



## THE BENEFITS OF USING DIALOGUE JOURNAL WRITING FOR IMPROVING STUDENTS' WRITING OF PERSONAL LETTER

Nur Aininna ✉

English Department, Faculty of Languages and Arts, State University of Semarang, Indonesia

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### Abstract

*This study aims at investigating how dialogue journal writing benefits students' writing of personal letter and how significance the resulted improvement is. Personal letter is important for it is used by people in their daily lives in diverse forms. Meanwhile, dialogue journal is chosen as the method for it is powerful to bridge learners' needs of supplementary learning times and a private student-teacher's interaction. The research design of the study is mainly qualitative. However, quantitative analysis is still used to reveal students' overall writing proficiency and the significance of students' improvement. The five writing aspects mentioned by Brown (2004) are used as the basis of both analyses. The qualitative analysis attempts to describe how the students perform the aspects in their writing. Meanwhile, the quantitative analysis tries to assess students' performance of the aspects by giving each aspect a score realization according to the criteria outlined in Brown's rubric of writing assessment. The results of the analysis show that students' writing improves all the aspects quite well. The biggest improvement lies in the content aspect. Majority of students' earlier writing fails to address the topic of writing. Nonetheless, all of their final writing has already addressed the topic correctly. Meanwhile, the aspect of style and quality of expressions seems to undergo the least improvement. Some vocabularies are still found to be incorrectly used. However, students' later writings exhibit a better sentence variety realized through the use of various cohesive devices. The improvement unfolded in the qualitative analysis is supported by the findings of the quantitative analysis of which all of the twenty students improve their writing scores in the final test. Some scores are even elevated quite significantly. The improvement of the five aspects presented in students' later writing has turned the writing to be more communicative. Therefore, the mastery of the aspects is very beneficial. Since all the five aspects belong to the micro and macro-skills of writing, the teaching of these skills is then imperative to be given.*

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✉ Correspondent Address:

B3 Building FBS Unnes

Sekaran, Gunungpati, Semarang, 50229

E-mail: Nuraininna90.na@gmail.com

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## INTRODUCTION

Writing is a language skill which remains problematic for many students. When are faced to the task of writing, students, especially non-native students, find it hard to not only decide what to write, but also how to write it in the target language. The students' confusion of writing is due to several reasons. Firstly, it may deal with various aspects of writing which need to be considered by writers, such as the system of genre which requires writers to employ different structures and features according to the purpose of their writing and other systems of language which demand writers to perform the proper grammar, linking words, vocabulary usage, and many other systems according to the necessity. Secondly, writing is not an easy task for it brings along some vexatious characteristics, which include permanence, production time, distance, orthography, complexity, vocabulary, and formality (Brown, 2001: 341).

However, the time allotment provided for the teaching and learning process is very limited at schools. This limited time results in the limited knowledge of writing internalized by students. Besides, the problem of writing is also caused by some student-related factors, such as confidence, laziness, motivation, and consciousness. Some students are not confident to express their ideas to others, moreover when they have to tell it in English. They are often too afraid and ashamed of making mistakes and therefore assume that saying nothing is way much better. Some others are too lazy to practice writing and review the materials they have learnt at school. This laziness can be caused by the students' lack of motivation or their unconsciousness of the importance of writing.

All the boundaries of learning mentioned before lead to the students' low performance of writing. The research done by Beh (1997) who examined English Language Instruction provided to 1265 third year students in four provinces reported that 80% of the Indonesian students involved in the research promoted a less than good writing ability. Similar findings were also seen in the students' writing product

gathered by the researcher in the writing pretest activity in 2013 which took place in a junior high school in Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia. Almost all of the students she taught at the school failed to properly perform some basic tenses, which are the simple present and the simple past tense. Some common mistakes the students presented in their writing are the incomplete structure of text, the incorrect use of verb form, the overuse of verb of which they used both operator and full verb in a sentence at once ('I am go to in grand mother house', 'I'm can play with you'), the improper use of vocabularies, and the lack of sentence variety that most of them began their sentence using 'I' and that the use of transitional words and other conjunctions are still poor.

