THE USE OF PEER-ASSISTED WRITING ACTIVITY IN INCREASING THE ABILITY OF THE FIRST YEAR STUDENTS OF SMA PGRI PEKANBARU IN WRITING DESCRIPTIVE TEXTS

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Abstract

The objective of this research was aimed to know whether the technique of Peer-Assisted Writing Activity can improve the ability of the first year students of SMA PGRI Pekanbaru in writing descriptive text. Besides, this research also aimed to find what factors cause the improvement on the ability of the first year students of SMA PGRI Pekanbaru in writing Descriptive text by using Peer-Assisted Writing Activity. The subjects were 32 students from class X (5) at SMA PGRI Pekanbaru selected through the result of small survey . The study was divided into two cycles in which one cycle consisted of four stages. Pre-test and Post-tests were given including a set of observation sheets and field notes were used to gain the record of the classroom activity during the Peer-Assisted Writing Activity treatment. Treatments were designed for three meetings in each cycle. The analysis found that the treatments could reach the improvement of the students' writing ability. The mean score of pre-test was 55.80, the mean score of post-test 1 was 68.54 and the mean score of post-test 2 was 75.33. There were about 69% of the students who could achive Minimal Mastery Criteria (MMC) of English subject in writing Descriptive text. In addition, the percentage of students' activeness was also improved from the first to the last meetings. In cycle 1 the students' activeness was 54.16% but in cycle 2 the students' activeness improved into 88.54%, there was improvement 34.38% from cycle 1 to cycle 2. Moreover, the result of observation sheets and field notes showed a positive behavior in a process of learning and it also helped students improve their writing ability and more active in learning process.

Keyword   : Peer-Assisted Writing Activity, Writing Ability, Descriptive Text

<u>INTRODUCTION</u>

Writing is one of difficult subjects at school, because there are many aspects to be considered in writing such as, choice of words, grammar, punctuation, spelling, coherence and still many others. Those should be integrated to produce meaningful and good coherence writing. According to Meyers (2005) writing is a way to produce language you do naturally when you speak. Writing is also an action-a process of discovering and organizing your ideas, putting them on a paper and reshaping and revising them. It can be concluded that writing is a way to produce language that comes from our thought. By writing, the students can share their idea, feeling or anything that exist in their mind.

According to School-Based Curriculum (KTSP), the first year students of senior high school are required to be able to express their ideas in a good rhetorical developmental text in written text. There are many genres such as, procedure, descriptive, narrative, recount, and news item.

Based on the writer's observation during practice teaching at the first year students of SMA PGRI Pekanbaru, the students faced some problems in writing ability. The students found difficulty in expressing their ideas in written form. They only translate their thoughts from their native language into English, so their written English grammatically incorrect. Other problems faced by the students were lack of vocabulary, so they were not able to use the appropriate vocabulary.

The problem might due to the teacher did not apply a correct technique or method in teaching English especially in teaching writing descriptive text. In teaching and learning process, teacher only explained the material of writing in the front of class. This technique could not help student to develop and express his/her writing achievement.

Moreover, the teacher did not have enough time to guide or give special attention to all of the students in the classroom meeting because of limited time. So, it was not enough for the teacher to correct all of the students' mistakes in writing.

In addition, the writer did small survey to know students' ability in writing descriptive text in class X (5) SMA PGRI Pekanbaru. The writer found that most of the students could not reach Minimal Mastery Criteria (MMC) are 73. Only 13% of the students could reach MMC and there were 87% of the students were still low in writing.

From the problems occurred above, the writer believes that the use of the appropriate technique is the significant way to increase the writing ability. Therefore, in this study the writer decided to use Peer-Assisted Writing Activity. Peer-Assisted Writing Activity is a new procedure in writing to promote students' writing skills. Peer-Assisted Writing Activity is a process in teaching writing in order to promote students' writing skills by activating the students in class (Teo: 2006).

The writer uses this technique because she found a research about Peer-Assisted Writing Activity get outstanding result. Peregoy and Boyle (2001) in Teo pointed out that pairing students up in writing is an ideal way to promote learning effectiveness. It does not only give teachers more quality time to work with students but also provides students with plenty of opportunities to brainstorm ideas and to learn from each other.

