

USING DISCUSSION BOARD AS THE MEDIUM TO IMPROVE THE SKILL IN WRITING A RECOUNT TEXT

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Abstract: This study is aimed to improve the students' skill in writing a recount text through the use of discussion board. The subject consists of twenty seven eighth graders. This study was carried out in one cycle. The cycle consisted of five meetings including the registration process on discussion board, prewriting and drafting in face to face classroom environment, and the process of revising, editing and publishing stage on discussion board. The data of the study were taken from the observation checklist, field notes, questionnaire and the students' final product. The findings of the study revealed that the discussion board was successful in improving the skill in writing a recount text of the eighth graders. The improvement was indicated by the increase of the students' writing scores, the students' participation in writing activities and the students' positive responses after the implementation of discussion board.

Keywords: Discussion Board, Writing Skill

INTRODUCTION

In the context of education it should be remembered that many kinds of learning activities are in the form of writing, especially in Junior high schools, as mentioned in syllabus of SMP made by the national standard of education (BSNP). BSNP (2007:263) stated that the writing skill is intended for students to have the ability in writing short functional text and recount text. The objective of teaching writing at the eighth grade of Junior high school stated in the School based Curriculum (SBC), is to express the meaning through functional texts as well as through short and simple text types of descriptive, recount and narrative texts to interact in the students' close surrounding. Meanwhile, "a recount text is a text that retell past events, usually in order in which they

occurred. The functional objective of recount text is to provide the audience with a description of what occurred and when it occurred" (Anderson & Anderson, 1998:24).

Nevertheless, in reality, the students' ability in writing a recount text is still poor. They have difficulty to write especially when it should be written in the past tense. The result of the preliminary study shows that the eighth graders' writing skill of recount text needs to be improved. Considerably, it is found that most of students find difficulty to write a recount text because there is no media for them to have an enjoyment in writing, the possibility is that writing skill is considered as difficult and they are frustrated of the condition. In return, we can see that they have low self confidence to

write and they lack vocabulary. In accordance with the problem above, there are some implications for the teachers to arrange the method in teaching writing.

In recent years, science and technology has been widely used. The use of technology in many areas makes it possible for teachers to follow the development of it. Internet is one of the products of technology that can be used by teachers as the media in teaching. Crystal (2001:3) states that the Internet is an association of computer networks with common standards which enable messages to be sent from any central computer (or host) on one network to any host on any other. Furthermore, the Internet can be a source of language learning materials. Hyland (2003:160) states that the Internet is a rich source of language learning materials and advice on writing. There are hundreds of sites with quizzes, puzzles, grammar activities, and writing tips for second language students. In teaching English, the use of the Internet might help teachers to teach English effectively without spending the time in the classroom and doing the conventional teaching. Likewise, the use of internet enables teachers to conduct such kind of new method especially to improve students' English skill. Mohamad (2007:81) mentions that the internet can be used in a myriad of ways for language teaching and learning. It provides interactive linguistic exercises, authentic reading materials and stimulates communicative exercises. It also offers collaborative, evaluative and inquiry based environments that can develop critical thinking.

Related to the use of internet in language teaching, there are several ways can be considered as the media to teach English in Internet such as web based materials, web quest, podcast, virtual learning and many others. There are also a few studies concentrating on the Internet that is related to critical thinking and language learning that focus is more on online discussions featuring text conference, email and chat room. The present study focuses on using Learning Management System (LMS) in terms of online discussion forum or discussion board.

An LMS provides an interface that facilitates course construction (content organization, format, and design) as well as a set of educational and administrative tools. One of the tools in LMS is discussion boards. A discussion board is an asynchronous communication tool that allows one individual to post a comment or question online. Other individuals who are members of the same discussion board may read that comment/question, and respond to the postings with their own remarks over time.

Based on the researcher's assumption, it is important to use discussion board in teaching writing because students can learn how to write and browse internet too. Students can post some comments on discussion board or answer the questions based on the topic or respond to comments from their friends. After that, the teacher gives some feedback for students' comments. So, they can learn how to write comments simultaneously and regularly. By doing these steps, their writing skill may be improved. Besides, they can learn in an enjoyable learning environment in

order to avoid students' boredom. They also can work collaboratively with their friends to discuss something in writing form.

