

DEVELOPING WRITING SKILL OF GRADE VIII STUDENTS THROUGH PERSONAL LETTER

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Abstract

This research aims at finding whether writing skill of Grade VIII students of SMPN 1 Bulagi be developed through personal letter or not. This is pre-experimental research. It was conducted at SMPN 1 Bulagi, Bulagi Sub-district, Banggai Kepulauan Regency. The population was 230 students and the sample was 24 students. The researcher used tests that were pre-test and post-test to collecting data or to find out the students' ability in writing skill through personal letter. Pre-test was given to find out the students ability in writing skill before treatment, while post-test was given to find out the students ability in writing skill after treatment. Its result indicates that in pre-test there were 2 students (8.3%) who got greater score, while 22 students (91.6%) got lower score. In post-test, there were 21 students (87.5%) who got greater score, while 3 students (12.5%) got lower score. It means that the use of personal letter as a medium can develop writing skill of grade VIII students at SMPN 1 Bulagi.

Keywords: Developing; Writing Skill; Personal Letter.

INTRODUCTION

English is one of the languages that is a means of communicating thoughts from the speaker or writer to the listener or reader. In addition, it is used as media to express the meaning. The reason why English is important to be mastered is the pursuit of global communication which declares English as an International language. English use in oral and written to make an international contact and cooperation among people in different countries.

Writing is one of the English language skills. Nunan (2003:88) defines, "writing is the process of thinking to invent ideas, thinking about how to express into good writing, and arranging the ideas into statement and paragraph clearly". It indicates that the students are expected to explore the ideas and arranging into good paragraph.

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When someone writes something, she or he has own purpose. Brookes and Grundy (1990:3) expresses, “purposes of writing for each person are different. The first answer may be to get information to someone. The second answer may be to solve the problem of volume, of having to store more than the human brain can remember. The third reason for writing may be to filter and shape our experience”.

To write an interesting text and good paragraph, we should know what a paragraph is. Bram (1995:13) states, “A paragraph is a group of sentences which contain relevant information about one main or central idea”. A good paragraph normally focuses only on one idea that is expressed in the topic sentence. A paragraph basically consists of three parts; those are introduction, body, and conclusion.

Writing skill is complex and difficult to teach since in this case writing does not only mean putting down graphic form on a piece of paper. Nurgiyantoro (2001:306) expresses that there are least five components of writing. They are:

1. Content : the substance of writing, the ideas expressed.
2. Form : the organization of the content.
3. Grammar : the employment of grammatical form and syntactic patterns.
4. Vocabulary : the choice of structure and lexical items to give a particular tone or flavor to the writing. It is also called style.
5. Mechanic : the use of graphic conventions of the language.

In writing skill, we need to know and master the writing components. They must be mastered by the students before they write down what they want to express. Haris (1969:68) states, “In order to make a good writing, we need to recognize the component of writing skill such as content, forms, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics (punctuation and capitalization)”. These components will help us to produce good writing.

Writing as a productive skill is very important to be taught to the students especially in Junior High School. The students can express their ideas and feelings in written form by using English. To know the ability of the students in mastering the language is by looking their writing. However, there are many students still have low ability in writing. The researcher found this problem occurred in grade VIII students at SMPN 1 Bulagi. They are difficult to develop their writing, when they got commands from their teacher to write.

To solve the problem, the researcher chose personal letter as a medium to develop the students’ writing skill. Personal letter is a medium for someone to express ideas in written form. It can make her/him to be more motivated and easier to express their ideas

and feelings. Through letter, her/him can communicate to each other and convey their meaning.

Personal letter is one of the examples of writing product that can be used as medium to interact, sharing experiences and to communicate each other in written form personally. According to Adlan and Tanzili (2006:1), "Letter is a piece of paper or more that used as a communication tool to deliver the statement or information in written form, from one person to another". According to Rizal (2003:2), "Personal letter is a way to send message in written form". It is usually contains of feeling expression, private thing, and important thing as a way to communicate and also allows a person to leave a message and to keep in touch.

A personal letter is also called as a private letter and contains of private information about personal experience in the written form to be sent in a certain people. Hogue (1996:163) defines, "A personal letter is a letter to a friend or to family member". A personal letter consists of private information about people and things to a certain people in the written form.

As written communication way, letter consists of main parts of the letter. According to George and Julia (1980:335), the main parts of personal letter consist of heading, salutation, body of letter, closing and signature. The parts of letter have physical relation with the form.

Considering the importance of find out whether the application of personal letter as a medium can develop writing skill of Grade VIII students of SMPN 1 Bulagi, the researcher tried to conduct a research about *Developing Writing Skill of Grade VIII Students of SMPN 1 Bulagi through Personal Letter*, and formulated the research question as follows "How can writing skill of Grade VIII students of SMPN 1 Bulagi be developed through personal letter?" The aim of the research was to find out whether writing skill of Grade VIII students of SMPN 1 Bulagi be developed through personal letter or not. In conducting research, the researcher provided the limitation only on the content and vocabulary.