This technique is hoped to solve the problem because students usually get difficulties in express their idea in writing activity. In addition, it will generate their vocabulary and grammar as well. Peer-Assisted Writing Acivity can create a comfortable environment for students to establish peer trust. In short, the using of Peer-Assisted Writing Activity gives a contribution for both teachers and students in improving the writing ability of the first year students, especially in SMA PGRI Pekanbaru.

METHODOLOGY

The writer had gathered data and information about the students' problem in writing descriptive text through the small survey, and planned to solve the difficulties faced by the students in writing by using Peer-Assisted Writing Activity. This research contained of 2 cycles to see any the improvement of students' writing ability in writing descriptive text during the implementation of Peer-Assisted Writing Activity.

Before conducting the treatment in cycle 1, the writing proficiency of the class had been tested with by Pre-Test, where the students would have one topic to be written in the form of descriptive text. In addition to this, together with the collaborator, the writer prepared the lesson plans for one cycle of treatment, topics that would fit the the school curriculum, and also a set of observation sheets and field notes to note specific things, weakness, strengths or suggestions related to teaching and learning process. The writer used the score in Pre-Test as a guidance to group the students heterogenously during the treatment.

After giving Pre-Test and knowing the students' proficiency, the writer gave them treatment in writing descriptive text by using Peer-Assisted Writing Activity. The steps of using the technique were drawn as follows:

1. Pair up Students

   Teacher paired up students based on their writing level. The one who is at a higher writing level plays the role of a Helper, and the one who is at a lower writing level a Writer.

2. Warm up Activities

   Teacher had each pair perform warm-up activities to create a comfortable atmosphere that helps the pair establish mutual trust.

3. Steps in the Activity
   a. Giving Ideas
      Teacher provided questions to students that related to the topic.
   b. Making Draft
      Teacher asked the students to answer questions and take notes. They also can add things that she/he wants to write about.
   c. Reading
      Teacher asked the Writer to read the writing aloud.
   d. Editing
      Teacher asked the students to look at the draft together, edit the writing and consider whether improvement is necessary
   e. Making Final Copy
      Teacher asked the students to write the best copy writing and turned in completed copy to teacher.

The implementation of the action was followed also by the observation process of which the result was delivered into observation sheet. The students' and the teacher's activities were recorded by the collaborator in the observation sheets, and the situation in the class was recorded in the field notes during the treatment.

After conducting the treatment and recording the activities during the treatment in the observation sheets, then the result was collected as raw data of the research and was analyzed to find out whether the students showed a good progress in writing a descriptive text or not. Both researcher and observer analyzed the activity in cycle 1 through the observation sheets and field notes. The observer gave comments about the teacher's performance and added any other improvement in using Peer-Assisted Writing Ac tivity in the classroom.

Then, Post-Test 1 was conducted at the end of cycle 1 of this actional research by purpose of knowing students' achievement after getting the constructive treatment by the writer. Post-Test 1 consisted of a topic that the students should write in the form of a descriptive text. The writer decided to continue to the cycle 2 if the result of the quantitative and qualitative data in the cycle 1 did not show a significant improvement yet. In this cycle 2, the writer still used Peer-Assisted Writing Activity with different materials based on the result of reflection in the cycle 1 to improve the ability of students in writing skill.

