

**Improving Students' Writing Skills of Narrative Text through Brainstorming
Technique by the Second Year Students of
State Islamic University Suska Riau**

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ABSTRACT

Kurnia Budi Yanti. 2009. Improving Students' Writing Skills of Narrative Text through Brainstorming Technique by the Second Year Students of State Islamic University Suska Riau. At the second year students of State Islamic University Suska Riau, the researcher found that students had low ability in writing narrative text. It was identified that there were several factors that caused students had low ability. From the students themselves, they did not know how to start their writing because they did not apply certain technique. Then, they also get it difficult to express their ideas in written form. Furthermore, they got lack of vocabulary, lack understanding of gramatical devices, organization and mechanism in writing. To improve the students' ability in writing Narrative text, the researcher conducted classroom action research by using Brainstorming Technique. The purpose of this research is to find out whether Brainstorming Technique could better improve students' writing ability and to find out factors that influence it. In collecting the data, the researcher used essay tests, observation checklist, field notes, and interview. This classroom action research consisted of three cycles constituting meeting. Based on the finding, the implementation of Brainstorming Technique could better improve students' skill in writing Narrative text at the second year students of State Islamic University Suska Riau. The improvement was shown by the increasing of the percentage of students' writing tests from cycle 1 to cycle 2, and from cycle 2 to cycle 3. The factors influenced the students' ability in writing Narrative text were the indicators of Brainstorming Technique itself. Finally, the action research by the implementation of Brainstorming Technique could improve the students' ability of writing narrative text by the second year students of English Department of State Islamic University SUSKA Riau.

Key Words : Writing skill, Narrative Text, Brainstorming

A. BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

Writing might be a problem for some students in learning English because there are many aspects which should be considered, such as contents, grammars, vocabularies, forms, mechanics and styles. Besides, they should consider other important components in writing, such as coherence, cohesion, topic sentence, supporting details, etc. In general, it can be stated that problems in writing can be seen in technical writing, such as, the use of language, punctuation, quotation and lay out. Besides, it can be seen in content organization, such as, cohesion, coherence and unity. In addition, learners need to know the audiences of their writing, and why they have to write. It means that writing is communicative since it is an interactive activity. A writer should know how to express their ideas and how to convey their messages in their writing. Yet, not all people can write well. Some of them find difficulties in writing. In short, writing is not an easy skill for many students to apply in since there are many components that should be considered.

Based on the English Department of UIN SUSQA RIAU curriculum, the second year students have to attend writing classes as required subjects. At the forth semester, the students are expected to be able to employ linguistics conventions and English sentence patterns in English writing texts (descriptive, narrative, expository, and argumentative) in preferable forms. Thus, they had to be able to express their ideas in a written form by considering the linguistics conventions, such as, content and organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics.

However, the writer observed that many of the second year students of English Department of State Islamic University still had problems in writing, for example, when the lecturer asked them to write narrative texts for several meetings in the writing class, most of them got problem in grammar. Most of them did not understand the mechanism of writing narrative texts. Besides, more than 25 students had poor mastery of vocabulary and grammar. That condition had happened for several times. Most of them still made mistakes in those aspects. In addition, their writing ability could be categorized as poor.

The following case was observed. The students spent a lot of time to write a text. There were only three students who had finished doing their tasks. The other students

seemed to find it difficult for them to produce what ideas to write. In other words, they had difficulties in expressing ideas to be written which has become a problem for them. The students got problems in organizing their ideas, in terms of cohesion, coherence and unity in writing. It seemed that it derives from the fact that they did not use the prewriting techniques to express their ideas before the real writing take place. It can be concluded from their statement that they did not know what to start and where to start.

