ENHANCING SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' ABILITY IN WRITING DESCRIPTIVE TEXT THROUGH LANG 8

Nosa Yuliasandra[1], Havid Ardi[2]
Jurusan Bahasa dan Sastra Inggris
FBS Universitas Negeri Padang
Email: ochabana@rocketmail.com

Abstrak

Tujuan penulisan artikel ini adalah memperkenalkan kepada guru dan siswa Sekolah Menengah Atas sebuah jaringan sosial yang dapat dimanfaatkan untuk belajar Bahasa Inggris atau bahasa asing, yaitu Lang 8. Melalui Lang 8 siswa dapat memperbaiki dan memperluas keterampilan mereka dalam berbahasa asing, termasuk Bahasa Inggris karena Lang 8 memberikan kesempatan kepada anggotanya untuk menulis pada dinding lang 8 dan dikoreksi dan dikomentari oleh para penutur asli. Artikel ini difokuskan pada penggunaan Lang 8 bagi siswa SMA untuk memperbaiki keterampilan menulis (*writing*) siswa pada teks deskriptif. Pertama, siswa menulis teks deskriptif di kelas kemudian ditulis ulang pada dinding Lang 8. Lalu, siswa menunggu komentar dan koreksi dari penutur asli. Dari komentar dan koreksi tersebut siswa mengetahui apa kesalahan mereka, apa kata-kata yang tepat untuk digunakan, dan bagaimana cara menulis yang baik dalam Bahasa Inggris.

Keywords: Writing, Descriptive Text, ICT, Lang 8, Senior High School

A. Introduction

Writing is one of the four skills that is used to share the ideas, feeling, and thought beside speaking. Through writing, people can send message and information in written form. Having difference with speaking; writing is more formal which some rules that is needed to be followed. A writer has to consider number of aspects such as vocabulary, spelling, grammar, mechanics and organization of ideas.

Wilson and Glazier (2003: 212) state that writing consists of levels of structures, started from words to phrases, clauses, and sentences form. Then, sentences connect to form paragraphs and essay. In addition, Egawa (2003) states that writing is a social activity, it should be embedded in social context.

In learning language, writing is one of the most important skills that is learnt by language learners, including by Junior High School students in Indonesia. As Wilson and Glazier (2003:213) state that "Learning to write well is very important, one of the most important things you will do in your education". They add that writing sections will help the learners build confidence, whether

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they are expressing their own ideas or summarizing and responding to the ideas of others.

In Indonesia, learning English is the compulsory subject that has to be learnt by all of High School Students. This rule is put on the curriculum. According to *Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan (KTSP) 2006*, teaching English in Senior High School is expected to raise informational level. The informational level means that the students are able to communicate in oral and written form. It implies that besides speaking, the students of senior high school are expected to be capable in English writing.

Moreover, writing can encourage the students to focus on accurate language use and also lead them to think when they write. It can be identified sby teaching English writing in senior high school.

The students are expected to be able to learn using English appropriately and also develop their knowledge because in writing the students are guided to think. At the end, through writing the students can communicate in written form communicatively.

The using of ICT in teaching writing of English in Indonesia is very important to decrease the problems that are faced by the Indonesian students. The first problem is English is a foreign language and rarely used in communication by Indonesians. The students in Indonesia usually use their mother languages such as the language of each student's ethnic and Bahasa Indonesia in daily conversation so that they do not have many chances to speak English with their friends, their family and their communities. This case makes the Indonesian students are difficult to express their selves in English through writing.

In addition, writing English is not as simple as speaking. The writers have to pay attention to the vocabulary, grammar, and writing style. The students need to know much vocabulary in English to write so that they can develop their writing as good as possible. In fact, many Indonesian students have problems with the vocabulary in writing. They do not have idea to express their ideas and thoughts because they do not how to spell the words in English appropriately. Besides, the students also have grammatical problems in writing English because the grammar of Bahasa Indonesia is really different from English. Then, the Indonesian students also need to write in good style of English but they do not get much exposure of English.

The last problem that the students usually get is doing the process of writing. They need to make a good plan before they write, that is a writer need to do some processes of writing. The processes of writing that has to be follow by the students are prewriting, drafting, revising and editing. Some students even do not do the process of writing when they write the paragraphs.

Especially in writing descriptive text, many students of Senior High School get problems in describe thing, person, and place. They cannot write and describe the object that they want to describe in detail and specific. Many of them do not have enough vocabulary to tell how the thing, person, or place is looks like. They also have limited adjectives to support their writing. Moreover, some of them still have problem in arrange the sentences in good grammar and style.

Related to the problems above, the teachers and the students need an appropriate media that can enhance students' ability in writing, especially in writing descriptive text. One of the media that can be applied is by using ICT in teaching writing of English.