The presence of numerous writing mistakes makes students' writings hard to understand. The message the writer encoded in their writing is then not successfully conveyed. When a piece of writing fails to transfer the intended information, it is then not communicative. If it is not communicative, it then fails to achieve its ultimate goal as a mode of communication. Therefore, it is obvious that the students' low performance of writing needs to be improved. To realize this improvement, the researcher used dialogue journal writing to aid the teaching and learning of writing she conducted. Peyton (2000) defines dialogue journal as written conversations in which a learner and a teacher (or other writing partners) communicate regularly (daily, weekly, or on a schedule that fits the education setting) over a semester, school year, or course. This journaling method was chosen because it was seen as a powerful means to bridge the students' needs of extended learning time and space; private, safe and nonthreatening learning atmosphere; also informal, relaxing, and intimate student-teacher's interaction.

Dialogue journal can be carried out by using both offline and online media. Jones (1991) suggests that dialogue journal writing can be done in a bound notebook or on a computer disks or

files. In the research, the researcher preferred to use the online media by using the message service of a popular social network namely facebook. The students were demanded to make a piece of writing over a certain topic and then send it to the researcher's facebook account. The researcher will send back a feedback to their account afterwards which included some necessary corrections and encouragement for the students. This kind of activity is maintained for as long as two weeks in which they had to submit two journals in each week. The progress of students' writing made in each journal was noted in order to be able to meet the objectives of the research, which were to investigate in what ways dialogue journal benefit students' writing of personal letter and how significant the improvement of the writing is.

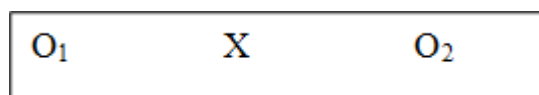
Personal letter is "a letter directed to one person and contains so many specific personal references and so much personal information..." (Levinson, 2007). It belongs to the genre of

personal writing and comes in many different forms in people's daily lives. In the research, this type of writing was chosen because it was included as one of the obligatory genres which needed to be learnt by the eighth grade students. Hence, a better mastery of the letter would help students answer and solve any related question, task, or test. Therefore, it would further help students improve their academic achievement at school.

This research needs to be done to find out how the use of dialogue journal writing affects each aspect in students' writing and whether or not it is effective to improve students' overall writing. Secondly, it is necessary to be done in order to know how significant the students' writing improvement is. The findings of the research can be beneficial for teachers and researchers in general as a source of consideration in order to conduct a better teaching and research of dialogue journal in the future.

## METHODS OF INVESTIGATION

In the process of gathering the data, this study uses one group pretest-posttest design. The diagram is shown as follows:



**Figure 1.** One Group Pretest-Posttest Design

Linguistics and Educational Research (Campbell and Stanley cited in Saleh 2011: 150)

This study consists of pre-observation (O<sub>1</sub>), treatment (X), and post-observation (O<sub>2</sub>). Pre-observation is the earlier stage aims at measuring students' initial personal letter writing ability and finding out several students' related factors which may influence their products of writing. This stage consists of two activities, which are pre-test and the pre-interview.

The second stage is the treatment which also consists of two activities, which are the explicit teaching and the dialogue journal writing activities. The explicit teaching is the ordinary teaching conducted in four meetings inside the classroom, within the school hours. The material taught in each meeting differs one from another

and covers several theories of personal letter, the simple past tense, cohesive devices, and recount text. Just as the explicit teaching, the dialogue journal activities also last for four submitted journal entries in which each journal entry is assigned to the students in the end of every explicit teaching. However, the assignment is supposed to be done outside the school hours. The topic of the writing tasks also varies but is still related to the material taught earlier in the explicit teaching.

The last stage is the post-observation which is accomplished in two major instructions. The first is the posttest and the second is the post interview. Posttest is done to measure students'

later ability in writing personal letter, while post interview is conducted to find out students' later perspective of English and dialogue journal writing, their problems when attending the journal writing activities, the benefits they get from the dialogue journal activities, and their suggestion regarding the task.

