

IMPLEMENTING CLUSTERING TECHNIQUE IN WRITING DESCRIPTIVE TEXTS

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ABSTRACT

This experimental research was conducted to find out the effect of using clustering technique on the students' writing skills at Senior High School No. 1 Delima, Pidie District. It also has several sub-foci, namely figuring out the students' writing content, organization, and language use. The subjects of the study were the 10th grade students that were divided in random sampling into the experimental and the control groups. This procedure was carried out through homogeneity of the selected samples. To expose the focuses of answers, the pretest and post-test instruments were applied to both groups. The result showed that the students in experimental group had an improved quality of writing a descriptive text than that of the control-group students. At a level of significance 0.05, the t_{test} score was higher than t_{table} score ($8,44 > 1,684$). In addition, the mean score of the experimental group (78,79) was higher than the mean score of the control group (53,75). This figure has corresponded with the results of the three writing aspects of the students' work, which also brought a relatively positive achievement. This means that there were significant improvements regarding the students' writing aspects of content, organization, and language use in descriptive texts respectively.

Keywords: *clustering technique, English teaching, experimental research, writing aspects*

INTRODUCTION

Writing assists authors to discover their own thoughts and feelings. Indirectly, it forces someone to articulate his or her ideas and explore

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what he or she really perceives about a topic (Werry & Walseth, 2011). This is no different from the other language skills like listening, where it demands ones to proceed the message grasped (Kamarullah et al., 2018). Therefore, writing is indispensable for everyone, specifically for students. Writing turns into something that cannot be neglected in facing the actual everyday needs (Ali & Yunus, 2004), primarily computer-based writing activity (Kamarullah et al., 2016). This statement is aligned with the argument of Walsh (2010) who believes that writing is vital in higher education and workplace due to communicating in a good way with professors, employers, peers, or anyone else. He further states that most professional communication is in the form of written texts like written tasks, proposals, memos, reports, applications, preliminary interviews, notes, emails, paperwork, presentation slides, thesis, and so the like. Even literatures contained in the current curriculum in Indonesia may offer the source for English writing learning (Fadhilah et al, 2016). Those written texts will become daily parts of life of either as a high school student, fresh graduate or professional worker. Therefore, students should be equipped with proper writing skills, which are necessary for their own future.

A preliminary study conducted in Senior High School No. 1 Delima, Pidie District by interviewing an English teacher on 3rd September 2019 showed that the students' writing skills are still below the Minimum Completion Criteria of the school, which was <78. The writing test (conducted on 10 September 2019) showed that the average score obtained by the students is 65. Out of 24 students, only four students achieved score above 75 (80, 83, 85, and 86), while nine students got score above 65 (66, 66, 68, 68, 68, 70, 70, 71, and 72), and the rest had score under 65 (58 on average). The results of interview with students (10 September 2019) revealed that majority of students have difficulty in writing English text. Based on the writing aspects, the test result (10 September 2019) showed that the students felt difficulty in writing particularly in the aspects of content (18 of 30), organization (10 of 20) and language use (11 of 25). Meanwhile, two other aspects, such as vocabulary and mechanism are considered sufficient with the average scores of 14 (maximum 20) and 4 (maximum 5) respectively.

Based on the description of the problem above, this research will have a focus on the three aspects, namely content, organization, and language use. The focus on the aspect of content aimed at improving the students' skill to understand the basic concept of a topic and/or an idea of a paragraph. Then, the focus on the aspect of organization is intended

to improve the students' skill to organize the ideas of a written text. Finally, the aspect of language use is focused on the improvement of grammatical mistakes and construction of good paragraphs.

Primarily, to produce a good paragraph, students are suggested to prepare and discover what they know and what else they need to know. Prewriting as activities that help a writer think about a topic, determine a purpose, analyze an audience, and prepare to write, may cope the issue. The activities of pre-writing are brainstorming, journalists' questions, clustering, free writing, et cetera (Nordquist, 2019). In this study, clustering is aimed to dissolve three writing aspects faced by the students above.

