



THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MARATHON TECHNIQUE IN IMPROVING STUDENTS' DESCRIPTIVE WRITING

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Abstract

This research was aimed to investigate whether or not Marathon technique gave impact on students' descriptive writing improvement. This research applied quantitative method with quasi-experimental research design. A total of 40 students of grade 9 of MTs Al-Islamiyah, Ciledug, participated as the samples in which 20 students were in the experimental class and the other 20 in controlled class. Both pretest and posttest were used as the instruments to collect the data. These data were analyzed statistically by using paired-sample t-test. The results of this statistical calculation showed that $(t_0) > \text{than } (t_t) = 2.81 > 1.76$ in the significance level of 5%. This explained that there was significant difference gained by groups of students taught with and without using Marathon technique. Therefore, this research concluded that Marathon technique affected students' descriptive text writing achievement.

Keywords: *descriptive text, Marathon technique, teaching and learning technique, writing skills*

Introduction

Indonesian students learn English as a foreign language in order to be able to use this language in various purposes both in spoken and written contexts. However, expressing ideas and thoughts in the form of writing is not an easy thing to do. Most of the students consider writing as the most challenging skill among the other three; speaking, reading and listening. As Ling (2016) claimed that writing is a multi-complex activity. Thus, Moses & Mohamad (2019) said that ESL teachers, nowadays, encounter major issues in developing students' writing ability.

Hayes & Flower (1980) cited by Cer (2019), explained that writing is a complex

process as it is one of the necessary skills to generate the symbols and signs required to express our emotions and thoughts. But in the context of English learning, the ways the students shape their minds to be conveyed into written sentences require more elements rather than just building sentences. The students should possess sufficient vocabulary, grammar knowledge, and sentence structures on how one sentence to another and or one paragraph to another should be coherent and cohesive.

According to Graham (2019), since writing is a complex skill that does not develop naturally, students should get enough instruction and practice to master

it. Purcell, Suchanan, and Friedrich (2013) reported in their paper that a survey of 2,462 Advanced Placement (AP) and National Writing Project (NWP) revealed that teachers find digital technologies as helpful instruments to teach writing to middle and high school students. These teachers opined that teen students tend to be more expressive and creative in writing while they were facilitated by digital technologies as media used in the teaching and learning process. Utilizing digital technologies media encouraged these teens to write more often.

There are many techniques that can be used in teaching and learning writing, such as: using pictures, presentation, POW + TREE, POW+W2H, TIDE, STOP and DARE, Mind-mapping, and Marathon. Among these techniques, Marathon seems to be less researched particularly in writing skills. Therefore, the authors intended to fill this gap by conducting a research work on descriptive writing skills through the use of Marathon technique.

Writing with Marathon technique is the activity of writing which involves several hours of time in different places. This type of writing technique is simple, powerful and adaptable. Martens (2013) said that writing in Marathon is simple but powerful. Small groups of writers move through landscape together, writing and sharing along the way for a class period, an afternoon, a day, or even longer. Marathon technique in writing was firstly conceptualized by Goldberg (2015) who explained that in this type of writing, everyone in the agrees to devote their time during the process of accomplishing a writing. For example, members of the groups decide to schedule 10-minute writing session, twenty minute and or a half hour around the writing.

Some students had difficulty in making sentences in descriptive writing. The lack of vocabulary that they mastered

made it difficult for them to make sentences. However, they need not to worry since in Marathon technique they will work together with their friends like in a cooperative learning.

Inspired by Cooperative Language Teaching (CLT) theory and Collaborative Learning (CL), Marathon technique is an approach that makes most of grouping activities in the classrooms by involving pairs and groups of students. All cooperative learning techniques share the concept of learning as a team and being accountable for students' team-mates and their own learning.

Cooperative learning is a type of active learning students tackle in small groups to complete specific tasks assigned by the teacher. The concept of cooperative work, as well as student team learning methods, emphasize the use of team goals and team success, which can only be achieved if all team members learn the objectives being taught. In other words, the students' tasks are not to work as a group, but to learn something as a group. Cooperative learning models can be used to teach writing in some cases. Team pair solo and round table or write round are two examples of learning in teaching writing. Cooperative learning has been taught in some school subjects. It is advantageous for us to teach students about teamwork and group responsibilities.