The participants of the research are eighth grade students of SMPN 8 Semarang studying in class VIII B in the academic year of 2013/2014. There are totally 36 students inside the classroom. However, 20 of them are chosen randomly as the main participants of the research.

In collecting the data, the research uses tests, field notes, and interview. The collected data are then analyzed in two ways. The students' writing in the pretest, posttest, and dialogue journal writing activities as well as their answers in the pre and post interview are analyzed qualitatively. The qualitative analysis of students' writing is done by describing how the writing performs some aspects of writing included in Brown's rubric of assessment, which are organization, content, grammar, punctuation/spelling/mechanics, and style/quality of expressions (Brown, 2004). This description is then used as a basis to classify students' writing proficiency and to draw a conclusion of the students' achievement of discourse competence as well as their mastery of the micro and macro-skills of writing. The qualitative analysis is also used to analyze students' answers in the pre and post interview. Students' answers to the same question are listed and then grouped based on its similarity. The findings of the grouping are used to draw a conclusion over the interview.

Secondly, to support the qualitative analysis, quantitative analysis is also done to students' writings in both tests. The description made in the qualitative analysis is used as a consideration to determine students' score realization of each writing aspect. To aid the scoring, the researcher uses Brown's rubric of writing assessment (2004). After getting the score for each aspect, the researcher then sum up the scores to obtain the total scores which are further used to calculate the average score. The mean

scores of the students' writing in the pre and posttest are then compared to one another to see whether or not there is an improvement. Furthermore, the mean scores of students' writing in the two tests are used to measure the significance of the improvement by using t-test formula.

## RESULTS OF THE STUDY

### 3.1 Findings of the Qualitative Analysis

The first qualitatively analyzed data was students' writing in the pretest, posttest, and in the dialogue journal writing activities. As the writer described the students' performance of the five writing criteria by using Brown's rubric of writing assessment (2004), she found that the students occupied three levels of proficiency, which were good, adequate, and fair. Each of these proficiency levels are further explained as follows:

Good proficiency refers to the developed ability of the five criteria. In the aspect of organization, students could be labeled as good if they were able to present all the needed structure of personal letter, a varied use of cohesive devices, and a good coherence in their writings. Meanwhile, the content aspect looked for the ability to address the topic of writing and develop the ideas put in the writing. Thirdly, the aspect of grammar required students to present the correct system of the simple past tense, in their writing which included the correct use of verb form, word order pattern, and other tense sequences. Furthermore, the fourth aspect of punctuation, spelling, and mechanics of writing could be labeled as good if students could present all the needed punctuation properly, all the spelling of words correctly, and obey kinds of writing convention, such as the use of indentation, capitals, etc. Finally, the aspect of style and quality of expressions was said to be good when students could show the appropriate vocabulary usage and a good register.

#### 1. Good Writing in the Pretest

In the pretest, no students' writing could be labeled as good. However, there were 2 students showed a good performance of organization in

which they presented almost all of the needed structure of personal letter and only missed out the part of heading in their writing. The other 4 students did well in the aspect of content for they could address the topic of writing appropriately although some of their ideas still needed to be more developed. Additionally, there was also 1 student presented a good performance of punctuation, spelling, and mechanics of writing. Unlike the majority, this student had made all her paragraphs indented. She had also presented all the needed capitals and full stops in her sentences.

## 2. Good Writing in the Dialogue Journal Activities

Students' writing performance during the journal writing activities fluctuated in each task. In the first journal writing assignment, no writing could meet the classification of a good writing. However, in the second assignment, 4 students' writings could be labeled as good. These four students showed a complete and well-structured writing. In the aspect of grammar, three of the students successfully avoided the occurrence of grammatical errors in their writings, but one of them still presented a few mistakes of grammar, such as the absence of a needed preposition and grammar.

The number of good writings decreased in the third journal writing assignment in that only one writing was labeled as good. This good student presented no mistake of grammar in her third journal writing assignment. She also included all the needed structures of personal letter and showed a varied use of cohesive devices. Regarding the content, the topic of writing was quite well addressed but the ideas were not fully developed. Few mistakes of punctuation and spelling were also still presented by the student.

