

Improving Students' Writing Skill by Using Modified Gist (Generating Interaction between Schemata and Text) at Fifth Semester of State Islamic College in Kerinci

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Abstract

This paper presented the research about how modified GIST was effective to improve students' writing skill in semester 5 of State Islamic College in Kerinci at academic year 2009-2010. The concept of this strategy referred to text-schemata-text. Besides, this paper also described the factors which influenced the improvement of students' writing skill by using modified GIST. By using class action research (CAR), the instruments of this research were observation sheet and test. It consisted of 3 cycles. Each cycle had better improvement, proven by the result of tests and also holistical observation and interview. Not only that, it was also found that there were some factors which influenced the improvement, they were: teaching and learning media, learning method, material, learning activity, class management, and lecturer's approach. Finally, we may say that using modified GIST was an effective strategy to improve students' writing skill.

Key words: writing skill, modified GIST, text, schemata

Introduction

Writing skill is essential in academic setting. College students should master the skill since they have to hand in assignments, to complete various types of writing tasks, and to express ideas of information in written forms. There are only few students who are proficient at writing skill. According to the data taken from writing II scores, the students' writing achievement was relatively low. It can be seen from the percentage of students' writing score in Writing II. From 30 students, the students who got A were only 3%, the students who got B were 27%, the students who got c were 43%, the students who got D were 23%, and the students who got E were 3%.

Because they lack of vocabulary, they just write by using the words that they know without considering appropriate context. Besides, they may have less motivation, so their achievement are low. Next, the problem also can be identified from the teaching strategy. Teacher or lecturer just ask students to choose some topics lecturers write in the blackboard and then ask them to write about that topic without guiding them how to develop their ideas. Therefore, the problem of the research was limited on strategy to improve students' writing skill. The strategy that was used is modified GIST (Generating Interaction between Schemata and Text). This strategy was applied to English Department students of State Islamic College (STAIN) of Kerinci who were taking Writing III class at class A of Semester V

The problems of this research are formulated as followed: 1) To what extent can modified GIST improve writing skill of the fifth semester English department students of STAIN Kerinci? 2) What factors influence the changes of writing skill of the fifth semester English department students of STAIN Kerinci by using modified GIST?. However, the writer expects that the result has theoretical and practical significances. Theoretically, it is expected to provide more information for students and teachers/lecturers of the benefits of using modified GIST as the strategy to improve students' writing skill. Practically, the use of modified GIST contributes on integrated materials on students' skills, they are reading and writing. It is hoped that the use of modified GIST improving both reading and writing skill.

Writing is one of language skill that are required by students in teaching learning process. Chakraverty and Gautum (2000:1) say that writing is an important part of language learning. It is essentially a reflective activity that requires enough time to think about the specific topic, to analyze and to classify any background knowledge. It is an mental activity which interacts between schemata and text. It is working under students' consciousness. This interaction provides students to think, to analyze, and to classify their background knowledge to make good sentences.

Besides that, according to Sokolik (in Nunan:2003) writing is both a physical and a mental act medium. At the most basic level, writing is 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. On the other hand, writing is the mental work of inventing ideas, thinking about how to express them and organizing them into statements and paragraphs that will be clear to a reader. From Sokolik's statement it completes the definition that writing as mental work produces physical product.

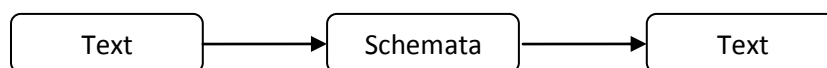
Furthermore, Perkins (2005:1) says that writing is a process that requires students to develop a cognitive awareness of the writing choices available to them. The students need to be reminded and further informed about those choices open to them. He adds that writing is a process that requires students to develop their ability to think critically. This type of critical thinking is a developmental process which is extremely complex process choices.

The acronym 'GIST' stands for Generating Interaction between Schemata and Text. The interaction is supposed to happen between the schemata, that is the past experiences and background knowledge of the learners and the text they will read. GIST is a strategy used for supporting reading comprehension, reading informational text, and summarization. Cunningham (in Herrel:2000) found that GIST can improve students' reading comprehension and summary writing. Since it is successful in increasing reading comprehension, in this research GIST was modified to improve students writing skill. It can facilitate students writing because in writing process students are required to generate interaction between schemata and text likewise in reading process.

According to Brummitt and Yale (2007) students become better writers when they read extensively. Reading a variety of genres helps students learn text structures and language that they can then transfer to their own writing. In addition, reading provides students with prior knowledge that they can use in their stories. One of the primary reasons that students read is to learn. Especially while they are still in college, a major portion of what they know comes from the texts they read. Since writing is the act of transmitting knowledge in print, they must have information to share before they can write it. Therefore reading plays a major role in writing.

