

IMPROVING STUDENTS' DESCRIPTIVE PARAGRAPH WRITING ABILITY THROUGH RAFT TECHNIQUE AT ENGLISH EDUCATION DEPARTMENT OF MANADO STATE UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

This research was conducted to find out whether RAFT technique can improve students' writing ability and to explain how RAFT technique can improve students' writing ability. This research used Classroom Action Research with the combination of Quantitative data (scores of pre-test and post-test) and Qualitative data in the form of observation, field notes, journal and documentations. The number of students involved in this research was 20 students. The implementation of this research was conducted in two cycles, every cycle consisted of three meetings with the steps of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. The findings through quantitative data of this research displayed an improvement with the percentage of the mean scores from pre-test and post-test. The mean score of pre-test was 50.75 and the mean score of post-test in cycle 2 was 81.9. The percentage of the students who could pass the standard score was 10 % and 100 % from pre-test to post-test cycle 2. It means that there was 31.5 increased from pre-test to post-test and 90 % students could reach the standard score (minimum criterion) since pre-test to post-test cycle 2. While in qualitative data, the results through observation checklist, field notes, the researcher's journal, and documentations showed that the use of the RAFT technique could improve students' ability in writing descriptive paragraph. The students became active, initiative, and responsible to their writing. Additionally, the students were interested in the use of RAFT technique due to the RAFT aspects in helping them to write descriptive paragraph orderly. Based on the findings, it could be concluded that RAFT technique was effective to be used in improving university students' ability in writing descriptive paragraph. Regarding on the conclusion, this research is recommended to English Lecturers or Teachers in teaching writing to improve students' ability.

Keywords: Writing, Writing ability, University Student, Descriptive Paragraph, RAFT (Role, Action, Format, Topic), Classroom Action Research

INTRODUCTION

The need of writing ability constitutes as a compulsory subject taught from elementary up to university. In Indonesia as well, students are insisted in mastering skills which are covered listening, speaking, reading and writing. Sudarningsih & Wardana (2011) give an opinion that writing is a skill to express the language although by the written form. In a word, writing synthesizes as a tool that can be used to interact.

Consequently, writing can be classified as an interaction among others. Because of the reasons, mastering writing is not easy. Oshima and Hogue (1999) also agree that mastering writing, particularly academic writing is not easy. It allows students to express something about themselves, explore and explain an ideas. In English language teaching, a few researchers had used statement markings that skill of writing in the classroom can be productive skill. Pollard (2008) further believes that writing is a productive skill and it can be such a similar way to treat it in class with the teaching and learning of speaking. This statement declares that writing skill in classroom can be considered as one of the powerful skill.

Interestingly, Clanchy and Ballard (1987) put forward that writing means as a process of transferring thoughts into written words and connecting those thoughts systematically one upon another in a coherent manner. From the statement, transferring is virtually meant necessary to deliver. However, the process of transferring is sometime found difficult by many students. From the words, writing has determined as the uneasy subject to learn.

Based on the background, teaching writing is important. Raimes (1983) states that there are three reasons why teaching writing is considered important. The first is that writing reinforces the grammatical form, idioms, and vocabulary that the teachers have been doing within the class. The second is when the students write, they have chance to be familiar with a language for themselves and readers. The last is the students involve with the language with himself / herself and with his/her readers. This might be one of the reasons of all the English teachers to cope the difficulties in teaching writing. Due to such an important aspect, the need of writing is widely known in universities and institutions. That is why the constitution of this subject is suggested to be mastered.

Despite being the importance one, there are many university students who do not rely on that subject. In English Education Department of Manado State University, however, it was found that the writing skill of the third semester students of English Education Department especially in writing descriptive paragraph is still low. Descriptive paragraph is considered as a kind of paragraph which gives information to tell the description of something we can sense. Mostly, that description explains about visual sense as related with Fine Clouse's opinions in 2004. Fine (2004) elaborates that description adds an important dimension to our

lives because it moves our emotion and expands our experience. The following sentences reveal that the description in descriptive paragraph is characterized as the primary functions. The functions may spread the writer's ability in expanding sentences to deliver something and also controlling the emotions of the writer.

According to Zemach and Rumisek (2005), descriptive paragraph explains about how someone or something looks or feels and a process to explain how something is done. The indication of the words can be clarified that descriptive paragraph exhibits to the things which are going to be described. Oshima and Hogue (2007) state in line that descriptive paragraph is the ability to describe people, places, or objects accurately. From the statement, it can be summarized that descriptive paragraph contains the explanation descriptively and accurately.

