

IMPROVING THE LEARNERS' WRITING SKILL THROUGH DICTOGLOSS

**(A Classroom Action Research at Grade IX I of SMP Negeri 3
Ungaran in the Academic Year 2011-2012)**



ARTICLE

**Submitted to Fulfill One of the Requirements for
the Completion of Graduate Degree in Language Education**

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MAGISTER of LANGUAGE STUDY

MUHAMMADIYAH UNIVERSITY OF SURAKARTA

2012

APPROVAL

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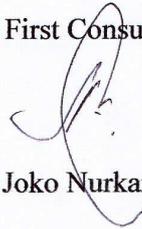
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This article has been approved by the advisors of the Post Graduate Program of the English Department of Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta on July 5th 2012.

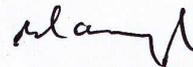
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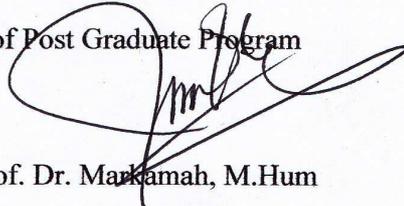
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ABSTRACT

Sugiarti. 2012. Improving the Learners' Writing Skill Through Dictogloss (A Classroom Action Research at Grade IX I of SMP Negeri 3 Ungaran in the Academic Year 2011-2012).

Thesis. Surakarta. English Department of Post Graduate Program, Surakarta Muhammadiyah University. 2012.

During the last two semesters, the learners' writing scores were below the passing grade. The scores of their writing pretest are low as well which indicates their low writing skill. That's why the condition needs improvement. Therefore, this study is aimed at: 1. Improving the learners' writing skill through dictogloss at grade IX I of SMP Negeri 3 Ungaran, and 2. Explaining the effectiveness of the learners' learning when dictogloss is implemented in the teaching of writing. The effectiveness can be observed through the learners' characteristics as effective learners in the writing classroom.

The research setting is at SMP Negeri 3 Ungaran. The data sources are the learners' writing scores in pretest and post-tests, informants, as well as the learners' in the writing classroom. The qualitative data which are collected through observation, interview and questionnaires are analyzed with constant comparative method. The quantitative data obtained through pretest and pos-tests are analyzed with statistic descriptive. The data are validated through triangulation method. There are four indicators as a reference of the success of dictogloss implementation to improve the learners' writing skill: (1) The improvement of the learners' writing scores; (2) The increase of the standard category; (3) The mean of each writing component achieve or exceed the passing grade; and (4) The learners are more active, participative and creative than before.

Finally, this study shows that dictogloss can improve the learners' writing skill as indicated by the improvement of their writing scores as well as their motivation in writing as indicated by the better changes of their behavior in the writing classroom. The learners' scores increase from the level of fair (the mean = 54.14) in pretest to the level of very good (the mean = 80.57) in the post-test of cycle 3. The learners' learning is also effective when dictogloss is implemented in the teaching of writing.

Key Words : Writing Skill, Dictogloss

**IMPROVING THE LEARNERS' WRITING SKILL
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A. Introduction

Based on the preliminary research conducted on July 25th 2011, the researcher revealed the learners' low writing skill reflected on their low pretest writing scores. The data indicated that out of 28 learners, 26 learners (92.86%) had scores below the passing grade (67). The mean of their pretest scores was only 54.14. Most of their writing products were poor and some of them even were opaque. There were many errors in the five writing components. The learners' low writing skill was caused by their limited acquisition of grammar and vocabulary, no outline or guidance in writing, limited prior knowledge related to the topic, difficulties in generating ideas, and inadequate acquisition of mechanics. Simultaneously, the writing difficulties cause their low motivation. Therefore, she decided to use dictogloss to solve the learners' identified problems. She assumes that it will be effective for improving the learners' writing skill and their motivation in line with the solution their writing difficulties as well as promoting effective learning in the writing classroom.