In addition to this, the quantitative data of this study was collected through the writing test (Pre-Test, Post-Test I, and Post-Test II), and the qualitative data was collected by the recording of activity during the treatment by using the observation sheets and field notes. For the rating scales, the three assigned raters had used the scoring from Hughes (1989), in which the holistic scoring rubrics are used to assess the students' competency in certain features of writing: grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, form/organization, and fluency of communication.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Pre–Test was given before Peer-Assisted Writing Activity used by the writer. The purpose was to know the students' base score in writing descriptive text. The quantitative data of Pre–Test can be seen as the following chart:
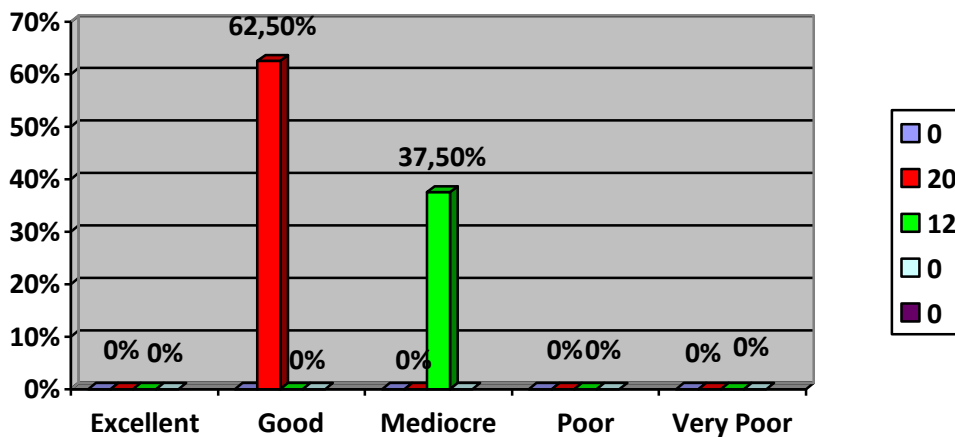
From the result above, it's obviously cleared that none of the students who reached level of "Excellent". There were 20 students (62.5%) who reached level of "Good", and 12 students (37.5%) who reached level of "Mediocre". It was indicated that the students' ability still need to be improved by using Peer-Assisted Writing Activity.

The quantitative data in cycle 1 was collected by looking at the progress that students' got through three treatments. In the end of this cycle, Post-Test 1 was given as the evaluation. The result of quantitative data in Post-Test 1 can be seen as the following chart:
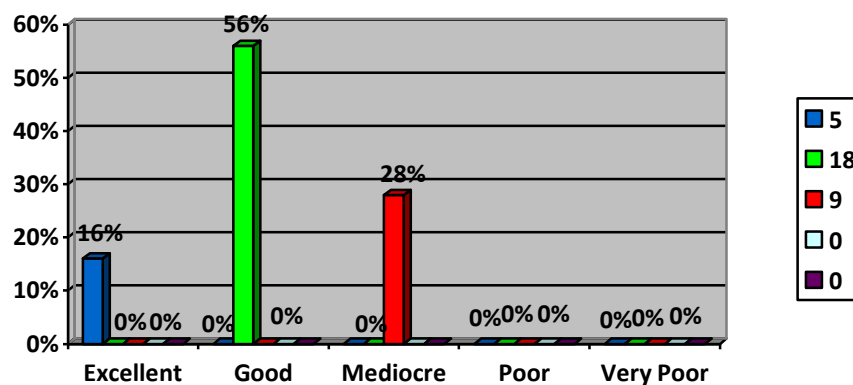
Based on the data above, the result of quantitative data in this cycle showed the unsatisfying score because their writing score did not reach MMC (73). It can be seen from the data above that there were 5 students(16%) who reached level of "Excellent", 18 students (56%) who reached level of 'Good', and 9 students (28%) who reached level of 'Mediocre'. It indicated that the students' skill in writing descriptive text using Peer-Assisted Writing Activity was level of "Good". Even though the result almost showed good improvement, the students still needed more treatments using Peer-Assisted Writing Activity.

In field notes result, it was found that the students' competency in the process of learning still needed to be improved. It could be seen in the observation sheets and field notes that there were many students had dissatisfied result. The process of learning in cycle 1 could be interpreted below.

At the first treatment there were only several students who were getting involved in the process of learning. The Collaborator noted that there were a lot of students who got difficulties in using Peer-Assisted Writing Activity even though the teacher had explained it before. It could be seen during the classroom activities that, many students did not fully understand about instructions or questions given. There were also some students who were noisy while they did the activities. In addition to this, the performance of teacher also need to be improved. It can be seen when she had a little problemin controlling the students in the class.

