TEACHING WRITING A DISCUSSION TEXT BY APPLYING PEER - ASSISTED LEARNING STRATEGY (PALS) AT SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Aulisa Niandari[1], Jufri[2]
Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris
FBS Universitas Negeri Padang
Email: aulisaniandari@yahoo.com

Abstrak

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan cara mengajarkan teks diskusi dengan menerapkan Peer – Assisted Learning Strategy (PALS). Teks diskusi adalah sebuah teks yang mempunyai dua pokok pembahasan, yaitu: pro dan kontra terhadap suatu topik. Peer – Assisted Learning Strategy (PALS) adalah salah satu strategi untuk meningkatkan kemampuan siswa dalam menulis. Murid memberikan ide-ide dan menemukan solusi tentang topik yang dibahas. Pertama, guru diharapkan dapat mengaktifkan pengetahuan siswa tentang topik teks diskusi yang akan dipelajari. Lalu, guru memberikan model teks dan proses dalam menulis teks tersebut. Selanjutnya, secara berpasangan, murid saling bergantian mendukung atau menolak pendapat dari pasangannya. Pada tahap terakhir, siswa ditugaskan menulis teks diskusi secara individu. Oleh karena itu, melalui penerapan Peer – Assisted Learning Strategy (PALS) diharapkan dapat membantu siswa dalam meningkatkan kemampuan menulis teks diskusi.

Kata kunci: teaching, writing, discussion text, PALS.

A. Introduction

Writing is a major skill in learning process which has been learned since the human have comprehended the process of learning. In fact, writing does not get as much attention as the other skills do because it has to be learned and practiced particularly since it is not an easy skill to be acquired especially for the English language learners. According to the Curriculum 2004 which was developed into curriculum KTSP 2006, teaching writing at Senior High School is done through Genre Based Approach. At the third grade students of Senior High School, one of the texts that must be able to be produced and written is discussion text. Discussion text is a text which presents a problematic discourse or issue, and the aim is to presents information or opinion about issue in more than one sides: argument for/ pros and argument against/contras.

There are some problems which are faced by the students when they write discussion text. The first problem is lack of idea. Richard and Renandya (2002, p. 303) states that the difficulty of writing is not only in generating and composing the ideas, but also in presenting the ideas into text. Meanwhile, generating ideas, then arranging them is the main point in writing. Therefore,

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[1] Writer, Student of English Department of FBS UNP graduated on September 2012
[2] Supervisor, Lecturer of FBS UNP

students cannot start writing if they do not have ideas to deliver and express their opinion, thoughts, and information of what they are going to write. The second problem is lack of vocabulary. Students will develop the text easily if they know much vocabulary, and it also helps the students to support their idea. However, most of students do not have enough vocabulary. They seldom use dictionary to get the meaning of new words so that they often use inappropriate words in their writing. Another problem is the students do not have sufficient knowledge about grammar. Grammar is needed when the students construct good sentences and expand them become good paragraphs. Therefore, the students have to use correct grammar to make their writing better.

The other problem that cause writing is difficult comes from the teachers. In learning and teaching process, the teachers directly or indirectly influence the successful of study in writing. It is undeniable that the teacher's role holds a significant part. The teachers usually use less authentic material in teaching writing so that the students follow the process of learning hardly. In addition, the teachers often use limited media to help them in teaching, including teaching writing. This situation makes the students less motivation and feels bored to learn. Moreover, the teachers usually explain the material by speech. However, the teacher's strategy should involve students on teaching and learning, not only the teacher as the center. Teachers should be able to choose some strategy that can improve student's ability and interest to help them in writing a text. The good strategy can give influence toward the student's motivation. For instance, when the teacher asks the students to write, he/ she should select the appropriate and interesting strategies which can help the students doing that exercise. Beside, choosing a good topic that relates to their interest will give motivation to them. In short, the teachers should be able to increase student's motivation in writing through the strategies they used.

