

THE COMBINATION OF TASK-BASED LEARNING (TBL) APPROACH AND AUDIO VISUAL AIDS TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' ACADEMIC WRITING SKILLS

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Abstract

This research was primarily conducted to prove that the combination of Task-Based Learning (TBL) approach and audio visual aids could improve the students' academic writing skills and to describe the students' responses after learning academic writing skill through the combination of TBL approach and audio visual aids. This research is Classroom Action Research (CAR), which was performed in two cycles (cycle 1 and cycle 2). Each cycle consisted of four meetings. The sample of the research is the fourth semester students of English Language Education Study Program of Catholic University of Saint Thomas North Sumatera in the Academic Year of 2017/2018. There are 21 students as the subject of the research. The analysis of quantitative data showed that the students' mean score increased continuously from 66,05 in the pretest, 78,62 in the posttest of cycle 1 to 88,81 in the posttest of cycle 2. The analysis of qualitative data showed that the learning teaching processes of academic writing skill, particularly writing the English essays through the combination of TBL approach and audio visual aids ran very well. The combination of TBL approach and audio visual aids could also increase the students' interest, motivation and involvement in the classroom activities. It is advisable that teachers or lecturers of English language should try combining TBL approach and audio visual aids to improve their students' academic writing skills.

Keywords: TBL approach, audio visual aids, students' academic writing skills, Classroom Action Research

Abstrak

Penelitian ini dilakukan untuk membuktikan bahwa kombinasi pendekatan Task-Based Learning (TBL) dan alat bantu audio visual dapat meningkatkan kemampuan menulis akademik siswa dan untuk mendeskripsikan respon siswa setelah belajar keterampilan menulis akademik melalui kombinasi pendekatan TBL dan alat bantu audio visual. Penelitian ini adalah Penelitian Tindakan Kelas (PTK), yang dilakukan dalam dua siklus (siklus 1 dan siklus 2). Setiap siklus terdiri dari empat pertemuan. Sampel penelitian adalah mahasiswa semester empat Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris Universitas Katolik Saint Thomas Sumatera Utara pada Tahun Ajaran 2017/2018. Ada 21 siswa sebagai subjek penelitian. Analisis data kuantitatif menunjukkan bahwa rata-rata skor siswa meningkat terus dari 66,05 pada pretest, 78,62 pada posttest siklus 1 menjadi 88,81 pada posttest siklus 2.

Analisis data kuantitatif menunjukkan bahwa belajar proses pengajaran keterampilan menulis akademik, khususnya menulis esai bahasa Inggris melalui kombinasi pendekatan TBL dan alat bantu audio visual berjalan dengan sangat baik. Kombinasi pendekatan TBL dan alat bantu audio visual juga dapat meningkatkan minat, motivasi dan keterlibatan siswa dalam kegiatan kelas. Disarankan bahwa guru atau dosen bahasa Inggris harus mencoba menggabungkan pendekatan TBL dan alat bantu audio visual untuk meningkatkan kemampuan menulis akademik siswa mereka.

Kata kunci: pendekatan TBL, alat bantu audio visual, keterampilan menulis akademik siswa, Penelitian Tindakan Kelas

I. INTRODUCTION

There are four language skills which are needed to complete communication. They are listening, speaking, reading, and writing. One of these four language skills which is very crucial and most required in academic field is writing. In all academic situations where writing in English is required, students must be able to present their ideas in a clear, well-organized manner. Bram (2012:114) states that the term writing may be defined as (learners') using written language across or sharing ideas with others, particularly in a one-paragraph composition. As a skill, writing is often taken for granted. But the fact shows that teaching writing is not an easy task because students often face some difficulties to write about what they think in their mind and state it on a piece of paper or on a computer screen.

