

Efforts to Improve the Writing Skill of Grade VII Students of SMPN 2 Muntilan by Using Cue Cards

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Abstract: This study aimed to improve the writing skills of grade VII D students of SMPN 2 Muntilan through the use of cue cards. The actions were implemented based on the curriculum, in line with the course grid and lesson plans developed before the implementation of the action. This was an action research study which consisted of two cycles. It followed the action research steps including reconnaissance, planning, action, observation, and reflection. The researcher worked collaboratively with the English teacher, the students, and the collaborator. There were two kinds of data presented in this research, namely qualitative and quantitative. The data were collected through the observation during the teaching and learning activities; interviews with the English teachers and the students of Grade VII D; a pre-test, a progress test, and a post-test; discussions with the English teacher; and questionnaires distributed to the students. The data were in the form of field notes, observation checklists, interview transcripts, student scores, questionnaire results, and photographs. The validity of the data was obtained by applying democratic validity, outcome validity, process validity, catalytic validity, dialogic validity, and content validity. To check the trustworthiness of the data, the researcher applied the time triangulation, space triangulation, researcher triangulation, theoretical triangulation, and inter-rater reliability. The qualitative data were analyzed by assembling the data, coding the data, comparing the data, building meanings and interpretations, and reporting the outcomes. The quantitative data were analyzed by comparing the students' average score in the pre-test, the progress test, and the post-test. The results of the study showed that the students' writing skills increased after the implementation of the cue cards. It helped the students to generate their ideas and improve their vocabulary mastery. The cue cards made it easier for them to connect between objects and language. The students' motivation in writing also enhanced in the teaching and learning process as they were more active in the class participation. The other finding of the use of cue cards was that the students wrote the singular and plural nouns and verbs more accurately. These findings were also supported by an increase in the average score of the students by 14.34, from 66.37 in the pre-test to 80.71 in the post-test.

Keywords: cue cards, media, students' writing skills, teaching writing

Abstrak: Tujuan dari penelitian tindakan ini adalah untuk meningkatkan kemampuan menulis siswa menggunakan kartu petunjuk pada siswa kelas VII D SMPN 2 Muntilan. Penelitian ini dilakukan berdasarkan kurikulum, grid kursus dan rencana pelaksanaan pembelajaran yang dikembangkan sebelum pelaksanaan. Penelitian ini terdiri dari dua siklus. Tahap-tahap dalam penelitian ini adalah pengambilan data, perencanaan, tindakan, observasi, dan refleksi. Peneliti bekerja sama dengan guru bahasa Inggris, siswa, dan kolaborator. Dua macam data disajikan dalam penelitian ini, yaitu data kualitatif dan data kuantitatif. Data tersebut diperoleh dari observasi selama kegiatan belajar mengajar; wawancara dengan guru bahasa Inggris dan siswa kelas VII D; pre-test dan post-test; diskusi dengan guru bahasa Inggris; dan kuesioner yang diberikan kepada siswa. Data tersebut berupa catatan lapangan, daftar observasi, transkrip wawancara, skor siswa, hasil kuesioner, dan foto. Keabsahan data diperoleh dengan menerapkan validitas demokratik, validitas hasil, validitas proses, validitas katalitik, validitas dialogik, dan validitas isi. Untuk memastikan keandalan data, peneliti menerapkan triangulasi waktu, triangulasi ruang, triangulasi peneliti, triangulasi teoretis, dan reliabilitas antarpenilai. Data kualitatif dianalisis dengan mengumpulkan semua data, mengkategorikan data tersebut, membandingkan data, menginterpretasikan temuan, dan melaporkan hasil. Data kuantitatif dianalisis dengan membandingkan nilai rata-rata siswa dalam pre-test, progress test, dan post-test. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kemampuan menulis siswa meningkat setelah menggunakan kartu petunjuk. Media kartu petunjuk membantu siswa untuk menghasilkan ide dan meningkatkan penguasaan kosa kata mereka. Kartu petunjuk memudahkan mereka dalam menghubungkan objek dan bahasa. Motivasi siswa dalam menulis juga meningkat dalam proses belajar mengajar. Hal tersebut ditunjukkan dengan keaktifan mereka di dalam partisipasi kelas. Temuan lain dalam penggunaan kartu petunjuk adalah para siswa lebih akurat dalam menulis kata benda dan kata kerja, baik tunggal maupun jamak. Temuan ini juga didukung oleh kenaikan rata-rata skor siswa sebesar 14,34 poin dari 66,37 pada pre-test menjadi 80,71 pada post-test.

