

It's Helpful and Easier Now: *Photographs to Scaffold the Writing Skill of Students with Limited English*

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Abstract— Despite its increasing importance in academic life, writing is still considered the hardest skill by most English Language Learners (ELLs). In addition to linguistic barriers, writing in English becomes more challenging for junior secondary school students in Indonesia due to limited language proficiency and lack of content knowledge so that they need extra supporting media from their teachers. Since identifying the most effective scaffolding to improve students' writing skills is not always easy, this study investigates how teacher's use of photographs in teaching and learning of writing can improve students' ability in writing descriptive text. The results of a quasi-experimental design conducted through tests (pretest and posttest) show that the use of photographs can, to a certain extent, improve students' writing ability. From the five aspects of writing, the highest improvement of the students' writing skill is a discourse with mean N-Gain score 0.23, followed by genre with the mean of N-Gain score 0.22, graphic feature with the mean score 0.21, register with mean of N-Gain score 0.05, and grammar with mean of N-Gain score 0.19. The study also provides suggestions for further research on improving the writing skills of students with limited English proficiency.

Keywords: limited English proficiency, photographs, writing descriptive text

I. INTRODUCTION

Writing is part of four language skills necessary to be mastered by the students because the ability to write well is becoming increasingly important in our global community (Weigle, 2002). Moreover, the workplace needs people who can master English well especially on transactional letters. Therefore, there is a very close relationship between professional success and writing skills. For these reasons, writing becomes the main part of the curriculum in schools, and almost all students in the formal education system will learn to write (Weigle, 2002). However, writing is not easy and errors are commonly found in students' writing. Some authors (i.e. Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994) state that there are some major categories of common errors in writing. These include, (a) content; (b) noun; (c) sentence structure; (d) mechanics; (e) organization; (f); and (f) style.

The aforementioned category of errors in writing proposed by Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (1994) focuses on both content and form. However, the implementation of teaching writing in the EFL class just focuses more on the form (mechanics) than the content. It means the writing practice focuses more on the

organization of ideas than on the ideas themselves. Consequently, some students get difficulties in developing the content of their writing. Harmer (2007) states that "They do not have anything to say and cannot come up with ideas" (p. 329). Whereas, writing does not only require the knowledge of the linguistic organization of written discourse but also requires the writers' creativity to move their ideas into written form (Richards, 1990). It means writing is not a simple process because many things should be considered to make good writing.

Therefore, the teacher must choose an appropriate way to teach writing to accommodate the failure in teaching and learning writing. One alternative way to support students to gather ideas is by using photographs. Learning through photographs is an important task not only for social but also for educational reasons. Macken and Horarik (2004) state that including photographs in multimodal texts is not only used in daily life but also used as a feature of the school curriculum.

Visual representations have been familiar and accessible in media and learning areas (Bezemer & Kress, 2008; Kress, 2010). Picture, as a visual mode, allows a complex idea to be easily conveyed (Kress, 2010). The idea is supported by some empirical researches which report that visual media such as photographs do not just convey meaning but represent external narratives of reality and figure out the way persons think and act (Kress, 2010).

Many previous studies related to the implementation of teaching writing by using photographs have been conducted by Chairena (2007), Fitriani (2009), Putri (2012), Setiawan (2014). Some of the studies were conducted to address writing skills. However, although some previous studies have used photographs in writing, no study has identified their use in writing descriptive text. Descriptive text is important to master. Therefore, the present study is an attempt to fill the gap by investigating the use of photographs in writing the descriptive text for junior high school students in the framework of genre-based approach; and investigating to what extent does the use of photographs improve students' ability in writing descriptive text.

