IMPROVING STUDENTS' COMPETENCE IN WRITING DESCRIPTIVE TEXTS THROUGH "FRESH" TECHNIQUE

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Abstract: This research was aimed to know whether "FRESH" technique can improve students' competence in writing descriptive texts. This research was conducted in one of the junior high schools in Banyumas in academic year 2012/2013. The method of this research is Classroom Action Research (CAR). The research participants were the students of VIII E class consisting of 28 students. The treatment was carried out in two cycles of four actions, from November 9th, 2012 to December 1st, 2012. The quantitative data (tests) were evaluated by using Burhan Nurgiyantoro's Writing Evaluation Criteria which consisted of evaluation in content, organization, vocabulary, language, and mechanics. Based on the data analysis, it could be described that the students' competence in writing descriptive texts improved. It could be seen from the improvement of students' score in pre-test and post test. The improvement of students' score was 23.607%. This meant that "FRESH" technique improved the students' competence in writing descriptive text in the eighth grade students of in academic year 2012/2013.
Keywords: *descriptive text, FRESH technique, classroom action research, writing competence*

INTRODUCTION

Writing is said to be the fourth competence in learning language. Although many students said that writing is a difficult competence, yet writing is actually an easy and enjoyable activity if there are appropriate methods, interesting teaching techniques, and actual materials.

Writing is an activity in which learners form graphic symbols, arrange them to form words, and put the words in order and link them together in a certain way to produce a logical sequence of sentences (Hernowo, 2004: 43). It is a complex activity since requiring students' comprehensive abilities such as mastering grammar, vocabulary, and punctuation. Besides, to write well, the students are expected to be able to present their ideas in the written form, as writing is a means of communication.

In the teaching and learning writing process in Indonesia, students have been introduced since they were in the elementary school, from the simplest form e.g. writing words to writing sentences. In the junior high level, students are taught to write more complex sentences and paragraphs.

Based on the junior high level syllabus, there are some texts that should be learned by the students, especially in the eighth grade. Those are descriptive, narrative, and recount texts. The purposes of learning those texts is that the students can express their ideas in a simple written form such as functional text and essay, and can use those texts in their daily life.

A descriptive text becomes the first text learned by the students, for it has the closest relation with the students' lives. As wanting to describe something in a written form, they have to write it in a descriptive text, even in the simplest form.

However, in the real writing classes, there have been obstacles faced by students, especially in writing a descriptive text. Most of them find some difficulties in doing their tasks given by the teachers especially in writing. They often show inconsistency in using either British or American spelling. Often time, their grammar used is not suitable for the tense desired. They are supposed to use past tense to tell about an event occurring in duration of time in the past by using since or for. Instead, what they thought is that they have to use present perfect because there is since or for as the time marker.

Based on the interview with an English teacher of class VIII at one of the junior high schools in Banyumas, many students still had problems in writing, especially in writing descriptive texts. When the teacher asked the students to write a descriptive text, they seemed still confused about what they should write and how they should organize their writing. It was likely that they had so many things to write, but unabling to express their ideas in a written form well. The problem mainly faced by the students was their confusion on what is first, next, and on to write a descriptive text.

There are some important factors influencing this present facts. Their insufficient vocabularies and provided materials seem to play importantly. Beside that, they have less ability to develop and organize ideas in such an appropriate way that their writings are difficut to understand. Then, their weak comprehension and mastery of grammar also make their writings hard to understand. As a result, many students fail to meet the standards given by the institution although having given enough exposures for students in writing lesson.

Besides, these happen because they are not used to writing, even in their own language. It is argued that the students' reluctance to write can also happen because they rarely write even in their own language, and so the activity feels like alien (Harmer, 2004, p. 61). Further, for many years, the teaching of writing has focused on the written product rather than on the writing process. In other words, the students' attention was directed to the *what* rather the *how* of text construction (Harmer, 2004, p. 11). This means, students are likely to be taught the form only without the process of forming itself. The teacher may often uses some kinds of media, such pictures, mind map, and other visual aids, but those are not helpful enough. Nevertheless, they still have difficulties in writing a descriptive text.

