THE USE OF DIARY WRITING TO IMPROVE EIGHT GRADE STUDENTS’ WRITING SKILL AT SMPN 3 MALANG

Euis Fauziah Ramadhani
English Department, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, University of Muhammadiyah Malang, eischiy@gmail.com

Riski Lestiono
English Department, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, University of Muhammadiyah Malang; riskilestiono@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT
The research was focused on solving the problems in a classroom and finding out that the diary writing can improve the students’ writing achievement. The research was classroom action research which was conducted in two cycles. The subjects of this research were eight grade students of SMPN 3 Malang, VIII-1 class with total number of students 32. Diary writing was the treatment that had been given during 2 cycles. Additionally, the instruments to collect the data were test and observation field notes. After implementing the diary writing in two kinds of text, descriptive and recount, and analysing the collected data, it is found that the students’ score gradually improved specifically when they wrote recount text. Besides, the changing topics in every meeting were needed to make the students more interested in writing. The researchers found two weaknesses at the first cycle; those were students’ lateness in submitting their diaries which made the researcher also late in giving the feedbacks, and the students’ limited vocabulary which made them tend to use simple sentences and the same vocabularies. Dealing with those weaknesses, the researchers used award strategy. The researchers provided different emoticon stickers that rewarded the students’ punctuality and creativity. In addition, the researchers also conducted a pair work writing activity in the second cycle in order to make the students learn from their friends.

Key words: Diary Writing, Writing Skill, SMPN 3 Malang

INTRODUCTION
One of the roles of writing skill is giving tremendous contributions in education because writings will become permanent documents that can be accessed now or in the future. Due to the fact, some people have difficulties in writing because it is different from speaking in terms of the complexity of the writing process and interrelationship of its components. Starting the paragraph, considering in the diction as well as grammar, developing the idea which must be relevant, and also having the communication in written text are the complicated things that will be faced by the writer. Writing is seen to be the most difficult skill [1]. In the same view, it is also claimed that writing is the most difficult skill for students to acquire, as it requires the readers to understand and interpret what has
been written [2]. In addition, there are some words that are effectively used in written form rather than in spoken form. For example word ‘furthermore’ which is efficiently used in written form while in spoken form, people tend to use word ‘besides’ or ‘also’ in order to replace the word ‘furthermore’.

Given that good writing skill for the students is worthwhile, nonetheless the fact shows that the students have low ability in writing. SMPN 3 Malang has high requirement in term of academic and non-academic grades in every student’s enrollment, and thus the students mostly have good proficiency in English. However, it does not mean that there are no students’ weaknesses in English. Although the students have their own strength in some English skills, they still make some mistakes in writing in which they mostly still do not realize their own weaknesses. In eighth grade, for example, students are taught descriptive text and some students have problems in punctuation, the use of article, the use of additional ‘s’ and ‘es’ (V1+s/es) in present tense, and subject-verb agreement. As the consequence, it needs a special treatment to make them realize their mistakes and weaknesses so they can improve it in their further practices. On the other hand, class activities for junior high school are dominant with reading activity and doing the textbook assessment making the students have less chance to explore their thoughts and feelings in written form. When the English teacher conducts writing assessment and asks the students to write something, they tend to copy the examples given by the textbook without adding other creativities in sentences as well as the ideas.

Seeing the importance of writing and the findings of the previous observation, the researchers were interested in applying diary or journal writing to help the students in their writing ability. The best way to learn to write is by writing in which it is like letter to yourself [3]. It means keeping writing diary or journal is advantageous to explore self-potential like the ability in exploring the subject to write about and the capability to communicate in the written form which help the readers understand the ideas. Constantly, writing a diary will help to preserve the precious idea, insight, and memories.

Concerning on the strength of diary writing, the researchers were interested in applying this method in junior high school level specifically to eight grade students of SMPN 3 Malang class VIII-1. The lack of
students’ chance as well as the motivation to explore their ideas in written form partly cause the low students’ writing ability. It attracted the researchers to conduct this study in order to improve students’ writing skill using diary writing.

