

Implementing Integrated Project Based Learning to Enhance Students' Writing Skill

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Abstract

Writing in English is important for vocational high school (SMK) students to prepare their future career so that they can compete with other job seekers both in Indonesia and other countries. However, the students find that writing is difficult to learn due to some cases: (1) they are less interested in it because it is not correlated with their major, (2) the limited time availability (3) the teaching learning process is less meaningful, and (4) they are lack of feedback due to the big number of students in one class. To overcome this problem, it is advisable to apply what so called integrated project based learning (PBL) by integrating writing to recount the project dealing with the students' major. This paper describes how the integrated PBL can enhance the students' writing skill through two main stages: (1) preparation stage. It is embodying grouping, determining the project work, determining the schedule, and learning the content as well as how to write a recount text in the classroom. (2) individual writing activity which covers (a) free writing; (b) drafting; (c) evaluating (peer reviewing and teacher learner conference); (d) revising; (e) post writing; (f) publishing in a social media; and (g) responding the social media reader's comment.

Keywords: writing, integrated project based learning.

The global era forces every economic sector including both local and international industries to communicate in English. It means that more non-native speakers widely use English as a means of communication in the interaction. Hence, the ability to communicate in English is a vital asset and usually becomes the main requirement for those who want to get better job. In line with the spirit of the revitalization of SMK (Vocational Education Training) which aims at improving the quality and competitiveness of the Indonesian human resources (President Instruction number 9 the year of 2016), the role of SMK is to prepare the middle level workers who are

capable to compete with other job seekers to enter job opportunities either in their own country or abroad.

As the middle level workers, they need to be able to simply communicate and comprehend meaning in the Intermediate level. It means that they have to be able to express themselves in handling their routine work in a general way. This capability seems enough for SMK graduate in order they are able to do their duties in their beginning of work (Directorate of Vocational School, 2017). They have to be able to communicate both in oral and written. It means that they have to be competence in the four English skills covering

listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Among the four skills, writing is considered the most difficult one to learn especially for foreign language learners. It demands many things in once. In the process of writing, learners apply their language skills to explore their ideas. They may get inspiration by reading any printed media or talking to people, in which they actually practice their reading, listening, and speaking skills. In the process of writing, they also challenged with their knowledge in grammar, vocabulary and mechanic as well in jotting their idea down. In short, the challenges are not merely in generating and organizing ideas, but also in translating the idea into a readable text with the appropriate language components (Richards and Renandya, 2002; Suyanto, 2007; Ekawati, 2015).

This difficulty is also experienced by the students of the year eleven of Agribusiness of Poultry 1 (XI ATU1) SMK Negeri 5 Jember (Vocational High School) at the first semester of 2017/2018 academic year shows very poor achievement in their English competency. Based on the preliminary study done in writing class, the students' writing Out of 33 students, 25 students (75%) of their writing telling about the holiday experience was hard to understand due to the very poor organization structure or the content, frequent grammatical errors disturbing comprehension, poor diction or vocabulary as well as the mechanic including the spelling.

The base line data above shows how ineffective the writing instruction is. Based on the teacher's reflection, it can be concluded that the causes are embodying: (1) students are less interested in writing because it is not correlated with their major. It seems that they have to learn the new more materials and it makes them reluctant due to the big number of subject they have to learn, (2) the limited time available. The English class which covers four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing is only done in one meeting with the duration of 135 minutes per week for the first

and second year students, and twice a week with the duration of 90 minutes each for the third year ones. Considering the limited time availability for English class, only a small number of English teachers who are willing to teach writing because it is considered times consuming activity. Teacher has to provide students enough time to guide along the process activity as written work needs much time to prepared and corrected or evaluated (Ekawati, 2015), (3) the teaching learning process is less meaningful. Students are lack of chance to use English by doing variety activities based on their need, experience, and interest as well. The English instruction does not meet the students' need related to the field of study they are majoring since teachers often used general instructional materials. It is based on the consideration that the national exam of English subject usually covers the general work field. Whereas, when we consider the principles of learning, teacher should actively engaged students in a meaningful learning. Hence, teacher must be creative in varying learning activity in order to achieve the learning objective. It is in line with Hudelson (1989) who suggests that writing class should be done as a part of learning experience, and (4) they are lack of feedback due to the big number of students in one class. English teachers tends to focus on the product rather than the process. It is done by explaining the topic to the students and asking them to write a short composition in certain time allotted after discussing the modeling text. Teacher gives the additional guidance if the student asks to. Finally the students' work is submitted to be graded without feedback as the output of the assessment.