Braine and May (1996, p. 21) stated that the formation of ideas and organization could be formed by narrowing or detailing the subtopics of a topic. Olson (1987, p. 24), in the meantime, suggested that clustering technique could help students to organize writing so their writing will be better. Ideas that have been well organized will form good paragraphs. Marzelia, Jamaluddin and Hastini (2014) have proved that language use in writing could be improved by following Olson's suggestion. It is admitted that the writing skill of the students (high school students) was improved with the use of clustering technique. The technique is known to provide a systematic way to develop ideas, sentences, diction, and punctuation. Related to this, Pharr and Santi (2005, p. 66) stated that clustering technique was very effective in writing since it linked topics and subtopics to create a good writing.

The efficiency of using the clustering technique in teaching writing has been proved in several studies. Hayati (2017) applied the technique in writing recount text to the second year of Private Madrasah Aliyah Swasta (Islamic Senior High School) Sampali, Indonesia. Her two cycles of classroom action research brought a good result, where the students' writing score improved significantly. In addition, Meisuri and Wahyuni (2016) examined the influence of using clustering technique in writing exposition paragraphs to the fresh men of the State Madrasah Aliyah Negeri Tanggamus, Indonesia. Within their experimental research, they found that the result of post-test given to the sample had higher score than the result of pre-test. The researchers agreed that their alternative hypothesis was accepted based on the statistical analysis.

Next, Marzelia et al. (2014) focused on the implementation of clustering technique in teaching hortatory exposition text. Applying experimental research, they chose the second-year students of senior high school Palu, Indonesia, as the sample. According to the researchers,

the practice should be taught based on the interest of the students, so they could understand the topic. Nevertheless, most of the sample obtained positive results compared with the previous process. In addition, Raharjo (2018) employed clustering technique his writing class, particularly in Cambridge Checkpoint writing test, to the junior high students of Al-Izzah International Boarding School Batu Malang, Indonesia. His experimental research found that using the technique to measure the students' writing ability was better than using pre-writing techniques.

Additionally, a study was deployed by Styati (2010) who discovered the effectiveness of clustering technique based on the students' linguistic intelligence, also resulted in a positive trend. Her participants, sophomores of English departments at IKIP PGRI Madiun, Indonesia, were taught with the technique and direct instruction prior to doing a linguistic intelligence test. The result led to the conclusion that the students taught with clustering technique had better writing ability than those were taught with direct instruction. She detailed that the students should apply the technique in writing regardless their linguistic intelligence level. It is the skills to use language effectively and to be capable to communicate appropriately both in written and spoken forms (Saeidi & Mazoochi, 2013). It means that clustering technique is applicable for non-advanced ones or low-level linguistic intelligence students.

Considering those related studies, the needs to prove the effects in the specific context as proposed in this research appear. Unfortunately, there is no relevant research reporting the implementation of clustering technique in writing descriptive text, particularly to discover its effect in the specific writing sub-skills. Besides, the researcher is interested in conducting this research at Senior High School No. 1 Delima, Pidie District since the typical research has not been done yet. This clustering technique is considered as an experiment to enhance the students' English writing.

The research question is how is the effect of clustering technique as a pre-writing activity in the aspects of writing skills of the students? The researcher has an intention to find out whether teaching writing by conducting clustering technique is more successful than applying other pre-writing activities, like freewriting. Thus, the positive trends depicted in the previous research above can be proved, which in this case, the writing sub-skills – content, organisation and language use – in descriptive texts become the main focus.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review focuses on clustering technique and all theoretical orientation on how to implement clustering technique in the way to improve the quality of writing.

Clustering Technique in Teaching Writing

Olson (1987, p. 2) stated that creativity in an actual application of writing activities is necessity. Many English practitioners have deployed a series of writing process to achieve the writing skills. Some focused on the process, including the prewriting, the other ones concerned on the product, rewriting and sharing, for instance. Even several concentrated on the supplementary aspect of the writing like building vocabularies.

