CLASSROOM ACTION RESEARCH: Using Semantic Mapping in Teaching Descriptive Paragraph

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Abstract: This classroom action research conducted to 38 participants at the seventh grade class D of SMPN 29 in 2011/2012 academic years. It tries to improve their writing skill by applying semantic mapping strategy. The researcher collecting writing tests, observations, field notes, and interview as the instrument. The date reveals that improvement exists after the treatment on the students' writing skill. The data indicates that some factors influenced their improvement. The first was brainstorming process that led them easy to convey and think about the ideas. The second was the categorization process that made them easy to determine kinds of the idea. The third was the mapping process made them easy to write a good descriptive paragraph. The last was the teacher's roles facilitated them to have an effective class.

Key Words: writing skill, descriptive paragraph, semantic mapping
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1. Introduction

Writing skill is one of important skills in learning English. Writing is definitely intended to propose the idea and thought in the well sequence, accordingly the readers are able to reach out the massage as expressed by the writer.The national curriculum set up writing as one of the expected outcomes while having English lesson. It signifies that writing should be seriously noticed in teaching and learning English. Being capable in English writing means students are able to communicate in written form.

Based on the researcher's observation in SMP Negeri 29 Pekanbaru that is as one of the public schools in Pekanbaru the school applies national curriculum in the teaching and learning English. In the curriculum clearly states that writing is one of language skill that should be possessed by the students after finishing the lesson. For more clarification, the syllabus described that student have to be able to write to vary aims and sentences such as describing, explaining and narrating the particular topics. Those must be English teacher's concern while running the class so that, the students are able to use their skill in the school circumstance and out of the school circumstance. Having a good writing skill is not easily attained. There are two aspects that should be applied, they are coherent and cohesion. Firstly coherent aspect is about the sequence of ideas compiled to organize paragraphs so that the readers do not miss the idea and they easily understand the ideas.

Further, topics given must be well developed. To start developing the topic students should generate topic sentence. Then, students decide the supporting ideas and supporting details. As the final student decide the conclusion. Thus, reader can identify the purpose, and message implied in a good organization. Cohesion aspect relates to the grammatical pattern of the sentences. This refers to writer's orientation to arrange sentences, phrase, punctuation, and even word choice. One should realize that writing needs a long process to be.

In contrast to the outcome expectation, the result of researcher's analysis of the students' exercise in writing descriptive paragraphs on 25 September, 2011 at the seventh grade class D of SMP Negeri 29 Pekanbaru, the first students had difficulty in determine topic sentence, because in determining the topic sentence they did not understand how to specify this. Second, Students were still confused to consider the supporting ideas.

Third, students jot down their ideas unstructured. The last, students are confused to consider supporting detail. So they were not able to construct the sentences well. According to the Mid-semester test students in writing a descriptive paragraph, from 39 students there were 6 students got score above 70, and 33 others students scored below 70. Thus, the result of their examination in writing descriptive paragraph was only 15% of students who could write well. For additional evidence, based on the researcher preliminary observation on 26 September, 2011 in class D was found that the teacher did not apply the exact strategy to the students to drive students write well especially descriptive paragraphs.

Extracting from the facts above, there are some suggestions for the possible solution to solve those problems above. First, Crow and Quigley (1985) and Brown and Perry (1991) found that semantic processing is the effective writing strategy and the series of studies, principally by Carrell, examined how schema theory and semantic mapping could improve students' writing skills [3]. It means that semantic mapping strategy can help students to write in English especially in writing the descriptive paragraph. Crow and Quigley argue that Semantic Mapping strategy can help students to make a good topic sentence, supporting idea and supporting details. So that students can write well and readers can understand the idea. Based on the problems and assumption of some experts which clarified above, the researcher decides to apply **Semantic Mapping** purposively to improve the students' writing skill in writing descriptive paragraph at the seventh grade students class D of SMP Negeri 29 Pekanbaru.

2. Nature of Writing

In this section, some definitions of writing are clarified. Those are derived from some experts that will be meaningful to support this research. All of those will be signified based on the relation of the ideas itself. In the first definition comes from Means and Lindner (1983: 13), define that writing is an indirect way to convey the intent of the author to the reader; it is said as an expression or speech in written form. Likewise, Richard (2003:8) defines that writing is written communication that work much on ability to generate expression in particular purpose [8].

