

# Using Collaborative Sensory Detail Chart to Increase Number of Content Words of Students' Descriptive Writing

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## ABSTRACT

This study promoted the use of sensory detail chart in collaborative learning as a strategy for more fluent writing. It aimed at investigating how the use of sensory detail chart in collaborative learning could increase the number of content words in students' descriptive writing. There are thirty students participated in a classroom action research (CAR) in two cycles. Students did a pre-test before the implementation and a post-test after each cycle. The tests results showed that number of content words in students' descriptive writing had increased by 62.44% overall. The increase in the second cycle was even higher. The results of the second post-test indicated that the number of content words in students' descriptive writing had increased by 138.17% overall. The researcher concluded that the use of sensory detail chart collaboratively has successfully increased the number of content words in the students' descriptive writing.

## KEYWORDS

Collaborative learning, sensory detail chart, five senses, descriptive writing, content words, Indonesia

## INTRODUCTION

EFL students commonly experience difficulty in learning the four language skills. As non-native speakers, they hardly adjust their mind, heart, and behavior to English language and its customs (Brown, 2000). These challenges consequently lead EFL teachers to appropriately innovate learning for students to overcome their struggles in learning the four language skills, especially writing. Thus, students need to enjoy and to be engaged in learning. It means that students are supposed to be entrusted, entailed, and alert physically, emotionally, and intellectually in what they are learning (Brown, 2000). Both EFL teacher and students are responsible for learning to be successfully founded to achieve its objectives.

Fluency in using the language orally and written becomes one of the objectives. Students also need to communicate effectively by giving clear arguments (Langan, 2013). It means that students need to supply his or her statement for specific reasons or details for them to be good writers. To produce good writing of any purpose, students need to earn some qualities of writing skill. Knowledge of the mechanical aspects of the writing becomes very important as the skill involves students' competence to coordinate cognitive, linguistic and psycho-motor processes (Westwood, 2008).

In this study, students are supposed to be competent writers of descriptive text. This type of writing is somehow special as it may appear in other kinds of texts, such as in recount, narrative and expository texts. Knapp & Watkins (2005) say that descriptive text is a basic function of any language system widely used across learning areas and in many text types. As a genre-based text, it carries its structure and grammatical features. Students need to know of those elements of descriptive writing to produce a qualified sort of text. The lack of students' knowledge of proper descriptive text has been a concern to the researcher, especially since she starts teaching writing subjects to her EFL students of tertiary level.

The knowledge on the text and the qualities of the good writing can help students to write fluently. One aspect of writing fluency is measured from the word quantities written in every minute (Abdel, (2009; Latief, 2008). In her study, the researcher considers writing fluency as the number of content words the students use in their writing in a given time. Content words are lexical words carrying important meaning or information to express the main idea in the sentences used in writing. They consist of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs.

To help her students to increase the number of content words in their writing, the researcher delivered an instruction by accommodating students with any activities to help them in generating ideas. EFL learners who produce poor writing have less "practice in generating ideas" (Liao & Wong, 2010). Therefore, to support that process of writing, the researcher used a collaborative strategy using a sensory detail chart to help students to brainstorm ideas before writing. Collaborative learning commonly is

carried out by dividing the students into small groups. This collaborative work aims to help students to gain more ideas organized in a sensory detail chart by exploring their five senses before they start writing individually. The use of sensory detail chart in collaborative learning is beneficial since it leads students to map their ideas. This activity stimulates students' creativity and imagination in producing more ideas, especially by exploring their five senses. Marpaung & Hambandima (2018) claims that "good writing employs all the senses." It means that students must be able to work on their ability to see, hear, smell, taste, and touch in writing a descriptive text.

The researcher expects that the result of this study could be another reference for future research related to the use of five senses which is organized in sensory detail chart of collaborative learning, especially in descriptive writing. The researcher delivered a classroom action research aiming at describing how the collaborative use of sensory detail chart increases the number of content words in students' descriptive writing. The research has been delivered by the following hypothesis: "The collaborative use of sensory detail chart increases the number of content words in terms of nouns, main verbs, adjectives and adverbs in the students' English descriptive writing."

## METHODOLOGY

The researcher conducted two cycles of classroom action research under a quantitative approach to describe the increase of number of content words in students' descriptive writing. She has managed the four-phase cycle suggested by Hall & Keynes (2005) which consisted of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. There were 30 students of her Writing class participated and divided into groups of four or five. They were given pre- and post-tests of descriptive writing tasks. The number of content words was measured from the number of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs used in their writing after doing the post-tests.

