

THE USE OF SWELL IN TEACHING WRITING NARRATIVE TEXTS TO EIGHTH GRADERS

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Abstract

SWELL (Social-Interactive Writing for English Language Learners) is one of several techniques that can be used to improve the students' writing ability. It is known that many EFL (English Foreign Language) learners have problems in composing the essay. Therefore, the study of how *SWELL* can enhance the students' skill in writing narrative texts is important to be conducted. Moreover, none of researchers tries to reveal the use of *SWELL* in the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language. The purposes of this study are to describe how the teacher applies *SWELL* in teaching writing narrative texts to eighth graders and the effects of using *SWELL* on the students' narrative writings. Focused on the enhancement of students' skill in writing narrative texts, this classroom action research was conducted at MTsN Model Trenggalek, East Java. To collect the data, observation checklist and students' tests were employed. The research showed that in applying *SWELL* in writing narrative texts, teacher did three activities, including opening activities, main activities, and closing activities. Meanwhile, based on the overall mean scores of the students' writings that improved from preliminary study to cycle II; 69.2, 76.41, and 76.47 and significant improvement on the students' class mastery of final drafts from preliminary study to cycle II; 35.3%, 76.5%, and 94.12%, there is a significant improvement on the students' writing ability that includes content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics by using this technique. To conclude, *SWELL* was successfully applied to improve the eighth graders' writing narrative texts.

Key Words: *SWELL*, writing, and narrative text.

Based on the observation in the classroom of MTsN Model Trenggalek, the teacher conducts the teaching of writing by only following the instructions on the textbook. Meanwhile, from the interview with an English teacher of MTsN Model Trenggalek, it is known that teaching writing skill in English is a headache for him because it deals with time-consuming processes. In addition, many students' compositions are poorly organized, insufficiently developed, grammatically awkward, and mainly weak in vocabulary usage. Hence, he usually teaches writing by giving the students a simple task. He usually emphasizes on the correctness in terms of language use or grammar only. He also does not often provide any comment or feedback on their writing assignments, so they tend to make the same mistakes. In short, in teaching writing, he uses product-oriented approach.

Due to the case, Teo (2007) proposes *SWELL* (stands for *Social-Interactive Writing for English Language Learners*). It is basically a writing technique that is supported by several theories related to collaborative writing, Vygotsky's theories of learning, and teacher as feedback provider.

Due to collaborative learning, Mason (1973, p. 119-120) states that many techniques

should be regarded to be appropriate to develop kinds of writings which are most frequently in school. Some of them include role playing, other kinds of simulation, invention of games, controlled experiments, experiments in observation, sensual exercises, studies in perception and interpersonal perception, modelling, all kinds of making, and all activities that take place amidst continual discussion of the youngsters themselves. Based on the statement, *SWELL* includes one of techniques in collaborative learning.

Meanwhile, Vygotsky in Dahms, et al (2008) states that learning involves the internalization of social interaction process which can help the learner progress from complex to conceptual thinking. Therefore, he recommends a social context where a more competent learner will be paired up with a less competent one, so that the former can elevate the latter's competence.

However, the presence of teacher as feedback provider is still necessary because as stated by Muncie in Harmer (2007) that the students see teacher's comments as coming from an expert, as a result the teacher's comments do affect revision.

In more detail, as stated by Teo (2007), *SWELL* deals with the integration of the process

and product of writing from getting idea until producing the best writing after revision. In implementing this technique, the teacher will pair up the students to work collaboratively, but their levels of English proficiency are different, so that a more proficient student could tutor a less proficient student. During the writing process, students with higher writing levels are assigned the role of *Helper* and those with lower writing skills are assigned the role of *Writer*. They have to carefully follow the suggested steps given by the teacher. Those steps (comprising of generating idea, drafting, reading, editing, best copying, and evaluating by the teacher) are as follows.

In *SWELL*, the roles of teacher are as facilitator – preparing students how to conduct *SWELL* – , monitor, and feedback provider (Teo, 2007). Moreover, it is allowed for students to use their mother tongue for oral discussion and use bilingual dictionaries for translation (Teo, 2007). Lucas and Katz (1995) state that using the students' native languages in classrooms can increase their openness to learning by reducing the degree of language and culture shock they encounter.