Kata Kunci: kartu petunjuk, media, kemampuan menulis siswa, pengajaran menulis

Introduction

English is one of the compulsory subjects for junior high school students in Indonesia as mentioned in the Education and Culture Minister Regulation (*Permendikbud*) No. 21/2016 about the primary and secondary education content

standards. According to the regulation, one of the competencies they should have is the ability to communicate interpersonally, transactionally and functionally about the things closest to the daily life and activities of the students at home, school, and communities. Therefore, it means that the purpose

of English in the teaching and learning activities for junior high school students is to develop their communicative competence, both in oral and written forms, to achieve the level of functional literacy. Furthermore, it will give them an awareness of the importance of English.

According to Curriculum 2013 (K-13) syllabi issued by the Ministry of Education and Culture, writing in English is one of the skills that should be mastered by junior high school students. Based on the basic competency, the students are required to have the ability to write several texts of different types. They are descriptive, recount, narrative, factual report, and short functional texts.

In fact, not all students can write in English correctly because it is not a simple thing to do. To write in English, there are many things to be considered such as spelling, grammar, punctuation, coherence, and cohesion to make the readers understand what the writer is going to say. Richards and Renandya (2002) state that writing is the most difficult skill for L2 learners. In line with this idea, Nunan (1999) specifically mentions that it is the most difficult thing to do in language learning to produce such coherent, fluent, extended piece of writing. Sometimes, the students have many ideas in their mind, but they cannot jot it down.

The students' lack of writing ability was also found in Grade VII of SMPN 2 Muntilan. Based on the observation held at SMPN 2

Muntilan and from the interview with the English teacher, the students of Grade VII got difficulties during the process of learning writing. Based on the issue, the researcher considered that it is important to find an effective solution to be applied in the writing learning process to improve students' writing ability. Therefore, the researcher used cue cards as the media to improve the students' writing skill.

Kemp and Smellie (1989) state that media would make the instruction more interesting. The use of cue cards is expected to increase the students' ability to write descriptive texts in a fun way. The cue cards are printed in full color and presented with clues so that the students can make the connection between objects and language. Therefore, it is easier for them to recognize the objects before writing.

Definitions of Writing

According to Langan (2011:13), writing is a skill that requires a good ability of the language, not a "natural gift." Therefore, writing can be learned through a series of steps, and it needs more exercises to express ideas in a written form. It includes the organization of words, phrases, clauses, and sentences into coherent and cohesive paragraphs and texts. In line with this idea, Brown (2007:391) mentions that a written product is a product of thinking, drafting, and revising that requires a special skill on generating ideas, organizing them coherently, how to use the discourse markers, and rhetorical conventions to put them cohesively into a written

form, how to revise a text for clearer meaning, how to edit it with appropriate grammar, and how to produce a final project.

The Process of Writing

Murray (2003) proposes that writing is a demanding, intellectual process that can produce a product worth reading. To do a worth product reading needs several processes as shown in the figure below.

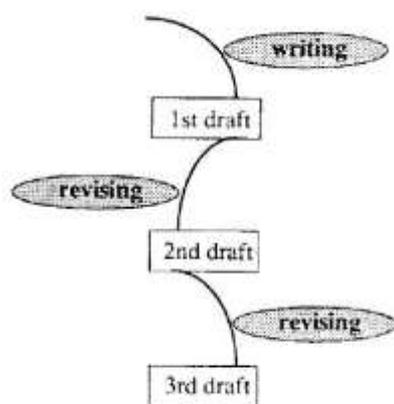


Figure I: **The writing process proposed by Murray**

The writing process involves prewriting, drafting and revising. Prewriting is everything that takes place before the first draft. It often includes invention, brainstorming, researching, planning, and outlining. The first draft is not polished and needs revision. Murray insisted that writers should have multiple drafts over the course of a writing process. After the third draft, the writing process involves rewriting, where the author evaluates what has already been written and determine what changes should be made in delivery and organization through revision.

