IMPROVING ENGLISH WRITING SKILLS OF STUDENTS OF SMAN 1 PRAMBANAN SLEMAN THROUGH THE USE OF WEB BLOG

AS AN ENGLISH WRITING COMPETITION MEDIUM

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ABSTRACT

English writing skills is one of English basic skills that need to be improved among high school students. This research is a classroom action research which aims to improve English writing skills of students of SMAN 1 Prambanan Sleman through English Writing Competition using STAD (student teams achievement division) cooperative learning model on a web blog developed by the English teacher.

The method of Kemmis & McTaggart was used in this research, consisting some cycles. Each cycle consists of four steps: 1) planning; 2) action; 3) observation; and 4) reflection. The problem was called succesfully solved when at least 75% of students passed the minimum passing standard (*Kriteria Ketuntasan Minimal, KKM*) of English writing. The research instuments were writing assessment

and pencil-paper test. The learning model that used in this research was STAD cooperative learning model.

The results showed that the problem of students' English writing skill can be solved in 3 learning cycles. English Writing Competition using STAD cooperative learning model on the web blog can improve English writing skills of students of SMAN 1 Prambanan Sleman.

1 INTRODUCTION

The development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in this digital era has significantly affected on education and learning sector. It is already known that the quality of teaching is very dependent on three main components, namely learning content, learning delivery system, and learning interactivity. ICT in this digital era can transform these three components form, so the learning becomes more accessible, flexible, and reach a higher quality. As has been reported by Susetyaningtyas (2015) that the use of ICT-based audio and video in the hybrid learning using Edmodo LMS was able to improve listening skills of high school students.

English writing is still perceived as a difficult component of English subject among high school student. English as Second Language (ESL) is taught by 4 main components. They are writing, reading, listening, and speaking which can not be separated each others. Therefore, the writing skill of students will affect they overall English competence. Improving students' writing skill also means improving their English competence. However, to improve students' writing skill requires some basic skills such as content, vocabulary, organization, language use and mechanics (Nik *et al.*, 2010; Hiew, 2012). Due to its comprehensive basic skills that must be mastered by students, the writing becomes more difficult to the students. More over, English is Foreign Language (EFL) to Indonesian students, so it is not to be heard/spoken nor written/read in daily life. In addition, the culture and the spelling of words in English are very different from the one in Indonesia. This condition makes the arrests of meaning, the management, and the interpretation of information in English becomes very not easy to do. Therefore, writing is not only about cognitive knowledge, but it is a skill which requires continuing practice.

The effort to improve students' English writing skill need to be held. According to Ahmed Ismael (2011), writing skills may

increase when the interests and the needs of students are facilitated, also when students are faced with a situation that force them to make their own authentic writing. Some various efforts can be developed, for example by giving independently or structured English writing tasks to the student. Flexibility of time and place needs to be given to students in order to minimize the problem of content and organization (Nik et al 2010, Hiew 2012) in learning English writing. In addition, the learning time and frequency of repitition of the content should be facilitated. Time and repetition of learning is closely related to self-regulated learning. It was proved that self-regulated learning is very effective in the success of learning (Butler and Winne, 1995). One of the efforts is learning by using website or web blog. Web blog can be accessed anytime and anywhere in accordance with the conditions of students.

This study use wordpress.com as a web application of content management system (CMS), which now can be enrich with several plugins for interactivity purposes as an online delivery system, for example, the plugins of Chat, FB comments, BuddyPress and BBPress. Menu chat facilitates the discussion for students, while FB comments can be used for giving comments on a post, while BuddyPress and BBPress can be used to create an active forum or group. The availability of those wordpress plugins may support the interactivity of each small group or the whole group in the class. In this research, this kind of web blog will be used as a medium for students to upload their paper, to give comments each other, to edit, or to make a discussion group.

One of learning model to improve students' writing skill is a STAD (student teams achievement division), a type of cooperative learning model. It was reported that using STAD can improve students' achievement on various subjects, attitudes, and learning motivation (Muraya and Kimamo 2011, van Wyk, 2012, Tran 2013). Students are being heterogeneously grouped, 4 people in each group.

The task of writing was given to each group and it was competed among groups through English Writing Competition on the web blog. STAD learning model is chosen in to order to motivate each group to work hard and to win the best writing score. Students' English writing skill are expected to be significantly imporved by this kind of method.

