

THE USE OF CLUSTERING TECHNIQUE IN TEACHING WRITING NARRATIVE TEXT

(A quasi-experimental study of tenth graders in one senior high school in
Bandung)

Meliya Adriati*

meliya.adriati@gmail.com

*Graduated in 22 February 2013 from English Education Study Program of Indonesia University
of Education

Abstract: This study investigated the use of clustering technique in teaching writing narrative text. Thus its specific objective was to find out: (1) whether the use of clustering technique is effective in teaching writing narrative text, and (2) the response of the students to this technique. The research method used in this study was quasi-experimental and the sample was sixty ten-graders in one senior high school in Bandung. Based on data from pre-test, post-test and interview, clustering technique was effective in improving students' score in writing narrative text. Also, students' response to the technique was positive as clustering had several strengths though it had several weaknesses too.

Keywords: *Clustering technique, narrative text*

Introduction

The low level of writing interest among Indonesians has long been unveiled. A report about number of published books which are written by Indonesians showed that Indonesians only wrote about 4,000 to 5,000 books each year in spite of the country's large population. This number is considered very low when it is compared to that of other countries, for example the neighboring country Malaysia. With the population only one tenth of Indonesians, Malaysians can write between 6,000 to 7,000 books each year (Hardjoprakoso, 1997, as cited by Alwasilah, 2005). This finding is supposed to greatly concern all of Indonesians because it can be inferred from this fact that writing has not been a culture of Indonesian people.

In addition, this phenomenon may also be attributable to the low emphasis of the teaching and learning of writing in schools. Current situation in schools confirms this notion as teachers generally ask their students to produce a good and

acceptable piece of writing without giving them enough encouragement and appropriate techniques to develop their eagerness in writing. As a result, the assumption that writing is very horrific and frightening still exists; moreover writing in second or foreign language. It is because writing in non-native language is not painless by any means, but it needs skillful language command to be able to produce ones which meet the standard of coherence, fluency and length. The setback then increases as the students often get confused not only by what they want to say, but also by how they say it (Kendall and Khuon, 2006:37; Tho, 2000 as cited by Tuan, 2010).

Among various techniques which can be applied in writing, clustering emerges as one potent brainstorming technique for producing the piece of writing. This study was set to explore if Indonesian students can employ clustering technique to deal with the aforementioned difficulties in writing, especially in writing narrative text. In detail, the study aimed to:

1. find out whether or not clustering technique is effective in teaching writing narrative text, and
2. find out the students' responses to clustering technique.

Literature Review

Clustering is a kind of technique which can be used in pre-writing stage. It is introduced by Gabriele Lusser Rico, a professor of English and Creativity at San Jose State University, California in 1980s. It is a technique which provides an alternative way for writers to do the brainstorming before starting to write. Rico also claims that clustering is a kind of technique in brainstorming which benefits greatly from the right brain (which she called 'Design mind'), the part of the brain in which non-linear pattern and images production occur (Folit, 2009). Likewise, Pica (1986, as cited by Baroudy, 2008) defines clustering as a "non-linear brainstorming process that generates ideas, images, and feelings around a stimulus word until a pattern becomes discernible".

Doing clustering involves several simple steps which can be easily accomplished. First, it is started by writing down a word or phrase in the center of a blank sheet and circling it. Next, it continues by immediately writing down

related words or phrases which come into mind, circling each of them, and making line which connects each to the main, initial circle or 'bubble' just like "spokes in a wheel" (Baroudy, 2008). Finally, writers may stop after the given time has passed, then they can examine the cluster to pick the subtopics that interest them most or are considered to be covered by their competence. Overall, the words or phrases in the cluster provide a starting point for writers to see and understand their world from a new perspective (Folitt, 2009).

Methodology

This study chiefly employed quantitative method, particularly in design of quasi-experimental. The population of this study was tenth graders in one senior high school in Bandung, and the chosen sample was two classes, they were class X-1 as the experimental group and X-3 as the control group with thirty students in each class.

To collect the data, two kinds of research instrument were employed, they were test, which consisted of pre-test and post-test, and interview guide. The pre and post-test were administered to both experimental and control group before and after treatment, while interview was administered after the treatment to control group only. The treatment given to the experimental group was clustering technique.

To analyze the data, several steps were taken. First, the result of students' work in the test underwent the scoring process. The scoring rubric used in this study was the one which was developed by Education Department of Western Australia (Emilia, 2011). Next, the collective scores were then analyzed and tested statistically. To accomplish this, the independent *t*-test was used since it functions as a tool for determining if the means of two different or independent groups have difference to a statistically significant degree (Kranzler and Moursund, 1999; Fraenkel and Wallen, 2006).

