

IMPROVING STUDENTS' WRITING SKILL USING A FOUR-PHASE TECHNIQUE

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Abstract

This article describes a classroom action research held in writing class using a four-phase technique to improve the eleventh grade students' writing skill and improve classroom situation. The method used in the research is classroom action research was conducted in two cycles. Each cycle included four stages: planning, implementing, observing, and reflecting. The research data were collected by using observation, interview, document, photograph and test (pre-test and post-test). The data were analyzed through descriptive analysis which consists of assembling the data, coding the data, comparing the data, building interpretation, and reporting the outcomes for the qualitative data and descriptive statistics for the quantitative data. The research findings show that a four-phase technique is able to improve students' writing skill and classroom situation. It shows that there was an improvement of the students' writing skill before and after the research.

Key words: classroom action research, writing skill, a four-phase technique

Writing skill is specific abilities which help writers put their thoughts into words in a meaningful form and mentally interact with the message. Writing skill helps the learner gain independence, comprehensibility, fluency, and creativity in writing. If learners have mastered this skill, they will be able to write so that they

can not only read what they have written, but other speakers of that language can read and understand it. Here are some kinds of writing skill that the students are expected to master: comprehensibility skill for writing includes understanding that writing is communicating messages or information. Fluency skill for writing includes recognizing the linear sequence of sounds, mastering writing motions and letter shapes, recognizing the chunking of words, recognizing the need for space between words, and writing quickly. Creativity skill for writing includes the ability to write freely anything the learner wants to write. Independence is the ability to function in a given area without depending upon another's help. Independence in reading and writing is the ability to read and write anything one can say or understand in his or her language without depending upon another's help. Comprehension is the ability to grasp something mentally and the capacity to understand ideas and facts. Fluency is the ability to read, speak, or write easily, smoothly, and expressively.

According to Harris (1993: 10), writing is a process that occurs over a period of time, particularly if the writer takes account the sometimes extended periods of thinking that precede initial draft. In writing, the writer needs a time to do some processes inside. The length of the time is different among writers. Some need a longer time to just think about what to write before making the initial draft.

The next definition is given by Byrne (1997: 1). He states that writing is producing a sequence of sentences arranged in a particular order and linked together in certain ways. A sequence of sentences whether it is short or long after being put in order and linked together, they will form a coherent whole. This coherent whole is

called a text. A text may consist of one paragraph or more. Langan (2001: 5) points out that a paragraph is a short paper of around 150 to 200 words. It usually consists of an opening point called a topic sentence followed by a series of sentences which support that point.

Bell and Burnaby in Nunan (1989: 36) say that writing is an extremely complex cognitive activity in which the writer is required to demonstrate control of a number of variables simultaneously. At the sentence level these include control of content, format, sentence structure, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling, and letter formation.

Based on the theories stated above, it can be concluded that writing is a process that occurs over a period of time to produce a sequence of sentences arranged in a particular order and linked together in certain ways that is cohesive and coherent. In writing, there are some aspects that should be concerned by a writer to write well. They are content, organization, word choice or vocabulary, language use, and mechanics (spelling and punctuation).

Generally, in this research, the writing problems identified through pre-test, interview, questionnaire, and observation that students had difficulty in producing a grammatically correct sentence, expressing their idea logically, using the appropriate words, producing cohesive and coherence text, and producing accurate spelling and correct punctuation. They had low in writing skill. Besides, during writing class, it was identified that: (1) teacher does not use interactive media; (2) students do not participate actively in learning process; (3) students get bored with

the monotonous technique of teaching; and (4) the classroom situation is very noisy.

Those problems were mainly caused by five things: (1) teacher does not use interesting media, methods, and techniques in teaching; (2) the students do not like English subject because they think it is a difficult one; (3) the topic is not interesting for the students; (4) the students dislike write something; and (5) teacher speaks in Indonesian during the lesson, so the students are not familiar with English words.