Those experts above put down the perception of writing based on the real activity which prefers conveying the ideas, information, thought, and even argument through the written language. As following, they also tend to prioritize on the ability of putting the ideas. In fact, it is strongly needed by the writers and/or students to be creative in conveying the ideas in written language in order, the ideas can be easily reached by the reader and/or another students.

In closing, the appropriate and related definition of writing for this research refers to MacDonald and MacDonald (2002). Their definition emphasize that in writing is not merely to write the sentences, but it also require students to organize the ideas as the result, it will be in a well sequence of the ideas. This section will clarify some kinds of writing according to Hutchinson (2005:1-7) [8]. He states four of the most frequent-done kinds of writing. There are descriptive writing, expository writing, narrative writing and persuasive writing. All of those will clarify specifically below.

First, descriptive writing engages with the senses-sight, touch, taste, sound and smell. It makes possible for the readers to experience places, people and things they have never before encountered. For example, even if they have never tasted Thai sweet chili sauce, a good restaurant review can tickle their taste buds. Descriptions also allow readers to step into your shoes and see the world through your eyes or through the eyes of characters you create. Second, expository writing is a type of writing where the purpose is to inform, explain, or define the writer's subject to the reader. Expository writing is meant to give information and is the most frequently used type of writing by students in each level. A well-written exposition remains focused on its topic and lists events in chronological order. Examples of expository writing include driving directions and instructions on performing a task. Key words such as first, after, next, then and last usually signal sequential writing.

Simultaneously, narrative writing is a story that is written about the author's point of view. This story often times is inclusive of the author's emotions during important events within the story. The narrative story is written in order to make some kind of point, and this point is generally said within the first few lines. Narrative writing is often used to describe what a person does over a period of time. The final kind is persuasive writing. This kind of writing is written to convince the reader to adopt and agree about the writer's point of view to take a specific course of action. The writer will need to state the pros and cons of the topic and reiterate to the reader why the writer feel the way readers do about the topic. Likewise, persuasive writing also persuades to take the same side. Then, the writer also should invoke the strong reason to convince the readers. This will be the real persuasive if it is done as well. In relation with this research, as stated before that this research will apply semantic mapping to improve students' writing skill in writing descriptive paragraph, therefore this will be the descriptive paragraph focused on with the hope that students' writing skill in writing descriptive paragraph will be improved.

3. Descriptive Paragraph

The following is the important parts in writing descriptive paragraph [8].

- *Topic;* is the general discussion which can be specified to make the title. For example, the topic is **transportation**. Then, it can be specified into *land transportation.*

- *Title;* is the entire discussion in the text. As exemplified above that the topic is land transportation. So, in the whole text the discussion must relate to the *land transportation.*

- **Topic Sentence ;** Topic sentence is the idea that will be developed in the text. For illustration, *there are some land transportations in Indonesia.*

- **Supporting Ideas;** are ideas that support the topic sentence. For illustration, the first is a bus. This sentences support ideas of *there are some land transportation in Indonesia.*

- **Supporting Details;** are the ideas that support the supporting ideas. It can be in form of example, evidence, explanation, etc. For illustration, *in fact, a bus is available in Indonesia especially in the town.*

- **Conclusion;** is an inference of all discussion in the text. For example, *so in Indonesia have many kinds of land transportation.*

4. Teaching Writing

Here are the notions of teaching writing are asserted by some experts to support this research. In teaching writing before students write down their ideas, students are suggested to outline their ideas to make them easy in constructing into the paragraph. This notion is very meaningful, as known that outline or list of the ideas will be smoothly developed into a paragraph.

This can be worked to avoid students forget the ideas and sequence of the ideas. Some previous studies considered that in teaching writing, students must learn the structure of thinking that leads to write. Therefore, a teacher has to conceptualize to the students' mindset in writing about the steps, aspect, and the sequence activity to support the writing activity. In undisguised notion, the outline of ideas is one implementation of determining the structure of thinking in writing.

The difference is that structure of thinking is the general one and outline line is the specification of it. Functionally, they are similar, that is to make students easy and work systematically in writing. Here, Rose and Bartholomae in Deluca et. al, (2002: 2) also argue that in teaching writing, the teacher has to be serious in electing the teaching strategy and activity for the students to make them easy in mastering writing. They also suggest the teacher to make the thinking structure before beginning writing a paragraph entirely. The last support is from Haynes and Zacarian (2010: 90) who suggest the teachers to offer students direct instruction in how to write for different content [8].

