

ENHANCING STUDENTS' WRITING SKILL THROUGH TASK-BASED APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

Writing is a communicative action where there is an interaction process between writer and readers through a text. The relationship has a value as the final result to decide what a message the writer wants to give to the readers. The writing process implies to the text itself which contains a cooperative work between writer and readers. *Task based approach* is an alternative language learning that is based on tasks. Students have to do and complete some exercises that are given by a teacher. While the writing process is an action to produce a language as naturally as speaking process. Through writing, we communicate our ideas to readers. Journalism, as a subject for English students in our department, aims to give a writing skill for students by following journalism's norms. Therefore, the writing skill is important because through writing, students can write a news story in English language that can be published in a newspaper following the Journalism norms.

Key Words: task based approach, Journalism

INTRODUCTION

In the communication frame, writing skill is an interesting activity that can be done through a writing form so we can communicate to others. In communication, we can share our ideas, opinions, and knowledge to others. Communication can be done through writing on a paper (or sending an email) or speaking directly. Writing, as a communication activity, says through a text the interaction process between writer and readers. This approach puts the value as the final aim of writing.

Writing, as a communication activity, suggests an interaction process between the writer and readers through a text. This

approach puts the value as the final aim that can be accepted by readers. The teacher should motivate students in choosing what kind of message they suppose to be sent and who will receive the message. In the writing process, there is a lack of interaction between the writer and readers, so the writer should anticipate it by producing a cooperative text. As stated by Murcia (2001:207) by producing a cooperative text, the writer has to write a text clearly, the text should have a relevant between one sentence to another, the text should give an interesting information and can be remembered easily. Murcia adds that readers can interpret the text as the

writer's hope if the signs are available. The signs should be completed by the writers including linguistic accurate, presentation clearness, the coherence of ideas. The writer should avoid bad hand writing, errors in grammatical and spelling, so that the readers can understand and interpret the text easily. When we complete our text, we should reread what we wrote to revise our writing.

How to write a good writing has been taught in our department. Students learn the process of good writing since the second to fifth semesters. The writing process is taught step by step. In second semester, students learn to write some simple good sentences when they take Sentence Based Writing subject. In the third semester, students have to take Paragraph-Based Writing subject. In this subject they learn how to write long and complex sentences well. They also learn how to write their ideas in writing forms. In the fourth semester, students have to take Genre- Based Writing subject. In this subject, students are introduced some genres in writing forms and they write some genres as their assignments. In the fifth semester, students have to take Academic Writing subject. In this subject, they learnt how to prepare a final project.

Journalism is a subject that should be taken by students in sixth semester. Because students have enough ability to produce a good writing, they should take Journalism subject. The aim of this subject is giving a writing skill to students how to

create ideas to be a good news story that can be understood by readers. The description of this subject is to publish the main issues in news stories both spoken and written news stories. The aim of this subject is to give a skill so that students can acquire and understand the characters of news. They can explore writing news stories. Therefore, as a subject, Journalism is important for our students.

Sumadiria says (2005:2) that journalism is an activity to collect, write, edit, and publish news and writing for newspapers, magazines, and other mass media such as radio, television, and internet. Journalism is a professional field which deals with publishing any daily events to mass media. As a professional job, the news story should follow the journalism standards so that the news can be a qualified story. Those standards require news to be balanced, objective, concise and clear, and recent (up-to-date/accurate). Students should write a news story by following those standards.

This study aims to solve the following problems: (1) How can the application of *Task-Based Approach* improve students' ability in writing news story in Journalism class? (2) Can the application of *Task-Based Approach* change the students' behavior in writing a news story in Journalism class?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Task-Based Teaching

Task-based language teaching is probably the most promising and productive one among the recent innovations in the field of second language teaching because the one which has drawn much attention from both second language teaching profession and second language researchers. There are three distinctive variations over the last ten years that they can be put under the general category of task-based language teaching because they all consider the use of content-based tasks as the most important feature of their innovations. At the *task-based approach*, learning is based on task that provides an alternative for learners. Based on a task, a teacher does not need to decide what language will be learnt because an exercise is given based on the completeness of an assignment when students do the exercise. This exercise follows some steps, they are:

(1) *Pre-task*

Teacher introduces topic that will be discussed and give some instructions to students about what they have to do. Teacher may help them to remember what language can be used to complete their task. The pre task step involves games by recording students' task. Students can write some notes to revise their task.

