

PROMOTING LETTERS TO INCREASE STUDENTS' WRITING SKILL

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Abstract: Writing is one of important skills learned by students because everyone can express their ideas, opinion, feeling, and information on the paper. However, writing considers difficult for students. To overcome the students' problem in writing, teachers can use various ways and authentic materials. One of them is by using letters. Therefore, the aim of this study was to find out whether or not students' writing skill could increase by using letters. Quasi - experimental method was used which involved experimental and control groups. The samples consisted of 72 students of SMP Negeri 5 Kayuagung. Writing test was used to collect the data. Content validity and inter-rater reliability were used to measure the validity and reliability of instrument. To analyze the data, t-test was used. Based on the result, the value of t-obtained (5.495) was higher than value of t-table (1.9944) and p_{value} (0.000) was lower than α_{value} (0.05). It meant that the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted. In other words, letters could increase students' writing skill.

Keywords: writing skill, letters

INTRODUCTION

Writing is process of communication on the paper. Writing is the ability to express the idea, opinions, and thought to develop communication. Caroll (1990, p.2) states that writing is share out communication not only with contemporaries but also with future generations. It permits people from near and far distant past to speak to us. Harmer (2004) also states that writing is a form of communication to deliver or to express feeling through written form. Writing is a process that begins with learning these

foundational skills and leads to students being able to devote more attention to developing and to conveying their thoughts (Doing What Work, 2012). Hence, everyone from near and far distant can keep communication to share ideas, feeling and information through written form.

In addition, writing is one important skill because everyone can express their ideas, opinion, feeling, and information on the paper. Meyers (2005, p.2) states that writing is also a process of discovering and organizing ideas, putting them on paper, and reshaping and revising

them. However, writing considers difficult for students. Oshima and Hogue (2007) said that writing is really not easy for both native speakers and students. Furthermore, students get problems in getting, exploring and organizing ideas, writing draft, editing, revision and final draft. It is supposed by Jun (2008) confirmed that L2 writing is a complex process of discovery which involves brainstorming, multiple drafting, feedback practices, revision, and final editing.

Furthermore, Widodo (2006, p.173) also states that in the context of foreign language teaching, besides its difficulty, learners experience some difficulties transferring ideas from their native language (for example, Indonesian) into the target language (that is, English). It is also in lined with Feliks (2008) who found that the overall structure of the text is good. Yet, it lacks details; its introductory and concluding paragraphs are poor; its word choice is heavily influenced by Indonesian and English; some sentences and paragraphs are poorly structured; some words are incorrectly spelt; and, some punctuations are false. Moreover, according to Mohamed, *et. al.* (2008, p.9), students have to learn how to organize their ideas in such a way so as to be easily understood by the reader. It

means that students need to learn and practice to be good writer that can make the readers understand easily their composition.

Besides, teachers seldom involve students to write a paragraph or composition as part of writing activities. Ramirez (2006, p.79) states that if some English teachers practiced compositions in their class, these composition exercises mostly limited to fill in the blank exercises, or just change some elements in a given paragraph. This condition leads students to have less practice in writing and they do not know how the process to make good compositions. To overcome these problems, teachers can use various ways and authentic materials. One of them is by using letters.

Letters are an authentic material. Letters are powerful vehicles that support authentic and purposeful writing development in our lessons and courses (Woodward, 2001). By using letters, students can express and share their ideas, feeling and thought on the paper. According to National adult literacy database (1999), letters have several advantages. First, they provide a permanent record of what was said. Second, the writer has the time to carefully compose the message, and the

reader has the time to read it and reread it until the message is clear. As well, a letter can be kept on file and used as many times as necessary.

In this study, students would write about an epistolary story by using letters. Banegas (2011, p.24) explains that epistolary story is a story told by a series of diary entries, letters, or other types of writing so that students can encourage creative writing and language improvement. When using letters, learners experience firsthand the value of English to communicate their feelings, emotions, and identities to other peers. Letters and stories will provide with rich information about what learners are interested in and what they expect from their teachers and education as a whole (Banegas, 2011, p.28). Thus, letters can help students to explore their ideas and thought on the paper.