In the further notion, Deluca et. al. (2002:1) emphasizes the teacher to recognize who students are. Actually, it is not as simple as knowing the students, but teacher must know the level of students in writing, the weakness the students in writing, and the need of students in learning writing. It is impossible to teach them in the advanced level material, if they are not that level. Accordingly, it will be the problem for the teacher. If the teacher knows about this, it can help the teacher to teach them to write as well in the writing class. As the further idea, in teaching writing for the beginners, the teacher should teach the students about how to describe thing or person as the easiest for them to get the concept of writing. Then they can continue to the next kind of writing easily if they really get the concept. Then, in describing something of person, students must know the focus of what will be written in their thought (Poon in Rijlaarsdam 2005). In the other notion, it can suggest the teacher to be more focus on the students' ideas while they are writing as presented below [8]:

Students write using what they know about conventionally representing words and ideas, although there are often numerous errors in this writing. Teachers may find it hard to look beyond the errors, but the focus needs to be on ideas, not mechanics.

Here the researcher does not agree with the idea above because the mechanics is also important and need to be focused. This is not about focusing in one aspect, but how the teacher separate and give the turn of the focus in the each aspect. In the end of this section, the researcher infers that in teaching writing the teacher has to be aware to choose the exact instruction. Here researcher ideas relates to the semantic mapping that intentionally gives the instruction for the students while they are writing in the classroom.

5. Writing Assessment

The following is about the writing assessment. That assessment will be run during having this research. It comes from Cohen in Richard (1998:89). Cohen separates the writing rubrics into five subdivisions. The first is about content that relates to the ideas of the students' in writing a descriptive paragraph. The second is about organization that concerns in how the students manage the ideas in writing. The next is vocabulary asserted. It focuses on how students elect the exact words in writing. As the further rubric, it is about grammar that relates to the sentences' arrangement [8]. The last will be the mechanisms that intended in spelling and punctuation.

This is considered appropriate to assess the students' writing descriptive paragraph. It is driven by the completeness of the rubrics that asserted by Cohen. In writing descriptive also needs some points that should be seriously noticed by the teacher such as content,

organization, vocabulary, grammar and mechanisms. Therefore, here the researcher decides to elect the scoring rubrics from Cohen that completely argued. Below are the rubric for writing test.

Figure 2. Rubric score

The conclusion, the researcher will use the above scoring rubrics to assess students' writing descriptive paragraph.

6. The Concept of Semantic Mapping

The researcher hereby will discuss about the concept of semantic mapping based on the assumption of some experts. To begin discussing, Berg et. al. (1984: 22) who defines that Semantic mapping is a graphic arrangement showing the major ideas and relationships in text or among word meanings. The next, Heimlich et. al. (1986:779) defines that semantic mapping is the categorical structuring of information in graphic form. The last, Antonacci (1991:174) who conceptualizes that Semantic mapping is a visual representation of knowledge, a picture of conceptual relationship. All of those ideas above generally tend to underline that semantic mapping is a method used to find an idea and develop ideas in accordance with the choice of words and sentences that relate to meaning. In addition, the arrangement of the information compile in the form of graphics that can be easily understood. Because of the information has been made and does not mix with others.

In relation with this research, the researcher would like adopt the idea from Heimlich that focuses on structuring information in the graphic. This is considered the exact concept that needs a structure in writing a paragraph to make the students easy in plotting the idea.

The procedure of Semantic Mapping that applied in this research presented in some steps that should be implemented by the teacher when applying Semantic Mapping in the class.

Introducing the topic

The teacher studies a unit in the syllabus and determines that Semantic Mapping can be useful. The teacher announces the topic of the unit by drawing a large oval on the chalkboard-an overhead projector can also be used-writing the topic inside of it. Some teachers display a picture relating to the topic to stimulate students.

Brainstorming

The teacher asks the students to think of ideas that might be related to this topic. This brainstorming phase allows students to make use of their prior knowledge or experiences. Brainstorming is an application of the schema theory, which attempts to explain.

Categorization

The teacher encourages the students to see relationships among their suggestions. As category clusters are formed, the teacher uses the same colored chalk employed in brainstorming, and records them in nodes connected by spoke like straight lines leading from the central node.

Personalizing the map

After each student has made a copy of the pre assignment map, the class is provided with some material on the topic.

Post-assignment synthesis

The last part of the class period is used to record the students' suggestions from their personal maps on the pre-assignment.