In this research, clustering is a technique that is experimented to the pupils in writing descriptive texts. It was firstly introduced by Gabriele Lusser Rico, a professor of English and Creativity at San Jose University, California, the United States of America in 1980s (Adriati, 2013). According to her, clustering technique offers an alternative means for writers to process the brainstorming prior to initiating to write. In addition, she proposed that clustering technique as a kind of technique in brainstorming to construct the ideas from the right brain, which she calls as a design mind. The occurrences of non-linear pattern and images production do not exist in this part of brain. This is in line with Pica (1986, as cited in Baroudy, 2008), who proclaimed that clustering is a process of non-linear brainstorming producing ideas, images and feelings. Those then stimulate the brain to generate visible word patterns.

Practically, clustering technique in prewriting stage is aimed to divide some related ideas and write down in a blank of paper to show the connections among ideas. Hogue (1996, p. 28) puts forward that clustering technique is another way to write down every word or phrase that appear in the performer's mind about the intended topic. Yet, instead of writing them down like usual writing or in the form of a list, the performer writes the words or phrases in circles or bubbles connected with lines as displayed in Figure 1.

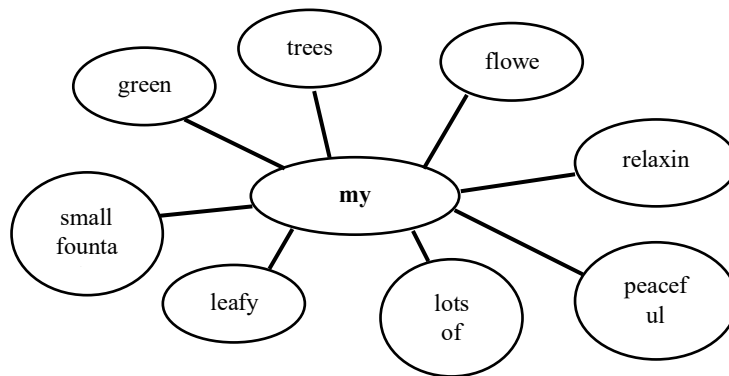


Figure 1. Composition of ideas made through clustering technique (Hogue, 1996, 91)

The example of the idea composition through clustering technique in Figure 1 is quite simple. Hogue (1996, p. 91) further described that each bubble in the figure may have more bubbles around them since those can trigger more ideas. The more ideas the performers, in this case the students, can produce, the longer paragraph the students can compose about. Hence, the students may think more ideas associated with the bubbles and write anything appears into their minds into new bubbles. Additionally, if they do not want some ideas involved in their writing, they may cross the bubbles, so the paragraph can be as their expectation as presented in Figure 2

Figure 2 shows a wider idea from previous composition in Figure 1. The students can omit ideas from the groups of bubbles. The preference can be based on the number of bubbles which are not suitable to the topic or do not produce many ideas. For the next phase, the students can think new ideas and relate those with lines, connecting ideas with the main ideas. The procedure of clustering technique in writing will be done until the ideas are saturated. After the students obtain relevant ideas and sub-ideas, they can start to compose the draft of the writing. Each paragraph is based on the main ideas followed by the sub-ideas. During this stage, since the students already generate their ideas, the teacher can support the students' work by giving the appropriate cohesion, word choices, and grammatical rules.

Furthermore, clustering technique has benefits in five matters (Durufaka, 1992, as cited in Şahbaz & Duran, 2011). First, it prevents the left hemisphere being continually dominant due to its type of systematic working. Next, language features occurring in the brain's left hemisphere do not have much importance in the clustering process.

Third, clustering technique offers the opportunity to the brain's right hemisphere to improve the perceptions and meaningful images. Fourth, it improves the brain's right hemisphere, sensory images. As a result of the clustering, the writing process starts spontaneously and without efforts. Last, clustering technique provides occasions to benefit from thought and abilities. On the other hand, the use of clustering technique in teaching writing also had disadvantages. The concept of which may claim to produce ideas that are irrelevant to the subject, yet the students still must clarify this connection when looking back on the concept of clustering. They may find the unconnected ideas or words during their writing process (Şahbaz & Duran, 2011).