To overcome this problem, teacher should consider the following things: (1) the content should be in line with the field the students are majoring. It enables them to easily jot their idea on the writing process because the schemata has been already in the students' mind, (2) teacher should provide enough time to guide students in the process

of writing, (3) students should write based on the idea they dig by themselves based on their real experience, (4) feedback should be available along the process by emphasizing on the message as well as the language feature, (5) the authenticity should be created by giving the students chance to create the text based on their interest.

Based on the aforementioned considerations, it seems that teacher has to find the effective English writing instruction which meets the need. As we know that English for vocational school has a central role in the development of intellectual, social and emotional aspects of students; it is also as a support of efficacy in learning the entire fields of study (Directorate of Vocational School, 2017). Therefore, the English instruction experienced by SMK students should be more focused on the using of English related to the field they are majoring rather than about the language. Hence, the students should also be equipped with the skills to use the language especially the terms or expressions related to the field they are majoring.

The Teaching of Writing in EFL Class

Taking into account the nature of writing which allows writers to explore thought and ideas, and make them visible and concrete, teacher should consider that writing encourages thinking and learning. When thoughts are written down, ideas can be examined, reconsidered, added to, rearranged and changed in order to have a good writing product. Hence, there must be a balance between the ends with the process of how the writer ends up writing is a process as well as product (Gaith, 2002).

The process approach emphasizes that students construct text independently. It can be said that students are text producers. Accordingly, teachers allow their students' time and opportunity to develop students' abilities to plan, define a rhetorical problem, and propose and evaluate solutions. Response

is crucial in assisting learners to move through the stages of the writing process, and various means of providing feedback are used, including teacher-student conferences, peer response, audio taped feedback, and reformulation (Hyland, 2003). Teachers in the process writing classroom plan activities to help students understand that writing by its nature is a process. Teachers also need to guide students through the writing process and help them develop effective writing strategies. It seems complicated due to the multiple stages students should engage. It may vary from a writer to others, yet every writer must deal with the stages of the writing process as the writer's individual and independent production (Seow, 2002). Gaith (2002) proposes four main stages, they are prewriting, planning, drafting, and post-writing while Seow (2002) points out the same number of stages which comprise planning, drafting, revising and editing. Richard and Renandya (2002) incorporate the four basic writing stages. They are planning, drafting (writing), revising (redrafting), and editing. Yet, they also add three other stages which are externally imposed on students by the teacher, namely responding (sharing), evaluating and post writing.

The two first models of writing process stages above seem very simple and do not take much time in getting students to concentrate on the process. They are suitable for the limited time writing class especially for writers who are in intermediate or advance learners. However, they are hard for the beginners who usually lack of experience in writing. They require some helpful steps to associate ideas and stimulate thinking before starting drafting. They also require evaluation from both peer and teacher to share their drafts with each other to invite discussion and receive helpful feedback for revision. Hence, the adaptation from those three models is needed. During the writing process, students are engaged in prewriting, first drafting, evaluating (which comprises peer review and teacher learner conference), revising and post-writing activities.

Why should Project Based Learning be Integrated?

Teaching writing is considered a thinking process in which learners develop their ideas freely and openly (Brown, 2001). Dealing with this statement, Richard and Renandya (2002) say that planning and teaching a course in writing can be a discouraging task since there are so many conflicting theories around and so many implementation factors to consider. Hence, teachers should be wise in adapting or adopting a particular approach in teaching writing for the sake of effectiveness. In the context of English writing instruction, Tesema (2005) states that project based learning (PBL) can give a positive impact on students' motivation in learning English as well as in developing their writing skills. It means that PBL, when well-planned, is a good way to motivate students to write because it offers the opportunity to match tasks with interesting topics that are relevant to the students. Furthermore, it is necessary for SMK students to have PBL to consolidate their vocational skills before entering work. Through PBL, students are provided with the representation of working life which allows them for the integration of theory and practice dealing with the field they are majoring. Therefore, it is necessary to integrate English class into this activity by asking the students to recount their experience in completing the project in the form of writing as the output. It is in line with Cahyono (2008) who states that PBL is an adoption of real-life issues, use of technology, collaboration, multi disciplinary components, long-term time frame, and outcomes-based.