(2) *Task*

Students complete their task by doing it in partners or in groups. They can use the languages sources when the teacher monitors their task.

(3) *Planning*

Students prepare a brief report and tell to

the class the process when they do the task both orally or in written. They prepare their presentation in a group before they present it in front of class. The teacher will help them explain about their task pleasantly.

(4) *Report*

Students present their report both orally or in written in front of class. The teacher will give feedback to students. He also records the students' reports to compare one task to another.

(5) *Analysis*

Then the teacher will make highlight in the relevant parts to be analyzed. He may ask students to create an interesting feature in the text itself. He also writes language highlights to be analyzed.

(6) *Practice*

Finally teacher will select the language area to practice students' ability based on students' need and the important task or report phase. Students do some exercises to increase their self- confidence and write some notes.

Richards says a task is an activity or action which is carried out as the result of processing or understanding language (ie. as a response). For example, drawing a map while listening to a tape, listening to an instruction and performing a command, may be referred to as tasks. Task may or may not involve the production of a language. A task usually requires the teacher to specify what will be regarded as successful completion of the task. The use of a variety of different kinds of tasks in

language teaching is said to make language teaching more communicative since it provides a purpose for a classroom activity which goes beyond the practice of a language for its own sake. (Richards, Platt and Weber, 1986: 289). While Crookes states that task is a piece of work or an activity, usually with a specified objective, undertaken as part of an educational course, or at work." (1986). Prabhu adds that task is an activity which required learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought, and which allowed teachers to control and regulate that process, was regarded as a 'task'. (1987:

24). Nunan adds that a task is a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is a principle focused on meaning rather than form (1989:10). Therefore, we can say that a task is a piece of an activity or work that usually is done objectively which involves the benefit of language which is focused on the result of the task itself than the language.

A task also typically has a set of procedures usually predetermined by the instructor for the learners to follow for its completion.

<i>A Preference Rule System for Defining a Task</i>	
<i>Necessary Conditions</i>	
	a task is a learning activity.
	a task is a meaning-focused activity.
	a task is activity which leads to a specific outcome
<i>Typical Conditions</i>	
	a task requires the use of the target language as the primary means for its completion.
	a task has a definite beginning and ending point.
	a task has a set of predetermined procedures.

Meyers (2005:1) says writing is an activity- a process. Writing is a way to

produce a language which you do naturally when you speak. We say something, we

think what we want to say, we move to the next statement. Writing is not difficult. Meyers adds that writing is a speaking to others on papers – or computer screen. Writing is partly a talent, but it's mostly a skill, and like any skill, it improves with practice.

Writing is an action - a process of discovering and organizing your ideas, putting them on paper, and reshaping and revising them. Like speaking, writing is a way to communicate ideas, but unlike speaking, in writing, we can not see and hear our readers so we must think about their reactions. We have to choose a subject that interests them and try to present it in an interesting way. We have to reread what we write and then we rewrite it until we express our meaning strongly and clearly.

According to Meyer, here are six steps of writing process diagram (2005:3-11):

1. Explore ideas
 - a. Consider the subject
 - b. Consider the purpose
 - c. Consider the audiences
2. Pre write-using one or more of these methods
 - a. Brainstorming
 - b. Clustering
 - c. Free writing
3. Organize
 - a. Select
 - b. Outline
4. Write a first draft
 - a. Write quickly to record your thoughts
 - b. Put notes and new ideas in the margins

5. Revise the draft
 - a. Read it aloud
 - b. Add or omit material, and move material around
6. Produce the final copy
 - a. Edit
 - b. Copy over, or print a clean copy
 - c. Read carefully for errors, and then make another clean copy.