With a purpose to overcome the problems, the researcher interested to conducted classroom action reseach that attempted to improve students' writing skill through the implementation of a four-phase technique. A Four-Phase Technique is a teaching technique that divides learning activities into four phases: Need phase, Attention phase, Visualization phase, and Action phase (Monroe in Ross, 1974: 185). They are put in a sequence, as follows: (1) writing ideas that they pay attention more; (2) knowing their needs in writing; (3) visualizing their ideas clearly based on their own imagination and experiences of life; and (4) acting the writing confidently without any burden of making mistakes (Carnegie, 1971: 228).

This technique follows clear steps from warming up to round up phases. It is by requiring attention through channelling learners' imagination by Oral Composition to help them get ideas quickly. The idea of this activity is that the teacher and class build up a narrative together. It continues with Sentence Writing to guide students write imaginative characters, setting, plot, and theme. The

activity is done to fulfil the students' needs to produce accurate sentences in order. It is for the purpose of avoiding more mistakes. Then, to visualize their work is done by doing Co-operative writing to reconstruct story from the model to be worked through by every student. Finally the students do the action to write by Written Composition designed to help them organize their writing clearly and coherently with cohesive devices after getting feedback from the teacher and peers.

The writer recommends using A Four-Phase Technique as it can give solutions to problems of students in writing. Firstly, it is by requiring attention through Oral Composition to help them get ideas quickly. Secondly, it is by checking their grammar, spelling, and punctuation in the Sentence Writing activity. Every groups write their works on the board and let other groups revise the grammar errors and mistakes in spelling and punctuation. The teacher writes possible ideas to help them revising their short stories.

Thirdly, it is by requiring every student to add or combine their imaginative stories in Co-operative writing.. And lastly, it is by requiring a direct writing guidance using sentence styles in English. The students can develop that story by Written Composition activity to renew the setting, plot, or characters based on their own imagination. They just revise the setting or add more conflicts to be looked new. It is designed to help students organize their ideas of writing clearly and coherently into elements of stories after getting feedback from teachers and peers.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was carried out in MAN 1 Surakarta in the academic year 2011/2012. The subject of this research is the eleventh grade students of MAN 1 in the academic year of 2010/2011. The method used in this research is action research method. Mills (2006: 6) defines action research as any systematic inquiry conducted by teacher researchers, principals, school counsellors, or other stakeholders in the teaching learning environment, to gather information about the ways that their particular school operate how they teach, and how well their students learn. This information is gathered with goals of gaining insight, developing reflective practice, effecting positive changes in the school environment (and on educational practices in general), and improving student outcomes and the lives of those involved.

This action research follows the stages of action research which are proposed by McNiff (1992: 22).

1. Planning: how the teacher make the students learn to imaginative writing. The teacher tries to use A Four-Phase Technique accompanied by pictures to help the students get ideas and instrumental music to condition class situation.
2. Acting: the teacher applies A Four-Phase Technique. Every time students do the task activity, it is accompanied by instrumental music to guide them to the right track of learning.
3. Observing: at the same time the teacher observes whether using A Four-Phase Technique, the students writing skills are improved, whether pictures and instrumental music can control class situation. It is a step to observe the

effects of the critically informed action in the context in which it occurs. The researcher observes the students' activities during the teaching and learning process. The result of the observation was recorded on observation sheets as the data. The data collected can be used as basic to decide what activity would involve in the next meetings.

4. Reflecting: the students' skills are improving in terms of getting ideas to write and wrote into paragraphs, but possibly there are many grammatical mistakes in writing the ideas. Therefore, the next cycle then is done to omit the grammatical mistakes in imaginative writing.

