

DIALOGUE JOURNALS AS A COLLABORATIVE LEARNING TECHNIQUE (CoLT) FOR TEACHING WRITING

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Abstract

Learning writing is useful not only for developing students' writing skill but also for improving their English skills. This study was intended to know that Dialogue Journal is effective to teach writing. This study is a quasi-experimental. Based on the data analysis, it was found that in pre-test, there were 20 % students who active in group activity and 23 % got excellent to very good score. Meanwhile, in post-test, the students who got excellent to very good score were 43%, and 73% students were active in group activity. It indicates that Dialogue Journal is effective to teach writing.

Keywords: *Dialogue Journals, Teaching Writing, Writing ability.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In countries where English is not widely used, the curriculum of English departments normally begins with some competence skills, including writing/composition. Writing as a part of the language skills besides listening, speaking, and reading, must be taught maximally by the teacher. Through writing, students can develop their capability in communicating with people in written form. Rozimela (2004), argues that learning to write is useful not only for the sake of developing students' writing skill but

also for improving their English skills.

Johnson (2008) classifies five steps of writing process; prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and then publishing and sharing. *Prewriting* identifies everything the writers need to do before they start the rough draft, such as finding the idea, building on the idea, and then planning and structuring. *Drafting* is the activity where the writer starts to write. In this stage, forgetting about word count and grammar is needed. In *revising* stage, many writers naturally adopt the A.R.R.R. (Add, Rearrange, Remove, Replace) approach.

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Then, *editing* is the stage where grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors are corrected, because a word of caution is the quickest way to ruin a good writing project, and it is because if writers are editing or worrying about mechanics used in the prewriting, drafting, and revising stages, it means that the flow of ideas and the quality of writing suffers.

Writing in English has for many years, occupied a large portion in teaching and learning procedures. Teaching writing in a foreign language does not mean teaching how to transfer sentences from students' mother tongue into English. According to Richards (2003), learning how to write in a second language is one of the most challenging aspects of second language learning. It is the same as what many teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) around the world have agreed that the process of teaching and learning writing skill seems to be more difficult and demanding than learning the other skills. The difficulties lie not only in generating and organizing ideas, but also in translating these ideas into readable text.

As Richard (2003) says that writing skills are specific abilities which

help writers put their thoughts into words in a meaningful form and mentally interact with the message. However, the problem is the second language writers have to pay attention more to a higher level of skills of planning and organizing as well as the lower level of skills of spelling, punctuation, word choice, language use, and others. So, many students still get difficulty in writing, and as Harmer (2004) states, for many years the teaching of writing focused on the written product rather than on the writing process. In other words, the students' attention was directed to the what rather than the how of text construction.

One of teacher's roles in teaching is as a facilitator who facilitates learners to have effective, and meaningful learning. About this facilitator, Brown (2001) points out that as a facilitator, the teacher offers guidance in helping students to engage in the thinking process of composing but, in a spirit of respect for students' opinion, must not impose his or her own thoughts on students' writing. Brown (2001) also adds that as a teacher, guide, and facilitator to help students to revise and refine their work before final

submission, he or she will help give them confidence in their work. Nevertheless, English teachers, in teaching writing, face complicated problem, such as finding the appropriate technique or strategy to teach writing, and also the complexity of writing that causes difficulties to write for the students themselves. Therefore, English teachers, cannot be passive. An English teacher should consider many things in teaching writing as one of the skills to be mastered by students in learning a foreign language. They should try to find, adapt, or even adopt the appropriate method, technique, or strategy to teach writing skill. As Mahfudz (2012) says, all teachers should vary and upgrade the way they teach to have a better and successful teaching and learning.

There is no excellent writer. Writing is not an easy matter. Writing is not a single act of getting words down on paper. Writing skill is not the same as speaking skill where speaking skill can be acquired naturally as a result of hearing to the spoken language continuously, while writing skill has to be learned. Harmer (2004) says that some students interpret that it is not easy to write English sentences,

paragraphs, moreover texts or essays. When writing, students frequently spend more time to think rather than when speaking. However, Errors still happen, particularly for beginner students.

Prihantoro (2016) argues that for students whose L1 is not English, the evaluation of the writing is mostly on grammar; which is how the students can express their ideas logically through grammatically correct sentences. He adds that one of the reasons for these errors to take place is L1 influence (interference or negative transfer).

Besides, Harmer (2009) also states that some students are extremely unconfident and unenthusiastic writers. There may be some reasons for this: perhaps they have never written much in their first language. Perhaps they think that they do not have anything to say and cannot come up with ideas. Whereas, the first need of students to write is motivation. Motivation is a feeling of interest and enthusiasm in doing something. In fact, many students now lack of motivation in writing.

It is like Hidi & Boscolo (2007) who says that a major problem in writing instruction is students' lack of motivation to write. This problem may

be due to both the difficulty and the limited attractiveness of certain demanding academic genres and writing tasks. Motivation is such a broad a research field that it is difficult to analyze its various aspects.