Aspects of Writing

There are five elements need to be addressed for successful and complete writing. Those elements are genre, register,

discourse, grammar, and graphic feature (Rose, 2007, as cited in Emilia, 2011). Genre consists of the purpose of the text; the stages in writing the text such as distinctive beginnings, middles, and ends; and particular linguistic features. The register consists of field, tenor, and mode. Discourse is a continual stretch of (especially spoken) language larger than a sentence, often constituting a unit such as a sermon, argument, joke, or narrative (Crystal, 1992, p. 25). Discourse covers phases, lexis, conjunction, reference, and appraisal. Grammar consists of topic sentences, paragraph unity, transition and cohesion, sentence construction, verb arrangement, tense, word orders, articles, pronouns, and prepositions. The graphic feature focuses on grammar, spelling, punctuation, citation of references (if applicable), and neatness and appearance (Brannan, 2010).

Photograph in Language Teaching

Learning activities are more interesting when it involves various media in use. It can be by giving creative visual aids to attract students' attention, develop interest, share content, and increase the understanding of an idea (Zacharisen, 2010). As visual aids, there are many types of pictures used in teaching and learning activities such as photographs, diagrams, drawings, and charts (Bearne, 2009). The photograph is one type of picture that can be used in the classroom to help the students in constructing texts.

There are many reasons why photographs are used in language learning. First, using photographs with English language learners is extremely more effective to support learning than thousands of words (Ferlazzo, 2012). Then, as the picture is made using a camera, learning with photographs is different from learning with other objects. Although photographs have two sources for evidence: the physical photo (photographic print) and the image (Sieber & Hatcher, 2012, p. 19), Sieber and Hatcher (2012) state "...most of the information in photographs is gained from studying the image rather than the physical aspects of the photograph". Therefore, learning with a photograph provides the students with an accurate description because they can describe what they see based on the reality in it.

Some elements in photographs include time, place, subject, photographer, purpose, and technology which can influence the information contained within. It is because every photograph is created at one point in time, in a particular place, of a chosen subject, by a particular photographer, for a specific purpose, and using a particular technology (Sieber & Hatcher, 2012, p. 15). There are many possibilities for interpreting photographs. Whatever the immediate topic, it is always important to ask: "Why was this photo taken?" and "What did the photographer mean to convey?". It is only after answering these questions that we can fruitfully ask "What can we learn from the subject of this photo?" (Sieber & Hatcher, 2012, p.20).

Like language, pictures in multimodal texts also fulfill three functions: a representational function in which the pictures represent what is perceived, believed, and imagined based on the reality; an interpersonal function whereby the images build a relationship with the readers; a textual function whereby the

images combine the elements that give them an artistic and emotional impact (Joyce & Gaudin, 2011).

II. METHOD

The research design used in this study is quasi-experimental. It is an experiment in which units are not assigned randomly (Cresswell, 2008). It was employed to see the effectiveness of photographs in writing descriptive text by comparing the scores of pretest and posttest in the experimental group and control group. In this study, the students in an experimental group were taught by using photographs and students in a control group were taught with the regular method. Pretest and posttest were administered to measure the improvement of students' ability in writing descriptive text.

This study was conducted in a junior high school in West Lampung regency, Lampung province with eighth-grade students. The data taken from the pretest and posttest were the score reflecting the students' writing ability.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. *Findings of pretest Score Analysis*

To answer the first research question about the use of photographs in writing descriptive text, there are some procedures for analyzing the data. Normality distribution and variance homogeneity tests are needed to be considered before testing the students' improvement in writing ability. Then the data were analyzed by using the T-test. The data obtained were analyzed by using SPSS 20.00.

- The Normality Distribution Test of Pretest Data

A normality distribution test was conducted to identify whether data of pretest from experimental and control groups have normal distribution population or not. This test used the test of Shapiro-Wilk. Based on the normality test of pretest data, it was found that the score of significance is 0.066 for the experimental group and is 0.016 for the control group. The score of the significance of the control group was under α (0,05) so that H_0 was rejected. It means the data of the pretest of the control group were not distributed normally. While the score of the significance of the experimental group was more than α (0,05) so that H_0 was accepted. It means the data of the pretest of the experimental group were in a normal distribution. Because one of the data of the pretest was not distributed normally, the following test was using the Mann-Whitney non-parametric test.