In this classroom action research, the researcher used some techniques to collect qualitative and quantitative data. The researcher used tests to get the data as the technique of collecting quantitative data in this research. To collect the qualitative data, the researcher used some technique in the following: interview, observation, document analysis, and photographs

After collecting data, the next steps of study is analyzing the data obtained from observation, interview, document and test. According to McKernan (1996) in Burns (1999: 156-160) there are five steps in analyzing the qualitative data. They are: Assembling the data, Coding the data, Comparing the data, Building interpretations, and Reporting the outcomes.

The result of the tests (pre-test and post test) were analyzed by using a statistical technique to find the students' mean score. The data from the test were analyzed in order to prove whether or not implementing the used of a four-phase technique to teach writing skill.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

After the implementing a four-phase technique to improve students' writing skill, the researcher got some results dealing with both writing skill and class situation. The result are presented below:

Table of The Improvement of Students' Achievement

Aspects	C	O	V	LU	M	Total
Pre-test	19.92	12.20	11.25	10.50	3.42	56.42
Cycle 1 Test	22.88	14.17	12.92	13.83	3.58	67.37
Cycle 2 Test	25.63	14.17	15.42	15.00	4.04	73.58

C: Content O: Organization V: Vocabulary LU: Language Use M: Mechanics

The table above presents that the students' improvement in writing skill. Before action, it was shown that the student got low score in writing. It can be seen that the mean score was 56.42. The students' score is lowest that passing grade that was 70.00. After the implementation of a four-phase technique in cycle 1, it was found that there were some students have errors in using capitals for names and sentence beginnings. At the end of the cycle 1 after having feedback and revision, there were some students who still have problems with capital missing and spelling words so the score is better than pre-test. Then, in cycle 2, the findings showed that the students had more improved in writing score. From the improvement, it is seen that a four-phase technique can improve the students' writing skill through the activities in each phase. This idea is supported by theory proposed by Carnegie (1971: 228). He states that a four-phase technique brings improvements toward the students' imaginative writing skills as it uses a process

approach in teaching writing where the assessment in a form of portfolio. Furthermore, he stated that a four-phase technique can give solutions to problems of students in writing. Firstly, it is by requiring attention through Oral Composition to help them get ideas quickly. Secondly, it is by checking their grammar, spelling, and punctuation in the Sentence Writing activity. Every groups write their works on the board and let other groups revise the grammar errors and mistakes in spelling and punctuation. The teacher writes possible ideas to help them revising their short stories. Thirdly, it is by requiring every student to add or combine their imaginative stories in Co-operative writing. Finally, Fourthly, it is by requiring a direct writing guidance using sentence styles in English. The students can develop that story by Written Composition activity to renew the setting, plot, or characters based on their own imagination. They just revise the setting or add more conflicts to be looked new. It is designed to help students organize their ideas of writing clearly and coherently into elements of stories after getting feedback from teachers and peers.

The students' improvement was not only in writing skill but also in classroom situation. The improvements are presented in the following table:

Table of the Students' Improvement in classroom situation

Problems indicator	Before Research	After Cycle 1	After Cycle 2
The students took longer time to start writing.	Some students chatted with their friends instead of focusing on their writing task.	The students did not take long time to start writing as they already had ideas of what they write. The students write eagerly	The students wrote with their group enthusiastically.

Some students seemed bored in the lesson	Some students seemed not too interested in the lesson especially with the monotonous technique of teaching.	The students participated actively during the lesson and got involved in the lesson. The students also were very interested to learn by using picture	The students participated actively in writing class and enjoyed in the lesson
The students did not focus on their task	The students chatted in writing class and some other did non-academic activities. As a result, they could not finish their task	There were some students focused in describing picture so the class situation was levelier.	The students focused on the task and were able to finish their writing in the time given