Journalism

Sumadira (2005:2) says that etimologically, journalism derives from *jourm*. In French word, *jourm* means daily report or notes. Journalism is an activity that relates in noting and reporting daily news. Journalism has a relationship with mass media and mass communication words. Journalism is a set of mass media which has a function as an interesting daily reporting, started from collecting to publishing for audiences about every event in the world.. Amalia states journalism relates with the correspondent activity (<http://jurnalistikuingd.wordpress.com/2007/04/26/pengantar-ilmu-journalistik/>)

F. Fraser Bond in *an Introduction to Journalism* (1961:1) says journalism embraces all the forms in which and through which the news and moment on the news reach the public. It means journalism is an effort to produce words and pictures which relates with ideas or thoughts. Adinegoro, as cited by Sumadira (2005:3) says that journalism is a practical skill to collect, to edit, and to publish news stories in newspapers or magazines. He

adds journalism is also an art skill. Roland E. Wolseley in *Understanding Magazines* (1969:3) adds that journalism is collecting, writing, processing, and publishing information to audiences through newspapers, magazines, televisions, or radios.

From the definition above, we can say that journalism is a job activity to prepare, search, collect, process, and publish any daily events which is factual and actual to audiences through some media as soon as possible.

According to Sumadiria (2005:4) journalism is divided into three parts, they are: newspaper and magazine, which includes daily and weekly newspapers, tabloid, or magazines; Radio broadcast journalism including radio publication; Television journalism including television publication, and on-line (internet) journalism. While journalism product is divided into news, views, and advertising which is published on newspapers, magazines, tabloid, television, radio, and internet. The news group includes *straight news*, *comprehensive news*, *depth news*, *depth reporting*, *investigative news*, *feature news*, *photo news*. The views group includes article, opinion, caricature, essay, audience letters.

Marshall McLuhan as quoted by Rakhmat says that every media has its own rules, which has relation with media (1996: 248). There are some journalism languages in general. There are simple, brief, clear, attractive, democratic, logic,

avoid the informal conversation, avoid a foreign language, using an active sentence, and using a popular nature. Simple means choosing a simple word which can be understood by all audience. Brief means to be to the point, to tell the news directly. Clear means to be pure, not biased, be honest. Attractive means to motivate audience to read the news stories. Democratic means that there is not any difference, social status, education level among audiences. Logic means that journalism language should be accepted logically and with common sense. Avoid the informal conversation that we usually speak in a market, bus station, café, or others. Avoid a foreign language means that journalism languages should avoid difficult words which only few audiences who understand the words. Therefore, synonyms should be written. Using an active sentence, it means that using an active sentence is easier to understand the news stories. Using a popular nature means that the journalism language should be accepted by all levels and ages (populist).

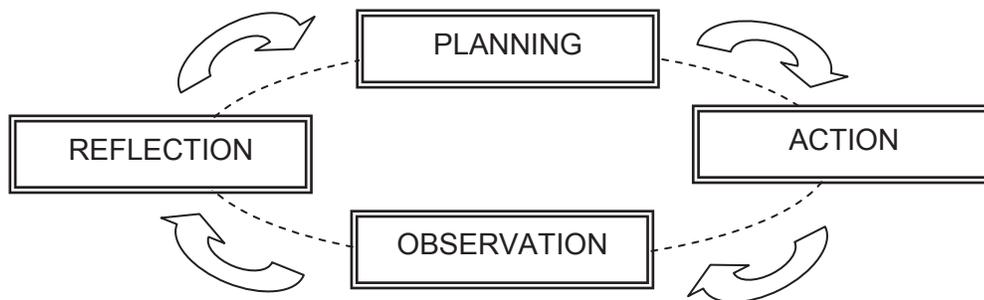
There are some qualities of news: news should be balanced, objective, concise and clear, and recent. News is balanced. It means that balance is a matter of emphasis and completeness. A reporter must constantly strive to give each fact its proper emphasis, to put it in proper relation to every other fact, and to establish its relative importance to the meaning of the story as a whole. News is objective. It

means that news is the factual report of an event as it occurred. Objectivity means that the news comes to the consumer untainted by any personal bias or outside influence that would make it appear anything but what it is. News is concise and clear. It means that news should be direct, terse, and logically coherent. It should be well paced, unified, and above all, written so clearly that the meaning of the story is absolutely plain. News is recent. It means that emphasis on the time element of a story is necessary because people are aware of the transitory nature of existence. Things are always changing, and news consumers want the most recent information on subjects of concern to them.