The students of English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Catholic University of Saint Thomas North Sumatera learn Writing I-Writing IV subjects. They are equipped with writing skills in order to be able to write in the English language correctly. They are prepared with academic writing skills related to their future career as English teachers. The purposes of mastering academic writing skills are not only to equip themselves in order to be able to complete writing their *Sarjana's* theses but also to prepare themselves to be qualified teachers, writers or researchers. Based on the researchers' observations towards the fourth semester students of English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Catholic University of Saint Thomas North Sumatera in the Academic Year of 2017/2018 when they were learning Writing IV subject, it was found that most of the students sometimes had low expectation of writing so they were not motivated to learn this skill, whereas in fact, writing like any other skills can be improved by strong motivation and steady practices.

In the context of English as a foreign language (EFL) and of English as a second language (ESL), writing might be a very challenging language skill for learners to master. Wishon & Burks (1980:viii) state that the thoughtful teacher usually faces a dilemma in deciding how much or how little correcting to do on the students' papers. Often, there is a tendency for the teacher to make so many corrections on his/her students' compositions. The researchers also experience the same thing during teaching Writing I-Writing IV subjects. The researchers tend to make so many corrections on the compositions written by their students. In the present context, the primary focus is on

a number of grammatical errors, for instance missing a determiner (as in **I want to be English teacher*, instead of *I want to be an English teacher*) and no concord/agreement between the subject and the finite verb (as in **Her children is studying English now*, instead of *Her children are studying English now*). Unfortunately, when their students read over their compositions, they generally are unable to identify many of their errors.

The writing problems faced by the researchers' students motivate them to find a probable solution in order to solve the problems. To succeed in writing, in expressing themselves, the students need then to equip themselves with at least a number of fundamental abilities such as how to use punctuations and construct simple sentences in the target language correctly. Now, a relevant question to ask is: What can a teacher/lecturer do to encourage his/her students to reduce their writing problems and to improve his/her students' academic writing skills? Well, the combination of Task-Based Learning (TBL) approach and audio visual aids might be an alternative.

Task-Based Learning (henceforth, TBL) approach is a further refinement of Contextual Language Teaching approach, emphasizing the successful completion of tasks as both the organizing feature and the basis for assessment of language instruction. In this learning (teaching) approach, a task to produce a writing product is a key factor. The next question to raise might be: What is a task? A task is an activity in which a person engages in order to attain an objective, and which necessitates the use of language (Van den Branden, 2006). In a similar vein, Loschky & Bley-Vroman (1993) say that a task may refer to an activity involving the use of language where participants or learners share information with one another. It should be stressed that in the current context, the focus is on writing tasks carried out by EFL learners to produce compositions which contain as few mistakes as possible. TBL approach is advantageous to the students because it is more student-centered, allows for more meaningful communication, and often provides for practical extra-linguistic skill building. As the tasks are likely to be familiar to the students, they are more likely to be engaged, which may further motivate them in their language learning (Napitupulu, 2012:37).

Besides applying an appropriate approach, the use of media is also something that may not be ignored in order to get the success of learning teaching process. Media can be used to make the learning teaching process more effective and to help achieve the learning objectives written in the syllabus and lesson plans. Using audio visual aids may help students enjoy learning and make them more creative and imaginative in expressing their fresh ideas. Considering this matter, the researchers decided to combine TBL approach and audio visual aids (in this case, motivational videos) in order to improve their students' academic writing skills.

Teaching academic writing skills is not an easy task. The researchers strongly believe that the use of an appropriate approach and media in the learning teaching process of academic writing skills can improve their students' motivation and interest in learning academic writing skills. If their motivation and interest in learning academic writing skills improve, their academic writing skills will definitely improve. The strong belief made the researchers interested in conducting a research entitled *The Combination of*

Task-Based Learning (TBL) Approach and Audio Visual Aids to Improve Students' Academic Writing Skills.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. Task-Based Learning (TBL) Approach

The recent years have seen a growing interest in TBL approach, and the role of tasks in second or foreign language acquisition. TBL approach, a methodology that is widely used in language learning (Ellis, 2003; Willis & Willis, 2007), is believed to be known as an approach which enjoys the potential to make up for the inadequacies of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and can be considered as a logical development of it (Richards & Rodgers, 2001:223).

