USING THE FOUR-SQUARE WRITING METHOD TO IMPROVE ELEVENTH GRADERS’ABILITY OF WRITING HORTATORY EXPOSITION TEXT AT MAN KEBOAN JOMBANG

Arum Puspita Dewi  
E-mail: dewiarum22@gmail.com  
State University of Malang

ABSTRACT: This study is intended to develop a strategy to solve the students’ problems, particularly in writing hortatory exposition texts. The strategy used in the study is the Four-Square Writing Method which utilizes a simple graphic organizer. The study employs collaborative Classroom Action Research design involving four stages, namely planning, implementing, observing and reflecting. The instruments used in this study were questionnaires, interview guides, observation checklists, field notes and scoring rubric. Based on data analysis results, the Four-Square Writing Method could help the students overcome their writing difficulties and improve their ability in writing hortatory exposition text.

Key words: Four-Square Writing Method, writing ability, hortatory exposition text

According to Standard of Content of the Indonesian Curriculum of English, developed by the Board of National Education Standard (Badan Standar Pendidikan Nasional/BSNP), the teaching of English is carried out based on the standard of competences and basic competences including four languages kills, which are listening, speaking, reading and writing. Moreover, in language learning situation writing is perceived as an important skill to master because through writing the students can expand and strengthen their knowledge (Graham &Perin, 2007: 9). Besides, writing can develop the writer’s intelligence and way of thinking. This is because when we write, we activate our brain to make our ideas meaningful to the readers. In addition, writing also provides ways of learning, for example taking notes during the class will help us remember what we have learned better than just listening to the lecturer (Axelrod &Cooper, 1988: 2).

However, students generally find it difficult to become proficient at writing. This is because in writing, the writer is responsible not only for transforming his/her ideas into the written text but also for making sure that the readers will understand the ideas he/she tries to convey(Byrne, 1995, as cited in Lopa,2012). For EFL students, such as students in Indonesia, this situation can be more complex because they are demanded to write the composition in English, which is not their native language. A study carried out by Silva (1993, as cited in Beare2013), reveals that generally EFL students face difficulties in generating and organizing the ideas they are going to write. Besides, students’ limited vocabulary also contributes to a lot of mistakes in their writing.

The results of preliminary study carried out at class XIIPA 1 of Madrasah
Aliyah Negeri Keboan Jombang revealed that most of the students had low ability in writing, especially in writing hortatory exposition text. This can be seen from the number of the students whose writings core could pass the minimum passing grade which was 70. Out of 20 students, there were only two students (10%) whose score could pass the minimum passing grade. The average score achieved was 51.15.

The results of the questionnaire distributed in the preliminary study showed that the students’ writing difficulties lied in some aspects. Most of the students stated that developing content is the most frequent problem they faced in writing as they often felt confused about how to start writing, which was then followed by writing organization in the second place. Then, the students revealed that they often found it hard to express their ideas in proper English and also had difficulties in terms of vocabulary and grammar. This indicates that the students need a particular treatment or strategy to help them improve their writing ability, especially in writing hortatory exposition texts.

The use of graphic organizers is considered to be one of strategies to overcome the writing problems faced by the students as many organizers proved to be effective in facilitating students in writing. Marzano, Pickering & Pollock (2001) state that graphic or visual organizers enable students to organize their thought as the organizer stimulates and increases activity in the brain. In addition, graphic organizers help students to conceptualize, understand, and structure a piece of written discourse as well as provide coherence and cohesiveness in writing (Houston, 2003).

There are various kinds of graphic organizers that can be utilized to help the students to learn languages, one of them is the four-square organizer. The form of the four-square organizer, which is very simple as it is made up off our squares which are connected to each other with another box in the middle, can help the students plan and organize their ideas or thoughts in writing (Gould & Gould, 1999).

Moreover, different from other graphic organizers, this visual organizer is developed along with certain writing method, namely the Four-Square Writing Method. It is called method because it has several steps which can be followed. The steps are (1) Categorizing; (2) Brainstorming three ideas with a summary sentence; (3) Placing a thesis statement in the center of the four-square; (4) Writing three ideas; (5) Adding more details; (6) Writing a wrap-up sentence; and (7) Adding transition words. Through these steps, the students will be guided to use specific instructions to write and organize their ideas before finally writing the draft.

