

CONFERCING APPROACH IN PROMOTING WRITING ABILITY: A CLASSROOM ACTION RESEARCH STUDY ON LANGUAGE CREATIVE WRITING IN INDONESIAN LANGUAGE

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Abstract

In recent days there is a growing interest in the study of creative writing. A number of approaches for teaching creative writing have also been investigated. However, studies investigating creative writing particularly for primary school students are hardly to find. The aim of the present research is to figure out how conferencing approach is applied to teach poetry writing and to find out the impact of this approach to the students' writing skills. The study used a classroom action research with 30 sixth-grade students as the participants. To ensure the present approach effectively improves the learning achievement, the study used three cycles of teaching steps, including classical, group, and individual. Various media and sources to support the learning activities were also used. The results of the study show that there is a significant improvement in students' writing skills, in which the average score of the third cycle was twice higher than that of the first cycle. This suggests that conferencing instruction had been successful in improving students' writing skills. The process of interaction, both among students and between students and the teachers, were also emphasized. In addition, the teachers gained an experience of assessing poetry writing analytically using four aspects: creative idea, diction, information, and imagination.

Keywords: conferencing approach; creative writing teaching; primary school

Creative writing is defined as a writing process based on the development of personal creativity and expression in a form of good and interesting writing (Yunus, 2015, p. 2). Creative writing, especially poetry writing, is taught to make students learn how to appreciate literary works, and begins from reading to writing a literary product. Poetry is a form of aesthetics commonly used by adolescents as a medium that serves to tell about experiences in ways that are not censored by the structure and rules (Jocson, 2005). The reading, writing, and performance of poetry offer youth not only affective but also academic affordances (Hawkins & Certo, 2014). Poetry teaching in schools is very important because students are required to express their ideas into an expressive writing and enables them to express feelings that they do not normally tell others. According to Pebriana (2015), the teaching of poetry writing in primary schools can help students express their ideas, feelings, and experiences. This is in line with Zulela's (2012) opinion that poetry teaching in primary schools is necessary because poetry is a contentful and expressive literary work.

Creative writing is divided into several literary works including poetry, prose, narration and drama (Bishop, 1993). The focal point of this study is poetry writing because it is found that poetry writing skill was considered to be low as indicated by the low scores of Indonesian subject among primary

school students in grade six. Out of 30 students, half of the them had met the minimum mastery criteria.

Some approaches to improve writing skills have been studied previously. Warren, Dondlinger, & Barab (2008) suggest that the problem-based learning approach and games improved students' writing skills and achievement. In addition, active learning approach could also trigger students to write better. Komalasari (2013) suggests that active learning technique takes place when students are given more chances to write about what is relevant to them. Students will find it easier to understand the materials by studying them than just listening to the teacher (Wardiah, 2016).

However, an approach that is more teacher-centered has resulted in lowering students' performance. Based on initial observation, the dominant role of teaching in the teaching process has resulted in the lower performance as teachers spent too much time on giving explanation. In order to address this problem, an approach that is more student-centered is required so that students can actively participate in learning, and one the approaches is conference approach. Some studies suggest that students who were given this approach outperformed than those who did not experience the approach.

When implemented in primary school context, this approach cannot be applied without the assistance of other teaching media. Teaching writing using media seem to offer alternative and more

effective features than conventional teaching without the use of media (Clark, 1983). In addition to using media, learning outside the classroom can influence students' writing skills. As stated by Gardner and Kuzich (2017) a writing stimulated by a natural environment is qualitatively better than writing in the classroom. For children, group study can feel like playing in a school environment. Jacquest (1992) suggests that the benefits of studying in groups in general include developing collaborative skills, learning from the experience of others, having a sense of belonging to social groups, supporting each other, learning to make collaborative decisions, idea sharing, and developing creativity. Intrinsically, the group study can develop imagination, critical thinking, creative thinking, knowledge, awareness of interests, academic awareness, social responsibility and elicit happiness in a lifelong learning. Based on the above explanation, it can be seen that learning in a conferencing group elicits interests in acquiring knowledge in the best possible way. Learning in groups is also a process of rich and total experience (Talmage, Pascarella, & Ford, 1984).

