

THE USE OF PERSONAL PHOTOGRAPHS IN WRITING IN PROJECT- BASED LANGUAGE LEARNING: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

Writing is an important skill needs to be acquired by EFL students in senior secondary schools. However, for most of them considered this difficult. This article was a case study which aimed on finding out the students' perception on writing utilizing personal photographs. In this *project-based language learning* (PBL), the students worked in a group to accomplish their writing project. The subjects were 6 students determined to take account on solving their problems in writing. The results demonstrated that writing activity became easier since personal photograph reinforced their memory to remember certain events. This method had guided them to brainstorm the ideas of what to write, thus organizing their thought became easy. They also stated, writing was more fun and interesting since they could express their feeling freely based on their photos. Finally, they affirmed that writing improved through the use of their personal photographs. This finding could be indicated from score achieved, categorized as good.

Key words: *personal photograph, project-based learning*

Introduction

Writing is one of the language skills that should be possessed by any EFL student. This is clearly stated in the Indonesian most current *School-Based Curriculum* (SBC), the standard competence required to be achieved by the students in high schools regarding writing is the ability to express meaning in written medium of interpersonal and transactional discourses either formally or informally in the forms of genres, such as recount, narrative, procedure, descriptive, news item, report, analytical exposition, hortatory exposition, spoof, explanation, discussion, and review in daily lives

(BSNP, 2009). Regarding the goal, it is indicated that students are expected to be able to write at a discourse level in various genres either in formal or informal styles.

Though writing has been given attention along the development of various curriculums which have been applied in Indonesian education system, students still encounter several problems in writing. To mention some are: (1) they find it difficult to start on their writing, as it is not easy to express what they have in mind using a foreign language, (2) they often cannot develop their writing well due to their limitation in vocabulary, (3) they are unable to organize their writing coherently, and (4) they are concerned with the grammatical mistakes they make in their writing. This is consistent with Celce-Murcia (2001) who states that writing is always found to be difficult either by foreign language learners or even native speakers.

Taking into consideration of the problems faced by the students in writing, the teacher in senior high school named SMAN I Singaraja made use of a project based learning (PBL) to enhance the students' writing competence. According to Simpson (2011), PBL is a student-centered activity driven by the need to create an end product which has three main components, those are: (1) begin with questions/problems that help student to select their topic of interests, (2) work collaboratively and design plans for their research, (3) develop a meaningful product/presentation/performance.

Using PBL in teaching, writing was regarded as giving more opportunity for the students to construct their knowledge by cooperating with others. Learning with others made them able to share ideas and opinions in developing their writing. Moreover, the problems of limited vocabulary and inaccuracy in grammar use could be solved through interacting and working collaboratively. This is in line with a research conducted by Tamin and Grant (2013) who state that learning by using PBL enables students to facilitate their own construction of knowledge, targeting their academic and non-academic skills, and turn learning into a comprehensive and authentic experience. Taking into account of the benefits of using PBL which provides more students centred learning in a cooperative way led the teacher in SMAN I Singaraja to apply this method to grade eleven students of senior high school. In order to accomplish the project, they were assigned to take a trip to an interesting place that they freely selected, took personal photographs, and wrote a recount text as the product of the project.

A trip to an interesting place gave an enjoyable learning atmosphere which could motivate students to study. More importantly, this activity guided them to learn something much related to their lives and environment, well known as *Contextual Teaching and Learning* (CTL) (Johnson, 2002). Meanwhile, personal photograph, according to Tachibina (2010: 1), is a new and exciting way as prompts, which can encourage creative and thoughtful writing from writers of all ages. The significant place of photographs in language teaching has inspired many researchers to conduct studies concerning with it. Youra (1998) in his research found that students' writing significantly improved and less advanced students made surprising strides, as they became creatively engaged by the connections between writing and photography. A similar research done by Ambarsary (2005) to grade one students of SMA Lab IKIP *Negeri Singaraja* proved that personal photograph could improve students' achievement in narrative writing. Furthermore, Dewi (2006) research comparing two types of media stated that personal photograph and autobiography in narrative paragraph writing found, there was a significant difference upon students' achievement in writing between the students who learned using personal photograph and those who learned using autobiography. The students who learned using personal photograph performed better than those who learned using autobiography. Thus, it illustrates that personal photograph can be a powerful teaching media which can be employed to help students to perk up their creative writing skill.

