

Improving Students' Writing Skills through Mind Mapping in Grade VIII at SMPN 1 Imogiri in the Academic Year of 2014/2015

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Abstract: The study aimed to improve the students' writing skills using mind mapping technique in Grade VIII A at SMP N 1 Imogiri in the academic year of 2014/2015. The study was action research involving 30 students of Grade VIII A at SMP N 1 Imogiri. The other participants were the English teacher and the researcher's colleague as the collaborator. The research procedure which was carried out in two cycles consisted of reconnaissance, planning, action and observation, and reflection. The data were qualitative and quantitative. The qualitative data were analyzed through assembling, coding, comparing the data, building interpretations, and reporting the outcome. On the other hand, the quantitative data were analyzed through descriptive analysis. The research findings showed that the students' writing ability improved, especially in the aspects of content and organization of the text. These results were supported by the mean score of the post-test (78.34), which was 6.71 higher than that of the pre-test (71.63). This achievement proves that using mind mapping technique in teaching and learning process of writing could improve the students' writing skills significantly.

Keywords: mind mapping technique, improvement, writing skills

Introduction

Writing is one of the ways to communicate. It helps students to express their mind and helps students to learn English in a more controlled way. Therefore, writing is considered as an important skill to be learnt. Teachers of English should teach writing equally and appropriately as the way they teach other skills. However, what happens seems to be different from what we expect. In reality, there are cases where the chances to practice English skills, especially writing skill, are barely inadequate. There are some teachers who ignore writing skills since they are not included in the national examination. Furthermore, writing is considered to be the most difficult skill to learn.

There are some reasons why writing becomes the most difficult skill to learn. Firstly, as stated by Harmer (2004, p.3), if spoken language can be naturally acquired because children (as learners) are exposed to it, the ability to write has to be consciously learned. While students learn writing, they need time and a teacher to teach them. Time is needed because writing involves a number of stages such as brainstorming, making notes, planning, writing a draft, editing, and proof-reading (Spratt, Pulverness, and Williams, 2005). A more experienced teacher is needed because students need someone to help them in the process of writing and to evaluate their writing. Secondly, writing involves some aspects which students need to master before they can really write. Those include the mastery of spelling, grammar, punctuation, and capitalization. Thirdly, writing needs higher-order composing skills (Westwood, 2008). It involves the ability to sequence and to express the content of the writing.

The students of Grade VIII A at SMP N 1 Imogiri also did not have enough chance to practice writing in English. Moreover, they also considered writing as a difficult skill to learn. From the interviews and observation, the researcher found that the students had some problems related to content and text organization. When they had writing task, it took them long time to think. They wrote slowly and they found it difficult to find ideas to write. In addition, they did not know how to organize those ideas to make appropriate texts. As a result, they produced short and incoherent texts. Then from further interview in the teaching and learning process, it was found that the teaching and learning process did not expose students to the process of writing. It might explained why students had difficulties in finding and arranging ideas.

Considering the problems identified above, it was necessary to find a way to solve the problems in the teaching and learning process of English in order to improve the students' writing skills at SMP N 1 Imogiri. Hence, the researcher decided to use mind mapping technique to solve the problems. Writing has been described by some experts in a series of way. Spratt, Pulverness, and Williams (2005) define that writing is one of the productive skills. When people write, they produce language rather than receiving it. It involves communicating a message and making signs on a page. Furthermore, they need to know what messages they want to communicate and to whom they are writing. These things will influence what people write and how they write. In line with this, Harmer (2004) adds that writers should know who they are writing for. It helps the writers to decide what to say and how to say it.

Brown (2001) states that long time ago, written language was simply seen as the graphic representation of spoken language, that writing and speaking was the same. The difference just lied in graphic instead of auditory signals. However, that statement was not true. Brown further explains that writing requires different set of competencies and is different from speaking. Writing needs a process, it is a result of thinking, drafting, and revising. This statement is supported by Harmer (2004).

Speech is so instant, speakers make quick decisions about what to say and modify it as they speak. Writing, however, is significantly different because the final product is not nearly so instant. Writers have a chance to plan and modify what finally appear as the final product, which is later referred as the writing process (p. 8). According to those statements, nowadays in pedagogical area, the current emphasis on the process of writing must be seen in the perspective of a balance between process and product. Therefore, it is important to introduce the process of writing to the students. It helps students to be creative and helps them to develop what they want to say.

