

USING MENTOR TEXTS TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' WRITING SKILLS

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to find out how mentor texts improved students' descriptive writing of year-10 students of SMAN 9 Pontianak. To achieve this goal, Classroom Action Research was conducted over two cycles. The participants of this study were 32 students in class X MIA 1. Observational checklists, field notes, and writing tests were used to collect data. The observational checklist and field notes revealed noticeable changes in both student and teacher behaviors during the instructional process. These alterations appear to enhance students' activeness and motivation, leading to improved writing skills. In addition, results from the writing test indicated that students improved their ability to identify and organize relevant information to describe a topic in their descriptive writings. Moreover, the activity provided from Read Works called article a-day increased students' vocabular and background knowledge. These outcomes suggest that mentor text is a medium for enhancing writing skill among year-10 students. Therefore, the researcher recommends that teachers use mentor text as a medium to help students improve their writing skills.

Keywords: mentor texts, descriptive writing, classroom action research

I. INTRODUCTION

Mastering writing is a fundamental skill in the English language that foreign-language students should acquire. In Kurikulum Merdeka, writing refers to the skill of effectively conveying thoughts, communicating ideas, showcasing creativity, and composing diverse types of written texts in a way that is both clear and understandable (Kemendikbud Ristek, 2022). One type of written text that Year-10 Indonesian students should learn is descriptive. It is also mentioned that one of the lesson objectives that should be achieved by students are they have to produce written multimodal descriptive texts about great athletes in accordance with the context and intended goals, the theme or the context of the lesson is about sports and athletes description (Hermawan et al., 2022).

However, based on observations conducted at SMAN 9 Pontianak, it was noted that two significant issues identified during the researcher's preliminary observation that hindered students from reaching the desired goal were lack of motivation and limited vocabulary that employed by year-10 students of MIA 1 at SMAN 9 Pontianak. This led the students to have some problems in producing the descriptive text, as outlined in Kurikulum Merdeka. Two of the absolute problems based on

the pre-observation conducted by the researcher was that detained the students from achieving the objective goal were the lack of motivation and limited vocabulary. According to the interview with the English teacher and students feedback, the instruction was textbook-focused, lacking diversity of texts, and engaging teaching-learning activity. These problems led the students to face difficulties furnishing comprehensive and precise details in their writing due to a lack of adequate information or resources to support their descriptions, resulted poor performance. Moreover, the students faced confusion in utilizing the present tense as the language feature for descriptive texts, particularly concerning subject-verb agreement.

To address the challenges, related to students' low motivation, limited vocabulary, and adequacy of materials, the researcher proposed using the mentor texts as media to improve students' descriptive writing skills. Mentor texts are resources or instruments utilized during instruction to assist students in enhancing their writing abilities, specifically in the realm of descriptive writing. Mentor texts is able to be additionally served as a tool for delving into particular genres, like dystopian literature, with the aim of inspiring and

assisting student writers (Middleton, B., 2020). Mentor texts are tools used in teaching to help students improve their writing skills, particularly in the area of descriptive writing. They act as examples for students to understand writing techniques, including the selection of words, the flow of sentences, and adherence to conventions (Lee et al., 2022). Cushman (2020) declared that using mentor texts as read-alouds can not only enhance comprehension, engage students, and help transform students' writing, but it can also help shape a culturally responsive classroom.

Mentor texts provide students with models of quality writing, which students can analyze and utilize in their own writing. They help students develop awareness of writing techniques and enhance their confidence, interest, and motivation in writing (Mcdowell, 2015). Using mentor texts to teach descriptive writing involves the teacher presenting students with selected texts that can be used as models to improve their descriptive writing. Exposure to the methods used by published authors to shape and structure their writing allows students to emulate their techniques and attain a level of writing excellence that they may not have otherwise achieved (Premont et al., 2017). This enables them to learn how to replicate form without copying the contents.

