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Improving Writing Skill of EFL Learners through Picture Series

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Abstract

The skill of recount paragraph writing of the fourth semester Mathematics students of Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University of Malang was still unsatisfactory. To overcome this problem, the researcher proposed one of the appropriate strategies in the teaching of recount writing using picture series. The findings indicated that using picture series had improved the students' ability in their recount paragraph writing. After the researcher conducted the first and second cycle, it was shown that the result of the second cycle improved. Only 6 of 34 students (17.15%) still received score below that of the criterion success 60. The teaching procedures used were: (1) the lecturer gave the picture series to groups of four students, (2) the lecturer explained Simple Past Tenses, vocabulary of irregular verbs, and plural nouns to the students to help them solve their problems in recount writing, and (3) the lecturer provided the vocabulary of irregular verbs and plural nouns on sheets of paper expected to be able to make their writing better. It is suggested that lecturers socialize the strategy in the lecturer's meeting, workshops, trainings, or to write articles about writing which uses picture series strategy in the students' books, or journals. Second, it is recommended that the students use picture series as a learning strategy to practice their writing ability, which can be done in their extra-curricular activity. Third, future researchers are suggested to conduct a similar study using picture series for the improvement of the teaching of recount writing.

Keywords: writing skill, EFL learners, recount paragraph, picture series

Recently, writing has received great interest not only because it plays crucial role in learning and transforming knowledge but also in promoting creativity. Writing provides a useful tool for refining and extending one's knowledge about a particular topic (Applebee, 1984). However, writing is not an easy skill to be mastered (Raimes, 1987a). According to Kroll (1997) teachers need to understand all the facets of the complex nature of writing as an intellectual activity and consequently choose the suitable method to teach it that takes into account such nature. Similarly, Reid (2002) stated that "Teaching English L2 writing differ from teaching others.

Writing is not an ability the students acquire naturally; even in their first language, it has to be taught. This means that if the English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners are not taught how to write in the new language, their writing skills will be left behind (Morley, 2005). However, teaching writing is not considered only teaching grammar, spelling, or the mechanics of the alphabet, but the learners should also see the new concepts of the use of the conventions of the genre in the new language.

Writing is a tool for the creation of ideas and the consolidation of the linguistic system by using it for communicative objectives in an interactive way. From this perspective,

writing implies the successful transmission of ideas from an addresser to an addressee via a text, and this exchange of information becomes a powerful means to motivate and encourage the development of language skills (Bougey, 1997).

In the teaching of writing, usually, the teacher encourages the students to transfer what they think or imagine into text types. The teacher can elaborate the strategy of teaching writing due to the situation the students face, and then the students use the strategy to improve their ability in writing. This activity forces both the teacher and the students to develop ideas into paragraphs.

Generally, there are two main problems in the teaching of writing particularly at the college level. First, time to practice writing is very limited since English is offered only two hours a week. Second, the class usually consists of about thirty students, who are learning together. The students do not have enough time to practice not only in writing but also in other language skills. Writing practice has not been provided satisfactorily so that students lack exercises and motivation for self-development. As a result, many students complain and find difficulties in writing.

According to Byrne (1988), writing involves the encoding of a message of some kind, that is, we translate our thoughts into language. He states that when we write, we use grammatical rules and the letters or combinations of letters which relate to the sounds we make when we speak. We do not write just one sentence or even a number of unrelated sentences. We produce a sequence of sentences arranged in a particular order and linked together in certain ways. The sequence may be very short, which consists of two or three sentences but because of the way they have been put in order and linked together, they form a coherent whole.

The research problem in this research can be formulated in a question form as follows: "How can the fourth semester students' ability in writing recount paragraphs at Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University of Malang be improved using picture series?"

Method

The researcher conducted a study called a Collaborative Classroom Action Research (CAR). The research used two cycles. Each cycle consisted of four meetings. The researcher worked together with the classroom lecture. The researcher implemented the CAR proposed by Kemmis and Mac Taggart (1998) which consists of four steps (1) planning an action, (2) implementing an action, (3) observing and (4) reflecting, while the collaborative lecture observed and recorded all the data that were found during the implementation. The collaborative lecturer also conducted the implementation for two meetings. The lecturer wanted to have an experience in implementing the strategy, so that in other times he can implement the action in his own classrooms.

In conducting this study, the researcher used the research procedures proposed by Kemmis and Mc Taggart (1998) as illustrated in Figure 3.1. The research applied a one-cycle action research at first. However, because the result did not meet the criteria of success, it was continued by the second cycle. One cycle consisted of four meetings. The meetings had one lesson plan to implement. The cycle covered planning, implementing, observing, and reflecting. The study was initiated with the general idea of how the students' writing skill improved by implementing the picture series strategy. Thus, a preliminary study was done to identify and analyze the problem that should be overcome. Following the preliminary study was designing the general plan. The researcher then implemented the strategy and the collaborative lecturer observed it. Finally, the reflection was conducted in order to identify all facts including the success and the failure in the implementation as well as the effects of it.