From the observation and experience in teaching writing at English Education Department collaborated with the lecturer, it was found that the students were difficult to write descriptive paragraph very well. It was defined also that many students confused and did not have any better instruction to understand how to write the descriptive paragraph properly. The students did not know to focus on what they were writing during writing activity. They confused with writing problems in organizing, structuring, spelling, punctuating, using proper diction and monitoring their writing (Sudarningsih and Wardana, 2011). Some of the students were also getting bored during the process of the writing. On the other hand, the students did not only face problems like they usually get such as vocabulary, grammar, coherence, and organization, they also faced some factors which influence their ability especially in writing. These components require and challenge the researcher to offer solutions for this problem.

Indeed, to overcome the problem, the appropriate technique can be used. Ransdell and Laure Barbier (2002) maintain that a good writing technique can be trained, it can improve writing performance. In terms of concerning the definition, the current researcher is interested to apply RAFT technique in teaching writing. This technique can be said to help the students understand their role as writer, the audience they are addressed to, the varied formats for writing, and the topic they were writing about (Santa, 1988). Santa reveals that RAFT technique is the acronym of R (Role of the writer,) A (Audience to whom the product is being directed), F (Format of the product is being created) and T (Topic of the product), (Parilasanti, Suarnajaya, Marjohan, 2014).

The contribution of the aspects can strengthen and direct the students to have a good result in writing. Moreover, RAFT technique is believed as a potential writing technique which is to help the students to understand effectively and to be able to communicate their ideas and their role as writer so that the readers can understand the writing. Allen Simon (2012) adds that RAFT technique helps the students more focus on the audience they will address, the varied formats for writing, and the topic they will be writing about. In the other

meaning, the opinion emphasizes on the role of a teacher in encouraging the students to write effectively, to help the students in determining topics, and to see the ability of the students.

The procedures and organizations of RAFT allow the improvement of students' skill and their awareness as well as to think critically. The following illustrations are suggested from Buehl (2009), analyzing the important ideas or information that the teacher wants the students to learn from a story, a textbook passage, or other classroom material, brainstorming possible roles that students could assume by deciding who the audience will be for this communication and determine the format for the writing. Then, after the students complete the reading assignment, the teacher writes RAFT on the chalkboard and list the role, audience, format, and topic for their writing. The teacher can assign the same roles for the writing or offer several different roles from which students can choose. Finally is doing an authentic examples for a specific RAFT project for students to consult as they plan their writing.

Within this context, the research questions formulated in this research are : Can the use of RAFT technique improve students' writing ability? How can RAFT technique improve students' writing ability?

METHODOLOGY

This study was employed through quantitative and qualitative analysis by using RAFT as a technique to improve students' ability in writing descriptive paragraph. The research design in this study was classroom action research. The major characteristics of action research can be done through the following patterns listed by Kember (2000). The patterns are concerned with social practice, aimed towards improvement, a cyclical process, pursued by systematic enquiry, a reflective process, a participative, and determined by the practitioners.

Somekh (2006) emphasizes that the classroom action research gives a benefit as they learn from their own practice, then the teachers become more aware of what is going on in their classroom.

In handling through this research, the researcher conducted two cycles in which consisted of four interconnected activities, namely Planning, Acting, Observing and Reflecting. As the main required data, the researcher embodied university students as the subject and Manado State University as its location. The researcher took class A (writing class) in the level of writing III of the fourth semester students in English Education Department. The total students in the class were 20 students with 17 girls and 3 boys.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The objective of this research was to find out whether RAFT technique was effective or not and to explain how was the RAFT technique improve students' writing ability. The required data were collected from pre-test, post-test and observation in each cycle. In accordance with the improvement of the students, the researcher had done with two cycles.

Every cycle was done in three meetings within two months. In cycle 1, the researcher held the meetings on Thursday morning per week. As the first stage of cycle such as planning, the researcher designed the instructional activities and observation checklist to look forward the students' achievement through cycle 1. The researcher implemented this research through descriptive paragraph writing in line with the use of RAFT technique by presenting, pairing, and a game as its method of learning in classroom.

The observation indicated that the students were not applicable enough in doing the paragraph through RAFT technique. The indication of the reflected moments showed that the implementation of cycle 1 did not effective enough. The results of cycle 1 displayed that RAFT technique could not reach all of students' ability to write descriptive paragraph properly. Hence, cycle 2 was required to implement.

The stages in cycle 2 were significantly arised instead of cycle 1. The planning, acting, observing and reflecting declared that the researcher satisfied and stopped continuing to find out in the next cycle. The researcher provided a clear instruction in order to have a better plan rather than cycle 2. It was managed by revising the instructional teaching requirements such as lesson plan, teaching methodologies and new topics to enhance students' comprehension to write.

The findings drawn that the students could perform a good attitude while doing the process of writing with RAFT technique. Likewise, the three meetings in cycle 2 drawn an effective learning throughout the lesson. It can be said that the implementation of RAFT technique in cycle 2 was offered to solve the students' problem in writing descriptive paragraph.

