PROJECT-BASED LEARNING IN LEARNING WRITING FOR UNIVERSITY LEVEL

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Abstract

This research describes about the problems of writing in university level. Writing becomes a challenging and complicated skill to master. Some of components must be involved and integrated proportionally. Therefore, project-based learning is offered to solve the problems. This study purposes to explore the improvement of project-based learning in the students' writing in the fourth semester students of the English Education Program and the students' responses when it is implied in learning writing. Qualitative was used as a research method and classroom action research as a research design. The research sample was fourth-semester students from English Education Program in a university in Magelang, Central Java in the academic year 2022-2023. To collect the data it is using observation, test, and questionnaire then for analyzing the data is using triangulation. The result found that project-based learning is able to improve the students writing achievements. It could be seen from the increasing of the score for each cycle (writing better) and students' positive responses during the implementation of this method from improving of students' activeness and motivation in writing learning. So it can be stated that Project Based Learning increases mark and encouragement of students' writing learning.

Keywords*: project-based learning, writing, classroom action research, students of English Education program*

INTRODUCTION

Writing is considered a productive skill and activities in writing lead to complex activities in integrating some components in writing. As stated by Hyland (1996), writing is a way of sharing personal meaning and writing courses emphasize the power of the individual to construct his or her own views on a topic. It can be inferred that a person delivers his/her own ideas through his/her own writing and everyone can have a different perspective about something that they think. Nunan (2003, p. 88) also believes that writing is the physical act of committing words or ideas to some medium, whether it is hieroglyphics inked onto parchment or an e-mail message typed into a computer. Through writing, students can express feelings, describe something, discuss an idea, present a point of view, and share experiences they have in the form of written products (Argawati & Suryani, 2017). Besides, writing is a means of extending and deepening students' knowledge; it acts as a tool for learning subject matter (Graham & Perrin, 2007).

Concerning studying in university level, students are necessary to attain writing ability since it influences their academic achievement (Oktarina, Emzir, & Rafli, 2018). Students at the university level should master the way to write well. It has to be done to fulfil the purpose of learning writing for them as students. Bailey (2015) wrote that the purposes of writing, as follow: 1) to report what the writer has done, 2) to answer the writer's questions, 3) to discuss one specific topic and provide the writer's opinions, 4) to synthesize research conducted by someone about one topic. Nevertheless, writing is not an easy skill to do, especially for EFL students.

This problem is faced by university/ higher students too. They are in trouble to start writing and expressing ideas through writing. It is supported by Heaton (1998) who states writing skill is complex and sometimes difficult to teach, requiring mastery not only of grammatical and rhetorical devices but also of conceptual and judgmental elements. Therefore, this indicates that writing is hard because there are several components or aspects to consider in writing, and it can cause that the students are afraid to write because they do not want to do mistakes. This is because writing demands adequate knowledge of content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics (Oshima & Hogue, 2007; Toba *et al.*, 2019).

The components or aspects of writing that need to be considered by the teachers based on Jacobson (2003) are covering: 1) Content – refers to the substance of writing, the experience of the main idea. i.e., a group of related statements that a writer presents as a unit in developing a subject. The content of the paragraph does the work of conveying ideas rather than fulfilling special function of transition, restatement, and emphasis. 2) Organization – refers to the logical organization of content. It is scarcely more than an attempt to piece together all collections of fact and jumbled ideas. 3) Vocabulary – refers to the selection of words that are suitable with the content. Choosing words that express his/her meaning is precisely rather than skews it or blurring it. 4) Language use – refers to the use of correct grammatical form and synthetic pattern of separating, combining, and grouping ideas in words, phrases, clauses, and sentences to bring out logical relationships in paragraph writing. 5) Mechanic – refers to the use graphic convention of the language, i.e., the step of arranging letters, words, and paragraphs by using knowledge of the structure and some others related to one another. Those components will be hard to master and apply because they are not only connecting them but also choosing one better such as using suitable part of speech grammar, syntactic, structure, spelling, prepositions, punctuation, cohesion, discourse markers, writing paragraphs with a clear focus, paraphrasing, vocabulary, etc. It's why this situation is not just coming from the students but also lectures. The lecturers have an important role to help the students to develop their writing. So, they have to decide suitable method or strategy for teaching writing.