To solve the problems above, teachers should find great solution to arouse the student's motivation in writing a text. Moreover, they may invent a better strategy in order to change the belief that says writing is the most difficult skill to be acquired. Teachers can start from applying various strategies in teaching. There are many strategies that can be used by the teachers in teaching discussion text at Senior High School. One of them is by applying Peer-Assisted Learning Strategy (PALS). It is a version of peer learning where teachers evaluate and identify students who need help in writing. The students are peered, and then change each of their first roles. The use of peers in the classroom provides more focus on student's needs rather than an individual activity that may give the needs for a few students but not the needs of all students. In addition, by peering the students, they may generate their idea easily in writing a discussion text because it help them to choose wheteher they are agree to the issuue or not. This strategy will encourage the students to show up their ideas. Moreover, the students will not feel inferior to share, discuss and evaluate their ideas because they work with their peer.

Barnet and Stubbs (1990) states writing is the media of communication of making contact between the writer and the readers. It means the writer has to consider who his/ her readers are and what they want to know. A good writer can make the reader feel and understand what he/ she talks about without looking at his/ her gesture and facial expression.

Harmer (2007) says that writing is a process as well as a product. The process of composing is as important as the final product. In other words, writing is not only producing a text or an essay but the more important one is how the process of producing the text is done. It means that writing can be viewed in two sides, writing as a process and writing as a product. As a process, writing seen from the activity from the beginning to the end. While writing as a product deals with the result of the student's writing itself. These two terms make the most important part in producing a text or an essay.

Tompkins (2000) uses five- stage writing process that is commonly used by the teacher. It consists of prewriting, drafting, revising, editing and publishing.

1. Pre-writing

   Pre-writing is the activities to generate the idea, establish purpose, and identifies who the readers will be. It is clear that the writer should pay attention to the plans, aims, and the readers of the written text.

2. Drafting

   In this stage, students write their ideas on paper. It includes: making outline, writing through draft and so on.

3. Revising

   The students focus on the content whose parts are not clear. They may add, rearranging, removing and replacing to revise.

4. Editing

   The editing stage is different from revising stage where the students check the mechanic errors.

5. Publishing

   The students publish their writing or share it with others or appropriate readers.

The government has designed the process of teaching and learning activity for Senior High School. It is covered by *Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan Nasional no 41 tahun 2007 tentang Standar Proses untuk Pendidikan Dasar Menengah*. The process itself is specified in three activities in teaching learning process; they are Pre Activity, Whilst Activity, and Post Activity. The explanation is as following:

1. Pre Activity

Pre activity is an early activity of learning process to increase students' motivation and focus their attention so that they can participate actively during the teaching and learning process. In this activity, the teacher prepares the students for the learning process physically and mentally.

2. Whilst Activity

Whilst Activity is a learning process purposed to accomplish the basic competencies. The learning process is done by interacting, inspiriting, enjoyable, challenging, motivating students to actively participate, and giving enough space

for idea, creativity, and independency based on their needs and interest. In this activity, the strategy used is based on the students' characteristics and the subject that is being taught. Whilst activity consists of three phases, they are exploration, elaboration and confirmation.

a. Exploration

This activity purposes to involve the students to find a large amount of information related to the topic of their learning material and facilitate the interaction among the students, between the students and the teacher, the students and the environment, and the other learning sources. Moreover, the teacher tries to activate the students' background of knowledge that related to the topic. The teacher discusses or gives some questions which are related to the topic and explains to the students about basic competencies that they should acquire in learning process.

b. Elaboration

This activity makes the students involved in various writing activities by giving certain meaningful tasks. In this activity, the students have opportunity to think, analyze, and solve any problem without fear because they are free to convey their ideas related to the topic. The students are facilitated in cooperative and collaborative learning and write exploration report both oral and written, both groups and individual.

c. Confirmation

In this activity, the teacher give the positive feedback, emphasize through oral, written, sign, or even gifts to student's achievements and give confirmation toward the result of student's exploration and elaboration. The teachers facilitate the students to do a discussion for correction in order to get learning experience which they have done in order to achieve basic competencies.

