



The Use of Journal Writing to Improve High School Students` Writing

Masdianti

masdianti.unsa@gmail.com

Universitas Sawerigading Makassar, Indonesia

Risma Asriani

rismagenisa.unsa@gmail.com

Universitas Sawerigading Makassar, Indonesia

Titin Suhartini

tutinsuhartini.unsa@gmail.com

Universitas Sawerigading Makassar, Indonesia

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Abstract

The research aimed to find out whether journal writings developed students' writing skill. The method employed in this research was a pre-experimental design, where a pretest, a treatment and a posttest were given to measure students' writing skill. The instrument of this research was writing tests which consisted of two guided themes. The population of this research was the ninth-year students of SMP Negeri 18 Makassar in academic year of 2017/2018. The total sample of this research consisted of thirty students. A cluster random sampling technique was used. The data collected was analyzed through descriptive statistical analysis. The results of the paired-sample t-test of this research indicated that there was a slight development of the students' posttest scores after applying journals in their assignments within six meetings. The students mentioned that the interesting themes made them excited to write. In writing the personal narrative, the students were trained to find the stories they think are best for sharing with others. Therefore, the data analysis tended to show the relation between journal writings and the students' skill in writing. However, not all students can be easily encouraged to write.

Keywords: Writing skill, Journal Writing, high school students, reflective writing

Introduction

Many efforts have been made to solve problem faced by students in learning writing skill. Writing is very important for students to express their knowledge, thought, experience. It can be expressed in the form of an essay, a paragraph, a letter, a short story and others. For instance, Ismail, (2017), Kelly (2017) and Smith (2013) stated that students' competence with writing assignments could help them increase their writing skills. Writing can also be found in various forms of electronic media such as social networking posts (e.g., WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, Line, Twitter), blogs and emails to describe current events and daily social interactions.

There are some factors that influence students' ability to write, such as reading habit, interest of students' ability to learn, writing strategies, interesting topics, length of teaching time and suitable teaching techniques. These facts make writing skill a central role for students. Contextually in learning English especially writing, we found that students at SMPN 18 Makassar expressed difficulties in Writing in English because the learning activities were dominated by instructions that asked the students to memorize grammar rules, definition of sentences, paragraphs and so on. Thus, one way that students can convey ideas and feelings is by writing a journal. Journal, in this case, is a 'day book' (Klug, 2002). Klug mentioned that a journal is a place to record daily happenings, a tool for self-discovery, an aid to concentration, a mirror for the soul, a place to produce and comprehend ideas, a safety valve for the emotions, a training ground for the writer, and a good friend and confidant.

Faroek (2013), Ikayati (2009), and Kurnianingsih (2009) found that involving journal writing for students in the classroom can be an effective way to develop students' capability in writing. However, teachers need to support students by providing them qualified and understandable inputs for writing activities to prevent the perception that English is difficult and to stimulate students in expressing ideas and to guide them in writing process. Hence, based on the studies above, we tried implement this journal writing to develop our students' writing skill. Thus, our study aimed to see whether journal could be effective for the third-grade students of SMP Negeri 18 Makassar.

Literature Review

The concept of writing

Some experts have stated various definitions of writing. According to Brown (2001), writing is a thinking process. Furthermore, he claimed that it can be planned and given with unlimited number of revisions before its release. Besides, Elbow (1973) in Brown (2001) also said that writing is a two-step process. The first process is figuring out the meaning and the second is putting the meaning into language. Moreover, Harmer (2004) stated that writing encourages students to focus on accurate of language use.

Based on the definitions above, writing is a productive process done through some stages and the writing production is in the form of readable text that should be meaningful for everyone who read it. Therefore, the process of teaching and learning in writing should be run well by giving a good input and effective activities to improve student's writing skill.