In the fourth semester, the problem persists due to learners' lack of exposure to writing practice (Ilham *et al.*, 2020). In addition, based on preliminary observation and interviews conducted by the researcher on the English academic writing subject, the factors that cause students' problems in writing are

arranging correct sentences, writing the topic sentence, organizing ideas into paragraphs, and the limitation of vocabulary. Therefore, to be proficient in writing, students need to have good knowledge of how to recognize, manage and overcome such things as complexities at the level of the clause, grammatical form, and unfamiliarity with the use of language in writing that is not only learning how to write but also reinforce several aspects of language that they have not completely mastered.

Dealing with the problem, lecturers need to continuously seek for some methods or approaches to implement in teaching writing. The process approach seems appropriate to be used into this case. One of the methods that belong to the process approach is Project-Based learning (PBL). PBL is a method that allows "students to design, plan, and carry out an extended project that produces a publicly exhibited output such as a product, publication, or presentation" (Patton, 2012; as cited in Riswandi, 2018). This project is be able to engage students on doing things done based on their own plans, idea, and creativity. In this research, the researchers asked the students to do such a project; it was mini book project. They chose their own topic and design. This research aims on describing the implementation of project-based learning in elevating the students' ability on writing and on describing the students' opinion of the implementation of project-based learning in teaching writing.

Moreover, Alan & Stoller (2005) offer ten steps of project-based learning in maximizing the benefit of project work in the foreign language classroom. Steps 1 and steps 2 are used for project preparation by agreeing on a theme for the project and determining the final outcome. Steps 3 to step 7 are applied to accomplish by students for conducting the project. Step 3 is to structure the project, the students and instructor work out project details that guide students from the opening activity to the completion of the project. Step 4: instructor prepares students for the language demands of information gathering. At this stage, the instructor prepares students for the language, skill, and strategy demands associated with information gathering. Step 5: After practising the skills and language needed for gathering information, students are ready to collect information using methods such as interviews, letter writing, and library search. Step 6: The instructor prepares students to compile and analyze data. At this stage, students need to master the language and skills needed to compile and analyze the information that they have collected from different sources. Step 7: students compile and analyze information. Working in groups, students organize information and discuss the value of the data they have collected, keeping some and discarding others. Furthermore, steps 8 and step 9 are used for the student to present the final outcome of the project. The instructor designs language improvement activities to help students successfully present the outcome of the project and the last step, step 10, is used to evaluate the whole process of the implementation of PBL.

Based on the explanation above, it can be seen about the needs and crucial of project-based learning in students' learning of writing, this research tried to investigate the improvement of PBL in the fourth students and to describe the students' responses of the implementation of project-based learning in learning writing.

METHOD

Method of research used in this study was qualitative with Classroom Action Research. There were two objectives of the research, they were, describing the implementation of teaching writing using Project-Based Learning (PBL) to improve the ability of the students on writing and revealing the students' responses toward the implementation of the method of teaching used. Classroom action research is defined as a research that is used to improve better learning (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005) and teachers as researchers in the classroom (Mertler, 2009). In other words, teachers know the problems in the classroom and find out the solution to solve the problems. In this research, writing became the problem of the students and the lecturer offered project-based learning as the solution to the problem that was faced by students.

