

Improving English Writing Skill Through Critical Reviews

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Abstrak

Beberapa tantangan dihadapi oleh mahasiswa dalam menulis dalam bahasa Inggris. Hal ini lebih buruk bagi mahasiswa yang tidak menggunakan bahasa Inggris sebagai mata pelajaran utama mereka. Mahasiswa mengaku tidak memiliki waktu khusus untuk berlatih menulis dalam bahasa Inggris. Hal ini membuat mahasiswa kesulitan dalam menulis berbahasa Inggris karena belajar menulis dalam bahasa Inggris tanpa latihan tidak akan pernah berhasil. Hal tersebut menjadi kendala besar bagi mahasiswa karena menulis merupakan salah satu keterampilan bahasa Inggris yang penting. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengatasi masalah tersebut dengan menggunakan tinjauan kritis. Tinjauan kritis dapat menjadi media untuk meningkatkan kemampuan menulis dalam bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian tindakan kelas. Prosedur analisis data dalam penelitian ini dikategorikan menjadi data kuantitatif dan kualitatif. Data kualitatif diambil dari wawancara dan data kuantitatif diambil dari tes. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tinjauan kritis dapat menjadi media alternatif yang efektif untuk meningkatkan kemampuan menulis dalam bahasa Inggris. Hal itu dibuktikan dengan peningkatan kategori nilai rata-rata siswa dari pre-test dan post-test. Rerata skor aspek content/isi meningkat dari 18,01 menjadi 22,22. Rerata skor aspek organization/pengaturan meningkat dari 11,24 menjadi 15,58. Nilai rata-rata aspek vocabulary/kosakata meningkat dari 10,82 menjadi 14,24. Nilai rata-rata aspek penggunaan bahasa meningkat dari 9,81 menjadi 14,96. Nilai rata-rata aspek mechanics/mekanik meningkat dari 3,20 menjadi 4,06. Selain itu, dari wawancara siswa juga menunjukkan sikap positif terhadap penggunaan tinjauan kritis.

Kata Kunci: *Peningkatan, Keterampilan Menulis dalam Bahasa Inggris, Tinjauan Kritis*

Abstract

Some challenges are faced by college students in dealing with writing in English. It was worse for collage students who did not have English as their main subject. Students admitted that they did not have special time to practice writing in English. It made students had difficulties in writing in English since learning writing in English without practice would never be successful. Those became big obstacles for college students as writing is one of important English skill. This study aimed to overcome that problem by using critical reviews. Critical reviews could become a media to improve English writing skill. This study was a classroom action research. The data analysis procedures in this study were categorized into quantitative and qualitative data. Qualitative data was taken from interview and

quantitative data were taken from tests. The result of the study showed that critical reviews could become the effective alternative media to improve English writing skill. It was proven by the improvement of the students' mean score category from pre-test and post-test. The mean score in content aspect improved from 18.01 became 22.22. The mean score in organization aspect improved from 11.24 became 15.58. The mean score in vocabulary aspect improved from 10.82 became 14.24. The mean score in Language use aspect improved from 9.81 became 14.96. The mean score in mechanics aspect improved from 3.20 became 4.06. Besides, from the interviews students also showed positive attitude toward the use of critical reviews.

Keywords: Improvement, English Writing Skill, Critical Reviews

1. Introduction

Some challenges are faced by college students in dealing with English as an International language. In learning English, students have to learn four aspects namely speaking, writing, listening and reading. One of the most difficult one among them is writing. Brown (2001, p.336) said that writing is considered as a complex process of putting ideas down on paper to transform thoughts into words. Besides, writing also plays an important role in the personal and professional lives. In academic side, writing has become the measurement of academic success. Therefore, Students attempt to gain more control over improvement of English writing skill (Hamid, 2012).

As we can see that in Indonesia college students should make an adequate English abstract and sometimes should publish English journals for their final project. Some students who want to continue their study to master degree have to make a good English essay for applying scholarship. After graduation, some of them who want to apply in companies have to write cover letters and a curriculum vitae in English. Those become big obstacles for college students as writing is one of difficult English skill for them. Those problems are worsen if the students are non English department students who did not learn English as their major subject.