Considering those problems, a technique believed can help students in writing descriptive text, especially in organizing their ideas was proposed - "FRESH" one. "FRESH" technique is the new one of generating ideas to write a descriptive text in which each letter of the acronym has meaning. "Fact" stands for "Fact", "R" stands for "Reason", "E" stands for "Elaboration", and "SH" stands for "Shift", which can also mean decision or conclusion (Faisal, 2010, p. 8). Through this technique, it is hoped that students can write a descriptive text easily since "FRESH" technique will help them to organize their ideas in writing descriptive. As the result, students will be able to write a descriptive text in a clear, detail, and fluent organization.

Generally, there are three types of rating scales used in scoring writing: holistic scoring, primary trait, and analytic scoring. In this occassion, the hoistic scoring will be employed.

Holistic scoring uses a variety of criteria to produce a single score. Brown (2004) states that each point on a holistic scale is given a systematic set of descriptors and the reader-evaluator matches an overall impression with the descriptors to arrive at a score. Descriptors usually follow a prescribed pattern. It is states that the rationale for using a holistic scoring system is that the total quality of written text is more than the sum of its components (O'Malley 1996).

Writing is viewed as an integrated whole. The elements of the holistic scoring involved four dimensions as follows: (1) Idea development/ organization: focuses on central idea with appropriate elaboration and conclusion; (2) Fluency/structure: appropriate verb tense used with a variety of grammatical and syntactic structures; (3) Word choice: uses varied and precise vocabulary appropriate for purpose; and (4) Mechanics: absence of errors in spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.

Writing is the last skill which should be mastered after the English learners master listening, speaking and reading. Even the native still have difficulties in doing writing activities. Lyons (1987: 2) states few people write spontaneously and few feel comfortable with a formal writing task intended for the eyes of someone else. As the problems above, the teacher should find an effective way to teach writing to the students.

Gaffield-Vile (1998) in Harmer (2003: 259) states that creative writing is a journey of self-discovery, and self-discovery promotes effective learning. If the students find something thaythey are learning by themselves, they will be easy to understand and apply it. They will be more interested in the thing they understand well. Moreover, Badley in Hudson (2011, p. 34) states that creative writing as a new or alternative form of writing in higher education, which is

perceived as developmental, therapeutic and self-expressive rather than academic. From the both quotations above, it can be concluded that creative writing can be used as the expressive writing more supporting the learners to find what they should write . Learners can find their ideas through the surrounding that they see or think. This underlies the "FRESH" technique.

"FRESH" is an acronym in which each letter has meaning. "F" stands for "Fact", "R" stands for "Reason", "E" stands for "Elaboration", and "SH" stands for "Shift", it also can mean decision or conclusion (Faisal 2010, p.8). In fact, It is a technique of an application of creative writing.

"FRESH" technique itself can be seen as the way of developing descriptive text's generic structure. There are two main parts of descriptive text; those are general identification and descriptions. Students are more likely confused on what they have to write as the general identification and what they have to write as the descriptions. While in "FRESH" technique, students will get easy to construct a descriptive text because the two parts before are developed specifically. There will be four parts provided.

"F" is FACT meaning the facts related to the topic which will be developed in writing descriptive text. Here, students are required to think about the general facts eaily found in their minds. Wishon & Burks (1980: 65) mention that another method of paragraph development is to begin with a general statment and support the statement with a number of sentences giving particular details or additional information. This supports the writer that the first thing students must do is to write the general things of subject that the students want to describe.

"R" is REASON consisting of some reasons which can support the

facts they have written before. The reason which will be mentioned can be sense impressions. Description gives sense impressions – the feel, sound, taste, smell, and look of things (Wishon & Burks 1980: 128). This will really help the students since they can disclose their personal feelings in describing the subject.

After that, the students have to develop their reasons into "E" (ELABORATION). Wishon and Burks (1980: 129) say that the writer may begin with a dominant impression and proceed to specific details. This means that after establishing generals statements having been mentioned before, students must develop it into the detaiedl one so that they will get are creative, complete, and coherent paragraph.