The Classroom Action Research has four steps to be implemented in the research; they are covering Planning, Action, Observation, and reflection. Those four steps are bonded together in a cycle which can be repeated based on the researchers' need. In every cycle, there must be a pre-test and post-test to measure the improvement of the

student's ability on writing. In this study, the researcher conducted pre cycle and two cycles to collect the data. The study was already done in the fourth semester of 2022-2023, during January to march 2023. The participants of this study were the fourth-semester students of a university in Magelang. It consisted of 43 students. The instruments used were test, observation and questionnaire. Tests were in the form of text test related to the instruction for the students to build a descriptive text and given to the students as a pre-test and a post-test. While the observation and questionnaire were done during the activities conducted in the classroom. The observation was done towards all of the students in the classroom, while the questionnaire was only done toward students to dig in-depth information related to their responses to the instruction conducted. The data were then analyzed through triangulation. It was used to find out the similarities and differences in the data. The result of data would be discussed in the following section of this research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The result of the research is divided into two categories; the first is the implementation of project-based learning to improve student's writing ability and the next is the students' responses about the use of project-based learning in learning writing.

The Implementation of Project-Based Learning to improve students' writing ability

The first point of finding was found from the using of Classroom Action Research activities which consisted of pre cycle and two cycles. Before doing the cycle 1, the researchers started with pre-cycle. In this step, the researchers did the test for the students to know their ability before project based learning method was applied. Here is the result of implementing Classroom Action Research:

Pre-cycle

The researchers conducted the research over two months from February to March 2023. This precycle consists of four steps; they are planning, action, observation, and reflection. In the first meeting, the researcher did a pretest by asking the students to write paragraphs regarding to the topic and instruction. The topic given was related to descriptive text. The result was then used as the beginning score before

implementing project-based learning as the score of pre-test 1. The mean score of the pre-test in this pre cycle was 60 and it was considering as bad score regarded to the minimum standart of score. Therefore, project based learning was offered to be implemented to solve this problem.

Cycle 1

Its cycle was done because there was not getting standard score in pre cycle. After getting the score from pre cycle, the researchers did activities as they did in pre-cycle. Cycle 1 was conducted in two meetings and the test is in the third meeting. 1) The first meeting in cycle 1, The lecturer wrote down the topics, and related descriptive paragraphs. Then, the student decide the topic into the suitable title. After they found the title they had to elaborate the topic based on the points they have. In other ways, the lecturer also explained about topic sentences and supporting sentences, 2) The second meeting, students were introduced about the project and at the end of the project; the students had to submit the mini book. The lecturer explained the steps in doing project-based learning. There were four steps in doing project-based learning; they are starting the project, developing, reporting, and assessing the project. The lecturer also explained about editing and proofreading. After that the lecturer asked the students to write a descriptive text. They could discuss with their friends, check to the dictionary or even ask the lecturer related to the content, vocabulary, grammar etc. Then, the students did peer correction. Peer correction was based on the criteria of proofreading that the students have already got in the previous meeting, 3) The third meeting is conducted post-test 1. It was by giving the students instruction to write down a composition in a kind of descriptive text. For the topic it was decided by lecturer. After the students finished, then the researchers analyzed the result based on the component writing rubric (Brown, 2004). The result showed that the mean score of post-test 1 on cycle 1 was 70. It means there was an improvement based on pre cycle result of the students but still lower from the standard that must be in 75.

In the reflection step, the students gained good improvement from pre cycle, 60 to cycle 1, 75. Most of the students had good responses and they could discuss actively. Critical thinking of the students appeared in

learning and it was meaningful for them. It can be seen from peer feedback that they did with their friends in their own group. They could share and analyze text. Nevertheless, some of the students were confused and they did not have idea to write. Some of them could not develop and write down the topic sentences and supporting sentences when they made the composition. Grammar errors and punctuation also were still found in the students' writing.

Cycle 2

Cycle 2 was conducted on March, 2023. Activities in cycle 2 like the steps in pre cycle and cycle 1, they were planning, acting, observing and reflecting. Reflection in cycle 1 was used to revise the planning and some activities in cycle 2. The lecturer tried to explain more to the students about descriptive text, project based learning, topic sentence, supporting sentence and how to elaborate the points and also writing mechanism that often students made the mistakes in it. To make it clearer lecturer gave some samples both in composition and writing errors. After the students understood, the lecturer asked them to did some exercise and lecturer gave feedback and correction to them.