7. Methodology

The type of the research used in this study was a classroom action research which aims to improve classroom teaching and learning process. It especially was done to improve the student writing skill. Firstly, According to Burns (1999:93) defines that the application of fact finding in the classroom action research is the practical problem solving in social situation with a view to improve the quality of action within it that involves the collaboration and cooperation of researching, practitioner and laymen.

In relation with this research that was designed to improve the quality of teaching and learning activities particularly in teaching writing class at the seventh grade class D of SMP Negeri 29 Pekanbaru. The researcher was applying a collaborative classroom action research that researcher and collaborative became a team and work together to solve the problems in order to improve students' writing. Therefore the idea from Burn was strongly related with this research.

The participants of this research were at the seventh grade class D of SMP Negeri 29 Pekanbaru, there were thirty-nine students, twenty-two female and seventeen male students.

The researcher used two circles in this action research. Each circle consisted of five meeting then the fifth meeting is for the test. Each meeting embodied four steps such as plan, action, observation, and reflection. All of those had been taken from by Kemmis and McTaggart in Koshy (2005: 4) Koshy as drawn below:
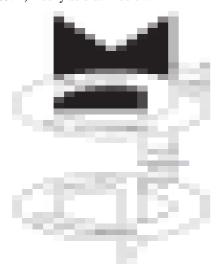

Figure 2: Action Research Spiral

8. Instrumentation of the Research

The instruments of this study are the researcher who gathers the data from the checklist of observation, field notes and the test in every step of two cycles. Those all deal with teaching and learning activities in writing class:

Observation checklist

The collaborator and the researcher together observed students, Semantic Mapping, and teacher to get the data. After observing it, researcher and collaborator discussed their findings to conduct improvement for the next meeting (see appendix 6).

Field notes

The collaborator wrote notes of activities occurring in the classroom during teaching and learning activities of using semantic mapping strategy in teaching writing.

Test

To evaluated the students' progress in teaching writing by using semantic mapping strategy is tasking students to write descriptive paragraph by writing form. Each student was asked to write about the topic discussed in the class. Then they were assessed based on indicator writing descriptive paragraph tested.

9. Technique of Data Collection

There were two steps had been used by researcher to collect the data as available below:

9.1 Collecting Quantitative Data

In collecting quantitative data, the researcher gave the writing test that is about the descriptive paragraph. The test was given to students at the end of each cycle. Then, written that made by the students was assessed based Cohen's idea. The last, it was conversed as the score of writing task.

9.2 Collecting Qualitative Data

In collecting qualitative data, the researcher used some instruments such as observation, field note, and interview. The first, from the observation checklist that listed by the collaborator is about teacher activity and Semantic Mapping. Then, field note was taken by the collaborator during having the class. The last, the chosen students were interviewed about the problems in writing and their impression of learning by using semantic mapping strategy. The researchers conducted interviews at the end of the research.

10. Technique of Data Analysis

There were two steps used by researcher to analyze the data as explained beneath:

9.1 Analyzing Quantitative Data

The researcher analyzed mean of the data by using scoring system. To saw the mean score, researcher used the theory proposed by sudijono (2008:38) as follows:

$$\mathbf{Mx} = \sum X / N$$

Where:

$\mathbf{Mx}$: the mean will be found

$\sum \mathbf{X}$: amount of the score

$\mathbf{N}$: number of case

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Then, to decide whether the students pass the minimal score, the researcher adopted the passed-score criteria:

90-100	:	excellent
80-89	:	very good
70-79	:	good
60-69	:	fair
<60	:	poor

9.2 Analyzing Qualitative Data

In analyzing the qualitative used the following steps proposed by Gay and Airasian (2000:239-253). They were as follows:

a. Data managing

The data had been collected during the study managed and organized by researcher and collaborator.

b. Reading or Memoing

This is data from the observation, field notes, and interview and also test transcripts, read so that the data analysis was easier done.

c. Classifying

The data from the observation, field note, interview and test was classified based on the category and specification of the data itself.

d. Interpreting

The last the data was interpreted into general conclusion or assumption for the qualitative data and then qualitative data interpreted as report.

10. Findings and Discussion

After analyzing quantitative and qualitative data, the researcher examined that Semantic Mapping could improve students' writing descriptive paragraphs. This could be probed by investigating facts from this research that had been collected and analyzed from tests and observations such as the ability to write at the end of each cycle, field notes and interviews.