For this study, the mentor texts was sourced from ReadWorks, a website that offers free passages suitable for students at various levels of proficiency. These passages can be used to guide students through the writing process, from brainstorming to peer editing, and help them develop awareness of technique in writing descriptive text. One of the content types of ReadWorks is called Article a Day (AAD). It provides a collection of passages on the same topic, allowing users to access them. This helps researchers to verify that the texts align with the learning objectives for descriptive writing and are rich in descriptive language and vivid details, serving as a mentor for students to model. According to Rockman (2017), AAD schools demonstrated improvement in their English Language Arts (ELA) proficiency rates by 4.7 percentage points. This growth surpassed both the New York City (NYC) average of 1.4 percentage points and the NYC average for economically disadvantaged schools, which was 1.1 percentage points. Thus, in implementing the steps to teach descriptive writing using mentor texts, the researcher leveraged the ReadWorks collection to

carefully select texts aligned with learning objectives.

Meanwhile, the steps in using mentor texts to teach descriptive writing are also crucial. According to Holland, W (2012), the teacher should share the step of making as many comparisons as possible, taking into account both writing craft and content. As previously mentioned, the learning objectives for year-10 students include the ability to produce descriptive writing on sports topics, specifically focusing on athlete descriptions. Thus, chosen texts from ReadWorks that this study sourced would be about athletes. The passage discusses the use of descriptive writing to portray athletes, specifically focusing on two passages provided by AAD in ReadWorks. After selecting the mentor text, the next step is engaging in active noticing and level of support (Pytash & Morgan, 2014). The researcher selected these two passages for their study, and then engaged in a pre-reading discussion with the students to explore the purpose of descriptive writing, the impact of vivid language, and any relevant vocabulary or concepts within the text. In this step, there are two key elements come to the forefront: structure and the author's use of language. The goal of this discussion was to prepare the students for a deeper analysis of the chosen mentor text. The level of support means teachers facilitate understanding through demonstrations, employing a gradual release of responsibility model where the teacher takes the lead in noticing aspects of the text until students become adept at this new approach. Learning to write with mentor texts involves ongoing support and guidance to help students develop the skill of looking at writing in this analytical manner.

Given the numerous advantages that mentor texts offer to both students and teachers in the learning and teaching process, it's unsurprising that many researchers utilize mentor texts as a tool for teaching English as a foreign language. As stated by Sudhoff (2019), it was found that incorporating mentor texts ultimately elevated the caliber of student writing, and students successfully applied the acquired skills across various subjects. Another study conducted Herusatoto (2018), students' confidence, interest, and motivation in writing can be boosted by mentor texts. Furthermore, multimodal mentor texts could enhance teachers' familiarity which is crucial for the literacy development of both educators and their students (Mcdowell, 2015). Nevertheless, a majority of studies in this domain have not specifically addressed the utilization of mentor texts in

instructing descriptive text within the EFL context. Hence, this study makes a substantial contribution to research by showcasing mentor texts as a

fundamental tool in the teaching and learning process

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

With the goal of improving students' and teachers' reading comprehension of report texts, the most fitting research method to employ is Classroom Action Research (CAR). CAR is a teacher-led strategy that focuses on resolving classroom issues that have been identified or recognized (Burns, 2010). This approach allows teachers to investigate a particular problem or subject relevant to their professional setting, with the aim of addressing a practical and unique challenge within the school environment.

The research questions of this study were “how did the use of mentor texts improve students descriptive writing?” and “how did the use of mentor texts improve students’ ability of using simple present tense in writing descriptive text?” Thus, the most appropriate research method for the writer was Classroom Action Research (CAR). This CAR was conducted in two cycles on X MIA 1 students of SMAN 9 Pontianak. In the initial stage of the CAR process, the researcher commenced planning the action. Collaborating with the teacher, the researcher devised a lesson plan for a teaching and learning activity, which was rooted in the Genre-based approach. This lesson plan was intended for the year-10 MIA 1 students of SMA Negeri 9 Pontianak, and it concentrated on employing mentor texts as a teaching medium to instruct descriptive writing. The lesson plan encompassed instructional objectives, teaching materials, teaching procedures, assessment procedures, and media for the teaching activity.

In the action stage of CAR, the researcher and teacher started to apply the lesson plan which was already designed. In the Genre-based approach, there were building knowledge of the text, modelling of the text, joint construction of the text, and independent construction that were implemented by the researcher in each cycle. In the observing stage of CAR, the researcher conducted observations of teaching and learning activities, including the interactions between teachers and students. After collecting data from these activities, the researcher analyzed it. In the next stage, the researcher collaborated with the teacher to reflect on the analyzed data and determine whether another cycle of activities was necessary.