3. Post Activity

Post activity is an activity which has a purpose to end the teaching and learning activity which can be done through creating summary or conclusion, assessment, giving feedback, and follow up activity.

Discussion text is one of the texts that are taught at Senior High School. Discussion text is a text which presents a problematic discourse or issue. This problem will be discussed from different viewpoints. According to Gerot and Wignell (1994), a discussion text has the following characteristics:

1. Social function: to present (at least) two points of view about an issue.
2. Generic Structure

   It consists of issue, arguments for and against, and conclusion or recommendation. First, issue explains about what issue is going to be discussed. This must be problematic issue from different point of view. Then, arguments for: support the arguments which are agreed with the issue and the argument against: which disagree to the stated issue. The last part is conclusion or recommendation. At the end of discussion, it is important to re-think to formulate certain recommendation for the discussed issue.
3. Lexico grammatical features:

a. Focus on generic human and non human participants, e.g: handphone
b. The use of simple present tense (S+V1+O), e.g: handphone gives good and bad effects.
c. The use of mental processes, e.g: feel
d. The use of transition words, e.g: moreover, however, beside
e. The use of modal auxiliary, e.g: should, could, would
f. The use of comparative, e.g: better, higher

In short, discussion text is one of genres that tell about two points of views and issues, share of information in form of argumentation. At the end of text it makes a recommendation based on the evidence presented.

Peer assisted learning Strategy (PALS) considered as an effective strategy in teaching which can improve all language skills includes writing skills. The students with high proficiency will be paired up with the student's low proficiency. In this case, the students will work together on an activity and give help for each other. So, the teaching and learning focus on the students themselves.

Daraz (2001) says PALS is a strategy to support scheme of each student for both academic and personal development. It means that PALS is a learning process in which the students may give help to their friends and can help them in improving their academic skills and also their personality so that it can be categorized as one of cooperative and collaborative learning.

In addition, Peer - Assisted Learning Strategy gives the students the opportunity to work together with their partner and give feedback to each other. As Peregoy and Boyle in Teo (2006) point out that pairing student up in writing is the best way for promoting learning effectiveness. Peer assisted writing not only gives more quality time to the teacher to work with the students but also offer the students with plenty of opportunities to brainstorm ideas and to learn from each other. So, in applying PALS, the students will work together in pairs.

B. Discussion

Before teaching, the teacher needs to do some preparation in order to make the process of teaching and learning run well. The teacher has to prepare the materials that will be taught. The materials are important things to be prepared before teaching. Without materials, the teacher does not know what they are going to teach. Moreover, the teacher should prepare the texts that appropriate with curriculum. Nowadays, the texts are available in textbooks that students used at school. The teacher also searches other example of texts from internet in order to add student's knowledge about the texts. In addition, the teacher also prepares good media for teaching the materials. There are many media that can be used by the teacher in teaching, such as pictures, video, poster, realia, LCD, etc.

By applying PALS, the teacher can manage the classroom and it will also help the teacher to control the class. The students are asked to work in peers based on their level of proficiency; the teacher should know the ability of each student by viewing from student's academic record. The low level of proficiency

students will be paired with the high level of proficiency students. Thus, PALS enables the students to support their peer's idea even against them. They can help each other if they find difficulties during discussion activity and revise their writing if they find any errors.

During discussion activity, the teacher has such important role. He/ she lead the class by telling the direction of what the students should do. The teacher controls the class and helps the students who need helps and guides. The teacher monitors the students who find the difficulties and let them ask to the teacher to get help and make the discussion run well.

Applying Peer-Assisted Learning Strategy in teaching writing discussion text is by following these stages. The stages are pre- teaching activity, whilst teaching activity, and post- teaching activity.

1. **Pre- Teaching Activity**
   In this stage, teacher follows a common activity similar to other teaching material. This is the first activity of teaching and learning process that has to be done by the teacher. In this activity, teacher greets the student and checks the student's attendance list. Then, the teacher checks the student's readiness to study and also reviews the previous lesson to remind the students about the last lesson by asking questions. Beside that, the teacher should motivates students to attract their attention and interest.