In response to the fact that students lack of familiarity and confidence in writing (or indeed enthusiasm for it), Harmer (2009) states that the teacher needs to give students interesting and enjoyable tasks to do. The teachers need to be ready with enough suggestions to make sure the students can never say “I can’t think of anything to write”. Thus, teachers are demanded to be able choose the technique or strategy that can help students learn more easily to improve their writing skill.

Sokolik (2016) proposes some principles for teaching writing. First, students’ reasons for writing should be understood. It is important to understand the students’ goals of writing. Second, the teacher should provide many opportunities for students to write. Writing skill requires lot of exercises because it has many aspects to fulfill (vocabulary, content, organization, language use, and mechanics). It is impossible to master

them in a short time and with few exercises. Third, the teacher should make feedback helpful and meaningful. Fourth, the teacher should clarify for himself and for students how the writing task will be evaluated. To avoid students’ misunderstanding toward teacher’s evaluation, the teacher should develop a rubric, a kind of scoring grid that elaborates the elements of writing.

Then, Kroll (2005), says that there are some points to be considered for teaching EFL writing course. The first is syllabus design. A syllabus should be designed to take account curricular goals and particular students will face. Second, teachers should have techniques to help writers get started. To do this, the teachers can do several activities, such as brainstorming, listing, clustering, and free-writing. Third, there should be assignment design.

Assignment is needed because to make a good writing, practice has an important role. Practice helps students to learn how to make a good writing and it includes some criteria of effective writing learning process. Sova (2004) adds that the writers should do a role-play and pretend to be their reader when placing words on paper. If they find the

explanation unclear, so does their reader.

Boardman & Frydenberg (2008) argue that well-written paragraph has three separate parts: a topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence. In addition to organization, writing in English must also have the characteristics of coherence, cohesion, and unity. Muschla (2011:1) also gives statement of good writing that good writing begins with a good idea. Without an interesting idea, even the most skillful writing will be resulted in a weak piece. Being a good writer, one must be aware of the importance of ideas.

Then, to make students able to write, or even to make a good writing, teachers must have a capability to teach with the best strategy or technique for the student. Because the method used by teachers has often been said to be the cause of success or failure in language teaching and one of the supporters to achieve the success of learning process is Dialogue Journals.

As the information cited in https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialogue_journal) that a Dialogue Journal is an ongoing written interaction between two people to exchange experiences, ideas,

or reflections. It is used most often in education as a means of sustained written interaction between students and teachers at all education levels.

Dialogue Journal is one of the Collaborative Learning Techniques (CoLT) focusing on writing. In this CoLT, individuals keep a journal in which they write about a reading-assignment, lecture, task, or experience. Each student then exchanges journals with a peer who reads and responds to the entry with comments and questions. Then, Dialogue Journal is a technique where interaction occurs in notebooks, letters, email exchanges, and audio journals (cited in https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialogue_journal).

About this technique, Barkley (2005) points out that Dialogue Journals offer a formal medium for students to record their thoughts, connect coursework to their personal lives, and ask each other questions. He adds that journals can be particularly effective when writers know that someone who is also interested in the topic will read and respond to their entries.

There are some procedures of writing activity using Dialogue Journal according to Barkley (2005):

- 1) On a fresh page in the journal, students draw a vertical line about one-third of the page from the right margin. The writer writes in the left; the responder writes in the right.
- 2) The writer enters comments or questions after reading an assignment, hearing a lecture, performing a task, engaging in an activity, or listening to the discussion, and dating and signing the entry.
- 3) The writer gives the journal to the responder, who reads the entries and responds with comments, suggestions, answers, questions, and so forth, also dating and signing the entry.
- 4) The instructor may read the journals to clarify points, answer questions, and comment on or evaluate the quality of observations and responses.

This research was intended to know the effectiveness of using Dialogue Journal to teach writing. By using this technique, students were expected to have good motivation in learning writing to gain good result in their study.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

Research design of this study is one group pre-test post-test design. It is quasi-experimental. McMillan (2001) says that quasi experimental design is not true experiments. They provide reasonable control over most sources of invalidity and they are usually stronger than the pre-experimental designs. According to Cresswell (2008), the researcher uses the experimental research when they want to establish possible cause and effect between the independent and dependent variables.

The two variables of this study were independent variable (Dialogue Journal) and dependent variable (writing ability). Creswell (2008) adds that independent variable is a variable which influences the result of the research whether or not there is any difference before and after treatment, while dependent variable is an attribute or characteristic that is dependent on or influenced by the independent variable.