This study was carried out among the year-10 students of SMAN 9 Pontianak, specifically those enrolled in class X MIA 1, which comprised of 32 students. The researcher employed observation as the method of data collection, with the aim of describing the students' and teacher's activities during the teaching and learning process through the utilization of mentor texts. The researcher in this study used various tools, including observation checklists, field notes, and writing performance, as secondary data sources. The observation checklist was used to collect data during teaching and learning sessions that featured an educative cartoon film. The researcher observed both the students' and teacher's activities in the classroom, evaluating the fulfillment of each criterion indicator. Field notes were taken to record important observations during the teaching and learning process, covering teacher-student interactions and the impact of mentor texts on students' writing improvement. Writing performance served as secondary data, providing insights into students' writing abilities in front of the classroom after being exposed to mentor texts. In each cycle, the teacher showed the mentor texts, and students were required to individually present their writing to the class. The researcher observed and described the students' writing performance, aiming to assess whether behavioral changes influenced their improvement in writing before the class. Furthermore, the researcher used qualitative data analysis to examine the outcomes. The constant comparative method was employed to analyze the qualitative data, allowing for a thorough examination of the observed results.

The researcher in this study grouped the data into categories based on student activity, teacher activity, and the impact of mentor texts on student writing. The data were examined to observe any changes in behavior and evaluate how it affected students' writing improvement. Finally, the researcher analyzed the data from observational checklists, field notes, and writing performance to determine whether mentor texts had a positive effect on students' writing. In cases where there was no behavior change during the teaching and learning process, the researcher and teacher would revise the plan for the next cycle to address the issue. When behavior change was evident, students were more focused and enthusiastic during the teaching and learning process, experienced fewer writing

challenges, and displayed less tension while composing in class.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The use of mentor texts in teaching English improved students' motivation and activeness. Observation checklists, field notes, and writing performances revealed that students became more focused and attentive during lessons when mentor texts were used as an additional supporting medium. This was because mentor texts offered a dynamic and engaging combination of written content, images, and formatting that appealed to different learning styles. Moreover, students' motivation in individual writing improved when they had a clear purpose and understanding of the lesson's goals. The teacher's provision of clear instructions and modeling also boosted students' confidence. As a result, mentor texts were recognized as valuable supporting media in teaching English, contributing to increased focus and attention in the classroom. The findings indicated that mentor texts could effectively enhance both enthusiasm and confidence, making them a beneficial tool in English language teaching.

During the initial stage of building knowledge about the text, the teacher employed a visual aid by displaying a picture of athlete LeBron James engaging in basketball-related activity. This aimed to tap into the students' prior knowledge and set the stage for the upcoming lesson. Subsequently, the teacher read the selected mentor text aloud, emphasizing the intricate use of descriptive language, sensory details, and imagery crafted by the author. The ensuing discussion focused on dissecting the key elements of descriptive writing present in the mentor text, with a particular emphasis on identifying vivid adjectives and ensuring verb agreement. Moving on to the modeling phase, students actively participated in an interactive analysis of the mentor text. The teacher guided them through a breakdown of specific sentences or paragraphs, fostering discussions about the author's deliberate choices. To enhance engagement, students were prompted to identify and highlight instances of descriptive language within the text, utilizing various colored markers or digital tools for this analytical activity. The class also engaged in facilitated discussions about the profound impact of descriptive language on the reader's overall experience. In the joint construction phase, the class transitioned into smaller groups, each receiving a distinct mentor text. Students were divided into groups and assigned a mentor text to

inspire them in crafting a descriptive paragraph or short passage. The focus was on developing creativity and using descriptive language to vividly convey their thoughts. This activity aimed to help students apply the techniques learned from analyzing the mentor text and deepen their understanding of descriptive writing. In the independent portion, students were asked to write a descriptive passage about their favorite athletes, incorporating elements from the mentor text that resonated with them and adapting those techniques to their own writing.