TBL approach is an approach which emphasizes the successful completion of tasks as both the organizing feature and the basis for assessment of language instruction. Based on the theory of TBL approach, a number of positive findings have supported the pedagogical advantages of this approach. It is acknowledged that TBL approach is potentially motivating, stimulating, empowering, and challenging. Besides, TBL approach lies at the heart of autonomy in language learning. Therefore, students can work on their own, in small groups, or as a class to complete a project, sharing their ideas and real life experiences.

The following are the steps of implementing TBL approach according to Willis (1996):

Pre-task

In the pre-task, the teacher will present what will be expected of students in the task phase. Additionally, the teacher may prime the students with key vocabulary or grammatical constructs, although, in "pure" task-based learning lessons, these will be presented as suggestions and the students would be encouraged to use what they are comfortable with in order to complete the task. The instructor may also present a model of task by either doing it themselves or by presenting picture, audio, or video demonstrating the task.

Task

During the task phase, the students perform the task, typically in small groups, although that is dependent on the type of activity. And unless the teacher plays a particular role in the task, the teacher's role is typically limited to one of an observer or counselor-thus the reason for it being a more student-centered methodology.

Planning

Having completed the task, the students prepare either a written or oral report to present to the class. The instructor takes questions and otherwise simply monitor the students.

Report

The students then present this information to the rest of the class. Here the teacher may provide written or oral feedback, as appropriate, and the students who are observing may do the same.

Analysis

Here the focus returns to the teacher who reviews what happened in the task, in regards to language. It may include language forms that the students were using, problems that the students had, and perhaps forms that need to be covered more or were not used enough.

Practice

The practice stage may be used to cover material mentioned by the teacher in the analysis stage. It is an opportunity for the teacher to emphasize key language.

Seeing that the task-based instruction is student-centered, the teacher plays an important role in providing support and guidance throughout the learning of writing in and out of the classroom. After the experience of writing a meaningful final product, the students have found themselves more capable of expressing their own ideas in English and evaluating peers' work. Simultaneously, they have gradually developed a sense of dignity and even mental growth, while improving their own language.

2. Audio Visual Aids

Audio visual aids are considered as a help for teachers to clarify, establish, co-relate and co-ordinate accurate concepts, interpretations and appreciations as well as they enable the teachers to make learning teaching process more concrete, effective, interesting, inspirational and vivid. On the other hand, when used appropriately as teaching aids, audio visual aids help the learners enjoy, understand and communicate for better results especially with foreign languages, which aims to involve the communication of ideas through the senses either orally through the medium of speech or visually by the use of written or printed material. There is a close relationship between audiovisual aids and learning teaching process, where a teacher may use it as a medium for a fruitful result. Allou (2013) states that audio visual aids, materials, media, communication technology, instructional media, learning resources educational technology and instructional technology are broadly meant the same thing.

Hence, the audio visual aids are based on two senses, namely the hearing and the vision of an individual learner. There is a Chinese proverb saying, "If I hear, I forget, If I see I remember, If I do, I know". This proverb shows the importance of the sensory perception in the learningteaching situation. However, the audio visual aids enhance clarity in communication and provide diversity in method.

2.1 The Kinds of Audio Visual Aids

According to Khirwadkar (2004:197-208), there are four kinds of audio visual aids. They are films, television, video and CDs. The four kinds of audio visual aids are elaborated as follows:

Films

Films represent an effective instructional device to cater to the students' attention and create interest and motivation among them towards effective learning. Films are projected with the help of projectors.

Television

The television in the present day society is one of the most important teaching aids. Television based instruction helps students learn in a better way. As the topics of discussion are announced in advance and if well qualified persons are invited to discuss on the relevant topics or to give lectures, teachers can easily plan their work and incorporate in classroom instruction.

Video

Video is a viable aid towards effective learning and teaching. Teaching with the help of video is called video-aided instruction. In video-aided instruction, learners' comprehension is generally tested through a questionnaire and video is clearly an instructional medium that generates a much greater amount and enjoyment than the more traditional printed material. In this research, the researchers used motivational videos in order to improve their students' academic writing skills.