This research focuses on certain problems related to the effort of solving the learners' writing difficulties as follows: 1. Can dictogloss improve the writing

skill of the learners at class IX I of SMP Negeri 3 Ungaran?; 2. How effective is the learners' learning when dictogloss is implemented in the teaching of writing? This study is aimed at: 1. Improving the learners' writing skill in grade IX I at SMP Negeri 3 Ungaran; 2. Describing the effectiveness of the learners' learning when dictogloss is implemented in the teaching of writing. The theoretical benefits of this research are the results can be used as a model of teaching writing, a reference to empower the previous theories, and as a research foundation for future researches. The practical benefit for English teachers is it offers an alternative technique appropriate for teaching writing contextually in order to overcome their learners' writing difficulties. For future researchers, the results of this research can be evaluated by future researchers. For textbook writers, they can include dictogloss as an alternative technique for teaching writing in their textbooks. For school, the school will produce more skillful graduates, especially in writing.

B. Theoretical Review and Previous Studies

1. Theoretical Framework

a. Notions of Writing

Ghaith (2002) defines "Writing is a complex process that allows writers to explore thoughts and ideas, and make them visible and concrete." Elbow, 1973 (in brown, 2001: 336-337) states,

Writing is a two-step process. First you figure out your meaning, then you put it into language: ... Writing is an organic, developmental process in which you start writing at the very beginning before you know your meaning at all and encourage your words gradually to change and evolve. ... Writing is not a way to transmit a message but is a way to grow and cook a message. Writing is a way to end up thinking something you couldn't have started out thinking. Writing is, in fact, a transaction with words whereby you free yourself from what you presently think, feel, and perceive.

Writing can also be defined by a series of contrasts as Nunan (2003:88) points out

Writing is both a physical and a mental act. At the most level, writing is the physical act of committing words or ideas to some medium. On the other hand, writing is the mental work of inventing ideas, thinking about how to express them, and organizing them into statements and paragraphs that will be clear to a reader. Its purpose is both to express and impress. Writers serve two themselves, and their own desires to express an idea or feeling, and readers (audience), who need to have ideas expressed in certain ways. It is both a process and a product. The writer imagines, organizes, drafts, edits, reads and rereads. Ultimately, what the audience sees is a product.

The three notions of writing refer writing as a communication activity that involves both writers' mental process and physical process.

b. Types of Classroom Writing Performance

The followings are five major categories of classroom writing performance (Brown, 2001:343-344): 1) Imitative, or Writing down; 2) Intensive or Controlled; 3) Self-writing; 4) Display Writing; 5) Real Writing: academic, vocational/Technical, personal.

c. Principles of Teaching Writing

The following are few principles of teaching writing proposed by Nunan (2003:92-94): 1) Understand learners' reasons for writing; 2) Provide many opportunities for learners to write; 3) Make feedback helpful and meaningful; and 4) Clarify for yourself and learners, how their writing will be evaluated. Meanwhile Nation (2009:93-94) proposes four principles for teaching writing used to evaluate teaching and learning activities, and to evaluate a writing course or the writing section of a language course to make sure that learners are getting a good range of opportunities for learning: 1) Meaning-focused Input (learners should bring experience and knowledge to their writing); 2) Meaning-focused Output (learners should do lots of writing and lots of different kind of writing); 3) Language-focused Learning; 4) Fluency Development.

d. Approaches in Teaching EFL Writing

Genre Based Approach

Badger and White (2000:155-156) point out, in the genre approach the knowledge of language is intimately attached to a social purpose, and more focus is on the viewpoint of the reader than that of the writer. Writing is mostly viewed as the learners' reproduction of text based on the genre offered by the teacher. Learning takes place through imitation and exploration of different kinds of models.