The last part is SHIFT. This part is in the form of conclusion of all things the students have written before. Based on the previous research (Faisal 2010, p. 9), here are the procedures of teaching descriptive text using "FRESH" technique:

Dealing with FACT, the students are asked to think and draft the general facts of subject they want to describe. Example "Bunny, My Rabbit": "I have a rabbit. Its name is Bunny." Coming to the second part, REASON, the teacher invites the students to write the reasons or impressions of the subject. "I like Bunny because it is cute and funny."

Teacher encourages the students to elaborate the draft they have made before as the development. The teacher guides the students to make description why Bunny is cute and funny. "It has a white and soft fur. Its body is fat. It likes eating carrots very much. It likes to enter the house, especially my parents' room."

The last step is making conclusion of all ideas which have been described.

"Those are the reason why Bunny is cute and funny. My family and I love it very much."

From those sentences, it will form a descriptive paragraph:

I have a rabbit. Its name is Bunny. I like Bunny because it is cute and funny. It has a white and soft fur. Its body is fat. It likes eating carrots very much. It likes to enter the house, especially my parents' room. Those are the reason why Bunny is cute and funny. My family and I love it very much.

METHOD

The research conducted was a classroom action research. Arikunto (2010: 132) states that classroom action research is an observation of activities intentionally given and happen in a class. This research was conducted at one of the junior high schools in Banyumas Regency in the academic year of 2012/2013 from August until December 2012. There were 28 students, consisting of 16 males and 12 females as research participants.

In conducting the research, the Kemmis and McTaggart's research design was employed. There are cycles in an clasroom action research, and each cycle consists of stages. The stages are planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Taken from Arikunto (2010), there were two cycles of four meetings conducted.

Technique for collecting data is aimed at supporting the success of the research. It helped to obtain data and information about the process of improving students's competence in writing descriptive text by using FRESH technique by giving test.

Nurgiyantoro (2001: 58) states that test is one way to do measurement in the form of assignment ha to be having to be done by the students to get the data of their mark being able to be compared with their friends of the standard mark. Here, test was used to know the improvement of students'

competence in writing after "FRESH" technique was implemented as an aid to develop their descriptive text.

The form of the test was writing descriptive paragraphs. The test consisted of pre-test and post-test. Pre-test was given before the collaborator taught writing descriptive text by using "FRESH" technique, while the post test was given after the cycles were completely conducted.

The quantitative data were used to evaluate the success of implementation of each cycle. By processing the quantitative data, it was revealed whether the success target had been reached or not. According to Nurgiyantoro (2001) in Martani (2001: 307), there is a model of scale instrument for every certain class in aspect scored.

Each point of each component has different score. It can be seen at the following table of scoring.

To get the average of students' writing score, the following formula was used:

$$M = \frac{\Sigma X}{N}$$

M = mean
ΣX = Individual score
N = Number of sample
(Nurgiyantoro 2001: 361)

To know improvement from the pre-test until post-test, the formulas were as follows:

$$P = \frac{y1 - y}{y} \times 100\%$$

$$P = \frac{y2 - y}{y} \times 100\%$$

Where:
P = Percentage of students improvement
y = Pre test result
y_1 = Post test 1 result
y_2 = Post test 2 result

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following are the evaluation results out of cycle 1 and cycle of the research.

To know the improvement of students' competence in writing descriptive text, pre-test and post-test were given. Pre-test was conducted on November 9th, 2012. From pre-test, the average of students' score was obtained. The average of students' writing score in pre-test was 66.25.