**METHODOLOGY**

Action research is the appropriate research method for the formulated statement of problem and research objective in this research. Action research is a type of applied social research that differs from other types of research with regard to the closeness of the researcher’s involvement in the action process. In this current classroom action research, the researchers collected and analyzed both quantitative and qualitative data. It is believed that in doing classroom action research, both quantitative and qualitative methods are appropriate, because it needs three types of data for having triangulation, such as students’ score, observation of students’ behavior, and teacher evaluation [4]. The researchers were dealing with numbers of the students’ scores that were got from test. The quantitative data were aimed to show the students’ writing achievement. Besides, the researchers got the qualitative data from the observation notes in which they wrote the field notes about students’ responses and behavior during classroom activity.

The subjects of this research were the eighth grade students of VIII-1 in SMPN 3 Malang in academic year 2014-2015. The class consisted of 32 students, 14 males and 18 females. This class was chosen as the subject since the students had some problems in writing which needed to be improved. They were given the treatment which was diary writing to improve their writing ability. The treatment was implemented continuously to them for two weeks. This research was conducted with the researchers as the teachers and the main roles in the acting stages, based upon the classical concept of action research in which there are four steps in each cycle of action research, those are planning, acting, observing, and reflecting.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The implementation of diary writing to improve students’ writing ability was the discussion in this classroom action research. There were two cycles on this classroom action research that had different topic as well. After implementing diary writing in two cycles that were in total of 8 meetings,
The researchers found that the students’ score improved significantly.

The first cycle of this research consisted of six meetings which had different topic in each meeting. In the first until forth meeting, the students wrote the diary or did their writing tasks in the form of descriptive text which had different topic in each meeting. It was adjusted because the descriptive text was the only text that the students had already learnt. At the fifth and sixth meeting, the researchers explained another type of text called recount text. In each meeting, the students were asked to write their descriptive text (first till forth meetings) individually with the given topic, those were:

1. Describing the picture of infringement of the prohibition or instruction
2. Describing a special place where their parents usually ask them to go
3. Describing a game that they usually played with their friend
4. Describing their own favorite thing

In the fifth and sixth meeting, the students were still asked to write individually but it has different form of text, recount text. The topic on the fifth meeting was ‘writing a recount text of their pairs’ activities on the last weekend’; while on the sixth meeting, the topic was ‘writing a recount text of their previous day activity’.

In this cycle, there were two weaknesses in the implementation of diary writing; among of those weaknesses were: first, there were twelve students who did not submit the diary in the determined time which was on every Monday. Consequently, the researchers could not give the feedbacks on the diary on time either. Second, there were fifteen students who wrote only simple sentence which used almost same verbs in each day specifically when they were told to write descriptive text. As a consequence, they could not learn new vocabularies and develop their ideas.

However, the result of writing test in the first cycle was higher than in the pre-test. The result of the pre-test showed that there were 12 students who got the score under 80, and there were 7 students who got a score equal to the passing grade, 80. After the implementation of diary writing in the first cycle, the number of students who got the score under eighty decreased. There were only 8 students who got the score under 80, and there were 5 students who got the exact score as the passing grade, 80. The researchers measured the students’ average
scores in the pre-test and in the post-test 1 or after diary writing treatment in the first cycle in order to know the students’ improvement. The researcher did the subtraction between the students’ average score in the cycle 1 and students’ average score in the pre-test. Then it was divided by the students’ average score in the pre-test. The result of the researcher’s calculation of students’ improvement percentage showed that the students’ score enhanced 3.2%.

Although the students’ score improved 3.2% during the diary writing implementation in the first cycle, the researcher declared that the first cycle was unsuccessful because of two reasons. First, there were eight students who still got scores under the passing grade. Second, the students still had difficulty in expounding their ideas which made the students tend to use simple sentences with the same vocabularies.

