

## Developing the Students' EFL Writing Ability through "Put Yourself in the Picture" Strategy

By

Rizka Safriyani

**Abstract:** This research was aimed to develop the students' EFL writing ability through "Put Yourself in the Picture" strategy. This research involved 21 second year students of SMA YPPI-II Surabaya in the academic year 2009/2010. This research was conducted in two cycles by following the procedures of the action research, namely, *planning, implementing, observing, and reflecting*. Each cycle of the research encompassed three meetings. The data of the research were gathered through observation checklists, field notes, questionnaire, and portfolio. The findings of research showed that "Put Yourself in the Picture" strategy is not only effective to develop students' writing ability but also enhance their participation in the learning process.

**Key words:** "Put Yourself in the Picture" strategy, writing ability

As a productive skill, writing plays an important role in communicating ideas, thoughts, and messages to a reader for a certain purpose. Hyland (2003:9) viewed that writing is a way of sharing personal meanings and it emphasizes the power of the personality to construct someone's view based on a certain topic. However, writing is regarded as the most difficult skill for foreign language learners to master because it involves several components which need to be considered while the learners are writing, such as content, organization, vocabulary, language use and punctuation (Brown, 2004:244–245). In addition, writing is linked with several components of language such as choice of word, grammar, syntax, mechanism, and generating of ideas. Furthermore, writers should pay attention both on the goal of writing itself and the readers (Gebhard, 2000: 211).

As a means of communication, writing should be included as a primary part of the teaching and learning activities in the classroom. Teaching writing is as important as teaching listening, speaking and reading. The most common problem

that is usually faced by the teachers does not lie on how to ask students to write, but on how to motivate the students to write interesting and effective materials.

In fact, several previous studies show that the EFL students' writing ability is generally poor. It is revealed by some research concerning the students' writing ability. Sundari (2002:24) conducted a study intended to improve the students' writing skill through pictures. Her preliminary study revealed that the students faced difficulty in writing English, especially in expressing their idea. Khoirunnisa (2007) in her preliminary research stated that the students faced some difficulties in writing in terms of the content and the organization. It happened due to the fact that the teacher did not involve during the process of writing. From the findings above, still there are some problems found in the teaching of writing.

The similar problems are found at the second year students of SMA YPPI-II Surabaya. Most students could not write properly when they were assigned to write a composition. They did not have any ideas about what to write first. As a result, the students were unmotivated to complete the task. They did not have sufficient vocabulary to develop their writing and they got difficulties to determine the content of their writing. The inadequate result may also happen because of improper teaching strategies. The teacher only assigned them to write paragraphs without giving pre writing activities. The teacher also monotonously let them write the paragraph alone without giving any feasible example of paragraph writing strategies. Hence, the strategies applied by the English teacher tend to be less effective since the teacher did not give much contribution to develop the students' writing skill. Thus, there should be an effort to make writing class more interesting.

Taking the problems into account, the researcher tries to find out the appropriate strategy to help the students develop their writing ability and motivate them to participate actively in the writing class. Brown (2001:340) suggested that the teacher has a role as a facilitator who offers guidance to the students in creating an interesting and motivating lesson. Thus, the teachers must be creative in selecting and preparing instructional media. Instructional media can enhance learning and support the teachers' instruction in the teaching and learning process in the classroom. However, the teachers should follow some considerations in

applying instructional media in order not to face many difficulties in the teachers' activities during teaching and learning process in the classroom. In addition, the instructional media should be easy to prepare and easy to organize. They should be interesting and give enlargement to an adequate amount of language (Wright, 1992).

The English teachers can employ pictures as their instructional aids in the teaching of writing. Pictures can translate an abstract idea into a more realistic form and they are inexpensive (Suyanto, 1999: 21). The pictures are appropriate for EFL learners because they are easy to prepare, easy to organize and interesting to the students. In the teaching and learning process, the use of pictures is aimed to make the process of teaching and learning more effective. Wright (1992) explained that pictures could play a role in motivating the students. Pictures can also provide a stimulating focus for students' attention, a variety of tasks, and a shared experience (Raimes, 1983: 27). From those statements, it is obvious that pictures could be used as media to teach writing especially in helping the students to express the ideas in the written form.

Short essays or composition writing is one of writing activities that can be used by the teachers to teach writing (Gebhard, 2000:226). In writing short essays activity, the teachers teach students how to write short stories related to their past events and description of people, places or object. Likewise, the teaching of writing in Senior High School must be viewed as a continuing process. It means that teaching writing involves pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing (Hill, 1998: 68).

For those reasons above, the researcher would apply pictures to develop students' skill in writing a descriptive text. A descriptive text has a functional objective to describe a particular person, place, things (Depdiknas, 2006). The descriptive text is selected in this study because a descriptive text is considered difficult. The students studied about descriptive text on the previous grade but still, their writing must be improved.