In addition, some of them also conveyed that they absolutely did not spend much time to look up words in a dictionary, even though they were lack of vocabulary. In addition, more than 25 students did not take dictionary to school with them. The second is that they did not know where to put generic structure of the text, such in narrative texts orientations, complications and resolutions. In addition, among the thirty students, only three students (10%) used the generic structure of narrative texts correctly. It seemed that most of them did not understand the generic structure of narrative text. At last, the students did a lot of mistakes in using past tense and choosing appropriate vocabulary items. For example, they wrote 'want' for 'wanted' and 'cut off' for the word 'decided' or "I did" became "I do" for past tense. Only three students (10%) categorized as good students in term of that. From the descriptions above, it could be seen some problems which were faced by the students in writing narrative texts. Those problems could be stated as factors which influence the students' writing. For those reasons, the use of brainstorming technique would help the students to express their ideas into written forms.

B. REVIEW OF THE RELATED THEORIES

1. Writing Skill

According to Harper (2004), writing is one of four main macro-skills taught in the ESL classroom, besides reading, speaking, and listening. All of the four macro-skills can be considered important components of ESL, including writing skill. He (2004) also adds that writing is one of four basic skills which involved in productive (output) skill. In other point of view, Hamp-Lyons (in O Malley, 1996:136) explains that writing is a personal act in which writers take ideas and transform them into "self-initiated" topics. Besides, Robert (1982:2) emphasized the practical importance of the communication

skills in writing, because communication skills enable students to fully express their thought and feelings. It is also echoed by Laksmi (2006:40) that writing does not merely mean applying grammatical rules; it is more students' learning to communicate their ideas in written forms. Based on the theories above, it can be stated that writing is a way of learning and developing the students' communication skill as one of the effective ways to develop students' thinking, to understand their thought and feelings more precisely than just expressing them orally. Besides, writing can improve the students' language and stimulate the students' cognitive which is useful for students who learn a language.

In relation to nature of writing, Richard (2003:44) views "writing as a complex, recursive and creative process that is very similar in its general outlines for first and second language writers: learning to write requires the development of an efficient and effective composing process". Teaching students to write well is one of the most challenging tasks in education. Karten (2005) also argues that writing itself is complex, often disorderly, and frequently frustrating. When teachers compare notes and approaches, they invariably conclude that they need more than a fixed or single approach to teach writing, particularly if they are to address the needs of all students. In other point of view, Oshima and Hogue (1999) also state that writing is not easy, because students need to consider to some processes in order to produce a good writing. Those processes are also mentioned by Fitzpatrick (2005). Those are prewriting, writing, revising, and writing final draft. In addition, Simon and Schuster (2003:8) add that a good writing does not happen overnight because it involves a process which consists of five steps: prewriting, writing a first draft, sharing, revising into a second draft, and editing into a final draft. Based on the definitions above, it can be concluded that writing needs a process in order to produce a good writing.

On the other sides, Reid (1994:81) states that writing is a complex skill. It is caused by some components that should be focused in writing, such as the purpose of writing and writer's knowledge of writing (paragraph's component and pattern organization). Besides, Malley (1996:142) finds four dimensions of writing: (a) Ideas development/organization (focuses on central idea with appropriate elaboration and conclusion); (b) fluency/structure (appropriate verb tense used with a variety of

grammatical and syntactic structures (cohesion and coherence); (c) word choice (uses varied and precise vocabulary appropriate for purpose; (d) mechanics (absence of errors in spelling, capitalization and function). It is also mentioned by Weir (1993) that there are seven components in writing; relevance and adequacy of content, compositional organization, cohesion, adequacy of vocabulary for purposes, grammar, mechanical accuracy I (punctuation) and mechanical accuracy II (spelling), appropriateness of language to context, function and intention and appropriateness of layout.

In short, based on the explanation above, it is concluded that writing skill is one of four macro skills which is involved in productive skill in which a student is able to develop ideas and feeling by considering some important components and writing processes.

2. Brainstorming Technique

a. Definition of brainstorming

A good writing involves a process that begins with prewriting and end with proofreading a final draft. Prewriting is very helpful for a writer to have something to express. Simon and Schuster (2003) mention, that there are several prewriting techniques; free writing, brainstorming, clustering, and mapping. Oshima and Hogue (1999:4) Fitzpatrick (2005:9) also divide some technique into prewriting called brainstorming; listing, clustering and free writing. All of them are used before writing by discovering ideas without editing thoughts and limiting ideas. Besides, a writer should not concern with grammar or spelling. In this research, the writer focuses on brainstorming technique. It is clearly stated that brainstorming is one of helpful technique to generate ideas before starting writing.