CDs

Cds can be programmed and the user can quickly access any part of the disc. Even they can be programmed to play in any desired sequence. Information can also be selectively retrieved by the students. A major advantage of the cd is its resistance to damage.

3. Academic Writings

A broad definition of academic writing is any writing done to fulfill a requirement of a college or university. Academic writing is also used for publications that are read by teachers and researchers or presented at seminars or conferences. Bailey (2006:8) states that academic writing is for international students studying in colleges and universities where courses are taught in English. Those students who are not native speakers of English often find the written demands of their courses very challenging. In addition to learning English for academic purposes, they need to adopt new conventions of style, referencing and layout.

Research proposals, research papers, research articles, conference papers, books, translations, academic journals, theses, dissertations, and essays are included into academic writings. In this research, the researchers combined TBL approach and audiovisual aids in order to improve their students' skill in writing English essays.

3.1 Essay

An essay is a group of paragraphs written about a single topic and a central main idea. It must have at least three paragraphs, but a five-paragraph essay is a common length for academic writing. An essay has three main parts (Zemach & Rumisek, 2005:56). They are:

The Introduction

This is the first paragraph of an essay. It explains the topic with general ideas. It also has a thesis statement. This is a sentence that gives the main idea. It usually comes at or near the end of the paragraph.

The Main Body

These are the paragraphs that explain and support the thesis statement and come between the introduction and the conclusion. There must be one or more paragraphs in the main body of an essay.

The Conclusion

This is the last paragraph of an essay. It summarises or restates the thesis and the supporting ideas of the essay.

The following is the example of an English essay entitled Fear of the Speech. This English essay was taken from Writing and Grammar: Communication in Action written by Carroll, Wilson & Forlini (2001).

Fear of the Speech
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Omaha, Nebraska

High school can be a scary place. Deadlines loom like stone sentinels in the future. Previous grades and papers haunt the past. Besides academic anxieties, social scares also abound. Above all of these, there is one event that can strike terror into even the most confident student's heart; something that can make the prom queen's knees shake and the valedictorian's hair stand on end. This dreaded occurrence is, yes, a speech in English class.

In theory, classes in public speaking provide a excellent opportunity to become accustomed to speaking in front of people before having to conduct presentations in the business world. After all, one gets to speak in a familiar classroom environment in front of friends, right? Wrong. First of all, sitting at a desk is completely different from standing in front of the room looking at everyone with everyone looking back. Second, those sweet best friends, no matter how close they are, will enjoy teasing and heckling a poor stuttering classmate all too much. It's all in good fun, but the teasee often doesn't realize the teaser is teasing until his or her feelings are already hurt.

Class speeches in high school aren't greatly helping students once they reach the business world, either. A recent survey conducted by our local newspaper found that public speaking in the second-most common fear among adults. Only bugs and other creepy-crawly things provoke anxiety.

So, what can be done? Is there anything that can keep a normal, talkative student from becoming absolutely speechless once she steps up to the lectern? You may not be able to completely overcome your fear, but preparation, a strong will, and some relaxed breathing can help you keep your fear from getting the best of you.

Fear of forgetting is a major cause of anxiety for almost all speakers. There are a few things you can do beforehand to make remembering the

speech easier. If note cards are allowed, write down key points and the statistics, and keep it short. Too much detailed information on the note cards will just get in the way when you are delivering your speech. If the speech must be completely memorized, your best bet is to memorize the opening and closing statements and have a good idea of what you need to say in between. It is almost impossible to try to memorize a speech word for word, and it is better to have a solid, logical outline that can easily be modified on the spot.

Anyone who has ever stood in front of a class and felt numb or panicky has probably had the same thought: "Why didn't I practice more?" The more familiar you are with your material, the more comfortable you'll be when the dreaded hour strikes. Practice in the morning before you go to school. Practice on the bus. Practice in front of the mirror before you go to bed. Keep at it until you feel as if you are speaking in your sleep. Practice is the most effective fear-buster.

