Teaching Writing through Guiding Questions Technique to Improve Students’ Writing Skill

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Abstract

Writing is not an easy skill to acquire for EFL students, especially without intense help from teachers. This research was aimed to examine whether students’ ability in all aspects of writing can be improved by using Guiding Questions technique or not. To do so, the writer used factual report text. In addition, the writer employed quantitative research with one group pretest and posttest. Through random sampling, the writer took 21 out of 115 second grade students of MAN Darussalam Aceh Besar to be involved in this research. The result reveal that the mean score of posttest is higher than the mean score of pretest (54.87<71.02) and the value of t-score is higher than the value of t-table (14.67 > 2.086). Therefore, it can be concluded that the use of Guiding Questions technique in teaching writing improves the students’ writing performance. Moreover, out of all the writing aspects, content and organization are two of the highest improved aspects. Hence, Guiding Questions technique is recommended as a good technique in teaching writing.

Keywords: Guiding Questions Technique, Writing Skill, Report Text

1. INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, English is one of the obligatory subjects taught at Senior High School. Mastering English becomes crucial for these students especially for students in Senior High Schools. Therefore, Nunan (1989, p. 21) states that there are four basic competencies that students should master in learning English, those are listening, reading, speaking, and writing. One of skills that have to be developed by students in Senior High School is writing skill.

Writing is the way of students to expressing their idea, thought and experiences to other in written form. In writing process, students have to create their ideas into sentences or paragraph clearly. As claimed by Nunan (2003, p.88), “writing is the process of thinking to invent idea, thinking about how to express into good writing, and arranging the ideas into statement and paragraph clearly”. Thus, writing is the combination between physical act and mental work, because it involves thinking and transferring idea into written form.
For EFL students, writing in English is not an easy task to do. Amir (2010, p.11) assumed that writing seems the difficult skill, because during the process the writer should to pay attention to the aspects of writing that is content, organization, vocabulary, language use and mechanics. To find out the problem of students’ writing skill, the writer conducted a preliminary study by giving a writing test for 18 first graders (8 students from class X-IPS-1 and 10 from X-IPA-2) and interviewing one English teacher and five students on February 16th and 17th, 2016, at MAN Darussalam, Aceh Besar. The average score achieved by most students were 50.2.

In details, the first problem is the content aspect. The students do not know what they have to write on their writing. Although they have written several lines, they mostly find difficulties on how to continue their writing. The second problem is the aspect of language use in which students tend to make grammatical mistake, as in Mustafa, Kirana, and Bahri Ys (2017, p. 44). The third mistake is mechanics aspect. Students make error in punctuation, capitalization, and soon. The fourth problem is organization aspect in which a student was not able to write in a sequent manner. The last problem is in terms of vocabulary aspect. In addition the students have limitation of vocabulary mastery so they cannot develop their paragraph well.

Meanwhile, the results of interviews with one English teacher show that most students have not been able to construct English sentences properly and then they cannot develop their idea clearly. Besides, the students lack knowledge in writing. In addition, the results of interviews with some students indicate that student’ inability to write was due to the lack of ideas and inability to correctly connect ideas. They assumed writing is a boring and difficult activity in classroom.

The problem faced by students in writing skill above happened because the teacher was not creative in applying the teaching model and he did not contribute much in aiding the students to write. The teacher also did not encourage students to writing activity, as the result they were not able to write a short simple writing. As an English teacher, they need to know a variety of teaching method, strategies, or technique in teaching writing. One of techniques that can be used by teachers in teaching writing skill is guiding questions technique.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1 Definition of Writing

Writing is one of the important skills to be mastered by the students in each level of education. Oshima and Hogue (2007, p.15) stated that “writing is never one-step action; it is an ongoing creative act”. Therefore when writers write down a paragraph or an essay, they have already been thinking about what to state or how to state it. Then, after they have completed the writing, they read over what they have composed and make changes and improvements.

