THE ROLE OF PICTURE SERIES
IN IMPROVING STUDENTS' WRITING ABILITY

ARTICLE

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Abstract:
Writing is a productive skill that plays an important role in English language teaching and learning. However, teaching writing is not an easy matter, so it demands the care and attention of English teachers. Writing product should fulfill some criteria, such as content, organization, vocabulary use, grammatical use, and mechanics in order to be a good one. Instructional media is one of the aspects that can help the teachers in teaching writing. This article aims to review the role of picture series, as one of the instructional media, in improving students' writing ability. It covers the theory, regulation, research, and practice in teaching writing, gives some examples of various media in teaching writing, highlights the role of using picture series in improving students' ability, and provides an example of procedure of how to implement picture series. It is expected that this article could provide a guideline of teaching writing by using picture series and some suggestions for future practice and research.

Key words: picture series, improve, writing ability

INTRODUCTION

Writing, in addition to listening, speaking, and reading, is one of language skills that plays an important role in English language teaching and learning. It helps the students learn a second language, in this case English (Lutfiah, 2009). The activity to communicate or deliver our ideas with others can be done through written form. Petty and Jansen (1980) states that writing is an activity that creates ideas or opinions, thought, and feeling in written form.

Among the four language skills, writing is the most complex skill. Therefore, it is considered to be the most difficult skill for second or foreign language to master. There is no doubt that writing is the most difficult skill for the second language learners to master (Richards & Renandya, 2002). According to them, the difficulties lies not only in generating and organizing the ideas, but also in translating these ideas into readable text. So, teaching
writing for Junior High School students is not an easy matter, especially when the students’ English competence is not well developed.

In line with their statement, Pertiwi (2016) states that students have some difficulties in writing. They said that writing is the most difficult skill in learning English. Those difficulties are poor organization, unstructured content, incorrect grammar, word choice, and mechanics, such as spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. In learning writing, the students should fulfill the criteria of good writing. Further, those criteria should be taken care by teachers when they want to teach writing in their classroom. Those criteria are content, organization, vocabulary use, grammatical use, and mechanics (Brown, 2007). Thus, it demands the care and attention of English teachers.

Regarding the difficulties, English teachers should pay attention to components and characteristics of teaching in order to make the teaching-learning process conducted well. Those components are objectives, strategies, environment and media (Smaldino et.al, 2009). All of them may become the problems for teachers in teaching writing. Among these, media become the main focus of attention in this article.

This article aims to review the role of picture series, as one of instructional media, in improving students’ writing ability. To achieve this aim, it begins with the theory, regulation, research, and practice in teaching writing. Hereafter, it gives some examples of various media in teaching writing and highlights the role of using picture series in improving students' ability. Finally, this article suggests a procedure of how to teaching writing using picture series.

**TEACHING WRITING: THEORY AND REGULATION**

In the teaching of writing area, there are some views about writing itself. These views may influence the teachers' practice in teaching writing. Writing is viewed as a productive
skill. It is considered as a productive skill because its activity refers to the production of written texts. In line with this statement, Harmer (2004) states that writing is an activity that creates ideas or opinion in written form. The most important thing from this view is the students' product of writing.

Writing is also viewed as a process. The students need some processes to produce a good written text. Brown (2000) states the process of composing written text as the result of thinking, drafting, and revising. Firstly, students have to think of the topic or theme that they are going to write. Next, they can generate the ideas by making a draft for their writing and finally students can organize and make the revision for the final product. According to Harmer (2004), writing should be taught through cyclical process, namely planning, drafting, editing, and final version. The process of writing is not linear, but rather recursive.

Additionally, writing can be viewed as a social activity. This view sees communicative competence as involving the mastery of different text types (Richard, 2006). Therefore, the teaching of writing should be able to create opportunities for students to understand and write various kinds of text for the sake of purposeful communication. It is known as genre-based approach. Agustien et al (2004) provides the steps of this approach. Those steps are building knowledge of the field (BKnF), modeling of the text (MoT), joint construction of the text (JCoT), and independent construction of the text (ICoT).

Teachers have important role in teaching writing. Harmer (2001) points out three roles of teacher in teaching writing, namely: motivator, resource, and feedback provider. Teachers should create the right conditions for generating ideas and persuade them to get involved in writing activity. Additionally, teachers should be ready to supply information and language where necessary. Those roles demand special care of the teachers.