The success of this study was indicated by the increase in the number of content words produced by the students in their English descriptive writing. The number of content words students produced, the skillful they are in adding details in their descriptive writing. The increase in the number of content words and quality of the students' descriptive writing was measured with the formula recommended by Alawi (2011).

$$P = \frac{y_1 - y}{y} \times 100\%$$

P : Percentage of students' improvement

y : Pre- test result

y<sub>1</sub> : Post-test result of first cycle

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Cycle 1*

The first cycle of classroom action research was started by having an introduction on descriptive text writing and the strategy to be implemented. In this meeting, there were 4 students absent. Then, at the second meeting the first implementation of collaborative use of sensory detail chart was conducted and attended by 28 students. Procedures and indicators of success in the process as well as in the result of the first cycle are comprehensively explained as the followings.

After giving pre-test, the researcher designed a lesson to accommodate students in the collaborative use of sensory detail chart in writing a descriptive text. The lesson plan was prepared for two meetings in the first cycle. In the first meeting of Cycle 1, the researcher introduced the students to descriptive text, its purpose, generic structure, and language features. Some examples of the text were also analyzed to get more understanding. The second meeting was for delivering the strategy in which they had a group discussion on the exploration of their five senses to describe a place familiar to all members of the group. A copy sensory detail chart for each student and twelve pages of the vocabulary of the senses were distributed. In groups, students learned how to use SDC.

Second meeting also ran for 90 minutes which spent more time in the implementation of the strategy. The first activity, taking 15 minutes of the total time, was for grouping and reminding the students about some examples of five senses exploration in describing a topic. Then the researcher distributed a copy of sensory detail chart to each student in each group. The next activity occupied 60 minutes. It was for the implementation of the strategy by which students work together on the chart and explore their five senses. With the chart and a list of vocabulary senses, students in groups collaboratively share ideas of description by exploring their five senses. They noted down the points of description they have discussed in the chart.

During the implementation of the strategy, the researcher observed the students' interest, attention, and participation. In groups of five, all members tried to put their interest and attention on their collaborative work. Based on her observation during the implementation in the first cycle, the researcher found that students were actively participated in sharing their ideas of sensory-based description on the topic they had in each group. There were only one up to three students in each group who stayed passive. They waited for their friends to fill in the sensory detail chart so that they could copy the details of the description.

Moreover, not every student in each group was ready with any references recommended to be prepared and used during the learning. Each member of the group was supposed to provide him or herself with a list of senses vocabulary and dictionary to help the group consolidate the meaning of words listed in the vocabulary of senses. Only two or three members in each group had printed dictionaries. Some others were

accommodated themselves with dictionary application in their smartphone. The rest who did not have any references became less active and unable to contribute ideas in giving details to the description. They tended to depend on others who were active. They stayed passive in sharing ideas. Thus, they filled in their sensory detail chart by copying others'. However, the collaborative learning benefits the submissive students in gaining new knowledge and information as well as more details about the topic.

During collaborative learning, the researcher as the lecturer who delivered the instruction let the students work independently in groups after instructions were given. She monitored the learning activity in a certain distance for students to be more comfortable during the discussion. At times, she checked on the students whether or not they did the instructions as they should be. She also approached the groups when the representatives of the groups occasionally asked questions for more apparent instructions on the learning. Collaborative learning surely stimulated the students to talk with other students to get the same ideas in learning; especially in details they got by exploring their five senses.

After the implementation of the strategy in Cycle 1, the researcher reflected some important points for better implementation in the next cycle. What she reflected from the action in the first cycle was intended to find a way on how to enrich the students with more ideas for they could explore their five senses much more.

The first significant point was to reinforce the students to study the meaning of words listed in the vocabulary of senses individually before coming to the next cycle. The researcher also concerned with the use of the dictionary as their reference. The next point was motivating all students to be more actively engaged in the activity. Building more interest to the students in exploring the five senses by giving a more familiar topic became another point of intention to be done in Cycle 2.

As in Cycle 1, the students did not get a chance to present or share the result of their group discussion, the researcher decided to reduce the time of group discussion in the next implementation. Giving each group opportunity to share ideas to other groups could enrich all students' knowledge on the topic and would let them think more on what they could explore by using their five senses.