Discussion

Quantitatively, the discussion was administered from the data in pre-teaching and after post-teaching. The researcher conducted a pre-test in order to know students' ability in writing. Otherwise, a post-test was conducted to measure and conclude the students' achievement toward a cycle. The data was calculated with the following formula by by Hatch and Hossein (1981) :

$$\bar{X} = \frac{\sum X}{N}$$

$$\bar{X} = \frac{1013}{20}$$

$$\bar{X} = 50,75$$

From the following formula, \bar{X} represented as a mean score of pre-test. The result of mean score in pre-test was 50,75. In short, the data summarized that the students' ability before cycle 1 was very low. Similarly, the minimum criterion was found only 10 %. This was far from the researcher's expectation since the researcher known that they already became four semester students. The percentage can be calculated through the following formula by Anas Sudijono (2008) :

$$P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100 \%$$

$$P = \frac{10}{20} \times 100 \%$$

$$P = 10 \%$$

The explanation of the percentage brought the reasons that the students should learn a lot in cycle 1 with RAFT technique. However, the calculation of mean score in cycle I and its improvement displayed that only 13 students could get through the standard score.

$$\bar{X} = \frac{\sum X}{N}$$

$$\bar{X} = \frac{1314}{20}$$

$$\bar{X} = 75,7$$

and

$$P = \frac{21 - Y}{Y} \times 100 \%$$

$$P = \frac{75,7 - 50,75}{50,75} \times 100 \%$$

$$P = \frac{24,95}{50,75} \times 100 \%$$

$$P = 49,2 \%$$

The mean scores in post-test and the percentage clarified that there was an improvement in cycle 1. In other words, there was a quarrel score 24.95 between pre-test to post-test cycle 1. The percentage of students who could pass the standard score at the end of cycle 1 was counted with the same formula with pre-test,

$$P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100 \%$$

$$P = \frac{13}{20} \times 100 \%$$

$$P = 65 \%$$

Based on the data, the percentage gave $65 \% > 10 \%$. It can be explained that the students could have presented their ability in achieving the score of cycle 1. Yet, all of the students did not achieve the standard score as expected. Then, cycle 2 was needed. The development of cycle 2 was carried out extensively rather than cycle 1. The results indicated that cycle 2 was better than cycle 1.

$$\bar{X} = \frac{\sum X}{N}$$

$$\bar{X} = \frac{1638}{20}$$

$$\bar{X} = 81,9$$

and

$$P = \frac{y^2 - y}{y} \times 100 \%$$

$$P = \frac{81,9 - 80,97}{80,97} \times 100 \%$$

$$P = \frac{1,62}{80,97} \times 100 \%$$

$$P = 3,203 \%$$

At a final computation in cycle 1 and cycle 2. The students showed that they could achieve the standard score through the computation of mean score. The mean score at the previous cycle before implementing RAFT technique to the students' writing was 50,57, in post-test cycle 1 was 75,7 and the last post-test in cycle 2 was 81,9. It means that there was 1.62 or 3.203 % of mean score improvement. Based on the data, the number of students who passed the standard score can be counted by the following formula and performed on the following scores at table 7,

$$P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100 \%$$

$$P = \frac{20}{20} \times 100 \%$$

$$P = 100 \%$$

The table below summarized all the scores from pre-test to the last post-test

Table 7. The performance of all the students' scores

NO	NAME	STANDARD SCORE	PRE-TEST	POST-TEST CYCLE 1	POST-TEST CYCLE 2
1.	N S	75	59	91	77
2.	J H	75	55	69	85
3.	A M	75	75	91	90
4.	M T	75	38	53	82
5.	T S	75	88	78	75
6.	I B	75	67	86	75
7.	S B	75	47	76	76
8.	A P	75	25	53	78
9.	I T	75	72	76	78
10.	S K	75	69	64	90
11.	L S	75	64	78	85
12.	C P	75	30	64	80
13.	J Y	75	74	98	95
14.	M S	75	79	93	95
15.	Y K	75	25	76	85
16.	N M	75	28	75	79
17.	J T	75	30	81	80
18.	E T	75	25	71	77
19.	S S	75	25	89	81
20.	F D	75	40	52	75
Total			1015	1514	1638
Mean			50.75	75.7	81.9
Percentage of improvement				49,2 %	3,203 %
Percentage of passing the standard score			10 %	65 %	100 %

Based on the calculation through the mean scores and the related percentages on table 7. It can be concluded that the students could get through the lesson quantitatively.