Since this writing method is relatively new, there are still limited studies conducted on this field. One of the studies was an experimental study conducted by Lubanet al (2006) at Spring view Elementary, one of elementary schools of Allendale Public, resulting in the improvement of the students’ writing especially in terms of
organization and the use of details. Moreover, in Indonesia, the only study concerning the use of the method was done by Darmawan (2011) who investigated the effectiveness of using the Four-Square Writing Method to improve students’ ability to write narrative text sat SMKN 1 Bukateja. The results of the study shows that the students taught using the Four-Square Writing Method produce more structured composition in terms of organization, content, style and lexicon.

Different from the studies which were initially conducted, the present study is intended to overcome the students’ writing difficulties, especially in writing hortatory exposition text, found during the preliminary study carried out at MadrasahAliyah Negeri Keboan Jombang, East Java. However, in this research study, not all of the steps in the method will be implemented. Gould and Gould (1999) state that the first two steps are appropriate for younger learners and intended to help them to develop and conceptualize the relationship between ideas and objects by classifying and categorizing the items in everyday world. Thus, these two steps will not be applied in the study as they are considered unnecessary for eleventh grade students who had psychologically developed their learning capacity and analytic ability (Lenneberg, 1967).

**METHOD**

The design of the research was collaborative Classroom Action Research (CAR) involving four stages, namely planning, implementing, observing and reflecting. Nunan (1992, as cited in McKay, 2006:29) says that action research has three main characteristics, namely (1) carried by practitioners, (2) collaborative, and (3) aimed at changing things. This research is aimed at developing an innovative strategy to solve the problems found in the preliminary study and providing better improvement in practice. The design of the present research study can be seen in Figure1.
The subjects of the study were eleventh graders of class XIIPA 1 at MAN Keboan Jombang in the second semester of academic year of 2012/2013. There were 20 students who continuously joined the lesson during the study as the subjects of the study. They consisted of three male students and 17 female students.

During the implementation, the researcher was the one who delivered the lesson as well as introduced the strategy used in the research. Meanwhile the classroom English teacher and another English-native-speaker teacher took part as observers.

There were several instruments used to collect data during the observation. The first instrument was scoring rubric. This instrument was utilized by the researcher and the classroom English teacher to assess student’s writing. Another instrument was observation checklist which allowed the observers to record students’ participation during the lessons. The next instrument was interview guide. This instrument consisted of several questions that were asked during the interview sessions with the classroom English teacher in order to collect some information, such as how writing is taught in the class, what kind of problems occurs when teaching writing as well as the classroom English teacher’s opinion about the implementation of the strategy in the teaching of writing. Then the last instrument was questionnaire. This instrument was utilized to figure out students’ attitude toward writing assignments and problems in writing, both before and after the implementation of the Four-Square Writing method. The information of type of data, data source as well as instruments used to collect the data will be presented in Table 1.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Data</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Instrument</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students’ writing score</td>
<td>Students’ writing work(second meeting)</td>
<td>Scoring rubric</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students’ participation during the lesson</td>
<td>Observation checklist filled by the observers and field note written by researcher</td>
<td>Observation checklist, field note</td>
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<tr>
<td>Classroom English teacher’s attitude to the implementation of the strategy</td>
<td>Classroom English teacher’s statement during the interview</td>
<td>Interview Guide</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students’ attitude to the implementation of the strategy</td>
<td>Statement written by the students in the questionnaires</td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
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Eventually, the data derived from all instruments during the observation would be analyzed and reflected to the criteria of success to determine what aspects of the criteria of success had been achieved and what aspects of the research should be revised.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

**Findings**

The results of the study include information related to students’ performance during the teaching and learning process and responses toward the implementation of the Four-Square Writing Method.

**Students’ Performance During the Teaching and Learning Process**

The analysis was carried out on the basis of the data obtained from the observation checklists filled by the two observers, which were then enriched by the data acquired from the field notes.

In Cycle 1, both observers gave score 5 for students’ attention and participation, in either meeting 1 or meeting 2, indicating that more than 60% students paid attention to the researcher’s explanation and were eager to participate during the class activity and discussions.

Meanwhile, both observers also noticed that the students showed better performance in Cycle 2 since they also scored students’ performance with the highest score (5). This means that most of the students were attentive and participated actively during the classroom activities, reflected from their enthusiasm for taking part in the discussions and sharing their opinions toward certain issues.