Dudley-Evans (in Badger and White, 2000:155-156) identifies three stages in genre approaches to writing. First, a model of particular genre is introduced and analyzed. Learners can carry out exercises which manipulate relevant language forms and, finally, produce a short text. This parallels product approach very closely. Accordingly, learners should be exposed to many examples of the same genre to develop their ability to write a particular genre. Through exposure to similar texts, learners can detect the specialized configurations of that genre, and they also can activate their memories of prior reading or writing experiences whenever they encounter the task of creating a new piece in a familiar genre.

e. Components of Evaluating Learners' Writing

There are six general components or categories that are often the basis for the assessment of learner's writing: content, organization, discourse, vocabulary, syntax, and mechanical (Brown, 2001:356-357). Besides the six criteria listed above, microskills for writing can become testing criteria in writing assessment, especially to imitative and intensive types of writing tasks (Brown, 2003:221). The microskills for writing include: 1) Produce graphemes and orthographic patterns of English; 2) Produce writing at an efficient rate of speed to suit the purpose; 3) Produce an acceptable core of words and use appropriate word order pattern; 4) Use acceptable grammatical systems patterns and rules; 5)

Express a particular meaning in different grammatical forms; and 6) Use cohesive devices in written discourse.

f. Notion of Dictogloss

Dictogloss is a form of classroom dictation activity where learners listen to a passage read by the teacher, jot down key words, pool their resources, and work together to create a reconstructed version of the original text by discussing the grammatical decisions about the text, such as word choice, cross sentences connection. Afterward, the groups' new texts are analyzed and corrected (Wajnryb, 1990). Thornbury defines dictogloss as a form of dictation, but in which the learners hear and reconstruct the whole text, rather than doing so line by line (1999:82).

g. Dictogloss Variations

There are eight variations on the basic dictogloss procedure Student-Controlled Dictation; 3) Student-Student Dictation; 4) Dictogloss Summaries; 5) Scrambled Sentence Dictogloss; 6) Elaboration dictogloss; 7) Dictogloss Opinion; 8) Picture Dictation.

h. Stages of Dictogloss Procedure for Teaching Writing

The followings are the four stages of dictogloss procedure for teaching writing.

1) Preparation

To start the writing activity using dictogloss, first the teacher sets the theme by introducing the topic. After chatting about this a few minutes, the teacher begins to tell/read the text. The learners are asked to listen to the story attentively, and write any words, phrases, or sentences that they can remember (Thornbury, 1999:83).

2) Dictation

At first dictation, teacher dictates the text a little bit slower than a native. Learners only listen to the global meaning of the text. Then they think what the text is about. In the second dictation, they listen to teacher reading the text at native speaker speed, they individually have make a brief notes such as key words or phrases which can help them to reconstruct the text but not whole sentences (Wajnryb, 1990:7-9). A third listening gives them a chance to confirm the information and revise their notes if necessary. A short 5-minute break between the second and the third listening gives them a chance to discuss their notes and identify the points they need to focus on (Vasiljevic, 2010:44).

3) Reconstruction

Learners work in group to discuss what they heard and attempt to reconstruct the version of the text from their shared resources. They should produce a coherent text close in content and organization to the original version. They compare notes and discuss the text for its grammar, text cohesion and logical sense. They are asked to use all the

words from the preparation stage, but need not to use accurately the same words as the original text. The informational content should not be different and should be grammatically correct (Wajnryb, 1990:8).

4) Analysis and Correction

Learners compare their text with other learners' various versions of reconstruction and the original, and make the necessary corrections. They discuss the language choice made. The small group versions can be reproduced on board or overhead projector; the text can be photocopied and distributed. Ideally, the original text should not be seen by them until after their own versions have been analyzed (Wajnryb, 1990:9). When the groups have finished, they are then shown the original text. They compare it with theirs, identify any differences, and amend what they have written. Their versions can also be stuck up on the board or the walls together with the original one (Harmer, 2004:76).

i. Advantages of Dictogloss for Teaching Writing

Dictogloss offers at least ten advantages over other models of teaching writing as follows: 1) Dictogloss is experiential, communicative, and oriented toward active creativity while at the same time it focuses on grammatical structures in a deliberate and methodical fashion; 2) Dictogloss involves learners actively in the learning process; 3) Dictogloss is an effective way of combining individual and group activities; 4) Dictogloss facilitates the development of learners'

communicative competence; 5) A collaborative reconstruction task in dictogloss gives learners the opportunities to practice and use all modes of language and to become engaged in authentic communication; 6) The reconstruction stage helps learners try out their hypotheses and subsequently to identify their strengths and weaknesses; 7) The dictogloss procedure promotes learners' autonomy; 8) The reconstruction task also promotes the acquisition of vocabulary; 9) The reconstruction tasks can raise learners' awareness of rhetorical patterns in the target language; and 10) Dictogloss helps learners put aside affective factors.