According to BSNP (2006), the teaching of writing skill has some objectives and indicators. The teaching and learning writing skill in Junior High School is targeted to achieve a functional level which should be able to communicate adequately both in spoken and written form to complete daily activities. Moreover, students should be able to create monologue short functional texts and essay in form of descriptive, narrative, procedure and report. Besides, student should be able to develop linguistic competence namely using grammar and vocabularies.

The evaluation of writing

According to Jacob (1981) in Brown (2001), evaluation on the teaching writing should be done to measure the students' ability in writing. The first category is Content; it should have unity, coherence and continuity, and should be adequately developed. The second is Organization. The purpose of organizing material in writing involve coherence, order of importance, general to specific, specific to general, chronological order and spatial order of pattern. The third is Vocabulary; it is always needed to express idea, the lack of vocabulary makes it difficult to express idea; the next is Language use. It involves correct language and point of grammar in writing description and other form of writing; and the last is Mechanics; that is at least two main parts of mechanic in writing, namely punctuation and capitalization.

Journal writing

Journal writing is has been considered to be able to encourage critical reflection. According to Al-Rawahi and Al-Balushi (2015), journal writing could engage students' thinking through different cognitive processes such as prediction, brainstorming, reflection, and questioning. It encourages students to express their thoughts, interests, and curiosity about what happen around them and encounter new ideas. It is often used as a class brainstorming activity; it is used primarily to give students confidence that their ideas, observations, emotions, and writing will be accepted without criticism. Journal writing can encourage students to be responsible for their own learning; students tend to develop higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Dunfee et al., 2008).

Additionally, Ikeyati (2009) indicated that one effective way to teach writing is by encouraging students to write their daily activities both through diary studies and journal writing. These two techniques have been increasingly popular in language teaching and learning, because they are good to implicate writing recount. The activities brought attention to the ways to get ideas, to get reason, to get structure and to arrange in all ways for writing.

Similarly, Kurnianingsih (2009) conducted an experimental study in writing recount with 76 junior high school students. A pretest was conducted before the experimental research was taken (an essay test in the form of writing a recount text in the short paragraph). Furthermore, for more supporting data, questionnaire was also given. The result of this research showed that there was in improvement of students' achievement in writing recount who wrote diary as a strategy for writing. For students who wrote diary as the source for the recount text writing had better achievement than those who did not use diary as the source of the recount text writing.

Moreover, Faroek (2013) reported that the students of the experimental group outperformed in both writing skills and teaching performance. The study presented some recommendations to maximize the practical use of journal writing and suggested some topics for further research. Based on the above-mentioned related studies, the current study aimed to answer the question whether students' writing skill could be developed through journal writings.

Methodology

Research design and instruments

This research used tests as the instruments to respond the problem statement. "Can writing skill of students be developed through journal writings?". The method in this research was a pre-experimental with a one group pretest and a posttest design. It aimed to find out whether or not the third-grade students of SMP

Negeri 18 Makassar can improve their writing skill through writing journals. The treatment was between a pretest and a posttest. For the treatment, we taught writings through journal writings for six times (Gay, 2006).

The instruments of this research were a test of writing through journal writings. It was based on a five classification of writing skill (content, organization, vocabulary, language use and mechanics). The tests were given to the students as a pretest and a posttest. The pretest was used to measure the prior knowledge of the students in writing, while the posttest was aimed to see the improvement of students writing skill after giving to them the treatment of journal writings in writing class. The test consisted of some parts, the students were asked to write the reflection of their own experiences by relating their knowledge or experience that they have known before into their journal or diary. In this case, the students were given a blank paper to write journals.

Site and participant of the study

The population in this research was the third-grade students of SMP Negeri 18 Makassar in academic year 2017 / 2018. There are nine classes and the number of students in each class was 36 students, so that the total number of populations was 324 students.

This research was applied cluster random sampling technique, meaning one of a nine classes was taken as the sample. The class selected randomly, which the group was selected to represent the population. The total sample consists of 30 students. The reason using clusters random sampling technique because the class consisted of the students who have different achievement and ability.