The teaching and learning writing through the internet is one of the examples of utilization of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in education. ICT means the technologies that support of delivering information and communication.

According to Ministry of Education in Malaysia (in Bakar and Mohamed: 2007), the concept of ICT in education is seen as a system that enables information gathering, management, manipulation, access, and communication in various forms. In addition, Jaffer et al (2007) state that it has been suggested that information and communication technologies (ICTs) can and do play a number of roles in education. These include providing a catalyst for rethinking teaching practice, developing the kind of graduates and citizens required in an information society, improving educational outcomes (especially pass rates) and enhancing and improving the quality of teaching and learning.

The use of ICT in people's life is very important, including in education. As Ololube (2006) says that information and communication technologies (ICTs) have become key tools and had a revolutionary impact of how people see the world and how they live in it.

Especially for teaching and learning English, Bakar (2006) states that the utilization and integration of ICT tools can indeed assist students in acquiring English Language competency as well as enhance the quality of their learning experience. She adds that based on the research that has been done by impaCT2 (www.becta.org.uk), it has been showed that the use of ICT tools in teaching and learning has positive effects on behavior, motivation, communication and process skills and that it enables pupils to learn more autonomously. ImpaCT2 further shows that teachers in schools where pupils used ICT in English achieved higher mean gain scores.

It has been known that internet is one of the ICT tools that is used in education, including in language learning. The internet is a media that is used to develop language learning for long time.

The teachers can apply the best approaches of using internet in teaching writing in the class, including take advantage from social media. Based on Karchmer's opinion (2007:225), the teachers around the world can speculate the best approaches that are taking advantage of the internet by engaging their students in technology-based writing practices, by providing them opportunities to develop electronic texts, and by publishing their work online for others to read and critique.

Based on research that has been done by Wen-chi Vivian Wu, Ling Ling Yen, and Michael Marek on 2010, students have opinions that actual interactions with the American native speaker allowed students to experience American culture more intimately, providing a strong connection with their own lives. It also suggests that use of technology in EFL instruction should always stress interaction

and active communication, using both formal and informal dialog, and with scenarios for interaction that are as authentic, frequent, and enjoyable as possible.

Beach and Frederick (In Karchmer: 225) state that inviting critique from outside audiences via internet, writers may recognize the social context of their work, leading them to consider different perspectives on their ideas and to think more deeply about how best to approach revision. Dörnyei (in Wu et all) predicts that the more learners felt connected internationally, the more likely they were to succeed in increasing their perceived confidence and ability (2010 : 9).

The use of ICT in learning language to improve students' ability in writing is the use of Lang 8. According to Manlove, (2007) Lang 8 is a kind of social media that aims to bring together people of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds in an effort to enhance foreign-language study. The site's founder, Yang Yang Xi, graduated from Kyoto University this spring with a degree in computer science and has been working on the Web site since. The format, similar to Mixi, allows people to write daily diaries on whatever topics they choose and in any language they want. These diaries are then edited by their friends on Lang-8, who are native in the particular language in which the diary is written. For example, Miyuki composes a diary in English, the language she is studying. This diary is then edited by her friend James, a native speaker. James, on the other hand, is studying Chinese and has a Chinese friend correcting his mistakes, and so on.

The entries that are written on Lang 8 is not limited. This article give an example of writing descriptive text on Lang 8. Descriptive text is a kind of monolog text that describes about something in detail. According to Marahimin (1994), descriptive text is a kind of writing which draws things, place, situation, or condition with words. The writer shares his perception and understanding by drawing pictures with words.

Descriptive text has different characteristics or features from other texts. Besides, descriptive text also has its generic structure to differ it from other texts. According to Gerot and Wignell (1994), the rhetorical structure or generic structure of a descriptive text consists of identification or introduction of paragraph. It explains about the topic or identifying what or who want to be described and descriptions. It explains about details of the topic: describing parts, qualities and characteristics. Depdiknas (2004) states the grammatical or language features of descriptive text are:

(1)It focuses on specific participant. It means that having one clear objet that is to be described. (2) It uses attributive and indentifying process. Attributive process is use assign the quality of object. Attributive process is used in active clause such as "It has white fur". Identifying process is used in passive clause such as "the white fur is owned by the do". (3) It uses adjective to modify noun. For example big house, beautiful beach, beautiful girl and etc. (4) It uses linking verbs, because it describes an object. (5) It uses simple present tense, because everything that is described should be true.

B. Discussion

Lang 8 is used by connecting it to the internet. If there is an internet connection in the school, this media can be applied when the students are in the classroom or when they are in teaching and learning process. Some senior high schools in Padang have internet connection in their range, especially the schools that are based on internasional standard that is called as Rintisan Sekolah Berstandar Internasional (RSBI) although there are many senior high schools do not. The examples of the school are SMAN 1 Padang, SMAN 2 Padang, SMAN 3 Padang, and SMAN 10 Padang. So that, the utilization of using Lang 8 is limited on the schools that have internet connection. Media Lang 8 to enhance writing can be applied in the language laboratory, in the multimedia room, or in the class.

