

The Effectiveness of Opinion-Gap Activity to Improve Writing

Discussion Text

Monitha Geraldine

STBA Pontianak

geraldinecassiopeia@gmail.com

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***Abstract** - This research objective was to find out whether teaching writing discussion text through opinion-gap activity based on Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) approach was effective or not. To accomplish the purpose of this study, a quasi experimental design was utilized. The measurement technique was employed in this research. The data collection instrument was written test. The t-test formula was applied to analyze the quantitative data obtained through written test, while an analytic scoring rubric was developed to assess the students' writing in discussion text. The results of data analysis through statistical procedure of t-test confirmed the superiority of the experimental group to the control group, and opinion-gap activity helped the students to improve their writing discussion text.*

***Keywords:** Opinion-Gap Activity, TBLT, Writing, Discussion Text*

I. INTRODUCTION

The School-Based Curriculum (KTSP) is currently implemented by several senior high schools. This curriculum was implemented in the academic year of 2006/2007 and as recently as in the academic year of 2009/2010 (Direktorat Pembinaan Sekolah Menengah Depdiknas, 2009, p. 1). It can be developed and determined by the implementers through the need consideration (Permendiknas/24/2006, pp. 2-3). In the School-Based Curriculum (KTSP), the students of Senior High School are claimed not only to be able to speak but also to write various kinds of texts in English. There are 12 genres of texts that should be mastered by Senior High School students. They are narrative, recount, procedure, descriptive, news item, report, analytical exposition, hortatory exposition, spoof, explanation, discussion, and review text. One of the texts that must be taught to the twelfth grade students is discussion text.

Discussion text is a type of spoken or written text that is intended to present differing opinions, points of view or perspectives on an issue, enabling the reader to explore different ideas before making an informed decision. Experiencing discussion texts help students to think clearly and critically. It encourages students to respond to others' opinions, to ask pertinent questions and to present an argument in a clear and coherent way. It helps students become aware that facts can be interpreted in different ways and that a variety of opinions on an issue may be valid.

There are four stages in a discussion text: (1) A statement of position supplying necessary background information. A discussion begins with a brief introduction describing the situation, (2) Arguments for and supporting evidence. The next few paragraphs elaborate the arguments for the issue, based on researching, surveying or interviewing people, (3) Arguments against and supporting evidence. The next set paragraphs describe the arguments against the issue, based on researching, surveying or interviewing people. Each paragraph should be clearly structured with a topic sentence supported by details. The supporting material could be reported speech reflecting comments, specialists who have responded to the issue, supporting evidence from research or surveys. Thinking and action verbs are used to persuasively establish and evaluate each argument, (4) Recommendation or conclusion. The discussion ends by presenting a personal point of view before concluding. The recommendation or conclusion sometimes sums up both sides of the argument if they are fairly balanced, or can recommend one argument over the other if the evidence is overwhelming. Because this text is considered very important to be taught for Senior High School students, the teacher should have an appropriate approach for teaching writing discussion text.

However, based on the researcher's pre-research, it was found that most of the twelfth grade students of SMAN 10 Pontianak in Academic Year 2016/2017 encountered problems in writing discussion text. These problems were caused by two main factors: the students and the learning environment. The first problem came from the students themselves. Many students encountered difficulty in writing discussion text because they should be able to see the topic of the text from two sides: pro and con and give their arguments for each side. The problem often

arised because the students tended to respond to an issue emotively rather than objectively. Therefore, it would be difficult for them in giving the arguments from the side with which they might not agree.

Another problem came when the students had to write an unfamiliar issue. Having no background knowledge about the issue being discussed made the students difficult to give their arguments. It was getting worse when the teacher did not realize it and asked the students to write the text individually without giving the students the opportunity to discuss their arguments with the other students. Whereas, in writing discussion text the students can support their point of view through survey results, interviews and research.

