

FACILITATING STUDENTS’ VERBAL CREATIVITY IN EFL WRITING COURSE

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Abstract

This article reported a pedagogical attempt to facilitate students’ verbal creativity (hereafter: VC) in EFL writing course. This study was aimed at (1) providing students with learning activities that could promote students’ VC; (2) promoting students’ VC in EFL writing class; and (3) revealing students’ perception towards the implementation of the pedagogical attempt in promoting students’ VC. To achieve the aims, a collaborative action research was employed. The subject of this study was 30 of the second-grade students of English Education Department in a private university in East Java, Indonesia. The data in this study was taken from class observation, VC test, and in-depth interview. The results show that (1) the nine-learning-step proposed by Avila (2015) was implemented. Those nine steps are remembering English grammar and structure, creating a fictional story, promoting creative writing, boosting vocabulary through screenwriting, sharing a speech, circle of life, drawing and speaking, asking and answering questions, and asking the students to create their own activities. (2) From the VC test, it was also revealed that through Avila's (2015) nine-learning-step, the students' VC is facilitated and promoted. (3) The students also have a positive attitude and positive feedback towards the implementation of the nine-learning-step. The findings of this study might have implications for EFL writing teachers and students.

Keywords: verbal creativity, EFL writing course, pedagogical attempt, collaborative action research

Introduction

Promoting student’s creativity (including verbal creativity) in schools is pivotal as learning entails thinking (Rababah et al., 2017). This is due to creativity is one of the factors that can be used to find solutions to problems. In fact, most students fail to use their higher order thinking skill in which it will affect their successful achievement in their profession in later life (Rababah & Melhem, 2014). Creativity is crucial for students as it is an imperative and effective skill. In writing, creativity also plays a crucial role. Creativity in writing (or VC) is a means for individuals to reflect their feelings, emotions, opinions, reactions, and notion to the readers in a distinct literary manner (Shorofat, 2007).

Flower & Hayes (1980) elaborate that writing process involves planning, translating and reviewing. Planning comprises of generating the idea, organizing

idea and setting the goal. Translating comprises of producing language that is in line with the ideas from the writer’s brain. In this case, creativity plays a crucial role in producing ideas in the planning process. Flower & Hayes' (1980) model of creativity in writing is presented in the following figure.

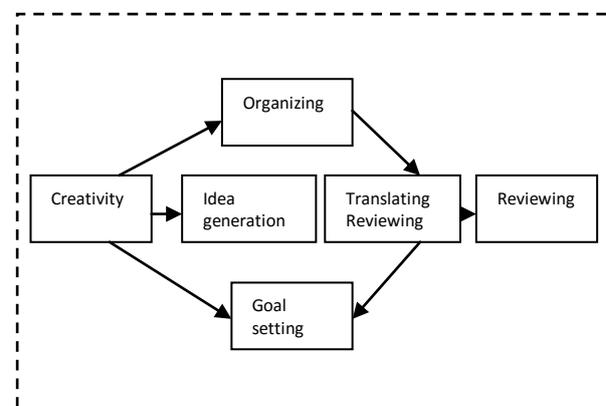


Figure 1. The relationship between creativity and writing (Flower & Hayes, 1980)

Many studies have revealed that verbal creativity plays a significant role in EFL writing (see Al-jarf, 2015; Izadi, Mehri; Khoshsima, 2015; Pishghadam & Mehr, 2011; Rababah, Luqman; Melhem, 2014; Rababah, Halim, Mohamed, & Jdaitawi, 2013; Rababah, Alshehab, & Melhem, 2017; Weisi & Khaksar, 2015). Verbal creativity is an ability to think creatively and to measure one's fluency, flexibility, and originality of a verbal form, which deals with words and sentences. Moreover, verbal creativity is an ability to form and create new ideas and then combine them into something new referring to the existing information. The new ideas reflect fluency, flexibility, and originality that can be seen in divergent thought revealed verbally (Munandar, 2009).