The Murray's model was applied in this action research because, in the classroom, the researcher would have the students to put most of their time in the process. By going through each step, the students' writing evolves from just ideas to an organized piece of work.

Teaching of Writing in Junior High School

In the Education and Culture Minister Regulation (Permendikbud) No.22/2016, the implementation process in schools has been mentioned. Based on the regulation, the learning processes in schools are organized interactively, fun, challenging, and motivating the participants to perform actively. Therefore, one of the principles of learning that can be used is strengthening the scientific approach. Based on that principle, the scientific approach was used in this study. It consists of some steps, including observing (identifying things that need to be known), questioning (formulating hypotheses), collecting information on various techniques, associating (analyzing information and concluding), and communicating the answers.

Cue Cards

According to Mora (1994), a cue card is a medium with pictures or words that contain clues. It means that the content in the card is not explicitly explained. The students have to work with their mind to interpret the meaning behind the pictures.

Cue cards are also described as words or pictures that are used to prompt or encourage learners to produce a particular language during a controlled practice activity/drill (Spratt et al., 2002). However, in this study, cue cards with pictures are the central element. Avery (2013:69) states that cue cards are hints you need to take through your talk. It can be in the form of words or pictures. In teaching, it can be used in productive skills, which are speaking and writing skills. In this research, the researcher used pictures-based cue cards to improve the students' writing skills.

Assessing Writing

In assessing writing, teachers should consider two important things. They are purpose and text type. Purpose affects how teachers determine the aspects of writing and how they grade the aspects. If they want their students to write descriptive texts, the aspects can be content, organization, language use, vocabulary, and mechanical components of writing.

In this research, the researcher used the scoring rubric taken from Jacobs et al.'s (1981) in Weigle (2002). It consists of five aspects of writing, namely content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. Each aspect has four levels, and it also has a range that is used to determine the quality of a written work. In addition to this, the details of each criterion are also described.

Research Method

This was a classroom action research study. In general, classroom action research activities involve repeated cycles, each consisting of planning, action, observation, and reflection as stated by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) in Burns (2010:9). This study aimed to improve the writing skills of Grade VII D students of SMPN 2 Muntilan using cue cards. The subjects were 32 students of Grade VII D of SMPN 2 Muntilan. The study was done in two cycles from June 1st to July 31st, 2017. The result of one cycle was used to determine the need for the following cycle in order to solve the problems by applying the media.

The table below shows the types of data, the data collection techniques, and the instruments used in the study.

Table 1: The Types of Data, the Data Collection Techniques, and Instruments

| Types of Data | Techniques | Instruments |
|----------------------|-----------------------|---|
| Qualitative | Classroom Observation | - Observation checklists - A camera |
| | Interview | - Interview guidelines - A recorder |
| Quantitative | Testing | - Written tests - The scoring rubric of writing in five components adapted from Jacobs et al. in Weigle (2002) - Questionnaires |

The data in this research were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. For the qualitative analysis, the researcher followed the steps adapted from Burns (2010:104-105) which consists of assembling the data, coding the data, comparing the data, building meanings and interpretation, and reporting the outcomes. For the quantitative analysis, the researcher compared the pre-test, the progress-test, and the post-test scores using repeated measures ANOVA since the students were tested more than once. It was also used to know the difference between the scores of the tests (Larson-Hall, 2010).

To make the data collected valid, Anderson et al. in Burns (1999) propose five criteria for qualitative data in action research. They are democratic validity, outcome validity, process validity, catalytic validity, and dialogic validity. Meanwhile, content validity was used for the quantitative data. To fulfill this validity, the researcher talked to the English teacher about the lesson plan and the tasks given to the students. Huck (2012:82) states that in testing the validity, one should have the experts to compare the content according to the syllabus or outline that indicates the instrument's claimed domain. Furthermore, Sugeng (2010:199) also mentions that most tests which are used at school must have this type of validity. Thus, the test given to the students must be the material based on the lesson plan.