- The Variance Homogeneity Test

Mann-Whitney test was used to know whether the data of the pretest of experimental and control groups were significantly different or not. Based on the Mann-Whitney test for data of pretest, it is found that the score of the significance of the Mann-Whitney test in Asymp.Sig (2-tailed) was 0,383. It means it is bigger than α (0,05) so that H_0 was accepted. Therefore, it can be concluded that the data were not quite different or homogenous.

- T-test Computation on Pretest

After calculating the normality distribution test and variance homogeneity test, t-test computation was conducted. Based on independent samples test for data of pretest, it is found that the t_{obs} was 0.361. It is higher than the t -table (0.05) so that H_0 was accepted. There was no significant difference in the preliminary ability of students writing between experimental and control groups.

B. Findings of Posttest Score Analysis

- The Normality Distribution Test of Posttest Data

This test used to know whether the data of the posttest of experimental and control groups were in the normal distribution or not. The test was using *Shapiro-Wilk*. Based on the normality test of data of the pretest, it is found that the level of significance of the experimental group was 0.052. It is bigger than α (0.05) so that H_0 is accepted. It means the data of the posttest of the experimental group were distributed normally. While, the score of the significance of the control group was 0.296 or bigger than α (0, 05). So that H_0 was accepted. It means the data of the posttest of the experimental group were also distributed normally. If the data from both experimental and control groups were in the normal distribution, the following test used a parametric test by using the *One-way Anova* test.

- The Variance Homogeneity Test of Posttest Data

The homogeneity test used to know whether the data of the posttest of the experimental and control group were homogenous or not. Based on the result of the one-way Anova test, it is found that the score of the One-Way Anova test was 0.013. It is smaller than α (0.05). It means the data were different or not homogenous. If the data were not homogenous, the following test used T-test computation to know whether there is a difference between the scores of the posttest in experimental and control groups.

- T-test Computation on Posttest

T-test computation on the posttest was conducted to identify whether or not there are differences between the scores of the posttest in experimental and control groups. The result of independent samples t-test for posttest data shows that the score of sig. (2-tailed) was 0.013. It was smaller than α (0.05). It means H_0 is rejected. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference between posttest data between experimental and control groups.

C. Findings and Discussions of Data Analysis of Each Area of Writing

The second research question proposed in this study is to what extent the use of photographs improve students writing skill. The data were collected from the pretest and posttest of students in the experimental group. Then, each area of writing aspect from pretest and posttest were calculated by the index gain formula to see the students' writing improvement in each area of writing descriptive text.

Genre is related to the organization of the text in which descriptive text consists of two elements namely identification and description (Feez & Joyce, 1998; Emilia, 2013), and the purpose of the descriptive text is to describe particular thing, place, or person (Knapp & Watkins, 2005; Emilia, 2013). Figure 1 shows the result of the index gain of genre aspect of writing in the experimental group.

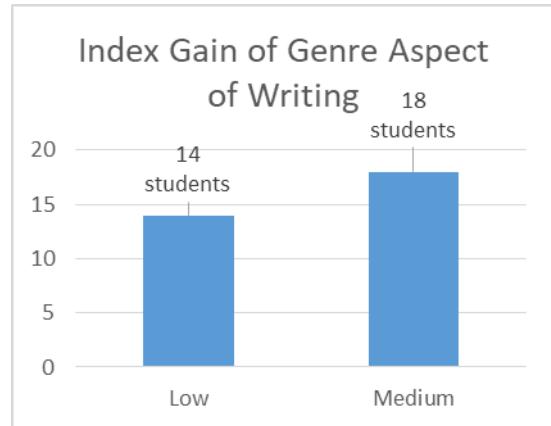


Fig. 1. Index Gain of Genre Aspect of Writing

Based on figure 1, it can be seen that 14 students in the experimental group are included in low improvement in the genre aspect of writing. Meanwhile, 18 students of them are in the category of medium improvement in the genre aspect of writing, and there is no student belongs to a high category in the genre aspect of writing. Moreover, 13 students have the same score and one of them has a decreased score. Despite the unexpected results, in general, more than half of the students (18 students) in the experimental group have an improvement in the genre aspect of writing.