In the fourth journal writing assignment, five students' writings were labeled as good. These students did well in all the five writing aspects even though some grammar and punctuation problems still appeared. The students' clearest improvement was seen in the aspect of organization, particularly in the area of generic structure, in which they exhibited a complete heading containing city, zip code, and

full address which were mostly absent in their previous journal assignments.

## 3. Good Writing in the Posttest

As many as 11 students presented a good writing in the posttest. Considering that no student was good in the posttest, such a number represented a quite great improvement of students' writing proficiency. 6 from these students even elevated their proficiency from fair to good, while the rest moved from adequate to good. The students' improvement in the posttest took place in all the five assessed writing aspects. In the aspect of organization, all of the writings presented a complete and well structured letter. Majority of the students had also made use of various cohesive devices, such as the use of temporal conjunction, references, etc. In the content, most of the students' writings in the posttest already mentioned the statement of the topic and the conclusions which were absent in all the pretest writings.

Grammar was the worst aspect performed in the pretest. However, it turned to be the second best performed aspect in the posttest. There was even one student who did not show any single mistake of grammar in her posttest writing. The rests might still present some grammar mistakes but it was getting fewer in number. In the aspect of punctuation, spelling and mechanics of writing, students improved their writings through the presence of indentation, a needed comma in the closure and salutation, as well as the correct spelling of some words which were used to be misspelled in the students' earlier writings. The students' style and quality of expressions also improved quite because unlike their pretest writings, the students' posttest writings already attempted variety which was realized through the use of various cohesive devices.

Adequate level of proficiency refers to students' enough ability of the five aspects. Adequate organization means students are able to present an acceptable introduction, body, and conclusion. As an instance, they may not clearly state the topic sentence, but if their introducing sentence is still topic-related then it is still acceptable. This adequate proficiency is also represented by the misuse or the absence of

transitional expressions, and omission of one or two parts of the letter structure. In the content, a piece of writing is said to be adequate if it appears several criteria, which are first, the essay addresses the issues but misuses some points. Second, the presence of not-fully developed ideas, and the last is the presence of extraneous material in the writing. Meanwhile, adequate proficiency of grammar allows the occurrence of some grammatical problems as long as those do not harm the communication of the ideas. On the other hand, the fourth aspect is adequate if students present some problems of writing conventions, punctuations, and occasional spelling errors. In the last aspect of style and quality of expressions, students' writing is adequate if it shows some misused vocabularies. However, it does not accept writings from being too wordy.

#### 1. Adequate Writing in the Pretest

In the pretest, 11 students' writings were labeled as adequate. Among all the aspects, almost all of the students were adequate in the aspect of style and quality of expressions. Students' writings in the posttest already attempted variety unlike theirs in the pretest. This was realized through the use of many references in the beginning of their sentences which made it less monotonous. However, they still showed some inappropriate uses of vocabulary, such as preposition 'in' in the reference in there, 'such' in the sentence such letter from me, and 'much' used in so much letter from me. Aside of style and quality of expressions, many students were also adequate in the aspect of punctuation, spelling, or mechanics of writing, organization, and content. However, in the aspect of grammar, no student was labeled as adequate because all of their grammar were fair in the pretest.

#### 2. Adequate Writing in the Dialogue Journal Writing Activities

Adequate writings could be found in all the four journal writing assignments. In the first journal assignment, 19 students' writings were labeled as adequate. In the organization, students failed to present the complete structure of personal letter for most of them omitted the part of heading, while some others excluded the

salutation part of the letter. Besides, half of the students missed out the statement of the topic in their writing. Nevertheless, several uses of cohesive devices already appeared in the students' first journal writing assignment. In the content, all of the students' writings addressed the topic quite well but their ideas could be more developed.