Then, Creame and Lea (2003, p.5) stated that writing comprise of words and these words are composed in specific arrangement to make sentences which then composed into paragraph. While, Ontario Ministry of Education (2005, p.3) added that writing is a tool that the students use to create meaning based on their prior knowledge, thought and also feelings. It means that writers use both mental and physical in writing down something. Nunan (1989, p.36) also asserted that “writing is not a natural activity”, It should consist of mind and physical work to produce a good writing.
2.1.1 The Purpose of Writing

Every action in communication actually has its own purpose, including writing skill. Generally, writing has several main objectives. As mentioned by Hacker and Sommers (2012, p. 7), the purposes for writing are: (1) As a tool to tell the reader about some information or news, (2) To convince the reader about something, (3) To amuse the reader, (4) As a tool to influence the reader to act, (5) To change the way to behave and act, (6) To investigate some information, (7) To claim something that has different views, (8) To appraise something, (9) To encourage the reader to do or to use something, (10) To appeal for the reader, (11) To suggest or recommend something, (12) To stimulate the reader to think more, (13) To devote what is perceived writer to reader, and 14) Also to conclude something in a writing.

2.1.2 Aspect of Writing

Brown (2010, p. 261) stated there were five aspects in writing process, i.e. organization, content, vocabulary, grammar and mechanics.

1. Organization

Baker (2014, p.3) stated that in organization the students learn about the paragraph arrangement and construction. Then, Brown (2000, p. 357) asserted the organization includes “the effectiveness of introduction, logical sequence of ideas, conclusion and appropriate length”. While, Oshima and Houge (2010, p. 21) added that a good paragraph should be coherence and each all sentences in one paragraph should be connected. In addition, Bailey (2011, p. 77) said that the reader will understand the topic of paragraph definitely if the paragraph has good structure and it can be done by separating the argument from each section in a paragraph. Organization is a difficult aspect to master for some students, as described by Yohana (2005, p.21) there are 32% students in Kiswahili having difficulties in writing a paragraph well-organized and in sequences. Another problem was the students made their paragraph obscured and not systematic.

2. Content

Brown (2000, p. 357) asserted that content deals with “thesis statement, related idea, development of idea through personal experience, illustration, fact and opinion”. Besides, content indicates what topic is selected and also “the purpose for writing” (Ontario Education, 2005, p.15). It means that the writer needs to be clearly expressed, focused and supported with sufficient detail. Content is also one of difficult aspect in writing, based on a research by Huy (2015, p. 62), he found out that students lack of ideas consume 15% of other problem in writing aspects. There are 3% of the students who write students write inappropriate topic in their writing. In this case, 5% of them think that the lack of materials in teaching process and least assistance from teacher are the main problems in their writing.

3. Vocabulary

Oxford dictionary (2008, p. 495) stated that vocabulary is a number of words that are discern and used by people and also has significant meaning. Vocabulary is a crucial part for students in learning foreign language and it is also a central and the most important aspect in language teaching (Alqahtani, 2015, p.21). Vocabulary is also one of difficult aspects found in writing process. According to Huy (2015, p.61) 50% students in Dong Thap University have problems in vocabulary aspect.
They have limitation of vocabulary mastery which affect student in improving their writing.

4. Language Use (grammar)

Brown (2000, p. 362) stated that grammar is the structure of language use to give meaning and also function to word. While, Harmer (2007, p. 32) said that grammar is not only concerned with syntax, but also related with the way words are formed, which then can change their form to express different meaning. Then, Gerson (2005, p.7) asserted that grammar is essential aspect in a composition. To prove that, he made a survey that invited 700 technical writers as participants in order to reveal the importance of grammar. The result was that 98% of the writers answered that the success of writing was determined by the correct grammar. Besides, Gerson also added that grammar is not only necessary and important for English teacher, but it is also crucial for professional writer and business people. Grammar is one of the most difficult aspects in writing skill which is proved from the result of a study conducted by Yohana (2005, p.22). She found that 14% of the college students in Tanzania could not write the sentences with the right structure of English. Yohana said that “they were unable to apply correctly the relative markers in the subordinate constructions according to their noun classes referred to”.