Based on the explanation above, therefore, the aim of this study was to find out whether or not students' writing skill could increase by using letters.

METHODOLOGY

In conducting this study, quasi - experimental method was used which involved experimental and control groups. The population of this research was all the

seventh grade students at the SMP Negeri 5 Kayuagung in the academic year of 2014/2015. The total number of population was 210 students. In this study, purposive sampling technique was used. As a result, the samples chosen were 72 students. Writing test was used to collect the data. Content validity and inter-rater reliability were used to measure the validity and reliability of instrument. Finally, t-test was used to analyze the data.

The process of teaching writing by using letters are as follows (Banegas, 2011):

- a) Each learner writes a letter to "Dear you." Included in the letter is the beginning of a true, fictionalized or imaginary story. The students begin by setting their story in time and place and presenting what the problem or situation is, but they do not offer much information; this way, they can be asked for more details in the next letter. Each learner signs the letter with his or her real name. Collect the letters and distribute them, making sure nobody receives his or her own letter.
- b) Ask students to reply to the letter. In their response they need to ask,

- “And then what happened?” so that the thread of the story develops, thus maintaining interest in the letter exchange. When the original authors continue the story in subsequent letters, they will do it from the point of view of their own character, and what started as facts may become fiction.
- c) Now that each learner has a letter relationship with another peer, ask the class to continue for a certain number of exchanges. Each learner will always exchange back and forth with the same peer until the stories are wrapped up. Students may find it more useful if they write the letters at home and ask you for support now and then.
 - d) While students develop their stories through the letter exchanges, organize some feedback sessions to provide language support.
 - e) Once they reach the second exchange, organize a brainstorming session in small groups in which students discuss ways of keeping the reader's interest and ways of motivating the writer to continue developing his or her story.
 - f) As a class, discuss their suggestions. Teachers can even take this opportunity to ask them as a class how the stories may be finished.
 - g) When they finish their stories, collect them to provide language feedback and return them for editing work. Editing can be done in class in small groups. Once they edit their letters, suggest ways of binding the letters so as to produce a collection of epistolary stories. Prior to this step, teachers need to make sure that every learner gives permission to put all the stories together for others to read.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the result of the study, it was found that the mean difference between pre-test and post-test in the experimental group was 10.472, t-obtained was 10.306 at the significant level of $p < 0.05$ in two tailed testing with $df = 35$. Since the value of t-obtained (10.306) was higher than critical value of t-table (2.0301) and p_{value} (0.000) was lower than α_{value} (0.05), it meant that students could increase their writing skill after giving treatment. See table 1.

While in the control group, the result showed that the mean difference between pre-test and post-test in the control group was 0.417, t-obtained was

0.328. Since t-obtained (0.328) was lower than t-table (2.0301) and p_{value} (0.745) was higher than α_{value} (0.05). It meant that the students in the control group did not increase their writing skill. See table 1.

Based on the calculation in table 1, the t-obtained was 5.495. At the significance level of $p < 0.05$ and the degree of freedom (df) 70. The critical value of t-table was 1.9944. Since the value of t-obtained (5.495) was higher than value of t-table (1.9944) and p_{value} (0.000) was lower than α_{value} (0.05), the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted. In other words, letters could increase students' writing skill.

Table 1
The Summary of Statistical Analysis
of Experimental and Control Group

Category	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Std. Error difference
Experimental group	10.306	35	.000	10.472	1.016
Control group	.328	35	.745	.417	1.272
Comparison between experimental and control group	5.495	70	.000	10.194	1.855

By using letters, students could increase their writing skill because it could help students to explore and share their ideas and thought on the paper. Besides, students could plan, explore, and organize their ideas to create their story

through letters. By writing stories in letters, it also could increase students' vocabulary. Students also could do peer review and edit when they exchange the story so that they could get more ideas to continue developing their story. In short, students could increase and practice their writing skill by using letter.

CONCLUSION

Based on the the result of the study, it could be concluded that letters could increase students' writing skill. Letters could help students to brainstorm and organize ideas so that they could create a story. Through letters, it could increase students' vobulary so that it made students easily to convey their ideas and thought in a piece of paper. Hence, students could increase and practice thier writing skill by create story in letter.

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