Furthermore, "Put Yourself in the Picture" strategy which is adapted from Lindstromberg (2004: 132) is developed as a prewriting activity. Prewriting, which is typically characterized as a *planning* activity is very fundamental in

determining the students' success in drafting the entire text. This stage consists of three stages called generating ideas, focusing, and structuring (White & Arndt, 1991 cited by Widiati & Cahyono, 2006:141) which enable the students to identify any materials related to the topic they are going to write.

“Put Yourself in the Picture” is one of an appropriate strategy to solve the students' problem in writing descriptive texts. This strategy can guide the students to generate ideas into a meaningful composition. By placing themselves in the pictures, the students will get involved indirectly. They will express their imagination freely as if they were in the pictures. Then, the students will easily recognize the vocabulary items around their positions. Therefore, this condition will stimulate the students to construct various sentences related to the pictures and the topic discussed.

Considering the benefits of “Put Yourself in the Picture” strategy, the researcher is interested in applying this strategy to develop the students' writing ability at SMA YPPI-II Surabaya through an action research.

## **METHOD**

The design of this research was action research since this research is carried out in order to understand, to evaluate and then to modify, in order to improve educational program (Bassey, 1998 cited in Koshy, 2005: 8). This research was focused on the teaching and learning activities in the classroom. This action was designed to develop the students' writing ability through “Put Yourself in the Picture” strategy. The successful action research involves collaboration (Fang, 2007). It means that we need to collaborate with other teachers in conducting action research. Therefore, in this research the researcher was the practitioner and the other teacher acted as an observer.

The action research follows the cyclical process proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (2000:595) cited in Koshy (2005: 4), which comprises four steps: (1) planning the action, (2) implementing the action, (3) observing the action, and (4) reflecting.

In the planning stage, the researcher and her observer made a careful action preparation prior to the implementation of the action based on the result of the

preliminary study. The preparation consisted of teaching strategy, the lesson plan and (c) the criteria of success. The success criteria encompassed first, the students are able to write a final draft. It is indicated from the data found in the students' sheet. The improvement intended is that the students' average score on writing skill will increase at least the same or more than the minimum passing standard. The minimum passing standard of the second year students of SMA YPPI-II is 65. The scoring is based on the analytical scoring rubric proposed by Cohen (1994: 328-329) According to Cohen (1994), the analytical score can provide feedback to students on specific aspects of their writing and it gives teachers diagnostic information for planning instruction. Second, the students are able to make good improvement in the teaching and learning process. The improvement can be seen when the students participate actively and enjoy the process of writing. It means that the students enjoy doing the writing tasks given by the teacher and feel that the "Put Yourself in the Picture" strategy can help them construct better compositions. To know the students' participation in the writing activities, they are observed during the implementation of the strategy. It is indicated by the data found in process of writing. If more than 70% students participate actively in the stage of prewriting, drafting, revising and editing, it is considered successful. The observer utilized the observation checklists and recorded the activities in field notes format. Then, to know whether the students are getting fun during the process of writing, the questionnaires were used.

In the implementation stage, the researcher took the role as a practitioner who taught writing descriptive texts based on the lesson plans by implementing the strategy, while the teacher acted as an observer. The implementation of the action was done in two cycles. Each cycle encompassed three meetings.

Observing was done during the implementation of the action. Observing is the process of recording and gathering data about any aspects or events which is occurring during implementation. The data obtained from the results of the writing final product, which were in the form of scores, were classified as quantitative data. Furthermore, the data gained from the students' involvement in writing activities were classified as qualitative data. The data were taken from some sources such as (1) the result of observation checklists and field notes about

the students' participation during the implementation of the strategy, (2) the result of questionnaire to find the students' response toward the implementation of the strategy, and (3) the students' final compositions.

In reflecting stage, all relevant data from implementation were analyzed and reviewed to examine whether the action was successful or not by matching the result of the observing stage with the criteria of success.

## **RESULTS**

“Put yourself in the Picture” strategy has proven effective to develop the students' writing ability in SMA YPPI-II. At the first cycle, the average score was 54.53. Then, at the second cycle, the average score for final draft was 68. The increase of the students' average score from the first cycle to the second cycle was 13.47 and the students' average score is greater than 65 in their final draft. Furthermore, it showed that out of 21 students, 80% (17 students) were involved actively in prewriting stage. Then, 15 students (73%) were active in the drafting phase. In the revising stage, 18 students (86%) were actively involved. And, most of the students (93%) were successfully involved in the editing period. Afterward, the students showed positive responses toward the implementation of “Put Yourself in the Picture” strategy. They enjoyed the writing process and recommended “Put Yourself in the Picture” strategy for the future writing activities.