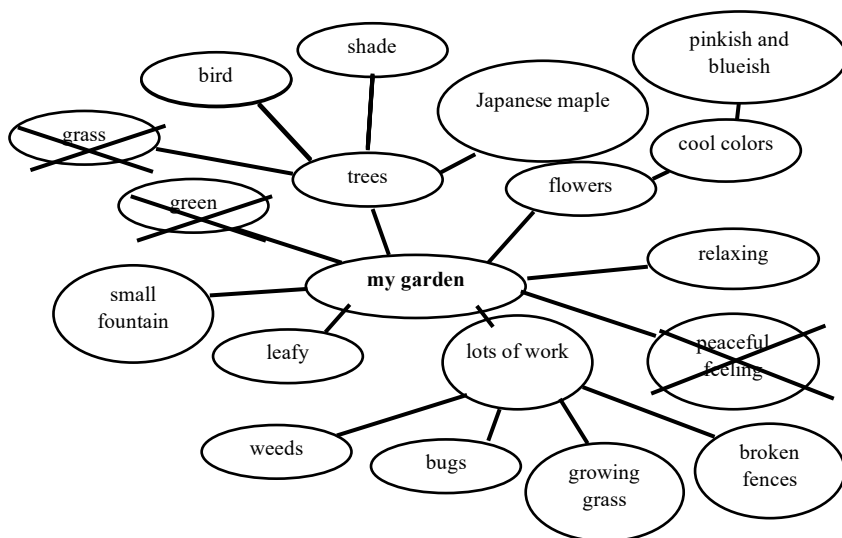


Figure 2. Further composition of ideas made through clustering technique (Hogue, 1996, 92)

Related to the procedure of clustering technique in teaching writing, Dawson and Essid (2018) coined that it starts with choosing, putting and circling a word or phrase in the center of the paperwork by the learners. Then, they write words all around the word or phrases that associate with the word in the central. Last, they connect the new word or phrase to previous ones with lines. This is the same as outlined by Rico (1987, as cited in Olson, 1987, p. 18). Procedurally, clustering technique can be carried out as follows. The student chooses a word, which is closed to the topic preferred. For example, if a student is writing a paper about the value of a college education, he or she may choose the

word ‘expectations. The student writes the selected word in the middle of the sheet of the paper. Then, the student circles the word. Next, the student writes words all around it. The words are related to the first word chosen. There is no problem if many of those words at first seem to be random. The student then circles each word collected. Furthermore, the student groups words around the central word ‘expectation’. Afterward, the student connects the new words to previous ones with lines. When the student feels he has lack of associated ideas, he or she should go back to the central word and begin again.

Accordingly, by concluding procedures of clustering technique above, writers, in this case, the students, need to determine ideas and sub-ideas by inserting them into circles connected with lines. This connected ideas and sub-ideas will ease the students to make those into several sentences, which turn into a simple paragraph.

METHODOLOGY

The research design will be elaborated here. The sampling is explained in conjunction with how data are collected and analysed.

Research Design

A quantitative method with testing was conducted in this research. This method was acted to test, analyze and prove the hypotheses statistically due to revealing the answer of the main research question (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p. 461), including the sub-questions. The pretest-post-test control and experimental group design based on Cohen et al. (2007, p. 462) was selected to discover the relationship between independent and dependent variables. In this research, the independent variable is the writing skills of the students as the sample, while the dependent variable is the clustering technique.

Then, the researcher divided the sample into two classes – the experimental and control groups. The former group was treated carrying out the clustering technique, while the latter was treated by applying free writing activity. Before doing so, the researcher should have done in comparing both groups, which presumably may have the same characteristics and capabilities by using different benchmark.

Population and Sampling

The population of this research was (118 students) the tenth-grade students of SMA Negeri 1 Delima, Pidie. There were five parallel classes

which consist of about 20 students each class. Of those classes, these classes were equally treated by the school. It means all classes had the same potential as the sample. Then, the researcher applied a simple random sampling as Sugiyono suggests (2011, p. 91). It selects experimental and control groups. Out of 118 students, based on the sample size determination synthesized by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), the sample for each group should be around 90 participants. However, it was difficult to select such number within five classes in a same time. Therefore, in a random way, this study selected two classes containing around 20 students respectively.

