USING THEME-BASED APPROACH TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' NARRATIVE WRITING ACHIEVEMENT

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Abstract: The objectives of this study were to find out whether or not there were 1) a significant difference in students' narrative writing achievement before and after they were taught by using Theme-Based Approach, and 2) a significant improvement in students' narrative writing achievement in terms of content (purpose and narrative development). This study was a pre-experimental study which applied pretest-posttest one group design. The population was the 10th grade students of SMA N 1 Indralaya Utara in academic year 2013/2014 with a total number of 123 students. The total number of the sample was 32 students that was taken purposively. The data were obtained by means of writing test. First, the result showed that the students got better scores in the posttest than in the pretest. The calculation of paired-sample t-test showed that there was a significant difference in students' narrative writing achievement before and after the treatment. This showed by the t-obtained (12.042) that was higher than the t-table (2.041). Second, the calculation of paired-sample t-test per aspect of writing showed that content (purpose and narrative development) was the most significantly improved aspect out of the five aspects. In other words, there was a significant improvement in students narrative writing in terms of content (purpose and narrative development) after they were taught by using Theme-Based Approach.

Key words:*narrative text, writing achievement, theme-based approach, improve*

Indonesia is one of the countries that have low English proficiency level. According to EF English Proficiency Index (EF EPI) in 2012, Indonesia with 53,31 proficiency index was in the 27th rank among the 54 countries and Indonesia is categorized as country with low English proficiency level.

One of the problems faced by Indonesian students in learning English is concerning with writing. In many academic contexts, writing is essential for the display of a student's knowledge (Brown, 2007, p. 396). Therefore, in schools, writing is one of the ways to express the idea or comprehension. Without some abilities to express ideas or comprehension in writing, the students may not pass the course. According to Khoi (2011, p. 493),

"writing is the most difficult skill of language for second language learners". Idrus (2011, p.1) also states that writing is the most difficult skill to acquire among other skills. Meanwhile, Al-Fadda (2012, p. 123) claims that students of English as a second language (ESL) face many difficulties and stresses in their academicwriting, such as difficulty in distinguishing between spoken and written English, making an outline before writing adraft, identifying the skills needed for successful writing, and avoiding plague words andphrases.The difficulties become even more obvious if students' language proficiency is still in the low level, especially for those who learn English as a foreign language. This statement is also strengthened byKhoii (2011, p.494) who states,

> However, learning to write is difficult especiallyfor those who write in asecond or foreignlanguage;they must write accurately within a limitedtime. Ifthe English teacher tries to enable students toproduce fluent, accurate and appropriate writtenEnglish, there are a number of aspects which need tobe considered (mechanics of writing, accuracy,fluency, etc).

When students write, they have to find and use the proper dictions to express their ideas. Then, they have to compose the words to make good sentences which convey cohesion and coherence. As Ahmed (2010, p.212) states that cohesion concerns with connecting sentences and phrase, and coherence is the combination of semantic configuration. It means that in writing, the writers need to use the proper tense, vocabulary, grammar, and etc to make the sentences have good connections to each other so that the paragraph or text they write will be readable.

Some kinds of text can be used in teaching English writing in senior high school level; such as recount, narrative, procedure, descriptive, news item, report, analytical exposition, hortatory exposition, spoof, explanation, discussion, and review(Permendiknas, 2006, No. 23). Among those kinds of texts, the writer focused on writing narrative text because it has been already set on KTSP curriculum to be taught at the tenth grade of senior high schools.

Some standard competencies are expected to be achieved by the senior high school students in learning English. The standard competencies are outlined in the KTSP curriculum. One of the standard competencies in writing is expressing the meaning in short functional text and simple essay in the form of *narrative, descriptive, and news item* in daily life context. It means that after learning English writing, students are expected to be able to write short functional text and simple essay in the form of narrative, descriptive, and news item in daily life context. To write those kinds of text, students need to have good skills in writing. To arrange a good text, they have to be able to express their ideas by using proper sentences, grammar, and generic structures. Harmer (2004, p.22) states "When we write text we have a number of linguistics techniques at our disposal to make sure that our prose sticks together". By using good techniques, approach, and media such as ICT, pictures, and etc., teachers can help students to improve their writing achievement. One of the approaches that can be applied by the teacher is Theme-Based Approach.

The integration of theme based approach into language teaching originates from general primary education and "has been practiced since the 1960s in UK primary classrooms, where children typically spend all day with the same teacher" (Cameron, 2001, p. 181). Theme-Based Approach contains different activities which are linked together by their content and it

intertwines with communicative language. By applying the theme based approach in teaching writing, especially writing narrative text, it allows students to develop their ideas in writing. This is line with Miller (2011, p.2) who states that Theme-Based Approach allow students to (a) develop a repertoire of relevant vocabulary, (b) read passages that are related to a common theme to enhance background knowledge, (c) write composition within the constraints of the theme, which encourages more relevant detail and greater elaboration, and (d) learn skills in context rather than incidentally.