The subject of this research was all students of semester VI English Letters, Faculty of Languages and Arts, Semarang State University. The object was 21 students of one class of English Letters which took Journalism Class. The research was done for 6 months in English Letters Department, Faculty of Languages and Arts, Semarang State University.

This is an action research which began with the teacher willingness to improve the learning activity. This research was done through some action cycles, they are planning, action, observation, and reflection. Here is the picture of action research according to Arikunto (2002: 23):

RESEARCH METHODS



The collecting method that was used in this research based on observation, notes, interview, and questioner. Observation was used to observe and note the process of activity in the classroom. Note was an activity in writing important information during the learning process. Interview was done among students to know the

improvement of the research, and questioner was done to know the students' comprehending about Journalism itself.

The data was collected by using descriptive analysis. Score 1 to 4 was done to evaluate the learning improvement. Here are the criteria to know the increasing of learning: (1) The

students' ability in understanding writing process; (2) The students' ability in understanding writing process and quality of news and journalism languages.; (3) The students' ability in understanding writing process and quality of news and journalism

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This research applied *Task-based Approach* by giving task to students. According to Nunan (1989:10) a task is a piece of paper work which involve learners in understanding, manipulating, producing, and interacting with the target language while the learner's attention is focused on the meaning than in the form. As the researcher, I explained to students about the understanding of writing process consisting of six process, they are exploring ideas, pre write-using one or more of these methods, organizing, writing a first draft, revising the draft, and producing the final copy.

Meyers adds (2005:1) writing means an activity – a process. Writing is a way to produce a language which you do naturally when you speak. We say something, we think what we want to say, we move to the next statement. Writing is not difficult. Meyers adds that writing is a speaking to others on papers – or computer screen. Writing is partly a talent, but it's mostly a skill, and like any skill, it improves with practice. Writing is an action - a process of discovering and organizing your ideas, putting them on paper, and reshaping and revising them. Like speaking, writing is a

languages and the application in writing news story; (4) The students' ability in understanding writing process and quality of news and journalism languages and the application in writing news story based on interview and investigative reporting

way to communicate ideas, but unlike speaking, in writing, we cannot see and hear our readers so we must think about their reactions. We have to choose a subject that interest them and try to present it in an interesting way. We have to reread what we write and then we rewrite it until we express our meaning strongly and clearly.

The Application of *Task-Based Approach* for English Letters Students in Writing News story

In cycle I, I prepared media, method, and lesson plan. The lecturer taught and explained the quality of news. Students were given pre test. Then students were explained *task based approach* and how to apply it in the writing process. Students were given test 1 to know the comprehending of the task-based approach and wrote their ideas in writing form. The observation result at cycle 1 was: Students did not understand task-based approach and Students could not write a news story by applying task-based approach in writing news story.

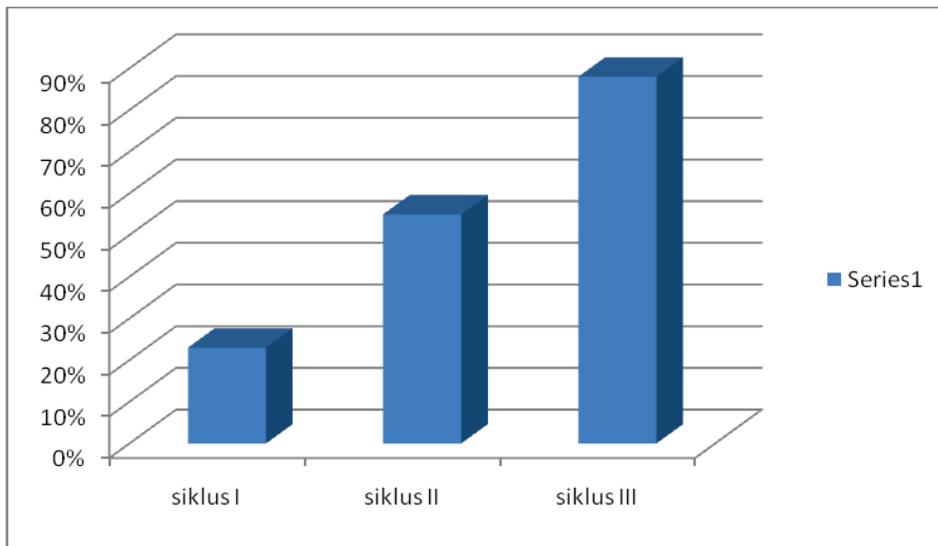
In cycle II, lecturer and observer prepared all media, teaching material, and the method to revise cycle I. The lecturer