METHODOLOGY

The researcher used pre-experimental research design in this research. It means that there is only one group and the researcher applied pre-test and post-test to experimental group. There is no control group in pre-experimental research design. The

pre-test was conducted before the treatment while the post-test was conducted after the treatment, based on the following research design proposed by Arikunto (2006:85).

O₁ X O₂

Where:

- O₁: pre-test
- X : treatment
- O₂: post-test

Population is number of individuals which is researched that has one or more characters in common. Best (1981:8) states, “A population is any group of individuals that have one or more characteristics in common that are of interest to the research”. The population of this research was the students of SMPN 1 Bulagi. They were 230 students.

Sample is an item or a subject selected from the population to observe and analyze. Best (1981:8) defines “Sample is a small proportion of population selected for observation and analysis”. The grade VIII students were sample of this research. They were 71 students that were divided into three classes, namely Class VIIIA, Class VIIIB, and Class VIIIC. The researcher chose one of the classes as sample randomly.

Table 1
Sample of the Research

Classes	Number of Students
VIIIA	24
VIIIB	23
VIIIC	24
Total	71

There are two kinds of variables; they are dependent variable and independent variable. Best (1981:59) states, “Research consists of two variables, namely dependent variable and independent variable. The independent variable is the conditions of characteristics the experimenter manipulates in attempt to as certain their relationship to observe phenomena, while the dependent variable is the conditions of characteristics that appear, disappear, or change as the experimenter introduces, removes, or changes independent variables”. Based on the title of this research, “Developing writing skill of Grade VIII students of SMPN 1 Bulagi through personal letter”, the variables of this

research consist of dependent variable and independent variable. The dependent variable is writing skill and the independent variable is personal letter.

In conducting this research, the researcher used test as the instrument of data collection. There are two kinds of test are pre-test and post-test. Pre-test was conducted before treatment while post-test was conducted after treatment. Both of the tests used to measure the students' development in writing skill and to know the effectiveness of personal letter as medium that was given.

To score the test, the researcher applied the scoring system for writing assessment. Weigle (2002:116) states, "there are five components presented in the analytical scoring rubric for writing are content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics".

Table 2
Analytical Scoring Rubric

Components of Writing	Scores	Indicators
Content	4	Relevant to the topic and easy to understand
	3	Rather relevant to the topic and easy to understand
	2	Relevant to the topic but is not quite easy to understand
	1	Quite relevant to the topic but is not quite easy to understand
Organization	4	Most of the sentences are related to the main idea
	3	Some sentences are related to the main idea
	2	Few sentences related to the main idea
	1	The sentences are unrelated to each other
Vocabulary and Mechanics	4	a few errors in choice of words, spelling and punctuation
	3	some errors in choice of words, spelling and punctuation
	2	occasional errors in choice of words, spelling and punctuation
	1	frequent errors in choice of words, spelling and punctuation
Grammar	4	a few grammatical inaccuracies
	3	some grammatical inaccuracies
	2	numerous grammatical inaccuracies
	1	frequent grammatical inaccuracies

(Adopted from Weigle, 2002:116)

In analyzing students' individual standard score in pre-test and post-test, the researcher applied the following formula by Arikunto (2006:308).

$$\Sigma = \frac{x}{N} \times 100$$

Where:

Σ : standard score
 X : raw score
 N : maximum score

In order to compute the mean score of the students, the researcher used the following formula proposed by Best (1981:225).

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

Where:

M : mean of the score
 Σx : sum of the score obtained by the students
 N : number of the students

Then to compute the mean of deviation between pre-test and post-test, the researcher used the following formula by Arikunto (2006:308).

$$Md = \frac{\Sigma d}{N}$$

Where:

Md : mean of deviation
 Σd : the total score of deviation
 N : number of the students

After that, the square deviation computed by using the following formula proposed by Arikunto (2006:308).

$$\Sigma x^2 d = \Sigma d^2 - \frac{(\Sigma d)^2}{N}$$

Where:

$\Sigma x^2 d$: sum of square deviation
 Σd^2 : sum of deviation
 N : number of students

The researcher compared the result in pre-test and post-test. If the result in post-test greater than the result in pre-test, it means that this research was successful. If the result in post-test lower than the result in pre-test, it means that this research was not successful.

FINDINGS

In collecting data or to find out the students' ability in writing skill through personal letter, the researcher gave test to the students before and after treatment. The tests are pre-test and post-test. Pre-test was given before treatment to find out the students' ability in writing skill before treatment. Post-test was given after treatment to find out the effectiveness of the treatment. In other word, both of the tests were used to measure the students' development in writing skill and to know the effectiveness of personal letter as a medium that was given.