The unnatural learning context was the second problem that caused the low level achievement of writing discussion text. The twelfth grade students of SMAN 10 Pontianak were not given the opportunities to interact with each other when they finished their task. They only focused in writing without having any pair work and group work. As a result, the learning context became unnatural for the students. Whereas, learning a foreign language should be based on the natural context which is aimed to create the natural learning environment for students. In this research, the researcher covered those two points because they were considered as the main factors that caused the low level achievement of writing in discussion text to the twelfth grade students of SMAN 10 Pontianak in Academic Year 2016/2017.

Corresponding to the statements above, the teacher, therefore, needed to develop teaching writing discussion text in the classroom. Task-Based Language Teaching has been proposed by many experts as one of the ways in Teaching English. It is an approach of teaching which focuses on task activity, provides contexts to activate learning acquisition process, and promotes language learning (Nunan, 2004). In addition, Skehan (1996) in the study of *a Framework of the Implementation of TBLT* states that the characteristics of a task provides meaningful activity and requires problem solving and real-world based activities. It also offers task completion and task assessment as the outcome. In addition, Nunan (2004, p. 14) asserts that TBLT is not only focused on the learners' language, but also on the learning process itself. In classroom learning, the tasks are administered in order to give learning experience to the students.

There are as many different task types as there are some experts who have written on Task-Based Language Teaching. In this research, the researcher did not have space to deal exhaustively with them all, and so have chosen several to describe and illustrate. One of the earliest curricular applications of TBLT to appear in the literature was the Bangalore project. In this project, three principal task types are used: information gap, reasoning gap, and opinion gap as cited in Nunan (2004, p. 57). This research focussed on one type of the tasks that is opinion-gap activity. The opinion-gap activity involves identifying and articulating a personal preference, feeling, or attitude in response to a given situation. One example is story completion; another is taking part in the discussion of a social issue. The activity may involve using factual information and formulating arguments to justify one's opinion, but there is no objective procedure for demonstrating outcomes as right or wrong, and no reason to expect the same outcome from different individuals or on different occasions. In this research, the opinion-gap activity was implemented in the process of teaching writing discussion text.

There were also some previous researches on Task-Based Language Teaching in teaching writing. Setyaningrum (2010), Birjandi & Malmir (2009), and Sholihah (2011) conducted an experimental research about the use of Task-Based Language Teaching in teaching writing. Based on their finding, teaching writing by using Task-Based Language Teaching was much more effective because it could develop students' writing ability through performing a series of activities as steps toward successful task realization. In addition, their finding revealed that TBLT enabled the students to make a better composition of writing by using the appropriate vocabulary, correct grammar, mechanic, content and organization. In brief, those research finding had proved that TBLT has been more effective for teaching writing.

Having examined their research works thoroughly, neither of them discussed the use of a opinion-gap activity which was actually one type of tasks in TBLT in teaching writing discussion text. The opinion-gap activity involves identifying and articulating a personal preference, feeling, or attitude in response to a given situation. The activity may involve using factual information and formulating

arguments to justify one's opinion, but there is no objective procedure for demonstrating outcomes as right or wrong, and no reason to expect the same outcome from different individuals or on different occasions (Nunan, 2004). Moreover, the twelfth grade students of senior high school have rarely been selected to be in investigation.

Regarding to the statement above, the researcher was encouraged to fill in the research gap and purely investigate the effectiveness of opinion-gap activity in teaching writing discussion text based on TBLT at SMAN 10 Pontianak. Therefore, the method that was implemented in this research was quasi experimental study. To sum up, there was a strong belief that this research would promote the opinion-gap activity as an effective task in TBLT changing the traditional teaching writing.

II. METHOD

In this research, the quasi experimental research was utilized by the researcher. The researcher used quasi experimental research because all classes in SMAN 10 Pontianak had already set by the teachers based on the level of students' achievement. Therefore, it was impossible for the researcher to randomly assign the research participants. Quasi experimental research defined by Ary, et al. (2010) is a type of evaluation which aims to determine whether a program or intervention has the intended effect on a study's participants. In this research, the researcher focused on one form of quasi experimental studies that was a pre-post test design with a control group.