However, schemata has important part in the relationship between reading and writing. Schemata can be seen as the organized background knowledge (Brown:1984). Schemata describe in detail how the background knowledge of the learner interacts with the reading task and illustrates how a students' knowledge and previous experience is crucial to deciphering a text. Schemata is produced from reading a text and also students experiences. In modified GIST students will read the text then they generate schemata. The schemata they get from the text will be used to write a new writing. It will not be difficult for them because they are guided by the text. In other words, students use higher-order thinking skills to analyze and synthesize what they have read.

Basically the process of generating interaction between schemata and text in modified GIST by can be figured as follow:



The first *text* in the figure is the text that lecturer asks students to read. Students identify the topic and main idea of each paragraph. By reading the text, students will have information and its details that they keep as *schemata*. The schemata that they have in their brain will be used as

background to write a new text. The second *text* of the figure is the result of interaction between first text and schemata students get from the first text. Students use those information to write a new text without copying the original text. The topic of both texts are the same, however the result will be different.

Sequence of Steps for Direct Instruction of Modified GIST

1. Identify text to be read by the students
2. Divide the class into cooperative groups
3. Distribute the copy of text
4. The leader read the first paragraph in the group
5. Demonstrate the strategy by discussing background knowledge
6. Write a new paragraph based on what they have read
7. Discuss the paragraph as a group and add details
8. Instruct the students to write the paragraph on their papers.
9. Explain to the class to read the entire passage in this manner.
10. Instruct the students to read the entire passage.
11. Ask students to return the copy of the text to the lecturer.
12. The group then discuss the paragraph, read, and negotiate the best paragraphs.
13. Have the groups read and compare their paragraphs.

Herrel (2000:61) mentions that GIST has some advantages. GIST is especially helpful when students are required to read long texts containing a significant amount of new information. In addition it is also developed to help students learn to write organized and concise summaries of their reading. It assists readers as they organize their thoughts for class discussion, research, and writing. Moreover, he also mentions that implementing GIST in classroom can support comprehensible input for the students, give opportunities to increase verbal interaction, encourages active involvement, support contextualizing language, and reduces anxiety. In conclusion, GIST is beneficial for every students in classroom. It is not for English language learner only, but it had been implemented to science students too.

Research Method

This research was a Classroom Action Research (CAR). The characteristic of classroom action research is collaboration. The model proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988:9) is known as the action research spiral that consists of four steps. They are planning, doing action, observing and reflecting or evaluating. The participants of the research were class A students of fifth semester majoring in English. The class consisted of 30 students, 20 were female and 10 were male. They were taking Writing 3 class. Another participant in this research was an English lecturer as a collaborator. The instruments used in this research were observation, interview, writing task, and writing test. Observation was aimed to know both students and lecturer's activities during the process of teaching and learning. Meanwhile writing task and test meant to evaluate the students writing skill at the end of meeting and cycle. Observation guide, field notes, and interview were used to collect qualitative data. It meant that the data were presented qualitatively. While students' tasks and tests were used to collect quantitative data. The data taken were numerical data that were analyzed by counting the percentage and the mean scores. However, they were presented by using graphic.

The data got from task and test were analyzed by finding out each mean score of writing skill indicators. The indicators that were identified are content, grammar, vocabulary, organization and mechanics (Cohen:1994). Then, the data were analyzed qualitatively by using data gained from observation guide, field note, and also interview at the end of each cycle. The steps to analyze the data was adapted from Gay (2000:239).

Discussion

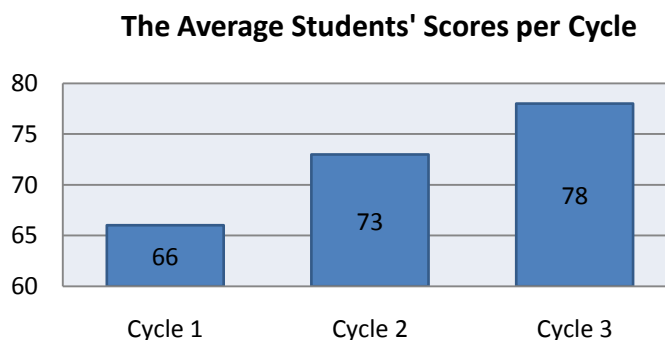
The writer conducted three cycles of class action research and accompanied by the collaborator. The cycle I was done in four meetings. The students showed their great motivation in this cycle while they were divided into groups. Basically each indicators of writing skill in this cycle were good, except vocabulary and grammar. It was because they had limited vocabulary, so they could not develop their ideas more detail. Beside that, grammar was also the problem. They were not aware that the grammar were not perfect. As a result, they scrambled the tense and subject-verb agreement. In other hand, the collaborator observed that the students were so familiar with the reading material which the title was *The Source of Islam*. The content of the text was fit with their background education. It could be concluded that reading material influenced students' improvement. Finally, they got mean score 66 at the end of the cycle. Because of vocabulary and grammar, so the writer continued to cycle 2.