The subject of this study was the fourth semester students of STKIP Muhammadiyah Pringsewu in academic year 2017/ 2018 consisting of 38 students. In collecting data, the researcher used tests: pre-test and post-test. Pre-test was given before the

treatment to find out the prior students' ability in writing before applying Dialogue Journal. Post-test was administered after the treatment to find out students' ability in writing after applying Dialogue Journal. In scoring, the scoring rubric from Jacobs et al. in Hughes (2003) had been used. The scoring system is as follows:

Content	: 13-30
Organization	: 7-20
Vocabulary	: 7-20
Language use	: 5-25
Mechanics	: 2- 5
<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>: 100</u>

The data of this study had been analyzed by using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. McMillan (2001) states that descriptive statistics transform a set of numbers or observations into indices that describe or characterize the data. The statistics are used to summarize, organize, and reduce large numbers of observations. Then, inferential statistics are used to make inferences or predictions about the similarity of a sample to the population from which the sample is drawn (McMillan, 2001), and to test hypothesis, this study used pooled variance t-test.

3. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data analysis showed that there was significant improvement of students' writing ability after having Dialogue Journal as a technique to learn writing. In pre-test, there were 20 % students who active in group activity and 23 % got excellent to very good score. Meanwhile, in post-test, the students who got excellent to very good score were 43%, and 73% students were active in group activity.

The result of this study including of pre-test results, post-test results, and the data analysis.

Pre-test

The pre-test was administered on March 06th, 2018, and it was found that students' abilities in writing range from fair to poor. There were 14 students who got score 36-43. There were three student who got score 44-51, five students who gained 52-59, ten who got 60-67, and six students who earned 68-75. The mean score that the experimental class got in the pretest was 60.52.

Table 1. The Frequency Distribution Table of Pre-test Score

Class	Interval	Fi	Xi	Xi ²	Fi.Xi	Fi.Xi ²
1	36-43	14	39.5	1560.25	553	21843.5
2	44-51	3	47.5	2256.25	142.5	6768.75
3	52-59	5	55.5	3080.25	277.5	15401.25
4	60-67	10	63.5	4032.25	635	40322.5
5	68-75	6	71.5	5112.25	429	30673.5
$\Sigma=$		38	230	16041.25	2037	95350.5

Post-test

The post-test was administered on April 24th, 2018. Having conducted post-test, the researcher found that students' ability in writing ranged from excellent to very good category. The students who got score 60-66 were eight. The number of students who gained 67-73 was ten. There were 13 students who got 74-80, five students who earned 81-87, and two who got 88-94. The mean score of post-test was 78.82.

Table 2. The Frequency Distribution Table of Post-test Score

Class	Interval	Fi	Xi	Xi ²	Fi.Xi	Fi.Xi ²
1	60-66	8	63	3969	504	31752
2	67-73	10	70	4900	700	49000
3	74-80	13	77	5929	1001	77077
4	81-87	5	84	7056	420	85280
5	88-94	2	91	8281	182	16562
$\Sigma=$		38	385	30135	2807	259671

Table 3. The Data Analysis of Pre-test and Post-Test Score

Data Description	Scores	
	Pre-test	Post-test
Number of Subjects (N)	38	38
Mean (M)	58.98	75.17
Standard of Deviation	11.52	48.52
Ranges	39	34
Maximum Scores	75	94
Minimum Scores	36	60

Normality Testing

To measure whether the distribution was normal or not, Chi Square formula ($\frac{f_o-f_h}{f_h}$) was used. When it was measured based on the level of significance of 5% and degree of freedom (df) 4, it was found that the pre-test result was lower than Chi Square table (-51.4 < 9.49). It means that the distributions were normal. In the post-test, the result of was the same as the pre-test result. It was lower than Chi Square table (-80.44 < 9.49).

Hypothesis Testing

The criterion of hypothesis is that H_0 is rejected if $t_{\text{calculated}} \leq t_{\text{table}}$, and H_a is rejected if $t_{\text{calculated}} > t_{\text{table}}$. To prove whether or not Dialogue Journal was effective to teach writing, polled

variance t-test was used. By using pooled variance t-test with (df) = 44 and standard error 5%, it was found that $t_{\text{calculated}} < t_{\text{table}} = 0.67 < 1.6802$.

Refer to the criterion that H_0 is rejected if $t_{\text{calculated}} \leq t_{\text{table}}$, and H_a is rejected if $t_{\text{calculated}} > t_{\text{table}}$, it means that H_0 was rejected and H_a was accepted. In another word, Dialogue Journal was good to teach writing ability to the fourth semester students of STKIP Muhammadiyah Pringsewu in academic year 2017/ 2018.

4. CONCLUSION

After given six treatments by using Dialogue Journal, it was known that students got better achievement in writing. In pre-test, the students' ability in writing range from fair to poor. And having conducted post-test, the researcher found that students' ability in writing ranged from excellent to very good category.

Then, pooled variance t-test was also showed that $t_{\text{calculated}} \leq t_{\text{table}}$ ($1.13 < 1.6802$) where the interpreting was Dialogue Journal is effective to teach the fourth semester students of STKIP Muhammadiyah Pringsewu in academic year 2017/ 2018.

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