' writing and the results of observation of the students who were actively involved during the two meetings in the writing activities which focused on generating and organizing ideas through idea mapping.

Results of the Students' Writing

Better mean score change from the preliminary to Cycle 2 analysis. In the preliminary study, the mean of the previous test was 46.25 and the mean score of writing by the students in cycle 2 was 69.85. Therefore, the data obtained from the writing of the students indicate that the results of the Cycle 2 students are between 59.38 and 81.25. Fifteen out of 20 students (75%) scored 65,63–81,25 and five out of twenty (25%) scored 59,38–62,50. That means that there was 75% of the students who achieved the score equal or greater than 65. The improvement met the first criteria of success because there was 75% of the students who achieved the target score 65.

Nonetheless, some students also won scores worse than the previous scores, but overall, the mean score of the students was better than the previous score and it could be said that the second cycle results met the expected success criteria. In addition, students were found to be able to write in their descriptive paragraphs using more words. As the paragraph had good content and organization, they could also produce understandable descriptive paragraphs. However, the paragraphs still had some grammatical errors although the number of the errors was not as many as the errors they made in Cycle 1.

Cycle 2 results also show that the mean score of the students in writing descriptive paragraphs using improved idea mapping. The mean score for the students in Cycle 1 was 59.69, while the mean score for the students in Cycle 2 was 69.85. It indicates that from Cycle 1 to Cycle 2 there was a change and it met the success criteria. 9 About the participation of

students in reading activities, while, 95% of the students were actively were involved in generating ideas and 75% of the students actively involved in organizing ideas in Cycle 2. This means that it was successful.

The individual score also improved. There were only 5 out of 20 (25%) of the students whose scores decreased from the previous scores, but 15 out of 20 (75%) of the students whose scores achieved from the previous scores.

Table 2 The Result of the Students' Writing

Group	Ss' Initial	Score	
		Cycle 1	Cycle 2
1	M.W.I	78.13	81.25
	S.R.N	62.50	68.75
	N.I	62.50	68.75
	P.S	50.00	62.50
2	E.K	75.00	81.25
	A.A.I	71.88	78.13
	N.P	62.50	68.75
	AL	46.88	62.50
3	M.F.R	75.00	78.13
	S.B	62.50	65.63
	M.I.G	50.00	65.63
	B.C	46.88	59.38

The Students' Involvement in Writing Activities

At Cycle 2 Meeting, 15 out of 20 students (75 percent) generated their ideas, while at Meeting 2, 14 out of 20 students (70 percent) were able to organize their ideas properly. The students were also actively involved in revising their writing. 16 out of 20 students (80%) may actively participate in editing their writing at Meeting 3. In addition, Cycle 2 involved 70 percent of students in writing activity. This is calculated by applying the amount of student participation divided by 3 at all meetings (Meeting 1 + Meeting 2 + Meeting 3). This situation suggests that the second criteria of success had been met.

Overall Findings

Based on the students ' writing results, it is discovered that the writing skills of the students gradually improved. This means that idea mapping has had a positive impact on increasing the ability of the students to write. In other words, using idea mapping could help them learn to write better. Previously, the mean score for the students was 46.25. The mean score was 59.69 in Cycle 1 and 69.85 in Cycle 2. Most students also increased their mean score. There were 15 students out of 20 (75%) whose mean scores improved and 5 students out of 20 (25%) whose mean scores did not improve. However, there were 8 students (40%) whose scores fluctuated from the previous mean score.

Furthermore, the study result yielded in teaching writing the final' recipe' of the definition mapping. The steps of the Cycle 2 strategy have indeed been successful in helping students improve their ability to write. Yet one of the definition mapping ideas, namely individual responsibility, was absent. Therefore, the principle was also enhanced in Cycle 2 to the initially formulated Cycle 1 steps which ultimately resulted in the final steps which included the following steps. First of all, the teacher asked the students leading questions. Second, the teacher connected the topic with the students' background knowledge. Third, the teacher

introduced the topic and explains the instructional objectives. Fourth, the teacher showed a picture related to the topic by sticking it on the whiteboard. Fifth, the teacher asked students to observe the picture, generate and organize their ideas through idea mapping. Sixth, the teacher informed the students about the things they should do in their groups.

In addition, the instructor discusses the role they have to perform. Seventh, each group was distributed by the teacher with other different images, large paper, and different color markers. Eighth, the teacher asked the students individually to begin writing their first draft. Ninth, the teacher guided the students in revising their writing in terms of content and organization and in grammar and vocabulary editing their writing. Tenth, to be proofread, the instructor asked the students to share their copy. Eleventh, the teacher asked the students to write their final draft, and last, the teacher asks the students the conclusion of the lesson they had learnt.

Conclusion

Based on the research findings and discussion outlined in the previous chapter, it is concluded that the correct idea mapping method, which improved the writing ability of the third semester EFL college students at Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, covered the following procedures: (1) leading students to the topic by asking questions, (2) connecting the topic to the background knowledge of the students, (3) introducing the topic and explaining the educational objectives, (4) displaying a picture of the topic by placing it on the whiteboard, (5) asking students to observe the picture, generate and organize their ideas through idea mapping, (6) informing students about what they should do in their groups, (7) distributing other different picture, large paper, and different colour markers to each group, (8) asking students to start writing their first draft individually, (9) directing students to rewrite their writing in terms of content and structure and edit their writing in terms

of grammar and vocabulary, (10) asking students to exchange their draft for proofreading, (11) asking students to write their final draft and (12) asking students to complete the lesson.

In the third semester of EFL class, idea mapping was shown to improve student writing skills at Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. The mean score of the students in Cycle 1 of the action implementation was 59.69. In Cycle 2, the mean score of the students was 69.85. In addition, the involvement of the students in writing activity also improved, particularly in generating and organizing the ideas. 65% of students were actively involved in ideas generation and 55% of students were actively involved in the organization of ideas in Cycle 1, while, 75% of the students were actively involved in generating ideas and 70% of the students were actively involved in organizing ideas in Cycle 2. In addition, 63% of the students' involvement in writing activity in Cycle 1 increased to 75% of the students' involvement in writing activity in Cycle 2.

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