Teachingwriting for Junior high school students is focused on some genres of the text and functional texts. Based on the researcher observation at eighth grade of MTsN Model Pandeglang 1, the eighth grade students had been taught many kinds of genre and they had low ability in English subject. Due to the fact thatgenerally their average grade on writing were below minimum passing criteria/kriteriaketuntasan minimal (KKM), which is 65. Thus, the result of preliminary study indicated that most of the students of eighth grade still had low ability in writing recount text and most of their scores were lower than minimum passing criteria/KKM. Then, most of them found difficulty in writing. In MTsN Model Pandeglang 1, the English subject was provided 4 hours every week for each class. Then, there was information and technology subject in this school in which the students were introduced in operating computer and browsing internet. So, it would be easier for them to use discussion board as they have background knowledge about internet.

Based on the students' problem in writing and the benefits of using discussion board, the researcher was interested to investigate the use of discussion board as the medium to improve the skill in writing a recount text of the eighth grade students of MTsN Model Pandeglang 1.

METHOD

Research Design

The study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) design since it focused on a particular problem which occurred on particular group of students in certain classroom. Hopkins (2008:43) states that classroom research by teachers consist of three grounds, firstly, its role in refining professional judgment; secondly, its focus on the key professional activities of teachers; thirdly, the inadequacy of existing research paradigms for teacher researcher. Latief (2008:2) states that classroom action research is a research planning specifically arranged to improve teaching learning quality in the class. The main objective of CAR is to find learning strategy in order to solve the teaching learning problem in the class and to improve teaching quality of the teacher.

In this study, the researcher conducted collaborative classroom action research in which the researcher collaborated with the teacher in handling and conducting this study. This is relevant to Kemmis and McTaggart's idea (1988), cited in Burns (1999:13) which mentions that the approach is only action research when it is collaborative, though it is important to realize that the action research of the group is achieved through the critically examined action of individual group members.

Hence, the researcher conducted the research based on the idea that classroom action research will have advantage if in the study a collaborator is involved. In conducting the research, the researcher was assisted and worked collaboratively with one of the English teachers of MTsN Model Pandeglang 1who was involved from

the beginning up to the end of the process of the research activities. The researcher acted as the practitioner who taught writing recount text by using discussion board, whereas, the collaborator acted as the observer who observed the implementation of the action in the classroom.

Research Setting and Subjects

This study was conducted at MTsN Model Pandeglang 1. The researcher chose class VIII A as the subject of the study that consists of 27 students. The eighth grade students were chosen as the subjects under some considerations. First, in the syllabuses of the eighth grade for Junior high schools, it was stated that the students of eighth grade have to have an ability to write recount text. It was relevant with the text that had been given by the researcher to improve their writing skills. Second, the students of eighth grade had been introduced to the use of internet as there was computer and information technology subject where they learned to operate computer and browse the internet. Therefore, the researcher was inspired to solve the students' problems in writing skills, particularly recount text through discussion board.

Research Procedures

This study was preceded by a preliminary study which was then followed by cycles comprising several steps, includes planning the action, implementing the action, observing the action, and analyzing and reflecting the action. The researcher conducted the preliminary study in order to obtain data about the real condition of the teacher's and the students' problem in the

teaching and learning of writing. In this phase, the data were obtained by giving the writing test and questionnaire to the eighth graders, and also interviewing the English teacher. After analyzed the result of the preliminary study, the researcher and the collaborator determined the strategy will be applied, designed the lesson plan, designed the criteria of success, and prepared the instruments. In this study, there are three instruments used, namely; observation checklist, field notes, and writing test. The general plan, then, was implemented and observed. Finally, the reflection was conducted in order to identify the success and the failure in the implementation of it.

The procedures in applying discussion board consisted of some steps. In the initial meeting, the teacher enforced preparation activity. Teacher introduced the discussion board that would be used as the medium of writing activity, besides the students registered to that forum first before starting the activity. The teacher gave a model of recount text on the discussion board. The students gave comments based on teachers' writing. Then, the students were able to write recount text or give comments if they were registered to the forum. So, registering process needed to be considered in the first activity since it needs a large amount of time.

