

PROJECT BASED LEARNING APPROACH TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' ABILITY TO WRITE DESCRIPTIVE TEXT

(A Classroom Action Research at Grade X SMAN I Bengkulu Selatan)

Vera Maria Shanti

Syahrial

Irwan Koto

University of Bengkulu

Email : veramariabkl@gmail.com

Abstract: *This study was a classroom action research. It was aimed to explain whether Project Based Learning can improve students' ability in writing descriptive text and step of Project Based Learning which improved the students' ability to write descriptive text at grade X of SMAN 1 Bengkulu Selatan in the 2015/2016 academic year. The subjects of this study were 35 students, consisted of 10 females and 25 males. The instruments of this study were writing tests, students' observation checklists, teacher's observation checklist, and interview. The study was conducted in two cycles which included plan, action, observation, and reflection. The evaluation test was administered at the end of each cycle. Based on the result of the study, the improvement of students' mean score in cycle 1 and cycle 2 was significant. It was proven that the students' mean score in cycle 1 that 70.45 increased into 80.31 in cycle 2. To conclude, Project Based Learning was effective to improve students' ability to write descriptive text and also step 4 of Project Based Learning approach; monitor the students and the progress of the project became the best step which improved the students' ability to write descriptive text at grade X SMAN I Bengkulu Selatan. To suggest, English teachers can apply Project Based Learning approach as one of the alternative ways to improve students' writing ability and to improve students' academic achievement.*

Keywords: *Writing Ability, Descriptive Text, Project Based Learning.*

INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of basic language skill which is very important in teaching and learning process. Writing involves some language components, such as spelling, grammar, vocabulary, and punctuation. To make a good sentence someone needs to know the rules of English grammar and mechanics such as the correct use of verb and pronouns, as well as commas and other mark of punctuation (Braine, 1996: 60). Moreover, writing as a productive skill plays important role in communication

since all information and feeling can not be uttered through oral communication. Due to its importance, students therefore have to be taught how to express their feeling and need through written communication.

In addition, writing is often considered as a complicated learning because it needs some techniques and preparations. Writing should be practiced and learned gradually in order to make the students master it well. The students also need time and special task to improve this ability. If students do not study continuously and regularly, it will be

difficult for them to master writing ability. Thus, it means that in learning writing, it takes the study and practice to develop it well (Lado, 1998).

Writing skill is taught not only from any sentence or expression but also from many kinds of texts. There are twelve kinds of text that taught in Senior High School, but the only five basics text which has been taught in junior high school level. They are descriptive, recount, narrative, procedure, and report text. Descriptive text becomes one of the basic texts which related more toward students' daily life.

Descriptive text is a text which says what a person or a thing is like. Its purpose is to describe and reveal a particular person, place, or thing. The description tells the object as the way without being affected by the writers' personal opinion. Before telling what they have caught through their sensory system, a mental activity is involved. They firstly identify certain imagery or real object which is located somewhere.

Through the words, then they describe the thing they have in mind. In short, writing a descriptive text is "a way of picturing images verbally in speech or writing and of arranging those images in some kind of logical or association pattern" (D'Angelo, 1980). Meanwhile, according to Corbett (1983) that descriptive text is one of the expository writing.

The description draws a picture, tries to convey the sound, taste, and smell of things or objects. Tompkins (1994) and Stanley (1988) defined descriptive text as painting pictures with words. By reading a descriptive text, readers feel that they see

the description just like they see pictures. Descriptive text has the purpose to describe an object or a person that the writer is interested in. Thus, in writing a descriptive text the writers should know well what they want to describe. They describe their ideas and thought vividly based on what they see, hear, taste, smell, or touch. Anderson and Anderson (2003) add that descriptive text is different from information reports because they described a specific subject rather than general group.

Furthermore, when the researcher reflected on her experience of teaching at class X of SMAN 1 Bengkulu Selatan the researcher often found a gap between the real situation of teaching-learning process in the classroom and the expected condition. The researcher found that the students' writing skills were poor. The students often found difficulties to write a descriptive text. Most of the students are difficult to compose a paragraph even a sentence. Moreover, their writing ability is still low, it can be seen from the score of students' writing test.

There were many students in SMAN 1 Bengkulu Selatan lack in writing descriptive text. It was about 48.5% or 17 from 35 of students at grade X in this school got 60 (score), 20.00% or 7 from 35 of students got 55, 31.42% or 11 from 35 of students got 50 in writing descriptive test.