### *Cycle 2*

The second cycle of this classroom action research was conducted only for one meeting attended by 26 students. It means that 4 students were absent during the implementation of the strategy. In the following meeting, post-test in cycle 2 was held and attended by 28 students with 2 students not in attendance.

After reflecting from the first cycle, the researcher set a plan for conducting the second cycle. She reshuffled the group members based on the result students attained in pre- and post-test 1. She chose six students who got the highest score in pre-test to be the new group leaders. The researcher expected that each leader could lead and encourage his or her group members to be more active and participative.

The next plan made was to manage time for each group to be able to present the result of their discussion. The purpose of this activity was to help other groups to get more information they might miss in their description. It was also to stimulate students in other groups to have better exploration on their five senses for adding much more details in their descriptive writing.

In the second cycle, the topic given for their descriptive writing was about the university. Since this familiar topic was the same topic given in their pre-test, the researcher highly expected that students could attain much better product of descriptive writing in their post-test 2.

Each student in each group got a copy of empty sensory detail chart to note down all details they could have by exploring their five senses. Then, the researcher reminded them of what to do during the learning by giving instructions and time limitation. Then, students had their collaborative learning. They started their exploration on their five senses to dig up detail information about the topic assisted with the list of senses vocabulary which provided them with sensory words potentially used in their descriptive writing. During the discussion, the researcher as the lecturer who delivered the strategy monitored the activity. Since it was not the students' first experience, they rarely asked questions. The researcher occasionally monitored the progress of students' activity during the discussion.

After having a group discussion, the researcher spent 20 minutes to give the students a chance to share the result of the discussion. This activity was aimed at aiding students with more details they possibly missed during the group discussion. After each representative of each group shared their ideas, the researcher gave direct feedback to help students get more comprehension on the ideas shared. This activity allowed the students to ask questions or to give comment on the ideas shared. By having this extended collaborative learning, the researcher expected that students were inspired by other groups' ideas for they could enrich their knowledge and detail information on the topic being discussed. As a closure, the researcher reminded the students of what to do in the second post-test, especially of how students could write better quality of descriptive text in terms of ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and convention.

In Cycle 2 students started to be more active during group discussion. It did not take much time to explain what to do in the learning. There were more students who provide themselves with dictionary and list of the vocabulary of sensory words. Students, who were previously inactive, began to get engaged in the learning activity. They got a better awareness of what to do in the activity. They became more independent in taking notes on the details being discussed. The researcher did not find confused but pretending to be cool-look faces of those submissive students. Nevertheless, those students kept being passive in sharing ideas.

When representatives of the groups were presenting the result of their discussion, students actively took notes on ideas being shared which would add more details to their

descriptive writing. The researcher noticed some students nodded their head when she gave feedback on ideas each representative shared. It confirmed that students got more understanding of the details to be added in their descriptive writing.

After conducting the second cycle of her classroom action research, the researcher reflected on three points. The points of reflection come from her self-evaluation and her collaborators' feedback. Feedback from collaborators was gained from the questionnaire and observation sheet they should fill in while observing the learning activity.

The first point of reflection is about giving more encouragement to the students, especially those who are passive during learning. The researcher as a lecturer should be able to motivate all students to be more actively participated in the learning activity, especially in sharing ideas. The next point is about giving a follow-up activity or task to give a chance for students, especially the submissive students, to explore their five senses individually. The researcher also needs this activity to ensure that all students get the same knowledge and gain equal comprehension in the generic structure and language features of the descriptive text. This follow-up activity or task is looking forward to do much better quality of the students' descriptive writing. The last point is about providing students more interesting and impressive authentic learning materials related to the five senses exploration in describing any topic. The use of video presentation from native speakers or video of natural English conversation on the use of five sensory details description can be an alternative. The researcher also can provide learning resources the students can access for individual and independent learning for students to have more knowledge on five senses exploration and to have more writing practices.