Data Collection

To collect data, this research employed a written essay test. It contained certain themes to be described in a simple or short paragraph or essay by the students. It was conducted in two sessions, namely pretest and post-test, which were distributed both to experimental and control groups. The data were collected through one type of instrument, the test covering the pretest and the post-test.

Since this experimental study is categorized as a quantitative study, the researcher analyzed the data based on the data obtained which brought the result to accept or reject the hypothesis or to know the result of this study whether it was successful or not. The data from the tests were analyzed by using suitable statistical procedure. In this research, the researcher discovered the mean, standard deviation, normal distribution, homogeneity variance, and t-test as suggested by Sugiyono (2011, p. 67). By carrying out the five stages above, the conclusion could be retrieved by matching the result of the experiment with the research hypotheses. Besides, additional descriptions upon the implementation of clustering technique were described to depict the condition during the research.

Data Analysis

The data analysis concerns the result of the quantitative data obtained from a series of test. Firstly, the data obtained from the pre-tests were analyzed through chi-square formula. It aimed to discover the normality of experimental and control groups. The formula was also applied to find out the homogeneity of the samples selected. The result proved that both groups were normally distributed, while the samples taken were homogenous.

Next, the students' tests were assessed by an analytical rubric focusing on content, organization, and language use. Each of them has an equal portion with a set of score ranges, namely 50 – 65, 66 – 75, 76 – 85, and 86 - 100 scores (Weigle, 2007). In addition, the data then underwent T-test with Independent method in order to find out the level of difference of clustering technique in scores of students' writing between the experimental group and the control group (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). In the end, the t_{score} was compared with t_{table} to find the level of significance. The hypothesis was then tested accordingly.

RESULTS

There were two sub-sections presented here, namely the outcome of the independent T-test of pre-test and the outcome of independent T-test of post-test.

The Process of Calculating the Independent t-test on the Pretest

The pre-tests, which were done before applying the treatment, aimed to discover the students' previous ability of writing and to find out the equivalent of the experimental and control groups. In this situation, the students' scores of the pre-tests were evaluated through statistical procedures. The result of t_{test} , which was lower than t_{table} , remarked that previous writing skill of the students in both groups was similar. The process of calculating the data can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Statistical summary of the result of the pre-test for both of experimental and control groups

<i>Experimental Group</i>		S_{gab}	t_{test}	Df	A	t_{table}	<i>Control Group</i>
n	24	7.9	0.03	46	0.05	1.684	24
$\bar{x}$	48.95						48.87
s^2	64						62
S	8						8

Based on the description of statistical summary above, two mean scores of the pre-test results were calculated for both experimental and control groups. Both of them were compared by employing an independent sample t_{test} . As shown in the Table 4.6, the mean score of the pre-test of the experimental group was 48,95 and the mean score of the pre-test of the control group was .48,87. Both of the mean score were

then compared through an independent sample t_{test} with the level of significant degree $\alpha = 0,05$.

After comparing the two means in which $df = (n_1 + n_2 - 2) = (24 + 24 - 2) = 46$, the result of t_{table} with the level of significance 0,05 was 1,684 and the result of t_{test} was 0,03. Therefore, it could be perceived that the t_{test} was lower than t_{table} ($0,03 < 1,684$). In other words, there was no significant difference between the result of the pre-test of the experimental and control groups. Hence, the previous writing skill of the both groups was similar.

The Process of Calculating the Independent t-test on the Post-test

The post-tests were done after five times meetings of the treatment. It aimed to find out the students' achievement in writing skills both in the experimental and control groups. The researcher wanted to discover any different students' score in both groups. In this case, the hypotheses were formulated to determine the result. Those were mentioned as alternative hypothesis (H_a) and null hypothesis (H_o). The alternative hypothesis specified that the groups had different mean, while the null one indicated that the groups had the same mean. Those were formulated as follows:

- H_a : There was a positive influence of clustering technique on the quality of students' writing skills, particularly in the skills of the organization, content, and language.
- H_o : There was a negative influence of clustering technique on the quality of students' writing skills, particularly in the skills of organization, content, and language use

The criteria was:

- if $t_{score} > t_{table}$, H_a was accepted and H_o was rejected
- if $t_{score} < t_{table}$, H_o was accepted and H_a was rejected