This research aims to describe how the efforts should be made to improve English writing skill of students of SMAN 1 Prambanan Sleman through English Writing Competition on web-blog. More over, this research is expected to recommend the design of cooperative learning using web-blog, where the students can collaborate and compete each other to make the best results of writing. The web-blog can be used for online learning and also hybrid learning learning, which is proven that it was able to improve students' learning motivation and students' achievement (Ikhsan and Hadi 2015, Ikhsan 2014, Susetyaningtyas 2015).

This kind of learning model is expected to inspire other teachers to optimize the use of social media such as facebook, twitter, and others as a effective and flexible medium for distance learning, where students are able to collaborate and positively compete for the sake of learning objectives. Today, the widely use of gadgets which connected to internet may support the accesbility of web blog anytime and anywhere. This will make an oppotunity to familiarize the students to read and learn anytime and anywhere, so the the long-term aim of this research is a preliminary effort to make reading as a good culture among students and to make a way to achieve life long learning.

2 METHOD

This research is a class action research to resolve the problem of low English writing skills of students of SMAN 1 Prambanan Sleman. The method of Kemmis & McTaggart (1983) was used in this research, consisting some cycles. Each cycle consists of four steps: 1)

planning; 2) action; 3) observation; and 4) reflection. The problem should be called succesfully solved when at least 75% of students pass the minimum passing standard (*Kriteria Ketuntasan Minimal, KKM*) of English writing. The research instuments were writing assessment and pencil-paper test. The learning model that used in this research was STAD cooperative learning model.

This research was conducted in SMAN 1 Prambanan Sleman on odd semester from July to September 2015 in accordance with the time schedule set by the department of academic in the school. The research subject was grade X students of SMAN 1 Prambanan Sleman Yogyakarta. The object of this research was the English writing skills of the students.

The learning activities were conducted in accordance with the lesson plan and syllabus in the curriculum, but the last 20 minutes at each meeting were being used to English Writing Competition on the web blog. English teacher is an administrator on the web blog. Each student is a member of the web blog and made in to some groups.

English Writing Competition was conducted in groups. Students write in groups and coordinated by the group leader and the guidance of the teacher. The assessment of the writing result was done for each group while each student's English writing skill was assessed by individual paper-pencil test. The title of "the best group" was given to the group which reach the best score in writing. This title could move to other groups in accordance with the test results at the end of the next cycle.

3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Preliminary Research Finding

Preliminary observation in this research was conducted at the first meeting to find and to detect any problems that students' faced

in English writing. Data in the beginning activities were collected through observation and English writing test. Observations was conducted by the teacher and assisted by one other English teacher as an observer. Test (pretest) was given at the beginning of learning to measure the students' English writing skill.

At the first meeting, the teacher gave the rules of English Writing Competition, formed the groups, and made a discussion about English writing. One class consists of 24 students and they were divided into 6 groups with 4 students in each group. The groups were formed heterogeneously according to their cognitive level and gender. The theme of the first meeting was talking about self. The writing was conducted by the guidance of the teacher (guided learning). The first meeting was held on August 15th 2015 during the 2 session of lesson.

The English teaching in class was not done continuously about writing along the research. The teaching was conducted as the planning in the lesson plan and syllabus, but at the end of the study, on about 20 minutes, the task of English Writing Competition was given to the students. They solved the task by working cooperatively in group and online using the Web Blog (WB). Students are expected to discuss and actively contribute to the editing of the writings on their group to produce the best writing results by the coordination of the group leader and always guided by the teacher. Teachers are always there and become a member in each group on the web-blog.

The results of the observations conducted showed that students still have difficulties in writing English. Some of the difficulties were the lack of ideas, limited vocabulary, the lack of grammar, the low confidence in writing, and the absence of anymedium that may lead students to continue to write and discuss.

Pretest to measure the initial English writing skill was conducted at the first meeting. Minimum passing standard was 75 of 100. The average score of the pretest was near to the standard which is 73.47 but the sum of students who passed the standar was only 58.33%.

Based on the findings of this preliminary research, it was decided that at the next learning cycle, English Writing Competition using STAD model on the Web Blog (WB) would be start.

Cycle I Reseach Finding

Learning cycle I was conducted in 2 meetings and held on the third and fourth week of August 2015. The test was conducted at the end of the cycle which was the meeting on August 29th 2015. The theme of writing in this cycle was about expressing compliment. The test result showed that the sum of students who passed the passing standard was about 91.67% with the average score of 79.85. Comparing to the preliminary cycle, this result was better.

Based on the observation in this cycle, problem of the lack of the idea in writing was not clearly found, as well as the problem of vocabulary. But some problems such as grammar and confidence in writing were still found. Those problems could be solved by continuing writing guidance.