The next requirement to use Lang 8 is having email. In the same case with other social media, when registering to Lang 8, the users need to type their email as a requirement of Lang 8's members. Some emails that can be used are yahoo, Gmail, etc. Commonly, the social sites will confirm the messages of registration to the users through email and email is absolutely needed to become a member of social sites.

1. Implementation Lang 8 in the Writing Class

a. Writing on Lang 8

After completing the registration, the members can write the journal entries. It is not difficult to write on Lang 8's wall. As provided in others social media, Lang 8 also provides the space to write. Through the space, the members can write everything they want in their target language. The members can write in a free version. The absolute thing that should be considered is the user has to write in target language.

If the users are apprehensive about their writing, or not sure whether they write well in target language or not, they can use the optional choice to write and explain more about their target language writing in their native language. The following picture shows the example of writing entry on Lang 8.

Picture 3: Figure of the space to write the entry

After writing the entry, the member clik the button "preview", and the server will perform the users' writing. The statement that was written will be performed as the following picture.

Picture 4: Figure of the entries on Lang 8
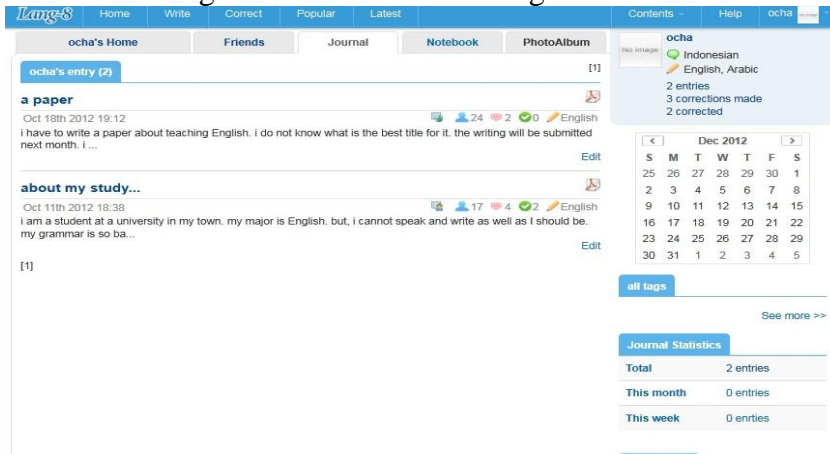
b. Correcting and Commenting Other's Writing

The communication between a language learner and a native speaker happens through asynchronous writing. Asynchronous interactions are occurred through the writing and the comments and corrections of the native speaker. After the member upload their writing, their friends will read it. They can make the corrections about the the statements or passage that has been written. The writing will be corrected from the title until the last sentence.

Beside making corrections, the other members can also comment the writing. They can add some suggestions, commendations, emendations, advices, and others on the provided box. Beside writing for the statements and being commented and corrected by others, the members can also correct and comment for the other's writing who learn their language. Athe corrections and comments are showed by the following picture.

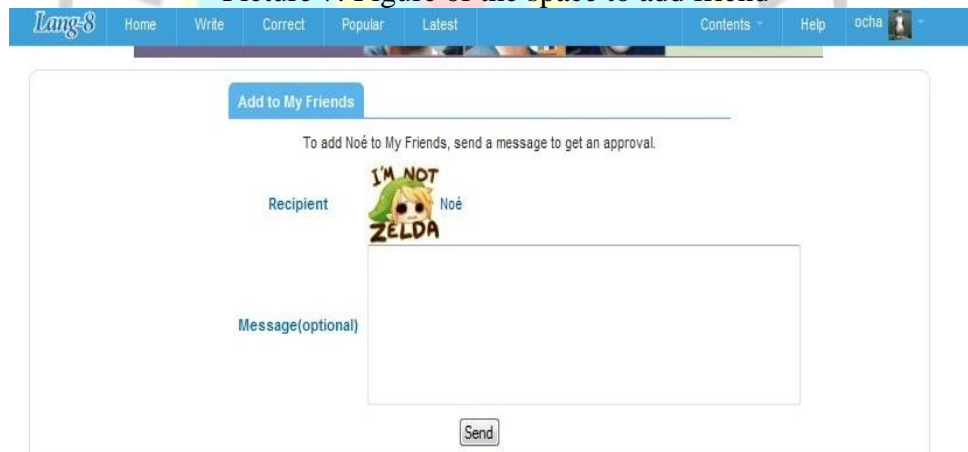Picture 5: Figure of writer's comments and corrections

Picture 6: Figure of native speaker/ other's comments and corrections

c. Finding friends

To get the friends, the members can add others users as the friends. It is better to find the friends that the native language is what language we learn.