Realizing the importance of verbal creativity in EFL writing, teachers should be aware of VC in teaching EFL writing course. Students' verbal creativity should be stimulated through teaching and learning process. Verbal creativity can be stimulated through pedagogical activities (Avila, 2015). The successful implementation of verbal creativity in EFL writing class also depends on teacher's beliefs about creativity (Bereczki & Kárpáti, 2018). Therefore, it is urgent for EFL writing teachers to be able to develop learning model which could promote VC in EFL writing class.

Based on the results of the preliminary study conducted to the second graders of English Education Department of IKIP PGRI Bojonegoro who take EFL writing course, it was revealed that students do not notice their VC. Further, the result of VC test (which is proposed by Munandar, 2009) shows that the mean score is 108.2. This is categorized as the low level of VC since they are the second-grade students of English Education Department. Normally, the English Department students' VC is \geq 116.

After conducting an in-depth interview with the teacher and students, it was revealed that the students' low level of VC is caused by the scarcity of learning

activities which could promote VC implemented in EFL writing class. The teacher does not pay a serious attention to students' VC. He only pays attention to students' writing product without considering other factors that could affect students' writing skill. Further, the students admit that the VC test given by the researchers in the preliminary study was their first experience.

During the observation is preliminary study, it was observed that the students are usually taught with a traditional method where the teacher uses a marker and writes the lesson on the board. In regard to that tradition, the researchers suggest that fact that educators have to be quite prepared to teach, rather than just cover the units of an English book with its requirements. It is important for teachers to give students a sense of what to expect in the course while making the class fun, entertaining, and beneficial for the learners (Avila, 2015).

To overcome the problems identified above, it was proposed the nine-learning-step (Avila, 2015) to be implemented in EFL writing class. It is the activities that could strengthen English teachers' views on how to carry out their tasks in a more innovative, creative way, distancing them from just explaining on the board or following a book. Having such kind of activities will benefit teachers while they embark on this difficult, but rewarding task, especially those practitioners who will be confronting several students to please.

Methodology

The design of this study was action research which followed the process related to (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). It was chosen since action research is an approach that could be a huge step toward making the positive changes in the English class that creative activities are meant to achieve. Further, Kemmis & McTaggart (1988) add that action research means to plan, act, observe, and reflect more carefully, more systematically, and more rigorously than one usually does in everyday life. This action research was done

collaboratively with EFL writing teacher and the researchers.

The subject of this study was the II-A class, consisting of 30 students, of the second-grade of English Education Department, Institute of Teacher Training and Education of PGRI Bojonegoro, East Java, Indonesia. This study was done in the even semester of the academic year of 2017/2018.

The data of this study was taken from class observation, VC test, and in-depth interview with students (taken purposively). The VC test instrument used was the test which was designed by Munandar (2009). There are six sub-tests with four items in each of this VC test. The six sub-tests items are word initials, word creation, sentence formulation from three letters, similar characteristics, extraordinary uses of words, and consequences of effects. An in-depth interview with students was also done as triangulation process (see Creswell, 2012). The data resulted from VC test was analyzed quantitatively, and the data yielded from observation and interview was analyzed qualitatively.

The procedures of this action research were first, the researchers conducted a preliminary study to reveal the problem and its causes. Then, the researchers tried to propose the solution for the problem. In implementing action research, there are four stages, i.e. planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). Those stages will always be done in two cycles (each cycle consisted of two meetings).