Instructional materials and treatments

Before giving the treatment, we administered a pretest. It lasted for 60 minutes. 30 students were in the class joining the writing test. The students were given two guided themes. The writing practice was surveyed by using table of score based on the five classifications (content, organization, vocabulary, language use and mechanics). It was administered in order to get data on the students' prior knowledge. The researchers asked the students to write about the themes given. The writing test was consisting of two guided themes with allocated time for 60 minutes.

Afterwards, a treatment was given after the pretest. We described about a journal writing and its procedure to the students. This process was conducted for a month with six meetings +after giving treatments, the posttest was conducted. It was just the same with the pretest. The posttest was employed to find out the value of the treatment whether the result of the posttest was better than the pretest. In the posttest writing activity with two themes was given as same as the pretest. This test aimed to find out whether there was a development in students writing after giving treatments.

The course started by explaining about journals, some suggestions for starting journaling and benefits in writing skill and activities to the students. Before the class started, the researchers here as teachers made a list of interesting topics for students to write and discussed them. Then, students learnt about grammars and how to write a narrative journal. For examples, in students' notebook, students were asked to find a blank page, on top of it they asked to write student's name and write the date and where the students were right now and put capital letter on the month. After that, students were asked to title their writing, the title was called 'Yesterday'. Students were asked to

write about their day yesterday in form of simple past writing. Students made one paragraph of things that happened yesterday and so on.

In other day, students learnt about a descriptive writing. The aimed was for students to write about a single chosen abject. For example, the teachers used some questions to help students in describing what the idea is, what the things look like. Describe the things with words about senses, how is it different from others, what makes it unique and analyze whole thing into smaller parts.

To encourage students' motivation in learning, teachers made some games related to the topics before starting the lesson. For example, playing association game with students. Students were divided into four groups, each of the group given one word and ask them to create the association chain for it. Each word should be connected into the last word. Students were asked to write a story by using their own words. This game aimed to help them finding their creativity and teamwork.

Technique of data analysis

This research used descriptive statistics in analyzing the data. Descriptive statistics that were used in this research consists of the sum number, mean, standard deviation number, frequencies table and also the t-test value, and hypothesis testing in five categories (Content, Organization, Vocabulary, Language Use and Mechanic) by using SPSS 15 Version (Roever & Phakiti, 2018).

Findings

The findings of this research deal with the students score of pretest and posttest, the mean score, standard deviation, minimum and maximum score, as well as the t-test value, and hypothesis testing in five categories (Content, Organization, Vocabulary, Language Use and Mechanic). These findings were described in the following section.

Table1.

The mean score and standard deviation of pretest and posttest

Pre-test	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum	N
Content	4.7333	1.59597	2.00	7.00	30
Organization	4.8333	1.36668	2.00	7.00	30
Vocabulary	4.4333	1.59056	2.00	8.00	30
language use	4.0333	1.06620	2.00	6.00	30
mechanic	4.6333	1.60781	2.00	8.00	30
Valid N					30
Post-test	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum	N
Content	7.3667	1.15917	5.00	10.00	30
Organization	7.2000	.92476	6.00	9.00	30
Vocabulary	7.1333	1.35782	4.00	10.00	30
language use	5.9000	1.02889	4.00	8.00	30
mechanic	6.8333	.94989	5.00	9.00	30
Valid N					30

Table 1 shows that the students' posttest was higher than pretest. The mean score of content in pretest was 4.7333, whereas the posttest was 7.3667; for organization category, students' pretest was 4.8333 while the posttest was 7.2000; Vocabulary pretest was 4.4333 while the posttest was 7.1333; Language Use Pretest was 4.0333 whereas the Posttest was 5.9000; and for Mechanic Pretest was 4.6333 while the Posttest was 6.8333. Based on the descriptive statistics above, the students' writing ability after giving treatment (Posttest score) was better.