2. **Whilst Teaching Activity**
   In this activity, the teacher leads the students to the main activity in teaching writing a discussion text by applying Peer-Assisted Learning Strategy (PALS). The activities involve three steps: exploration, elaboration and confirmation.

- **Exploration**
  The teacher prepares the students in teaching and learning process by preparing some questions and pictures to build up the student's background knowledge with the topic to be learnt. The purpose of this activity is to make the students ready to learn about discussion text. From this stage, the teacher has to explore the student's background knowledge about the topic as much as possible to make them easier to follow more about the topic in the next stages.

The teacher introduces a model of discussion text and explains about its structure, the social function and language features. The purpose of this modeling is to build up student's understanding about discussion text. Then, the teacher gives a model of a discussion text and tells how to apply Peer-Assisted Learning Strategy. The teacher introduces the topic to the students and it is about the effect of watching TV.

The Effect of Television

Television, also well known as TV, is one of the sources information and entertainment media. It is one of the most influential for society in two different sides especially for children. Almost everyone nowadays have a television set in their home. In many cases, some depend on television very much. Why does this happen? Does this magic box give many advantages? What are the disadvantages? Can it cause a serious problem for the viewers?

In one side, TV is not only give bad effects; TV impact could give us some easeness. First, all programs on TV are basically designed to entertain and give information to people. They help them relax and get to know about different news or information. They also make them laugh because they are amusing. Beside, some TV shows an educated, inform and inspire. Many programs serve good lessons to children through cartoon, films, games, music, sports, and local film series for children. It can be more effective than books and audiotapes in teaching children about processes like how a plant grows or how to make a cake.

In contrast, TV exposes children to negative effects, and promotes negative behavior. Some programs, however, are sometimes about the exhibition of violence, sarcasm, crimes, murder, etc. For instance, twenty years of research has shown that children who are more exposed to media violence behave more aggressively as kids and when they are older. They are taught by TV that violence is the way to resolve conflict; as when a TV hero beats up a bad guy to subdue him. Moreover, it has bad effect for their health. Children who watch too

(The teacher shows the text about effect of watching TV)

much TV are usually overweight, according to the American Medical Association. They often snack on junk food while watching TV. In addition, they are influenced by commercials to consume unhealthy food. Also, they are lazy to do activities such running, jumping, or doing activities that burn calories and increase metabolism.

In spite of having disadvantages, many parents should realize about this problem. They can start to follow the good effects by selecting the good programs for their children. They also need to control their children by accompanying them when watching TV while educated them. Last but not least, many parents should remember to limit time of watching TV for their children because it is bad for their health and education if it takes a long time.

Adapted from : http://www.smartenglishcourse.com/online-english-course/discussion-text-the-good-and-bad-effects-of-tv-for-children

Based on the text above, the teacher tells the generic structure of the discussion text. First paragraph is called issue; it contains an opening statement presenting the issue which is going to be discussed. In discussion text, the issue must be a problematic. Second paragraph is called arguments for (pro), because it provides arguments to support the pro opinion. It is completed with supporting evidence/examples. The third paragraph is called arguments against (contrast), because it states the arguments which disagree to the stated issue. These

contradictive arguments are also supported with evidence/examples. The last paragraph is called **conclusion or recommendation; it** says the writer's conclusion or recommendation for the discussed issue on how people should concern with it. Then, the teacher explains about lexico grammatical based on the text above.

   a. Focus on generic human and non human participants: *television*.
   b. Using simple present tense (S+V1+O): *Television, also well known as TV, is one of the sources information and entertainment media*.
   c. Using mental processes: *feel, hope, believe*, etc.
   d. Using transition words: *beside, in contrast, however, moreover*, etc.
   e. Using modal auxiliary: *must, should, could*, etc.
   f. Using comparative: more effective, etc.