Findings and Discussion

1. Learning Activities to Promote Students' VC

As previously stated in the research objectives, the first aim of this study was to provide learning activities (pedagogical attempts) to promote students' VC. There are nine steps which were implemented in EFL writing class. The nine-learning-step implemented is based on the theory proposed

by Avila (2015). The elaboration of those steps is as follows.

a. Remembering English grammar and structure

In this activity, The teacher asked the students make a small group consisting of 4-5 students. In each group, Each student had to speak one word following the structure of the previous word already spoken. For example, Student A would speak "I". Then, Student B would continue with another word following the structure of the word Student A spoken. For example, Student B would speak "I bought" because the students had already known that a personal pronoun is followed by a verb. Student C would follow through with the third word: "I bought a book," and so on. Consequently, students would remember grammar and structures in the language and they would be listening to their peers.

b. Creating a fictional story

Still, in the group, the students were asked to create their own story. Each student must speak one complete sentence. Then, the other student will continue the friend's sentence by creating a fictional but logic story. For example:

Student A : Yesterday, I saw a fairy Godmother

Student B : She called my name

Student C : Then, she gave me a magic pencil

Student D : Everything that I draw using that pencil became real

..... (so on) until the story is complete.

During the process of learning, the teacher guides the students and encourage them to use their dictionary to make up the story.

c. Promoting creative writing

In this activity, the students were asked to write an imaginative story. But, first, the teacher gave them a sheet of paper. On the paper, it was a sentence "it was a very hot Sunday afternoon". Then, the student in each group had to write 3 sentences in 3 minutes dealing with the written sentence on

the paper. The group which had the best story, grammar and content got the points.

d. Boosting vocabulary through screenwriting

In this activity, the students were given a short movie to watch. After watching the movie, the students were given the script of the screenplay. Then, they tried to find difficult words from the script and guessed the meaning from the context of the scenes.

e. Sharing a speech

In this activity, the students were asked to do writing and sharing a speech about any topic they wanted. They were given 15 minutes to write their speech. After they had finished writing, then, they started sharing their ideas through speech.

f. Circle of life

In this activity, the students were asked to make a circle. In the circle, they write an important thing/person in their life, e.g. mother. Then, they stood up in front of the class and tell how important a mother is for their life.

g. Drawing and Speaking

In this activity, the students, in the group, were asked to draw an object on the board one by one. Then, he/she describe the picture which was drawn and why it was drawn. The next is another student, from the same group, came up and draw another object besides the pal's picture on the board and did the same thing. After all members of the group had finished drawing, they had to make a story based on the series of pictures they drew on the board.

h. Asking and answering questions

In this activity, the students were asked to write some questions about the effects of events if those events do not happen in daily life, e.g. what will happen if people do not have a mouth?. Then, they pals had to answer the questions by giving some alternative answers.

i. Students' autonomy in creating their own activities for EFL writing

The last, the students were asked to create their own activities for EFL writing. They, even, were permitted to work in the group and/or individual. Some of them did guessing game, discussion, browsing on the internet, and many more activities that could help them find ideas in EFL writing.

2. Students' VC in EFL Writing Class after the Implementation of the nine-learning-step

Since this study was an action research, there were four stages that were done by the researchers, i.e. planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). In the planning stage, the researchers prepare everything dealing with teaching and learning process, i.e. making the lesson plan, preparing learning activities, making the test instruments, preparing appropriate media, and so on. In acting stage, the researchers implemented the nine-learning-step as previously described. During the acting stage, one researcher became a teacher, and another researcher became an observer. So, acting stage and observing stage were actually run at the same time. The last stage is reflecting. It was done after the learning process happened. The researchers collaboratively reflected the process of learning through discussion and looking at the observation sheets and notes.

a. Cycle I

At the end of the learning process of the cycle I, the students were given a VC test. The VC test was developed based on six indicators (Munandar, 2009), i.e. (1) Able to create some words based on the beginning of word given (to measure the fluency), (2) Able to create some words based on the letters provided in one word (to measure fluency of words and word structures), (3) Able to construct sentences of five words based on the letters provided (to measure the fluency in expressing something in the form of sentence with correct grammar), (4) Able

to find out the object of the two same characteristics (to measure the fluency in expressing ideas), (5) Able to find out unusual usages of the daily objects or things (to measure flexibility and originality of minds), and (6) Able to find out or predict the effects of an event (to measure fluency in expressing ideas and the ability to elaborate an idea). The followings are the results:

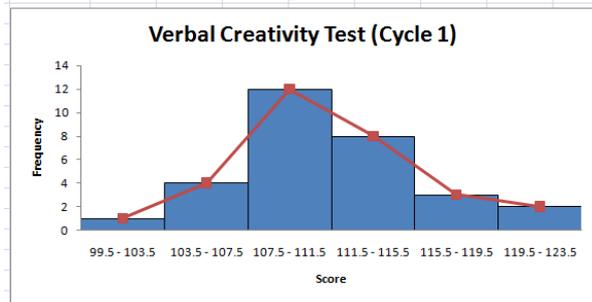


Figure 2. The Results of VC Test in Cycle 1

The results of VC test after the Cycle 1 show that there is the improvement in students' VC. The mean score of the students' VC is 112. The highest score is 123 and the lowest score is 100. However, this improvement is still considered not significant compared to the students' VC gained in the preliminary study. Therefore, it was decided to conduct the second cycle.

Before conducting the second cycle, the researchers firstly analyzed the weaknesses of the cycle 1. From the notes taken from observation and reflection stage, it was known that the teacher still did not optimally organize the nine-learning-step during teaching and learning process. It was also revealed that not all students got the same turn in taking part of the learning process. Some students were also confused with the learning activities due to the unclear instruction is given by the teacher. Then, from these points of reflection, the cycle 2 was carried out.

b. Cycle 2

In cycle 2, the teacher conducted re-planning, re-acting, re-observing, and re-reflecting. The teacher improves the points that became weaknesses in cycle 1. After the

cycle 2 was done, VC test was re-tested to the students. The results are the followings.

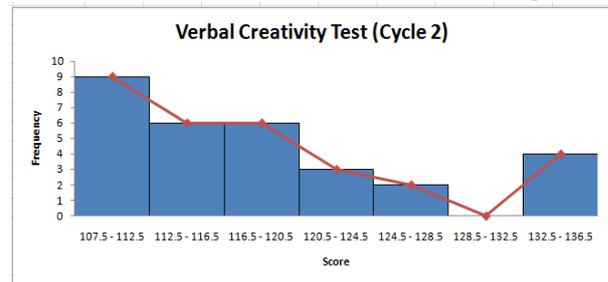


Figure 3. The Results of VC Test in Cycle 2

The results of VC test after the Cycle 2 show that there is the significant improvement in students' VC. The mean score of the students' VC is 118,4. The highest score is 136 and the lowest score is 108. However, this improvement is significant compared to the students' VC gained in the preliminary study. Therefore, it was decided to stop the action.

The students' VC improvement from the preliminary study, cycle 1, and cycle 2 based on each indicator are presented in the following figure.

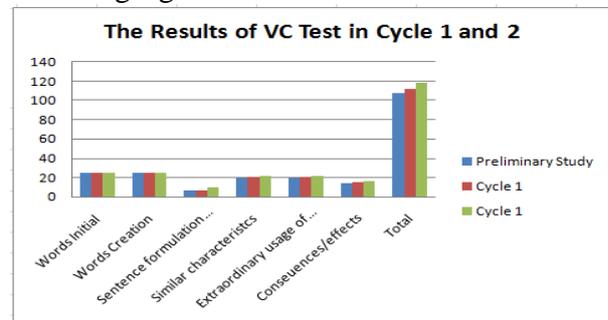


Figure 4. The Students' VC Improvement in Each Indicator

The detail data can be seen in the following table:

Table 1. The Students' VC Improvement in Each Indicator

	Words Initial	Words Creation	Sentence formulation from 3 letters	Similar characteristics	Extraordinary usage of words	Consequences/effects	Total
Preliminary Study	25	25	6,2	19	19	14	108,2
Cycle 1	25	25	7	20	20	15	112
Cycle 2	25	25	9,4	22	21	16	118,4

3. The students' perception towards the implementation of the pedagogical attempt in promoting students' VC

The last objective of this study was to reveal the students' perception towards the implementation of the pedagogical attempts to promote students' VC. To meet that objective, a class observation and an in-depth interview with students were conducted.