j. Outcomes of Effective Learning

Effective learning involves outcomes (Watkins, et.al., 2002:5): 1) More connected knowledge; 2) Wider range of strategies; 3) Greater complexity of understanding; 4) Enhanced action appropriate to goals and context; 5) Increased engagement and self direction; 6) More reflective approach; 7) More positive emotions and affiliation to learning; 8) More developed vision of future self as a learner; 9) Greater facility in learning with others; 10) More sense of participation in a knowledge community.

k. Learner Characteristics of Effective Learning

The definition of effective learning suggests that the effective learner is active and strategic; is skilled in cooperation, dialogue and

creating knowledge with others; is able to develop goals and plans; monitors his/her own learning; and is versatile across context (Watkins, et.al., 2002:6).

l. Teaching-Learning Processes for Effective Learning

From the definition above effective learning is promoted by (Watkins, et.al., 2002:5-6): 1) Activity, with Reflection and Sense-Making; 2) Collaboration for Learning; 3) Learner Responsibility for Learning; 4) Learning about Learning.

m. Previous Studies

Kowal and Swain (1997) cited in Tedick (2001) investigate the effectiveness of dictogloss for teaching the eighth grade immersion learners. They find out that the learners focus not only on the grammatical aspect being emphasized but also on the semantic issue. Rismayanti (2009) in her research about “Using Dictogloss to Improve Students’ Listening Ability” finds out dictogloss is effective not only to improve students’ listening ability but also other learners’ language competences, such as vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar. Wulandari (2011) in her research “Improving students’ Listening Ability Using Spot the Dictogloss Technique: A Classroom Action Research at Eight year Students of SMPN 03 Ngargoyoso” finds out that dictogloss can improve the students’ listening ability in terms of raising their

achievement in finding the meaning of words and phrases based on context, finding main idea of the text, finding specific information, and identifying communicative purposes of recount and descriptive texts. The class situation is more fun and alive, and the students become more active. Koosafhar, et al. (2012) in their research of “The Effect of Dictogloss Technique on Learners’ Writing Improvement in Terms of Writing Coherent Texts” find out the two techniques of teaching cohesive devices (explicit teaching and dictogloss) are effective, but dictogloss seems more useful in case of these participants.

Wajnryb points out the value of dictogloss: learning becomes active involvement, teaching and testing go hand in hand, this is an exercise based on an information gap, it strikes a balance between the role of memory and the role of creativity, it stimulates grammar practice contextually, it compromises between traditional and contemporary approaches to learning grammar, it stimulates motivation, it contains experiential factor, it helps to use language as communication, it caters for individuals and for groups, it involves communication and group interaction, and text is seen as the unit of language (1990:11-19).

Both the reconstruction phase and the comparison phase encourage a strong form focus-good for alerting learners at this level to features of the language that might ordinarily pass them by (Thornbury, 1999:82). Dictogloss is useful for vocabulary acquisition too in very much the same way. And on top of that it is especially appropriate for

building the writing habit. (Harmer, 2004:74). Based on the rationale which the researcher described, she proposes action hypothesis as follow:

- 1) Dictogloss can improve the writing skill of the learners in grade IX I at SMP Negeri 3 Ungaran;
- 2) The learners' learning is effective when dictogloss is implemented in the teaching of writing.

C. Research Method

This research was conducted at class IX I of SMP Negeri 3 Ungaran which consists of 28 learners. It was planned that the research preparation until the report of the research results would be conducted in twelve months from July 2011 until June 2012. The research subjects were the learners at class IX I of SMP Negeri 3 Ungaran in the academic year 2011-2012. The research design used was the model of Kemmis and Mc Taggart' action research spiral which included four steps: planning, acting, observing and reflecting to examine what occurred in the writing classroom before and after the dictogloss implementation.