Considering, this research focused on finding out the students' perception on the use of personal photograph in writing in a PBL.

Teaching Writing Competence

In general, competence is something to do with ability. In this case, it is the ability concerning with writing. Richards & Rodgers (2003) describe competence as the essential skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behavior required for effective performance of a real-world task or activity. Ferril (2012) further defines language competence as an ability posed by someone in acquiring or mastering the content of language that is being learned consciously or unconsciously. He further explains that this ability involves two groups of basic skill namely respective skills and productive skills. Respective skills are correlated with listening and reading, while productive skills are speaking and writing.

Writing is the mental work of finding ideas, thinking about how to convey and organize them into statements and paragraph that will be clear for reader (Nunan, 2003). Writing is a complex process that allows writers to explore thoughts and ideas, and make them visible and concrete (Gaith, 2002). In order to be understood by the reader, a writer should consider some factors affecting good writing namely content and development, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanic. Collin (2002) states there are six traits to make an effective writing. They are: (1) the ideas or content should be clear, (2) the structure should suit the topic, (3) the tone should be obvious, (4) the word choice should be appropriate with the topic, (5) the flow of the language should be vary, and (6) the mechanical correctness of the writing should be accurate. From those traits, some indicators of good writing can be determined. The criteria consist of several dimensions such as content, organization (generic structure), grammar, word choice (vocabulary), and mechanic (convection).

According to the *Board of National Standard of Education (BSNP, 2006)*, there are some genres in writing that should be taught to senior high school students. Those are descriptive, narrative, procedure, recount, report, exposition, news items, spoof, and explanation texts.

According to Hyland (2004), a recount text is a kind of genre that has social function to retell event for the purpose of informing or entertaining. The generic structure in recount consists of (1) *Orientation* this provides the setting and produces participants. It provides information about “who”, “where”, and “when”. (2) *Record of Events* this tells what happened and past event in temporal sequence. It is usually recounted in chronological order. Personal comments and/ or evaluative remarks are interspersed throughout the record of events. (3) *Re-orientation* this is an optional-closure of events and “rounds off” the sequence of events.

Project-Based Learning

Project Based learning is an instructional strategy that, by participating in a project, appeals to students due to learning by way of problem solving, data collection and discussion, as well as the presentation of the result as reports (Chu, et al. 2011) . The project which was assigned to students must be in open ended assignment where teams of students are encouraged to continually search for information and evaluate their findings (Prince & Fielder, 2007). It hails from a tradition of

pedagogy which asserts that students learn best by experiencing and solving real-world problems (Vega, 2012). Vega further explains, *Project Based Learning* enables teachers to create a real-world problem-solving situation by designing questions and tasks that correspond to two different frameworks of inquiry-based teaching.

Thomas (2000) lists five criteria to projects which are called project-based learning, namely: (1) the projects are central, not peripheral to the curriculum, (2) the projects focus on questions or problems that "drive" students to encounter (and struggle with), (3) the projects involve students in a constructive investigation, (4) the projects are student-driven to some significant degree, and (5) the projects are realistic, not school-like. Moreover, Grant (2002) defines several features in PBL implementation, such as anchor the activity, guiding question or driving question, a process or investigation, resources (e.g. subject-matter experts and textbooks), scaffolding, (e.g. teacher conferences to help learners assess their progress), collaborations, and opportunities for reflection and transfer. Therefore, in PBL the students can design their own learning and cooperatively work with others through real experience and meaningful environment. In addition, Marhaeni (2005) states that meaningful education will be helping us, while a not meaningful education will be a burden to our life.

Regarding to its characteristics, PBL can give beneficial effect to learning activity. According to Weimer (2009), PBL is a student-centred approach that can encourage greater understanding and develops lifelong learning skills for the students. Besides, it can develop students' long term retention and develop satisfaction to students and teacher (Strobel, and Barneveld, 2009). Similarly, Thomas (2000) proposes some positive side effects of project-based learning for students as the development of positive attitudes toward their learning process, work routines, abilities on problem-solving and self-esteem. PBL can offer English learners exposure to authentic materials, opportunities to use the target language, and motivation to learn, which are all considered to be essential conditions for language learning (Willis, 1996, in Eguchi & Eguchi, 2006). Furthermore, Neo & Neo (2009) state that the implementation of PBL provides students with the experience in problem-solving, critical-thinking and creativity skills, communication and reflection that improve the students' learning process. A case study about the implementation of PBL in teaching-learning activity conducted by Tamin and Grant (2013) resulted some advantages for both students and teacher. The implementation of

PBL supports and facilitates the learning process for the students, creates their creative abilities, as well as increases their motivation, engagement and collaboration. Meanwhile, PBL enables the teachers to develop their roles as re-inforcer, extender, initiator, and navigator.