5. Mechanics

According to Brown (2000, p.357), mechanics deals with “spelling, punctuation, citation of reference (if there is applicable), neatness and appearance”. While, Kane (2000, p.15) indicated that mechanics refers to “the appearance of words” and how to compose them in a writing. Then, Harmer (2004, p.49) stated “if capital letter, spelling, commas, full-stop, etc. are not used correctly, this is not only make negative impression but also can make a text difficult to understand”. He also adds that many people measure quality of writing not only by determining aspects like content, language, or a writer's handwriting but the use of good punctuation also greatly affects writing.

2.1.3 Problems in Writing

Writing is one of the difficult skills to be mastered by EFL students (Fadda, 2012, p. 123). There are some problems faced by students in writing process. First in vocabulary aspect, according to Huy (2015, p.65), Shasmita and Sthitaprajan (2016, p.39) the problems of vocabulary happen because the students do not know how to master vocabulary in effective ways. Additionally, Huy (2015, p.65) stated that students choose to read in learning vocabulary and also to use dictionary to help them. Then, Shasmita and Sthitaprajan (2016, p.39) asserted when the students do writing, they are tangled in choosing the appropriate words or a sentence. Shasmita and Sthitaprajan add that the students also do not consistent in language use and make disorganize paragraphs. Besides that, Shasmita and Sthitaprajan (2016, p.39) also stated “the student tends to translate their ideas from mother tongue into English then express their ideas into long sentences”.

The second problem is in grammar aspect, similar with the problem in vocabulary aspect, Huy (2015, p. 65) stated that the students do not have effective strategies in improving their grammar. In line with Huy (2015, p. 65) one of the factors which cause the students lack of grammar is that there is no activity outside of the classroom that can help them to develop their ability in grammar.
The third problem is in mechanics aspect. Yohana (2005, p. 19) stated that mechanics aspect (capitalization and punctuation) is the most common writing problem for secondary school students in Tanzania. Yohana (2005, p.19) asserted that the secondary school students in Tanzania do not understand the functions of each punctuations mark, they do not know where to put comma or full stop in a sentence. Yohana also said that the students do not put appropriate punctuation marks such comma, semicolon or colon in place where it should be required. Based on Yohana research, it showed 51% of secondary school students in Tanzania used punctuation wrongly. Another opinion was stated by Afrin (2016, p.108-109) that mechanics mistakes happen because of the intrusion of students’ first language.

The fourth problem is organization aspect. Afrin (2016, p. 109) stated that in the organization aspect, the students misplace in generic structure of a text. Besides, Afrin (2016, p.109) asserted that most of students in all levels of education in Bangladesh do not follow the generic structure of the text. To illustrate when they were asked to write descriptive text, they did not follow what should be written in the beginning, middle or end in the descriptive paragraph.

2.1.4 Technique of Generating Ideas in Writing

In writing process, an idea is a very important part. In agreement with Peha (1995, p. 5) the idea is the goal of the writer when she or he wants to write something or express his or her thought, if there is no an idea it will not be a writing because writing appears due to the ideas. Therefore, the way to make the writing easier is by using “invention technique” (Leki, 1998, p.20). According to Leki, there are some invention techniques that can help the students to find out the ideas before they begin to write, i.e. free writing, listing, WH-questions, clustering and looping.

2.2 Guiding Questions Technique

In agreement with Traver (1998, p.1), “a guiding questions is the fundamental query that directs the search for understanding”. It means that guiding questions technique is believed as a technique that can guide the students’ ideas in writing process and also can help in finding out the ideas in writing. Meyers (2005, p. 2) said that questions can be one way to explore ideas in writing process. Therefore, guiding questions can help the students to generate the ideas in learning writing.

2.2.1 The Characteristic of Guiding Question Techniques

Guiding questions technique has its own characteristic of question that differs from other types of question, because not all types of questions are kind of the questions in guiding questions technique (Traver, 1998, p.2). There are some characteristics of guiding questions technique that differs from the usual questions. Traver (1998, p.2) classified four characteristics of question that is used in guiding questions technique, they are:

1. Open-ended yet focus inquiry on a specific topic. In line with Traver’s statement (1998, p.2) we can conclude that good guiding questions should be open ended to give opportunity for the students to describe what they are understand to the questions given.