It is claimed that writing poetry should be based on a sense of pleasure to produce meaningful poetry and reach the reader (Benton, 1984). As evidenced by Martinez, Kock, and Cass (2011), the feelings of students affect their writing skills. The students learned how to express themselves through poetry and could interact with their peers as well as with the teacher (Hadaway, Vardell, & Young, 2001). Based on initial observation to teaching poetry writing, the teaching process is often off the track. Many students seemed to struggle to generate ideas, imagination, and creativity when writing poetry.

Writing is closely related to language (Granger, 1998). Many studies find out that it is the most difficult skill in comparison with the other three skills namely listening, speaking, and reading (Lea & Street, 1998; Flower & Hayes, 1981; Graham & Harris, 2000). This is most likely due to the fact that writing requires such aspects as grammatical intricacy (Truscott, 1999), lexical density (Johansson, 2009), cohesion and coherence (Connor, 1984). In other words, written language appears to be more formal than spoken one. In writing, one cannot directly revise expressions such as in spoken utterances.

In this paper, the language focused is Indonesian. There are certainly some differences between Indonesian and other languages; however, experts believe that there are basic rules in languages. Some others call this universal grammar (Meisel, 1991). It confirms several similarities in languages such as the existence of subjects, predicators, objects, and so on in sentences. Even though the order is not always the same, most of the languages have the aforementioned parts to form a sentence (Pollock, 1989). In writing poetry, students

are required to have adequate skills of language, in addition to creativity (Amabile, 1985).

Conferencing approach enables students' interactions with peers and with the teacher (Hartati, 2016). As Calkins (1986) puts it, conferencing is meaningful if students learn to interact with their writings. Students confer with teachers and with the peers by means of guided training. Conferencing is a part of guided writing that is very useful if implemented appropriately. The students need feedbacks from the teacher and their peers. According to Kupper-Herr (2000), conferencing with students in writing is very essential and is different from a writing process because it enables personal interaction between the teacher and the students that is hardly to happen outside the classroom. As a pioneer of conferencing approach, Graves (1983) suggests that the teacher move around the classroom, from one student's table to another, to begin the conference. This is important to stimulate students to solve difficult problems and discover something hidden in their experiences. The objective of conferencing, according to Thomason (1998), is to inspire the writer by paying attention to what he is saying.

Thus, a classroom action research to improve the teaching was used to find out how a conferencing method is applied to teaching poetry and to find out the improvement of students' skills in writing poetry as a result of the application of the approach. It is expected that the students could be able to write poetry well in accordance with the elements of poetry, read and write with pleasure, and develop collaborative skills, listening skills, idea delivery skills, and persuasive skills.

METHOD

This study used a classroom action research method, which is a research through self-reflection strategy. This method has characteristics of active participation and collaboration of education practitioners to improve student achievement and teacher performance, and solve classroom problems. According to Kusumah and Dwitagama (2010), a classroom action research should be undertaken if the number of students achieving a given competency is less than 75%.

The subjects were 30 sixth-grade students at Al Muhajirin Primary School in Purwakarta, Indonesia. They were selected based on their problems associated with students' poetry writing skills and other information, such as summative scores, interviews with students, teachers, and the principal. The obtained information was then used to develop the research instruments. The study was conducted in six weeks.

Research Design

The research design is referred to Kemmis and

McTaggart's model (Hartati et al. 2008). Every cycle consists of planning, observing, and reflecting as illustrated in Figure 1.

It illustrates the research design adapted from Kemmis and McTaggart, beginning with classroom problem identification, problem formulation, and planning the teaching procedures using conferencing approach. Afterwards, the plan was then piloted in accordance with the conferencing instruction

procedures wherein there was a process of observation which is the next step in this research, aiming to find out if the implementation went as planned and to see how far it affected the learning process and outcomes. This was intended to produce the desired changes. The next step was reflection. This was to evaluate the impact of applying conferencing approach to teaching writing poetry.