Dealing with the definition of brainstorming above, there are some functions in educational field. Coffin, et al (2003:34) states that brainstorming, as one of prewriting strategies can help writers find ideas, collect information, activate tacit knowledge, and organise their thoughts. Fitzpatrick (2005) explains that brainstorming has functions to gather ideas (brainstorming) and discover about the topic is really important to you. It is added by McDowell (1999) that brainstorming is as the act of defining a problem or idea and coming up anything related to the topic - no matter how remote a suggestion may sound. All of these ideas are recorded and evaluated only after the brainstorming is

completed. Alice and Ann (1999) also support the Fitzpatrick and McDowell that brainstorming step is to generate ideas. Moreover, Simon and Schuster (2003:21) state that brainstorming is a way to map ideas. In addition, Jeffrey (2006) adds that brainstorming can be an effective way to generate lots of ideas on a specific issue and then determine which idea – or ideas – is the best solution. It is most effective with groups of 8-12 people and should be performed in a relaxed environment. From those ideas, it can be stated that brainstorming has an important role in order to do creative thinking and find the focus on the writing because brainstorming is one of stages in writing process which has the function to generate ideas before writing.

Based on the definition above, it is concluded that brainstorming is one of prewriting techniques which is very helpful for a writer to collect ideas before coming to the first draft of writing.

b. Procedures of Brainstorming

According to Coffin, et al (2003:35), in brainstorming, student sparks ideas off each other after a discussion or reading. Ideally, students throw ideas into a non-judgmental forum, with the goal of generating multiple ideas on a topic without immediately evaluating their suitability for development. The lecturer or a student lists the ideas generated by the group on the blackboard to create a record. An individual writer can also others will be missing. In the same points with Coffin, et al (2003), Simon and Schuster (2003:21) mentions some formula to brainstorm; writing the topic of a sheet of paper and the purpose of the assignment at the top, listing everything that relate to the topic by using simple words and phrases, letting the ideas be creative, selecting the best ideas and grouping the ideas. Besides, based on McDowell (1999), there are some procedures of brainstorming: (1) Select a leader and a recorder (they may be the same person), (2) Define the problem or idea to be brainstormed, (3) Set up the rules for the session which include: letting the leader have control, allowing everyone to contribute, ensuring that no one will insult, demean, or evaluate another participant or his/her response, stating that no answer is wrong, recording each answer unless it is a repeat, setting a time limit and stopping when that time is up, (4) Start the brainstorming by having the leader select members of the group to share their answers. The recorder should write down all responses, if possible so everyone can see them, (5) Make sure

not to evaluate or criticize any answers until brainstorming has been done, (6) Go through the results and begin evaluating the responses. Some initial qualities to look for when examining the responses include: looking for any answers that are repeated or similar, grouping like concepts together, eliminating responses that definitely do not fit, and discussing the remaining responses as a group. Based on the procedures above, it clearly describe that each participant need to participate to brainstorm their ideas without eliminating any ideas.

C. DESIGN OF THE RESEARCH

This research was an action research. It means that a teacher can apply certain treatment in order to give improvement to the students. When there is no improvement after giving the treatment, the teacher can give more treatment by adding more cycles until the teacher sees a good improvement of the students.

In this research, the second year students of State Islamic University of Riau would be asked to write a narrative text in both pre-test and post-test. It would be done in certain time with certain topics. After giving the pre-test, the students would be given some treatments as it was stated above. The treatments given would be dealing with the steps mentioned by Simon and Schuster (2003). There were five steps that would be done: writing the topic of a sheet of paper, listing everything that relate to the topic, letting the ideas be creative, selecting the best ideas and grouping the ideas. In addition, this research would be done in three cycles, which consists of two meetings for each cycle. The procedures would be done in every meeting of treatment given. After treatments, the post-test was given with certain topics and times. Based on the results between the pre-test and the post-test, it can be seen whether there was an improvement or not of the brainstorming technique.

