

## IMPROVING LITERACY SKILLS THROUGH WRITING DRILLS OF THE SECOND YEAR STUDENTS OF SMP 1 PALEMBANG

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### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this study to find out whether or not writing drills to improve the second year students' literacy skills as observed at SMP Negeri 1 Palembang. The population of this study consisted of eight classes with 156 male students and 154 female students. The population of this study are 320 students of the second year students of SMP Negeri 1 Palembang. The total number of sample was 80 students. A quasi experimental method was used in this study. The data collected by means of a pre-test given to both groups before the treatment and a post-test given after the treatment to both groups. To check whether the application of the instruction could run well as it was designed. the students were evaluated using t-test analysis of statistical product and service solution (SPSS) version 12 to run the analyses and interpreted quantitatively and qualitatively to satisfy the objectives of the study. The result showed that there was a significant acceleration in terms of the students' reading and writing skills, and there was a positive respond towards this instruction. In conclusion, writing drills can improve the second year students' literacy skills. Thus, the proposed instruction for reading and writing skills through writing drills either conceptually or practically is plausible to apply in any subjects, especially in reading and writing classes.*

**Key Words** : literacy skills, writing drills

### 1. Introduction

In this era, English is spoken by two-third of people all over the world. English has been a very important tool of communication in global era nowadays. In Indonesia, English has been chosen as a compulsory subject from the first year of Junior High School leve, the teacher teaches the language according to the 2006 competency-based curriculum. The curriculum states that the main objective of teaching English is to help learners develop learner's linguistic, actional, socio-cultural and strategy competence in an integrated way. Whereas, there are four language skills enable the students to work actively.

Among those four language skills, literacy skill which include reading and writing, are intersting to write. The write assumes that the students of Junior High School, especially the students of SMP Negeri 1 Palembang, still get difficulty in reading and writing. Based on her own experience when she taught reading about the descriptive texts that is to identify main idea, details, sequence, cause and effect, reference, inference, vocabulary. For writing, she taught to arranging words into good sentences to the students of Junior High School during the PPL (Practice Teaching), she found that the students get difficulty to understand descriptive texts to identify those aspects of reading, and tenses of English in writing good sentences.

Literacy has a language component. It implies a proficiency in reading and writing sufficient to communicate ideas and influence environments. Through reading the Junior High School students are hoped to be able to increase their knowledge by reading English books and other English written materials

(Saleh, 1991:41). Through writing the Junior High School students are hoped to be able to use written English for the purpose of writing out forms, and the ability to introduce Indonesian culture to foreigners through written English although writing is the most difficult language skill to acquire (Saleh, 1991:55).

Furthermore, Tierney and Pearson (1985:63) show reading and writing relationship as follows: We believe that the heart of understanding reading and writing connections one must begin to view reading and writing as essentially similar processes of meaning construction. Both are acts of composing. From a reader's perspective, meaning is created as a reader uses his background of experience together with the author's cues to come to grips both with what the writer is getting him to do or think and what the reader decides and creates for himself. As the writer, she uses her own background of experience to generate ideas and in order to produce a text with consideration to her idealized reader, filter these drafts through her judgements about what her reader's background of experience will be, what she wants to say, what she wants to get the reader to think or do.

Based on the statement above, it can be cocluded tht reading nd writing are closely related and the most difficult language skills to study because they include so many different elements such as vcularies, phrases, sentences and ideas. More specifically, by experimenting with writing, writer constructs and refines the kind of knowledge about written language that make reading possible. Writer integrates knowledge of reading with knowledge of writing. Writers reconstruct meanings by

constructing texts, readers reconstruct texts by constructing anticipated meaning.

Literacy skills are so natural, most students simply do not know about many of their own writing and reading experiences until researchers point them out (Taylor, 1983:234). Literacy skills focus narrowly on a set of skills perceived as those needed for learning to read and write. Students's main resource for literacy learning is their knowledge of ways to symbolize experience and to communicate through those words, sentences in pre and post speech interactions.

Students learn about writing drills by observing and participating with the language aspects, such as spelling, grammar, punctuation and vocabulary which can be learned to support the mastery of the literacy skills. Students need to work independently on the function and form of writing that they have experienced through interactions with literate others. One of those is stated by Teale (1986:236), that students' literacy to come to "complete fruition" they may involve practicing or rehearsing aspects of writing-sentences formation.

In writing drills, the students are supposed to be more active during teaching-learning process in the classroom and writing drills help students practice the new grammatical patterns that have been presented (Allen and Valette, 1977:99). When students write they have to transform the word recognition into written sentences. The more students write the better.

