Improving Students’ Writing Ability by Application of Semantic Mapping Strategy at SMA Muhammadiyah

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ABSTRACT  
Writing skill is one of the most important skills in English to communicate information or something through media like paper, email, book, etc. Excellent writing skill allows the students to express their opinions, thoughts, and imagination. The result is to make the readers understand and attract to their writing. Writing activities make every writer think, learn and communicate in the media. Unfortunately, most of the students face difficulty and stagnant in writing. They need some strategies to help them in improving their writing skill. Semantic mapping is one of the effective ways for improving writing ability. It helps students to get an idea and improve it into sentences and paragraphs. This study described the use of semantic mapping in teaching writing skills. This study is aimed to improve student's language skills, especially writing based on their literacy level. It also applied semantic mapping in the joint construction of the text. Students were asked to write the report after they created a semantic mapping of their idea and group. The method of this study was action research which had four steps. The steps were planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. The data was collected from the cognitive test, observation checklist, questionnaire, and interview. The purpose of the research is to know whether using a semantic mapping strategy can improve the students’ writing skills. This study is a classroom action research and It focuses on how students respond to semantic mapping strategy in English writing skills. The instrument of this study is using a questionnaire which is distributed to the students of the academic year 2021/2022 that consisted of 30 students in XII grade, 17 females and 13 males. The result of this study was 90.33 % of students got easier in learning writing tasks and 26.33% had great enthusiasm to master writing skills by using semantic mapping strategy.

Keywords : semantic mapping strategy; students’ response; writing skill

1. INTRODUCTION

Learning English is a very important activity for everyone because it is used to communicate among people. English is the international language that almost all nations use it. The English language is one of the subjects that is learned by the students from elementary to university level. It consists of four language skills speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Those skills should be mastered by the students who want to achieve a high level of mastering English proficiency.

Nowadays, there is a general secret that almost students have a great obstacle in writing English. It causes writing to become a long process and needs concentration, instruction, practice, and patience. And half of them could not be finished on the deadline stated by the lecturer.

Those reasons make some of the students bored to write. Another reason is they do not know what they are going to write and how to start writing. Sometimes they are lack ideas and lost their spirit to write. In this case, the researcher user the strategy to help students to find an idea and are eager to start writing passionately. Semantic mapping can help students to map their ideas and develop them into
regular sentences (Oxford, 1990). Semantic mapping is known as a tool of an active learning strategy to assist students to accomplish writing tasks.

Writing is one of the English language skills which is not as well-known as speaking. Certainly, it is also very essential to be learned by English students. Writing is one of the ways to communicate with others through media. Writing can be the form of communication that allows students to put their feelings and ideas on paper or other media. Learning writing is not easy, because writing skill includes complex and difficult things. Students could make mistakes in speaking and most people might ignore it because difficult to ask our opponent to repeat it as long as both of them understand. On the contrary, students’ writing could be examined many times, which makes it riskier for the reader to read and read again to make sure the writing is correct grammatically or the content.

Through writing, people can get some advantages from the context which will be delivered directly to the reader. Referring to the function of writing, people could express their thoughts, ideas, and opinions using written communication, and receive new information. Writings are connected to all aspect of our lives as politics, education, business, law, religion, socials, art, and entertainment. In short, delivering messages to the readers or audience without meeting directly, writing comes to be the best solution to replace.

Most students assume that writing is the most difficult skill to be learned and quite boring. It makes students refuse to learn writing. They often make grammatical mistakes and errors when they write a text. Almost all Students are still lacking vocabulary in expressing their ideas. One of the students’ main problems in learning writing is that the students felt difficulty in developing ideas. To face that problem, some techniques could be used to solve the difficulties in developing ideas. One of the techniques is the semantic mapping strategy. The use of semantic mapping technique was possibly implemented to develop an idea in learning writing. There are many benefits from the use of the semantic mapping technique. A Semantic mapping technique can be used as a technique in teaching and learning writing. The use of semantic mapping can help students identify the patterns of organization of a text. It can help the students to describe their ideas. It concludes that the semantic mapping technique can be useful to help students to generate ideas in writing.