D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Finding

- *The Extent to which Brainstorming Technique could improve students' writing skill and motivation.*

Pre-test

In order to find the second year students' ability in writing, the writer had conducted a pre-test with the test result in percentage as follow:

Table 1

The Students' Writing Pre-test Result in Percentage (%)

No	Score	Ability Level	R1		R2	
			F	P	F	P
1	86-100	Excellent	0	0	0	0
2	76-85	Good	1	4	0	0
3	66-75	Fairly Good	2	8	3	12
4	51-65	Fair	12	48	11	44
5	0-50	Poor	10	40	11	44
TOTAL			25	100	25	100

Diagram 1

Diagram of Writing Test in Pre-test

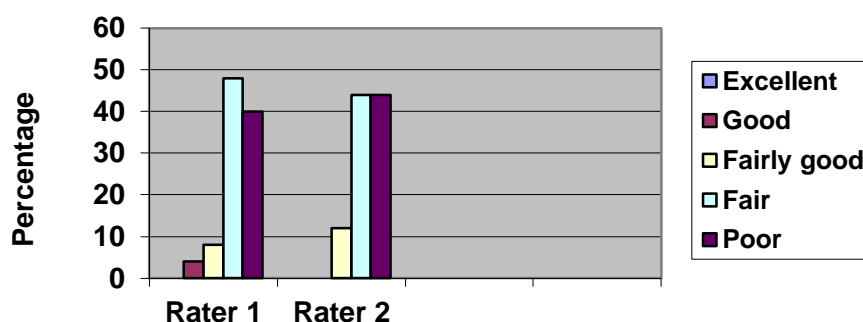


Table 1 and diagram 1 above shows that:

1. The students' writing skill ability was mostly in fairly good and poor.
2. There were still 40% students from the first rater and 44% students from the second rater who were in poor level.
3. There were no students in excellent level.
4. There were only 4% students from the first rater in good level.

It can be concluded that the students' writing ability was still low at the average.

Cycle 1

In order to know the students' writing skill in the first cycle, the researcher set up writing test 1.

Table 2
The Students' Writing Test Result in Percentage (%)

No	Score	Ability Level	R1		R2	
			F	P	F	P
-1	86-100	Excellent	0	0	0	0
2	76-85	Good	1	4	0	0
3	66-75	Fairly Good	4	16	3	12
4	51-65	Fair	12	48	12	48
5	0-50	Poor	8	32	10	40
TOTAL			25	100	25	100

Diagram 2

Diagram of Writing Test in Cycle 1

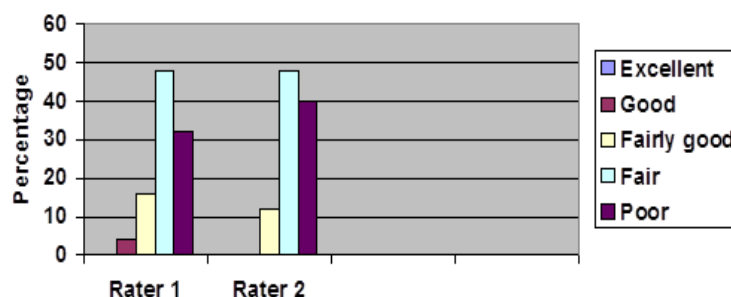


Table 2 and diagram 2 above shows that:

- The students' writing skill ability was mostly in fair.
- There were still 48% students from the first rater and the second rater who were in fair level.
- There were no students in excellent level.
- There were 4% students from the first rater in good level.

Based on the data gathered in cycle 1, the researcher and the collaborator determined to revise some activities in cycle 1 to be applied in cycle 2. The researcher and the collaborator gave stress to the grammar and vocabulary because by having good grammar and rich vocabulary, the students writing would be much better. It would be a good writing.