English teaching and learning in Indonesian schools is aimed to develop the students' communicative competence with which they can communicate through both spoken and written text in order to deal with daily issues. This competence is presented

by four macro skills of English namely listening, speaking, reading and writing.

The use of Project-based Learning in English classrooms has become more popular in recent years. There are numerous studies in the English language teaching context which suggest that it provides more contextual environment to learn the four macro skills of English, enhances the teaching-learning quality, enhances learners' higher-level cognitive development and improves learners' language learning achievement (Haines, 1989).

For instance, a study was conducted by Bayu (2014) which the result of the study showed that the implementation of PBL was proved to be significant to improve the students' writing skills. Thus, how to implement the method and the subject of the study makes this current study different from the previous.

Thus, the researcher believed that there is a possibility to improve the students writing skills through the implementation of Project-based Learning, since it is potentially motivating, empowering and challenging to them. It proposes a student-centered, cooperative, interdisciplinary and integrated teaching-learning process which contextualizes the students' real life (Solomon: 2003).

Instead to learn writing, learning writing by accomplishing a project will be more motivating for learners. It facilitates them to construct language meanings and constructions through the series of activities leading to the accomplishment of the project. In addition, group works in accomplishing the project make the students share ideas or correct one another.

By those descriptions above, the researcher applied Project Based Learning approach in order to know whether or not it solved the students' problems in writing descriptive text especially at grade X-Science 1 of SMAN 1 Bengkulu Selatan. The research questions of this study were;

1. To what extent Project Based Learning approach improved students' ability to write in descriptive text at grade X of SMAN I Bengkulu Selatan?
2. What is the step of Project Based Learning which improved students' writing ability in descriptive text?

METHODOLOGY

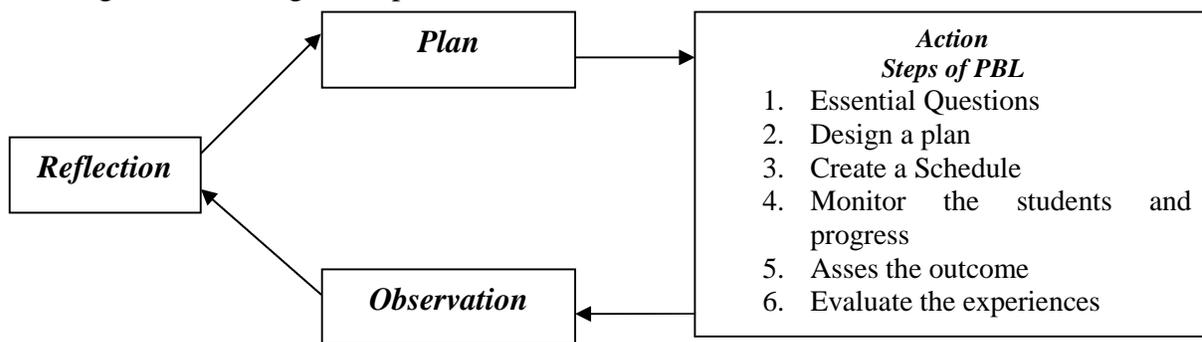
The design of this study was classroom action research (CAR). Kemmis (2012) stated action research is a form of collective self-reflection research conducted by participants – participants in social situations to improve educational practices and justice reasoning and their social practices as well as their understanding of their practices and against situations where such practices are performed.

Classroom action research did not use the population and sample, because the effect of action focus on the subject was investigated. The subject of this study was the student at grade X SMAN I Bengkulu Selatan. There were 35 students in the classroom; 15 males and 20 females' students. The researcher was helped by DS and Ed as collaborators of study. They are English teachers at SMAN 1 Bengkulu Selatan.

The instruments of this study were writing test, observation checklist, and

interview. The researcher collected the students' writing test result after the teaching learning process on each cycle. It was done to know the students' ability through the project based learning as a teaching aid in writing descriptive text and

also to know whether the objective of the learning achieve or not. According to Lewin (2010), there are four steps, they are consisted of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. In the fourth step, a schematic that can be described as follows:



After collecting the data, the researcher analyzed the data by evaluating and comparing the result from each cycle to know whether using of Problem Based Learning in writing descriptive text improved the students' ability or not.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Project Based Learning approach improved students' ability to write descriptive text