Through this activity, students learn about literacy skills of writing drills to the point where their sentence form will improve. Writing drills promotes not only growth in literacy skills but also in grammar of English. Writing drills are excellent activities for helping students to develop greater awareness of sentence structure while gaining important practice in literacy skills.

In the processes of learning English especially in learning literacy skills, Parker (1983:248) states that involvement in such activities is associated with learning to write and read easily and naturally. Of course, writing drills develops oral language and also motivate students to emulate in writing. Therefore, the writer focuses her study on improving literacy skills through writing drills of the second year students of SMP Negeri 1 Palembang. However, in this study, the writer focuses on literacy skills which include reading and writing skills. The materials are limited to make students understand descriptive texts that is to identify details, main idea, sequence, cause and effect, reference, inference, vocabulary. For writing skills, the writer's materials are limited to arranging words into good sentences.

#### A. *The Problem of the Study*

The problems that the writer would like to discuss in this study deals with the following question: can writing drills improve the second year students' literacy skills at SMP NEGERI 1 Palembang?.

#### B. *Literature Review*

##### a) *The Concept of Literacy Skills*

Some jurisdictions define a person as being literate if he or she has attended school for a given number of years (and thus ignore the question of the quality of that experience). Others reduce the notion to a set of identifiable skills required to survive in the contemporary world (e.g. the value of formal grammar instruction, and alternative methods for teaching reading and writing). Some educators interpret the term more broadly as a capacity to appreciate through language a broad range of achievement in civilized society.

Literacy is conventionally understood as the ability to decode and understand the graphic symbols we use to represent spoken language. So conceived, it is an important type of mediated human communication that needs a connection link-a medium. In its strict Latin sense from *medius* it means that there is something 'in the middle'. Mediated human communication is in contrast to direct communication when the source and receiver are in face-to-face contact. Literacy, then, is a visual vehicle of language and thought, acting both as a substitute and supplement for speech. 'Literate' is a term that can act as adjective and noun denoting a person who can read and write and who can use this medium of communication (McGee, 1990:29-30).

Furthermore, McGee (1990:3) cited in Zulkarnain (1994:6) states that: that person is literate who, a language he speaks, can read with understanding anything he would understand if it had been spoken to him; and can write, so that it can be read, anything he can say.

##### b) *The Concept of Writing*

According to Hornby (1983), writing is an activity or occupation in written or printed words. In other words, it can be stated that writing is a way of communication, information, ideas and feeling to other people in written symbols. It means that when we write, we also compose or create meaning that is received by the readers of the words with words, so that writing is someone's thoughts that written down. Therefore, writing is one of language skills that is the last phase of language development. It means that students learn to write after they learn to listen, speak and read. Bromley (1992:326) makes a point that : Writing is informing or inscribing (words, letters symbolism, etc) on a surface as by cutting carving or especially marking with pen or pencil. It is also both composition and transcription. Composition is the mental of creating ideas, identifying and selecting words and using appropriate grammar, and transcription is the physical act of spelling, legibility, punctuation, capitalization, and indenting.

Writing demonstrates as well as develops comprehension. Writing is composition that produces written output and composition is the process of creating with language to construct meaning. It means that writing is the communication of ideas by means of conventional symbols that are traced, incised, drawn or otherwise formed on the surface of some materials such as paper. Writing also gives permanence to one's knowledge and enables them to communicate over great

distance. It means that it is a necessary condition of civilization as we know the complex society of higher civilization would be impossible without the art of writing.

People realize that teaching English at this level become very important and need much concerns. As an English teacher, he or she demands to explore effective techniques, methods, and approaches. The students have to master the four basic language skills. They are listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Beside such basic skill, the student has to master some vocabularies as well as possible. Vocabulary is one important aspect in learning a foreign language. With a limited vocabulary anyone will also have a limited understanding in terms of speaking, reading, writing, and listening. It is true that it might be impossible to learn a language without mastering vocabulary. Vocabulary is one of the problems confronted by English language learners.

Because of the limited vocabulary, the learners cannot communicate to others clearly. Sometimes it is acquisition of a large number of vocabularies can help the students read, speak, listen and write. A good vocabulary and ability to use words correctly and effectively can help the students make school work easier and more rewarding, and also many tests that they take in school include vocabulary questions. The more vocabularies they know the better their chance to do well on an English test.