Many benefits can be obtained from applying theme based approach. Bringing meaning to language learning and especially its content is considered to be very helpful in the process of learning. Theme-based language teaching compared with 'normal' language teaching offers more opportunities for using the target language in different contexts (Cameron, 2001, p. 191). Furthermore the integration of Theme-Based Approach can help identifying learner's individual difficulties since they might come across new content. Nevertheless, Cameron (2001, p.192) also states "[supported] by meaningful content, children may be able to work out the meaning of new or unfamiliar language, or motivated by real interest in a topic, they may struggle to communicate their knowledge to someone else". Therefore Theme-Based Approach is helpful for communicative stretching, too. The use of Theme-Based Approach in language teaching offers the probability for students to decide what topics to cover. The role of the teacher changes in line with students' role. But even if the students have greater influence, "the teacher's role is not diminished, but changed" (Mumford, 2000, p. 4).

Several studies that have been conducted are related to Theme-Based Approach. Some of them are conducted by Dilek (2002), Yang (2009), Osman, Ahmad, and Jusoff (2009), and Pusparini (2013). Dilek's study shows that the academic successpercentage of the class taught by using the approach is higher than the academic success percentage of the class that is not taught by using the Theme-Based Approach. Yang's study also shows that most of the participants involved in the study agreed that teaching activities and tasks are more integrated and organized with the adoption of theme-based teaching. Then, Osman, Ahmad, and Jusoff find that the implementation of theme-based instructional method and cooperative process writing did to some extentimprove the learners' motivation and proficiency in the language, mainly their writing skills as they learnt about writing,underwent learning processes of writing, assessed each other's writing, corrected the errors committed and wereinformed of their performance.

Furthermore, Pusparini finds that the use of theme-based in teaching writing descriptive text helps students in learning vocabulary, providing language learning through 'communicative stretching', providing discourse skills learning, using many informational texts, encouraging students' motivation to precision in language use, and producing outcomes from theme-based learning. From the explanation, it can be inferred that theme based approach can be used to teach in social science students, to teach writing or specifically to teach writing descriptive text and etc. However none of them did the research about the use of Theme-Based Approach in teaching narrative writing. Therefore, the writer conducted this research to know whether or not there is a significant difference in the students' narrative writing achievement before and after they are taught by using Theme-Based Approach.

The implementation of Theme-Based Approach provides students to

develop their understanding about the content of what they are learning. This is in line with the statement from Language and Arts Bulletin of Portland Public School which reported that the Theme-Based Approach offers opportunity for students to connect what they know and what they are learning and finally presents a variety of content learning activity.

Met (as cited in Sheila Brannigan slide share from British Council) also claims that the language in Theme-Based Approach is used to explore content, and language growth emerges as students need to comprehend or produce language related to content. Therefore, besides to know whether or not there is a significant difference in students' narrative writing achievement before and after they are taught by using Theme-Based Approach, the writer also wants to know whether or not there is a significant improvement in students' narrative writing achievement in terms of content (purpose and narrative development) before and after they are taught by using Theme-Based Approach.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research was pre experimental study which used one group pretest-posttest research design that was exposed to the Theme-Based Approach for 24 meetings. Each meeting covered a 45-minute teaching activity. Therefore, it could be argued that the exposure of the treatment to the students could be maximized since there was only one group.

The population of this study was 126 students of the 10th grade of SMA N 1 Indralaya Utarain the academic year 2013/2014. In selecting the sample, the writer chose a class whose average score of the mid test was under the minimum criterion, or under 75. The total number of the sample was 32 students. To collect the data, the writer asked the stduents to write a narrative

paragraph. The data was analyzed by using paired sample t-test through Statistical Package for Social Science 21 (SPSS 21).

FINDINGS

The calculation of Paired-Sample Statisticsshowed that the mean of the pretest was 55.25, and the mean of the posttest was 70.50. The standard deviation of the pretest was 9.085 and the standard deviation of the posttest was 9.078. The standard error mean of the pretest was 1.733 and the standard error mean of the posttest was 1.716. The t-obtained of both pretest and posttest was 12.404. The degree of freedom (df) for both pretest and posttest was 31. At the significance level < 0.025 for two tailed testing with the degree of freedom 31, the critical value of t-table is 2.041. It showed that the critical value of t-table was lower than t-obtained that was 2.041<12.404.

Since the value of t-obtained 12.404 exceeded the critical value of t-table 2.041, it could be stated that there was a significant difference in students' narrative writing achievement before and after the treatment. The summary of statistical analysis of the pretest and posttest by using paired sample t-test can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1
Summary Statistical of Paired Sample T-test

Exp Group	Mean	Std Dev	t	df	Sig.
Posttest	70.50	9.079	12.4	31	.000
Pretest	55.25	9.805			

The analysis of narrative writing score per aspect, namely purpose, narrative development, structure, style, and convention, was done by using paired sample t-test. The summary of statistical analysis for narrative writing score per aspect was presented on Table 2.