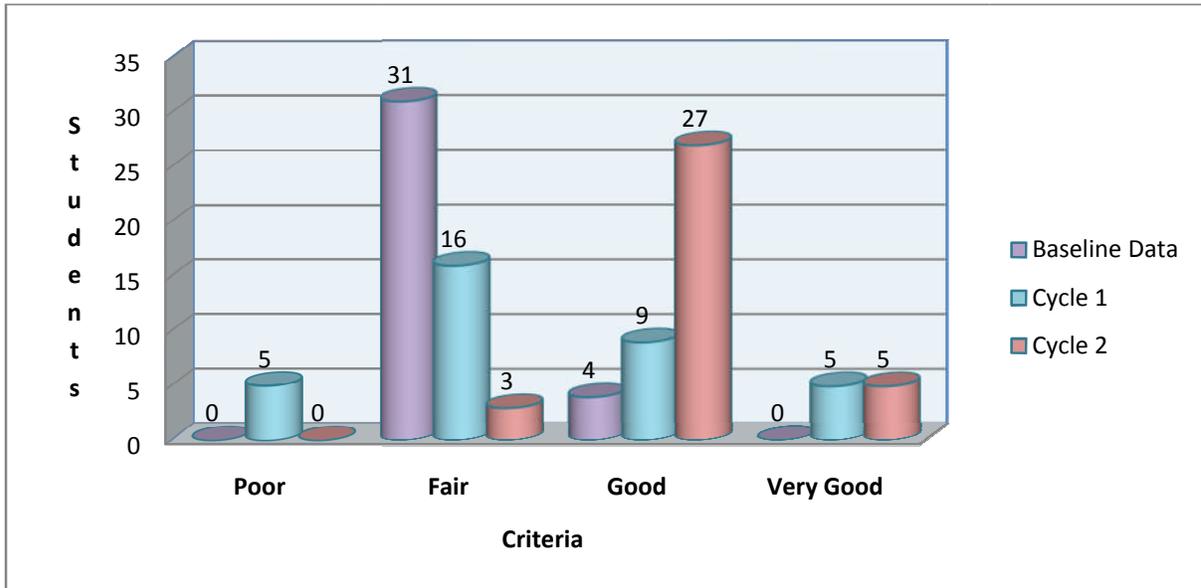
The use of observation checklist and writing test as the instruments made the researcher came to the findings of the study. By analyzing those instruments, the researcher

was able to get the improvement of the students' writing ability. Through the cycles conducted by the researcher, then it can be showed that project based learning could improve students' writing ability.

The improvement of students' mean score in cycle 1 and cycle 2 was significant. It was proven that the students' mean score in cycle 1 that 70,45 increased into 80,31 in cycle 2 which 77,14% of students reached good category. It means that the indicator of success of this study was passed.

The chart below showed the improvement of students' writing score in baseline data, cycle 1, and cycle 2:

Chart 1: The Students' Score in Writing Descriptive Text in Baseline Data, Cycle 1, & Cycle 2



From the chart, it can be seen that there were significant improvement between the result in baseline data, cycle 1, and cycle 2. Based on the test result, there were 5 or 14,28% of students who got poor category in cycle 1 decreased into 0 student in cycle 2. Then, 31 or 88,57% and 16 or 45,71% of students who got fair category in baseline data and cycle 1 decreased into 3 or 8,57% of students in cycle 2. Furthermore, 4 or 11,42% and 9 or 25,71% of students who got good category in baseline data and cycle 1 increased in cycle 2 that there were 27 or 77,14% of students gained good score.

To the next, there was no student who got very good category in baseline data, 5 or 14,28% of students in cycle 1 and cycle 2. To sum up, the researcher concluded that the research should be ended in cycle 2 since the result of writing descriptive test in cycle 2 was satisfied and could fulfill the indicator.

The improvement of students' writing ability was especially in analyzing the five aspects of composition profile scoring guide, they were content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics aspects. Each aspect showed better improvement in cycle 2 rather than cycle 1. Especially that result was highly influenced by the fourth step of PjBL (monitor the students and the progress of the project). Furthermore, the results of the observation checklist were satisfying and the study could be ended in this cycle.

To asses the students' writing ability the researcher used writing rubric by Heaton (1988) which consisted of five aspects, namely; content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanic. The five aspects increased from cycle 1 to cycle 2.

For the content aspect, the students' mean score revealed the improvement, the mean score increased from 19,97 to 21,34

with 45,71% of students reached good to average score in cycle 2 and 28,57 % in cycle 1. The students' writing content was good to average with some knowledge of subject and adequate range. The students' writing ideas developed well in cycle 2.