After conducting the both Cycle 1 and Cycle 2, post-test was given in order to know the improvement of students' competence in writing descriptive text after they were taught "FRESH" technique. The post-test 1 was conducted after the Cycle 1 had been done. It was on November 21st, 2012, while, the post-test 2 was done on December 1st, 2012. The students' improvement was calculated by using the following formula:

$$P = \frac{y1 - y}{y} \times 100\%$$

where:
P = percentage of students' improvement
y = pre-test result
y1 = post-test 1
y2 = post-test 2

Calculation of post-test 1 result:

$$P = \frac{71.89 - 66.25}{66.25} \times 100\%$$

= 8.513 %

Calculation of post-test 2 result:

$$P = \frac{81.89 - 66.25}{66.25} \times 100\%$$

= 23.608%

The improvement of students' writing competence can also be seen through the following table:

Table 1.
The Scale of Writing Evaluation Criteria

No	Aspect	Score	Criteria	Indicators
1.	Content	27-30	Very good	complete information, substantive, complete in developing writing, relevant with the problem
		22-26	Good	enough information, less substantive, not enough in developing writing problem
		17-21	Fair	limited information, less substantive, insufficient development of writing problem
		13-16	Bad	no content and problem
2	Organization	18-20	Very good	fluent in expression, clear in expressing idea, well organized, logic and cohesive sequence
		14-17	Good	less fluency, unorganized but clear main idea, limited supporting material, logic but incomplete sequence
		10-13	Fair	not fluent or irregular idea, illogical sequence and idea development.
		7-9	Bad	not communicative, unorganized, and invaluable organization
3.	Vocabulary	18-20	Very good	appropriate diction, good word order mastery
		14-17	Good	sometimes incorrect choice of the word which does not change the meaning
		10-13	Fair	limited word use, some mistakes in vocabulary which can change the meaning
		7-9	Bad	bad choice of the word, less and invaluable vocabulary
4.	Language	22-25	Very good	effective complex construction, only few language mistakes.
		18-21	Good	Simple but effective construction, few mistake in complex construction which does not change the meaning
		11-17	Fair	serious mistake in sentence construction, unclear meaning.
		5-10	Bad	lack of syntactical construction's mastery, many mistakes, not communicative and invaluable language
5.	Mechanics	5	Very good	good mastery of the writing mechanics, only few spelling errors
		4	Good	some spelling errors which do not change the meaning
		3	Fair	many spelling errors which can change the meaning.
		2	Bad	lack of mastery in writing mechanics, many spelling errors, unreadable and invaluable writing

Table 2.
Model of Writing Evaluation Criteria Using Score

No	Evaluation aspects	Score
1.	Content	13-30
2.	Organization	7-20
3.	Vocabulary	7-20
4.	Language	5-25
5.	Mechanics	2-5
	The sum of score	………

From the table above, the students' writing score improved 23.607% from the pre-test score which was 66.25 to 81.89 in the post-test. The improvement above had reached the success indicator which was 20%.

Based on the result of Cycle 1, the improvement could be seen through the ways the students improved their competence in writing descriptive text by applying "FRESH" technique. The students could write quite good content in their descriptive text. Through the elements of "FRESH", students were

Table 3.
The Evaluation Result in Cycle 1 and 2

Meeting	Activity	Positive Result	Negative Result
Action 1, Cycle 1	Identifying generic structure using "FRESH" technique and language features of descriptive text.	1. Most of students understood the parts of descriptive text in detail. 2. Some students understood more about simple present tense and adjectives.	1. Some students were confused in determining each element of "FRESH". 2. The rests were confused in distinguishing verbs and adjectives.
Action 2, Cycle 1	1. Writing sentences using adjectives and simple present tense. 2. Writing a short descriptive text	1. Half of the students were able to write simple sentences using simple present tense correctly. 2. Some students were able to write simple descriptive text. 3. The mean score of the post-test was 71.89 compared to the pre-test which was 66.25. 4. The improvement from pre-test to post-test showed 8.513% .	1. Some students got problems in writing sentences using simple present tense. 2. Some students got difficulties in writing descriptive text because they lack vocabulary. 3. Some students were confused in distinguishing the "Fact" and "Reason" of "FRESH".
Action 1, Cycle 2	1. Gathering information from the pieces of text into a good arrangement of descriptive paragraph in group discussion. 2. Completing incomplete essay of descriptive text.	1. Half of the students were able to determine the elements of "FRESH" and gather the information into good paragraph. 2. Students were able to differentiate the adjectives and verbs to complete the incomplete essay.	1. Some students were not involved in group discussion. 2. Some students were chatting with their friends while having group discussion. 3. Some students did not finish in rewriting the information gotten.
Action 2, Cycle 2	1. Arranging jumbled sentences. 2. Writing descriptive text using "FRESH" technique.	1. Most of students were able to determine the elements of "FRESH" that they could arrange the jumbled sentences correctly. 2. Students were able to write descriptive text more fluently than before. 3. The mean score of the post test was 81.89. 4. The improvement was 23.608%.	1. Some students did not focus on the lesson. 2. Some students often asked the teacher the English translation of words when they were practicing writing.