Writing plays an important role in English language teaching and learning. The importance role of writing in English language teaching and learning for Junior High School
can be seen in the curriculum. Nowadays, the education system in Indonesia implements two types of curriculum. They are 2006 School Based Curriculum and 2013 Curriculum. According to 2006 School Based Curriculum for Junior High School, it is stated that the teaching of English involves the four language skills, namely: listening, speaking, reading, and writing which are taught in an integrated manner to achieve functional literacy level (Depdiknas, 2006). The students should able to comprehend and produce not only short functional texts, such as announcement, invitation, and advertisement; but also essays in the form of procedure, descriptive, recount, narrative, and report.

In addition, based on 2013 Curriculum, it is stated that the objective of teaching English for Junior High School is that the students should be able to identify social function, generic structure, and linguistic feature of the text. They are expected to communicate interpersonally, transactionally, and functionally about their selves and their environment in their daily life. They should able to produce short spoken and written texts, too (Kemdikbud, 2016). It means that writing still has important role in English teaching and learning in this curriculum.

RESEARCH AND PRACTICES IN TEACHING WRITING

There are some research and practice in teaching writing related to the use of media, especially picture series, both in Indonesia and abroad. Most of them conduct action and experimental research in using picture series to improve students' writing ability. This article focuses on the research and practice of teaching writing by using picture series for Junior High School in Indonesia.

Hassanah (2009) in her study reported that the English teachers usually focus on mostly grammatical aspect and not so much on the product of writing. This means that some English teachers only occasionally practice the teaching of writing, starting by only
explaining the topic to the students are going to write about while the students listen the explanations. Then the students are asked to write a short composition in certain time allotted without using any model. The teacher waits for the students' product without giving additional guidance. Finally, the students submit their work to the teacher. She conducted action research by using picture series to improve students' writing ability. The result of her research shows that picture series can improve students' writing ability.

Sudaryo (2013) conducted action research on the use of picture series through process writing approach to improve the students' achievement in writing narrative texts on Grade 8 of SMPN 1 Batu. The result of the research revealed that the use of picture series as media through process writing approach to teach narrative texts is improving students' achievement in writing narrative texts on grade eight of SMPN 1 Batu. It means that the use of picture series through process writing approach could solve the students' problems in writing narrative texts.

In line with Sudaryo, Mudassir (2014) conducted experimental research on the use of picture series on students' ability in writing a recount text at the second grade of SMPN 1 Pasuruan. From the research result, the value of t-observed was 3.153 and t-table was 2.018. The result of the research proved that picture series is an effective media in recount text teaching writing.

**VARIOUS MEDIA IN TEACHING**

As mentioned above, media are components of teaching which have great influence in improving students' writing ability. Due to media, the writing teaching-learning process will have more variation and will be exciting. Hamalik (1985) defines media as any tools, methods, and techniques used to make the communication and interaction between teacher and students more effective in the teaching-learning process. Students will be more interested
and enthusiastic in joining the teaching-learning process.

There are many kinds of instructional media that can be used in teaching and learning process. According to Samjaya (2012), there are three types of media, namely audio (radio, tape recorder, cassette), visual (picture, photograph, drawing), and audiovisual (video). Visual media considered as the most effective way in learning since students learn most through the sense of sight, then through the sense of hearing, and the remainder via the senses of smell, touch, and taste (Chee & Wong, 2003). There are a lot of choice of picture that can be used as aid in teaching writing, such as one picture, picture series, diagrams, tables, maps, and charts (Raimes, 1983).

Pictures as the visual media are very useful for teaching writing. The use of pictures as visual media in the teaching learning process is intended to make teaching learning more effective and sufficient so that the students' writing ability can be improved. Wright (1992) states that pictures make a particularly powerful contribution to both the content and the process of language learning. He also suggests that picture can often be used to promote productive skill like writing. He adds that pictures can motivate the students, can be described in an objective way, can cue responses to questions, and can provide information. Pictures also contribute to the context in which the language is being used. Additionally, Raimes (1983) states that writing teachers can find valuable resource from pictures since they provide a shared experience in the classroom, a need for common language forms to use in the classroom, a variety of tasks, and a focus of interest for students.

Harmer (2004) proposes some ways to have pictures as media to teach writing. They are describing pictures, writing postcards, story tasks and so on. Pictures bring the outside world into the classroom in a vividly concrete way. Teachers can get the pictures whether drawn, taken from books, newspaper and magazines, internet, or photographs. Pictures can be in the form of flashcards, large wall pictures, cue cards, photographs, or illustration (Harmer,
Some teachers also use projected slides, images from an overhead projector, or projected computer images. Teachers also draw pictures on the board to help with explanation and language work.