For the organization aspect, the students revealed that the score increased from 28,57% of students in cycle 1 into 74,28% of students in cycle 2 reached excellent to very good; somewhat choopy-loosely organized but main ideas stand out-etc. With the mean score 15,68 in cycle 1 increased into 18,02 in cycle 2. For the vocabulary, the students revealed the adequate range- occasional errors of word/idiom form, choice, usage but meaning not obscured. The students' mean score increased from 15,57 in cycle1 into 17,94 in cycle 2 and also there were 77,14% of students in cycle 2 reached excellent to very good score for vocabulary aspect.

For the language use, the students' score was good to average; effective but simple constructions. With 11,42% of students in cycle 1 became 31,42% of students who reached good to average score. And the last, for mechanics the students demonstrated mastery of conventions.

The students mean score increased 2,97 in cycle 1 into 3,54 in cycle 2 with 17,14% of students in cycle 1 and 42,85% of students in cycle 2 reached good to average score. To conclude, from all writing aspects the two highest improvement were on vocabulary and organization aspects with 27 and 26 students reached excellent to very good score.

2. Step 4 was the step of Project Based Learning which improved students' writing ability in descriptive text

Besides having the result of the improvement on students' writing ability through writing tests which were held at the end of each cycle, the researcher also found the step of project based learning which improved students' writing ability in descriptive text. Interview , writing score and observation checklist were used to answer this question.

Project Based Learning approach was consisted of 6 steps, they were; 1) Start with the Essential Question, 2) Design a Plan for the Project, 3) Create a Schedule, 4) Monitor the Students and the Progress of the Project, 5) Assess the Outcome, 6) Evaluate the Experiences. All of the steps was done in 7 meetings of each cycle.

Based on the interview result, step 4 became the step of Project Based Learning which improved the students' writing ability. Step 4 was monitor the Students and the progress of the project. It was the most important stage in which the project development takes place. It was important since the success of the project accomplishment will be determined by how well the students develop the project. Besides, in this phase the teacher is required to optimally play his role as a monitor. The teacher was responsible to facilitate the process to run, to guide the students during the process, to help them if they face difficulties and to make sure that each student is involved in the process. Moreover, the observation result showed that how the teacher guided and assisted the

students was very good and the students' interest and attitude toward this step was very good too.

Furthermore, the interview result also shown that step 4 was the best step. Based on interview result analysis, all of the students who interviewed mentioned that step 4 was the best step in improving their writing ability. It was proven by the students' statements as follow:

(Student 5) Indonesian version:

Menurut kami step yang ke 4 lebih dominan Mam, karena di step 4 kami bisa bekerjasama dengan baik dalam grup dan dapat menambah pengetahuan lebih, karena kami harus mencari informasi dulu lebih banyak sebelum membuat proyek tersebut jadi secara tidak langsung melalui step 4 pengetahuan kami bertambah sebagai bahan untuk menulis teks deskriptif.

English version:

In my opinion step 4 was the dominant step Mam, because in step 4 we can work together well in group and can enrich more knowledge, because we need to find out more information before we make the project so through step 4 our knowledge was improved as the basic to write descriptive text. (S5. Rec 005. Jan 11, 2016. 11:30).

(Student 2) Indonesian version:

Step 4 saat pembuatan project yang lebih berkesan Mam, karena disini kami butuh banyak waktu untuk membuat dan banyak pengalaman yang didapat dan bagi kami ini lah proses paling penting dalam project based learning ini mam.

English version:

Step 4 while creating the project was more interested Mam, because we need much time in this step to make it and also there were many experiences that we got and for us, this is the important process in this Project Based Learning Mam. (S2. Rec 002. Jan 11, 2016. 10:45).

Regarding to the explanation it can be concluded that step 4 was the step that improved student' ability to write descriptive text. It was proven by interview result analysis. It was also supported by the students' writing score which improved better from cycle 1 into cycle 2. Moreover, the observation checklist result revealed that the teacher's and students' activities were better in cycle 2 rather than cycle 1.

Based on the improvement of each cycles, Project Based Learning improved students' ability to write descriptive text. The result of this study was also similar to the result of some previous studies. Firstly, the result of the study by Bayu (2014) was similar to the result of this study which also proven that the implementation of PBL was proved to be significant to improve the students' writing skills. PBL provided a motivating, empowering and challenging series of activities which vary the activities during the teaching-learning process. It elevated the students' motivation and gave them more opportunities to practice writing.

Secondly, the result of the study by Kessler (2012) also proven that students focused more on meaning than form, that their grammatical changes were overall more accurate than inaccurate, that they participated with varying frequency, and that they used the tool for simultaneous

varied purposes. Thirdly, the result of the study by Lou and Mac Gregor (2004) proven that provide some insights into the computer supported collaborative learning process among students in a higher education context.