The pre-post test design with a control group will allow the researcher to measure the potential effects of an intervention by examining the difference in the pre-test and post-test results. It does not allow the researcher to test whether this difference would have occurred in the absence of her intervention. To get the true effects of the program or intervention, it is necessary to have both experimental group and a control group.

The procedure of quasi-experimental study which applied in this research was described in the following steps: (1) Applying pre-test for both groups, (2) Giving the treatments to the experimental group. The treatment was implemented in the process of teaching writing discussion text. In the process of teaching writing

discussion text, the researcher used the opinion-gap activity based on TBLT as the treatment, (3) Applying post test for both classes, (4) Compared the result of pre-test and post-test to determine the students mean score of pre-test and post-test, (5) Applying the appropriate statistical formula (t-test and effect size formula) to determine whether the students' writing in discussion text had improved significantly or not after implementing the opinion-gap activity.

Concerning the sampling technique, since the fixed classrooms had been set and randomizing each individual was impossible, cluster sampling was applied. It is a technique used to randomly select and include groups comprising research participants who have similar characteristics which are relevant to the research variables. When the clusters have been selected, all participants must take part in the research (Ary, et al., 2010).

One way to randomize the sample is through a lottery using slips of paper (Ary, et al., 2010). Based on this recommendation, the researchers applied the procedure. The sample of each of the two groups in this research was determined through the lottery in which four small folded pieces of paper with alphabetical codes from A to D representing all the science classes in the twelfth grade were put into a small box. The box was closed and shaken afterwards. Finally, the box was opened and two pieces of paper were picked and opened out of their folds. The first selected class (i.e. Class XII IPA 1) was experimentally assigned, whereas the second selected one (i.e. Class XII IPA 3) was the control group

The researcher used measurement technique to measure students' writing in discussion text. Since the data was obtained by using measurement technique, the relevant tool to collect the data was written test. It was used to assess students' writing performance. Students were asked to write a discussion text based on the topic given. The students' score from the test was used to find the mean score. In assessing the students' writing performance, the researcher provided the analytical scoring rubric so that the scoring would be more objective. The researcher applied the same test for both groups.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

From the result of the pre-test, it was found that both students in experimental and control group got difficulties in developing and strengthening ideas or arguments 'for' and 'against' the issue. The students' difficulties in developing and strengthening ideas could be indicated when the students were given a topic by the researcher to write. The students were not able to strengthen their topic sentence by giving some examples and evidences. In addition, the students encountered difficulties in writing a statement of position for discussion text. When they wrote the statement of position, they were unable to provide the sufficient background information and outline the issue or topic being discussed. Therefore, both students in experimental and control group only got 19.25 and 19.39 for their content. Based on the scoring rubric that was used for assessing the students' writing, the arguments' scores of both groups were considered as "average".

This condition was in contrast with the students' score after implementing opinion-gap activity in the process of teaching writing discussion text. From the result of the post-test, it could be seen that the students' writing ability in writing discussion text had been improved. The mean score of experimental group was 70.60, the highest score was 92, and the lowest score was 60. Meanwhile, the students' mean score in control group was 55.70, the highest score was 75, and the lowest score was 40.

After implementing the opinion-gap activity for teaching writing discussion text, the students in experimental group were able to develop and strengthen their arguments 'for' and 'against' the issue by providing some examples and evidences to support their statement of position. The students' argument score after implementing opinion-gap activity was 28.45. The difference was about 5.17 if it was compared with the students' arguments score before implementing the opinion-gap activity. Meanwhile, the students' arguments score in control group was 20.60. It showed that the score was lower than the pre-test's score. The difference was about -0.10 if it was compared with the students' argument score before implementing eclectic method in the process of teaching and learning in control group. Based on the scoring rubric that was used for assessing the students' writing,

the arguments' scores of experimental group was considered "good". Meanwhile, the students' arguments scores of control group is considered "average". Therefore, it could be concluded that there was an increase on the students' arguments score of experimental group from "average" to "good".