2. Guiding questions are non-judgmental but answering them requires high-level cognitive work, such as the development of a rich description, model, evaluation, or judgment. According to Traver (1998, p. 2) the questions given
should be able to direct the students’ thinking in organizing their ideas in writing process.

3. Good guiding questions contain emotive force and intellectual bite. According to Traver (1998, p. 2) we can conclude that guiding questions should be able to encourage students’ thinking.

4. Guiding questions are succinct. In Oxford Dictionary (2008, p. 444), succinct defined as “briefly and clearly”. It means the questions that given by the teacher should not be in long sentence and the questions should be clear and does not make students confused in interpreting the questions.

2.2.2 Teaching Writing with Guiding Questions Technique

According to Harmer (1998, p. 79) “the reason for teaching writing to students of English as a foreign language include reinforcement, language development, learning style and most importantly, writing as a skill in its own right”. It means that in teaching writing, the teacher should guide their students to compose a good writing.

As people know, writing is not an easy activity to do (Younes & Albalawi, 2015, p.7). Its means that it needs a lot of time to practice. In this case, the teacher should teach writing with appropriate technique in order to let students explore their ideas (Leki, 1998, p.20). Dealing with this, the easier technique that will help the students is guiding questions technique. This technique may stimulate the students in generating ideas in writing (Traver, 1998, p. 1).

2.2.3 The Process of Teaching Writing by Using Guiding Questions Technique

According to Sundem (2006, p. 41), “the writing process comprises the mechanics by which writers create publishable product. It is the method all writers use to generate ideas, choose and organize these ideas, write and revise their pieces, and format them for publication.” From the statement, we can conclude that writing needs some processes and steps to construct a text; it is not an instant process to create a text. There three processes of writing described as follows.

1. Free writing: Guiding questions technique

Sundem (2006, p.41) stated that free writing is the first step of the writing process. In this step, the writer can generate their ideas before starting to write and put their thoughts in correct formation. In addition, writer uses guiding questions technique to generate students’ ideas by preparing questions related to the topic and ask the students to answer the questions given.

2. Drafting

Drafting is the next step in writing process. According to Sundem (2006, p.53) in this step the students expand their previous ideas, then they write it down on a paper. Donohue (2009, p.12) also stated that “during drafting stage, the students are able to craft their own writing”. It means that the students can pour their ideas that they had thought before writing.

3. Revising

Revising is the final step in writing process. According to Sundem (2006, p. 55) revising is often forgotten in writing process. He also adds that sometimes the students think they write enough without revising again. While Western Australian Minister for Education (2013, p. 223) stated that revising mean make changes to the text and the goal of revising is to make the writing better and clear.
3. METHODS
3.1 Research Method
The writer used quantitative research which is appropriate with the research objectives of this study. According to Khotari (2004, p.3) “quantitative research is based on the measurement of the quantity”. While, Noor (2011, p. 38) states that “quantitative research is done to try certain theories by researching variables of its research”. The variables measured will produce the data that consist of numbers which can be analyzed by using statistical procedure. For research design, the writer applied a type of pre-experimental design, namely “one group pretest and posttest designs”. Conforming to Kasim (2010, p.239) one group pretest and posttest design has three steps that is pretest, treatment and posttest. For the treatment, the writer taught the students in two meeting by using Guiding questions technique in writing skill at second grade of MAN Darussalam Aceh Besar.