There were some observations made by the collaborator and researcher. At this time researchers provided learning how to write descriptive paragraphs using the Semantic Mapping strategy in the classroom, watching his collaborator on the basis of observation checklist. It was intended to know the effectiveness and consistence with the expected learning objectives. Besides that, the observation checklists were to measure a better way of teaching for next meeting. After the meeting was completed, the researcher and collaborator observed learning outcomes that had been granted by giving students a test to write descriptive paragraphs using the semantic mapping strategy.

The results of first cycle test scores were presented clearly. The average of their writing score was 55, 3. It indicated that their writing was better than before which was in average 32, 8. From this test, it was known that students had an improvement to determine the main idea, supporting idea, supporting detail and arrange sentences although it was not really better than before. There were 1 student who were in level very good. In score, it was 80. The next, there were 6 students who were in a fair level of the students writing skill. In the score, it was ≥ 60. And then, 31 students who were in level poor. In score, it was <60. But their scores were better than the based score previously.

Based on by average scores of students in the first cycle that still needed improvement, researcher and collaborator discussed what was needed to be further enhanced. There were several aspects that should be improved: first was inviting students to write descriptive paragraphs by using of semantic mapping strategy to map out their ideas in writing. Second, the teacher had to teach students the appropriate word choice. Finally, the teacher had to explain the importance of grammar in writing descriptive paragraphs for their writing better.

11. Reflection

Reflection was very important in improving some of the researcher's action. There were several aspects that concluded: first was changing the feeling bored students in writing descriptive paragraphs continuously. Second, Inviting students to study harder and last, test results should be better than the previous one.

The observation was aimed to determine the effect of semantic mapping, to improve students writing in a descriptive paragraph with a semantic mapping, As a final decision, researchers conducted tests to the students with the results below.

From the test, it was known that the average of their writing score was 70, 9. There were 10 student who were in level very good. In score, it was 80. There were 8 student who were in level very good. In score, it was ≥72. The next, there were 17 students who were in a fair level of the students writing skill. In the score, it was ≥ 60. And then, 2 students who were in level poor. In score, it was <60.It meant that their skill in writing descriptive paragraph was really better than before 55, 3. The improvements of their writing skill were in arranging sentences, organizing ideas and determining main idea. The comparison of their writing score from the quiz to the second cycle was presented below:

12. Discussion

Based on the research findings, Semantic Mapping was considered as the suitable strategy to improve students writing skills in writing descriptive paragraph at the seventh grade class D of SMP Negeri 29 Pekanbaru. Semantic Mapping was not only improved their writing but also their learning process. There were some factors influenced their improvement as discussed below.

The first, materials that were contextual or always seen by them made them easy to write. As presented in the lesson plan, they were house, bedroom, kitchen, my family, classroom, library, garden, and canteen. All of those were considered familiar by the students because they always saw it. Furthermore, they were able to imagine and think about what they would write.

The second was class management. Their improvement of wring skill and its learning process was led by the researcher as the teacher in managing the class. Managing the class was about how the teacher controlled the class and the students. in this case, the teacher always tried to persuade and prevent the noisy students during having the class. Furthermore, the teacher paid attention to the students who did not focus on participate the class. This was considered the influenced factor.

The third, students' interest toward semantic mapping could help to improve their writing skill and its learning process. This was recognized from the interview that had been done. From the question was addressed most students showed their positive response while learning with semantic mapping. In fact, when students showed their interest in learning, it could help them to understand the lesson.

The fourth was the contextual media. As discussed in the previous, the materials were closed to them such as my classroom, library, canteen, etc that made them easy to write. Eventually, they could directly imagine and see the real condition of what they would write. This very contributed for the students' writing process.

The results of this research were supported by the expert and the previous researcher. The first, it was Wahyudi (2009) who examined that Semantic Mapping could improve students' comprehension, grammar, and vocabulary as found in this research. In addition, it could increase the effectiveness of its learning. The last was Antonacci (1991) who stated that semantic was the effective ways to help students put out their ideas while writing.

13. Conclusions

From the data was got through doing tests, observations, field notes, and interviews, the researchers concluded in the research some conclusions as can be seen below:

Teaching writing through Semantic Mapping could improve the students writing skill at the seventh grade class D of SMP Negeri 29 Pekanbaru.

Teaching writing through Semantic Mapping had some factors that influence the student' writing skill at the seventh grade class D of SMP Negeri 29 Pekanbaru as follows:

- Brainstorming made them easy to convey and get ideas.

- Categorization led them easy to make sentences while writing.

- The teacher as the controller and facilitator led the class more effective.

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