Most students in Indonesia feel anxious or suffering when teachers ask them to write compositions in class. Students dislike writing because they often lack self-confidence in their writing abilities and most of their writing abilities and most of their writings are evaluated for academic achievement, not belonging to themselves. Furthermore, in a conventional classroom writing environment in Indonesia, students write compositions based on an assigned topic within a limited period of time and follow the teacher's guidance and interpretation on how to write well. After receiving submissions from students, the teacher reviews works. Students generally get feedback from the teacher and the put their works a side. Writing itself is more a teacher-oriented job than a student-oriented task. Writing might be viewed as complex problem solving processes. It is important to make a students feel confident as a successful writer. At the pre-writing stage, teachers can conduct various activities for students to generate writing ideas, brainstorming, or make an outline to support their writing. Within the area of pre-writing study, free writing as emerged as one of the most useful pre-writing skills. Student just write down whatever comes to mind without regard to spelling, grammar, and make no corrections. The main principle of free writing is nonstop writing. The way of free writing will help the students in finding interesting topics and in promoting their motivation in writing.

It studies indicated that pre-writing plays an essential role in successful writing for students who lack of confidence in writing. Also, students engaged in extensive reading skill get great improvement in writing

competency. However, they paid less attention to the integration in pedagogy with both extensive reading and pre-writing. In some ways, the ability to write effectively hinges upon having an adequate vocabulary even more than does the ability to read. Once students have learned to decode words, they may be able to read and pronounce many words that are unfamiliar to them. They may even be able to determine accurate meanings of unfamiliar words to simply by examining the context in which those words are used. During the writing process, however, a student does not have the luxury of examining the context in which a word is used; he or she creating the context. Therefore, the writer must be able to spontaneously recall words that are known not only by sight, but that are understood well enough to use correctly. Writing is dependent upon the ability to draw upon words to describe an event.

Writing is the process of thinking. Once we begin to write, then we think how to set goals, generate ideas, organize information, select appropriate language, make a draft, read and review what we have written, and the last revise and edit it. Academicians and business people view writing skills as crucial, yet increasing numbers of these professionals note steady erosion in the writing abilities of graduates. It is important to have positive attitudes especially in writing since they are also required to make reading summaries, write a research report and, paper in English. In fact, writing is considered the most complex and many English teachers notes that acquiring this skill seems to be more laborious and demanding than the other three skills (Valette, 2006:217). Moreover, according to Byrne (2001:1), writing is much more than just the production of graphic symbols. The symbols have to be arranged to form sentences. It is clear that the sentences formed by the words. The words as a based of vocabulary should be at the center of language teaching. The teacher has to manage the learning process that the students can do some of all of the things within the target vocabulary to be learned.

Traditionally, English teachers have also graded and corrected students' writing by simply reading at glance, checking the grammatical errors, and giving scores. Recent experience and research suggest that the writers should also consider rating their writing hostically and responding without evaluation. Considering commonly that evaluation refers to correction in red ink, marginal comments, and no comment at all, assessment does more than that. It means an analysis and interpretation of the data for the purpose of grading or placement. Byrne adds that the scoring procedure directs a rater's attention to four categories content, organization, language, and vocabulary. Moreover, holistic ratings for writing samples are now preferred over indirect, multiple choice assessments of writing skill for students.

### *c) The Concept of Reading*

The word "reading" has a complex definition. One simple definition will not be enough to explain it. This definition can be supported too by other definitions

given by others experts in reading. Heilman, et al., (1981:4) as cited in Novrieta (2002:6) defines: (1) reading is interacting with language that has been coded into print, (2) the product of interacting with the printed language should be comprehension, (3) reading is an active and ongoing process that is affected directly by an individuals interaction with his environment.

The writer intended to provide the sample with various printed materials in the form of descriptive texts. According to Smalley and Reutten (1990:75), descriptive text is a kind of texts that is used by the writer to show a person, place or object to his reader. It especially appeals to the readers' sense of sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell.

In everyday life we have to face so many forms of language like poster, newspaper, magazine, brochure, story books, street signs, announcement, bills, letters, the list goes on . Readers should be able to recognize the distinctions of these various forms of text. To be able to recognize these texts and their messages, of course, readers need to develop their comprehension skills in reading relate it to their background knowledge. It is clearly stated by Nunan (2003:67), who defines reading as the fluent process of readers combining information from a text and their own background knowledge to build meaning and he also adds that the goal of reading activities is comprehension. Good readers know what to do when they encounter difficulties. Competent reader will quickly reject the irrelevant information and find what he is looking for. (Grellet, 1981:3). The second activity is fluent reading. It is defined as the ability to read at an appropriate rate with adequate comprehension. Meaning does not lie in the reader or in the text. Meaning should be created by integrating reader's background knowledge and the text.