To find out the reliability of the qualitative data, the researcher applied the time triangulation, space

triangulation, researcher triangulation, and theoretical triangulation. Burns (2010:97) states that triangulations principle is usually implemented to test out the trustworthiness of research. Furthermore, for the quantitative data, the researcher gave the fair test for the evaluation of the students' writing skills in every writing task. The writing scores for each student were obtained from two raters. The raters were the researcher and the English teacher. The researcher analyzed the data using Pearson's product-moment correlation. According to Huck (2012:75), it is one of the simplified procedures to measure the reliability among the raters if the data are raw scores. Thus, to do so, the researcher used IBM SPSS software version 22. Since the inter-rater reliability was fulfilled, the scores were reliable.

Research Findings

In the reconnaissance step, the researcher conducted some activities to find the field problems. First, an observation to know how the teaching and learning process in Grade VII D of SMPN 2 Muntilan was conducted. Before doing the observation, the researcher also discussed with the teacher to know the general condition of the teaching and learning process, including the problems faced by the teacher and the students, as well as the actions that would be implemented to solve them. Second, the researcher also interviewed the students during the observation regarding their English learning, especially in writing. It was to support the identification of the problems found. Lastly, the

researcher distributed evaluation questionnaires to the students about the effectiveness of the media and strengthened the findings of the problem, so the actions that were implemented would be suitable for them. The following field note shows some of the problems on the field.

R entered the classroom with ET. ET then introduced the observer to the Ss formally. R then sat behind the class immediately. ET said that the lesson would begin at 7.30. This school familiarizes Ss to check the cleanliness and readiness before starting the lesson. ET reminded that the drawer should be cleaned before the lesson begins. Some Ss came out to throw the garbage from their drawers. Fifteen minutes later, the lesson began. ET greeted the Ss by saying "Good morning students, how are you today?" Then, the Ss replied "Good morning, miss Lasmi. I'm fine, thank you, and you?" "I'm fine too, thank you," answered ET.

Then, ET checked for the student attendance. Two Ss did not come that day because they were sick. ET asked if the Ss had finished their homework the previous week. Some of them answered that they had finished it. **Some did not answer, and the others were just noisy.** ET then warned them to keep quiet.

Because the task was a group assignment, ET instructed the Ss to sit with their group. **This took a while because the Ss were noisy when they moved from their seat.** ET warned them once more. Then, each group exchanged their work with another group. The topic of the task was the descriptive text about the profession. ET asked one of the

group representatives to read the descriptive text. After that, ET explained once more by translating every sentence in the text and read it aloud to the class. Then, ET asked all of the groups to answer the questions provided in turn. After two groups finished reading out the results, **the classroom atmosphere was not conducive. The group that had read the text start chatting with his group mates.** ET reminded them to stay focused on the answers from the other groups.

After all the answers were corrected, ET asked the Ss to sit in their seat. ET said that the next activity was the reading assessment. ET called the Ss, and they came forward one by one to read the text. Some Ss were fluent and had good pronunciation, **while the others were stammered.** Three minutes later, the bell rang, meaning that the time was up. There were some Ss who had not read the text. ET then said, "Okay everyone, because the time is up, we will continue the materials next week, please prepare for it." The lesson finished at 9.50. ET then said goodbye. R along with ET left the classroom.

FN 1

After doing the observation, the researcher interviewed some students and discussed with the English teacher. Then, to know the students' writing skills before conducting the action, the researcher held a pre-test. It was conducted on May 17th, 2017. Their writing was scored based on a writing scoring rubric. The mean score of the pre-test is 66.37. Regarding the field notes, interview

transcripts with the English teacher and the students, and also the students' score, some problems in the teaching and learning activities in Grade VII D of SMPN 2 Muntilan were chosen to be solved. They were the students' difficulties in organizing ideas, the students' lack of vocabulary mastery, the students' lack of motivation in English writing, the students' inaccuracy in using plural and singular verbs, and the lack of media used in the classroom.

After deciding the problems to be solved and the technique to be used in the teaching and learning process, the researcher and the English teacher discussed the plans for Cycle 1. This cycle consisted of two meetings. In each meeting, the researcher covered all of the steps in the Scientific Approach. Then, cue cards were used to overcome the lack of teaching media in the classroom, the students' low mastery of vocabulary, students' difficulty in generating ideas, and the students' lack of motivation. The researcher also designed worksheets for the students.