While in qualitatively, the discussion of the data appeared through the observation checklist, field notes, journal, and documents with the application of RAFT technique in this research. In cycle I, the observation was clarified that the students did not understand and pay fully attention during the process of teaching and learning. The researcher had to make sure and did a kind of repetition to explain every single point to the students. Besides that, the students revealed some difficulties and undertook some mistakes due to unknown things. This was happened in the process of teaching and learning through cycle I. The students faced some difficulties such as using generic structures or format of the text, enhancing vocabularies, avoiding grammatical errors and identifying neither topic sentences nor support sentences. The process could describe that students' attitude to start writing and conclude the conclusion were inappropriate. Similarly with the researcher's journal, it was addressed that the students occasionally complained to finish their writing through

RAFT technique. The researcher found those limitations until the last meeting. In addition, about the results of documents from the first meeting, the investigation of all the tasks notified that the students could not reach maximally about the ability to write a paragraph coherently.

On the contrary, cycle 2 intensively got through than cycle 1. The findings from the observation checklist and field notes were drawn an improvement from the first to the last meeting. The students, of approximately 5 students who had less attention and enthusiasm changed dramatically in the cycle 2. The activities can be seen in the process of teaching and learning during cycle 2. The students showed a better attitude toward the teaching and learning process. For instance, the students could solve the problem without asking and consulting to the researcher. Additionally from the journal activities, the students performed with their enthusiasm during the meetings. The implementation was pictured that the students sense easier to receive the lesson in the form of group. In short, the students could make connection with a new knowledge and context in writing. The explanation can be related with Groenke (2006) that RAFT technique can help students make connection between prior and new knowledge and among interconnected concepts and provides a context for thinking deeply about a topic. The reflection of this technique was seen useful throughout cycle 2. As a result, the contribution of the students through their documentations was notified that the students could prove their ability to have good paragraph writings and appropriate setting with RAFT technique.

In accordance with the findings, RAFT technique can be promoted as an appropriate technique in writing. R.L.Sejnost & S. These (2010) supports that RAFT promotes the students to raise their ability in thinking critically and reflecting while they synthesize what

they have learned. On the other hand, the indication toward the findings could also help the students to identify the main aspects in writing. This is linked with the theory of Allen Simon (2012) that RAFT is a writing technique that helps students to understand their role as a writer and learn how to communicate their ideas effectively and clearly in order to make the readers understand about what have been written.

In sum, Fisher and Frey (2007) and Allen Simon (2012) summarized that RAFT provides a scaffold for students as they explore their writing based on various roles, audiences, formats and topics.

In addition, the changes of learning method in cycle 2 indicated that the students could perceive a new atmosphere to master the content together. Santa, C.M and Holston (1988) was right that RAFT technique could guide students to a meaningful way to incorporate writing into content-area instruction. The students were finally being able to write effectively as they were aware of their role, their audience, their writing format and their writing topic (Lindawaty Januarnita , Sudarsono, Clarry Sada, 2014).

Based on the findings and discussions, it is concluded that the two cycles in this classroom action research could be able to make students be more active, initiative and responsible to their writing

CONCLUSIONS


The implementation of cycle 1 and 2, with applying RAFT (role, audience, format, and topic) to improve the students' ability in descriptive paragraph writing was considered effective. The reasons are written based on quantitative and qualitative sides.

- a. Quantitatively, the interpretation of the data since pre-test indicated only 2 students could pass the standard score (the minimum criterion). The percentage was 10 %, and the mean score was 50.75. While in the cycle 1 post-test, the mean score increased to 75.7 with the percentage of its improvement 65 %. From the percentage, 13 students of the total students in classroom could pass the standard score in cycle 1. It means that $N_2 > N_1$ or $75.7 > 50.75$ with the percentage $65 \% > 10 \%$. However, in cycle 2 post-test, the total of the students who could pass the standard score increased to 100 % with the mean score 81.9 or 3.203 %. The comparison score between pre-test and post-test cycle 2 can be counted as 31.15. This quantitative explanation can be proved with the theory of Santa and Holston (1988) that RAFT technique could empower students with an easy, meaningful way to incorporate writing into content-area instruction. In other words, it can be concluded that applying RAFT technique could improve students' ability in writing descriptive paragraph.

- b. Qualitatively, there were some aspects which supported the improvement of students' ability in writing descriptive paragraph. It could be seen through the observation checklist, field notes, journal notes and documentations toward the application of RAFT technique. The students performed their activities by giving their participations and attentions to the researcher during teaching and learning process. The researcher considered that the students were being controlled, well-motivated and comfortable through the activities in the cycles. This could be shown through the process of learning. The students were finally being able to write effectively as they were aware of their role, their audience, their writing format and their writing. From the qualitative descriptions, it could be concluded that RAFT technique in the process of writing could be able to make students be more active, initiative, and responsible.

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