Reflection

Based on the data gathered in cycle 1, the researcher and the collaborator determined to revise some activities in cycle 1 to be applied in cycle 2. The researcher and the collaborator gave stress to the vocabulary, because we thought if the students had more vocabulary, they would be able to write longer, as long as they used Brainstorming Technique.

Cycle 2

Table 3
The Students' Writing Test Result in Percentage (%)

No	Score	Ability Level	R1		R2	
			F	P	F	P
1	86-100	Excellent	0	0	0	0
2	76-85	Good	2	8	3	12
3	66-75	Fairly Good	16	64	10	40
4	51-65	Fair	5	20	8	32
5	0-50	Poor	2	8	4	16
TOTAL			25	100	25	100

Diagram 3

Diagram of Writing Test in Cycle 2

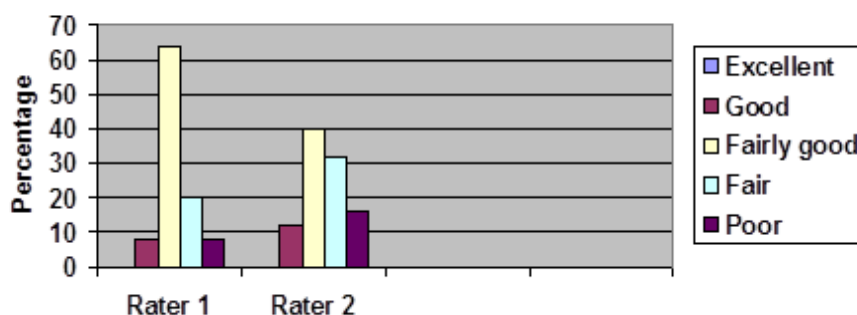


Table 3 and diagram 3 above shows that:

- The students' writing skill ability was mostly in fairly good.
- There were 64% students from the first rater and 40% students from the second rater who were in fairly good level.
- There were no students in excellent level

- d. There were 8% of the students from the first rater and 12% from the second rater were in good level. It was a much better progress.

Reflection

The researcher and the collaborator thought that the students writing skill had been improved until the second cycle, because there was the increasing through each proficiency in writing skill from cycle 1 to cycle 2. Yet, in the third cycle, the researcher and the collaborator decided to focus on the mechanism and organization of the students' writing.

Cycle 3

In order to know the students' writing skill in the third cycle, the researcher set up writing this test.

Table 4
The Students' Writing Test Result in Percentage (%)

No	Score	Ability Level	R1		R2	
			F	P	F	P
1	86-100	Excellent	0	0	0	0
2	76-85	Good	12	48	11	44
3	66-75	Fairly Good	8	32	8	32
4	51-65	Fair	4	16	6	24
5	0-50	Poor	1	4	0	0
TOTAL			25	100	25	100

Diagram 4

Diagram of Writing Test in Cycle 3

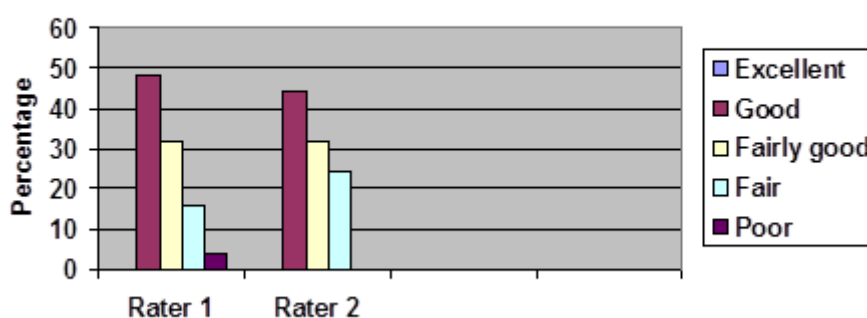


Table 4 and diagram 4 above shows that:

- a. The students' writing skill ability was mostly in good.

- b. There were still 16% students from the first rater and 24% students from the second rater who were in fair level.
- c. There were 4% students in poor level.
- d. There were more than 75% students in good level. It was a much better progress.