Inspired by Teo (2007) who has successfully implemented this technique to increase his students' proficiency and confidence in writing in his ESL class, this study was conducted. This study was limited to the implementation of *SWELL* in teaching writing narrative texts to eighth graders in MTsN Model Trenggalek, specifically VIIIA, the place of which the problem exists. Specifically, the purposes of this study are to describe how the teacher applies *SWELL* in teaching writing narrative texts to eighth graders and to describe the effects of using *SWELL* on the students' narrative writings.

The students of MTsN Model Trenggalek, specifically VIIIA students, were chosen as the participants of this study because they had problems in composing the essay that could be seen in the result of interview with the teacher (see p.1). To make sure about the result, a preliminary study was conducted in this class. The result was only 12 students (35.3%) who got score 70 or higher. It meant that most of them could not write narrative text well.

Hence, the result of conducting this study is expected to be able to lead the students to write better. Finally, it is expected that the result of this study can be used as an idea to other English teachers in teaching English as foreign language. In addition, it can be an 'awakening' to the reality that happens to their students and finally make them more creative in finding other ideas used in stimulating the class and conducting the writing excitingly, so the students' writing ability can be

improved.

METHODS

This study was an action research. An action research was selected for the reason that the significance of this study is to solve the writing problems faced by the students, so that the teaching and learning process becomes better. As stated by McNiff (1992, p. 4) that action research is an approach that is appropriately implemented to "improve education through change, by encouraging teachers to be aware of their own practice, to be critical of that practice, and to be prepared to change it."

In the implementation of *SWELL*, as the participants of this study, the eighth graders of MTsN Model Trenggalek, specifically VIIIA students (34 students, comprising of 20 females and 14 males), were divided into 17 groups consisting of 2 people each. They consisted of the student who was at a higher writing level played the role of a *Helper* and the student who was at a lower writing level became a *Writer*.

The instruments used in this study were observation checklist and students' tests. The first instrument was designed to answer the first research question about how teacher applied *SWELL* in teaching writing narrative texts to eighth graders. Its contents included three components; the material, technique, and teaching learning process. Then, these contents were connected with the process of teaching writing narrative texts by using *SWELL*. The data of observation checklist was gathered during action stage of research by the collaborator as observer by ticking the observation checklist in terms of yes or no.

The second instrument was important to answer the second research question about the effects of using *SWELL* on the students' ability in writing narrative texts. The writing tests were measured by using the rubric – ESL composition profile. The rubric included content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. In this study, in preliminary study and each cycle, the students were asked to make a narrative composition based on the title given.

The data collection of this study was done in two cycles. In each cycle, the data was collected through some stages. Each cycle was conducted in two meetings. The implementation of the action stage in the cycle 1 includes ideas, draft, read, edit, best copy, and the teacher's evaluation step, while that in cycle 2 includes ideas, draft, read and edit, best copy, and the teacher's evaluation step.

Meanwhile, to analyze the data of this study, there were three steps. First, the data from

observation checklist was analyzed by using descriptive qualitative analysis to describe the implementation of *SWELL* in EFL class in the process of teaching writing narrative texts. Second, the results of students' writing tests were evaluated by using rubric – ESL composition profile in order to know the students improvement in writing narrative texts from the first meeting until the last meeting. In more detail, the writing components that were improved were measured and then the mean scores of each writing component of preliminary study and final drafts in each cycle were found out. Next, the overall scores were measured. After that, the means of preliminary study and final drafts' overall scores were found out to know whether the students' ability in writing narrative text improved or not when *SWELL* technique has been used. There would be an improvement on students' ability in writing narrative text if the last mean score of final drafts was better than in previous ones. From this result, the students' scores from time to time were analyzed. In addition, the indicator of implementing *SWELL* in this research was 85% students got score 70 or higher.

The last, after all the results were analyzed, the data was described by classifying them one by one into topics.