Simpson (2011) proposes some steps in implementing PBL, namely (1) starting the project, that is by selecting the topic that is of interest and relevance to the students, (2) developing the project, which involves a research undertaken by all group members either individually, in pairs, or as a group, (3) reporting to the class, that involves presenting and receiving feedback from other students on the progress, and (4) assessing the project, which is the evaluation of the final product.

In this study, all of the steps were followed, except for stage 3, the group members did not hold the oral presentation to the class but reported their writing only to the teacher in the form of conference to discuss about their problems encountered in the process of writing and consult the draft.

Using Personal Photographs in Language Teaching

Basically photographs are not different from pictures, as both of them are visual media which are visible to students in the teaching and learning process. Both photographs and pictures have high artistic value which is colourful and importantly they are rich with information. For that reason, these two media are very potential to help learners to understand the lesson. Specifically related to personal photograph, this kind of media has another extra value, in which the learners' feeling is involved. Since the scenes behind the photographs have something to do with personal experience, the students are able to talk or express many things about their photos. According to Wichardt (2011:1) pictures, and especially photographs, carry with them implicit narratives, making them ideal writing prompts for generating new short story ideas. Similarly, Hayden (2010: 1) cites that using interesting pictures to spark creative ideas is one way to get students writing. Students are asked to take a picture and turn it into a great story with many descriptive words. Kellner (2008) further conveys that photographs are powerful teaching aids that can inspire students at all levels to create both expository and creative compositions. Gardner (2003:1) adds that a photograph is worth a thousand words from image to detailed narrative. This means that from a photograph students will have chance to think critically about the interpretation of the events in image and to write

about those ideas. By simply distributing a picture that tells a story, students are encouraged to brainstorm words and ideas about the image before writing the story. Therefore, it can be concluded that photographs has a possibility to foster students' creative writing in the form of various genres, narrative, descriptive as well as expository.

According to Ahola (2004:1), students tend to enjoy the writing process when they are able to write about the topics related directly to their lives. Dipardo (as quoted by Duffy, 1998:2) agrees with Ahola that students are interested in writing that has personal aspects on it. Ahola further adds that photographs or pictures, which usually capture important moment in our lives, can be powerful narratives since they can help us to remember little details about people, places and events. Thus, by looking at the photographs or pictures that tell a story, it can encourage students to brainstorm words and ideas before they write in more details on what happened. As a result, they are able to say or write more about their experience into a good narration by a guidance of the photograph. They might find it easy to create ideas since they have much information which supports what they say or write. Lutz (2001: 1) in this case, it might illustrate how photographs help the students to express their thought and ideas creatively. It can create a challenging and enjoyable activity which does not only strengthen students' writing skills, but also improve their attitude toward writing, their confidence in their own ability to write a good theme and create excitement and interest in writing. Youra (1998: 1) further explains that photograph in narrative writing exercise is designed to inspire more varied and creative perspective. This means that the utilization of photograph can help students build up their ideas into written form creatively and they will not find difficulties in expressing their ideas into writing since the ideas come from their personal experiences.

Steps In Writing The Project

Step I

In this step, the teacher gives a problem to the students in the form of a group project-based writing focusing on a recount genre text. In this project, the students in each group are required to conduct short field trip and take photographs of series of events in the place of interest they decide to go. The decision on where and when to go is freely determined by each group.

Step 2

In this second step, the teacher gives grounding to the students to ease them in their writing by showing a model text. While showing the text, the teacher guides the students to understand the generic structure of a recount text, which consists of orientation, series of events, and reorientation.

Step 3

After the explanation of the generic structure, the teacher divides students into six groups consisting of 5 to 6 students each. She also reminds the due date for the project (two weeks)

Step 4

In the group discussion, each group firstly discusses where to go, what transportation to take, when to go, and what things to prepare. In this respect, the teacher gives a sense of responsibility to students in accomplishing their task which is of their own interest.