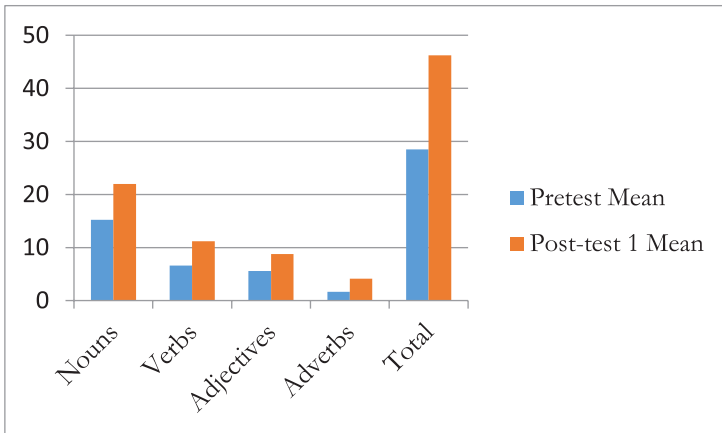


Figure 1. Number of Content Words in Pre- Test and Post-Test 1

Compared to the observed attitude of the students in the first cycle, the students who were submissive started to be more active in the second cycle. They were encouraged to take notes on what the details being discussed by filling in their sensory detail chart

rather than copying from the other members'. However, the researcher still found that those students kept being passive in sharing ideas.

The use of sensory detail chart collaboratively increases the number of content words in students' descriptive writing in terms of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs.

Success in the result of this research is seen from the outcome of the students' descriptive writing. It is measured from the number of content words produced in their writing and the writing quality in the first post-test after CAR of the first cycle. Based on the result shown in the following tables, students produce content words in their descriptive writing of post-test 1 more than in one of the pre-test.

Figure 1 indicates that the average number of content words in post-test 1 increased for 62.44%. Students produced approximately 17.77 more content words in post-test 1 than ones in the pre-test. The data show that the largest number of content words students produce in their descriptive writing is a noun. The noun production increases for 44.73%. The second largest number of content words produced is a verb. Figure 1 shows 70.13% increase for verb production. Then, adjective is following. It has increased for 57.95% in its use. Surprisingly, adverb significantly increases for 153.44%. This great improvement in the number of content words in students' descriptive writing in the first cycle indicates that collaborative use of sensory detail chart in pre-writing activity is a success.

The success in the result of the second cycle is indicated by the increasing number of content words production in students' descriptive writing. Since students gain more confidence in writing, they produced much more content words in the the second post-test than in pre-test and post-test 1. However, students used less adverbs in their descriptive writing of the second post-test. The average numbers of content words in pre-test, post-test 1 and post-test 2 are compared in the following tables.

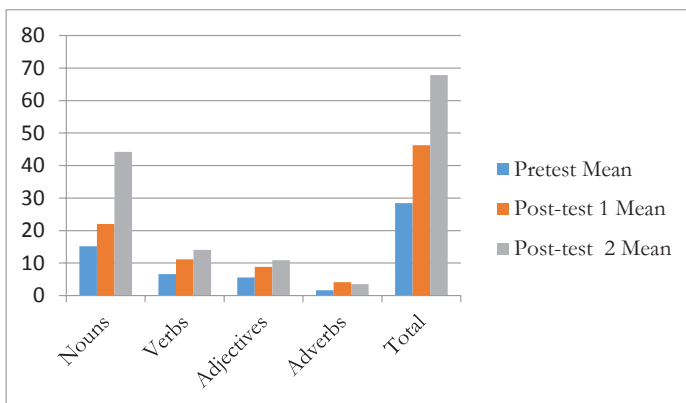


Figure 2. Average number of content words in Pre-Test, Post-Test 1 and Post-Test 2

Figure 2 shows that students used 39.33 more content words in post-test 2 than in pre-test. The average number of content words increased for about 138.17% by having 103.37% increase of nouns, 114.29% increase of verbs, 95.04% increase of adjectives and 118.38% increase of adverbs. It is noticeable that the implementation of the strategy promoted in the second cycle has contributed to a larger increase in the number of content words produced in the students' descriptive writing.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings in the classroom action research, the researcher concludes and argues that the use of sensory detail chart collaboratively can help EFL students to increase the number of content words in their English descriptive writing. It is good as students gain better confidence and fluency in writing their text by producing more meaningful words to express their thoughts and feelings about the topics. Students' exploration of their five senses also lets the students experience a stimulating learning activity and exercises. Thus, the researcher suggests EFL teachers accommodate the frequent use of sensory detail chart provided with a list of vocabulary senses collaboratively in writing exercises for they can write more fluently and improve their writing quality. Follow-up activities or task are also important for students to learn to write individually and independently.

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