By incorporating a genre-based approach with the use of mentor texts, students' active engagement and proficiency in writing descriptive texts were considerably improved. The genre of descriptive writing was first introduced by explaining its definition and providing examples, with a focus on key features such as vivid adjectives, sensory details, and precise language. Mentor texts were carefully chosen to demonstrate these characteristics, serving as prime examples for students to analyze and emulate. Collaborative analyses of the mentor texts involved breaking down specific passages or paragraphs to identify the use of descriptive language. Facilitated class discussions were conducted to explore the impact of descriptive elements on the overall quality of the text, encouraging students to share their observations and interpretations. The sentence can be rephrased as follows to improve its language quality and clarity: The use of interactive activities encouraged students to identify and highlight instances of descriptive language in the mentor texts. These activities utilized tools such as colored markers or digital platforms for visual engagement. Afterward, the class was divided into small groups, with each group assigned a different mentor text from within the chosen descriptive writing genre. The groups collaboratively explored their assigned mentor texts, focusing on how descriptive elements were used to create immersive and vivid experiences. During guided modeling sessions, the entire class engaged in a detailed analysis of specific sentences or paragraphs from the mentor texts, delving into the author's choices and their intended impact on the reader. This was followed by a shared writing experience where the class collaboratively worked on crafting a descriptive passage, drawing inspiration from the mentor texts. Individual writing tasks were then assigned, requiring students to produce their own descriptive

texts within the chosen genre, with a focus on applying the lessons learned from the mentor texts.

To foster a collaborative environment, peer review sessions were implemented, where students exchanged their written pieces and provided constructive feedback based on the principles observed in the mentor texts. The activity concluded with a reflection and discussion session, allowing students to share their experiences, challenges, and insights gained during the process of writing descriptive texts. This genre-based approach, supported by mentor texts, actively involved students in the learning process and provided practical exercises to enhance their descriptive writing skills.

The enhanced writing skills evident in students' performance, as well as the data collected by the teacher, validate the effectiveness of using mentor texts to teach descriptive writing. This approach, which fosters increased student activity and motivation, has proven to be particularly engaging and conducive to focused participation in the teaching and learning process. The students' heightened activeness and motivation facilitate a smoother delivery of instruction by the teacher, leading to improved mean scores across each cycle. In the initial cycle, the mean score was 75.53 (average), while in the second cycle, it improved to 87.08 (good to excellent). These results suggest that the use of mentor texts can not only improve students' writing skills but also contribute to their overall academic performance.

The research findings showed a noticeable shift in students' behavior during the instructional process when using mentor texts. This shift was observed in their activity and motivation in their writing abilities, which aligns with the study conducted by Lisa (2019,) when students feel involved and can relate to the text, they become more engaged in learning. The goal for older students should be to find their own text, while teachers can model for them. Mentor texts provide clear examples and understanding of good writing, which is crucial for students to become proficient writers. Furthermore, mentor texts can enhance students' critical thinking skills by inviting them to observe, describe, compare, connect, question, investigate, and explore different viewpoints. By studying mentor texts, students can learn from other writers and understand the various decisions made in crafting texts. In summary, mentor texts can be a valuable resource for improving students' engagement and critical

thinking skills in the classroom. The classroom environment created by using mentor texts as supportive learning tools encourages discussions that promote peer interaction, collaborative learning, and a sense of shared exploration. This atmosphere is characterized by cooperation and mutual discovery, allowing students to explore their strengths and areas for improvement, as well as the strategies that work best for them at various stages of the writing process. By engaging in these creative and exploratory activities, students feel empowered to develop their unique writing styles, fostering a sense of creativity and ownership. This was also in line with statement from Ünveren & Karakuş (2020) about constructivism, they said that mentor texts can employ constructivist teaching strategies to foster learning and create a dynamic learning environment for students. They can act as facilitators, models, coaches, and scaffolders in their classes, providing a supportive and engaging atmosphere for student development.

The use of mentor text led to an improvement in students' motivation, as evidenced by their continued efforts towards achieving their goals in the teaching and learning process, especially when completing their drafts of descriptive writing. Despite some initial confusion with the use of simple present tense, students remained enthusiastic and persistent in their pursuit of the correct verb agreement with their factual descriptions. Data collection revealed that students' intensity levels varied, with female students generally displaying greater intensity through regular attendance, participation in discussions, and positive behavior. However, this does not imply that male students lacked intensity; rather, some of them had prior knowledge and ability in English without putting in much effort.