Table 3.1
Scoring Rubric of Evaluating the Students' Writing Products

Components of Writing	Level	Scale and Descriptor
Content: - Vocabulary related to recount writing. - Events in a chronological order	4	The content is relevant to the topic and easy to understand.
	3	The content is almost complete, relevant to the topic.
	2	The content is relevant to the topic but is not quite easy to understand.
	1	The content is not quite relevant to the topic.
Language use: - Use of Past Tense - Use of connectives, such as <i>first</i> , <i>second</i> , <i>third</i> , and <i>finally</i> .	4	No grammatical inaccuracies
	3	Some grammatical inaccuracies
	2	Numerous grammatical inaccuracy
	1	Frequent grammatical inaccuracies
Mechanics: - Spelling - Punctuation - Capitalization	4	It uses correct spelling, punctuation, and capitalization
	3	It has occasional errors of spelling, punctuation, and capitalization
	2	It has frequent errors of spelling, punctuation, and capitalization
	1	It has no mastery of convention – dominated by errors of spelling, punctuation, and capitalization

Findings

The data obtained from the students' writing products showed that the students' achievement of the first cycle lay among the score of 33 to 75. The data were taken from the writing quiz conducted on February 9, 2015. It was found that from the first cycle, 18 students achieved the score of 60 - 75 (51,4% out of 34 students), 17 students achieved the score of 33 – 58 (48,6% out of 34 students).

Table 4.1
Students' Mistakes in Recount Writing

No	Mistakes	Corrections
1.	Contents Not quite easy to understand	
2.	Language Use - He went home school to played in main road - First prepared some food for stock - Second they talked and laugh because they long not meet	Language Use - He went home from school but played in the main road - First, she prepared some food for stock - Second, they talked and laughed because they did not

		meet for a long time
3.	Mechanics Several, activities, in food of, fishes	Mechanics Several, activities, in front of, fish

Moreover, the data obtained of the students' writing products showed that the students' achievement of the second cycle lay among the score of 50 - 83. The data were taken from the writing quiz conducted on March 3, 2015. The researcher found that from the second cycle, 29 students achieved the score of 60 - 83 (82.8% out of 35 students), 6 students achieved the score of 50 - 58 (17.15% out of 35 students).

From the above data, the achievement of the students improved. The improvement of the students score had met the criteria of success because there were 82.8% of the students achieved the score of 60. Thus, the students' achievement in writing recounts had achieved the target score. In this case, the researcher and collaborator compared the results of the students' achievement of writing recount with the criteria of success. It was found that the strategy of implementing the picture series had met the criteria of success. It means that the teaching of recount writing using picture series in the second cycle had improved in terms of contents, language use, and mechanics.

Discussions

Referring to the findings, the researcher considers that the use of the picture series strategy in writing recount had made the students have a great deal of progress. This could be seen from the finding of the analysis of the students' commenting, responding, questioning, and the students' writing products show significant improvement. The improvement of the students' progress can be seen from the score of the students' achievement. They achieved the higher score from each cycle of the action.

After the actions of the first cycle conducted in the first up to the fourth meeting, it was found that from the first cycle, there were 18 students achieved the target score. It means that only 51.6% out of 34 students had reached the target score 60 as set in the criteria of success. So, it can be concluded that the criteria of success was not achieved yet. In the second cycle, the improvement reached the target score as stated in the criteria of success. The improvement increased because there were 29 students got the score of 60 to 83. It means that 82.8% out of 34 students had reached the target score 60.

Conclusions

Using picture series strategy had made the students' recount writing ability improved. To come to success, several procedures in teaching and learning activities should be followed. First, the lecturer gives a pictures series to each group of four to five of the students to be observed more clearly. Second, the lecturer teaches grammar to the students about the simple past tense, and plural nouns by asking the students to make some sentences orally on the bases of picture series. Third, the lecturer asks the students to find ideas of the picture series.

The teaching of recount writing using picture series has some strength. First, the picture series provides the opportunity for the students to share ideas in improving their writing ability and to show their individual ability. Second, the picture series help the students improve their ability in writing recounts. Third, picture series can encourage the students to be actively involved in writing recount. Fourth, the pictures also suit to the students' real lives and their interests.

The use of picture series strategy help the students make a great deal of progress. The findings indicate that the students' results in writing recount paragraphs showed significant improvement. The students achieved the higher score from the first cycle to the second cycle.

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