Those problems are also faced by management students of STIE Putra Bangsa Kebumen. The students had difficulties in a good English writing since they did not learn English as their main subject. The students said that they had difficulties in making abstract or journal in English. They said that using technology such as Google Translate was not enough to get a good English writing. Some of management students who want to apply scholarship also had difficulties in writing English essay. They said that even they had learnt English so many times but they still had difficulties in language use and word choices. Some students also admitted that they were afraid of applying in company that required employee candidates to write cover letters and CV in English. They even judged themselves they could not write English well. Student said that they did not have special time to learn how to write well so that they did not find a good English in their works. They also said that they did not know how a good English should be.

Learning English writing skill is not an easy thing as writing is a complex process. Students have to learn actively along with their teachers. Students and teachers equally have fundamental roles in English writing learning process. The roles of the students are to wider their knowledge about English vocabularies, language use, grammatical and also to practice a lot while the roles of the teachers are to give students chances to practice and to give feedback.

This study aims to give an alternative solution to support students' English writing learning process using critical reviews. A critical review can be used to maximize students' and teachers' roles in English writing learning process. It is because before making the review, students need to read an English text first. It can help students wider their knowledge about English vocabularies, language use and grammar imitated from English text that they have to read regularly. Brown (2003, p. 50) quoted a popular argument at the time that learning is mainly a matter of imitation. As EFL, learning to write by imitating others is the most efficient, sure-fire method to rapidly growing as a writer. It once even became the standard method for teaching students how to write. Making critical reviews also give students chances to have English writing practices. Langan (2011) states that as writing is a skill, it makes sense that the more they practice to write, the better their writing will be. From this critical review, teachers also have chances to give feedback from the students' works. Lumetta (2005) states that feedback is the process by which the teacher provides learners with information about their performance for the purpose of improving their performance. Imitation, practices and feedback are believed can improve students' writing skill.

2. Research Method

This research was a Classroom Action Research (CAR) which means the researcher concerned changing individuals the culture of the groups, institution and societies to which they belong to (Cohen, Monion and Morrison, 2008, p. 298). This study had been conducted in one of STIE Putra Bangsa Kebumen, Indonesia. The participants consisted of seventy management students from two classes, A and B. They were selected since they met the criteria of this study. The students from those two classes were students who had the lowest score based on the pretest conducted from the beginning of this study.

There were two instruments that were used in this study. They were interviews and tests. Interview are ways of listening and gaining the understanding of people stories. Stories have been the way people have made meaning of their experiences thorough recorded history and they provide a context of behaviour Seidman (2016). The interviews were used to observe the students' problems in learning writing skill and also to find out students' attitude toward the use of critical reviews in English writing learning. The tests were used to see the improvement of students' writing skills. Scoring rubric used to assess the students is proposed by Jacobs et al (as cited in Weigle, 2002, p. 116) which focuses on five aspects of writing. They are the content, the organization, the vocabulary, the language use, and the mechanics aspect.

The data analysis procedures in this study were categorized into quantitative and qualitative data. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2008, p. 461) qualitative data analysis can be done by organizing, explaining, defining and concluding research. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2008, p. 501) says that quantitative data analysis is a powerful research form, emanating in part of positivist tradition. The quantitative data were analyzed based on the students' writing scores in the pretest and the post-test and was held in two cycles. Validity of the data is one of the main concern of the researcher. Bell (2005, p. 117) states that we could select whatever procedure for collecting the data but it should always be examined critically to access to what extent it is likely to be reliable and valid. To keep the validity of the data, researcher included a collaborator. The collaborator is an expert of Classroom Action Research (CAR) since this study is a Classroom Action Research. The collaborator was given chances to give opinions, comments, and suggestion towards the research. At the end of every cycle, discussions were

held by the researcher and collaborator to evaluate the actions that had been implemented and to decide the continuous actions in the next cycle.

3. Results and Discussion

In the results of improving students writing skill through critical reviews, two themes were highlighted: (1) improvement of students writing skill through critical reviews; (2) Students' and the teacher's attitude toward the use of critical reviews; (3) The factors that cause the improvement of the students.

3.1 Improvement of Students' Writing Skill

In improving students' writing skill, researcher did pretest, treatments (in two cycles) and post-test. Pretest was done at the first beginning of the action. The students' pretest score were found as follow.

Table 1. The Result of Pretest

Aspects	Class of A	Class of B	Mean Score
Content	18.08	18.12	18.01
Organization	11.45	11.03	11.24
Vocabulary	10.54	11.10	10.82
Language Use	11.97	11.65	9.81
Mechanics	3.19	3.22	3.20

The mean score of pretest could be categorized that students still have inadequate development in retelling the reading text that they have read, lacks logical development and sequencing, have frequent errors of word form, choice, usage and meaning obscured/ confused, have limited mechanism, consistent errors of punctuation, capitalization, and spelling, impedes readability.