**The Students’ Writing**

There were two raters who scored the students’ writing. The first rater was the researcher while the other rater was the classroom English teacher. The raters scored the students’ writing in three aspects, namely content, organization, and language. The students’ writing score were obtained from the average of total scores given by the both the researcher and the classroom English teacher.

The computation of the scoring of students’ writing in Cycle 1 revealed that eight students (40%) gained scores above 70, with the average score of 69.3. Meanwhile, computation of the scoring of students’ writing in Cycle 2 indicated that 16 students (80%) achieved writing score above 70, with the mean score of 75.1. The students’ writings core in relation to the minimum mastery standard (*SKM: Standar Ketuntasan Minimal*) in both Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 can be seen in Figure 2.
Responses Toward the Implementation of the Four-Square Writing Method

The results of the questionnaire also revealed that the students gave positive responses to the implementation of the Four-Square Writing Method in teaching and learning writing. Ninety percent of students (18 out of 20 students) answered that the use of the method was interesting and facilitated them in writing hortatory exposition texts as the procedure as well as instruction given in every stage guided the students to write the text in a simple way.

Moreover, during the interview session, the classroom English teacher stated that the Four-Square Writing Method is a practical method to teach writing to the students as she noticed that the students seemed to be more active and could develop more independence with their writing. Besides, in her opinion, the procedure of the method is simple, so she was confident that she would not have difficulties in applying the method to teach writing later on.

Discussion

The results of this research study indicated that the students’ writing problems related to the initiation of ideas in a hortatory exposition text, such as the construction of the thesis statement and the organization of arguments gradually could be solved along with the application of the Four-Square Writing Method in the writing process. This is reflected from students’ writing performance which improved during the research.
The Four-Square Writing Method is a practical method in teaching writing. It employs a graphic organizer used by the students in the prewriting Stage to develop their writing plan. This organizer is an integral component of the method which can help the students to understand, organize and recall important concept or content as it stimulates the brain activities (Baxendell, 2003). Moreover, the procedure as well as instructions given in every step of the method, also take an essential part in guiding the students to develop better writing composition. This is because through the stages of the method, the complex process of writing can be divided into several simpler and more manageable tasks for the students (Luban et al., 2009).

Another factor that may contribute to the improvement of the students’ writing performance is the application of pair/group discussions. The discussion was employed to help the students to collect information about the given issue and build up their ideas before the draft writing. Bacay (2004) states that group discussion enables the students to learn from each other and enrich their knowledge about the discussed topic. Besides, Hammer(2001) also reveals that discussion could create cooperative learning atmosphere which help the students to work better.

Besides, the improvement of students ability in writing can also be influenced by the students writing practice during the research. The repetition of writing practice during the research enable the students to recognize certain pattern of the text which results in more fluency in writing. This is in line with Flesh and Lass (1955) who point out that practice in the most important key to be able to improve ability in writing.

In conclusion, the results of the analysis above indicate that the Four-Square Writing Method facilitated the students in writing a hortatory exposition text and improved their writing performance, especially in writing and organizing the ideas they were going to write. This achievement was attained by combining the writing method with appropriate technique and media to help the students to improve their writing ability.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusions

The Four-Square Writing Method used to teach and guide the students to write a hortatory exposition text in this study consists of five steps. The steps are writing the general impression in the center box, writing three reasons in box2, 3 and 4, adding several facts for each reason, writing wrap-up and a suggestion, and finally, adding transition words in box 2, 3, 4 and 5 before finally taking the ideas off the organizer and
writing their draft. The data analysis results indicated that
The implementation of the Four-Square Writing Method had facilitated the students to
overcome their difficulties in writing, supported by the improvement of the students’
writing performance after the implementation of the Four-Square Writing Method.

Suggestions

Several suggestions are proposed to English teachers and researchers who wish
to conduct further research on the use of the Four-Square Writing Method in teaching
the skill of writing. It is suggested that English teachers implement the
Four-Square writing method in teaching writing. For better results, they could provide
feedback for the students to improve their writing. It is recommended that future
researchers apply the Four-Square Writing Method in teaching other genres of texts and
investigate the implementation of the Four-Square Writing Method in lower education
level, such as junior high school.

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