Step 5

Students in group hold field trip on a decided schedule and take as many photos as necessary to complete their project.

Step 6

After conducting the field trip, students collect their photographs taken from their own cameras or mobile phones. They discuss which photos used in their project-based writing. After determining the photographs to be used, the group members divide their tasks as who to write each paragraph covering the generic structure of a recount text within one week.

Step 7

The next step, members of the group then work collaboratively to discuss the result of the first draft of the project. The dimensions seen are the content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. By assigning them different paragraph to be observed and analyse, each member should be responsible to revise and edit the draft.

Step 8

The last step is teacher and group conference, students are given opportunity to show the edited version of their project and ask him for the problem that they still face and the teacher gives his comments.

Step 9

Students in group do revision based on the teacher's comments and are ready for the project submission on the required time.

Research Methods

This study was a qualitative research in the form of a case study in which the writer described the finding in the form of narration. The narration in this study was focused on the description of the perception of the use of personal photographs in writing recount text among six students in one group. Case study, according to Merriam (2002) begins with the selection of the "case". The selection is done purposefully on a particular person, site, program, process, community, or other bounded system. The case might be unique or typical, representative of a common practice.

This mini research was held in 2012 involving six students as the subjects. They were interviewed in their school after the class hours in order not to disturb them. The main instrument used in this study was an interview guideline which was designed in Indonesian language. This was aimed to ease the students to respond the questions regarding to their feeling and opinion about the use personal photograph and project based learning. Thus, they could express what they perceived and experienced in depth. Data triangulation was obtained from another source of instrument that is through collecting the result of writing assessment of their project given by their English teacher. The interview results were analysed descriptive qualitatively by narrating the findings as they were, while the result of writing project was analysed descriptive quantitatively by using the analytical scoring rubric.

Research Findings

There were nine questions given to the subjects in the interview covering their writing problems and the implementation of personal photograph and project based learning. In question number one focusing on the subjects' perception of writing in English, all subjects (100%) felt they were very difficult to start writing. This was caused by their incompetence in writing, in which they conveyed that they did not know the concept of writing, were difficult to find proper vocabulary, and even did not know how to begin a topic sentence. Their answers in question number one were more specific in question number two, which was about the problems encountered during the process of writing. Five of them (83%) stated that they were unable to develop and organize their ideas, afraid of making mistakes in arranging sentences, and three of them (50%) perceived of lacking vocabulary and grammar. Their answers indicated that they faced various problems in writing.

Viewing from the utilization of PBL, in question number three, most of the students (82%) gave positive perception toward the use of group work. They felt motivated to work collaboratively, they were challenged to take part, were happy to share to make the task easier, and even it could reduce anxiety. Yet, one of them, the subject 6 did not agree with group work project. He stated that passive students were less participated in working and tended to chat with other. Furthermore, being questioned on the benefits of working in a group, all subjects (100%) had a positive perception on PBL which made use of group work. They conveyed that they could share knowledge and responsibilities. They could share their opinions and did a peer correction. One subject even stated that he could learn from the high achieving student. From question number five, 4 subjects (67%) preferred to work in group to work individually. These findings signified that PBL which activated group work was considered as a good learning strategy in accomplishing their writing project. Moreover, involving a trip to a certain object in the project gave them satisfaction since they could go refreshing together with friends, get new experiences, have direct visualization of the visited object. However one student had a little objection as the trip spent money and time.

According to all of the subjects (100%), taking personal photographs during the trip was regarded as a memorable activity in which they could document their precious moments. They also mentioned the

benefits they obtained from the pictures. First, they thought writing was becoming easier because they could relate their imagination with the reality. They could also remember all places and events during the trip. More importantly, the pictures could lead them to write since there was a story behind every picture. All of them also felt that attaching their personal photographs in the project was a proof of involvement which made them proud of and happy to be able to participate in completing the project.