Register related to students writing' skills improved significantly. This aspect of writing is related to the appropriateness of language features, clarity and complexity of language features, the context of writing, and its addressee. The register covers three aspects, namely; (1) field is related to the topic that is going to describe by the writer, (2) tenor is related to the language used by the writer that indicates the relationship between the writer and the reader, and (3) mode is related to what kinds of language used by the writer whether it is in written language or spoken language. It can be seen from the result of the index gain of the register aspect of writing in the experimental group in figure 2.

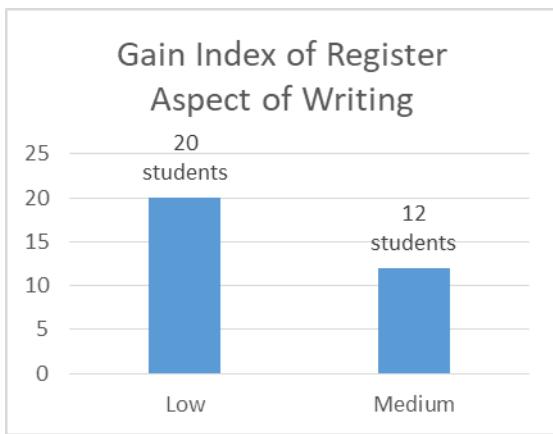


Fig. 2. Index Gain of Register Aspect of Writing

Figure 2 shows the students' improvement in the register aspect of writing. Based on chart 4.6, the classifications of students' improvement in register aspects are: 20 students have low index gain and 12 students have medium index gain. It means the scores of the register aspect of writing in the experimental group increased after getting the treatments of learning descriptive text based on photographs. However, from 20 students who have low index gain, 16 students have a stagnant score and there are four students' scores that decreased after getting the treatments. It means students' improvement in the register aspect is not good enough because not more than 50 % of the group gets an improvement in the register aspect.

Regarding the discourse aspect of writing, the students' scores also improve. This aspect of writing is related to a good connection, coherency, suitable references, and expressive ideas in writing text. Index gain of discourse aspect of writing of experimental group is presented in figure 3.

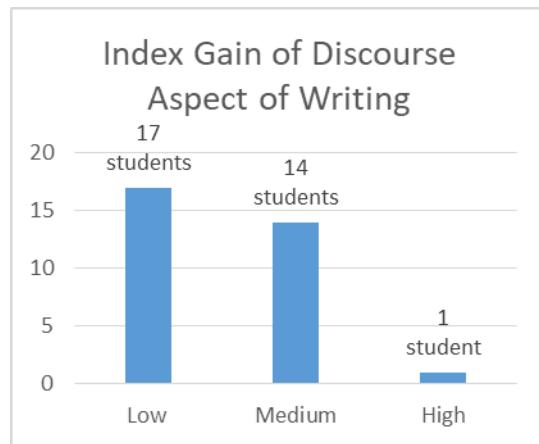


Fig. 3. Index gain of Discourse Aspect of Writing

Figure 3 shows the students' improvement in the discourse aspect of writing. 17 students have low index gain, 14 students who have medium index gain, and a student who has high index gain. Then, no student has a decreased score. It means students' scores in the discourse aspect of writing have increased after the treatments. However, 17 students with low index gain have a stagnant score. Meanwhile, 15 students from

32 of the total number of students in the experimental group have an improvement in the discourse aspect of writing after getting the treatment.

In the aspect of grammar, students' writing skill in this aspect also has an improvement. This aspect related to the whole aspect of grammar such as tense, verb agreement, sentence structure, and the use of the adjective in sentences. The result of students' improvement in the grammar aspect of writing can be seen in figure 4.