Furthermore, the result of this study also confirms some theories and ideas from the experts. First, Project Based Learning approach fits the students' interests and abilities. This result was similar to the theory by Moursund (1998) who stated that through the construction of a personally-meaningful artifact, which may be a play, a multimedia presentation or a poem, learners represent what they've. In addition, learners typically have more autonomy over what they learn, maintaining interest and motivating learners to take more responsibility for their learning.

Then, Project Based Learning helps the students to construct better knowledges and skills. This result was supported by Cheong and Goh (2002) who said that Students are then encouraged to use resources that go beyond textbooks, to work collaboratively, to think critically, creatively and independently and to communicate their findings. This will help students to construct a better knowledge and skills. Furthermore, it is an authentic form of learning, which prepares our students for increasing demands of the workplace.

However, this study was restrained by some limitations. Since this study was conducted in a classroom setting, the sample size was rather small. Thus, the time and money consuming in teaching and

learning process may cause the limitation of this study.

CONCLUSION

From findings, there are two conclusions that can be taken as follows; Firstly, Project Based Learning was effective to improve students' ability to write descriptive text. It was proven by the students' mean score of 70,45 in cycle 1 and increased into 80,31 in cycle 2. Secondly, the finding also shown that step 4 was the influential step which improved the students' ability to write descriptive text. Moreover, based on interview and observation checklist result analysis, all of the students who were interviewed and observed mentioned that step 4 was the best step in improving their writing ability.

Thus, further research is highly recommended to find as many as good writing strategy and technique to be applied in the classroom. By finding other strategy and technique, it hopes can create better writing ability for the students.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, Mark and Kathy Anderson. 2003. *Text types in English 3*. South Yarra: Macmillan Education Australia PTY LTD.
- Angelo, Frank J. D. 1980. *Process and Thought Composition*. Massachusetts. Winthrop Publishes, Inc. Cambridge.
- Arikunto, S. (2003). *Procedure Penelitian Suatu Pendekatan Praktek*. Jakarta: Renika Cipta.
- Badan Standar Nasional (BSNP). 2006. *Standar Isi untuk Satuan Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah*. Jakarta: Depdiknas.
- Braine. 1996. *Second Language Writing*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Kemmis, S. 2012. *The action research planner* (3rd ed.). Victoria, Australia: Deakin University Press.
- Lado, R. (1998). *Language Teaching: Scientific Approach*. New York. McGraw: Hill.inc.
- Lou, Yiping and S. Kim MacGregor. "Enhancing Project-Based Learning Through Online Between-Group Collaboration". *Educational Research and Evaluation* 10:4-6 (2004): 419-440. Web.
- Lewin, K. (2010) *Field theory in social science; selected theoretical papers*. D. Cartwright (ed.). New York: Harper & Row.
- Nunan, David. 1989. *Understanding language classrooms*. University press. New York.
- Nunan, David. 1991. *Language teaching methodology*. University press. New York.
- Richards, C.Jack. 2008. *Teaching Listening and Speaking*. New york: Combridge University.
- Solomon, G. 2003. "Project-based learning: A primer". *Technology and Learning Journal*, 23, pgs. 20-27.
- Stoller, L. S, 1997. Project Work: A Means to Promote Language Content. *Forum*, 35, 4, pgs. 2-18. <http://eca.state.gov/forum/vols/vol35/ no4 /p2.htm/>. Retrieved on September 25, 2011.
- Supe, O.2011. *Project Work*, <http://www.rezeknesip.lv /spaw/uploads/documents/> Retrieved on September 25, 2011.
- Sundem, G. 2007. *Improving students' writing skills*. Shell Education. USA.
- Susilo, A. 2009. In Between frame Untuk Video Animasi Berbasis Region Base Interpolation Dan Mean Shift Clustering. Surabaya: ITS.
- Stanley, F. (1988) - *Cerebral palsies: epidemiology and causal pathways*. Mac Keith Press with Oxford: Blackwell Scientific Publications Ltd. New York: Cambridge University Press. Clinics in Dev. Med. n° 15.
- Tezi, L. 2006. The Use of Project-Based Learning in Teaching English to Young Learners. *A thesis*. Konya: Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Seljuk University.
- Yi, Jyi-yeon. 2009. Defining Writing Ability For Classroom Writing Assessment In High Schools. *Journal of Pan-Pacific Association of AppliedLinguistics*, , 13(1), 53-69.