The next activity would be continued by the steps called process writing approach. The students worked in pairs to publish their first draft, which can be called as pre writing and drafting activities. Then, the students needed to give comments on their friends' writing. After that, the students revised and

edited their own writing based on teacher's and friends' comments and suggestions. This activity covered revising and editing stage. Then, the students published their final writing after doing some revision in the discussion board.

The last activity was done individually. The students were asked to publish recount text individually, then they gave comments on friend's writing, the next phase would be same as the previous activity.

FINDINGS

The process of teaching and learning by using discussion board consisted of five meetings. The result of analysis showed that on the whole of the action, this research can be said successful, since the result of the study has achieved the criteria of success. Consequently, the students' ability in writing recount text was successfully improved.

Related to the criterion Number 1, which deals with the students' ability in writing a recount text, the instrument used was writing test. The result of the data analysis pointed out that 81.48% (22 out of 27) of the students could achieve minimum passing criteria/ KKM. Their score was equal to or greater than KKM. Comparing to the first criterion of success, mentioned that if 70% of the students can achieve KKM, the action was successful.

The second criterion deals with the students' participation in the teaching and learning process and the students' responses after the implementation of the action. The instruments used were observation checklist, field notes and questionnaire. The result of the data analysis of observation checklist indicated that 92.37% students had

very good participation in almost indicators (33 indicators) in the teaching learning process. In addition, 72.22% of the students had good participation in only four indicators in the teaching learning process.

Concerning the second criterion of success mentioned that 70% of the students were actively involved in the teaching learning process. The result of the analysis of observation checklist showed that the study was successful because the students' participation was more than 70%. So, it has met the second of criterion of success.

Hence, the data analysis about the students' responses after the implementation of the discussion board was taken from the questionnaire. It revealed that 74.07% of the students like internet media for teaching learning process of English. About 88.99% of the students agreed that writing recount text with discussion board media is very interesting. There were 85.19% of the students agreed that the use of discussion board helps them in the process writing approach (prewriting, drafting, revising, editing and publishing). The students who agreed that the use of discussion board helps them to increase their ability in writing recount texts were 85.18% of the students. About 96.29% of the students agreed that the use of discussion board helps them in developing their writing since they can get feedback and review from the classmates and the teacher. There were 81.21% of the students agreed that they can make recount text after the teacher uses the discussion board as learning media. The students who mentioned that the teacher gives enough guidance when they learn recount text were 85.15% of the students. The last, about 81.48% of

the students mentioned that writing in the discussion board can improve their writing skill.

The findings of the study suggested that the students had improvement in their writing skill. The result was satisfactory because the result has met the criteria of success. First, the numbers of the students who got score equal to 65 or greater than 65 have been 81.48%. Second, the students' participation during the teaching and learning process indicates that 82.30% of the students were actively involved in the teaching and learning process. Then, the questionnaire about the students' responses after the implementation of the discussion board shows that 84.70% of the students have positive responses. Moreover, the teaching and learning process is not necessary to be continued to the next cycle. So, this study can be stopped. The description of the success of the implementation of discussion board as the medium to improve the students' skill in writing a recount text is presented in Table 1.

Tabel 1
The Description of the Success of the Implementation of Discussion Board as the Medium to Improve the Students' Skill in Writing a Recount Text.

No	Criteria of success	Data	Findings	Note
1.	The students' writing skills improved (70% of students get score equal to or greater than 65).	The description of students' score in writing skills.	81.48% of the students got score of 65 or more.	Success
2.	The students(at least 70% of the students) are involved actively	The students' participation and Responses to the	82.30% of the students were actively involved in the teaching	Success

during teaching and learning process. Implementation of discussion board.

84.70% of the students have a Positive response after the implementation of discussion board

DISCUSSION

This section portrays the discussion concerning the implementation of using discussion board in the teaching of writing. This part is based on how discussion board can improve the students' writing skill and the result will be elaborated on basis of the review of related literature.