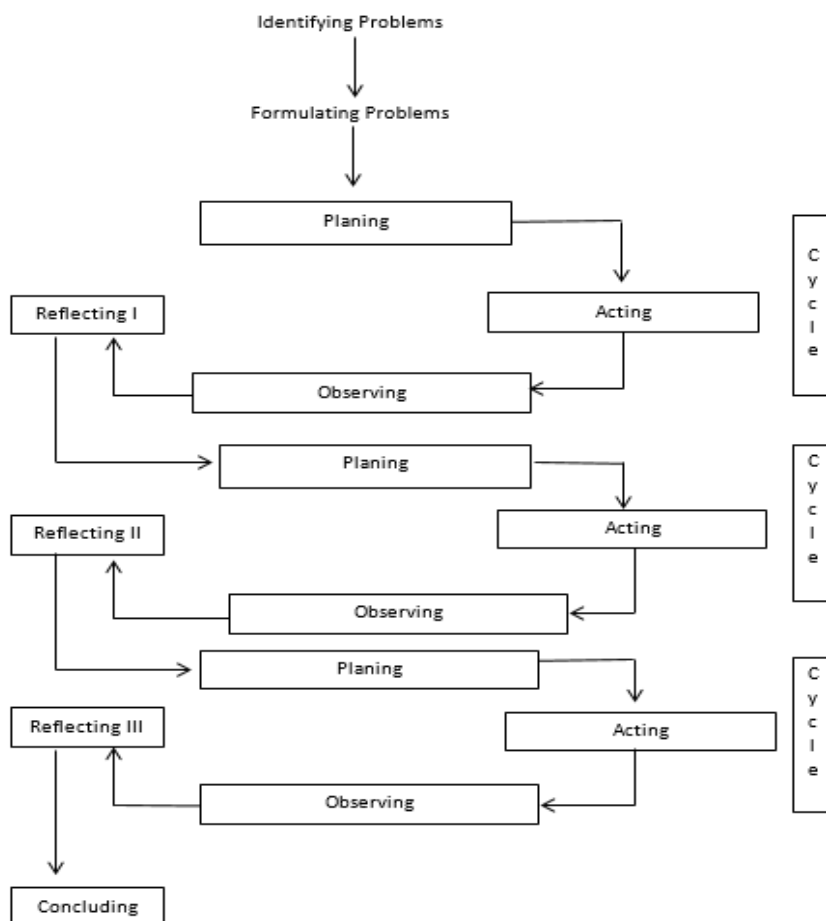


Figure 1. Research design

Teaching Condition

The teaching was carried out in three cycles. Each cycle contained a three-learning-hour action (one learning hour equals 35 mins). The classroom was adequate in terms of size, seating, lighting, and air circulation. All students are in a good shape for teaching and learning process. To facilitate the learning process, the teacher guided the students through two models of poetry. The students were then to have a silent reading session in order for them to recognize and understand free poetry with different themes.

Research Instrument

The instruments used in this research were: (1) Indonesian Latest Curriculum (K13) and literacy-based lesson plan. The instructional activities used conferencing approach with a teaching scenario of

creative writing of poetry; (2) coursework; (3) observation sheet; (4) field notes; and (5) documents. Students' skills in writing poetry were measured using a poetry writing assessment rubric. The assessment scale of each aspect ranges from 1 to 4. The assessment aspects included: (1) creative idea, (2) diction, (3) information, and (4) imagination. The coursework was outlined in accordance with the phases of conferencing approach. The observation sheet and field notes were to record the teaching implementation and to help the researcher gain accurate data about the application of conferencing approach.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research consisted of three cycles. At the beginning, the students were given a pretest to see

their initial skills in writing poetry. In the first cycle, the teaching process did not apply the conferencing approach, and it was revealed that the average score of students' poetry writing skills was 1.98. In cycles II and III, the teaching applied the conferencing approach.