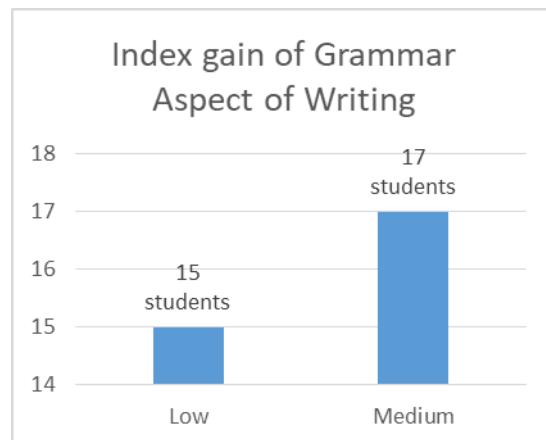


Fig. 4. Index gain of Grammar Aspect of Writing

Figure 4 shows the students' improvement in the grammar aspect of writing. 15 students have low index gain and all of them have a stagnant score, 17 students have medium index gain, and no student has high index gain. However, there is no student whose score decreases. Then, 17 other students have an improvement in the grammar aspect of writing. It means photographs can improve students' writing ability in the grammar aspect. Moreover, more than 50 % of the total number of students (17 students) have an improvement in the grammar aspect of writing.

The graphic feature is related to the spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and neatness in producing the writing. The result of students' improvement in the graphic feature aspect of writing can be seen in figure 5.

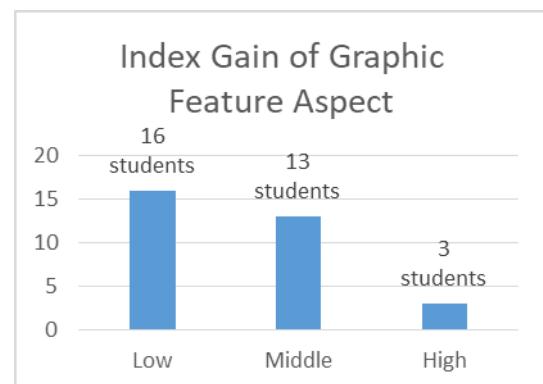


Fig. 5. Index Gain of Graphic Feature Aspect

Figure 5 presents the improvement of students writing in the graphic feature. Based on the chart, 16 students have low index gain, 13 students who have medium index gain, and 3 students who have high index gain. It means, students' writing skill, especially in graphic feature aspect, has increased. However, from 16 students who have low index gain, 13 students have a stagnant score and 2 students have a decreased score which is not more than half of the total number of students. Generally, 50 % (16 students) from the total number of students in the experimental group have an improvement in the graphic feature aspect.

IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the abovementioned findings and discussion, the study comes with some conclusions. As for the first question, the study finds out that the use of photographs in writing descriptive text is considered effective to improve students' writing skills. The SPSS 20.0 for Windows shows that the students in the experimental group who used photographs in writing have better descriptive texts than those in the control group applying the regular method. Proven by t-test computation in the posttest, the null hypothesis was then rejected as a significant difference between the posttest mean of the experimental and control group after the treatments are identified with a significant value of 0.02, lower than the level of significance (0.05). based on this result, it is concluded that photograph use in teaching writing can improve students' writing skills.

Next, as for aspects of students' writing, the analysis shows that students' writing skills improve in five features; genre, register, discourse, grammar, and graphic. Of these five features, the highest improvement is shown by discourse with mean N-Gain score 0.23, then genre with the mean of N-Gain score 0.22, graphic feature with the mean score 0.21, register with mean of N-Gain score 0.05, and grammar with mean of N-Gain score 0.19. These figures mean that photographs can be integrated into the teaching of writing descriptive text can improve all aspects of students' writing. To improve students' writing skills, the study suggests that photographs be also integrated into teaching other genres of writing such as narrative, recounts, procedures, and report.

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