Based on the effectiveness of using semantic mapping strategy, the writer makes the title “Improving Students’ Writing Ability by Application of Semantic Mapping Strategy at SMA Muhammadiah.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Writing Skill

Writing skill is a skill of how to manifest the ideas into written form. Chandler (1995) states that writing skills are specific abilities that help writers put their thoughts into words that attract people to read and understand the message. It declares that through writing, the writers or students can explore their ideas, experiences, knowledge, adventures, or feelings in written form to make good communication with their readers. Due to these definitions, writing can be classified as a very complex process, because it involves the process of ideas and knowledge to be expressed deeply.

Next, Raimes (1983:4) states that writing skill is a skill to communicate with a reader. It is used to articulate the ideas or opinions in words, sentences, and paragraphs without having face-to-face communication. Thus, writing is a method of communication that can be used to establish and maintain contact with others, transmit information, express thoughts, feeling, and reactions.
Writing is goal-directed and one will not write without a purpose. It is also explorative because there are not always know exactly what it is until the end of writing. (White in Saxenian, 1998, p.30). Many kinds of writing contain purposes and aims. Usually, the purposes of writing are entertainment, information, motivation, education, or simply an exploration of the imagination of the writer’s mind.

Writing is an integral skill of second language mastering. McDonough and Shaw (2004, p.152) state writing as a vehicle for language practice and further added that it communicates the writer's ideas, opinions, and suggestions. Students have to go through a structured process of writing.

In the classroom, writing activities can be done in a group or individually. Langan (2009, p.86) confirmed that the process of teaching writing consists of four basic stages. They are prewriting, writing the first draft, drafting, revising, editing, and proofreading. For each stage, various learning activities that can support the learning of specific writing skills are suggested. Pre-writing or planning is an essential step in the writing process and should be accounted for 70 percent of the writing time that writer spent (Murray, 1982, p.78).

B. Semantic Mapping Strategy

Harmer (2007:235) defines semantic mapping or word map as an extremely ravishing way of building up vocabulary knowledge as well as encouraging students into retrieving and using what they know. It is a prewriting technique by drawing a diagram of words using lines, boxes, arrows, circles, words, and phrases to show how new words and ideas are related to the topic. Brown (2000:308-309) states that practicing semantic maps strategy could be done individually. The early drafts of these maps could be quite messy, which is usually acceptable.

Canas & Novak (2006) defined concept mapping as “graphical tools for organizing and expressing knowledge. The concept of mapping can represent the title of knowledge mastering. It becomes a tool that is actively used by students during the writing process. The process of concept mapping not only demands an active response of the learners in learning but also highlights their understanding of a complicated sentence or paragraph. Semantic mapping can help students to classify their idea into some flowchart or drafts. Afterward, they write their sub ideas of the main idea and mention some vocabularies that they use to make an essay. Then, they can develop it into some sentences and paragraphs. A concept map is a special form the web diagram to emphasize some knowledge gathering and sharing information. Semantic mapping is a kind of strategy that made and shows the keyword and concept of the text that related each other by drawing a graphic word.

The framework of semantic mapping includes the concept of words, categories, and other examples. The steps of semantic mapping strategies are:

a) Select a word as central to the topic
b) Focus on the target word
c) Invite the students to mention as many words as possible
d) Classify the words in similar categories.
e) Construct the map based on the list of words.

The semantic mapping strategy has five stages as follows:

1) Introducing the theme.
   The researcher introduces the theme of the units and draws a large oval with the theme inside it on the black/whiteboard then displays a picture related to the theme.

2) Brainstorming
   The researcher asks several questions to the students to gain specific information related to the main title or topic.
3) Categorizing
   The writer asks students to make some categories that are related to the words. Then make
   some sub ideas of the paragraph.

4) Personalizing the map
   The students draw a map in their book. Then, they decide kind of words or vocabularies in
   every sentence and develop them into a paragraph

5) Post assignment
   The students develop their map of words or vocabularies into some sentences or paragraphs
   which they are prepared well.