3.2 Population and Sample
The population of this research is all the students in the second grade of MAN Darussalam Aceh Besar. This school is located on Glee Iniem street Tungkop, Aceh Besar. There are six classes in the second grade, and each class consists of 20-30 students. In selecting the sample, the writer used random sampling. Finally, the class of 2 MIA become as the experimental class.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis
The instrument of this research was written test. The writer selected two titles (Tsunami and Earthquake) as the topic of report text about phenomena. They were asked to write about phenomena in five paragraphs with the length of 150 – 200 words. They were also given 25 minutes to finish their posttest. To obtain the data needed for this research, the writer was collected the data through pre-test and post-test group design. To analyze the collected data, the score of pretest and posttest are tabulated and analyzed by using some statistical formula which consists of mean, the degree of freedom, standard deviation, the amount of class interval, the length of class interval, normality test and t-test.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
4.1 The Comparison Score between Pretest and Posttest
According to pretest and posttest result, both scores have significant difference. For detail, Table 4.3 below shows the comparison of frequency score both pretest and posttest.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score Interval</th>
<th>Frequency (N) of Pretest</th>
<th>Frequency (N) of Posttest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>46 – 50</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 – 55</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56 – 60</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3 The Comparison Score between Pretest and Posttest
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For comparison, the score both pretest and posttest were combined. According to table 4.3, the pretest score starts from the lowest score ranging from 46 – 50 obtained by three students. While the highest score ranging from 61 – 65 obtained by one student. From this result, it indicates that the students still lack of ideas and knowledge about the issues given. Therefore, to build up and stimulate the student’s ideas, the writer tried to apply a simple technique namely guiding questions technique. Meanwhile, after the students were taught by using guiding questions technique, the posttest score increased starts from the lowest range between 61 – 65 contained one student. Then, the higher score ranging from 76 – 80 for five students.

4.2 The Result of Writing Aspect Score in Pretest and Posttest

The following table below shows the difference of mean score between pretest and posttest in each writing aspect.

Table 4.4 The Mean Scores of Each Aspect of Writing in Pretest and Posttest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect of Writing Score</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Gain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td>Posttest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>17.04</td>
<td>21.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>11.71</td>
<td>16.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>10.85</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Use</td>
<td>10.61</td>
<td>12.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanic</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td>4.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>∑</td>
<td>54.87</td>
<td>71.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While, Figure 4.4 below describe both scores between pretest and posttest. The Y refers to the students’ mean score of writing aspects. Meanwhile, the X axis refers to the writing aspect.
Figure 4.4 The mean Score of Writing Aspect Between Pretest and Posttest

Based on Figure 4.4 above, the writer concludes that the mean score between pretest and posttest increased in all aspects of writing and significantly improved in content and organization aspect. Thus, this research proved that the use of guiding questions technique gave positive impression to the second grade student at MAN Darussalam Aceh Besar in their writing performance especially in writing a report text about phenomena.

4.3 Discussion

After collecting and analyzing all the data, it is necessary to discuss the result of the research. The aim of this research is to find out whether guiding questions technique improves the students’ writing ability or not. Based on the result of the students’ score in posttest, their performances in writing skill improve by using guiding questions technique. Besides, from five aspects of writing that writer assessed, writer found that the students’ score increased in content, organization, language use, vocabulary and mechanics aspect. The content and organization aspects more increased aspect than others aspects, while the lowest aspect was mechanics. After the writer applied guiding questions technique in teaching and learning writing during the treatments, the mean score in posttest improves than the pretest score. Content and organization aspect more increased from the others aspects. The result, students are able to generate and also organize the paragraph well. While vocabulary and mechanics aspect only increased slightly. Then, mechanics aspect was not improved at all.

In addition, based on hypothesis testing result, the score between pretest and posttest differs significantly. Each aspect also has various improvements; this is pretty similar to the result of previous study conducted by Muhayyinah (2012) with title The Effectiveness of Guiding Question Technique in Teaching Writing Text. The result of the study shows that guiding questions technique was effective in improving students’ writing skill in all aspect in writing. Then, Syam (2011) in his study entitled Using Fotonovela and Guiding Question to Improve the Ability in Writing Narrative Text of Students in grade VIII of SMPN 21 Malang also proved that the use of fotonovela, a media that is similar to comics or pictorial stories and using photographs as replacement of illustrative images (Djohani et al., 2007, p.70), and guiding question was good to be used in teaching writing especially to help students
in generating and organizing ideas in writing Narrative Text. The differences between the previous studies with this study are all aspect in Muhayyinah’s study increased while in this study the increased aspect was content and organization. In addition, in Syam’s study he use two techniques i.e. Fotonovela and Guiding Question technique, while in this study only use one technique that is Guiding Question technique which has the same result in increased aspect. Moreover, this study is conducted in public school; while the previous study conducted in vocational school that has different curriculum with public school.