The Teaching

Cycle I

In cycle I, the teaching did not apply the conferencing approach. During the lesson, the students looked bored and some were chatting with their peers while the teacher explained the theory of poetry. When assigned to write poetry, they struggled to express their ideas. This resulted in the low score in their poetry writing. This happened due to the monotonous teaching practice, both in terms of teaching method and media usage, so the students were not motivated. Porras Gonzales (2010) argues that the teaching process should intrigue interests and motivate the students to actively participate.

Cycle II

The teaching in cycle II applied the conferencing approach that was simplified into three phases. At the first phase, the students learned classically. Teacher explained the theory of free poetry; i.e., one that is not bound to certain standards, and then the students were assigned to write their own poetry. At the second phase, they were divided into groups. They then discussed and corrected each other's poetry. At the third phase, the students confer with the teacher about their difficulties in developing their writings.

In cycle II, the teaching process did not go very well as many students were seen to chat with their peers while the teacher gave an explanation. They also seem to find difficulties in determining the theme of their own poetry. This is due to the lack of media used by teachers; thus the students did not seem to pay attention. The teacher was supposed to use visual media in learning to attract students' attention, for example, photos or pictures, videos, and movies (Berk, 2009). This is evidenced by the results of Mayer et al research which show the mutually supportive visual and verbal materials such as in pictures or videos with the most effective integrated dialogue or narrative for students (Plass, Chun, Mayer, & Leutner, 1998). The use of visual media can encourage students' enthusiasm in learning. This fact is found in the results of research conducted by Sa'diyah (2017) that the visual media or images can increase the enthusiasm of students in the process of learning in writing. In addition, the teacher needed to provide a detailed and repetitive explanation as put forward by Gage and Berliner (in Hosnan, 2014, p. 8). They state that the teacher may have to use the principle of repetition to improve students' learning creativity.

Based on the findings and the result of reflection in cycle I, the improvement was made to the teaching process in cycle II; i.e., the use of media such as big book, mini book, magazine, newspaper, photo, and Internet. In addition, the teacher provided a more detailed explanation about the elements of poetry (Harmer, 2008). The discussion among students or with the teacher was focused on students' works (Zeichner, & Liston, 1987).

Cycle III

Like in cycle II, the teaching in this cycle applied the conferencing approach. However, in the first phase, the teaching used more varied media and the themes covered natural beauty, school environment, and natural disaster. The teacher also provided a more detailed explanation on the theory of poetry writing. The group study in the second phase was carried not only in the classroom but also the teacher invited the students to write poetry outside the classroom. In addition, with their peers in the group, students exchanged and corrected each other's work. They revised their works based on the feedback from their peers. The students would then choose the best poetry in the group. In the third phase, the students submitted the final draft of their poetry to the teacher. The teacher corrected them and chose the best one based on the assessment criteria.

As a result of media usage, in cycle III, some students who were previously chatting during the lesson, seemed to be more focused and listened to the teacher. In the group activities, they seemed to enjoy and motivated to write. This is supported by the opinion of Syh-Jong (2007) that group writing learning helps students build meaningful knowledge and learning to be interesting. This was because students gained a new learning experience that made them interested in learning writing due to the media use, change of learning atmosphere, and interaction with their peers. Hanauer (2012) argues that in learning, students need to create important moments and relive their experiences with other students.

What is found during the teaching process in cycle III shows that students' creative idea and imagination, compared to their ability to choose diction and information, still needed improvement. It is evident in the scores for creative idea that was only twice the score in cycle I. This is because the ability of creative ideas and imagination requires long-term and intensive training. It is commonly assumed that writing is neither easy nor difficult. Writing just needs a commitment, consistency, and persistency. Therefore, the researcher recommends the teaching of poetry writing applies the conferencing approach simplified into three phases. In the classical learning phase, teachers should use varied media and provide a detailed explanation about poetry theory in order for the students to understand the elements of poetry. A group

discussion is better carried out outside the classroom. In individual discussion phase, the teacher should guide the students in revising their works. Satriani, Emilia, and Gunawan (2012) support the statement saying that in learning community, not only does the teacher teach the students, but the teacher also listens to information from the students.