taught and explained the writing process completely from exploring ideas up to producing a writing product. Lecturer explained the qualities of news and asked students to observe the daily events. They were given the second test by asking them to write the factual events. The aim of the second test was to know how far they understood writing a news story by following writing process. The observation result at cycle 2 was: Students have understood how to write a news story by applying writing process and some students could not understand how to write a news story by applying writing process.

In cycle III, lecturer and observer prepared all media, teaching material, and the method to revise cycle II. The lecturer explained the writing process completely, qualities of news, *interview reporting and investigative reporting*. The lecturer asked students to observe, do an interview and investigate a factual event, then they reported it in a news story. Test III was

done to know how far students could write a news story after they did an interview and an investigation. The result of the cycle III observation was: (1) All students have understood the writing process completely which was started by developing idea up to produce a news writing; (2) All students have understood and comprehended the quality of news based on journalism languages; (3) All students have understood and could write a news story based on the interview and investigative reporting.

During the research, the observer observed and made some notes about all activities inside the classroom. The observer also did an interview to know the development of learning process. Then the observer distributed questioner to students. The aim of those steps was to know how far the students' comprehension about Journalism and standard in writing a news story.



This was a descriptive analysis. Data was got based on task, observation, interview, and questioner that was presented descriptively. Below was the picture the increasing of students' ability in understanding and writing a news story from cycle I to cycle III.

In cycle I, students did not understand task based approach. They could not apply the writing process. It could be seen from question no 1. Organization: *Introduction, Body, and Conclusion*. In writing news story, students could not organize sentences well. They could not separate introduction, body, and conclusion well.

In question no 2. *Logical development of ideas: Content*. The development of idea was not clear enough. They repeated sentences frequently. The content was not clear.

In question no 3. *Grammar*. There were many grammatical errors. For example:

- (1) Cosplay or costum player is competition which is each of contestants should wear Japanesse clothes such as Japanesse superhero, Japanesse comics, and so on. They also shown their action like the real superhero. The winner of this competition will get some prize from officer.

It should be written: Cosplay or costum player is a competition which each contestant is wearing Japanesse clothes such as Japanese superhero, Japanese comics, and so on. They also show some

actions like the real superhero. The winner of this competition will get some prizes from the committee.

- (2) This selection was not only in Semarang State University but also there was nine university joined it. It should be written: This selection was not only in Semarang State University but also nine universities which participated it.

In question no 4. *Punctuation, spelling, and mechanics*. Students wrote the general idea, but there were some mistakes in punctuation, and spelling. They did not follow the six steps in writing process as Meyer's suggestion. Below were the spelling errors, such as Personil, attarktive, applaus, jurnal. Students should write personel, attractive, applause, journalist.

In question no 5. *Style and quality of expression*. Students wrote long sentences. They repeated words frequently. They did not focus the topics.

The result was only 5 students (23%) who understood task-based approach, and they applied the writing process in their writing product, while 16 students did not understood task- based approach and applied writing process in their writing product.

In cycle II, students were asked to write a news story based on the factual events in their surrounding. They were explained the writing process completely. They were also explained the qualities of

news and journalism languages to support their writing product. In this cycle, more students understood and applied the task-based approach and writing process than in cycle I.

In question no 1. Organization: *Introduction, Body, and Conclusion*. Students could organize the sentences well. Though they did not develop their ideas maximally, they have divided introduction, body, and conclusion in some paragraphs well.

In question no 2. *Logical development of ideas: Content*. Students have showed the development of idea well, although some points had not been exposed optimally. Some students wrote unrelated sentences.