Of course, once you stand in front of the class, all your preparation can fly right out the window. Utter terror can leave even the best-prepared student with a blank mind, a dry mouth, and a roomful of staring eyes. The only way to combat this is to stay calm. Concentrate on your breathing. Calm breathing can make remembering easier and keep you from passing out, which is not a good thing. However, don't overdo it—hyperventilating won't help. Take a few deep breaths before starting the speech and try concentrate on speaking slowly and clearly. Do not drink massive doses of soda beforehand. Not only will this energy overload make you nervous and excitable, but the sugar can coat the back of your throat and vocal cords, making it difficult to speak clearly.

Sometimes, a simple psychological placebo can make the difference between a stuttering utterance and a stunning speech. Wearing a "lucky" shirt or a necklace or performing a prespeech mental ritual can soothe your nerves. If props or visual aids are allowed, by all means use them. Props give your hands something to do and help shift the audience's gaze away from your face.

There are a few gifted people who have no problems getting up in front of crowds and talking until the cows come home. For the rest of us, learning to speak comfortably in class is an inevitable challenge that we have to face and conquer. Like parachuting out of an airplane, you may not feel truly relieved until it's over, but after one or two jumps, you might even begin to enjoy the journey.

II. METHODOLOGY OF THE RESERACH

This is Classroom Action Research (henceforth, CAR). Burns (2010:2) says that CAR is a part of a broad movement that has been going on in education generally for some time. It is related to the ideas of reflective practice and the teacher as a researcher. It means that CAR is a process of research done by the teacher for repairing and improving the learning in the classroom. Action research is different from other more conventional or

traditional types of research in that it is much focused on individual or small-group professional practice and is not so concerned with making general statement (Wallace, 1998:18). Furthermore, McKay (2006:29) says that action research has three major characteristics: it is carried out by practitioners (i.e., classroom teachers), it is collaborative, and it is aimed at changing things. It means that action research can be done by a teacher in a classroom with the help of other teachers to discuss what and how to improve the classroom activities so that the students' learning achievement will be much better.

Based on the definitions above, it is concluded that CAR is a form of research in which an idea in a social or educational situation is applied in order to improve or change something to be better, or to get real effect on the situations. In carrying out this CAR, the first researcher collaborated with the second researcher to help her define and explore certain problems and needs in the classroom.

The researchers used CAR model developed by Kemmis & McTaggart (1998). This CAR was arranged into two cycles, namely cycle one and cycle two. Kemmis & McTaggart (1998) state that action research typically involves four broad phases in a cycle of research. The four phases in a cycle are: (1) planning, (2) action, (3) observation, and (4) reflection. The four phases can be seen in the figure 3.1.

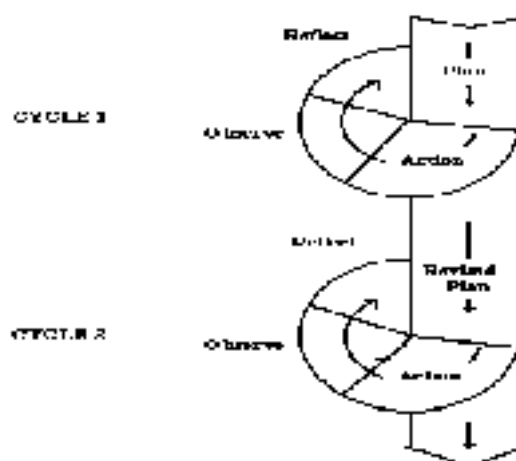


Figure 2.1 The Classroom Action Research (CAR) Model Developed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1998)

The four steps in cycle 1 and cycle 2 are explained as follows:

1) Planning

Planning is the first step of the CAR procedure. This activity covers the problem identification. This is the most important step in conducting CAR as by knowing the problems, the researchers could find an excellent solution to solve the problems.

2) Action

In this step, the scenario of learning teaching processes of academic writing skill through the combination of TBL approach and audio visual aids was implemented in the classroom activities.