The summary of both results of the post-tests of both groups is presented in the following table:

Table 2. Statistical summary of the result of the post-test for both of experimental and control groups

	Experimental Group	S_{gab}	t_{test}	Df	α	t_{table}	Control Group
n	24						24
$\bar{x}$	78.79						53.75
s^2	145.4	10.59	8.44	46	0.05	1.684	79.23
S	12						8.9

Based on the statistical summary above, the two mean scores of the post-test results were calculated for both the experimental and control groups. Both of them were compared by employing an independent sample t_{test} . As shown in the Table 4.9 above, the mean score of the post-test of the experimental group was 78,79 and the mean score of the post-test of the control group was 53,75. Both of the mean scores were compared through an independent sample t_{test} with the level of significant degree $\alpha = 0,05$.

After comparing the two means score of the post-test for both the experimental and the control groups in which $df = (n_1 + n_2 - 2) = (24 + 24 - 2) = 46$, the result of t_{table} with the level of significance 0,05 was 1,684 and the result of t_{test} was 8,44. It could be perceived that the t_{test} was higher than t_{table} ($8,44 < 1,684$). Literally, there was a significant difference between the result of the post-test of the experimental and control groups. Thus, the progression of the students' writing for both groups could be presented as the following figure.

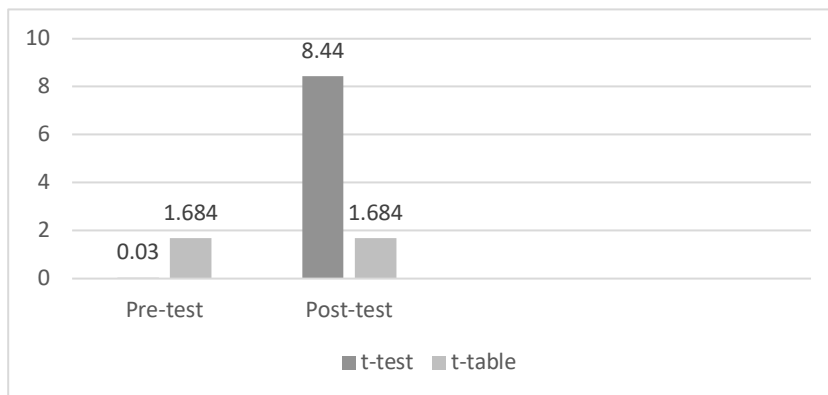


Figure 3. The Independent t_{test} scores of both experimental and control groups

DISCUSSIONS

The discussion put emphasis on the effects of clustering technique on the aspects of writing quality, namely content, organization, and language use.

The Effect of Using Clustering Technique on the Content of Descriptive Texts Produced by the Students

Most of the students' writing scores, specifically in content improved significantly. The use of clustering technique in narrowing topics given might contribute this finding. Even though several students had lack of ideas in composing their descriptive texts at first, they immediately wrote their two to three sentences after narrowing the topics. Indeed, the researcher also gave supporting ideas and sentences to those who did not have ones at all. In details, making list as suggested by Oshima and Hogue (2007, p.8) might also aid their shortage of ideas.

Technically, the ideas listed after the themes given both in the pretest and post-test were divided into sub-lists. For instance, a theme given, My Home, could be sub-listed into the one which the students have, or the imagined one. By dividing into sub-lists, they could describe both and pick what was best for their descriptive text. Therefore, their content within their writing text could be enriched by selecting appropriate sub-list prior to outlining a paragraph. This, then, led to the next writing aspect, organization.

The Effect of Using Clustering Technique on the Organization of Descriptive Texts Produced by the Students

The second writing aspect focused within this research, organization, increased significantly because of constructing appropriate ideas as depicted in subsection above. The students in the experimental group had adequate scores in this aspect. After several revising, and of course, by the help of the researcher as the teacher in the classroom, the pupils checked organizational elements in their writing such as the unity, coherence and logic as proposed by Oshima and Hogue (2007, p. 11). Technically, during several revisions of their writing, the students changed, rearranged, added, and deleted certain words or phrases so their thoughts were more clearly, more effectively, and in a more interesting way.