The integration which is then called Integrated Project Based Learning (Integrated PBL) actually combines the writing class with vocational subject matter being taught. In this case, students are stimulated to use the target language in the form of writing recount text based on the students' experience in completing PBL. Integrating English writing learning in Project Based Learning enables students to use written English which is relevant with

their expertise competence by solving the problem which ends with creating a product as the output.

The recount written text is chosen as the output for the sake of preparing the students in writing a report of internship program at year XI in even semester. According to Agustin (2006), the characteristics of a recount text are three folds: (1) the social function is to retell past events for the purpose of informing or entertaining; (2) the generic structure or the text organization is started with orientation: provides the setting and introduces participants, and followed with events: tell what happened, in what sequence, and ended with re-orientation: optional-closure of events; (3) the lexico-grammatical features are focus on specific participants, use of material processes, circumstances of time and place, use of past tense, and focus on temporal sequence.

By implementing the integrated project based learning, which is actually the combination between the content based learning and the project based learning by focusing more on the language used, students are encouraged to learn writing in the field they are majoring. To implement this, the ten stages of integrated project based learning scenario proposed by Stoller (2002) can be considered. See Figure 1.

However, considering that writing recount text as the output, the scenario proposed by Stoller (2002) can be adapted as follows. The Integrated Project Based Learning can be determined in two main stages. The first one is preparation stage which covers some sequences of activities: (1) grouping. The students will work in groups for the sake of both doing the project work related the field they are majoring as well as getting information or data needed about the project for the writing activity. However, the writing activity itself must be done individually after the data has been obtained; (2) determining the project work dealing with the students' field they are majoring; (3) determining the consultation