The Result of Teaching

The result of the teaching of creative writing of poetry using the conferencing approach in cycles I, II, and III is illustrated in Figure 1. The scoring scale ranges from 1 (insufficient), 2 (sufficient), 3 (good), to 4 (very good).

Figure 2 illustrates the improvement of students' poetry writing skills. The score for the aspect of creative idea in cycle I was sufficient and

improving in cycles II and III after the conferencing approach was applied. This is because the students found difficulties in generating ideas for their poetry writing, and the use of classical method as well as the lack of media usage failed to stimulate them to express their ideas. This is in accordance with Sa'diyah (2017) who states that the media statement is the best way to submit an assessment question for answering class, or students may submit a mediated presentation as a class project. The improvement in cycles II and III occurred because the students more actively participated in the lesson by way of discussions with their peers and with the teacher. The participation in the discussion stimulated them to express their ideas into writing. This confirms Langer's (2001) opinion that students' skills are shaped by interactions and participations during the lesson.

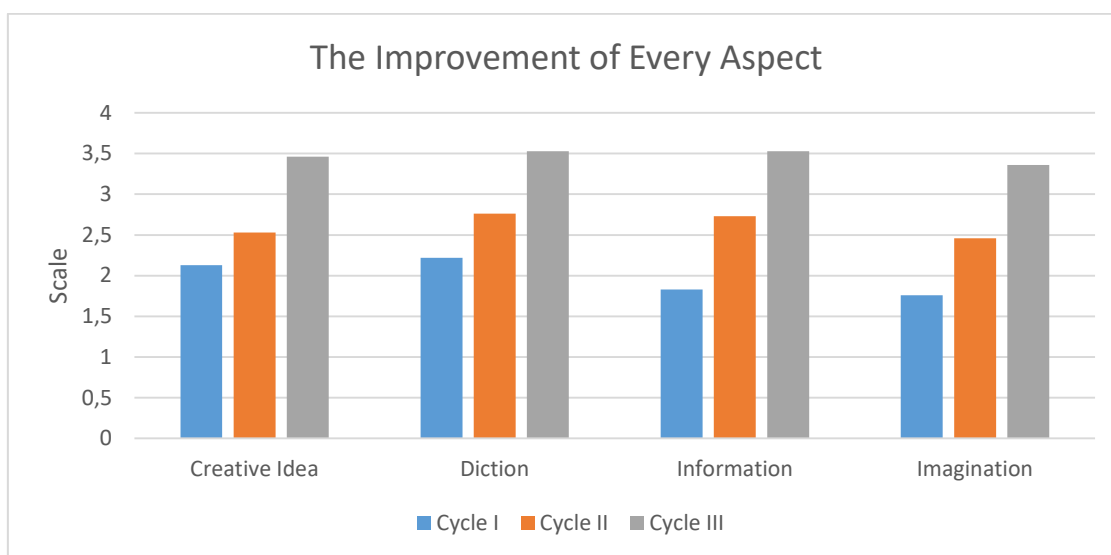


Figure 2. The improvement in all of assessment criteria

The diction criterion was categorized sufficient in cycle I. This is because the conferencing approach was not yet applied, low reading interests, and lack of vocabulary teaching. The result of a study shows that sustainable learning and vocabulary knowledge are very important for students who lack vocabulary (Lesaux, Kieffer, Kelley, Harris, 2014). The score for diction improved in cycle III almost as twice as many times as that in cycle I. This is because the teacher provided a more detailed lesson in cycles II and III about the theory of poetry and taught vocabulary through information seeking. The students were also assigned to read free poetry models and discuss them with their peers and the teacher (Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006).

Students' lack of information seeking from multiple sources causes the score for information aspect in cycle I to be smaller than the aspects of creative ideas and diction. But, the score improved in cycle III which is twice higher than in cycle I in

the same level as that of diction criterion. This happened because the students were instructed to search for a lot of information from various sources such as Internet, books, magazines, news, radio, and newspapers. It was an experiment conducted by the students by comparing information they heard and listened. They used the information to express their ideas into writing (Raimes, 1985). This confirms the result of study by Nandiyanto, Asyahida, Danuwijaya, and Abdullah (in press) which concludes that simple experiments can improve the level of understanding compared with conventional learning.