In addition, the students' post-test score of experimental group in statement of position and recommendation aspect which were 24.07 and 19.70 also showing that their scores were increased after the researcher giving the treatment. The differences were about 2.83 and 1.23 if they were compared with the scores before implementing the opinion-gap activity. Meanwhile, the students' post-test score of control group in statement of position and recommendation aspect which were 19.53 and 18.60. In this case, the students' score of control group in statement of position aspect was higher than the score in pre-test. The difference was about 0.20. However, the students' score of control group in recommendation aspect had decreased from 18.67 to 18.60.

From the result of t-test computation, it was found that t-obtained was 3.26. The researcher applied the significance level (α) of 0.05 with degree of freedom (df) = $N_1 + N_2 - 2 = 30 + 30 - 2 = 58$. Based on the table, for (α) 0.05 with (df) = 58, it was found that the $t_{ratio} = 3.26 > t_{critical} = (2.000)$. This finding indicated the significant difference result between pre-test and post-test. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_a) was accepted. In order to find out how significant the effectiveness of the treatment given to the experimental group, the researcher analyzed the effect of the treatment (Effect Size). From the result of the computation, it was found that the effect size of the treatment was 0.82. Based on the Cohen's criteria, it was qualified as "moderate". In conclusion, the use of opinion-gap activity was effective in teaching writing argument of discussion text to the twelfth grade students of SMAN 10 Pontianak.

Discussion

Based on the gathered data and related analysis, it was found that the students were not familiar with discussion writing at the beginning of the study. The students only knew that the discussion text had a statement of position, arguments

and a recommendation, but they did not know how to develop arguments in discussion text. When the students were given the topic, they only could write the topic sentence. They were not able to elaborate their arguments in order to strengthen their topic sentence.

During the process of teaching writing discussion text with their teacher, the students were only asked to make summary about discussion text without obtaining detail explanation from their teacher about that text. They were only asked to create a discussion text without having practices how to develop arguments in that text. Hence, the major points of their discussion text were still lack of relevant arguments.

Accordingly, even teaching writing discussion text through the traditional approach and via lectures by the researcher was effective in teaching the basic features of the discussion writing especially about the structure and organization of that text. The results showed that the writing of discussion text of control group where the main approach was traditional had improved too. However, the improvement of control group was not very significant than the improvement of experimental group.

From the score's comparison of both groups, it could be seen that the significant difference between students' score in experimental and control group were in the aspect of statement of position and arguments. In the case of recommendation, this difference increased in favor of the experimental group. The students were able to make the recommendation that justified their opinion and supports this with evidence since they had already practiced when doing the opinion-gap activity.

Another significant difference was also found in developing arguments in the discussion text. The students in experimental group were easily to develop their arguments after the researcher implemented opinion-gap activity during the process of teaching writing discussion text. It happened because the researcher gave the opinion-gap task to the students in experimental group which involved them in identifying and articulating a personal preference, feeling, or attitude in response to a given situation. The researcher gave the statement of position to the students and

she asked the students to express their attitudes toward the topic given by using expression of attitudes that already taught by the researcher.

Furthermore, another feature which could be referred to as a reason for the outperformance of opinion-gap activity class in comparison with the traditional class was the collaborative and interactive nature of the opinion-gap activity itself. In the experimental group, the students did the opinion-gap activity in pairs and in the form of group work. In doing this task, the students were engaged in discussion and exchange of ideas. Therefore, the language use and language learning could take place simultaneously. After doing this task, each group was asked to present the report of their work in front of the classroom so that the other students could give feedback to them. The feedback given covered the arguments and recommendation that they already made with their group. It came from peers, from other groups, and sometimes from the teacher. The students in experimental group could use such a feedback both during the task cycle that was during the writing process and after that on their final products during the post-task phase. Therefore, the feedback could be thought as an advantage for this group while in the traditional class the student wrote their text individually. Such an interpretation is in line with the superiority of TBLT has been emphasized by Ellis (2003) which lies in the meaningful, purposeful, communicative and authentic nature of the task-based language teaching approach.