Cycle 2 was divided into five meetings. They were, 1) fourth meeting, The lecturer asked the students to do individual exercises based on the topic and the students were having the opportunity to practice and develop their skill on building concept and making text. They wrote text based on their own title. 2) fifth meeting, This meeting was used to do peer correction. It was important because it could help them to build a better writing and make a good text, 3) sixth meeting, The students designed their own layout of mini book containing their text they had already made in descriptive paragraph. The students were more creative in using some applications that can be used in designing their mini book. Every student had to collect his/her own text and compiled in a group to attach in mini book. The final result of the project was in the form of mini book. The students revised their composition and their mini book again and made final revision before submitting it in the next meeting. 4) The seventh meeting, After doing some revisions, the students submitted the complete mini book as the unity of their result of writing to the lecturer. Then, the lecturer assessed the students' text as their score of writing subject.

In this meeting the lecturer also conducted post-test for cycle 2. The post-test was individual test which was done in the classroom. The students needed to make their own composition regarded to the mini book they made before. They only had an hour on making the text by their own without asking friends, lecturer or dictionaries. After doing the post-test, their final score was revealed. The mean score in cycle 2 was 78. It means that there was an improvement for the students from pre cycle to cycle 1 and from cycle 1 to cycle 2. Grammar errors and punctuation decreased even though there were still some mistakes found. The result said that the ability both in elaborating the text and writing skill improved analyzed from the writing rubric significantly.

It was as the result of the Project-based learning when implemented in writing. Project Based Learning can solve the problems of writing

Besides, this project could develop the students' critical thinking since they had to work both in group and in individual work. It means that they had opportunity to discuss the material with their friends, then they were given opportunity too to improve themselves individually. In addition, the project done could be a meaningful project for them. 5) The eighth meeting, the students were asked some questions related to project based learning. It was done to reveal their responses toward the use of Project based learning in teaching writing descriptive text in their class. Questionary was conducted to the students. The result showed that most of the students had positive responses to project based learning. It could effectively improve their ability which measured through several test; pre-test, post-test 1, and post-test 2.

As a result of the Classroom Action Research, the researcher analyzed the mean score of the students from test to test. Here was the detail information of the students' scores from pre cycle, cycle 1 and cycle 2, as drawn on table 1.
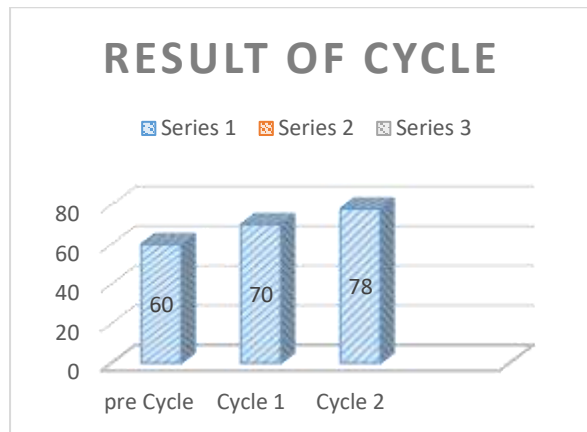
Picture 1. The mean score of each cycle

Based on table 1, it can be seen that there was an improvement from pre-test in pre cycle, which was 60 became 70 on the post-test 1 in cycle 1. Then, it was continued to the second post-test in cycle 2 which gained 78. Through this finding, it can be concluded that project based learning applied to teach writing descriptive text to the fourth semester students can help the students in improving their ability on writing although there were still some mistakes but they were decreasing from pre cycle into cycle 2. So it can be stated that using project based learning could help the students writing better.