The first meeting was held on June 12th, 2017 and the second meeting was held on June 13th, 2017. When the researcher gave cue cards and worksheets for the first time, various comments came from the students. They were interested in the colorful cards since they rarely used any media in the classroom. Furthermore, the cue cards used as the media and the worksheets were printed in full color. It would also be more exciting and easier for the students to write by observing the cue cards since that

would be the first time they used cue cards in the classroom.

While the worksheets were distributed, some Ss commented on the worksheet. "Hey, the cover is good." Some other Ss said, "There are some cards as well, we could play with them." Meanwhile, another student asked "Miss, do we have to pay for this?" "No, it is for you." "Wow, thank you, miss!" he said. The Ss then observed the cue cards enthusiastically.

FN 3

After the implementation of the cue cards in Cycle 1, the researcher collected evidence to prove whether the actions in Cycle 1 could solve the problems or not. The reflection was taken from the observation during the action and the interview with the English teacher and the students. Based on the observation and interviews, it was concluded that the media helped the students in writing the text.

R : What do you think about today's lesson?

S : I enjoyed it, miss, the materials were full of pictures.

R : When you used many pictures, was it easier for you to understand, or was it just the same? Or did it make you even confused?

S : Of course it was easier, miss.

R : Why?

S : Because I'm not confused about what to write.

Interview 5

However, some problems still occurred in this cycle. The students still made mistakes regarding spelling. They also had difficulty in writing the adjective about color, and they lost their motivation when it was close to recess. Furthermore, the mixed tasks of singular and plural made the students unable to focus on one thing at a time. Also, the researcher did not manage the time well in the first meeting, so some of the tasks that should have been given on that day were made as homework.

The researcher scored the last task as a post-test in Cycle 1 to estimate the students' writing ability before and after the actions of Cycle 1. The mean score was 69.34. Based on the result, the solutions to be applied in the next cycle was discussed by the researcher and the collaborators, especially regarding the students' writing ability and some other aspects that still needed to be improved.

Cycle 2 of this research also consisted of two meetings. The first meeting was held on June 16th, 2017 and the second meeting was held on June 17th, 2017. To solve the problems in the previous cycle, the researcher implemented additional actions such as adding an exercise on arranging jumbled words into ordered sentences and giving the cue cards of the primary color spectrum to help students write the adjective about colors. The researcher was also more disciplined in carrying out every activity that had been designed in the lesson plan.

In the last meeting of Cycle 2, the researcher had some interviews with

some students to know the effectiveness of the media given to them. Based on those interviews, it was concluded that the cue cards improved the students' writing skills as well as their motivation.

R : How was the post-test today? Was it easy or difficult?

S : It was so-so, miss. But I could do it.

R : Good. So, I have been teaching for four meetings now. Do you feel any progress in your writing from the cue cards?

S : Yes, I do.

R : What kind of progress?

S : Now I know new vocabulary items.

R : Is that it? Any other progress?

S : Well, now I know about those rules too.

R : What rules?

S : The rules that you told us, like indentation and punctuation.

R : Alright, what about finding the ideas for your text? Do you still have difficulty on it?

S : Not anymore, cause I got those pictures.

R : So, do you prefer to cue cards in writing?

S : Yes, miss.

Interview 14

Then, the students' writings were evaluated using a post-test. The mean score was 80.71.

Discussion

According to the interviews, observation, the evaluation of the students' writings, and the positive change of the students' attitude during the teaching and learning process, it can be said that the use of cue cards in improving the students' writing skills in Grade VII D of SMPN 2 Muntilan was proven successful. The students' writing ability in all aspects was improved after the use of cue cards.

Chayanuvat in Ambarini (2014) mentions that cue cards come in a wide variety and are beautiful and colorful, lending themselves as an essential element of fun and motivation. **They enable the students to mobilize their imagination and interpretation using their life experiences. In this way, the students are challenged** to show their creativity. Furthermore, pictures offer a rich source of contextualization. Not only is what is in the picture seen, but the background and the context linked with it are also portrayed as well. They offer a base for the students to build up their language. More importantly, they transfer the real world into the classroom as best as they can. They help the students to use a language in meaningful ways. For the teacher, this media is very easy to find. There are the interesting pictures in daily newspapers, magazines, and websites. It is in line with the findings of a study conducted by Renaningtyas (2014) that the implementation of picture-cued tasks in teaching writing increased the students' motivation and interest. Additionally, the

students were more active in the writing activities than before.