Teachers should follow some considerations in using picture in order to make their classroom activity efficient in achieving its purpose. Wright (1992) mentions those considerations, namely: (1) it should be easy to prepare; (2) it should be easy to organize in the classroom; (3) it should be interesting to the students and the teachers; (4) it should be meaningful and authentic; and (5) the activity must give rise to a sufficient amount of language in order to justify its conclusion in the language lesson.

THE ROLE OF PICTURE SERIES IN TEACHING WRITING

Pictures are two-dimensional visual representation or person, place, or things. They can be painted or drawn. Yunus (1981:49-53) classifies pictures into three types such as composite picture, picture series and individual picture. He describes picture series as numbers of linked pictures which form series of sequences in order tell a sequence of events or a story. The use of picture series can help the students to write types of text that require sequences like procedure, recount, and narrative.

Further, Wright (1992) argues that picture series are pictures which show some actions or events in a chronological order. It can be used as one of the stimulus in the learning activity to the students. When picture series are used as media of teaching writing, it can help the students in generate the idea in terms of deciding the theme and the information they want to write.

There are some examples of picture series that can be used in the classroom to teach writing. Those picture series are applicable to teach some genre which need chronological order, such as procedure, recount, and narrative text.
There are some factors supporting the use of picture series. The first factor is that sequential pictures help the students to generate ideas about what they are going to write. Most of the students are confused about what they will write first. Picture series provide information of which event comes first and which one comes next. Meanwhile, the second
factor is that picture series can draw students’ attention out to be involved in writing process. Hopefully, it will improve students' writing ability.

Furthermore, Harmer (2004) proposes several activities of story tasks that the students can have. They are dramatic pictures, a series of pictures of random objects, a series of pictures in sequence, and a headline or caption. Two of them are using picture series: a series of pictures of random objects and a series of pictures in sequence. In the first activity, students will be shown some pictures containing some random objects like a house, a shoe, a man, a tree or so. Then, the students are assigned to write a text based on the pictures they have. The text later can relate one picture to others. In other hand, in the second activity, the students will be shown sequence pictures. Then, they will write a text using pictures as the clue.

**PROCEDURE OF USING PICTURE SERIES IN TEACHING WRITING**

There are some procedure in implementing picture series to teach writing. It depends on the teachers' method in conducting writing teaching-learning process. One of the most popular method of teaching writing is by implementing genre-based approach. Those steps are described as follows.

The first step is Building Knowledge of the Field (BKoF). In this stage, the teacher tries to develop students’ prior knowledge of the text by doing brainstorming. Here, teacher asks some questions based on the topic which related to the text. Furthermore, teacher gives series of picture and asks some questions based on it. Series of pictures in this stage can enhance students’ motivation and interest in writing. Moreover, it also can stimulate students’ students to find what they going to write.

The second step is modeling of the text (MoT). In this stage, teacher tries to develop students’ understanding of the text from its feature and purpose. Here, teacher gives the text
based on the given series of pictures. Then, ask the students to read and explore a series of picture. Finally, teacher and students try to analyze the structural pattern and language features of the model text. They will also try to compare the model text with other examples of the text-type.

Joint construction of the text (JCoT) is the next step. In this third stage, teacher tries to develop students’ writing skill to make procedure text. Students here start to have group discussion related to the text. Doing some activities such as matching the sentences to the suitable pictures, arranging the jumble sentences into a correct order and combining them into a good writing based on a series of pictures. Then, they have a discussion to find the right answer.

The last stage is independent construction of the text (ICoT). The fourth stage lead students to have independent activities. They will construct (write) a text that is being studied independently. Here, teacher tries to develop students’ writing skill to produce the text individually.

**CONCLUSION**

Writing can be viewed as product, process, or social activity. These views may influence the teachers' practice in teaching writing. That is why, most of students consider writing as the most difficult skills to be learnt. Most of them are difficult not only to generate and organize the ideas, but also to fulfill the criteria of good product of writing such as content, organization, vocabulary use, grammatical use, and mechanics. Those difficulties demand the teachers to solve the teaching writing problem. One of the solutions is by using picture series as media to improve students' writing ability.

This article has reviewed various theory, regulation, research, and practice of teaching writing. It is shown that the use of picture series can improve students' writing ability since it
contain chronological order in sequence that ease the students to generate and organize their ideas in written form. However, it is indicated that much still can be done for future teaching writing research and practice to contribute the development of teaching language in general. Additionally, teachers should be creative in choosing and creating interesting media in order to success the teaching of writing. The use of picture series seems potential in improving students' writing ability.

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