In the writing activities, the students should follow the process called process writing approach. According to Sundem (2006), there are four stages involved in the process of text making. They are prewriting, drafting, revising and editing. As Hyland (2003) states, in the process writing approach the writer is given emphasis as an independent creator of texts. The process of writing can be separated into five stages namely prewriting, drafting, revising, editing and publishing. The use of discussion board for writing activities was done in the process of writing approach whereby it covers in the drafting, revising, editing, and publishing stages. The discussion board shows its existence in the drafting, revising, editing and publishing stages out of five stages. Moreover, for the first step of writing process which is called prewriting, the researcher used

the media of picture series and mind mapping to generate ideas.

Hence, the implementation of discussion board in the teaching of writing that focused on revising, editing and publishing stages can be described as follows. The students were asked to post their writing of recounts text in the discussion board. After that, they were asked to give comments about the content, organization, vocabulary, grammar and mechanics on their classmates' writing. Then, the students had to revise and edit their own writing based on the comments and suggestions from their classmates. In the last activity, the students published their final writing. These activities can be categorized as the peer review strategy. This is in line with the study proposed by Cathey (2007: 98) on peer review (peer editing) through online collaborative learning assignment using discussion board essay assignment. In her opinion, firstly, students responded favorably to the assignment and were able to accurately assess one another's work. Secondly, they seemed to enjoy the assignment in general and to enjoy reading other students' essays. Posting one's personal thoughts online and commenting on others' postings is becoming increasingly popular among college students through online blog sites such as MySpace and Xanga.

The term *discussion board* or *bulletin board* or *online discussion* can be beneficial for the teaching of writing. This is based on the claims that, it provides more writing practice (DiMatteo 1990, 1991), encourages collaborative writing (Barker & Kamp 1990), facilitates peer editing (Bolarsky 1990; Moram 1991) cited in Warshcauer (1995: 8). Based on the benefits of using online discussion proposed by the experts, the researcher can report that the

discussion board used in this study was emphasized more on facilitating peer editing, collaborative writing and providing more writing practice. It can be seen from the process itself. Firstly, the students were asked to give comments on classmates' writing. They did peer feedback about the content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and also the mechanics. Secondly, the students worked in pairs to have collaborative writing in producing recount texts. The writing practice done in pairs will encourage collaborative writing. Then, the students were required to have more writing practice while conducting an individual activity of writing recount texts.

Referring to the results of the analysis on the students' final product on writing recount texts, it was found that discussion board can improve the students' skills in writing recount texts. Their achievement can be identified by comparing their improvement of the students' writing in the preliminary study to the final product in Cycle 1. The improvement was influenced by the existence of giving comments on the revising and editing stages. This was because through discussion board, the students reviewed their writing and comment on several mistakes of their classmates' writing. Additionally, they also were trained to give comments in English. This result of the study shows that discussion board can promote critical thinking of the students.

Online discussion forum can promote students' higher order thinking skills and provide an environment that encourages the increased critical thinking of students (Black, 2005; Thomas, 2002; Klemm, 2000, cited in Zhang, 2007: 623). As cited in Zhang (2007:624),

some of the reasons for these results are that asynchronous text based communication provides participants more time to understand peer' ideas, think and create their own responses, edit and revise their postings (Yildiz & Bichelmeyer, 2003) and provide insightful reactions to others contribution (Black, 2005; Davidson, 2000; Klemm, 2000). Students can reread, revise, and proofread before posting (Hewitt, 2000).

Zhang (2007: 639) states that the students using online discussion forum were better at organizing the structure of their essays than the students who did not use online discussion forums. They could understand the structure of their essays more precisely and comprehensively than the students who did not discuss online. This provides support for using online discussion forums to help students improve their writing skills.

Furthermore, electronic discussion in the terms of online discussion can bring more equal participation among students. It can be seen while the researcher implements the discussion board in the eighth grade students of MTSN Model Pandeglang 1. About 82.30% of the students were actively involved in the teaching and learning process. As proposed by Kern (1995) cited in Zhang (2007:625), when comparing electronic and face to face discussion at the same length in his university class, all students in class electronic discussion participated equally, but there were four students who did not participate in face to face discussion, and five students tended to dominate. Sullivan and Pratt's study found that only 50% of the students participated in face to face discussion compared to 100% of

the students participated in online discussion.