FINDINGS

The Implementation of SWELL Technique in Writing Narrative Texts

The findings of this research proved that the teacher should do some activities in teaching narrative texts by using *SWELL*. The activities were opening, main, and closing activities. At the first cycle, main activity covered six steps; ideas, draft, read, edit, best copy, and the teacher's evaluation, but at the second cycle, the main activity was made to be simpler in which read and edit were combined to save the time and make this technique easier and more understandable to the students.

Opening activities included three activities. First, the teacher explained the definition, generic structures, and language features of narrative text. After everything was settled, she gave the appropriate example of narrative texts. Second, she taught and provided the appropriate example about how to apply *SWELL* in writing narrative texts based on the guidelines of *SWELL* that has been passed to each student. Besides, she taught and provided the appropriate example about how to revise and edit students' drafts based on the feedback given by her. To make the students understand well, she also explained the students' mistakes in writing narrative texts. Third, she

divided them into 17 pairs; each pair consisted of two students - a more proficient student who played the role of a *Helper* and a less proficient student who became a *Writer*.

In ideas stage, the teacher asked one of the students to take a lottery to choose the title. Then, she distributed the picture series and gave her students time to discuss what the pictures were. After that, they began to write the story. In this stage, the student who played the role of a helper asked the list of questions to help the student who became the writer to stimulate ideas, whereas the writer answered those questions and took notes. In addition to use WH-Questions, the pairs could use clustering. During the writing of the narrative text, the teacher moved around to help the students.

In draft stage, to facilitate a good interaction between pair, teacher gave and explained one of the options to the students as follows.

Option 1 Helper writes all words and then the writer copies them all.

Option 2 Helper writes the difficult words for the writer.

Option 3 Helper writes the difficult words in rough and then the writer copies them.

Option 4 Helper says how to spell the difficult words.

Option 5 Writer writes all words.

Then, the writer with a help from the helper and the notes or clusters made in idea stage wrote as fluently as possible without worrying too much about spelling.

In read and edit stage, the pair read the rough draft and edited it associated with the meaning (content), order (organization), style (vocabulary and language use), and mechanics (spelling, punctuation, and the use of capital letters). In editing process, it was allowed for students to open the dictionary when necessary.

In best copy stage, the writer copied "best" writing after being edited with a help from the helper and then turned in the complete copy to the teacher as a joint product.

In the teacher's evaluation stage, the best copy was evaluated by the teacher using the marking system associated with the four editing criteria stated in read and edit stage. Then, based on the teacher's evaluation, pair discussed the writing to make correction and resubmit it as the final product.

In closing activity, the teacher collected the students' writings and did a reflection. She also asked her students' problems during the teaching learning process. The last, she overcame the problems that might happen during the teaching learning process and did the better one for the next cycle.

The Effects of Using SWELL on the Students' Narrative Writings

In measuring the contribution of SWELL toward the students' narrative text, the improvement of the students' score that could be seen from their score in each cycle was listed. The scores comprise of the average score, the lowest score, the highest score, and the class mastery of writing narrative text in preliminary study and

each cycle. The class mastery of writing narrative text was counted by using the percentage. The technique of percentage was formulated as follows.

DISCUSSIONS

Based on the two cycle results, in teaching writing narrative texts, the teacher did some activities before, during, and after the implementation of SWELL. Before implementing SWELL tech-

$$\frac{\text{The number of students who got score 70 or higher}}{\text{The number of all students}} \times 100\%$$

To make the readers easy to know the class mastery of writing narrative texts in preliminary study and each cycle, the Table 4.1 was presented.

In addition, the Table 4.2 is to make the readers easy to know the students improvement of using SWELL technique in writing narrative texts.