Students' grammar in the first journal assignment was also almost good for the system of the simple past tense was already presented quite properly in most of the sentences. The form of the full verbs and the sequence of words were correct. However, the form of operator verb was still incorrect in some of the students' writing. In the aspect of spelling, punctuation, and mechanics of writing, students exhibited some common mistakes, such as the absence of comma in the salutation and closing, the omission of indentation, misspelling of words, and the absence of needed capitals. These many mistakes caused this aspect to be labeled as fair. Regarding the style and quality of the expressions, the students' first journal writing assignment had attempted variety which was seen from the various uses of cohesive devices.

Students' writing proficiency in the second journal writing assignment generally improved. The number of adequate writing in the second task was fewer than that in the first task and it resulted in the greater number of good writings presented in the second journal writing assignment. The best performed aspect was grammar which was the worst performed aspect in the first journal writing assignment. In this second assignment, most of the verbs used were in the correct form. This excellent performance might be resulted from students' fresh memories and understanding of past tense which had just been taught in the second explicit teaching. Besides, students' grammar might be good because they did not really apply it to create a whole text but simply sentence per sentence which did not seem to be related to one another.

However, the students' overall writing performance in the third journal writing assignment was worse than that in the second assignment.

### 3. Adequate Writing in the Posttest

The number of students who obtained the adequate scores in the posttest was smaller than that in the pretest. The minimum writing score given to the adequate students in the posttest was also higher. Among all the analyzed writing aspects, majority of the students were adequate in the aspect of style and quality of expressions. Students' register in the posttest was actually quite good for all the students' writings already attempted variety. Aside of the reference, they had also begun their sentence by using some adverbs of time. However, some misuses of vocabulary still appeared in many of the students' writings. Those frequently misused vocabularies include preposition in and pronoun your.

The insufficient ability in performing the aspects of writing leads students to the fair level of proficiency. In the organization aspect, students' writings are said to be fair if they present a minimally recognizable introduction and conclusion in their writings, also when they demonstrated many problems of word order pattern, less developed ideas, few or even no uses of cohesive devices, and when they omitted some parts of the generic structure. In the content fair proficiency refers to the incomplete development of ideas and an off the topic essay. Meanwhile, students' grammar ability is fair if they appear many problems of grammar which give a negative effect on the communication of the ideas. In the aspect of punctuation, spelling, and mechanics, fair level of proficiency refers to the presence of error uses of general writing conventions and punctuation which interfere with the writing ideas and the problems of spelling which distract readers. Lastly, fair ability of the style and quality of expressions means that the students misuse many vocabularies and present a lack awareness of register, poor expressions of the ideas, and a too-wordy writing.

#### 1. Fair Writing in the Pretest

Almost half of the students' writings in the pretest were labeled as fair. The students' worst performance lied in the aspect of grammar in which 19 of the 20 students were labeled as fair in this third aspect. They showed numerous problems such as the incorrect uses of verb form,

the problems of sentence structure in which the students failed to create a proper sentence because they missed some elements needed in the sentences, such as subject, verb, etc., the misuse of pronoun, and plurality, modality, preposition, ownership, and the mistakes of making correct noun phrases. Secondly, fair proficiency in the pretest was also demonstrated in the aspect of organization by 5 students. In this first aspect, no student could present a complete and well-structured letter for all of them omitted some parts of the letter, such as heading and closure. Besides, they also failed to create a good coherence because their ideas were incomplete and not fully developed. The use of cohesive devices was also poor that they frequently used adding 'and' and causal 'because' only.

In the content, 9 students were labeled as fair because the ideas they included in the writing were very limited, did not fully developed, and even off the topic for they filled their letters with greeting and questions related to the addressee's life instead of retelling their holiday experience. Meanwhile, in the aspect of punctuation, spelling, and mechanics of writing, 3 students were labeled as fair. These students presented many mistakes in their writings, such as misspelling of words, problems of indentation, capitalization, as well as commas and full stops usage. Smaller number of fair performances was shown in the aspect of style and quality of expressions in which only 2 students were labeled as fair in this fifth aspect. One of the students was even labeled as fairly unacceptable because he only wrote an introducing sentence in his writing and did not include any ideas nor he provided any conclusion or closing to finish his letter.