Based on the learners' writing problems and the causes, the researcher and the collaborator planned to use dictogloss to solve the learners' writing problems. In acting, the researcher used dictogloss for teaching writing with different topics related to animals and plants in each cycle. In observing she used tests, observation, interview and closed questionnaire to reveal the effects of dictogloss implementation in the teaching of writing. In reflecting she evaluated the effectiveness of dictogloss in the teaching of writing, whether or not the acting worked successfully in line with the objectives, and evaluated the

effectiveness of the learners' learning. The results of reflecting were used as the recommendation for the general planning in the next cycle. In replanning, the former general planning was revised based on the results of reflecting.

There were two types of data collected in this research: quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data were collected through pre-test and post-tests. The writing tests were the tasks of reconstructing the report texts read by the teacher. The learners' writing scores as the data of the test results were used to find out the improvement of their writing skill. The qualitative data were collected through interview, closed questionnaires and the collaborative observation of the learners' behavior which included their activeness, participation and creativity.

The quantitative data were analyzed with the descriptive statistics which includes frequency distribution and central tendency. Frequency distribution indicated the number of the observed phenomena which was correlated with certain criteria or categorization. Central tendency was indicated by mean, median and mode. The qualitative data were analyzed by using Constant Comparative Method which consists of four steps: comparing incidents applicable to each category, integrating categories and their properties, delimiting the theory, and writing the theory. The data are validated through method triangulation (using various data collection methods).

D. The Discussion of the Research Findings

1. The Improvement of the Learners' Writing Skill.

The results of the classroom action research show that if dictogloss is implemented in the teaching of writing, it will improve the learners' writing skill as indicated by the improvement of their writing scores and the standard category. In pretest the mean of the learners' writing scores is 54.14, in cycle 1 it increases to 66.43, in cycle 2 it increases to 73.08, and in cycle 3 it increases to 80.57. The standard category in pretest and cycle 1 is inadequate/unsatisfactory, in cycle 2 it increases to adequate and in cycle 3 it increases to good.

The scores of each component increase significantly. From pretest to cycle 3 the mean of diction increases from 2.68 (53.57%) to 4.16 (83.22%), of content increases from 2.84 (56.78%) to 4.14 (82.86%), of mechanics increases from 3.16 (63.22%) to 4.02 (80.36%), of grammar increases from 2.06 (41.08%) to 4.00 (80.00%), and of organization increases from 2.81 (56.07%) to 3.88 (77.50%). In cycle 1 the means of the grammar and organization scores are below the passing grade. In cycle 2 the mean of the organization scores is below the passing grade. In cycle 3 none of the five writing components, the mean of which is below the passing grade.

2. The Effectiveness of the Learners' Learning when Dictogloss is Implemented in the Teaching of Writing.

The research findings show that the learners' learning is effective when dictogloss is implemented in the teaching of writing as it results in 10

outcomes of effective learning as proposed by Watkins, et.al. (2002:5). Dictogloss implementation in the teaching of writing gives the learners more knowledge related to the lesson content and the five writing components. This results in their greater complexity of understanding of how to write effectively in the real context as indicated in the improvement of their writing scores. It raises their awareness, and improves their skill to use the five writing components contextually and appropriately. They have better skill in planning their writing based on the goal and purpose, in developing the planning, in discussing the text content with more accurate and relevant information, in organizing sentences and paragraphs, and in using grammar, dictions and mechanics appropriately and contextually.

The learners learn to use wider range of strategies in completing their writing tasks such as brainstorming, pair discussion, group discussion, finding appropriate dictions and synonyms in dictionary, outlining, paraphrasing, etc. They are also more reflective on the results of their learning through the immediate feedback provided in the analysis and correction stage. They gain insight into their linguistic shortcomings through the comparison of the original text versus the reconstructed one. In this way they can monitor both their progress and failure in writing for better achievement in completing their next writing tasks.

The learners are more self-directed. They construct their own understanding and meaning, think critically as well as restructure their own way of thinking and prior understanding in writing their texts. Their new

insights and understanding are made explicit in their texts. They are trained to overcome the problems systematically, and to build their own disciplines and responsibilities. They are actively engaged in the writing activities, passing through every stage of the dictogloss procedure. The time allocation for every activity in the dictogloss procedure limits their opportunities for distraction and gets them to work on, think through and inquire about the lesson content and the writing task (text reconstruction). They should manage the allocated time effectively and efficiently to complete their writing tasks well within the time limit.