The students' participation during writing activities by using discussion board, which is parallel with the research from So (2008: 143) about using asynchronous online discussions: collaborative learning. It is stated that when groups decided to use online discussion forums, participation levels were almost equal among individual group members, and discussion threads were sustained until the final completion of the collaborative project.

Based on the result of students' responses toward the implementation of discussion board, it can be found that 84.70% of the students have a positive response after the implementation of discussion board. In addition, Warschauer (1997) Dehler and Parras (1998) and Caldwell (1998) cited in Zhang (2007: 625) pointed out that the asynchronous network environment could help individuals engage more frequently in learning with greater enthusiasm. Warschauer (2000: 108) conducted a survey of second language students using Internet for writing and communication in 12 university course in three countries. In this study, the greatest degree of motivation occurred in classrooms where the teacher had integrated Internet based activities into the curriculum.

CONCLUSION

The result of the data analysis showed that discussion board was successful in improving the ability of the eighth grade students of MTsN Model Pandeglang 1 in writing recount text. The success was shown by the achievement of the two

criteria of success, which dealt with the students' score for their final product and participation in using discussion board. In regard to the students' writing score, it could be seen the improvement in terms of percentage of the students in which the percentage of score in the preliminary study who achieve the minimum passing criteria/ criteria ketuntasan minimal was only 29.63%, and after the implementation of discussion board, the percentage was improved up to 81.48% of the students who got score of 65 or more.

Regarding the students' participation and the students' responses, based on the result of observation checklist, field notes, and questionnaire it was revealed that about 82.30% of the students were actively involved in the teaching and learning process. There were 84.70% of the students had positive responses after the implementation of discussion board. Finally, it could be concluded that the discussion board was successful in improving the students' skills in writing a recount text.

SUGGESTIONS

To follow up the findings of the study, there are some suggestions recommended to the English teachers and future researchers.

For the English Teachers

Based on the research that has been conducted for some period of time, the researcher yields some points that should be considered for English teachers who want to implement discussion board in the class. First, before starting the class, the teacher should make sure that the internet facility runs well. It required them to check first whether the computer in

the language laboratory can be connected to the internet or not, sometimes there is a problem on the internet provider or the internet has not been connected yet. Second, the teacher needs to consider the time allotment of using discussion board, how much time needed by the students to register to the forum, posting their writing, giving comments, revising and editing and publishing the final writing, since sometimes some students work slowly, the technical problem of internet, the teacher may take an alternative to employ it as the homework. Third, before the students use discussion board, the teacher should clarify and stress the importance of involvement and interaction among students and also students and teacher. The teacher decides the grouping for whom the students A giving comments, students B giving comments, and so forth. This is done to avoid one student' writing has no comments from their classmates. Fourth, the teacher also should ensure that every student understand the requirements. Then, when the students begin the implementation of discussion board, the teacher should inform the students' progress, post follow up questions, which can provoke more critical ideas, give some examples of expected messages, continuously identify serious errors, avoid placing extra pressures on students and the most important one is giving feedback on the students' writing. The last but not the least, the teacher should ensure that all students in the class only access to the discussion board, no time for them to open facebook or play the game, etc.

For the Future Researcher

There are some points to consider if the future researchers want to conduct the research on the same field. First, the future researcher can decide to choose another design of research for example experimental research. They can investigate the use of discussion board/ online discussion forum compared to face to face discussion, or they can do the research about comparing face to face discussion, online discussion without instructor intervention and online discussion with instructor intervention. Second, the future researcher should prepare well in choosing the material to be discussed, what kind of genre which will be used, and it should be appropriate with the students' level. Third, she suggests to conduct the research in the higher level of education for instance in senior high school and university level. Next, discussion board or electronic discussion can serve as an important bridge for the transfer of communication skills between the written and spoken domain (Chun, 1994 cited in Warschauer, 1995). Based on this point, she suggests the future researcher to conduct the research about practical application to use discussion board as a bridge from written composition to spoken interaction. For example, first, the students discussed the specific topic in discussion board, then shared ideas in the class, and eventually engaged in an oral discussion or debate. This process is more suitable carried out for the students' higher level or university level.

In accordance with the suggestions above, hopefully the teachers and the future researchers will be able to maximize the use of

discussion board as the medium to improve the writing skill particularly and increase English language competence generally.

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