Figure 1. Semantic Mapping Diagram

Moreover, Nofrianti (2017) found that the implementation of the Semantic Mapping technique in
the essay writing class improved the researcher’s performance and also the students’ activities. The
previous studies were focused on the impact of semantic mapping and the students’ value after
semantic mapping implementation. Based on the previous statement, students’ response about the
strategy being the focus of this study and the purpose is to know how far the strategy can motivate and
help the students on writing skills.

C. Technique of Semantic Mapping Strategy

   Semantic mapping is one technique that can be used before the students start writing. The Semantic
mapping technique can help students in finding ideas before they begin to write a text. This research
concentrates on the use of semantic mapping techniques to help students to produce writing more
easily. The use of semantic mapping technique is possibly implemented in learning writing. Antonacci
in Amoush (2012:715) mentions that semantic mapping is a visual representation of knowledge, a
picture of the conceptual relationship. It means that semantic mapping is believed as a useful technique
to facilitate the students in comprehending texts properly. The semantic mapping technique has some
benefits. The technique can be used for several instructional purposes. The use of the technique can
help students to identify the patterns of organization of ideas and concepts. It can help students to
describe their ideas. Then, a semantic mapping strategy can be useful for introducing important vocabulary. It shows students how the terms are interrelated.

Figure 2. Semantic Mapping of “Element of Weather” Article

Referring to the teaching writing recount text, Urawan (2013) conducted action research showing that the students were afraid of making any mistakes and worried about their ability in writing and arranging words into the correct sentences. Another researcher is Novita (2012) informed that the students found it hard to find the ideas and arrange their ideas into an interesting paragraph. Their limited knowledge of vocabulary was the main obstacle in writing. They were seldom using a dictionary as a reference for writing.

Several factors could influence the quality of writing. They are teachers/lecturers, methods of writing, classroom management, writing materials, writing assessment, and many others. Teachers, furthermore, often failed to allow influencing students sufficient time for the writing processes, particularly during the important pre-writing stage when students interacted with their teacher and peers to generate ideas and determine their topic, purpose, audience, and organizational scheme. This stage of the writing process also provides opportunities for building vocabulary. The traditional manner of teaching is quite dull and never changing and no difference for a long period. Lack of variety in the lessons will discourage the enthusiasm of students to learn. The teaching method for every aspect of a text is the same every time without expanding to a new method and manner of teaching as poetry, drama, prose, novel, essay, or short story. The teacher does not attempt to create an interesting teaching manner.

The researcher also noticed that teaching methods of writing subjects in SMA Muhammadiyah were traditionally or ordinally manners as other schools. Teachers historically provided students with specific topics and asked them to write and expand the content. Usually, teachers focused on the
mistakes or errors that the students made and asked them for corrections. It was occurred because they believed that was the best way to increase students writing skills.

3. METHOD

Based on the conditions of the students’ problems in writing mentioned above, there was an indication that the teaching and learning processes were completely dominated by the teacher. The students were rarely told to be actively involved in a language classroom activity. They played as objects of the learning process but not the active participants of the learning process. When this condition was ongoing for a long period and no solutions were found, the learning of writing specifically was not effective so this would affect the students’ goal and the high competence of writing could not be reached. That’s the reason for the researcher to decide to take classroom action research to find out the writing problems above.

The researcher believed that writing in the English language is very difficult and takes a lot of time to accomplish it, compare to other language skill as reading, speaking, and listening. The main reason for this is that the writer and the readers are not in a face-to-face term and The writer must figure out effective communication with his readers only in his imagination. This requires a big effort and huge energy as part of the writer. How your writing skills can be improved? This is the problem and a vital question. There are several techniques and strategies to do this. They are pictures, reading authentic texts, using other language skills, practical writing, control writing, organization of ideas, Radio and TV programs, and semantic mapping. There are various ways, means, and techniques involved in teaching writing. Semantic mapping is one of those but the most attractive, easy to learn, and pushing creativity. Besides being as a prewriting technique by drawing a diagram of words using lines, boxes, arrows, circles, words, and phrases to show how new words and ideas are created during the process of learning the topic.