- **Elaboration**

   In this activity, the teacher pair up the students based on the level of students; the low level of student with high level of student. This pairing is purposeful for the low level of students to motivate them in giving their ideas. The teacher gives the topics to each group about the effect of internet. Teacher helps all peers first by grouping the advantages and disadvantages of internet and asks each pairs to continue adding some more of the advantages and the disadvantages of internet.

For instance:

The Effect of Internet

The Advantages   The Disadvantages

-   Know the latest news in the world   - Addictive
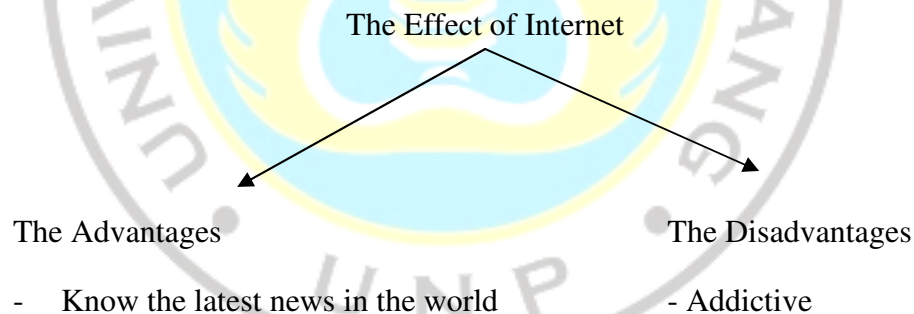
   (Continuing by each peers)
   After all peers making lists of the advantages and disadvantages of internet, the teacher ask the students to create a discussion text with peer by following the lists and based on example that was modeled by the teacher. After that, the students should find the generic structures and language feature of the text and write down on piece of paper. The teacher leads and controls the students while they are writing the text by walking around the class and asking the students problem.

- **Confirmation**

   In this activity, the teacher leads the students to discuss together about what they write in their peers. The teacher points one or two group to re-write their text on the board. After that, the teacher discusses that text together, such as

language features and generic structure of discussion text. The teacher helps students to solve the problems that appear. Then, the teacher collects the text of each peer.

3. Post Teaching Activity

This is the final and individual activity. In this activity, the teacher checks the students understanding about the lesson by asking some questions. The questions that appear are *what is the function of the discussion text? What are the generic structures of the discussion text? What is the language feature in the discussion text?* Then, the teacher summarizes the lesson. The teacher gives homework to the students. The teacher asks the students to create a discussion text based on the topic given, find the generic structures and language features of the text, and collect it in the next meeting. The last, the teacher close the class.

C. Conclusion

Based on the previous discussion, it can be concluded that one of the best strategies which can be implemented in teaching learning writing is Peer-Assisted Learning Strategy. This is an effective strategy for teaching writing because it can solve student's problems in writing such how to generate ideas for better content. Moreover, this activity provides students more opportunity to work with their peers in order to produce good writing. The students have time to brainstorm ideas and edit each other's writing that can promote learning effectiveness.

In this activity, the students are guided in writing process by providing the guideline of the activity by the teacher. There are some steps which should be followed by the students in guidelines. It is started by pairing up the students and activates student's background knowledge before they work with their peer. After finishing writing text, the teacher evaluates by giving comments which focused on meaning, order, style, spelling and punctuation of the student's writing. Therefore, Peer-Assisted Learning Strategy is considered as one of the effective strategies in teaching and learning writing because it can promote the student's writing ability, especially for Senior High School students.

This article is suggested for the teacher to apply it in writing activity. Basically, PALS can be applied in all types of genre so that it is also suggested for the teacher to implement this strategy to all types of genre. Moreover, the teachers are suggested to provide students with clear instruction of each step of the activity in order to gain the optimal effectiveness of this Peer-Assisted Learning Strategy. All of the suggestions may be advisable because it can help the students to improve their writing ability.

Note: this article is compiled based on the writer's paper with his advisor Drs. Jufri, M.Pd.

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