#### 2. Fair Writing in Dialogue Journal Writing Activities

There was only one piece of writing fairly performed in the dialogue journal activities. This writing was submitted by S-3 in the first journal writing assignment. In the aspect of organization, this student omitted three parts of the generic structure, which were heading, closure, and the signature. The statement of the topic and the conclusion were also absent in her writing. Additionally, the flow of the ideas was not good

for each idea seemed to stand alone. Hence, the coherence of the writing still needed to be improved. The use of cohesive devices was also still poor because the only devices found in the writing were only adding conjunction 'and' and causal 'because'. Another aspect which was fairly performed by the student was the aspect of grammar. The verbs used were mostly mistaken and some needed subject, verb, and prepositions were absent in the writing. It made the writing difficult to understand. A fair performance was also shown in the aspect of punctuation, spelling, and mechanics of writing in which the student presented many mistakes, such as the omission the full stop in the final sentence, the absence of indentation and needed capitals, some misuses of comma, as well as the incorrect spelling of word vacation which was spelled vocation. However, the student's performances of the content and style or quality of expressions were not fair but adequate.

### 3. Fair Writing in the Posttest

In the posttest, no writing could be labeled as fair because the lowest score obtained by the students was 73 which belonged to the adequate range of scores.

The findings of the qualitative analysis showed that students' initial writing proficiency was still low. It was shown from the various mistakes presented in their earlier writings. These mistakes appeared in all the 5 writing aspects and led to the great number of fair writings in the pretest. This was such an irony considering the findings of the interview which revealed that the students had actually learnt the language for many years. This might be caused by the negative perspective of English they held ever since. In the pre-interview, it was found that more than half of the students thought that English was important yet difficult, boring, scary, and confusing. These perspectives might have discouraged students to pay attention to the language and attend more of its learning. Their low ability of writing might also be caused by the limited time they got to learn the language. 85% of the students admitted that they did not take any English course outside the school and so their learning of English only depended on the learning given at school which

was very limited due to the time and the great number of materials required by government.

Nevertheless, their writing performance improved in the later writing as seen from the increasing number of students whose writings were labeled as good. A better perspective of English and the presence of Dialogue journal writing activities might have something to do with it. Students' answers in the post interview uncovered that 90% of the students held a positive perspective about English and Dialogue Journal by saying that the two were fun and easier to understand. This positive perspective might have motivated the students more to learn English, especially writing. Besides, they also claimed that Dialogue Journal really had helped them absorbed more knowledge of English writing, allowed them to interact with the teacher easily within a private ambience, so that they could ask everything more comfortably, and let them experience a new interesting way of learning.

### 3.2 Findings of the Quantitative Analysis

Just as the findings of the qualitative analysis in the pretest, the findings of the quantitative analysis of students' pretest writings showed that their proficiency in this first test was only in between fair or adequate. None of their scores could successfully reach the minimum score of good writings that was 81. The highest score the students got in the pretest was 73, while the lowest was 9. In order to find out the overall students' writing proficiency, the students' pretest scores were all summed up to be divided by the total number of students and so the average score could be obtained. Based on the formula, the mean score of students' writings in the pretest was 62,75.

The students' writing scores improved quite greatly in the posttest. The highest score obtained by the students in this final test was 91, while the lowest was 73. It was then clear to see that the students' highest score in the pretest became the lowest in the posttest. This score improvement resulted in the increasing students' posttest mean score. In the posttest, the students' average score was 82,35 and it was 19,6 higher than the mean score obtained in the pretest. The



significance of the improvement was also proven in the calculation of t-test. T-test was done by comparing t-value with the critical value of the t-table. If the value of t-value was higher than the t-table, it could be concluded that the improvement was significant and vice versa. The calculation of the t-value is shown as follows:

$$t - \text{value} = \frac{19.60}{\sqrt{\frac{6427}{20(20 - 1)}}} = 4,769$$

After obtaining the t-value, the next step was to gain the critical value of the t-table. Firstly, the writer calculated the degree of freedom by using the formula  $(df) = N - 1$ . N represents the number of the research participants and since there were 20 students in the research, then the

(df) was 19. By using the (df) 19 and the level of significance ( $\alpha$ ) 5%, the writer could get the critical value of the t-table which was 1,73 and it was 3,03 smaller than the value of the t-value. Hence, the really was a significant difference between the pre and posttests which indicated that there was also a significant improvement of the writing products.