Students' responses toward the implementation of Problem-Based Learning in Learning

The second objective of the research is to describe the students' responses towards the implementation on Project-based Learning in teaching writing descriptive text. The researchers collected the data regarded to the second aim of study through observation and questionnaire, then analyzed the result through data triangulation. The observation was done during the teaching and learning process of writing activities while the questioner was conducted to students. The information was described in table 2 below:

Table 1. serves the detailed presentation of the data gained through triangulation

No.	Observasion	Questioner	Result
1	They did the discussion. Peer correction with their friends nicely and actively. The interaction was better quantively from meeting to meeting	They stated that they had high encouragement to do discussion with friends. They had many things to discuss with their friends and develop their critical thinking	Students felt that the Project-based Learning was good to improve their activeness during writing learning
2	They found their way and thinking better to do the project given by the lecturer and created their descriptive text to mini book based on their own idea	They said that they had already found their own design for their mini book, and the way to make it based on their discussion	Students' creativity was overwhelmed during their work on their project of mini book. They created their own and made it into something they like the most.
3	They seemed to revise their work due to the new finding of something new. They made some corrections on some errors. They fixed the grammatical errors and other missing in writing comfortably	They felt that they knew something new during their work. Most of them said that in group they found many grammatical errors which could not be found if they did their work individually. Many corrections they made during the making of their project.	Students admitted that they study more. They sharpened their knowledge during constructing their project. Students seems to be happier during the learning process.

There were three points that the researchers got related to the second objective. The result showed that there were several things that could be an improvement during the teaching and learning activity covering: activeness, motivation, creativity and ability.

Students had many things to learn related to the improvement of writing ability. This situation motivate the researchers to offer the suitable method in learning writing especially in descriptive text. The researcher proposed Project Based Learning because the project

given to students and let them do that with their own creativity and effort. Project Based Learning was conducted during the even semester to teach writing descriptive paragraph in university level. The lecturer gave them a meaningful project to do. The project was to make a mini book based on the topic given by the lecturer. They did the project to design the mini book by their own.

From the activities, the implementation of this method could be seen many results. First, the use of PBL could literally improve students' score of writing assignment. It could be seen from their increasing movement of their score of writing. On the pre-cycle, their mean score was only 60, but they showed their improvement on score on the cycle 1, which was 70. It was then continued to their result of cycle 2, it was 78. In other word, we could say that they statistically improved on the field of knowledge and ability.

Moreover, the researcher could tell that they had improved their attitude qualitatively during teaching and learning activity. When they were asked to make a descriptive text, they showed their less desire since they felt that writing is difficult. However, by implementing Project based learning, their attitude started to move to the good one. They could work and discuss the project with their friends in their group during the writing session. They also felt enjoy on making new composition related to the description on thing they had chosen. Second, the researchers revealed the students' opinion toward the use of PBL on their writing class. It could be seen from the result of observation and questioner conducted during the teaching and learning activity. They had and showed good responses during the activities of writing. The data triangulation showed some points of finding. Those findings were: students thought that PBL was able to increase their activeness during discussion in writing class, and the motivation as its effect was also elevated. Besides, they felt that the application of PBL was able to improve not only their knowledge but also their creativity during writing activity on creating mini magazine, while they stated that they were so much happier on joining the lesson. It could be proven from their way of learning in the classroom.. So, project based learning not only help the students learn well but also the good method in encouraging the

better motivation and situation of learning especially writing.

CONCLUSION

The research was conducted in three cycles; pre cycle, cycle 1 and cycle 2. The result showed that there was an improvement before and after implementing project based learning. It could be seen from the score or mean of Pre cycle was 60, cycle 1 was 70, and cycle 2 was 78. In addition, they had positive/ good responses in using this method; Students were actively involved in learning process and they were more motivated in writing learning. Project Based Learning had significantly proved on helping the students' motivation in learning and quantively score in writing ability. In other word, Project Based Learning could develop the students' writing skill, increasing student's motivation and creativeness from the project given also creating the comfortable situation in learning especially writing.

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