The imagination aspect in cycle I was only half of the good criteria. Its improvement in cycle III was also lower than other aspects. This is because school aged children are still in the thinking transition phase from concrete to formal operations. Thus, it is hard for them to develop imagination (Boyes & Chandler, 1992). This is in line with Piaget's (Suparno, 2001) developmental theory that

children from 8 to 11 years of age are at concrete operational stage, and those older than 11 are at formal operational stage.

Figure 3 shows that the average in cycle I was 50%. This is because the writing teaching did not apply the conferencing approach. Cycle II reached 66% since it started to apply conferencing approach. In cycle III, there was significant improvement as the average score reached 87%. This is due to the

improvements to the teaching process including the use of media, the change of learning atmosphere in cycle III by carrying out lesson outside the classroom, and explanation of free writing theory especially about poetry elements. Viewed from the difference in the average scores of cycle I and cycle III, there was an increase of 37%. It indicates that the writing skills of the sixth grade students at a primary school in Purwakarta improved.

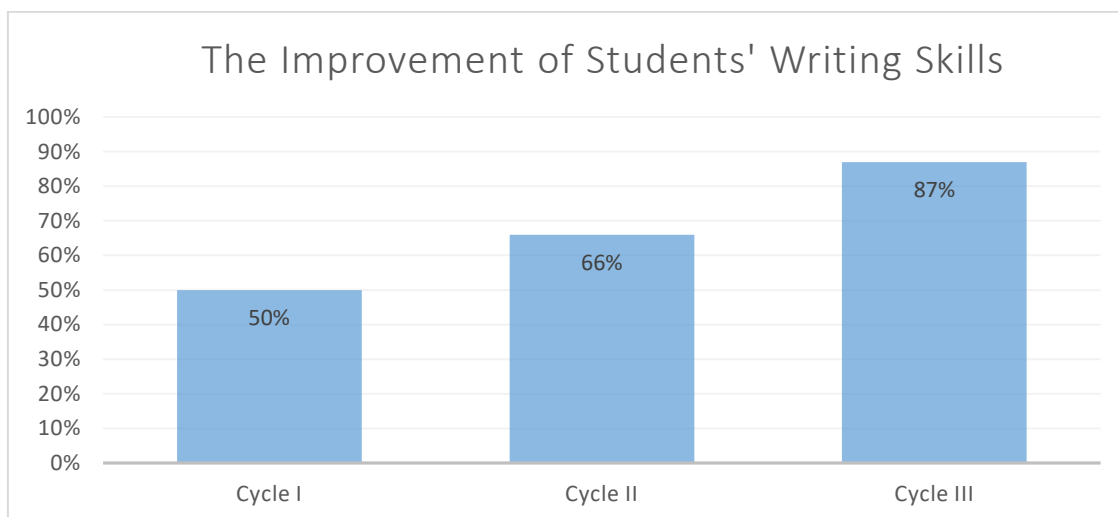


Figure 3. The improvement of students' writing skills

CONCLUSION

The result of this research shows that the application of conferencing approach improved the sixth-grade students' skills in writing poetry. It is evident in the improved score of each assessment aspect in cycle III. Since the conferencing approach was not applied in cycle I, the class condition was not conducive and the students did not pay attention to the teacher. In cycle II, some weaknesses were found in the phases of conferencing approach application. This was due to lack of media usage, lack of experience, lack of information and students had not yet understood how to write free poetry. Based on reflection in cycle I, the scores of all assessment aspects improved in cycle III. The score improvement for the imagination aspect was the lowest, but still there was an improvement. This was due to students' better understanding about the theory of free poetry writing, the use of varied media, and outside classroom lesson that enabled students to write free poems in a more pleasant atmosphere.

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