able to put sufficient information in identification by its "Fact" and "Reason", and, in the description by the use of "Elaboration" and the "Shift". Even though it was not complete enough, it was better than before.

They could organize their ideas better as well. By the arrangement of "Fact", "Reason", "Elaboration" and "Shift" of "FRESH" technique, students were able to determine what should be written first and next to get a fluent descriptive text easier. Even though, their organization was not fluent enough, the students could write their ideas in sequence. They used more new vocabularies in developing their descriptive paragraph. When students were asked to write a descriptive paragraph using "FRESH" technique, they tried to get vocabularies appropriate for their ideas in each element of "FRESH". Even though, they sometimes made mistakes in spelling.

In Cycle 2, half of the students could write simple sentences using simple present tense and adjectives correctly when they were practicing writing descriptive text. Through the elements of "FRESH", students understood the rule of how to write a good descriptive paragraph. They knew how to express their ideas as the content and organize it better than before they were introduced "FRESH" technique. However, they still needed to learn it more.

In general, after the treatment, the students' capability in writing descriptive text improved as well. Most of students could provide enough information about what they described. It could be seen in the students' result

that they wrote more sentences in the form of descriptive paragraph to describe something. They also organized their ideas clearly and fluently. The students could use good dictions and write those words correctly. Their understanding about simple present tense improved too. It could be seen when the students write descriptive text, there were only some of them who made few mistakes in sentence construction. They also mastered the writing rule better than before, so their texts were easier to understand.

Furthermore, this was in line with the research result conducted by Suwandita (2013) stating that after the implementation of FRESH Technique, the students' competence in writing a descriptive text increased. Through the elements of FRESH, the students were able to put adequate information in identification its "Fact" and "Reason", and in the description and conclusion by the use of "Elaboration" and "Shift". They were capable of organizing their ideas by the arrangement of "Fact", "Reason", "Elaboration", and "Shift". They were able to determine what should be written first and next to get a fluent descriptive text easier. Furthermore, they were capable of using more new vocabularies in developing their descriptive paragraph because when the teacher instructed them to write descriptive paragraph using FRESH technique, they tried to find vocabularies suitable for their ideas in each element of FRESH. Also, they made few mistakes in spelling. Automatically, the students were able to write simple sentence correctly. Throughout the

Table 4.
The Improvement of Students' Writing Competence

Indicator	Pre-test	Post-test
Average	66.25	81.89
Improvement (%)	23.607%	

elements of FRESH, the students were capable of mastering the rule of how to write a descriptive paragraph. In short, the students could write a good descriptive text.

CONCLUSION

The result of the test showed that there was improvement of students' writing score for about 23.607% from the pre-test which was 66.25 to 81.89. This improvement had reached the success indicator which was 20%.

From the result, it can be concluded that "FRESH" technique helped the students develop their ideas in writing descriptive text. Through the elements of "FRESH", students are able to give more complete information as the content of their descriptive text. They are able write the "Fact" and "Reason" as the identification, and the "Elaboration" and "Shift" as the description. They can also organize it well by the "FRESH" arrangement, so that, they will get their fluent descriptive text. They use more vocabularies and appropriate diction to make their ideas understandable to read. Students can use simple present tense and the adjectives in writing their descriptive text correctly. Moreover, they understand and apply the rule of writing descriptive text well. Because of "FRESH" arrangement, students can make their descriptive text fluent and easy to understand.

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