3) Observation

Observation was done when the action was being done. In this step, the students' participation and behaviour and the first researcher's action during the learning teaching processes of academic writing skill through the combination of TBL approach and audio visual aids were observed by the second researcher who acted as a collaborator in this research. It was done in order to get the actual data and to be used as a reflection to improve the quality of learning teaching processes of academic writing skill through the combination of TBL approach and audio visual aids.

4) Reflection

The data which were obtained such as the students' writing scores in the pretest, posttest of cycle 1 and posttest of cycle 2, the extent of students' participation and behaviour, and the first researcher's action during the learning teaching processes of academic writing skill through the combination of TBL approach and audio visual aids were collected and analyzed. In brief, the quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed to assess the students' progress or achievement in learning academic writing skill through the combination of TBL approach and audio visual aids.

THE SAMPLE OF THE RESEARCH

The sample of the research are the fourth semester students of English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Catholic University of Saint Thomas North Sumatera in the Academic Year of 2017/2018. The numbers of students in that class are 21 students, consisting of 18 female students and 3 male students.

There are two reasons why the researchers chose the university as the location of the research. They are: 1) Based on the preliminary observation done by the researchers during teaching the subjects of Writing I-Writing IV, it was found that the students' academic writing skills need to be improved, and 2) Based on the researchers' knowledge, there has never been any research about improving students' academic writing skills through the combination of TBL approach and audio visual aids.

III. RESULT

After analyzing the quantitative and qualitative data, it was found that the combination of TBL approach and audio visual aids could improve the students' academic writing skills, particularly writing the English essays. It could be seen from the increasing of the students' mean score from the pretest to the posttest of cycle 2. The students' mean score in the pretest is 66,05, in the posttest of cycle 1 is 78,62, and in the posttest of cycle 2 is 88,81. From the result, it was concluded that the combination of TBL approach and audio visual aids had successfully improved the students' academic writing skills.

IV. DISCUSSION

The students' responses to the learning teaching processes of academic writing skills through the combination of TBL approach and audio visual aids are very positive. All of them agreed that the combination of TBL

approach and audio visual aids could improve their academic writing skills, particularly writing the English essays. The analysis of qualitative data showed that the students were more active and enthusiastic in writing the English essays after TBL approach and audio visual aids were combined in the writing classes.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

To wrap up, the researchers conclude that:

- 1) The combination of TBL approach and audio visual aids could improve the students' academic writing skills, particularly writing the English essays. It could be seen from the increasing of the students' mean score from the pretest to the posttest of cycle 2. The students' mean score in the pretest is 66,05, in the posttest of cycle 1 is 78,62, and in the posttest of cycle 2 is 88,81. From the result, it was concluded that the combination of TBL approach and audio visual aids had successfully improved the students' academic writing skills.
- 2) The students' responses after learning academic writing skill through the combination of TBL approach and audio visual aids are very positive. All of them agreed that the combination of TBL approach and audio visual aids could improve their academic writing skills, particularly writing the English essays. The analysis of qualitative data showed that the learning teaching atmosphere became more alive and enjoyable after TBL approach and audio visual aids were combined in the writing classes so that the students were more active and enthusiastic in writing the English essays.

In line with the conclusions, it is advisable that:

teachers/lecturers of English especially whose primary task is to teach academic writing skill should teach academic writing skill by combining TBL approach and audio visual aids because the combination of TBL approach and audio visual aids can create a pleasant and challenging learning atmosphere so that students feel more motivated and interested in learning academic writing skill,

the learners of English are suggested to practice writing more and more. The more they practice writing, the better their writing skill will be. They should be active and enthusiastic in the writing classes and need not to be shy or afraid of making mistakes. They could combine TBL approach and audio visual aids as one of alternatives to help them improve their academic writing skills, particularly writing the English essays.

other writers who are going to conduct much deeper studies on improving students' academic writing skills through the combination of TBL approach and audio visual aids; the results of this research are expected to be able to provide them valuable information about how to improve students' academic writing skills through the combination of TBL approach and audio visual aids.

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