Picture 7: Figure of the space to add friend

2. The Example of Teaching and Learning Guidance of Implementing Lang 8 in Writing Descriptive Text
a. Find the Theme or Topic

On Lang 8, the members are free to choose the topic or the theme of the writing, so that this social media can be applied for all of types of written text. It does not matter if the users write as narrative text, descriptive text, persuasive or argumentative text, recount, report, or others. It means that this social media is not limited for a particular text. The teachers and the students can take advantages from that by applying any kinds of texts or genres on Lang 8, such as narrative, descriptive, persuasive, recount, procedure, etc.

However, refer to curriculum that applied in Indonesia, genre based teaching, it is given the example of applying Lang 8 in writing the descriptive

text. The students can write the paragraph that describes things, places, people, and animal.

b. The Students Write the Example Text

The best implementation of Lang 8 in writing class is in post teaching or as homework for the students. The teachers can teach writing as usual until the students produce the texts. The (descriptive) texts that are produced by the students then published on Lang 8.

c. The Students Rewrite the Text on the Lang 8

After learning writing and produce (descriptive) text in English class, the students then rewrite the example of the text on Lang 8. The function of Lang 8 is to make sure that whether the students are writing in good spelling, grammar and writing style, they can benefit the Lang 8 as a media to check their writing. The students' writing will be checked direcly by the native speaker or people who are good in English. So that, through comments and corrections, the students can measure how well they are in writing English.

d. The Students Wait for the Native Speakers' Comments and Corrections

The native speakers that read the text will correct their writing. Besides, they can also get the comments about their writing. It will also help teachers in giving the students mark. If the students get many corrections, it means that their writing ability is not good as the teachers expected. Through this social media, the students will be helped finding their weaknesses and their strength in writing English so that their ability in writing can be improved.

e. The Students Collect Their Work to the Teacher

It is better to print out the corrections of the students' writing and show it to their teacher. It is done to compare the original students' writing with the others comments and corrections. By using this print out paper, the teachers can make the predictions of students' progress and how good they are in writing English. Moreover, it can be used to assess the students' writing.

The purpose of using Lang 8 in the class is to increase students' ability in writing. So, when the students produce the text, they can check their writing to the people who is native speaker – in this case is English. By using this way, it is hoped that students have intense interaction and communication with the native speaker of English so that they can learn language directly from native speaker of English and also learn their culture.

3. The Advantages of Using Lang 8

Based on the description and the utilization of Lang 8, the teachers can take some advantages of using Lang 8. First, the students can improve their ability directly from native speaker. The students' writing on Lang 8 will be read by the native speakers or people who are expert in a language that are being learn by the students.

The second advantage of using Lang 8 to improve writing ability is through Lang 8, the students and the teachers use the authentic materials. Authentic materials mean the materials that are used in teaching have to be as real as possible. In language learning, the teachers are expected to provide the materials as authentic as possible in order to help the students understand well.

Moreover, the authentic materials also show the real situation of the native speakers culture because learning language is not only learn the four skills but also learn the culture.

The other important thing that the teachers can get from Lang 8 is it is kind of media that can increase and improve the students' ability in learning language, especially in writing. It means that through this social media the teachers can be helped in making the students understand how to write the good paragraph, the spelling, the grammar, and the style of writing.

In addition, Lang 8 is the interesting and not boring media for the high school students. Most of high the school students in Indonesia are familiar with the social media. Many of them are the members of Facebook, Twitter, Friendster, Webo, and others. It means that they are really interested with what the social media offers. In the same case, social media Lang 8 will make the students have fun without forget to study.

The last advantage of Lang 8 is the students can get many friends from all over the world. They are not only find friends for sharing and communicating, but they can also improve their ability in target language and know the new cultures. The students can practice their language learning directly with the native speakers as their new friends.

C. Conclusion

The use of the technology in language learning has been researched since many years ago. Based on the researches, technology is proven to be able to use in increasing the language learners' ability in four skills, including writing. Lang 8 is one of the social media that can be benefitted to improve the Junior High School students' ability in writing (descriptive text). Through this social media, the students not only can find the friends and communicate each others but they also can publish their writing and get the corrections and comments from other users over the world, including the native speakers of target language that are learning by the students. There are some advantages that can be gotten by the students when they use Lang 8 as media to improve their writing. The first one is they can increase their ability. Then they can find the new friens to practice their language. Moreover, this social media is interesting and not boring because the students are closed to social media. Also, the students can get the authentic materials because their writing will be corrected and commented by the native speaker.

Note: This article is compiled based on the writer's paper under supervision of
Havid Ardi, S. Pd. M, Hum

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