

Improving the Writing Ability of Grade XI Students of SMKN 1 Kalasan through Authentic Materials

Artine Ayu Utami

Suharso

Artineutami77@gmail.com

Abstract: This action research study aimed to improve the writing ability of Grade XI students of SMKN 1 Kalasan through authentic materials. This research used Kemmis and McTaggart's model. It was conducted in two cycles. Each cycle consisted of two meetings. The results of the research showed that the use of authentic materials was able to improve the students' writing skills. Based on the result of qualitative data, authentic materials helped the students to recognize the organization of the text. They were also able to generate their ideas and use appropriate vocabulary. During the research process, they also showed positive responses towards the lesson. The result of the quantitative data showed that there was improvement in students' writing scores. The mean score of the pre-test was 60.16, that of the progress-test was 70.72, and that of the post-test was 78.95.

Keywords: *authentic materials, invitation letter, writing skills*

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Introduction

English is defined as a lingua franca language that makes it widely used between two people whose native languages are different and are not English. Therefore, English is widely taught around the world including in Indonesia as one of the compulsory subjects from secondary up to university levels including vocational high schools.

In learning English, there are four skills that need to be mastered by the students: listening, reading, speaking and writing. Each skill has its own characteristics and difficulties. Writing, indeed, is difficult. Writing has to be both coherent and cohesive (Harmer, 2001:246). Coherence deals with the connection between the ideas and the point, while cohesion deals with the connection between the ideas and the sentence structure. He also mentions that some students are uninterested and insecure writers (Harmer, 2001: 329).

Brown (2000: 335) defines writing as a written product of thinking, drafting, and revising that require specialized skills on how to generate ideas, how to organize them coherently, how to use discourse markers and rhetorical conventions to put them cohesively into a written text, how to edit text for appropriate grammar, and how to produce a final product. This definition is supported by Harmer (2007: 326) who says that a writing process pays attention to some stages of writing like pre-writing phases, editing, re-drafting, and producing final product of writing.

The reasons of writing depend on its purposes. According to Nunan (2003: 88)

writing is commonly used to express and impress. Writing is used to express ideas or opinions. Writing can also be a medium to communicate ideas or opinions. Furthermore, Harmer (2007: 330) proposes two different purposes of writing: writing for learning and writing for writing. Writing for learning is the kind of writing to improve students' ability in using a target language. Writing for writing is the kind of writing to improve their writing skills in appropriate ways based on the context and purposes.

There are several approaches that can be implemented in the practice of writing skills. Harmer (2001: 257) states different kinds of approaches: writing as a process and product, a genre approach, creative writing, and writing as a cooperative activity.

He states that a product approach is more concerned on the final product of writing, while a process approach is more concerned on the stages in writing (Harmer, 2001: 257). Hyland (2003: 10) states that the process approach of teaching writing does not focus on the product of the writing, but on how the teacher should help the learners to perform writing tasks. Sokolik (2003, in Nunan 2003: 78) states that the process refers to the steps that a writer goes through in order to produce the writing. The product is the final product which is tangible. Richards and Renandya (2002: 316) state that there are four basic stages in the process of teaching writing. They are planning, drafting, revising, and editing.

A genre approach provides students with enough opportunities to become aware of the different purposes of written communication and the different ways information is organized in written texts (Richards, 2006: 303). A genre approach makes students less creative since most of the time, they just imitate certain genre of a text (Harmer, 2007: 327). On the other hand, students can really master a specific genre if they are given many different examples from the same genre so that they have a lot of variance in writing (Harmer, 2007: 328). By providing students with language to talk in the texts, they can better understand how to write the text more effective and communicative (Richards, 2001: 322).

Different from the genre approach, creative writing suggests the students to explore their imagination (Harmer, 2007: 328). Hyland (2010: 229) sees creative writing as any writing, fiction or nonfiction, that occurs outside of everyday, professional, journalistic, academic, and technical forms of writing.

Most people see writing as an individual activity. In fact, the teacher and students can take advantages if they do the writing in groups. In addition, cooperative writing also helps us to focus whether the writing is on the writing process or on a genre study (Harmer, 2007: 328).

Based on the preliminary observation conducted by the researcher, the students at SMKN 1 Kalasan had difficulties in English writing. The first problem is related to the students' attitude towards English. They had a negative stereotype that English is too difficult to learn. This made their motivation to learn English in the classroom low. The second problem is related to the materials. Most of the time,

they only used worksheets as the source of learning in the classroom. Moreover, in Indonesia, English is used as a foreign language so that it is hard to find English inputs in daily life. The third problem is related to the activities in the classroom. The activities done in the classroom were monotonous and teacher centered. Furthermore, the activities did not enhance the students to produce English. Most of the time, they only got input without having many opportunities to show what they have learned.

Based on the problems found, the focus was on the problems which were related to the students' writing skills and the materials used in the classroom. The research aims to improve the writing skills of Grade XI students of SMKN 1 Kalasan by using authentic materials.