During the observation, it was found and noted by the observer that in some parts of learning activities, the students faced some difficulties, e.g. when the students were asked to make a fictional story, creative writing, and circle of life. These difficulties were faced by the students not only in the first cycle but also in the second cycle. However, in the second cycle, the students' confusion was a bit decreasing since that was the second time for them having such kind of activities. Yet, although they seemed to have some difficulties, it was revealed that the students were very motivated. They were actively participating in the learning process, even though, not all of them got the same chance to practice.

To validate the data gained from observation, the researchers used an in-depth interview with some of them. The followings are the results:

(R = Researcher, S = Student)

- R : "What do you think about the teaching and learning process implemented in EFL writing class?"
- S1 : "I think the learning activities were very challenging. The learning activities really make the students to actively participate in. It's motivating..."
- S2 : "The class was fun and challenging. We do different things as usual. It can make the students learn writing, make a fictional story, learn grammatical aspect, think outside the box, and many more."

From the interview above, it can be inferred that the pedagogical attempts implemented in EFL writing class are challenging and motivating. The students can learn verbal language unconsciously. And they have a positive attitude towards the learning activities.

- R : "Do you have some difficulties with the learning activities? If yes, what are they?"
- S1 : "Sure, especially when we were asked to make a fictional story, for example. We, at first, do not know what to do. The instruction given by the teacher is unclear. Another part is when we were asked to make a circle of life. We were confused to express our ideas."
- S2 : "Yes, of course. For example, when we were asked to write a creative writing. It was a very challenging for me and for all students. (laughing..)"
- R : "Do the difficulties you have discourage you to learning?"
- S1 : "I don't think so. The difficulty in learning is normal. In fact, it makes me more motivated since the activities are very interesting and fun."
- S2 : "No, it never discourages me. I think the fun activities make me and all students happy."

From the transcript above, it can be inferred that although the students face difficulties during the learning process, they never feel discouraged.

- R : "What advantages can you take from the learning activities implemented in EFL writing class?"
- S1 : "I think, I can learn more vocabularies, I can learn to think outside the box, I can learn writing a fictional story, and many more."
- S2 : "Ya, the learning activities make me learn much about grammar, vocabulary, creative writing, and so on."
- R : "Do you think that the learning activities can help you to promote your VC?"
- S1 : "Sure, of course. My VC score was increasing than before."
- S2 : "Yes, I think so. My VC score is better."

The advantages that the students can take from the learning activities are, it can make them learn the verbal language, thinking outside the box, and sharpening the students thought in creative writing. Besides, the students also admitted that the activities can help them to promote their verbal creativity.

Conclusions

From the findings of this study, the conclusions are as follows.

First, a specific pedagogical attempt can be implemented in EFL writing to promote students' VC. In this case, the nine-learning-step proposed by Avila (2015) was implemented as a pedagogical attempt in EFL writing class. The steps have been elaborated in findings.

Second, after the implementation of the nine-learning-step, it is proven that those learning activities could promote students' VC. The students' VC improved significantly after the learning process. It means that the students' VC can be promoted through the nine-learning-step implemented in EFL writing class.

Third, the students have a positive attitude towards the implementation of the pedagogical attempt in EFL writing class. Even though they also faced difficulties during the learning process, they never feel discouraged. In fact, it is motivating and encouraging.

From these conclusions, it is suggested to EFL writing teacher to not only pay attention to students' writing (product) but also the process of writing, including students' VC in EFL writing. In order to promote the students' VC, he/she could implement this nine-learning-step in EFL writing class, or other pedagogical attempts that could promote students' VC.

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