Reflection

The researcher and the collaborator thought that the students writing skill had been improved until the third cycle, because there was the increasing through each proficiency in writing skill from cycle 2 to cycle 3. The researcher did not need to apply more cycles. For the reason, the researcher concluded that the research was done until three cycles.

- *The Extent to which Brainstorming Technique Could Improve Students' Motivation*

To measure the increasing of students' motivation through Brainstorming Technique, the researcher asks the collaborator to fill observation checklist. This observation checklist consists of five indicators that indicate students' motivation in writing based on Simon and Schuster (2003). In this case, the researcher takes the data from the students' motivation in every cycle.

From the students' observation sheet above, it can be concluded that the students had a good progress from each meeting. It influenced a much better progress in their writing result. In this case, the researcher found some factors that influence students' writing ability.

- a. Writing the topic of a sheet of paper

Students who did not write the topic of a sheet of paper found it difficult to find ideas because they did not know what to write. During the process, all students wrote the topic of a sheet of paper, for the reason they could focus on more ideas.

- b. Listing everything relate to the topic

Almost all students who listed everything relate to the topic found it easy to collect ideas. The other students could not evaluate the answers until all brainstorming finish. All students could contribute their ideas with no limitation.

- c. Grouping the ideas

By grouping the ideas, each student would get good ideas which were related with the topic given. Besides, the ideas are narrower and more focus.

2. Discussion

As it has been explained before, this research conducted in three cycles for six meetings, to investigate how far Brainstorming Technique can much better improve the students' writing ability at the second year of English Department UIN SUSQA RIAU.

The designing of Brainstorming Technique has been fulfilled what are suggested by Simon and Schuster (2003) about the use of Brainstorming Technique that give students more opportunity to explore their ideas. It is also explained by Fitzpatrick (2005) that brainstorming functions to gather ideas and discover about the topic is really important for a writer. Of course, it will give much contribution in vocabulary and essay development in writing.

First of all, before teaching Brainstorming Technique, the researcher did a pre-test in order to give first assessment to the students, and then she could compare the students' ability in writing before and after studying Brainstorming Technique. In this test, the researcher asked the students to write a narrative text entitled "The Unforgettable Event in My Life" in 2 x 45 minutes. The test was followed by 29 students. Four of them were absent. After evaluating the students' test, it was found that the students' ability in writing narrative text was mostly poor. Only 4 % or 1 student was good. It means that the percentage, 4 %, did not fulfil the researcher's pass grade that there had to be 75% or 25 students in good level in the score 76-80. Then, the researcher and the collaborator started planning the materials and designing the lesson plans for three cycles constituting six meetings. Each meeting was done in 2 x 45 minutes.

Based on the findings throughout the observation and writing test, it can be concluded that:

1. In the first cycle, most of the students could not let the ideas be in writing teaching and learning process using Brainstorming Technique. It was because most of them did not understand that they were not allowed to eliminate any ideas. Each idea should be written without limitation. In the next meeting of first cycle, the researcher explained about letting the

ideas is creative in order to improve the students' ability in collecting ideas and they could write their writing much better and longer.

2. In the second cycle (two meetings), the Brainstorming Technique gave more influence in students' mastery of vocabulary and development.
3. In the third cycle (two meetings), the Brainstorming Technique gave more influence in students' mastery of mechanism, grammar and development. Even though there were still problems on the grammar, but it seemed that the students' became familiar and comfortable with Brainstorming Technique because they explored ideas without limitation that influenced their writing ability.

E. CONCLUSIONS

The use of Brainstorming Technique in teaching writing has been successful to improve students' motivation in learning writing at the second year students of English Department of State Islamic University SUSKA RIAU. Based on the findings of the research, it can be concluded that (1) Brainstorming technique is an effective technique to improve students' writing ability of narrative text at the second year students of English Department of State Islamic University SUSKA RIAU, which was showed by the increasing of the average from cycle to other cycles. (2) Factors improved students' writing ability through Brainstorming Technique is as follows: Listing everything relate to the topic, Letting the ideas be creative and Grouping the ideas.

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