Authentic materials are those materials which are made not for language teaching purposes (Tomlinson, 2003). Nunan (1999) defines authentic materials as spoken or written language data produced for actual communication. It means that authentic materials are used in people's daily life and not specially designed for language classrooms.

There is no doubt that authentic materials will help the students' to improve their writing skill. Guariento and Morley (2001, in Kilickaya 2004) state that authentic materials increase students' motivation by exposing real language. Besides increasing their motivation, Richards (2001: 253) also states some other advantages. The first is authentic materials have positive effect on learner motivation. The second is they provide authentic cultural information about the target culture. The third is they relate more closely to learners' needs so that provide a link between the classroom and students' needs in the real world, and the last is authentic materials provide opportunities for the teachers to explore their potential in designing tasks and activities in the classroom.

The use of authentic materials in teaching English is also criticized from many aspects. There are some disadvantages of using authentic materials cited in Richards (2001: 253). They are 1) authentic materials are less interesting than created materials, 2) they often contain difficult language and unneeded vocabulary items, 3) created materials may be superior to authentic materials, 4) since they are specially made for pedagogical purposes, created materials provide more systemic coverage teaching items, and 4) the use of authentic materials can be a burden for teachers. Teachers need to allocate more time to prepare the materials, tasks, and activities in the classroom.

The use of authentic materials in the classroom has become popular discussions these days. Kilickaya (2004) mentions that authentic materials are beneficial in language classrooms since they contain cultural content. Learning a language is more than just learning the grammatical structure, vocabulary and pronunciation. It goes beyond than that. It also means learning the target culture. Since authentic materials are made to give real information for the readers, it contains culture of the target language. This information of culture helps the students to bridge the gap between classroom knowledge and real world knowledge. It also updates the

students about what is happening outside the classroom. By having a lot of information, students will have more ideas about what they are going to write since most of the students are still confused of what are they going to write.

Furthermore, Berardo (2006) states that authentic materials enhance the students' motivation in learning language. There are some reasons why authentic materials can motivate the students in learning language. The first is because of its variations and real presentation. There are a lot of kinds of authentic materials that can be found around the world. The materials will give the students excitement of learning new things differently. Secondly, they contain real information which will motivate the students to learn since they can actually find it in real world communication. This increases students' awareness to learn the language because they feel need it for communication. In addition, authentic materials also challenge students' intelligence since they are different in form and content from textbook materials.

In addition, authentic materials also enhance students' motivation in the way that it creates authentic environment in the classroom (Wu, 2008). By having authentic environment, students will have more chance to find real exposure of the target language. The exposure of the target language can be found in texts. Different texts have different goals to achieve. To achieve the goals, some different language features and grammatical forms are necessary to learn. Authentic materials will help the students to recognize different kinds of using vocabularies and structures among different kinds of texts.

This study intended to improve the writing skills of Grade XI students of SMKN 1 Kalasan through authentic materials and to find on how the authentic materials are used in order to improve the writing skills of Grade XI students of SMKN 1 Kalasan.

Research Method

This action research used Kemmis and McTaggart's model consisting of two cycles. Each cycle consisted of planning, action, observation, and reflection. This research was conducted in the first semester of the 2016/2017 academic year. The subjects were Grade XI students of SMKN 1 Kalasan. The data were qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data were obtained through observations and interviews, while the quantitative data were gained through tests. Some instruments were used to collect data, namely observation checklists, interview guidelines, and writing tests. The qualitative data were analyzed by following some steps, namely assembling the data, categorizing the data, comparing the data, and building interpretation. The quantitative data were analyzed by using repeated measures ANOVA. Democratic, outcome, process, catalytic, and dialogic validity were used to ensure the validity of the qualitative data. The reliability was achieved by using enhanced time, investigator, and theoretical triangulation. The validity and reliability of the quantitative data were assessed in the terms of content validity and inter-rater reliability.

Findings and Discussion

Before the implementation of authentic materials in teaching and learning process of writing, there were some problems found at the reconnaissance stage. The problems were related to the students' interest, vocabulary mastery, content, and insufficient scaffolding in writing.

Authentic materials were used as the model of the text in the classroom. The students were asked to study and identify the generic structure of the text. Moreover, the text, which is in the form of an invitation letter, was also presented and discussed. By identifying the authentic materials texts, the students were able to recognize the organization of the texts easily. This action also helped the students to write the content of the text. They could refer to the example of the text to help them develop their ideas. It can be seen from the following field note and interview transcript.

The researcher distributed examples of invitation letter to the students. The letters were authentic invitation letter about a conference conducted by UNY and an invitation about a company event. She asked the students to read the texts first. After that she asked them what the texts were about. They could answer it correctly in Indonesian. She also asked about the organization of the texts. She asked them to identify whether they had different kinds of organizations.

(Field Note 3)

R: *Apakah authentic materials membantu siswa menulis surat undangan Bu?*

(Do authentic materials help the students to write an invitation letter?)