The advantages of cooperative learning in the classroom. It has the potential to improve student-faculty interaction, student-student interaction, information retention, higher-level thinking skills, attitudes toward the subject, motivation to learn it, and teamwork. The most important benefit is that team or group learning can improve both interpersonal and communication skills. Cooperative learning techniques require students to think and speak independently

while also sharing with their peers. It demonstrates their ability to convey their message using both verbal and nonverbal communication. Cooperative learning aimed to accomplish the following: (1) Raise students' achievement, (2) Assist teachers in developing positive relationships among students through group discussions, (3) Provide students with experiences for cognitive development, healthy social, and psychological development, and (4) Replace a competitive organizational structure with a team-based and high-performance organizational structure.

Marathon, according to Brooke (2015:10), helps teachers and students step outside of their regular roles and into the roles of writers. For many marathon participants, claiming this identity is critical. Marathons typically begin with a teacher or facilitator asking participants to turn to one another and say, "I am a writer," emphasizing the importance of claiming one's identity as a writer. By far, the most powerful benefit of the writing marathon for students is embracing their identities as writers. Learning to speak up through their writers' voices is frequently the turning point that opens the door to learning many other things about writing and place—speaking against, for, and with their places and communities.

The procedures for using Marathon technique to teach writing are: (1) The teacher divides the class into groups of 5-7 people, (2) the teacher decides what topic to use and writes the first sentence on the white board, (3) all of the groups continue to write the sentence from the first sentence until the end, (4) the teacher gives the students fifteen minutes to prepare a descriptive text, (5) if it is completed, the students must exchange their results with other groups, and (6) the teacher selects one student from each

group as a leader to come to the front of class and write.

There are some advantages of the use of Marathon Technique in teaching writing, as following: (1) Make students enthusiastic or active in learning, (2) it allows students to think more creatively and try to provide stronger and better analytics in the group, and also permits students to look at subject matter from different perspectives, (3) everyone in the groups expresses their opinions, and this makes the students more aware of different opinions, and (4) is effective in terms of solving critical problems.

There is no doubt that group work requires some yielding of control to the students. In numerous cultures, students are indeed primed to be under the complete control and authority of the teacher, and forum work therefore is a very strange activity to engage in. There are some disadvantages of the use of Marathon technique in teaching writing, as following: (1) Sometimes there was no opportunity to draw conclusions because some students spoke more than others in class (2) Some students are very active, some students are very verbal, and other students are very shy, and (3) Sometimes the discussions were long and non-subject matters were raised in the class.

Referring to the background above, the authors formulated their research question as: "Does the implementation of Marathon technique affect students' descriptive writing skills?" This study aimed to scrutinize further the effectiveness of Marathon technique in improving students' descriptive writing skills. The authors believed that this study would give positive contributions to English teachers and also English students who face problems in writing.

Method

In this study, the method used was quantitative method. Quantitative method involves the process of collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and writing the research in numbers results. A quantitative methodology used to determine whether, and to what degree, a relationship exists between two or more variables within a population or a sample (Apuke, 2017). In this study, true experiment was applied as the research design to find out the effectiveness of using variable X (Marathon Technique) on variable Y (Descriptive Writing Skills), with two groups; experimental and controlled classes.

The population of this study were two classes of 40 students registered at grade 9 of MTs A-Islamiyah. These students were grouped into 8 in which each group consisted of 5 students to be treated as the participants of this study. The research itself was carried out in odd semester, academic year of 2023/2024, for 8 meetings including the administration of pre-test and post-test.

In collecting the data, both pre-test and post-test required the students to write and describe an image, randomly taken from their English text-book (curriculum 2013). The time given for them to finish the writing was 45 minutes. A writing rubric of Hughes (2018) used to assess students' pretest and posttest of writing. In this rubric, 5 aspects of writing are described as the indicators to reach certain criteria/category of writing proficiency, namely: content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, mechanics.