In the initial revision, the researcher suggested the students not to correct the grammar, sentence structure, spelling, or punctuation. This

work could be done in the next phase, which was the third aspect focused in this study, language use. The researcher asked the students to read over their paragraph carefully for a general overview. They needed to focus on the general aspects of the theme they selected. The students could also make notes in their paper margins, so that they could rewrite parts that were necessary to be improved. Then, the students were asked to recheck what they had achieved upon their selected theme. This was essential in order to make the readers able to follow their ideas easily and understand what they have written. The researcher also alarmed them to attach a topic sentence followed by several supporting sentences.

However, a number of students still had troubles to make ‘a bridge’ between their text and the readers’ comprehension. The researcher found that their initial texts had unrelated topics, absence of supporting sentences and incoherence states. To overcome those problems, the researcher applied some extra examples of writing descriptive texts though clustering technique on the whiteboard. The students might insert more details of their selected theme, including the topics, supporting sentences and coherence information.

It is vital to provide structured plot, even for a short descriptive text. Therefore, the use of conjunctions are also important here. In the pretest, students in the experimental group missed their conjunction within their texts. As a result, each idea, sentence, or even paragraph had something incomplete. During the explanation of clustering technique, the researcher often inserted several conjunctions to connect the information of the students’ work. Fortunately, most of the students showed positive trends by inserting conjunctions to link their ideas, sentences, and paragraphs.

The Effect of Using Clustering Technique on the Language Use of Descriptive Texts Produced by the Students

The result retrieved by the students in the writing aspect of language use were sufficient. After getting treatment by the researcher through the clustering technique, followed by several revision within their texts, the result of such writing aspect improved significantly. There were several steps committed by the students instructed by the researcher. As the previous subsection mentioned, they were asked to check their grammar, sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation by themselves.

The students crisscrossed over each sentence for correctness and completeness to make sure that there would be no fragments and choppy

run-on sentences. They also checked over each sentence for a subject and a verb, subject-verb agreement, correct verb tenses, and so the like. These kinds of errors were frequently found both in the preliminary study and the pretest. Then, the pupils were asked to examine the additional writing aspect, mechanics, covering the punctuation, spelling, capitalization, typing errors, and so on. Last, they were guided to find synonyms for commonly used words.

This section was not finished yet. To make it completed, the researcher asked the partner of each student to become as a proofreader. This was suggested by Oshima and Hogue (2007, p. 12) to incorporate all writing aspects of students' descriptive texts.

Prior to handing their work, the researcher was then asking the students to write the final copy of their writing. She asked them to attach the two drafts – the first draft having notes as a proof of revision and the second draft having the bubbles ideas produced by clustering technique. This action to match their work from the start to the result. Opportunely, both drafts brought a positive result upon the post-test in the experimental group.

As a brief conclusion in this analysis, the researcher found out that the process of carrying out the clustering technique in teaching writing a descriptive text was successfully conducted by having significant improvement, particularly in the writing aspects of content, organization and language use, which became the focus in this study. The process itself could not be separated from the phase of prewriting, revising and proofreading to produce a valid, rich descriptive text.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The three writing aspects – content, organization and language use, which became the main focus in this study, improved significantly through the use of clustering technique. The students' writing aspect of content was pushed by suggesting them to list primary and secondary ideas prior to choosing the best one. Then, the students' writing aspects of organization were strengthened by asking them to do revisions regarding their lack of related topics, supporting sentences, coherence states, and appropriate conjunctions. By focusing with those elements, a more structured plot of their writing could be tolerably understood. Lastly, the students' writing aspect of language use was reinforced by asking the students to proofread their writing's grammar, sentence

structure, spelling, and punctuation. They also proofread their partner's work to ensure the accuracy of language use upon their text.

After summarizing the results of the study, some suggestions can be proposed related to the use of clustering technique on the students' writing skill as the contributions for English teachers and other further research. The learning technique, however, should match the students' knowledge and skills. In addition, the appropriate and sufficient practices of writing activities are necessary in order to match the needs of school curriculum.

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