The following section presents the result of the tests (pre-test and post-test). The calculation of the mean score of the students in the pre-test and the post-test is as follows:

The mean score of the pre-test

$$M = \frac{\sum x}{N}$$
$$M = \frac{1,187.5}{24}$$
$$M = 49.47$$

The mean score of the post-test

$$M = \frac{\sum x}{N}$$
$$M = \frac{1,850}{24}$$
$$M = 77.08$$

In addition, the students' scores of the pre-test and the post-test are presented in the table below:

Table 3
Deviation of the Pre-test and the Post-test

No	Initials	Standard Score		Deviation d = (X ₂ - X ₁)	d ²
		Pre-test (X ₁)	Post-test(X ₂)		
1	AEM	37.5	75	37.5	1,406.25
2	DB	50	75	25	625
3	FDJ	62.5	75	12.5	156.25
4	FFM	62.5	87.5	25	625
5	FL	62.5	87.5	25	625
6	GNS	50	87.5	37.5	1,406.25
7	GVM	50	62.5	12.5	156.25
8	JFT	50	75	25	625
9	JL	25	75	50	2,500
10	KCS	37.5	50	12.5	156.25
11	MFM	62.5	75	12.5	156.25
12	PTL	37.5	87.5	50	2,500
13	RES	50	87.5	37.5	1,406.25
14	RHM	62.5	75	12.5	156.25
15	RPO	25	62.5	37.5	1,406.25
16	SCM	62.5	75	12.5	156.25
17	SMR	75	87.5	12.5	156.25
18	SS	25	75	50	2,500
19	VDD	25	75	50	2,500
20	VDM	37.5	87.5	50	2,500
21	VLS	50	75	25	625
22	VTB	62.5	75	12.5	156.25
23	WVM	75	87.5	12.5	156.25
24	YS	50	75	25	625
Total		1,187.5	1,850	662.5	23,281.25

After getting the mean deviation, the researcher counted the sum of square deviation shown as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \sum x^2 d &= \sum d^2 - \frac{(\sum d)^2}{N} \\ \sum x^2 d &= 23,281.25 - \frac{(662.5)^2}{24} \\ \sum x^2 d &= 23,281.25 - \frac{438,906.25}{24} \\ \sum x^2 d &= 23,281.25 - 18,287.76 \\ \sum x^2 d &= 4,993.49 \end{aligned}$$

DISCUSSION

This research focused on developing writing skill of Grade VIII students through personal letter. The researcher limited her research only on the content and vocabulary. She followed the process of conducting the research. First, she gave pre-test to the students to find out their ability in writing skill before treatment. The students who got pre-test were 24 students. Based on the result of pre-test, there were 2 students (8.3%) got greater score while 22 students (91.6%) got lower score. After getting and seeing the result of the students' pre-test, second, the researcher gave the treatment to the students to solve their problem. It was done in eight meetings by followed several treatment plans. In treatment, first, she explained the material about personal letter. Second, she asked the students to write a personal letter based on the theme given to develop their writing skill. Then, the students wrote a personal letter based on the theme given.

The next step is the researcher gave post-test to the students after treatment conducted. The purpose of this test was to find out the students' ability in writing skill after treatment or to find out the effectiveness of the treatment. The students who got pre-test were 24 students. Based on the result, it showed that there were 21 students (87.5%) got greater score while 3 students (12.5%) got lower score. The result of analysis data showed that there was progress in students score. Their score increased from the pre-test to the post-test. It was proved by the students' mean score in pre-test was 49.47 and in post-test was 77.08. By seeing the results, the use of personal letter as a medium can develop writing skill of Grade VIII students of SMPN 1 Bulagi.

From the results of the recent study, personal letter is an interesting medium for someone to express ideas in written form. It is suitable technique for develop students' writing skill because it can make the students to be more motivated, easier, effective, creative, and enjoy to express their ideas and feelings.

The researcher related the recent study to the previous study that had been mentioned by Helmi (2012). In Helmi's research, he discussed about the implementation of personal letter to improve students skill of the tenth graders of MASS Proto Pekalongan in writing recount text and to identify the improvement of students skill in writing recount text. The previous study used classroom action research as research design. Helmi expresses that the students' skill in writing recount text can be improved after being taught by using personal letter and the implementation of personal letter as a learning aid to improve students' ability in writing recount text was very effective. Therefore, the

researcher concluded that as a medium, personal letter was very effective in teaching writing skill.

There is a statement that supported this research in developing the students' writing skill. Nunan (1991:3) states, "successful writing involves mastering the mechanics of letter formation and obeying conventions of spelling and punctuation, using the grammatical system to convey one's intended meaning, organizing content at the level of paragraph and the complete text to reflect given/new information and topic/comment structures, polishing and revising one's initial efforts, and selecting an appropriate style for one's audience".

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the result of this research, the researcher concludes that using personal letter as a medium can develop writing skill of Grade VIII students of SMPN 1 Bulagi. It is proved by the result of the students' mean score of the pre-test (49.47) and the post-test (77.08). Besides, in pre-test the percentage of students who get greater score is 8.3%, while the students who get lower score is 91.6%. Then in post-test, the percentage of the students who get greater score is 87.5%, while the students who get lower score is 12.5%. It means that the result in the post-test is greater than that in the pre-test.

Based on the result of the research, the researcher would like to provide some suggestions that are useful in learning and teaching process. First, teacher should choose suitable technique in teaching writing skill in order that the students feel comfortable, enjoy, and be more active when they are asked to write in English. Second, students should have enough stock of vocabulary in their mind because vocabulary mastery can affect their ability in writing skill.

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