T: *Saya lihat cukup membantu ya, karena contoh surat yang dipakai cenderung sama jadi memudahkan siswa untuk mengingat templatnya.*

(I think authentic materials help the students to write. Since the examples are similar, it made the students easier to remember the template of the letter.)

(Interview 6)

Based on the interview, the use of authentic materials in the classroom also gave challenge for the students. They found many difficult words from the text. They also found difficulties in understanding some sentence constructions in the text. To overcome these problems, the researcher provided a hangman game as a supplementary activity in the classroom. The implementation of this activity helped the students to improve their vocabulary and increase their interest in participating in the teaching and learning process.

R: *Kemarin kan pakai teks undangan asli, contohnya yang dari UNY itu, menurut kamu suratnya gampang atau susah?*

(Do you think the example of real invitation letters are difficult to understand?)

S5: *Gampang-gampang susah Mbak, isinya lumayan susah, banyak kata-kata yang tidak tahu.*

(Well, some parts are easy and some others are also difficult. The content is quite difficult, there were many difficult words that I do not know.)

R: *Oh vocabularynya ya. Menurut kamu dengan mempelajari teksnya, membantu kamu untuk bisa menulis nggak?*

(I see, it is about the vocabulary. Do you think the texts help you to write?)

S5: *Membantu Mbak, jadi saya nggak bingung mau menulis apa dulu.*

(It helps me to write, so I am not confuse about ehat should I write first.)
(Interview 8)

This research aimed to improve the students' writing skills. In order to help the students to write, the researcher conducted activities which provided scaffolding to write. The activities were in the form of labelling text, arranging jumbled paragraphs, and completing the blank text. Those activities also helped the students to understand the text and recognize the structure and language features of the text.

To make the students be more motivated in learning invitation letter, the researcher gave easy task for them. In pairs, they were asked to label their invitation letter based on its generic structure. Most of them did the task quickly and correctly. "Do you find any difficulties in doing the task?" they answered "No, Miss. It is easy."

(Field Note 5)

The analysis from the quantitative data showed that the students' writing improved after the use of authentic materials. The result of the tests can be seen in the table below.

Table 1. Result of Quantitative Data

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Pre-test	60.161	3.9230	31
Progress test	70.726	4.3872	31
Post-test	78.952	6.9454	31

The result on the table above showed that the students' mean score increased. The result of the pre-test was 60.1. It increased into 70.7 in Cycle 1. In Cycle 2, the score increased to 78.9. These scores showed that there was an improvement of students' writing skills after using authentic materials in the classroom. To support the descriptive analysis data, the researcher also analyzed the data by looking at the Test of Within-Subjects Effects. The Test of Within-Subjects Effect is used to examine whether the test results are significantly different. The results of the analysis can be seen on the table below.

Table 2. Result of Test of Within-Subjects Effects

Tests of Within-Subjects Effects								
Measure: MEASURE_1								
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power ^a

Time	Sphericity Assumed	5500.941	2	2750.470	129.529	.000	.812	259.059	1.000
	Greenhouse-Geisser	5500.941	1.813	3034.927	129.529	.000	.812	234.778	1.000
	Huynh-Feldt	5500.941	1.922	2861.426	129.529	.000	.812	249.014	1.000
	Lower-bound	5500.941	1.000	5500.941	129.529	.000	.812	129.529	1.000
Error(Time)	Sphericity Assumed	1274.059	60	21.234					
	Greenhouse-Geisser	1274.059	54.376	23.430					
	Huynh-Feldt	1274.059	57.673	22.091					
	Lower-bound	1274.059	30.000	42.469					
a. Computed using alpha = .05									

From the results above, it can be seen that the significance value is .000 which is less than .05 ($p < .05$). Since the alpha level is less than .05 it can be concluded that there was a statistically significant difference. This suggests that there was a change in the students' writing scores across the three different time periods before, during, and after the implementation.

Richards (2001: 253) states that authentic materials are related learners' needs to provide a link between the classroom and the real world. This statement is also supported by Guariento and Morley (2001) who states that authentic materials increase the students' motivation in learning English since it contains real language. In this research, the researcher provided the authentic materials text which was used at the Phoenix Hotel Yogyakarta. Since the students were vocational students whose major was hotel accommodation, the use of the text increased their interest. They were able to relate their classroom knowledge to the real world knowledge which were related to their field.

However, Richards (2001: 253) also mentions that one of the disadvantages of authentic materials is that they contain difficult language. In this research, the researcher also found that the students had difficulties in understanding the text since it contained difficult words and sentence structures.

Conclusion

The result of the qualitative and quantitative data revealed the improvement of the students' writing skills by using authentic materials as the model of the texts. Authentic materials helped the students to be familiar with the content and organization of the text. The use of authentic materials also helped the students to improve their vocabulary mastery since they contain various words. The authentic materials also increase the students' interest in learning since they are related to

the learners' needs to provide a link between the classroom and real world knowledge. In conclusion, the result of this research shows that the use of authentic materials improves the students' writing ability of Grade XI students of SMKN 1 Kalasan.

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