The success of using personal photographs in PBL during this case study was also reflected by the subjects' score in their writing. The score of their writing showed that they had passed the standard score of writing requirements, in which their score was 83.5 categorized as good. Details of the students' score can be seen in the following tables :

Table 01. Students' Writing Score

NO	Indicators	Weight (total: 20)	Rater I		Rater II	
			Score (I-5)	W x S	Score (I-5)	W x S
1	Content	5	5	25	5	25
2	Generic structure	5	4	20	4	20
3	Word choice	4	4	16	4	16
4	Grammar	3	3	9	4	12
5	Convection	3	4	12	4	12
	Final Score			82		85
	Total score				83.5	

The table above shows that the content of writing attains the highest score from both raters, while the lowest score lies on grammar. This reflects that the subjects can achieve better writing in terms of the content, but they still face problems in grammar usage.

Discussion

There were three major findings that need to be discussed. First, in terms of the students' perspective of writing and its problem, all students found writing was difficult and can be caused by their incompetence, that they did not know the concept of writing and it was difficult to start writing as they lacked vocabulary and grammar. Therefore, they could not develop

their ideas and organize them into good sentences. This is supported by Cumming (2001), that the effort of determining what to write and how to write is considered to be difficult for the EFL students. Moreover, Weigle (2002) in his research found that the content and the organization of EFL students' writing are often less satisfying because of their linguistic knowledge limitation or their less effort committed in writing. A similar finding is also shown by Adas & Bakir (2013) that even the third year university students in Palestine had problems in their English writing concerning with limited vocabulary, grammar, and development and organization of ideas. The findings were consistent with Thornbury (2002), that without grammar very little can be conveyed and without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed. Both vocabulary and grammar are the building blocks for the students to develop their ideas into good sentences which are cohesive and coherence.

PBL was used as a solution of the students' problems by giving them a two week group project which utilized personal photographs. Based on the interview, the subjects had a positive perception toward the use of group work in PBL. They also found working collaboratively in group made them motivated to write, engaged in sharing their opinions as well as reduced their anxiety feeling. This result is in line with the concept proposed by Thomas (2000) that PBL could develop students' positive attitude toward their learning process. As well, it also supports the previous research conducted by Tamin and Grant (2013) who found that PBL could increase students' motivation, engagement, and collaboration. Writing was also regarded easier since each member of the group had their own responsibility to accomplish the whole project. In this perspective, PBL could ease the burden they faced in writing by sharing parts of writing among themselves. This finding is therefore related to Thomas (2000), and Neo & Neo (2009) that the implementation of PBL could provide the students with the experience in problem-solving. This resulted in a good attainment of the subjects' product in their writing project (83.5). The result strengthens the research conducted by Jantima (2011) that PBL could enhance the Thai university students' English proficiency in speaking and writing.

Taking the trip in the process of writing was viewed as interesting, satisfying, giving new experiences, and being able to visualize the object. These feelings of happiness and fruitfulness increased their motivation to make their project. This evidence illustrates the theories explained by Strobel & Barneveld (2009), Grant (2002), and Johnson (2002) that PBL can

develop satisfaction of students and gives them real experience which is meaningful for their life. Thus, it makes language learning successful.

Regarding the use of personal photographs, all of the subjects stated that personal photographs were valuable sources to be used in writing because they could use the pictures they took to develop sentences and organize them chronologically. This is supported by Ahola (2004) that the photographs can help them to remember the details about people, places and event. Moreover, by using photographs the students can express their ideas creatively as well as write them from their personal experiences, (Lutz, 2001; Youra, 1998). Personal photographs could be used by the subjects in developing the ideas in each paragraph. A sample of the first paragraph (see appendix I) shows how they could describe time, places, and people smoothly. It demonstrates that students were able to complete the paragraph with good content development.

Conclusion

Writing is a hard and challenging task for EFL students. To motivate them to write, teachers should provide with appropriate teaching strategies and media. PBL is one strategy which is powerful to assist the students to work cooperatively on the project, while personal photographs are effective teaching media to be employed to enhance students' creativity in writing as they contain lots of information which involve their personal experiences and feelings. The bountiful content possessed by personal photographs can be a prevailing teaching media, which can ease and prompt students to write something which is familiar to them and something they see.

The result of this study revealed that personal photographs could help the students to develop ideas, organize their sentences into good order, improve their vocabulary, accuracy in grammar use, and convection. Thus, it made their writing better. Besides, working cooperatively in completing the project, it also gave them opportunities to share and solve their problems in writing by interacting and discussing. Thus, English teachers are recommended to use PBL strategy and personal photographs as another alternative to improve students' ability to write.

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