At the second treatment, the collaborator noted that the teacher began to be more confident while she explained the materials. The teacher paired up students based on their writing level. She gave motivation to the students in the class and questions that related the topic. The students also paid attention to the teacher's explanation so that effective communication occurred during this activity. However, after teacher had explained the material, there were some students still made a noise in the back row and prefer talking to their friends.

Briefly, it still had a lot of students who was getting involved more than the first meeting. The several students were enthusiastic with Peer-Assisted Writing Activity and the material that the teacher presented. Even thought some students still got confused, but they need to practice writing more. The collaborator also noted that there were still a few students prefer talking to their friends than listening to the teacher's explanation. In addition, they spent a long time to finish writing.

At the third treatment, the teacher similarly teach the class in the second meeting – pairing up students and giving some questions. While giving those questions, the teacher engage students by asking them several interesting question and something that she/he wants write about. It was used to have a better communication between students and the teacher. The collaborator noted that teacher's efforts to overcome students attention was better than in the previous meetings. However, students lack of vocabulary still in the problem for this activities. they were not able to choose appropriate words in the right sentences.

In short, even thought almost all of the students got involved in Peer-Assisted Writing Activity. The students were more explanation and practice in order to be active and enthusiasm in using Peer-Assisted Writing Activity.

The result of the observation and field note in cycle 1 could be interpreted in a chart as below:

**The Chart of The Result of The Observation During Treatment in cycle 1**
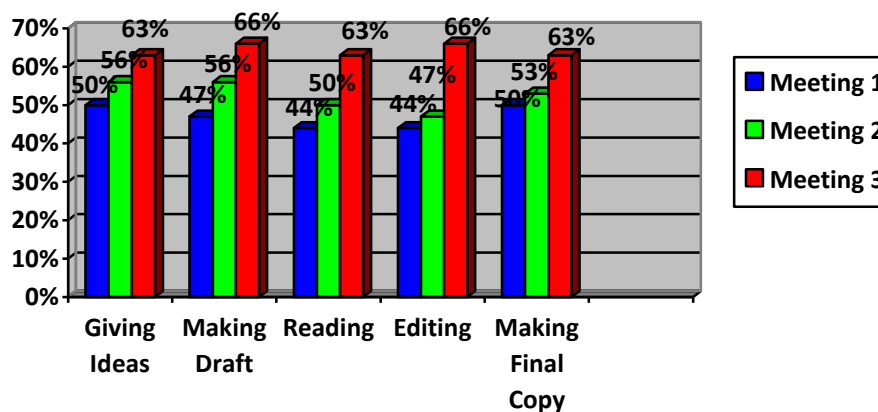
The data above indicated that the activeness of students in each activity from the first meeting to the third meeting in this cycle, students started to understand how to use Peer-Assisted Writing Activity in writing activities. However, in some activities almost all students got confused and they didn't get involved on it. The steps of Peer-Assisted Writing Activity had to be done completely in order to get the better result.

Therefore, referring to the result of observation above, the writer had to rearrange the planning in taking action, so that an improvement could be achieved by students. Then, the writer formulated the result of reflection that would be implemented at the second cycle, the way of teaching writing to the students was still same as before, she still used Peer-Assisted Writing Activity.

In order to get the better result, there were the several things that would be applied in the second cycle: 1. Peer-Assisted Writing Activity was still used in the second cycle but different topics around descriptive texts, 2. The writer had to give instructions or questions clearly to the students so students could understand what teacher asked, 3. The writer had to remain the students to study seriously and make them more active in learning the topic and

giving response to the writer's questions, 4. The writer had to give encouragement words or reward when the students were able to answer the questions, so it would motivate the students to be more active, 5. The writer should remain the students use the technique that they had studied in learning writing text, 6. The writer needed to take more control over students by being closer personally to them then they would listen to her.