The improvement of score from both pretest and posttest is actually different. For content aspect, the students’ score increase 4.91 point from 17.04 point in pretest and 21.95 point in posttest. Before the treatment, the students had a problem in generating ideas. Then, after implementing guiding questions technique in treatment, they were able in developing ideas. This is because guiding questions technique is very useful in stimulates students to explore ideas in writing process. Thus, students do not have to think hard about the ideas to be write in paragraph. The ideas of writing will appear when answering the questions. The students only need to compose it into a whole paragraph. This is related to the theories as stated by expert about guiding questions technique that is guiding questions technique can guide and stimulate the students’ ideas in writing process (Traver, 1998). Besides, questions is one way to explore ideas and can help the students in writing (Meyer, 2005; Leki, 1998).

In organization aspect, the students’ score improved 4.76 point from 11.71 point in pretest and 16.47 point in posttest. It indicates that the students can organize the paragraph structurally based on the generic structure in report text after the treatment process. The students can arrange the paragraph based on the questions given. Then, the students also follow the sequences of questions that have been given by teacher. The sequence of questions based on 5W+1H pattern (Aquino and Nocon, 2001). Meanwhile, vocabulary and language use aspect also increased but not as high as content and organization aspect. In vocabulary aspect increases 4.15 point from 10.85 in pretest and 15 point in posttest. This term increased rather significant because in earlier meeting in treatment process the writer taught the students about the technical term that is used in a factual report text then the teacher proposed them to learn vocabulary. Then in language use aspect increased 2.19 point from 10.61 point in pretest and 12.80 point in posttest. Same with vocabulary aspect that has been described above this term also increased but it is not as high as content and organization. This is because in earlier meeting the writer have to explain the material about language use that is used in report text.

Actually, according some research results that have been done and also expert opinion about guiding questions technique, the technique does not affect in vocabulary, language use and mechanics aspect (Syam, 2011; Hima, 2011; Muhayyinah, 2012; and Reny, 2011). However, vocabulary and language use increase due to teacher exposing students to learn various vocabulary and grammar. The last aspect is mechanics, it improves 0.14 point from 4.66 point in pretest and 4.80 in posttest. The students still have problem in this term from pretest until posttest. Because they did not really pay attention for the spelling, punctuation and capitalization in their paragraph. Therefore, this aspect does not improve considerably. In addition, the students got the lowest achievement on mechanics aspect. This is due to the students lack of focus in paying attention and often making mistakes in their writing. They forget to put the capital letter in the
beginning of sentences, then they make mistake on punctuation or paragraphing, also their handwriting was poor. Generally, applying Guiding questions technique in teaching writing skill does not really improve students’ problem in mechanics aspect, because the technique do not focus on mechanics problem but on how generating and structuring the ideas.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the discussion in the Chapter 4, the conclusion regarding the focus of this research is concluded here. Since t-score is higher than t-table it is accepted by alternative hypothesis that guiding questions technique improves students’ ability in writing report text.’ It can be inferred that the use of guiding questions technique implemented in teaching report text writing effectively and successfully improves the writing skill of the second grade students of MAN Darussalam Aceh Besar. Moreover, the writer found that the higher improvement comes from content and organization aspect.

The improvement is reflected in the analysis of the average score of the writing aspects which are content (17.04 to 21.95), organization (11.71 to 16.47), while the other aspects like vocabulary increased from (10.85 to 15), then language use (10.61 to 12.80) and mechanics (4.66 to 4.80). These average scores show that the students’ ability in each aspect gets better. In all, students’ writing ability improved well.

Based on the research findings along with the process, the writer would like to propose some suggestions for English teachers, students, other researcher and also the school where the treatment was done and also the other school. The writer hopes, it can give an input in determining the appropriate teaching technique which can improve the students’ writing ability.

5. REFERENCES