The results of the test and observation in this first learning cycle has shown an increase from the last cycle. Title "The best group" in this cycle was given to Group 2 with the score of 81.75. The sum of students who passed the passing standard was 91.67% this was actually exceeded the 75% as being set at the beginning of the research. But based on the observation, some of the students still encountered some problems that still need to be continuing

improved through the action and the guidance by the teacher so that the research has not been stop here and would be still continue to the next cycle. The action plan for the next cycle was to make more discussion over WB with comments from teachers and would be more focus on grammar and more compliment to increase the students' writing confidence.

Cycle II Research Finding

Learning cycle II was conducted in 2 meetings and held on the first and second week of September 2015. The test was conducted at the end of the cycle which was the meeting on September 12 2015. The theme of writing in this cycle was about showing care. It was not same as the previous cycle that used essay format on writing, in this cycle students were asked to write in dialogue form. Learning activities take place were conducted as in the lesson plan and syllabus, but just as in previous cycles, the last 20 minutes at each meeting, English Writing Competition on WB was held. . The test result showed that the sum of students who passed the passing standard was still about 91.67% with the average score of 83.19. Comparing to the previous cycle, this score was better.

Based on the observation in this cycle, problem of the lack of the idea in writing and grammar were not clearly found, as well as the problem of vocabulary. But the problem of confidence in writing was still found. This problem was very important to be solved. It could be solved by continuing writing guidance.

The results of the test and observation in this first learning cycle has shown an increase from the last cycle even the sum of students who passed the passing standard was still at 91.67%. Title "The best group" in this cycle was given to Group 5 with the score of

85.63. The sum of students who passed the passing standard was actually exceeded the 75% as being set at the beginning of the research. But based on the observation, the problem of confidence in writing was still seriously found. It considered that the learning cycle should be still continue with other kind of actions.

The action plan which would be done in the next cycle were to: a) keep continuing the discussion on the WB; b) more giving comments from teacher on grammar, c) more compliments, more motivation, and more reward to make more active students and to increase theier confidence in writing.

Cycle III Research Finding

Learning cycle III was conducted in 6 meetings and held on the third week of September 2015 untill second week of October 2015. The test was conducted at the end of the cycle which was the meeting on October 17th 2015. The theme of writing in this cycle was about describing people. In this cycle, students were asked to write in essay form. Learning activities take place were conducted as in the lesson plan and syllabus, but just as in previous cycles, the last 20 minutes at each meeting, English Writing Competition on WB was held. The test result showed that the sum of students who passed the passing standard was still about 91.67% with the average score of 84.17. Comparing to the previous cycle, this score was better. Title "The best group" in this cycle was given to Group 6 with the score of 87.50.

The problems of grammar, vocabulary and confidence in writing were still found in the observation, but only found in the same of few students since the the first cycle. The average score of the test continued to increase since preliminary research, the first

cycle, the second cycle and the third cycle. The sum of students who passed the passing standard was 91.67%, the same value since the first cycle and the second cycle. The sum of students who passed the passing standard was exceeded the 75% as being set at the beginning of the research. The other issues from the observation has generally been solved although still appear on a very few students. This result suggested that the action was enough and the research could be stop here in learning cycle III.

The Web-Blog

The web-blog (WB) which was used as an English instructional medium in this research can be accessed through www.inggrissma.com. The main menu which available on the home page WB were a) home; b) groups; c) members; d) activity; and e) contacts. Students could conduct the group discussion both in the classroom and outside the classroom by using internet. The discussions were able to be monitored by the teacher so that the teaching could take place without a direct face-to-face meeting between students and teacher. Learning through WB was very interesting because the learning would be not limited by distance and time. Students could access the WB anytime and anywhere through the internet. Figure 1 shows the view of one of the web-blog interface.
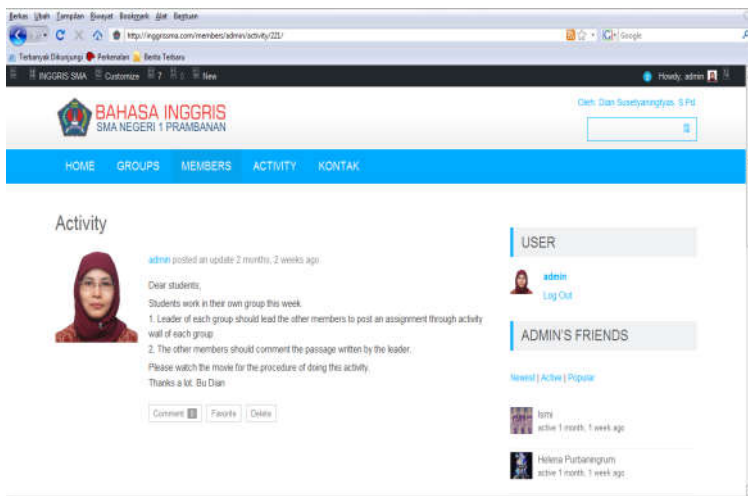
Figure 1. One of the Web-Blog Interface (Example of Giving the Task)