Table 4.1. The Class Mastery of Writing Narrative Text

CAR	Number of Students	Number of student who got score 70 or higher	Class Mastery (%)
Preliminary Study	34	12	35.3
Cycle 1	34	26	76.5
Cycle 2	34	32	94.12

Table 4.2. The Students' Score and the Percentage of the Class Mastery

	Preliminary Study	Quiz 1	Quiz 2
Average	69.2	76.41	76.47
Score Min	58	60	67
Score Max	85	97	95
Class Mastery (%)	35.3	76.5	94.12

Based on the table above, there was a good progress on the result of the students' final scores from the preliminary study to the second cycle. They had the mean scores; 69.2, 76.41, and 76.47. Overall, there was significant improvement on the class mastery of final drafts from the preliminary study to the second cycle. They were 35.3%, 76.5%, and 94.12%. This progress could be used to answer the second research question. The improvement score could be seen in the Chart 4.1. In conclusion, the technique of SWELL was successfully applied to improve the eight graders' writing narrative texts.

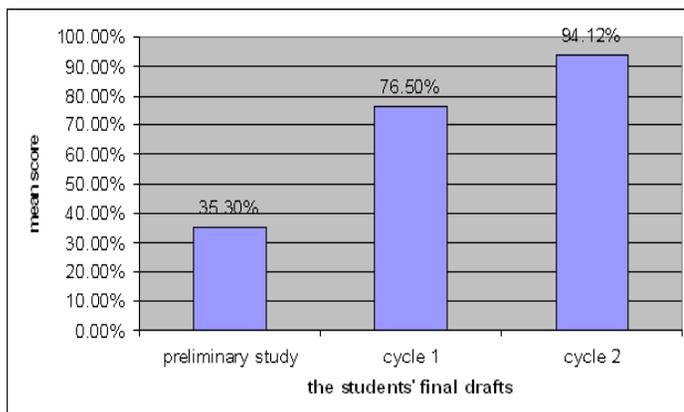


Chart 4.1. The Percentage of the Students Who Get Score Equal or Higher than 70

DISCUSSIONS

Based on the two cycle results, in teaching writing narrative texts, the teacher did some activities before, during, and after the implementation of SWELL. Before implementing SWELL technique, the teacher did three activities. First, the teacher explained the definition, generic structures, and language features of narrative texts. Second, she explained the definition, procedures, and gave the appropriate example on how to apply SWELL, to revise and edit the students' drafts based on the teacher's evaluation given. Third, the teacher divided the students into seventeen pairs. Those activities is in line with Harmer's suggestion (2007, p. 171) that before letting the students work together in pairs, the teacher should follow an 'engage-instruct-initiate' sequence in which the students can feel enthusiastic about what they are going to do and get an idea of when they will have finished that task. In this regard, the teacher has a big role in the success of the implementation of SWELL.

Vygotsky in Dahms, et al (2008) states that the cognitive development of individuals is as a result from social interaction in which they get their current competence through the guidance of a more experienced individual, which is also referred to as 'scaffolding'. So, it is hard to imagine that SWELL was students centred in which the students had to conduct their learning independently without the teacher's guidance.

Through the implementation of SWELL that posited the teacher as a facilitator (preparing students how to conduct SWELL), monitor, and feedback provider and the students as the decision makers, the students could study more independently without many pressures from the teacher and develop their social skill by working collaboratively in writing with their pairs. As the result, as indicated by the findings of this study, SWELL has made beneficial contribution to the students' writings in terms of content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. It is in line with Teo's statement (2007, p. 23) that SWELL can improve the students' writing skills.

CONCLUSIONS

In applying SWELL in teaching writing narrative texts, the teacher did three activities including opening activities, main activities, and closing activities. Furthermore, based on the students' tests, through the implementation of SWELL, there is a significant improvement on the students' writing ability in terms of content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. In conclusion, SWELL was successfully applied to improve the eight graders' writing narrative texts.

SUGGESTIONS

The study proved that SWELL could improve the students' writing ability. However, there were still some problems when this technique was applied. Hence, there are several suggestions for English teachers. Since SWELL has some stages, they should understand how to do SWELL technique well, especially in arranging the time in every phase of SWELL. In addition, related to this technique's advantages towards the students' writings, the teacher can use SWELL to other types of the texts, so that the students can assess their writing independently and improve their writing skill and their language proficiency in pair work.

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