In question no 3. *Grammar*. The grammar was well enough but there were some inappropriate sentences. It was not an important problem because readers could understand the meaning of their writing products.

In question no 4. *Punctuation, spelling, and mechanics*. Some students got difficulties in punctuation and spelling. In mechanics of writing, they followed Meyer's instruction.

In question no 5. *Style and quality of expression*. Students could express their ideas in writing form. They did not write long and non-sensical sentences. They did not repeat words frequently. The style and quality of writing was better than in cycle I.

In this cycle, 12 students (60%) could apply writing process *in writing a news*

story. Those students followed the journalism languages and standards. But 9 students did not apply the writing process and they did not follow the journalism languages and standards in their writing products.

In cycle III, students were asked to create a news story based on interview and investigative reporting. In question no 1. Organization: *Introduction, Body, and Conclusion*,

students could arrange sentences well. They wrote an attracting title. The introduction, body, and conclusion were written well. Some supporting ideas were written completely.

In question no 2. *Logical development of ideas: Content*. The development of idea was clear. Topics were written clearly.

In question no 3. *Grammar*. There were not any grammatical errors. Students wrote well.

In question no 4. *Punctuation, spelling, and mechanics*. There were not any punctuation, and spelling errors. Students wrote upper and lower case well. In the writing mechanics, students have followed Meyer's instruction.

In question no 5. *Style and quality of expression*. Students have expressed and explored their ideas in their writing product. They did not write long sentences. They increased their vocabularies by using some difficult words. Their style was well.

In this cycle, 18 students (90%) applied writing process in writing a news story. They followed journalism languages

and standards. They applied interview and investigative reporting based on a factual event or fact. Only 3 students (10) who did not apply writing process and interview and investigative reporting in their writing products. From the result from cycle I to cycle III, we could see there was an improvement in writing a news story.

The Application of Task-Based Approach can change students' behavior in writing a news story

There was an improvement in writing news story from cycle I, II, and III. In cycle I, the result was only 5 students (23%) who understood task-based approach, and they applied the writing process in their writing product, while 16 students did not understand task-based approach and applied writing process in their writing product. In cycle II, 12 students (60%) could apply writing process *in writing a news story*. Those students followed the journalism languages and standards. But 9 students did not apply the writing process and they did not follow the journalism languages and standards in their writing products. In cycle III, 18 students (90%) applied writing process in writing a news story. They followed journalism languages and standards. They applied interview and investigative reporting based on a factual event or fact. Only 3 students (10) who did not apply writing process and interview and investigative reporting in their writing products.

The observation result was reached from the pre observation when students did not know anything about task-based approach and writing process. They were confused when the researcher asked them to write a news story based on a factual event because they did not know anything about journalism languages and standards, and also the qualities of good news. After they were explained the task-based approach, writing process, journalism languages and standards, qualities of good news, interview and investigative reporting, students could write a good news story. The result of interview showed that students only understood the general journalism. They only knew that journalism was collecting and publishing information, but they did not know the journalism languages and standards. They did not know how to search and find the news stories. They did not know what sort of news when they read a newspaper, listen news on the radio, or watch news on television. They did not know the terms of hard news, soft news, color stories, yellow journalism. At the end of the research, students understood terms in journalism. It motivated them to learn more about journalism and produce a news story. They hope it could be published on a news paper.

The questioner result presented there was a behavior change among students in writing a news story. In question no 1. Do you know what journalism is before you participate in this class? There were 9

students who answered yes, while 12 students answered no. we could say that less than half students understood journalism before they attended this class. In question no 15. Do you know what soft news is? All students (21) answered yes. In question no 16. Do you know what hard news is? All students (21) answered yes. In question no 30 and 32. Do you know what interview and investigative reporting are? All students (21) answered yes. It could be said there was a change behavior among students in writing a news story.

CONCLUSION

Writing a news story is a skill that has been learnt by all English Department students who took Journalism subject. During the learning process, students were explained the meaning of journalism, rules in writing a good news story. More practices were better for students. It could be seen from cycle I, II, and III. There was an understanding improvement among students in writing a good news story based on journalism rules and standards. Students' motivation in creating a good news story increased.

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