From the definitions above, it can be implied that reading functions as the act of responding with the appropriate meaning to a written material in which the process of interaction and interpreting between the readers and the writer's message through printed materials. To understand what we are reading is based on the reconstruction of the meaning behind work which is related to previous experience with the topic, the familiarity with the concept have language work.

#### *d) The Purpose of Reading*

Reading is an activity with purposes. We read for several reasons. Grellet (1981:4) list two purposes in reading. They are: reading for pleasure and reading for finding and getting certain information. In addition that, Mickulecky and Jeffries (1996:1) say that reading in English specify at least the following importance:

1. Reading helps students to learn to think in English
2. Reading can enlarge English vocabulary
3. Reading can help students to improve their writing
4. Reading is a good way to find out about new ideas, facts, and experiences.

Grellet (1981:4) states that reading involves a variety of skills as follows:

1. Recognizing the script of language

2. Deducing the meaning and use of unfamiliar lexical items
3. Understanding explicitly and non explicitly stated information
4. Understanding conceptual meaning
5. Understanding relations within the sentences and between the parts of the text
6. Recognizing indicators indiscourse and identifying the main point or important information in a piece of discourse
7. Extracting salient points to summarize (the text, an idea, etc) and selective extraction of relevant points from a text.

Grellet adds that several activities and exercises can be used to develop those skills mentioned above. The ability to convey those skills in reading activities will lead to students' reading comprehension.

#### *e) The Concept of Writing Drills*

Writing drills are essential in English teaching and learning process. The students drills on reading and practices on writing. The purpose of writing drills is to concentrate the attention of the students on one structural problem at a time and provide student with steady practice in handling the problem in various lexical context, without requiring student to give conscious attention to the details of the sequence. (Cunningham and Cunningham, 1992:112).

#### *f) Benefits of Writing Drills*

According to Cheek, Flippo and Lindsey (1989:227), writing, like oral language is an expressive language process that enables students to associate what they hear, speak, and see with print. The aspects of language, such as spelling, grammar, punctuation and vocabulary that will influence the output of writing drills.

Students will:

1. Learn how to transform students' experiences through verbal symbols.
  - a. Learn how to use various strategies, ranging from grammar and sentence-building activities to essay assignments, to engage students in inferential reasoning rather than in isolated drill exercises and rule memorization.
  - b. Construct and refine the kind of knowledge about written knowledge.
2. Perform the directional constraints that they use in written English.
3. Grasp important aspects of functions and forms from writing drills.
4. Write drills point out sound symbol correspondences as the spoken word is transformed into the written.
5. Invent literacy aids in the development of student's phonological awareness.
6. Learn the peripheral skills and mechanics of writing (spelling, handwriting, punctuation, and spacing) through practice and instruction.

7. “Invent literacy skills during writing not only helps them become better writers and readers (Cunningham and Cunningham 1992:107).

g) *Steps in Teaching Literacy*

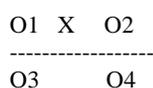
Teaching is an interactive process between a teacher and students. Basically teaching cannot be separated from learning. Teaching defined as a process that enables someone or some people to learn something by guiding, facilitating and providing them a certain condition for learning (Brown, 1987:7). Meanwhile, literacy means the ability to read and write. (Hornby, 1983:172) as cited Zulkarnain (1994:2). From the two definitions, it may be concluded that teaching literacy in this research is a process that enables, facilitates and guides the learners to learn how to convey their ideas, feelings and thoughts into written or oral form.

Department of National Education (1999:8) points out that they have developed literacy programme related to community social condition, which focus on teaching of literacy programme in the diverse regions of Indonesia. The new teaching of literacy programme was designed to cover Indonesia. Ways for implementing the functional of teaching literacy programme include:

1. Improving the ability of the learners to use reading and writing in daily life situation.
2. Improving the ability of the learners to read (language experience approach, local materials, self made materials).
3. Improving the ability of the learners to write about their own ideas, knowledge and experience.
4. Pre-assess the learners’ ability levels, needs and interest, and evaluate their learning progress.
5. Action ideas to guide the learners in implementing their new knowledge and experience.
6. Action ideas to guide the learners in implementing their new knowledge and skills to improve their daily lives.

C. *Methodology*

The writer applied an experimental method in this study. She classified the sample into two groups. The first is experimental group and the second one is control group. The research design used is shown in the following diagram:



D. *Population and Sample*

The population of the study are 320 students year students of SMPN 1 Palembang. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (1993:192), a sample, then refers to any group on which information is obtained often it is selected from a larger group (population). In this study, the sample will be taken about 20 – 25 % of the total population. From two classes by using matching subject. In the pre-test, matched subjects “designed, to or more treatment group used, but instead of relying on random assignment to a quite the group, the researcher matches

subject on certain characteristics (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1993:202).