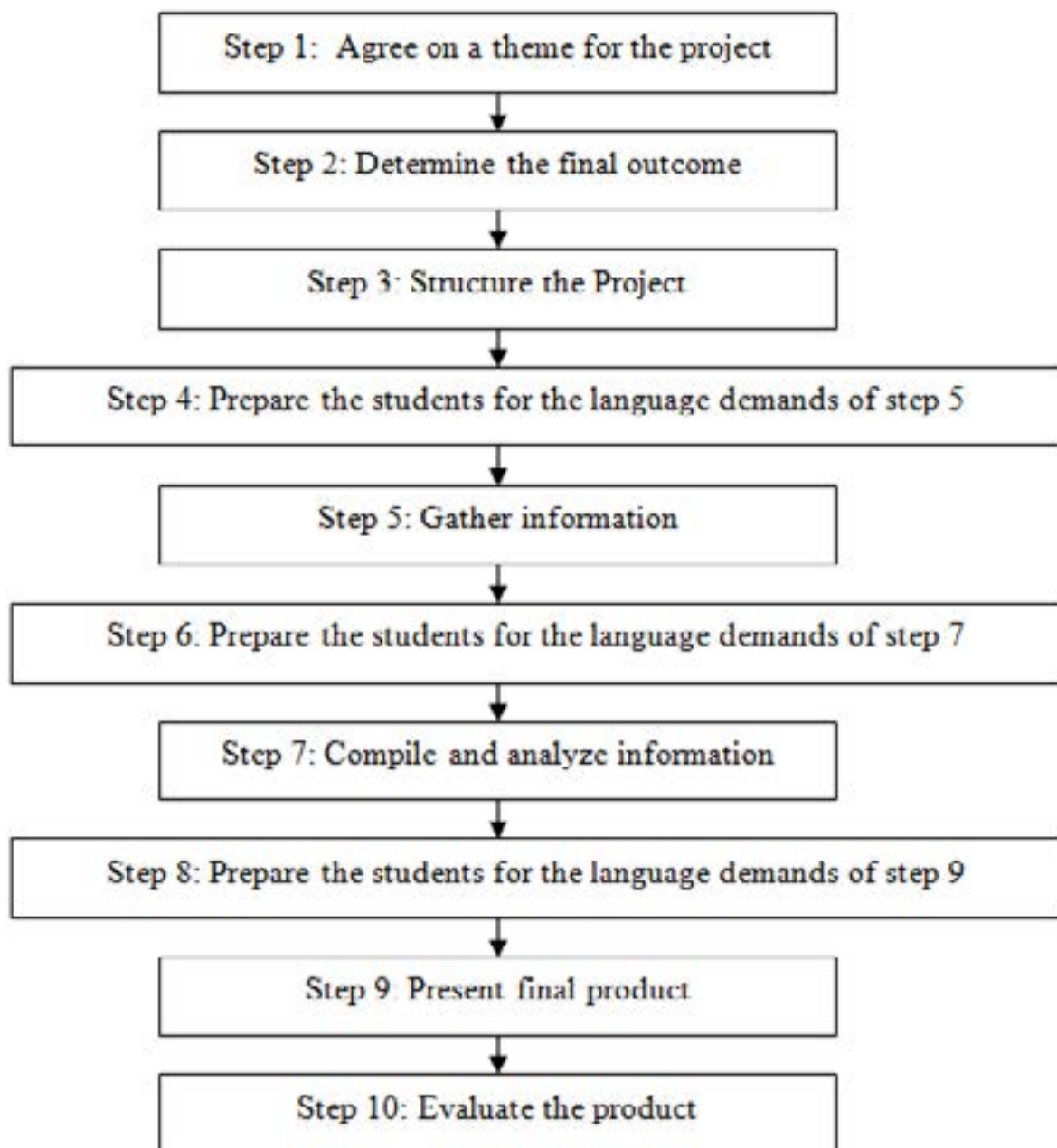


Figure 1. Developing a project in a Language Classroom (Stoller, 2002)

schedule for both the project and writing work; and (4) learning how to write recount texts in the classroom. This activity aims at preparing the language demand in order that they are able to write the recount text. It is started by analyzing the recount text model in a classroom discussion which is continued by doing the exercises provided by the teacher. It refers to

the famous statement proposed by Alexander (1975): "Nothing should be written before it has been read". Analyzing the text model enables students to deal with the five writing aspects covering the content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanic. Having the concept of how to write a recount text in groups of four, students are trained to write a