The improvement of students' writing products took place in all the five writing criteria. The greatest improvement lied in the aspect of content, while the smallest improvement was in the style and quality of expressions. This was seen from the comparison of the mean score of each aspect obtained in the pre and posttests. The comparison of the mean is shown in the following table:

**Table 3.2.1** Improvement of Each Writing Aspect

Writing Aspect	Mean of scores of the aspect		Improvement	Percentage of the improvement
	Pretest	Posttest		
Organization	13,65	17,90	4,25	21,25%
Content	13,05	18,55	5,5	27,5%
Grammar	9,8	14,35	4,55	22,75%
Punctuation, spelling, mechanics	13,45	16,65	3,2	16%
Style and quality of expressions	12,8	14,9	2,1	10,5%

### 3.3 Discussions of Findings

Based on the findings, there is a connection between the students' performance of organization and theirs of content. As that mentioned in chapter two, one of the area of organization aspect is coherence. This coherence refers to the logical connection between ideas. A logical connection between ideas can be seen if only students develop and divide their ideas clearly into opening or introduction, body which contained main and supporting ideas, and conclusion. Similarly, the aspect of content also assessed whether or not students fully develop their ideas. Therefore, both organization and content pay attention to the development of ideas in students' writings.

Students' completion of the area of coherence in the organization then reflects their accomplishment of content in the area of ideas development. If their coherence was good, then their development of ideas was also good. However, it only works in the area-level and not in the aspect-level. A good completion of organization does not mean that the content is also good because both aspects cover some other different areas which need to be considered in doing the holistic analysis. Therefore, the performance of a particular area of an aspect cannot be used to draw a conclusion over the aspect as a whole.

Another similar connection lies between the aspect of organization and the aspect of style and quality expressions. The later aspect assesses

several areas, one of them is the register or sentence variety presented in students' writing. One of the ways to see whether or not the students attempt variety in their writing is by observing how the sentences begin. If they are always begun with the same thing, for example it is always started with subject I, the writing tends to be monotonous and thus, the writing is lack of register. Meanwhile, if the sentence beginning varies from one to another, it shows that the writing attempts variety or may even be good at register.

Some cohesive devices can be very useful for creating sentence variety. The simplest and most common devices to use include reference and temporal conjunction. Several references, such as we, they, it, this, that, he, she, etc can be used to refer to a subject mentioned in the earlier sentence and avoid repetition in the later sentences. Meanwhile, temporal conjunction can also be used to clarify the sequence of events and distinct the sentence beginning at once. The ones such as firstly, secondly, then, next, and after that are the ones frequently used by the students in their writing. In short, it can be seen that when the use of cohesive devices varies, then the sentence variety is likely well presented. On the other hand, when its use is poor, the register is then not so good or even absent.

Aside of the relation between aspects, the findings are also useful for revealing students' achievement of discourse competence because the areas of some writing aspects are also the areas on which discourse competence concerns. The three areas of organization are the areas of discourse competence. The areas of content are the areas of sociocultural competence. Meanwhile, the areas of grammar, spelling (in the aspect of spelling-punctuation-mechanics), and vocabulary usage (in the aspect of style and quality of expressions) are the areas of linguistic competence. Hence, students' performance of the areas reflects their achievement of discourse, sociocultural, and linguistic competence.

According to the findings of students' writing in the pretest, no student seems to have possessed a good discourse, sociocultural, or linguistic competence at first. It is shown from

their performance in all the areas of the writing aspects which is initially both adequate and fair. The adequate proficiency presented in the aspect of organization shows that students' achievement of discourse competence still needs to be developed. Besides, the adequate proficiency showed in the content indicates that their achievement of the sociocultural competence is still below the expectation. Meanwhile, the aspect of grammar, the area of spelling and vocabulary usage which are shown to be fair in students' earlier writings reflects that students' initial linguistic competence is still low. Linguistic competence is then the worst competence among all the competencies performed in students' early writings. Nonetheless, students' performance in their later writings shows a quite great improvement for they can successfully improve their achievement of discourse and sociocultural competence from adequate to good, and their performance of grammar from fair to adequate.