Improving English Writing Skill of the Students

The increase of English writing skills on every student was analyzed from the results of the pretest and the English writing test at the end of each cycle. The average score of preliminary cycly continues to increase until the third cycle, as can be seen in Figure 2. These results showed that learning English using the WB and STAD learning model could contribute to the improvement of students' English writing skills individually.
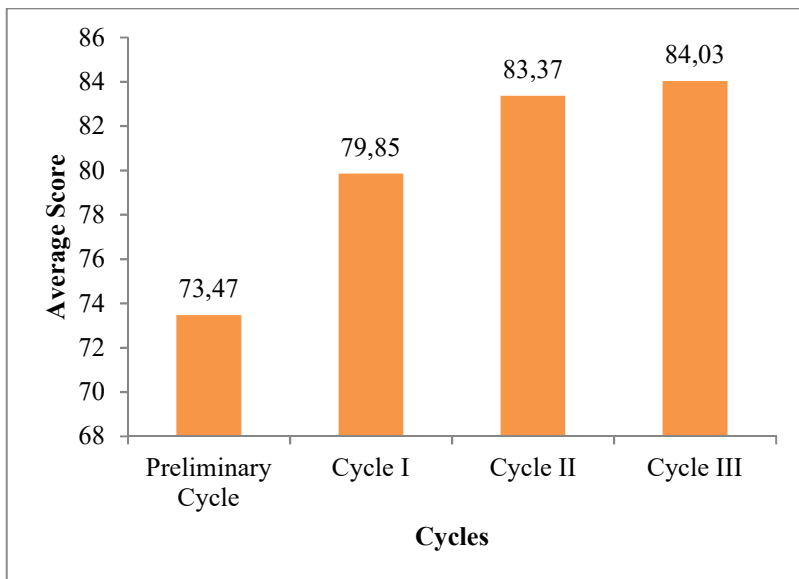
Figure 2. The Increase of English Writing Test Average Score

The result of the English writing in each group was also analyzed to see the increase or the decrease of the score in each group. Five of six groups gain the increasing score of from preliminary cycle to the last cycle, as shown in Figure 3. These results suggest that the increase in English writing skills can be reached by using WB as an instructional medium and STAD learning model. This method allowed students to discuss actively by the teacher guiding.
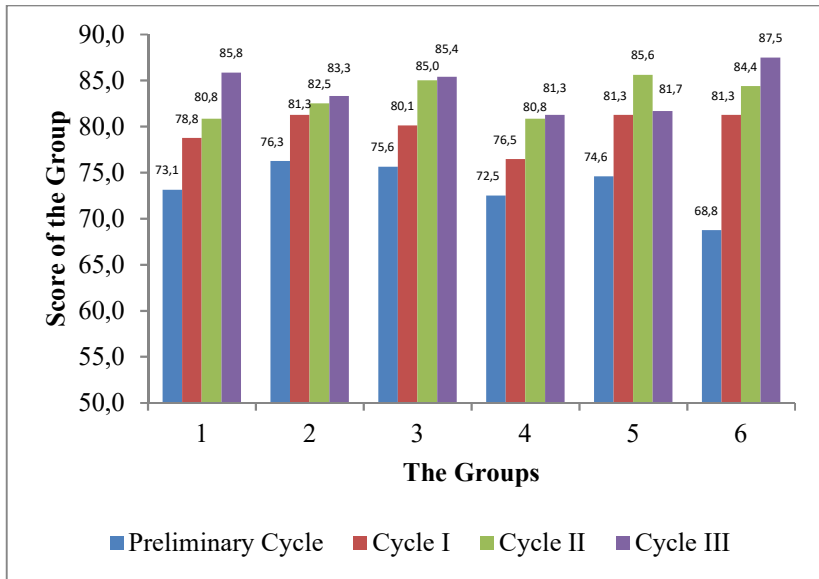
Figure 3. The Group Score in English Writing