To gain the evidence of the significant difference between the score of experimental group in both pre-test and post-test, the dependent *t*-test was conducted. Also, the calculation of effect size was performed to find out the extent of influence of the independent variable on the dependent one (Coolidge, 2000).

The interviews which were administered to students from experimental group were all taped. The tape was then transcribed, labeled and coded according to students' answer. Next, the answers were classified into several categories and also analyzed until the trends are recognized.

Data Presentation and Discussion

Table 4.1 shows the obtained mean and standard deviation of the scores gained by the students from experimental and control group both in pre- and post-test.

Group	N	Pre-test		Post-test	
		M	SD	M	SD
Experimental	30	53.50	2.529	57.57	2.012
Control	30	53.10	2.695	54.00	2.533

Table 1.1 The Result of the Pre-test and Post-test

In the pre-test, there was only slight difference in the mean of both groups (experimental group, $M=53.50$; control group, $M=53.10$). However, the difference became more significant in the result of post-test (experimental group, $M=57.57$; control group, $M=54.00$).

Test	t_{obt}
Pre-test	0.593*
Post-test	6.040**

Table 1.2 The Result of the Independent T-Test

* $t_{obt} < t_{crit}$
 ** $t_{obt} > t_{crit}$

In table 1.2, it is shown that the difference in of both groups' mean in the pre-test was statistically not significant ($0.593 < 2.00$). On the contrary, the difference in the post-test was statistically significant ($6.040 > 2.00$). This implies that clustering technique was effective to improve students' achievement in writing narrative text. However, the dependent t -test and the calculation of effect size were conducted to gain more evidence of the improvement.

Statistical Test	Result
The Dependent T-test	$t_{obt} = -13.422$
Size Effect	$r = 0.621$

Table 1.3 Statistical Analysis of Experimental Group' Post-test Scores

The result of the dependent *t*-test showed that there was statistically significant difference (progress) in the mean of experimental group's score before and after the treatment ($t_{obt}=-13.422$) and the result of effect size calculation also showed the large effect ($r=0.621$).

From the interview, it is revealed that the students' response to clustering technique was positive (yielded by 100% interviewee). In addition, there were also several strengths and weaknesses of this technique which were elicited by the interviewees. The proportion of each strengths and weaknesses are depicted in the following charts.

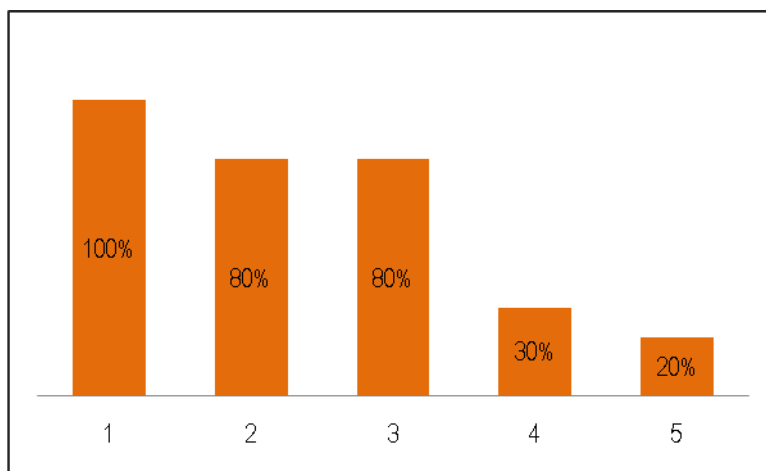


Chart 1.1 The Strengths of Clustering Technique

Legend:

1. Becoming the 'savings' of words which are needed in writing the narrative text
2. Making the plot construction easier
3. Becoming a new alternative to writing with/without other brainstorming technique
4. Empowering imagination
5. Creating fun atmosphere in learning

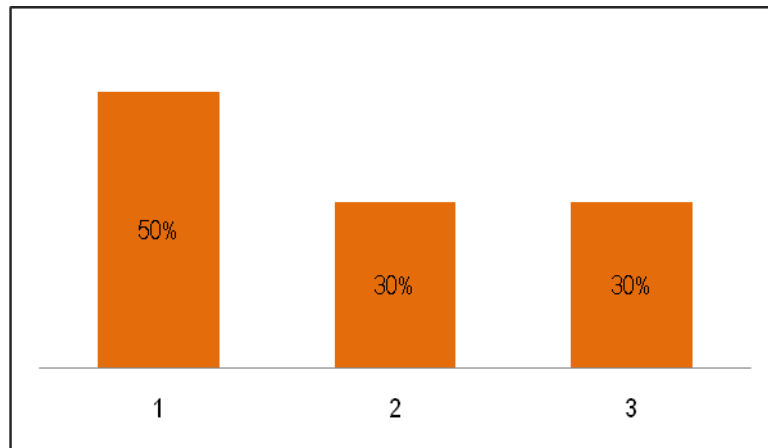


Chart 1.2 The Weaknesses of Clustering Technique

Legend:

1. Making the grammatical aspects ignored
2. Taking longer time than students' usual writing routine
3. Its tendency to occupy students' focus so distract them from the task of writing a narrative text which was the ultimate goal of the learning

The computation result of the scores gained by the students in the post-test shows that clustering technique was effective to improve students' score in writing narrative text. This may be due to its providing the viability to the student-writers to generate as many ideas as possible. The students have possessed more extensive ideas written in their text, hence there was improvement in their writing in the post-test. This is in line with Pica's (1986, as cited by Baroudy, 2008) proposition that clustering technique is very helpful to unleash ideas, images, and feelings related to the main topic in writing.

In addition, clustering lent itself to the easiness in organizing the ideas and transforming them into the writing product. After the students were capable to make cluster diagram and apply it before writing the text, the supporting details were more properly arranged until they made a clear, understandable plot line beside the growing number of those details. This suggests that clustering has assisted them to recognize clear association among the ideas which have been generated (Rico, 2000).

Beside its effectiveness, students' response to this technique was positive and variety of students' ideas about the strengths of the technique were also unveiled from the interview. First, clustering technique is considered very

effective since it provides the place for the students to store many key words or vocabularies which may be used in their writing. This also draws another advantage for them; clustering enriches their vocabulary as they were compelled to write every single word in English. Second, the technique helps the students in constructing the plot line of the story. By using this technique, they were assisted to organize their ideas in determining the plot line which they wrote into narrative text. Third, the technique is very potential to be a new alternative for them to writing with or without other kind of brainstorming. Next, clustering is a potent technique which empowers their imagination and creates fun atmosphere throughout their learning writing in the classroom.

Despite the strengths which have been mentioned, there were also found some potential weaknesses of this technique. First, the technique may lead the students to ignore the grammatical aspects in their writing. Second, it can take longer time for the students to finish their writing, compared to their usual writing routine. Last, it tends to occupy students' focus and consequently it may distract them from writing the narrative text which was the main goal of their learning.

Conclusions

Clustering technique is proven to be effective in elevating students' score in writing narrative text. Furthermore, the findings from the interview suggested students' positive response to the implementation of clustering technique throughout their learning in writing the text. In addition, this technique was very helpful as it became the 'savings' of words which were needed in writing the narrative text, eased the plot construction, made a new alternative to writing with/without other brainstorming technique, empowered imagination, and created fun atmosphere in learning. On the other hand, the technique had three weaknesses including making the grammatical aspects ignored, taking longer time than students' usual writing routine, and its tendency to occupy students' focus so distract them from the task of writing. Finally, paying the equal attention to the aspect of accuracy as to the fluency and assigning students to make journal or portfolio that contained their writing from time to time may help to improve the implementation of this technique.

References

- Alwasilah, A. C. (2005). *Pokoknya Menulis: Cara Baru Menulis dengan Metode Kolaborasi*. Bandung: Andira.
- Baroudy, I. (2008). "A Procedural Approach to Process Theory of Writing: Pre-writing Techniques". *The International Journal of Language Society and Culture*, 24
- Coolidge, F. L. (2000). *Statistics: A Gentle Introduction*. Britain: Cromwell
- Emilia, E. (2011). *Pendekatan Genre-Based dalam Pengajaran Bahasa Inggris: Petunjuk untuk Guru*. Bandung: Rizqi Press
- Folit, R. (2009). *Gabriele Lusser Rico Talks about the Benefits of Journaling*. [Online]. Available at: <http://blog.lifejournal.com/2009/06/12/gabriele-lusser-rico-talks-about-the-benefits-of-journaling/> [Oktober 7, 2012]
- Fraenkel, J.R., and Wallen N. E. (2006). *How to Design and Evaluate Research in Education (Sixth edition)*. New York: McGraw-Hill
- Kranzler, G., and Moursund, J. (1999). *Statistics for the Terrified (Second Edition)*. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, Inc.
- Rico, G.L. (2000). *Writing the Natural Way*. [Online]. Available at: http://www.amazon.com/reader/0874779618?_encoding=UTF8&page=28#reader_0874779618 [December 16, 2012]
- Tuan, L. T. (2010). "Enhancing EFL Learners' Writing Skill via Journal Writing". *English Language Teaching*, 3, (3)