Knowing the result of the pretest researcher did treatments. It was done in two cycles. Each cycles consist of 6 times of task. In every task, researcher gave reading texts recommendation that students can use in the task. They were *Reader's digest*, *TIME*, *Newsweek*, *The Jakarta Post*, *National Geographic* and etc. Besides, students could also choose from the recommendation from the teacher or find their own reading texts. After reading the materials, students were given task to write a critical review.

Every week, teacher gave feedback toward students' works. The feedback focused in content, the organization, the vocabulary, the language use, and the mechanics. After 6 weeks of the treatment, the teacher gave evaluation of students' progress by giving progress test. This test was done by the researcher to evaluate students' progress in the first cycle. The result of the progress test was as follow.

Table 2. The Result of Progress Test

Aspects	Class of A	Class of B	Mean Score
Content	20.77	20.35	20.56
Organization	14.22	13.87	14.04
Vocabulary	12.87	12.97	12.92
Language Use	13.39	13.16	13.27
Mechanics	3.61	3.58	3.60

The mean score of progress test showed that students almost match to the purpose of retelling the materials, loosely organized, limited support, logical but incomplete sequencing, still have frequent errors and meaning obscured, limited mechanism, consistent errors of punctuation, capitalization, and spelling, impedes readability.

Seeing the result of progress test, teacher and collaborator had discussion and decided to do one more cycle. It still consisted of six weeks of writing about what they had read from what students' reading activity. Researcher found that students had problem in the first cycle since they also had another reading activity of English Journal or English books from another subject. Seeing those problem, teacher and students agreed to use whatever English reading texts that students had been reading in the second cycle. Teacher still focused giving feedback in content, the organization, the vocabulary, the language use, and the mechanics. Researcher ended the second cycle by giving post-test to find the final result of the activity. The results of post-test were as follow.

Table 3. The Result of Post-Test

Aspects	Class of A	Class of B	Mean Score
Content	22.23	22.22	22,22
Organization	15.90	15.26	15.58
Vocabulary	14.42	14.06	14.24
Language Use	15.10	14.81	14.96
Mechanics	4.01	4.12	4.06

The result of the post-test can be explained that students mostly good at retelling the English reading text even still some lacks of detail, students loosely organized, and logical even though sometimes still have incomplete sequencing, occasional errors of word form, choice, usage but meaning not obscured, adequate mechanism, still have some errors in punctuation, capitalization, and spelling, need editing but does not impede readability. Those result became the reason of reseacher and collaborator to end the research.

3.2 Teacher and students' attitude in using Critical Reviews

To find students attitude toward the learning using critical reviews researcher used interviews. The interviews were done before and after the treatments. The interviews overview the obstacle in learning English Writing, English writing activities in the classroom, the way their teachers teach, and materials.

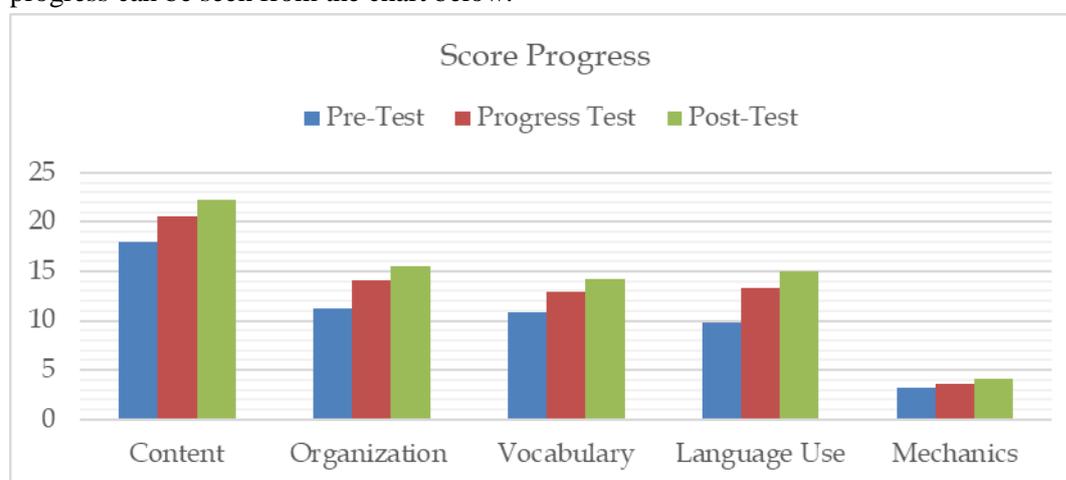
Researcher found from the interview before the treatment that seventy students said that English is difficult especially If they were asked to make sentences in English. Seventy students also did not have special activities to improve that problem. It happened since English is not students' major subject. Seventy students said that writing in English is difficult since they did not know much vocabularies in English. Sixty four students learn about grammar and vocabularies in some meetings with their English teacher. They strengthen their knowledge about grammar with making some sentences after getting explanation from their teacher. Seventy students got feedback from their teacher.