Dictogloss gives great contribution to the learners' motivation as indicated by their more positive behavior toward the writing activities. It gives guidance which helps them overcome their writing difficulties so that they have more positive emotion and affiliation to learning as well as more developed vision of future self as a learner. They become motivated to complete their writing tasks since the source of their low motivation, that is, the writing difficulties have been solved. As their motivation increases, they become actively involved in the writing activities. They are more responsive to the teacher's presentation, and look more enthusiastic, cheerful, active, and participative in the writing activities.

Dictogloss provides contextual opportunity for discussion and cooperative learning amongst the learners to cooperatively solve the problems in the reconstruction activities. They get greater facility in learning with others in which they can share their knowledge, information, ideas, and

experiences with friends who have acquired their knowledge in different ways. They have more sense of participation in a knowledge community with their groups as indicated by the improvement of their participation from cycle to cycle. In cycle 1 there are 22 learners (78.57%) who are participative, and it increases to 26 learners (92.86%) in cycle 2 and 27 learners (96.43%) in cycle 3.

Dictogloss involves active learning in which the writing tasks are designed for the learner activities. The learners have opportunities to meaningfully write, display, and reflect on their knowledge of content, ideas, issues, the organizational structure and language features of the text as well as concern of the topic. Their activeness improves from cycle to cycle. In cycle 1 there are 25 learners (89.29%) who are active, and it increases to 27 learners (96.43%) in cycle 2 and 28 learners (100%) in cycle 3.

Dictogloss promotes active and creative thinking skill as the learners should use their own phrases, sentences or even their own words in reconstructing their texts. Some of them are even able to creatively add accurate and relevant information beyond the one contained in the text read by the teacher. The reconstruction activity becomes the object of their attention, conversation, learning, and reflection. They also use thinking skill while analyzing the reconstructed texts in relation to the original. It proves that dictogloss is able to enhance their active and creative thinking skill as shown in the improvement of their creativity from cycle to cycle. In cycle 1

there are 25 learners (89.29%) who are creative, and it increases to 27 learners (96.43%) in cycle 2, and 28 learners (100%) in cycle 3.

E. Conclusion, Implication and Suggestion

Based on the research problems, research findings and research discussion, there are several important points as the results of implementing dictogloss in the teaching of writing that lead the researcher to draw the following conclusion: 1) Dictogloss implementation in the teaching of writing can improve the learners' writing skill. It helps them master and use the five writing components in writing an essay contextually and appropriately; 2) The learner' learning is effective when dictogloss is implemented in the teaching of writing. The learners feel motivated, happy, interested, challenged and easier in writing. In the writing classroom they are more enthusiastic, active, strategic, participative, responsible, self-directed and reflective on the results of their learning. They are more skillful and creative in writing a text as well.

The research findings implicate that dictogloss can be an alternative technique to improve the learners' writing skill and to create effective learning since it gives positive effects not only on the learners' writing scores but also on their positive behavior toward the writing activities. Therefore, English teachers should facilitate the teaching learning process in writing classrooms in order to improve their learners' writing skill. Dictogloss is one of the alternative techniques applicable for it. It can improve learners' writing skill, and can create effective learning, especially in the writing classrooms. Basically, the topic of

the material can be everything, but it should be based on learners' needs, level, interest and curriculum. Before the reconstruction stage in the dictogloss procedure, there should be the construction of the text outline.

For future researchers, hopefully, they will continue this research by developing the aspects which have not been developed in this research, and evaluate the use of dictogloss in the teaching-learning process. For text book writers, they should include dictogloss for teaching listening, speaking or writing in their English textbooks with clear procedure, and should include the reconstruction of text outline before the reconstruction activity. For headmasters, they should encourage and facilitate the language teachers in their school, especially English teachers to implement dictogloss in the teaching of English, especially writing by giving them motivation as well as providing the teaching media and facilities needed for dictogloss implementation in the classroom.

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