By referring to this writing rubric, the authors firstly assessed each student's writing task in the two tests and then calculated the average score gained by the students in each test. The different results gained in the two tests determined whether there was different achievement achieved by the students in the experimental group and in controlled

group. In order to answer the research question aforementioned in the introduction section above, statistical analysis of paired-sample test was used

In accordance to this, the statistical hypotheses were firstly formulated; (H_0): Marathon technique affects students' descriptive writing skill; (H_a): Marathon technique does not affect students' descriptive writing skill.

Before the students were given post-test, the authors carried out the treatment for 6 meetings to introduce Marathon technique and explained how this technique provides fun and effective learning strategy for students to practice their descriptive writing skills. Therefore, the results of their tests were used to measure the successfulness of Marathon technique.

Findings and Discussion

Based on the collected data taken from 8 groups in experimental class, it could be explained that the mean of pre-test before using Marathon technique in learning writing descriptive text was 60.375 with the lowest score of pre-test was 50 and the highest score of pre-test was 87. Meanwhile, the mean of post-test after the treatment of Marathon technique in learning writing descriptive text was 83.125 with the lowest score of post-test of 70 and the highest score of post-test of 97. Thus, the mean score gained was 22.25.

Meanwhile, the description of students score in controlled class taken from 8 groups revealed that the mean of pre-test was 70.75 with the lowest score of pre-test of 50 and the highest score of pre-test of 84. Meanwhile, the mean of post-test after teaching writing descriptive text by using conventional technique was 78.125 with the lowest score of post-test of 55 and the highest score of post-test of

89. Thus, the mean gained score was 7.375.

The findings of the statistical calculation of paired sample t-test showed the following results:

Table 1. Paired sample test results

		Paired Samples Test							
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pre-Test Experimen- Post-Test Experimen	-22.250	7.498	2.651	-28.518	-15.982	-8.384	7	.000
Pair 2	Pre-Test Control- Post- Test Control	-7.375	4.104	1.451	-10.806	-3.944	-5.083	7	.001

Based on the table above, paired-sample gained was 0.000 in the significant level of 5% (0.05), hence it showed that the students achieved significant differences before and after the research ($0.00 < 0.05$).

Besides, the results of the mean score in each class (the experimental and the controlled class) obtained t-observation (t_o) of 2.81, while t-table (t_t) of df was 14. The significance level of 5% was 1.76 which means t-observation (t_o) was higher than t- table (t_t). Therefore, the alternative hypothesis (H_a) was accepted and the null hypothesis (H_o) was rejected, because $t_o > t_t$ ($2.81 > 1.76$). Thus, there was significant difference between the students' score in learning writing descriptive text by using Marathon technique and the students' score in learning writing descriptive text without using Marathon technique. These results confirmed that Marathon technique gave impact to the improvement of 9th grade students of MTs Al-Islamiyah, Ciledug.

Conclusion

This research was aimed to prove the measure whether or not Marathon technique gave impact on 9th grade. The analysis data revealed that the students who were taught by using this technique (in experimental group) performed better than those who were taught by using conventional technique (controlled group) in which the average score reached by

experimental class was 22.25 while by the controlled class was 7.375.

The results of statistical calculation of paired-sample test showed that both experimental class and the controlled class obtained t-observation (t_o) of 2.81, t-table (t_t) of 1.76 at significance of 5%. It indicated that t- observation (t_o) was higher than t-table (t_t). Thus, the alternative hypothesis (H_a) was accepted and the null hypothesis (H_o) was rejected.

Therefore, this research concluded that there was significant difference between the students' score in learning writing descriptive text with and without using Marathon technique. This finding also confirmed that Marathon technique was proven to give significant impact to students' descriptive writing improvement.

Due to several limitations of this research, the authors suggest those who are willing to do the research under similar topic to involve more samples from various grades. Also, adding more variables to measure, such as gender, students' English proficiency, students' learning styles, etc., might give more varied research findings, hence they will give more contributions to the field of TEFL particularly in writing scope.

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