To know the level of significance of the pretest and posttest, we used t-test analysis. The table 2 showed that a significant difference was found between these two tests. The t-test of Content 11.334 was greater than significance value .001; the Organization 9.249 was greater than significance .001; the Vocabulary 9.117 was greater than significance .000; the Language Use 10.509 was greater than .001; the Mechanic 10.159 was greater than .001; and the t-test total 13.068 was greater than .001. It means that there was a significant difference between the mean score of the pretest and the mean score of the posttest in students' writing before and after giving treatment of journal writing. In other words, journal writing develops the students' writing ability.

Table 2.

The t-test of Student's Improvement

(Pre-Post) test	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Content	11.334	29	<.001
Organization	9.249	29	<.001
Vocabulary	9.117	29	<.001
language use	10.506	29	<.001
mechanic	10.159	29	<.001
Total	13.068	29	<.001

Discussion

The result of data collected through writing test was explained in the previous section. It showed that the students' ability in writing was better on posttest than on pretest. It was supported by the mean score and standard deviation in five categories of students on posttest was higher than pretest. Likewise, the value of t – test was greater than the value of significance ($13.068 > .001$). It means that there was a developing of the students' writing ability from each component of writing, Content, Vocabulary, Organization, Language Use, and Mechanic after giving treatment through journal writing, showing that the attitude, the approach or the strategy used in learning process had an effect to students that they can catch the message conveyed by the teachers. Studies have shown that writing diary is an alternative technique in teaching writing (Asti, 2009; and Faroek, 2013) with their research showed that there was an improvement of students' achievement than those who did not use diary as the source of the recount text writing.

There are series of actions between teacher and students in the teaching and learning process in writing based on reciprocal relationships that take place to achieve goals. Writing skill is a skill that is rather complicated because we must pay attention to Content, Organization, Vocabulary, Language Use and Mechanic. If it is wrong in writing vocabulary or something else, then the meaning will be wrong. Journal writing engages students' thinking through different cognitive processes such as prediction, brainstorming, reflection, and questioning (Al-Rawahi and Al-

Balushi, 2015). It encourages students to express their thoughts, interest and curiosity which often used as a class brainstorming activity. The activities brought attention to the ways to get ideas, to get reason, to get structure and arrange in all ways for writing (Ikayati, 2009).

The research which was conducted at SMP Neg.18 Makassar showed that the students' skill in writing developed and this research in line with the previous researchers. However, there are several things that should be underlined in relation to what differentiates this research from the previous one. Besides the difference lied about research, this also lied on the teachers' sense of humor which can help to relieve tense situations during teaching and learning process. To observe, to feel or to convey humor, someone needs sense of humor (Apte, 2002). As well as a teacher, teacher who has a good sense of humor can make the class be interesting. Next was the positive attitude that teacher always apply to help overcome difficulties. Teacher is a model in the classroom that every action will have a big impact on students.

The use of journal writing to improve students' writing skills is very well known. Even the researchers were inspired by western film entitled "Freedom Writers". By writing regularly, we can clear or reduce our thoughts. As Ron Klug (2002), he has put it a place to record daily happenings. Then we can see in a different way from the previous things. Then we just must write whatever we want into our journal. If you have an artistic soul, you can add decorations to beautify the journal. Although this journaling activity is normal, it has tremendous impact on our lives. That's why for those who have never tried writing journal, take a book and a pen, prepare time and write.

Conclusion

Based on the results of observations that have been carried out previously, it showed the lack or inability of students to write a sentence or paragraph. Although we all know that the teachers must have done various ways to improve the students' skills, but they have not shown satisfactory results. A habit becomes an important point in improving students' skills. Thus, we know that daily writing habits can be one way to improve students' writing skills. By knowing the role of parents, schools and student environments, it can provide changes related to student preferences in learning. Therefore, it is necessary to motivate students from the simplest level, namely from their family, teachers and schools so that students can study hard to be successful forever.

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