Semantic mapping is an extremely inherent way to establish vocabularies knowledge as well as pressing students to retrieve and mention what they know. (Harmer (2007, p.236) Moreover, not only does semantic mapping show facts but also show the overall structure of a subject and the relative importance of individual parts of it. It helps students to associate ideas, think creatively, and make connections in an as certain manner to learn (Buzan, 2010, p.80). It can also develop students’ creative writing skills and help remove writer’s obstacles. With the hope of improving the researcher’s teaching practice and enhancing students’ writing skills, action research was undertaken.

The procedures of the semantic mapping technique are as follows:

1) Write a keyword or topic related to classroom work on a sheet of paper, the blackboard, or a transparent slide.
2) Encourage the students to think of as many words as they can that are related to the selected keyword or topic.
3) Guide the students to list the words by categories or related words to the main topic. Then, have students labels the categories. After that, discuss the relationships between these words. (Johnson and Pearson, 1984, p.48)

The Researcher gave the questionnaire to students to fill out before the treatment (Pre-Test) and after treatment (Post-Test). The application of semantic mapping was held for 2 (two) months with 8 times meetings. The comparison between Pre-Test Result and Post-Test Result will determine the improvement of students’ writing ability after application of Semantic Mapping Strategy.
4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study focuses on the implementation of semantic mapping for writing in the classroom and how students respond to the implementation of semantic mapping in class. This research is a classroom action research and focuses on students in grade XII. A questionnaire instrument was used to collect the data. Students were asked to fill out the questionnaire before and after the application of the Semantic Mapping Strategy.

The object of this research is students of SMA Muhammadiyah grade XII consisting of 30 students which have equal homogeneity of ability and skill. The students were asked to write down one topic and expand it with related words. Every word should be explained comprehensively. Every student should explain what the writer and what the obstacles were found during writing the words. After that, The teacher or Researcher will give one topic and all students should write words related to the topic. The written words will be assessed by the teachers to give further teaching in using semantic mapping strategy.

Table 1. The Result of Students' Response Before Application of Semantic Mapping Strategy (Pre-Test)

| No. | Questions                                           | Amount of Students |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
|     |                                                    | Score 1 | Score 2 | Score 3 | Score 4 | Score 5 |
| 1   | Do you like English?                               | 7       | 12      | 7       | 3       | 1       |
| 2   | Do you often write an English Essay?               | 14      | 9       | 3       | 2       | 2       |
| 3   | Is it easy to Write English Essay?                 | 9       | 13      | 5       | 3       | 0       |
| 4   | Do you feel excited when you have an English task? | 11      | 8       | 7       | 4       | 0       |
| 5   | Is it easy to find some ideas in a writing task?   | 10      | 7       | 8       | 4       | 1       |
| 6   | Do you often have a great idea and can write it very well? | 8       | 10      | 7       | 5       | 0       |
| 7   | Do you have any strategy for starting good writing?| 13      | 8       | 5       | 2       | 2       |
| 8   | Do you feel enthusiasm when you start writing?     | 8       | 14      | 4       | 3       | 1       |
| 9   | Do you enjoy writing?                              | 14      | 7       | 5       | 4       | 0       |
| 10  | Do you wish to write more and more essays?         | 12      | 9       | 6       | 3       | 0       |
|     | Total                                              | 106     | 97      | 57      | 33      | 7       |

Students’ Percentage  
35.33% 32.33% 19.00% 11.00% 2.33%

Notes:
Score 1 = Strong No
Score 2 = No
Score 3 = Perhaps
Score 4 = Yes
Score 5 = Strong Yes

Based on the data above, we could tell the students’ ability in writing are as follows:
1) Majority of students (35.33% + 32.33% = 67.66%) didn’t like writing and had tendency to refuse doing the writing task.
2) Nineteen percent (19%) of students didn’t have clue and still hesitate to write or not to write.
3) Only 13.33% (11.00% + 2.33) of students had enthusiasm and ability to write.
We could tell that 86.66% of students didn’t have the eagerness, passion, ability, spirit to write any kind of essay because lack of vocabulary, comprehension, grammar, tenses, etc certainly influences their ability in writing.