Mastery learning of students was analyzed by the sum of students who passed the passing standard. The minimum passing standard was 75. In preliminary cycle, the results of students' English writing test showed that only 14 of 24 students who passed the standard. After the actions were implemented in the first cycle, second cycle and third cycle, this value was increase. Students who passed the standard were 22 of 24 or about 91.67%. This value was still same for cycle I untill cycle III. The grafic of these increasing can be seen in Figure 4.
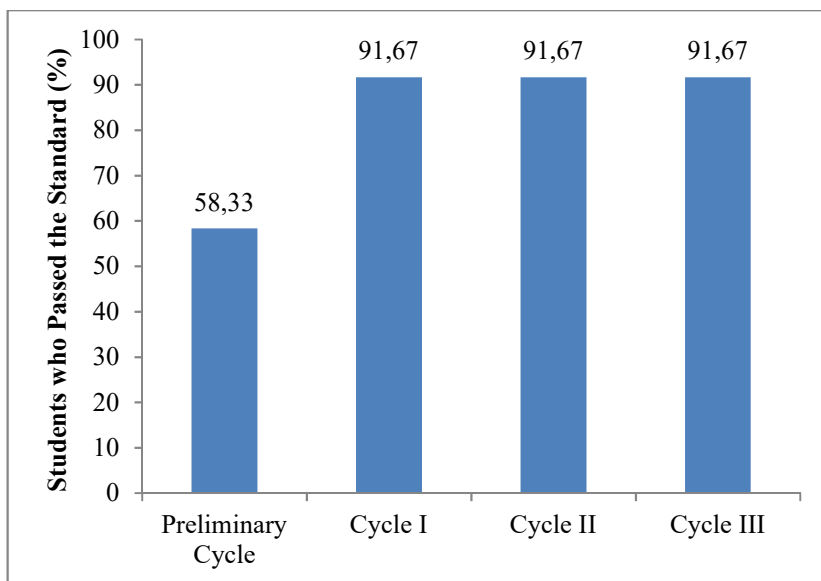
Figure 4. Percentage of The Sum of Students Who Passed The Passing Standard

The Students' Response Against The Web-Blog

How the students responded to the WB was observed using questionnaire, including self-regulated learning, learning motivation, and the ease of using WB. Moreover, some problems in using the WB were also observed using this questionnaire.

Using the WB with STAD learning model, beside gave a positive effect on the improvement of students' writing skills, also gave a good effect on student self-regulated learning. From questionnaires given to students, some informations were summarized as follows: 1) using the WB, students were able to

perform self-regulated learning easily without the help of others and without having to directly meet the teacher; 2) online learning using the WB can be done anywhere and anytime; 3) students fell more confident in writing English by using the WB; 4) the uploaded multimedia on the WB were very helpful in learning; 5) learning was more effective because it can be done with their own desire to learn; and 6)the discussion can be conducted freely and without pressure.

Another students' response was about learning motivation. Generally, students' learning motivation can be stimulated through interesting instructional medium which offers something new and different from other ordinary instructional medium. WB is one of alternative learning medium that can be used to stimulate the increase of students' learning motivation. From the questionnaires, some of the responses related to students' learning motivation were: 1) the students are motivated to do the task on time; 2) students feel challenged to improve their English writing skill; 3) the grant of title "The best group" motivated students to improve their English writing skill; and 4) students become more eager to attend the English class because they have an advance access to learning through the WB.

Generally, the students look very enthusiast in following the learning using the WB. The WB was easy to be accessed anywhere and anytime as long as the connection of the internet is available. Some students' response to the ease in using the WB including: 1)the WB features were easy to understand and easy to use; 2) students enjoy their learning in the WB; 3) the subject material which are available in the WB were very interesting and very helpful; and 4) the discussion on the WB is easy to do.

Beside some of the advantages described above, some problems were also found when student use the WB. Some of them were: 1) the ease of learning using the WB is rely on the ease of internet access, bad internet signal means bad quality of learning

using the WB; and 2) the task for any group sometimes make only some students are being active, while the other students only give a few contribution to the the task.

4 CONCLUTION AND SUGGESTION

Improving English writing skill of grade X students of SMAN 1 Prambanan Sleman can be done through English Writing Competition on the Web-Blog using STAD cooperative learning model. Such improvements can be done through active discussions, giving compliments, rewards and motivation, also through a positive response and comments on the results of students' written.

STAD cooperative learning model using the Web Blog as an instructional medium can improve students' English writing skills, both individually and by the groups. Based on the observations during the three cycles of learning, this method was also able to improve students' mastery learning.

The using of the Web-Blog as an instructional medium may continue to be applied to the English teaching to improve students' English skills. The use of the Web-Blog can be further combined with other learning model other than STAD cooperative learning model. The Web-Blog also can be equipped with more multimedia learning and more features to facilitate the learning anytime and anywhere.

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