Meanwhile, the students in the control group only knew the generic structures of discussion text but they still did not know how to develop their arguments. The students also did not get the feedback during the process of writing. They only got the feedback from their teacher on the end of product. Therefore, the difference of students' statement of position, arguments and recommendation scores were not really significant.

In addition, at the beginning of the study the learning context was unnatural because the students were not given the opportunities to interact each other when they finished their task. The students only focused in writing without having any peer-review activity with the other students. They only created a discussion text based on the topic given by the teacher. The students also did not have any opportunity to participate in writing since the teacher did not create such activity

which could involve the students working collaboratively with their friends. As a result, the students were very passive. This learning condition was very contrast with the condition after implementing opinion-gap activity in the process of teaching writing discussion text.

After implementing the opinion-gap activity in the process of teaching writing discussion text, it was found that the class situation was alive with many interesting tasks. The students' participation also increased and they gave fully attention to the lesson. The students were very active in the process of teaching writing discussion text since they dominated the activities. The bigger chances were given through pair work and group work when they were asked to do opinion-gap activity and present the report of their work in front of the classroom. Therefore, it could be concluded that opinion-gap activity provided students with a natural context for language use. When the students worked to complete their tasks, they had abundant opportunities to interact. The interaction is believed to facilitate language acquisition as students have to work to understand each other and to express their own meaning (Larsen-Freeman, 2000, p. 144).

Based on the discussion above, it could be concluded that teaching writing discussion text was effective through the use of opinion-gap activity to the twelfth grade students of SMAN 10 Pontianak in academic year 2016/2017. The outcomes revealed that the experimental group showed improvement of pretest-posttest scores and treatment scores. The controlled group, conversely, did not. Statistics also reflected that $t_{ratio}=3.26$ was higher than $t_{critical}=2.000$. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_a) was accepted. It could also be seen from the computation of the effect size, the researcher obtained 0.82 which was qualified as "moderate effect" based on the Cohen's criteria. Hence, the researcher concluded that the effectiveness of teaching writing argument in discussion text through the use of opinion-gap activity to the twelfth grade students of SMAN 10 Pontianak in academic year 2016/2017 was effective.

IV. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion

Based on the discussion of the research, it could be concluded that opinion-gap activity was very helpful for the students in the process of teaching and learning writing. The current study made it clear that opinion-gap activity was definitely more effective than traditional approach in teaching writing in general and in teaching writing mode like discussion text in particular. In fact, teaching writing to the twelfth grade students through opinion-gap activity had all of the advantages of the process approach to writing such as the focus on the processes involved in the pre-writing, during writing and post-writing phases.

Opinion-gap activity paid enough attention to all of the processes which are involved in producing a good discussion text. It fully considered such processes and helped students to brainstorm and develop more new ideas; it also activated their previous schemata and background knowledge, motivates the students and encourages them to write with concerning over specific language items. Hence, it could be stated that the use of opinion-gap activity was effective in teaching writing arguments to the twelfth grade students.

Suggestions

Related to the findings of the research, there are some suggestions: (1) to the academic institution. There is a need in the classroom activities to provide more activities to have writing task because it will encourage the students to write. Considering the potential of opinion-gap activity in improving students' skills in English, it is necessary for the teacher to learn about opinion-gap activity. Therefore, the school can facilitate this by conducting workshops on opinion-gap activity, (2) to the English teacher. This study can be used as a reference for the English teacher in improving the quality of teaching by applying the suitable approach toward improving the students' writing ability. Besides, the teacher can apply opinion-gap activity in the other aspect of English skills like reading, listening, or speaking. The research findings are expected to give insight to the teaching writing. The correct mechanics, content, and organization can be achieved by giving more chances to the students to write. The teacher should be able to

develop the teaching learning materials that have been provided in the curriculum, (3) to other researchers. This research is expected to be useful to other researchers particularly those who are interested in conducting a similar research by giving more various tasks (e.g. jigsaw task, problem-solving task, decision-making task, and so on).

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*Opinion-
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