Table 2

Summary Statistical Analysis ofNarrative Writing Score Per Aspect by Using Paired Sample T-test

Aspects	Post test	Pre test	M dif	Paired Sample T-test		
				T-obt	df	Sig.
Purpose	3.28	2.16	1.12	10.4	31	.000
Narrative Dev	3.03	2.63	.406	3.45	31	.002
Structure	2.75	2.56	.188	1.791	31	.083
Style	2.25	2.56	-.31	-3.30	31	.002
Convention	2.42	1.94	.531	5.22	31	.000

The data shown on Table 3 revealed the improvement of narrative writing score from five aspects. There were three out of five aspects which were significantly improving, purpose (10.499>2.041), p value (0.00<0.05), narrative development (3.455>2.041), p value (0.02<0.05), and convention (5.229>2,042), p value (.002<0.05). Structure and style were aspects that were not significantly influenced by the use of Theme-Based Approach since its t-obtained was below t-table, structure (1.791<2.041) and p value (0.83>0.05) and style (-3.304<2.041). Purpose was the most highly significant aspect that improved. Besides, narrative development also got a significant improvement. In other words, it can be stated that there was a significant improvement in students narrative writing in terms of content (purpose and narrative development) after they were taught by using Theme-Based Approach since its t-obtained was above t-table and p value < 0.05.

DISCUSSION

Using Theme-Based Approach is believed to improve students' narrative writing achievement effectively. This can be seen from the result of the pretest and posttest that shows a significant improvement. This study has the same result with previous related study (see section 2.5) that was done by Osman, Ahmad, and Jusoff (2009) entitled Nurturing Writing Proficiency through Theme-based Instruction. This study also showed that the students' writing achievement increased. This increase was the result of the treatment that was done during the experiment. In this case, Theme-Based Approach provided certain themes in teaching and learning process that can encourage the students to develop their ideas to give more details on their writing based on the themes given. Dealing with this, Miller (2011, p. 2) also states that Theme-Based Approach allows students to write composition within the constraints of the theme, which encourages more relevant detail and greater elaboration.

Theme-Based Approach allows students to learn some relevant vocabulary related to the themes while they were composing their writing. According to Miller (2011, p. 2) (see section 2.4), the Theme-Based Approach allows students to develop repertoire of relevant vocabulary. In the previous related study (see section 2.5) done by Yang (2009, p. 162), it was also explained that other important advantages of Theme-Based Approach for language learning, include the fact that new vocabulary items can be learned easily, with the theme providing a meaningful context for understanding, and for the natural use of a wide range of discourse types, both written and spoken.

The teaching procedures which were done in Theme-Based Approach made the students easier in writing. In the "themes" and "topics" analyses, the activities in these stages allowed students to learn more detail in writing by concluding several themes and topics of the texts with their evidence sentences. This was in line with Miller (2011, p.2) who said that "Theme-Based Approach allows students to write composition within the constraints of the theme, which encourages more relevant detail and greater elaboration." The activity in the

stage of "texts", allowed students to read and relate what happen in the text with their experiences and background knowledge. Based on the Language and Culture Bulletin of Portland Public School (Vol. 2, No. 4) by using theme-based approach, it offers opportunity for the students to connect what they know and what they are learning. The activity in the part of "tasks", students could develop valuable study skills, such as note-taking, summarizing, and extracting key information from textsthrough tasks.Then, in the stage of "transition", students did not only develop their writing skills but also their speaking skills. This was supported by Moon who said that "Theme-Based Approach aims to get learners using English 'in a purposeful way to find out things and do things which have meaning and interest for them and to communicate the results to others". In this case, the students should present what they know about the theme of the story before they write their own story in the stage of "threads".

Besides, the improvement of writing score from five aspects (purpose, narrative development, structure, style, and convention) was proven by the statistical analysis done by using paired sample t-test (see section 4.2.2). Purpose, narrative development, and convention were significantly improved. Meanwhile, structure and style were aspects that were not significantly influenced by the use of Theme-Based Approach since its t-obtained was below t-table. Purpose was the most highly significant aspect that improved. Besides, narrative development also got a significant improvement. In other words, it can be stated that there was a significant improvement in students narrative writing in terms of content (purpose and narrative development) after they were taught by using Theme-Based Approach. This is in line with Met (as cited in Sheila Brannigan slide share from British Council) who claims that the language in Theme-Based Approach is used to explore content, and language growth emerges as students need to comprehend or produce language related to content.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis of the data, it can be concluded that using Theme-Based Approach in teaching writing narrative text could improve the students' writing achievement. First, there was a significant difference in students' narrative writing achievement of those who were taught by using Theme-Based Approach. Second, the students' narrative writing achievement in terms of content (purpose and narrative development) was also significantly improved. Those could be seen from the result of pretest and posttest by using Paired Samples T-test. Their writing about narrative text based on the theme given was much better. In short, using Theme-Based Approach was effective in improving the 10th grade students' narrative writing achievement at SMA Negeri 1 Indralaya Utara.

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