Furthermore, the findings of the data analysis help the researcher figure out students' mastery of micro and macroskills of writing. Based on the findings of the students' earlier writings, the worst skill performed by the students is the fourth microskill of writing that is to use the acceptable grammatical systems. This is proven by the numerous problems of grammar presented in their initial writings. However, the students' grammar starts to improve from their second journal writing to the final writing.

The second worst performed aspect is the third microskill of writing, which is to produce an acceptable core of words. This is seen from the presence of many misuses of vocabularies. The third problematic microskill is the first microskill of writing which deals with the production of graphemes and orthographic patterns of English or spelling. Many students frequently misspelled several words, such as the word regards which is spelled regrads, reply which is spelled replay, and your which is spelled you're or vice versa. An improvement is also seen in the students' mastery of the first macroskill of writing of which is the use of rhetorical forms and conventions of written discourse. This macroskill relates to the use of punctuations and other writing conventions. In

the early writings, students mostly omit the indent in their paragraphs. Many of them also leave out a needed comma in both closing and salutation. On the contrary, in their later writings, the students already make their paragraphs indented and they have also put a comma in the closing and salutation.

The students' improvement of organization aspect leads to the improvement of several micro and macroskills of writing. A varied use of cohesive devices presented in the students' later writings shows that their mastery of the sixth microskill develops much. The complete completion of the generic structure in the later writings demonstrates that the students have a better mastery of the second macroskill of writing. Meanwhile, a better flow of ideas which indicates a better achievement of coherence shows that the students' mastery of the third macroskill of writing is also better.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analysis of the research, two kinds of conclusion can be drawn as follows:

1. Dialogue journal writing improves students' writing of personal letter in several ways. Those are:

a) First, it improves the writing in terms of organization, particularly in the completion of generic structure and in the achievement of cohesion. Unlike what was found in the initial writing, after being involved in such activities, students' later writings demonstrate all the five needed structures of personal letter. Besides, they also show a better cohesion in their writing which is realized through the various uses of cohesive devices, including temporal conjunction, listing and adding conjunction, consequence, reference, and synonyms.

b) Second, dialogue journal writing contributes to develop the content of students' writing. The findings of the field notes and the post test show that students can address the topic of writing better as compared to their writing before accomplishing the activities. Furthermore, they also develop their ideas more fully by providing some supporting sentences and

examples to support their main sentences in their later writing.

c) Third, dialogue journal writing improves students' performance of grammar. The improvement is shown in the use of correct verb form and the presence of all the needed elements of a sentence (parts of speech, article, pronoun, etc) in students' later writing.

d) Fourth, dialogue journal writing helps improve students' mastery of punctuation, spelling, and mechanics of writing. Commas and full stops that were mostly misused and absent in their earlier writings are already present and correctly used in their later writing. In addition, the beginning of the paragraphs has also been indented. Furthermore, the spaces in between clauses or sentences that were absent before has also been presented afterwards.

e) Finally, dialogue journal writing improves students' writing of personal letter in terms of sentence variety and the quality of the expressions through the presence of fewer misused vocabularies and various uses of reference, temporal conjunction and other devices which improve the register of the writing.

2. The improvement of students' writing is quite significant as seen from the measurement of students' writing scores in both pre and posttest which shows that the average score of the students' writing in the post test is higher than that of the pretest.

However, since there were two kinds of treatment given to the students in the research namely explicit teaching and dialogue journal writing itself, the writer cannot be so sure whether such a great improvement is merely resulted from the dialogue journaling. The explicit teaching might also have given some contribution to the improvement. Nonetheless, considering that language needs practice, dialogue journal writing which is also another form of language practice is believed as having a quite great influence to it.

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