At the next cycle, the researchers still used diary writing strategy in improving students’ writing ability. In this cycle, the researchers asked the students to write their diary in the form of recount text. The researchers also used reward strategy in order to cope with the weaknesses on the first cycle. The researchers gave different expression of stickers which indicated the punctuality in submitting the diary and the creativity in expounding the idea on the diary. It was purposed to motivate the students in writing their diary as creatively as possible and submitting it on time. Moreover, the researchers also gave pair work writing recount text activity in the class where the students were asked to make the recount text based on the provided pictures. This pair work activity was aimed to give the students chance to learn from their friends. The provided pictures were given to help the students arrange their recount text.

The students showed progressive improvement which could be seen at their scores. All of the students reached the passing grade. However there were 7 students who got the score equal to the passing grade. The researchers subtracted the students’ average score in the cycle 2 and the students’ average score in the cycle 1, then divided the result of the subtraction by the students’ average score in the cycle 1. The improvement of students’ abilities in writing could be measured in the number of 3.5%. The result of the calculation showed that the treatments which had been given by the researchers in both cycles influenced
students’ learning process so that they could achieve higher score and improve their writing skills.

If it is measured from their abilities before they are given the treatment, the students’ improvement reached 6.9%. It was gotten from subtraction of students’ average score in cycle 2 with the students’ average score in the pre-test. Then, it was divided by the students’ average score in the pre-test. The students had done a great effort in improving their writing skill and decreasing the number of errors in each writing product which was different from the first where the diary writing treatment had not been implemented yet.

During diary writing implementation, the students seemed to be more relaxed in learning English specifically writing. 25 out of 32 students wrote their diary in more than 10 sentences. Even, there were five students who wrote their diary in 2 pages and also gave some pictures on the diary. In diary, people provide frequent reports on the events and experiences of their daily lives [5]. Most of the students responded positively to the feedbacks which were given by the researchers. Some of them said that the way of advising was so cute completed by emoticon that made them happy as well as highly motivated to improve their abilities specifically in writing. They felt that writing diary was easier because they could write anything. The treatments also contributed to improve the students’ motivation so that they were encouraged to encounter about their weaknesses. It is also believed that journal writing can be used to energize what we do and how we do it [6]. As a medium for learning, it can be used in formal courses, our professional practice, or any aspect of informal learning.

To sum up, diary writing can be an alternative way in improving the students’ writing ability specifically in the recount text. This activity was the place for students to write freely without fear of being evaluated as well as the activity that can encourage students’ communication ability specifically in written form. Further, keeping writing diary enhanced the students’ motivation in writing that influences their achievements as well.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

There are some conclusions that can be drawn and presented as follows: Firstly, in implementing diary writing strategy to improve the students’ writing skill, the
researchers have done some topic changes in each meeting. The topics were about the students’ favourite or familiar thing or the students’ own experiences. Moreover, the researchers also did a change in the text forms which were from descriptive text to recount text.

Secondly, during the diary implementation, the researchers faced two weaknesses in the first cycle. Those were the students’ lateness in submitting their diary which was every Monday and the students’ limited vocabulary which made them not able to elaborate their idea and tend to write simple sentences using same vocabularies. The researchers used award strategy to cope with those problems, giving different emotion stickers to represent the students’ creativity and punctuality. Besides, the researchers conducted pair work writing task to give the students chance to learn from their friends.

According to the findings, the students were better in developing their idea in the form of recount text than in descriptive text. When the students were told to write a story in the form of descriptive text, the students had a tendency to write using simple sentences and same vocabularies. It was affected by the students’ confusion in writing their idea in the form of descriptive text which only focused on the certain object, and the students’ lack of vocabularies specifically in adjective. On the contrary, the students were able to expand their idea when they had to write a recount text. The students easily began to write the stories using various vocabularies because recount text’s focus was on the students’ experiences. It also could be said that the students were the main characters of their own stories. To sum up, the implementation of diary writing as the students’ additional writing practice markedly gave positive impact in improving the students’ writing skill.

In order to develop the English teaching quality, the researchers would like to share the suggestions for teaching and learning development specifically in writing. First, the students should keep writing their diary in the form of any text as their additional writing practice outside the classroom activity. Second, the teachers should conduct more English exposure activity concerning on writing whether inside or outside the classroom. Third, the next researchers should give diary writing in other kinds of text.
REFERENCES