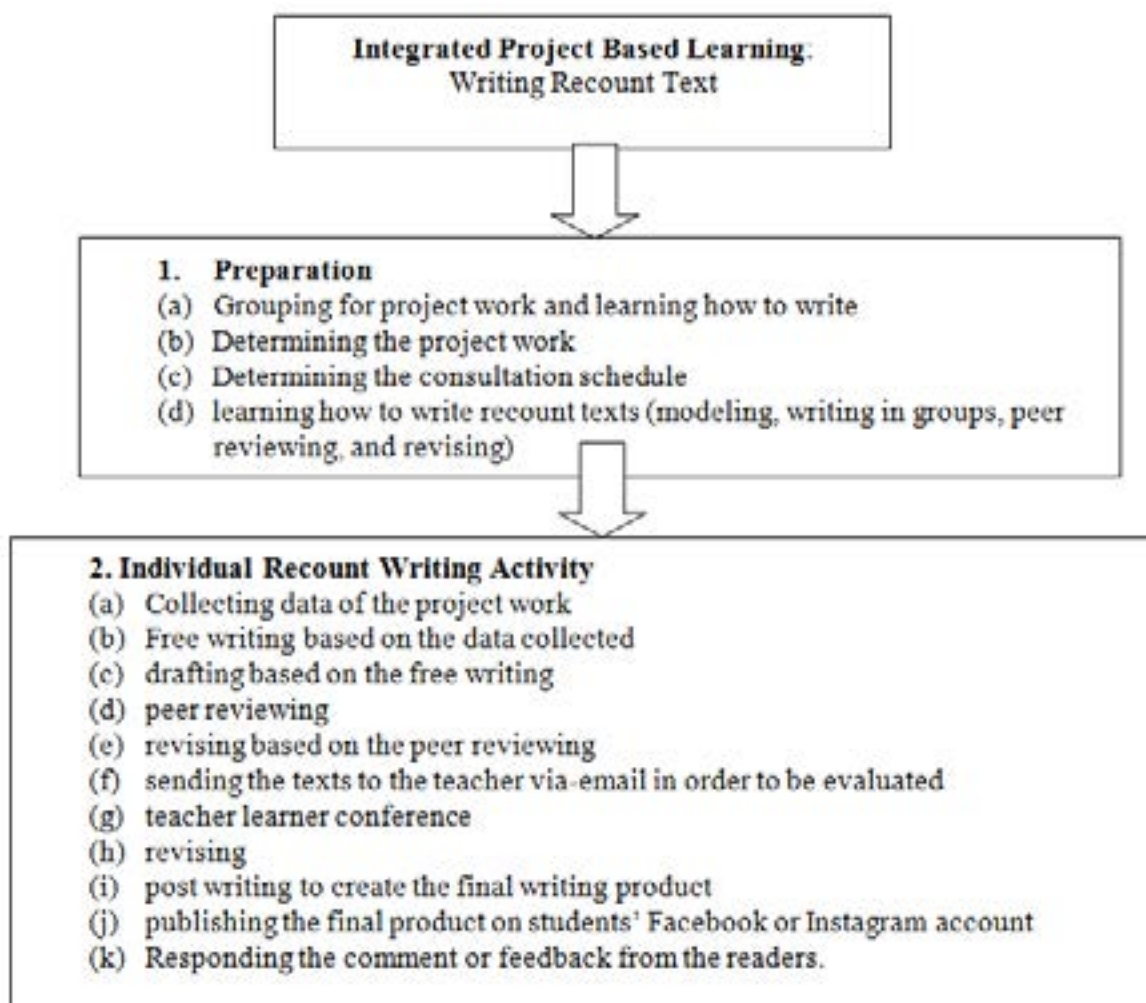


Figure 2. Ideas for Practical Implementation of Integrated PBL in Writing Recount Text

recount text based on picture series. In this phase, teacher's guidance is needed dealing with organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanic. To evaluate their text, by being helped by the teacher, they are asked to have peer group assessment.

The second main stage is individual recount writing activity. It covers two main activities: (1) collecting the data of the project work under the supervising of the subject matter teacher, (2) writing the recount text independently by adapting the writing process approach which comprises: a) prewriting to jot the students' idea based on the obtain data without being afraid of making mistake, b) drafting based on the prewriting activity.

In this stage, students need to consider the writing aspects including the content, text structure, the language feature, as well as the mechanic, c) evaluating in the forms of peer reviewing which deals with the activity of peer assessment or peer checking about the content, text organization, the language feature, as well as mechanic, and teacher learner conference, the face to face consultation based on the peer reviewing activity, d) revising based on the teacher learner conference, and e) post writing activities by completing with photos related to the project work to create the final writing product, and (g) publishing at the social media such as facebook or instagram which encourages students to work

harder to produce better writing due to their friends' comments. In short, the ideas how to practically implement the Integrated Project Based Learning in writing recount text can be seen in Figure 2.

Conclusion

Since the students need to deepen the field they are majoring as well as the English writing skill, Integrated Project based Learning is the alternative solution especially for vocational students whose learning time about English in the classroom are limited. The integration is between the project based learning and the English writing class by employing process writing approach. The Integrated PBL engages students in the use of the target language in the real world for real written communication. It is so challenging that the students are aroused to write appropriate recount text about completing the related project based learning. To implement it, teacher should collaborate with the subject matter teacher through following two main stages: (1) Preparation which is embodying grouping, determining the project work, determining the consultation schedule, and learning how to write a recount text in the classroom; (2) Individual Recount Writing Activity which covers (a) free writing; (b) drafting; (c) evaluating (peer reviewing and teacher learner conference); (d) revising; (e) post writing; (f) publishing in a social media; and (g) responding the social media reader's comment.

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