The result of cycle 2 showed a significant improvement. The result of quantitative data in cycle 2 can be seen as the following chart:
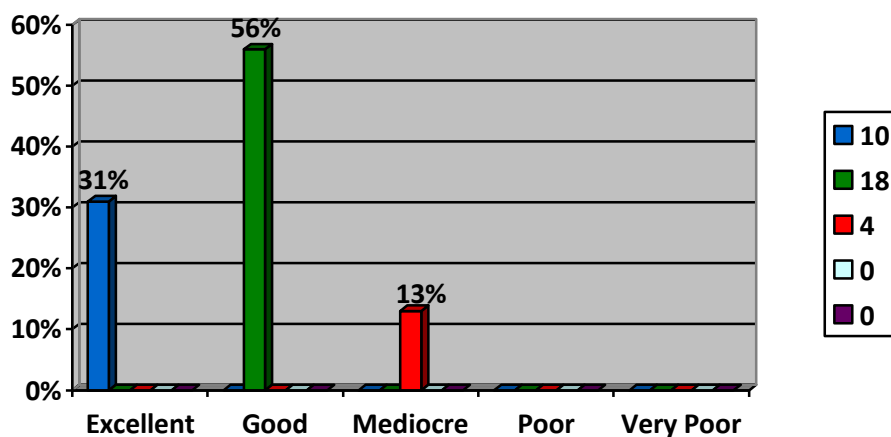
The data above showed that there was good increase in students' writing ability after giving three treatments in cycle 2. There were 10 students (31%) who could reach level of 'Excellent', 18 students (56%) who reached level of 'Good', and 4 students (13%) who reached level of 'Mediocre'. It was also obviously clear that there were almost all of the students achieved MMC. Compared with the result in Post-Test I, it indicated that the significant improvement can be seen in the level of "Excellent". There were several students got level excellent from Post-Test I.

For the result of observation sheet and field notes, it was found that the teacher's and student's activities in teaching and learning process was obviously better than cycle 2. The progression could be seen on observation sheets and field notes that collaborator made during the class activities for the fourth meeting to the sixth meeting. The process and result of teaching and learning in cycle 2 could be interpreted as follow:

At the fourth meeting, teacher's performance during teaching was better in giving materials. There were almost a lot of students paid attentions to the teacher's explanation. They were enthusiasm giving ideas that related the topic. It was occurred because she paired

up students affairly and provided the questions that related the topic. Students were allowed to making draft, and editing their writing is necessary.

During the fifth treatment, not only students' interest but also teacher's performance had already completely improved. It was because teacher explained the materials by giving several examples descriptive texts about the landmark in the world. Before starting to use Peer-Assisted Writing Activity, teacher paired up students based on their writing level. The one who is at a higher writing level plays the role of a Helper, and the one who is at a lower writing level a Writer. Teacher had each pair perform warm-up activities to create a comfortable atmosphere that helps the pair establish mutual trust.

At the sixth treatment, teacher just evaluated the teaching ways which he had done in the previous five meetings. Students were accustomed to use Peer-Assisted Writing Activity. They would take a long time for the teacher to explain what they should do in activities. Students also competitively enthusiasm while asking to make the the draft. They didn't spent a lot time to start the writing in grammatical correct.

In short, compared from the last meeting, the progress had been seen during at the fifth meeting. There were almost all of students got involved in the activities of Peer-Assisted Writing Activity. The students who had a lack of vocabularies, confused to organized the generic structure, and spent a long time in starting the writing, showed their improvement. Their interesting in writing also increased because The Helper helped The Writer to choose the appropriate vocabulary. In addition, Peer-Assisted Writing Activity also provides students with plenty of opportunities to brainstorm the ideas and to learn from each other.

The result of cycle 2 could be interpreted in the chart as below:

The Chart of the Result of Observation during Treatment in Cycle 2
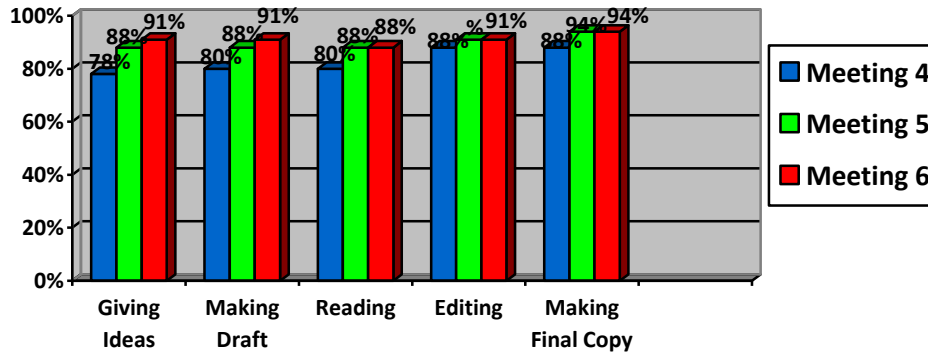
The data of field note above showed a significant progress during teaching and learning process. It was up to 88.54% of the students participated for whole activities in Peer-Assisted Writing Activity. It indicated that the use Peer-Assisted Writing Activity could engage the students' interest to be participated in the process of learning.

For the overall result, the following chart showed the result for students' writing ability from cycle 1 to cycle 2.

The Chart of Students' Writing Ability from Cycle 1 to Cycle 2
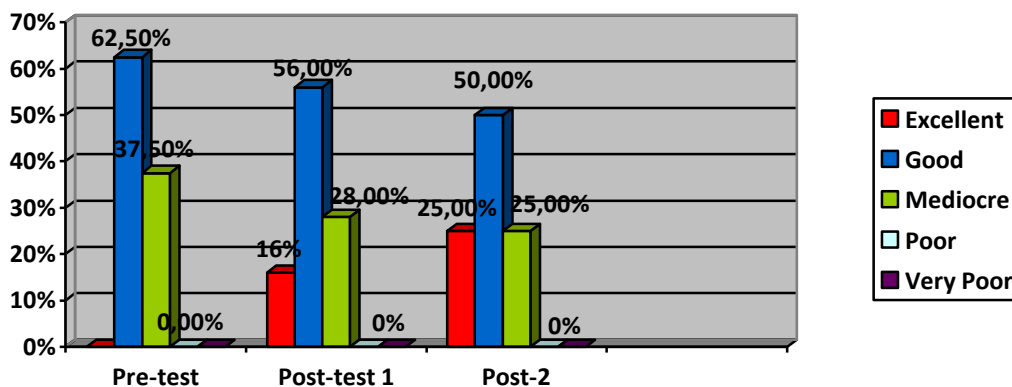
Shortly, it is true that there was significant improvement of writing ability of the first year students at SMA PGRI Pekanbaru from 55.80 (mediocre) in average score in pre-test and it improved into 68.54 (good) in post-test 1. Then it improved again into 75.33 (good) in

post-test 2. If the students' average score in post-test 2 was compared from minimal mastery criteria, it showed the significant improvement (75.33>73). In addition to this, there were 22 students (69%) who reached level of "Excellent" in Post-Test II. There was no students who got "Very Poor" and "Poor" in Pre-Test, Post-Test I and Post-Test II.

CONCLUSION

Based on the result of this research, the writer make conclusion that the using of Peer-Assisted Writing Activity gives a better improvement to the students' writing ability of X (5) of SMA PGRI Pekanbaru in writing descriptive text. Peer-Assisted Writing Activity is one of techniques in teaching writing that the teacher can use to train students in improving their writing and motivate them to write. It can be proved by the quantitative data that showed the percentage in cycle 1, where there are 50% of the students reached the score which is more than 73 (73.00–93.33). Moreover, in cycle 2 it increases significantly into 69% of the students who have score between 73–96. So, the using of Peer-Assisted Writing Activity to improve students' writing ability in the first year students at SMA PGRI Pekanbaru is categorized as a succesfull action.

In addition to this, based on the result of qualitative data during the observation in cycle 1 and 2, there were some factors that influence the improvement of students' writing in X (5) of SMA PGRI Pekanbaru, namely the students' activity in the pair that create a comfortable atmosphere, the students were free to give opinions and work together revise their writing, teacher's aprroach to the students in teaching and learning process, students' attention, and classroom management. The choice of topic to be written, the way that the teacher choose to help the students to brainstorm and express the ideas. It is also improved the students' motivation in learning process. It made students become more active at before, while and after writing.

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