After doing the treatments, researcher took another interview. Researcher found that after using critical review tasks sixty five students got some new vocabularies from the English

text since they have to translate it into Bahasa Indonesia. Seventy students said that English is still difficult because they have to memorize a lot of vocabularies but sixty one students said that when they use them so many times it is easier for them to remember. Using critical reviews students finally have special activities to improve writing skill. fifty seven students enjoyed the the use of critical reviews as their English writing learning activities. Besides, sixty six students said that they knew their mistake since the teacher always gave feedback of what their good and their mistake in writing English.

3.3 The Factors that Cause the Improvement of the Students

Considering the aforementioned findings, it could be deduced that critical reviews can become effective alternative media to improve students' writing skill. It can be seen from the improvement of students' writing skill score from pretest, progress test and post test. The progress can be seen from the chart below.



There are three points in this study that are believed become factors toward the improvement of students' score. The first one is students imitated and enrich their language use and vocabulary through reading activities before writing critical reviews. This is believed by researcher as the main factor that make significant improvement of students' language use and vocabularies. Before, from the interview, students said that the most difficult for the students in writing is lacking of vocabulary (word choice). As we can see in the chart that students showed significant improvement. This is well said that students enrich their vocabulary and language use since they learn those from the reading texts. Even though reading is not the only way to improve students' vocabulary but students cannot improve vocabulary unless they read a lot. This beliefs is supported by (Belzer, 2007) the only realistic chance students with poor vocabulary have to catch up to their peer with rich vocabularies that they engage in extraordinary amount of independent reading.

The second factor that cause the improvement of the students through critical reviews the opportunity to practice English writing. Students said that before using critical reviews they did not have special activities to improve their English writing skill. It is because English is not their main subject. They did not have reason to learn English writing skill whereas practice is a must when learning language. This belief is supported by Langan (2011). He states that as writing is a skill, it makes sense that the more they practice to write, the better their writing will be. Writing practice through critical reviews can help students to have activity in practicing

writing in English. This is really useful for students especially to the students who do not have English as their major subject.

The last factor is students get direct feedback from their teacher. Direct feedback from their teacher is very important. It is proved by students' beliefs that they remember their mistake as the teacher keep reminding students' mistakes. Besides, feedback also give a chance to the teachers to give suggestions about the content, organizations, and the mechanism. This belief is supported by (Ferris, 2004), (Mulati et all, 2020), (Latifah et all, 2018) who stated that corrective feedback might be appropriate for beginner level of students and when the students' errors are not treatable, that is, when students are not able to do such self-correct.

4. Conclusion

Based on the result of the data analyzed in this research, it can be concluded that the implementation of critical reviews in the practicing of English writing is believed to be an effective way to improve the students' writing skills. The result showed that students could minimize their writing problems especially in the five aspects of writing, they are the content, the organization, the vocabulary, the language use, and the mechanics aspect. Besides, through the given feedback and regular writing practice, the students did not make the same mistakes in their future so that they could have better writing. It is also described the improvement on the students' writing skills which could be seen from the results of the students' writing scores. The results showed that the mean scores of the students' writing increased in each cycle. The students also showed positive attitudes towards the use of critical reviews. The students involvement during finding good English text indicated that they were interested with the activity.

After conducting this action research, the researcher proposes the suggestions for English teacher that it is very important for the English teacher, to consider at giving more attention on the writing skills especially for students who do not have English as their major subject. The teacher could consider using critical reviews as the media to provide more writing practices to the students. Teachers also can wider the activity not only reading but also others skills like speaking and listening. For other researchers. The result of this research can be used as one of references for other researchers who want to conduct the similar study related to the use of critical reviews.

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