From the table presented above, it can be seen that the usage of a four-phase technique has created better classroom situation. The improvements occurred during the teaching learning process. Before action, it was found that students did not focus and bored in the lesson but in the cycle 2, there were improvement. The students became active, focus on the lesson, interested in the class and writing eagerly. The result prove that a four-phase technique is able to improve classroom situation. It is supported by theories given by some experts. Dealing with focus in the writing task, Eggen and Kauchak (1996: 218) stated that A Four-Phase Technique uses modeling as the central idea of social cognitive theory that people learn through interacting with and observing each other . This learning from models makes the students pay attention to the critical aspects of the model observed that can be in the form of writing tasks (Bandura, 1986). This is not only by sharing well-written paragraphs, but also by directing students' attention to specific elements that make the paragraphs well written, for example,

spelling and punctuation. Dealing with interesting in writing class , Eggen and Kauchak (1996: 231) state that a four-phase technique trained the students became interested in Attention phase as they go through the process of attention in observing the model. In Need phase, they are more interested in knowing their needs in writing and keep retention in their memory, and are more interested in reproduction of the observed behavior viewed in Visualization phase as they can see the models of writing. Lastly they have motivation to produce the behavior to do writing in Action phase. Surely this technique can cause new behaviors, facilitating existing behaviors, change inhibitions, and arouse emotions that will keep interests in the lesson.

The different result of research between cycle 1 and 2 occurred because the researcher made some revised plans in order to make the cycle 2 better. The revised plans were made based on the unsolved problem that occurs in the cycle 1. In cycle 1, there were some unsolved problems related to students' writing skill. Those problems were: (1) vocabulary mistakes, especially the diction and context, (2) grammatical mistakes in the use of past tense and word order, (3) some students were not active in the group work and group discussion, (4) some students did not have confidence to answer questions during the classroom discussion.

Considering these unsolved problems in the first cycle, the study was continued to cycle 2. In cycle 2, the researcher must do some stages to solve the problem in cycle 1. The stages as follows she reviewed tense, diction and word order to solve problem in number 1 and 2; to solve the problems in number 3 and

4 the researcher monitored the students' activities in group discussion. Therefore in cycle 2, the researcher the researcher gave more practical exercises about the vocabulary, word order, punctuation, capitalization, and the use of past tense. The students practiced to create sentences based on the picture which was shown through a four-phase technique. In this way, they practiced to create sentences using the correct tense, to choose the correct diction based on the context, and to use the correct word order.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on the research results presented above, it can be concluded that the a four-phase technique can improve students' writing skill. The improvement can be clearly shown in the students' writing score. Before the researcher implemented a four-phase technique in writing class, the students' writing score was really low. The result of pre-test showed that the mean score of the students only 56.42. The score was really far from the passing garde that was 70. After a four-phase technique was implemented in writing class, the students' mean score increased to 67.37 after cycle 1 and it finally rose to 73.58 after cycle 2.

Besides, a four-phase technique can improve the writing class condition. A four-phase technique change the classroom situation. The the class situation is changing as media of teaching used maximally. Their motivation improves during with class activities. This situation also gives effects to the students to pay attention more in working with the tasks. The students are not bored anymore as

the teaching technique in general is not monotonous anymore. This makes the students creative and more cooperative when working in groups.

The last conclusion is a four-phase technique improve the students' behavior in writing class. The students had positive perspectives as they greeted in a great enthusiasm anytime they met. The students could also enjoy the class, the students were also more confident to write on their own.

Having concluded the result of the research, the research would like to propose some suggestions for the students, for the teacher, the institution of education, and also for the other researcher. For the students, the researcher suggest the students should not be afraid of making errors and mistakes in the use of language because making errors and mistakes is part of learning. For teacher, the researcher suggests that the English teacher cshould reliaze that providing appropriate teaching technique or method is really helpful for the students. For the institution of education, the researcher suggest that the institution of education should be provided with appropriate facilities in order to support the teaching and learning process especially in learning English, so that the teaching and learning process can run effectively. Finally for the other researcher, the researcher wants to suggest that they can get a valuable experience which can be used for doing a better action research in the future and they are encouraged to follow up another research on the use of A Four-Phase Technique for other language skills.

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