In this study, the students' writing ability was scored by pre-test, progress test, and post-test to analyze their improvement. The researcher administered the pre-test after the observation on May 17th, 2017. While implementing the actions, the researcher conducted two tests on June 13th and June 17th, 2017. Lastly, the post-test was held on June 19th, 2017. The data were collected at three different points in time to meet the time triangulation. The success of the actions could also be seen from the students' score improvement in the table below.

Table 2: **General Findings of the Students' Score from Pre-test, Cycle 1, Cycle 2, and Post-test**

| COMPONENT | PRE-TEST | CYCLE 1 | CYCLE 2 | POST-TEST |
|--------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| CONTENT | 21.21 | 21.57 | 23.68 | 24.85 |
| ORGANIZATION | 14.99 | 15.35 | 16.06 | 16.59 |
| VOCABULARY | 14.60 | 15.65 | 17.12 | 19.60 |
| LANGUAGE USE | 12.57 | 13.29 | 14.24 | 15.34 |
| MECHANICS | 3 | 3.5 | 3.98 | 4.31 |
| TOTAL SCORE | 66.37 | 69.34 | 75.10 | 80.71 |

From the table above, it can be seen that the students' writing skills increased. The students' mean score in pre-test was 66.37. The students' mean score in Cycle 1 was 69.34. It increased in Cycle 2 to 75.10, and in post-test, the students' mean score reached 80.71. It can be concluded that the use of cue cards can improve the students' skills of writing descriptive texts.

The successful use of cue cards can also be seen from the analysis using repeated measures ANOVA. The analysis shows that there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the pre-test, progress test, and post-test. It is indicated by $F(1.450, 44.944) = 71.961, P < 0.05$. Then, the post-hoc tests using the Bonferroni correction indicate that the use of cue cards improved the students' average scores from pre-test to progress-test (from 66.37 to 72.22) which is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). Besides, the Bonferroni correction also indicates that there is an increase in their average scores from progress-test to post-test (from 72.22 to 80.71) which is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). Therefore, it can be concluded that the use of cue cards elicits a statistically significant improvement in the students' writing skills. Meanwhile, the result of the evaluation questionnaire also shows that the use of cue cards was effective to help Grade VII D students in writing. Out of 32 students, 19 of them admitted that they strongly agreed about this, the other 12 stated that they agreed, and one of them did not agree.

Conclusions

This research emphasizes the application of the use of cue cards to improve the writing ability of Grade VII students of SMPN 2 Muntilan. As to the findings of this research, the use of cue cards is believed to be effective to improve the students' writing ability. The improvement can be seen from the result of the students' score, the field notes of the observation, and the interview with

the English teacher and the students. There are two kinds of data namely qualitative and quantitative data presented in this research. Furthermore, there are some activities done in this research. They are using cue cards to stimulate the students to generate their ideas in writing, improving their writing ability, especially regarding vocabulary and the use of singular and plural, giving feedback about their writing to help them in revision, and improving their motivation to learn English.

From the qualitative data, the findings of this study show that the students' motivation in writing increases after the implementation of the cue cards in the teaching and learning process as they are also more active in the class participation. The use of cue cards has a significant role in helping them to generate ideas. Furthermore, the cue cards improve their vocabulary mastery because it helps them understand English words. The other finding of the use of cue cards is that the students can write the singular and plural nouns and verbs more accurately.

The quantitative data are used to support the qualitative data. They are collected from the students' mean score in the pre-test, Cycle 1, Cycle 2, and post-test. In the pre-test, the students' mean score is 66.37. After Cycle 1, the students' average score is 69.34. Then, after Cycle 2, the students' average score is 75.10. Lastly, in the post-test, the mean of the students' score is 80.71. Overall, the improvement in the students' mean score from the pre-test to the post-test is 14.34. Then, the analysis

results using repeated measures of ANOVA also proved the success of the actions. In the analysis, the researcher compared the scores of pre-test, progress-test, and post-test. The result of the analysis shows that

the value of P is 0.05, and the value of F is 71.961 ($F(1.450, 44.944) = 71.961, P < 0.05$), which means that there is a significant increase after the researcher implemented the actions to the students.

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