## **DISCUSSION**

Based on the finding of this research, it is proved that “Put Yourself in the Picture” strategy is one of appropriate to teach descriptive texts and gives beneficial contribution in improving students' ability in writing. This strategy was implemented on the view of writing as process that consists of four stages, namely prewriting, drafting, revising and editing (Gebhard, 2000). Therefore, the teacher has to follow a particular procedure in implementing this strategy.

In the prewriting stage the teacher has to introduce to the students' apperception about the concepts by conducting brainstorming to lead the students to focus on the activities which will be done. The teacher should create the

appropriate activities to guide the students to generate ideas, exploring their own or other ideas, from pictures. It is in line with Seow's (2002:317) opinion prewriting activities can lead students in generating indefinite ideas and collecting information for writing. In this case, the students are involved by placing themselves in the picture and they are lead to make a list by answering leading questions "What can you see in the picture?" and "What do the people do in the picture?". From their lists, the students are guided to make sentences based on their position in the picture. Subsequently, in giving instruction and explanation, the teacher uses English and Indonesian. It is done in order to avoid misinterpretation and to facilitate the students in accomplishing the task more easily. Gebhard (2000: 79) stated that the students had the tendency to start working a task sooner when it was clear to them.

In the drafting stage, the students write the first drafts based on their sentences that they were made in the previous stage. It is supported by Gebhard (2000: 228) who stated that drafting is a process of jotting down the ideas that they have got in the pre writing. In this stage, the teacher has to facilitate the students to exploring their ideas freely without thinking greatly on grammar. This finding is in accordance with the idea stated by Smalley, et al., (2001: 8) that in the drafting stage, the writer may not exceedingly concern with the grammatical form but the writer should focus more on finding the ideas to be put in the paper. Brown (2001:347) stated that by reading and studying a variety of relevant models of texts, students can gain important insights about how they should write about the subject matter that they may become the topic of their writing. Before having students write their first drafts, the teacher gives a model paragraph then followed by the explanation. In this case, the teacher gives model on descriptive text followed by the enlightenment about generic structure and generic features (simple present tense, preposition, to be) of descriptive texts

In the revising stage, peer revising are done by exchanging their first drafts each other. In revising stage, the students were expected to help each other and to be responsible to their team and their own (Slavin, 1978 cited by Rasyid, 1999). The students are assigned to check their friends' drafts in terms of the spelling, choice of word and grammar. In terms of research finding, at first, the students got

difficulties in correcting their friends' work because there were no revising guidelines. Later on, in the second cycle, they could progressively revised their drafts or their friends' drafts in terms of the spelling, choice of words and grammar based on the teacher's guidance and revising guidelines. The finding of this research showed that having mini-conference could give positive impact on the students' drafts. At first, the students were reluctant to come to the teacher's desk, but later on they enjoyed the activities very much. As the result, in the second cycle, most of the students could work cooperatively by giving comments or suggestions although they were still in simple ones.

The last stage is editing. In this stage, the students has to work individually to re-write the first drafts in order to construct the final drafts based on the feedback from their friends and the teacher.

The finding of this study showed that the students' ability in writing had improved significantly. It could be examined on the students' final drafts which were evaluated by using Analytical Scoring Rubric adapted from Cohen (1994: 328-329). At preliminary study, the students' average score was 46.22. At the first cycle, the result of students' final writing achievement was 54.53 at average of 65 minimum mastery standard determined as criteria of success. Then, at the second cycle, the students' average score was greater 65 in their final draft. The result of students' average score was 68.

Dealing with the students' participation, the results of the researcher's and observer's observation obtained during the implementaion of "Put Yourself in the Picture" strategy in two cycles showed that the students' participation on teaching and learning process improved from the first cycle to the following cycle.

At first cycle, most of students did not participate actively in the teaching and learning process. Some students looked reluctant to come together with the others to share and discuss ideas. They did not give good responses. They were not actively involved in a group work and could not give meaningful contribution in the revising and the editing their first drafts to be a better drafts based on feedback from the friends and the teacher. In addition, their perception toward this strategy is in good level even though still there is negative viewpoint.