Table 2. The Result of Students’ Response After Application of Semantic Mapping Strategy (Post-Test)

| No. | Questions                                      | Amount of Students |
|-----|------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
|     |                                                | Score 1 | Score 2 | Score 3 | Score 4 | Score 5 |
| 1   | Do you like English?                           | 0       | 4       | 3       | 15      | 8       |
| 2   | Do you often write an English Essay?          | 0       | 2       | 6       | 12      | 10      |
| 3   | Is it easy to write English Essay?            | 1       | 4       | 4       | 13      | 8       |
| 4   | Do you feel excited when you have an English task? | 0       | 3       | 2       | 20      | 5       |
| 5   | Is it easy to find some ideas in a writing task? | 1       | 2       | 3       | 18      | 5       |
| 6   | Do you often have great idea and can write it very well? | 2       | 1       | 3       | 14      | 10      |
| 7   | Do you have any strategy for starting good writing? | 0       | 2       | 1       | 16      | 11      |
| 8   | Do you feel enthusiasm when you start writing? | 1       | 2       | 2       | 18      | 7       |
| 9   | Do you enjoy writing?                         | 0       | 1       | 4       | 19      | 6       |
| 10  | Do you wish to write more and more essays?    | 1       | 1       | 3       | 17      | 8       |
|     | **Total**                                     | **6**   | **22**  | **31**  | **162** | **79**  |
|     | **Students’ Percentage**                      | **2.00%** | **7.33%** | **10.33%** | **54.00%** | **26.33%** |

Notes:
- Score 1 = Strong No
- Score 2 = No
- Score 3 = Perhaps
- Score 4 = Yes
- Score 5 = Strong Yes

Based on the Post-Data above (Table 2), we could explain their ability are as follows:
1) Only a small part of students (2.00% + 7.33% = 9.33%) didn’t like writing and tended to refuse to do the writing task.
2) Minority students (10.33%) still didn’t have clue and hesitated to write or didn’t want to write.
3) The majority of students (90.33%) became students who had enthusiasm and the ability to write.

We could declare that 90.33% of students had eagerness, passion, ability, and spirit to write any kind of essay because of the application of semantic mapping strategy. It improved students’ ability for mastering vocabulary, comprehension, grammar, tenses, etc in writing. It certainly improved students writing ability.

A. Finding

Based on the result of Tables 1 & 2, We found that 67.66% of students who said “NO” to writing tasks in Pre-Test, declined to 9.33% students in Post-Test. There were 58.33% of students who couldn’t or disliked the writing task became enthusiastic ones. We also calculated that 13.33% of students who said “YES” to writing task in Post-Test, increased to 90.33% students in the Post-Test,
There was 77% increase of the students who like and feel good about writing task after application of semantic mapping strategy.

Concerning the figure above, we could state that percentage of students who like and were able to write well increased significantly after the semantic mapping strategy was taught. The students can manage their vocabularies and idea easily by using semantic mapping. It almost helped them when doing writing activities. They enjoyed the learning activity and felt interested to write in English which had been very hard to do previously.

5. CONCLUSION

After finishing the research at SMA Muhammadiyah, the writer could declare significant improvement in students' writing ability. The data was collected through the questionnaire in Pre-Test and Post Test. During 2 months or 8 times studying the semantic mapping strategy, the students were given practice and lessons to activate their knowledge of words, related words, how to explain, and extended become an essay.

Referring to the scores of the questionnaire sheet, we could conclude that semantic mapping strategies can enhance students’ writing ability effectively. The students become enthusiastic about learning and practicing English, especially in writing skills. This lesson will make the students remember that writing in English is not as hard as people think. Their passion is high and will influence their learning spirit in the future.

After doing this research, the writer suggests some items as follows:

1. The English teacher can apply the semantic mapping strategy in other grades to enhance students’ writing ability.
2. Teachers could make some adjustments to the semantic mapping strategy to apply in other lessons.
3. Application of Semantic Mapping Strategy continuously will certainly improve lessons absorption of the students.
4. Other writers can use this research as a reference in the future.

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