The use of mentor texts resulted in an improvement in students' ability to write factual descriptions, as evidenced by their increased engagement during the analysis of present tense sentence patterns in the texts from Readworks. Additionally, many students actively participated when the teacher asked them about the sentence patterns and noun phrases with adjectives used in their peers' factual descriptions. The students' heightened engagement during the examination of present tense sentence structures emphasized the influence of mentor texts on their comprehension and application of grammatical concepts. By delving into the intricacies of sentence patterns,

students not only demonstrated a deeper understanding of the material but also displayed a heightened enthusiasm for exploring the nuances of descriptive writing. Furthermore, the collaborative aspect of the analysis, wherein students engaged with their peers' descriptive writings, created a dynamic learning environment. This interactive approach not only reinforced the understanding of present tense sentence patterns but also encouraged students to critically evaluate and appreciate the diverse writing styles within the classroom. In essence, the use of mentor texts not only improved individual writing skills but also fostered a sense of shared exploration and learning among the students.

Additionally, the writer discovered some unexpected outcomes while monitoring the teaching and learning process. It was revealed that the connection between the teacher and students was more robust. When using mentor texts, students were granted substantial autonomy in investigating the athletes-related mentor texts provided by ReadWorks. Consequently, their curiosity grew as they delved deeper into the material. As the students' curiosity increased, the teacher became more inspired to address their inquiries and provide confirmation, which in turn strengthened the relationship between them. This enhanced relationship proved to be more potent in influencing positive changes in a student's behavior.

The use of mentor texts, particularly those centered on athletes from ReadWorks, granted students a significant degree of autonomy as they delved into the provided materials. This autonomy, combined with the engaging nature of the mentor texts, ignited a heightened sense of curiosity among students, leading them to explore the content more deeply. The resulting curiosity of students had a noteworthy impact on the teacher-student relationship, fostering a more robust connection between them. As the teacher was fueled by the students' enthusiasm and questions, they found new inspiration to address inquiries and offer confirmations, creating a positive feedback loop. This reciprocal interaction not only enriched the learning experience but also strengthened the bond between the teacher and students. The enhanced relationship between the teacher and students served as a potent catalyst for positive changes in student behavior. The newfound autonomy and curiosity cultivated through the use of mentor texts contributed to a more engaged and participative student body. Students demonstrated a proactive

approach to their learning, actively seeking information and exhibiting a heightened level of interest in the subject matter. The unexpected positive outcomes highlighted the multifaceted benefits of integrating mentor texts into the teaching strategy. Beyond their role in enhancing specific writing skills, mentor texts played a pivotal role in fostering a collaborative and dynamic learning environment. The teacher-student relationship, fortified by the interactive exploration of mentor texts, became a driving force behind the positive behavioral shifts observed in students. As the teacher responded to students' inquiries and encouraged their exploration, a sense of partnership and shared enthusiasm permeated the learning atmosphere, creating an environment conducive to both academic and personal growth.

IV. CONCLUSION

Drawing from this research discussion, it can be inferred that the use of mentor texts has demonstrated encouraging outcomes in enhancing the descriptive writing skills of Year 10 MIA 1 students. One of the notable findings of this study is the considerable growth in student motivation. By actively participating in class activities, such as guided writing exercises where students imitate the descriptive elements observed in the mentor text, 'students have shown an increased interest in the subject matter. In conclusion, the academic performance of Year 10 MIA 1 students at SMAN 9 Pontianak for the 2022/2023 academic year improved due to the use of mentor texts as a teaching tool for descriptive writing. The implementation of mentor texts from ReadWorks as a learning resource provided students with the motivation to engage in self-paced learning and improved their comprehension of the course material. The passages from ReadWorks enhanced students' analytical skills and fostered critical thinking. This, in turn, made students more motivated and collaborative in class activities, allowing them to easily adopt effective techniques and successful strategies in their own writing. The improvement in student behavior made the teaching and learning process more effective and validated the action hypothesis presented.

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