E. *Techniques for Collecting the Data*

This section discusses the techniques for collecting the data in this study. That is (1) observation, and (2) test of writing and reading. The writer used test as an instrument to what difficulties that the students had in learning reading and writing by using writing drills.

F. *Technique for Analyzing the Data*

The writer observed the teaching and learning process during the research to get more information. The writer focused the observation on the activities of the teacher and the students’ activities in teaching and learning process. The observation was unstructured. The data which were got from observation might be needed for support the result of finding and any process of teaching and learning. The observation was done more than one months.

The data were analyzed by using t-test. The writer started from scoring the pre-test and post-test by reading and writing of experimental group and the control group. Then, she compared the scores. For the pre-test and the post-test of reading and writing test gained by the experimental group and the control group. After that she analyzed the data from the pre-test and post-test by using t-test (the paired sample t-test) and independent sample t-test) and (SPSS) version 12. The result of the post-test analyzed is compared with the result of the pre-test. By comparing the result of a pre-test and post-test, the writer could see that the students make improvement in reading&writing by using writing drills. Therefore, the difference of the scores of the tests was obtained by computing the mean scores of the experimental and control group one.

G. *Findings and Interpretations*

In order to find out whether or not there was a significant difference in achievement between the experimental group and the control group, the writer compared the results of the post-test in the experimental group with those in the control group by using independent samples t-test.

H. *Group Statistics*

	group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Post-test experimental & control group	Experi - mental group	18	72.25	7.877	1.863
	Control group	18	50.72	6.091	1.709

The statistical summaries from both samples can be seen from the table 12. The post-test in experimental group was 72.25 and the post-test in control group was 50.72. In short, it can be said that the post-test value obtained by the experimental group is higher than that of control group. The analysis of independent samples t-test

for reading & writing test by groups shows that the mean difference of the post-test in each group was 21.53 and the significant level was 0.000. Since 0.000 was lower than alpha value 0.05, it means that there was a significant difference in reading & writing achievement between the two groups. This confirms that the students in experimental group made better achievement if it is compared to those of the students in control group.

As we observed that the students already had good skills in writing so that the writing drills given during the treatment did not contribute as much as in the case of reading. This seems possible because Junior High School students are required to do a lot of writing and those students might have done this during the lesson of their study. Writing drills which was applied in this study came into effect due to some other factors like the interaction of the students and the lecturer (the writer) which was student-centered in which students trained to do their English's drills. Another factor was the small of the students involved made it possible for every student to express themselves individually. Most of the second year students at SMP Negeri 1 Palembang. They tended to be more dominant by asking and answering questions, giving opinions, expressing themselves. To close connection between the literacy practices related to studying writing drills in the class, reading, writing, discussing of grammar, vocabulary (words or sentences). The writing activities, in particular, contributed to the increase of students' awareness of what they were learning as well as their perception and competence. Additionally, they also contributed to developing the students' appreciation of writing drills.

### 3. Conclusion and Suggestion

Writing drills can improve the second year students' literacy skills. The result showed that there was a significant acceleration in terms of the students' reading and writing skills, and there was a positive response towards this instruction. Thus, the proposed instruction for reading and writing skills through writing drills either conceptually or practically is plausible to apply in any subjects, especially in reading and writing classes.

The factor which caused the problems in reading, among others were (1) word recognition, recognizing family, words in new passage, (2) new word recognition, recognizing new words through prior knowledge about words, (3) other factor such as from the student himself, his/her attitude towards the target language should be positive, from the teacher, and educational context. The factors that caused problems in writing were (1) no idea to write, (2) lack of time, and (3) grammar and vocabulary, most of the students did not know how to express words in English and could not choose the right words for certain expressions. In addition, they faced difficulties in arranging those words in phrases and sentences.

### Suggestion

The role of the teacher is very important in teaching and learning process. The following suggestions are offered by the writer to the English teachers.

1. The teacher should be able to create a good learning situation so the students will be encouraged to discuss their difficulties in reading and writing.
2. The teachers should motivate the students to use dictionary systematically and effectively.
3. The teachers should give the students more drills and practices both in reading and writing.
4. The students should understand the material given and learn them at school is not enough. It is necessary that students review the materials regularly before and after school.
5. The students should read many kinds of English books because it can help them to enrich their vocabulary.
6. The students should do some homeworks that related reading and writings' homework as a written and a retell what he/she write and read.

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