Finally, in the second cycle, most of the students had been enthusiastic, motivated, and actively involved in joining all the activities incorporated in the teaching and learning process using “Put Yourself in the Picture” strategy. Besides, they showed positive responses toward the implementation of “Put Yourself in the Picture” and recommended “Put Yourself in the Picture” strategy for the upcoming writing activities.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

Referring to the findings obtained during the implementation of “Put Yourself in the Picture” strategy in the two cycles, it can be inferred that the strategy that can be used effectively to develop ability to write descriptive texts, includes several steps as follows (1) leading students to the topic by giving some questions and showing a picture(s) related to the topic discussed, (2) introducing the strategy and distributing the pictures and the worksheet, (3) assigning the students to work in group, (4) informing students about the things they should do in their groups, (5) asking the students to place themselves in the picture and answering in a list the questions: “What can you see in the pictures?” and “What do the people do in the pictures?” (6) asking the students to make sentences based on their lists, (7) giving a model of descriptive texts and explaining generic structure and generic features (Simple Present Tense, Preposition) of descriptive texts, (8) assigning the students to write the first draft, (9) exchanging the works in group to get feedback by peer-revising (10) giving time to the students to do conference with the teacher, and (11) editing the first draft to make the final drafts.

Most of the students were active in joining the process of writing. Besides, they showed positive responses toward the implementation of “Put Yourself in the Picture” and recommended the use of “Put Yourself in the Picture” strategy for the future writing activities.

“Put Yourself in the Picture” strategy has some strengths in teaching and learning descriptive texts. First, the students’ drawings are easy to get and this gives a clear description about what the students’ knew about a certain topic. Second, it gives the students an easy way to generate the idea by placing

themselves in the picture. Third, it encourages the students to write without being afraid of making mistakes. Forth, it requires students to work cooperatively in order to solve their problems by giving feedbacks, suggestions, and comments. Finally, it encourages positive teacher feedback rather than judgmental comments.

With the research findings and discussion, the researcher offers some suggestions. The suggestions are addressed to the teachers and future researchers. It is suggested that “Put Yourself in the Picture” strategy to make the students feel enthusiastic and active in the process of writing. Yet, the teachers should focus on the followings aspects: (1) the lesson plans should be arranged in such away, (2) the pictures should be selected based on the students’ level and need, (3) the instruction in the worksheet should be presented clearly, and (4) The students should be grouped heterogeneously. Furthermore, the teachers should consider writing as a process to reach the expected outcome.

Future researchers, particularly those who are interested in applying “Put Yourself in the Picture” strategy in their research are suggested that they conduct action research in the teaching of writing of descriptive texts in the different level of education, for example, Vocational High School. Moreover, it is also suggested that future researchers conduct action research in the teaching of writing using different genres for instances, descriptive and recount texts.

## REFERENCES

- Brown, H. D. 2001. *Teaching by Principle: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*. New York: Longman.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2004. *Language Assessment: Principles and Language Classroom Practices*. White Plains, NY: Pearson Education.
- Cohen, A. D. 1994. *Assessing Language Ability in the classroom*. 2nd ed. Boston: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.
- Depdiknas. 2006. *Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan (School Based Curriculum)*. Jakarta: Depdiknas.
- Fang, Q. 2007. *Classroom Research and Action Research: Principles and Practice in EFL Classroom*. (Online), Vol 5, No 1, (<http://www.linguist.org.cn/doc/uc200701/uc20070109.pdf>, accessed on April 28, 2008)
- Gebhard, J. 2000. *Teaching English as a Foreign or Second Language: A Teacher Self-development and Methodology Guide*. Michigan: The University of Michigan Press.
- Hyland, K. 2003. *Second Language Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Khoirunnisa, R. 2007. *Using Process Oriented Approach to Improve the Writing Ability of the 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Students of SMP Negeri I Singosari*. Unpublished Thesis. Malang: Undergraduate Program State University of Malang.
- Koshy, V. 2005. *Action Research for Improving Practice: A Practical Guide*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.
- Lindstromberg, S. (Ed.). 2004. *Language Activities for Teenagers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Raimes, A. 1983. *Techniques in Teaching Writing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rasyid, F. 1999. *Teaching Argumentative Writing through Cooperative Learning*. Unpublished Thesis. Malang: Graduate Program of English, State University of Malang.
- Seow, A. 2002. The Writing Process and Process Writing. In J.C. Richard, & W.A. Renandya Willy (Eds.). *Methodology in Language Teaching: An Anthology of Current Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Smalley, R.L., Ruetten, M.K. & Kozyrev, J.R. 2001. *Refining Composition Skills: Rhetoric and Grammar. (5<sup>th</sup> Ed)*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
- Suyanto, K.K.E & Sukarnyana, I W. 2001. *Penelitian Tindakan Kelas (Classroom Action Research)*. Malang: Universitas Negeri Malang.
- Sundari, S. 2002. Improving Second Year Students' Writing Skill Through Pictures at SLTPN 3 Jember. *Lingua Franca*, 3(6), 23-32.
- Widiati, U. & Cahyono, B.Y. 2006. The Teaching of EFL Writing in the Indonesian Context: The State of The Art. *Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan*. 13(3), 139-150.
- Wright, A. 1992. *Pictures for Language Learning*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