From the definitions above, it can be concluded that writing is one of the productive skills. In order to write, writers have to know what message they really want to convey and to whom will the message be delivered. In addition, unlike speaking, writing requires steps that writers need to follow. Those steps include planning, drafting, and revising.

Mind mapping has a variety of names: concept map, semantic mapping, knowledge mapping, and graphic organizer; they refer to the same concept (Svantesson, 1989). It is a technique that was first popularized by Tony Buzan. It can be applied in every aspect of human life including writing. According to Buzan (1994) mind mapping technique is a method used to organize and prioritize information with the help of keywords or images. Each keyword is a tool to unlock facts, ideas, information, and also to release the true potential of brain. Further, Buzan (2007) argues that mind mapping technique is the best way to make creative notes, get new ideas, and plan a project.

In the other hand if mind mapping is the technique, a mind map is the visualization of mind mapping technique. Buzan (1994) explains that a mind map has four characteristics which include the following points.

1. The subject, the key image, or the keyword is put in the central image.
2. The main ideas of the keyword spread as its branches.
3. The branches, then, are developed to explain the main idea in brief words, a brief sentence or a simple image.
4. All of the branches form a connected nodal structure.
5. It is enriched with color, picture, and codes. These will improve students' creativity and imagination. Below is an example of a mind map.



Figure 1: Mind mapping technique as a prewriting strategy.

Because of the characteristics above, mind mapping technique helps students to solve their problems in writing, especially in developing and arranging ideas. If students use mind mapping technique, their time for writing preparation is reduced because their mind is structured. The clear organization encourages potentially endless flow of thought. Thus, students will find ideas easily and the structure will help them to arrange those ideas. Moreover, mind mapping technique focuses on the writing preparation. Therefore, asking students to use mind mapping technique will also expose them to the process of writing and encourage them to go through the process of writing.

Research Findings

Through the actions implemented in Cycle I and II, the use of mind mapping technique was proved to bring positive results towards the students' writing skills, including their motivation to write. The results could be seen from the changes after the implementation. Those changes will be presented in Table 1 as follow.

Table 1. The changes after the implementation of mind mapping technique

No	Before the implementation of actions	After the implementation of actions
1	The students did not apply the process of writing.	The students applied the process of writing
2	The students did not have confidence in writing. They	The students had more confidence in writing and

	wrote slowly and sometimes just copied from text books.	wrote faster.
3	Dealing with the content, the student only wrote few sentences and the writings were lack of ideas.	Most of the students were able to produce longer texts with details and more ideas.
3	Dealing with text organization, the students' texts were incoherent and contained many jumping ideas.	Dealing with the organization, most of the students were able to produce well-organized and cohesive texts. The ideas were clearly stated and supported.
4	Dealing with the vocabulary, the students did not write varied vocabularies.	The students had more varied vocabularies in their writing.

The results of the implementation not only can be seen from the changes behavior presented in Table 1 but also from the students' score. The tables below show students' writing score from pre-test and post test.

Table 2. The Students' Writing Score in each Aspect

Component	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Gain Score
Content	20.43	23.26	2.83
Organization	14.30	16.50	2.20
Vocabulary	14.30	15.40	1.10
Language Use	18.80	19.26	0.46
Mechanic	3.80	4.00	0.20

Table 3. The Students' Mean Score in all Aspects

	N	Mean
Pre-Test	30	71.63
Post-Test	30	78.34
Gain Score		6.71

Table 2 above presents the mean of the students' score related to the five aspects of writing i.e. content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and materials. Those scoring are based on the writing rubric adapted from Jacob's et al's scoring profile in Weigle (2002:116). The scores that improve the most are the content aspect and organization aspect. Meanwhile in Table 3, the scores are obtained from the accumulation of the students' scores in all five

aspects of writing in pre-test and post-test. In the pre-test, the mean score is 71.63. It increases into 78.34 in post-test. The gain score from pre-test to post test is 6.71. The scores above proves that the use of mind mapping technique is effective to solve the students' problems in writing.

Conclusion

Writing is a process of thinking, drafting, and revising. Therefore it is important for teachers to introduce the process of writing to the students before asking them to write a text. If teachers do not do that, the students might have problems in finding and developing ideas and they will find that writing is difficult. In accordance with the facts above, it is necessary to find an interesting technique to expose students to the process of writing, hence the appropriate technique is mind mapping.

Based on the findings, the students had improvement in writing because of the technique. It was proven by the students' post-test scores which were higher than students' pre-test score. It can be concluded that mind mapping technique is effective to improve students' writing skills especially in developing and arranging ideas.

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