Generally, each indicators of writing skill was increasing meeting by meeting in cycle II, but the improvement was not too significant. It might be caused by the reschedule of the class. The students were not working in the group anymore in order to let them be independent with the text. They work individually and it was so effective. The lecturer always discussed the text together with them, and they were asked to check their peer's grammar and vocabulary. As a result they got 73 in the meanscore.

In cycle 3 The writer used electric text for the students. They were so excited having it. Based on the observation, students were paying much attention to the text and carefully listening to discussion. They also seemed excited to write because they had another impression from the text and the way the lecturer provided it. The topic was so familiar for them, so they enjoyed to develop it. Therefore, for the final score they got 78, a perfect score to reach.

The writer agreed that modified GIST really could be used as a strategy used for supporting writing skill. The students used information from the text they read to develop their writing. It can facilitate their writing because in its process students are required to generate interaction between schemata and text likewise in reading process.

The implementation of modified GIST in classroom supported comprehensible input for the students, gave opportunities to increase verbal interaction, encouraged active involvement, and reduced anxiety. These were proven by students' enthusiasm in writing. Most of them actively participated in the classroom discussion and got more motivation in order to follow the instruction from the lecturer. Beside that, they also master new vocabulary every meeting. The important thing is that the scores were also improving from meeting to meeting. The graph showed :



The students were experiencing long process classroom activities started from reading and then writing. Then we could say that reading was the key to write well. As we always hear the proverb the more you read, the more you write. It was supported by Brummitt and Yale (2007) that the students become better writers when they read extensively. Reading a variety of genres helps students learn text structures and language that they can then transfer to their own writing. This theory had been applied by the fifth semester students of STAIN Kerinci and they

succeeded to improve their writing to be better. The findings in the research was matched with the theory. The writer had given them with various genres of text and let them get familiar with it. The students were closed to each reading to add the information as a basic for their writing.

Besides improving the students' writing skill, another finding was found during the implementation of modified GIST. They are; first, the students enjoyed studying English. The observation showed that the students were happy to use modified GIST to write with their own words. Second, students found no more difficulties in writing English. They developed their background of knowledge, kept as schemata to write a text even a longer one.

Next, the second research question was about the factors that influence the students' writing skill. Based on the writer and collaborator observation and interview with most of the students, it could be seen that there were a number of factors that influenced the students' writing skill by using modified GIST. They were:

1. Teaching and Learning Media

The lecturer ever used such electronic media to improve students' motivation to learn writing. They were excited since they never had such media before. They gave positive responds by doing good in writing. besides that, the students were also asked to bring photograph to support their writing quality. Such a real media like photograph was a new thing that was done in the class. they seemed excited and got motivated to write. Besides, they enriched much vocabulary from this.

2. Learning Method

The students' activities in group seemed good for them at first, however some students seemed not enjoy working in group. After having discussion with collaborator and the students' themselves, the lecturer decided to let them working individually. So that they felt free to express themselves in reading and writing.

3. Materials

Interesting reading topic gave contribution to the improvement of students' writing. Having interesting thing increased students' motivation and enjoyment. They felt happy and familiar with the text, so they would write that topic well.

4. Activities

The lecturer created interesting classroom management that made students more active in classroom activities. For example: the lecturer always told students about the result of their tasks, so that they might improve their writing more and more. It supported them to write well than before.

5. Classroom Management

A half semester students activities were done in the morning, but because of a reason students must enter at 11 am. It quite influenced students' motivation to write, but the lecturer always motivated them to not being influenced whenever studying time was scheduled.

6. The lecturer's Approach

The approach used by the lecturer caused the students improved the writing skill. It was such giving helps for each students. the students felt comfortable having it. Besides, the lecturer also circulated to monitored them in writing process, and while circulating the lecturer also guided them directly in grammar and vocabulary. This approach was beneficial for the students and it made them improved the writing skill.

Conclusion

Based on the findings above it was concluded, firstly, implementing Modified GIST can better improve students' writing skill. It was one of writing strategies that can be modified to improve writing skill. Since reading and writing are involving schemata, it can be used to develop writing. The procedure were adjusted by the writer to fit students best situation. Secondly, there were some factors that influenced students' writing skill, they are: teaching and learning media, learning method, materials, activities, classroom management, and the lecturer's

approach. Finally, the writer hopes that English lecturers/teachers could find other possible strategies to use in teaching students to get better satisfaction, if it is possible we might modify it to be useful in teaching and learning English.

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