Improving Students’ Mastery of English Punctuation Using Graded Written Exercises

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Abstract. This study was intended to answer the research questions namely; (1) which punctuation are found difficult for the students?, (2) do graded written exercises improve the students’ mastery of punctuation?, (3) are the students interested in learning English punctuation through graded written exercises?. This study employed a pre-experimental method. The population consisted of the third year students of SMP Negeri 33 Makassar. The number of the population was four classes which consisted of forty students each class. The sample was taken by using cluster sampling: ten students of each class were selected randomly to become the sample of the study. The result of the study were (1) punctuation that was found difficult for the students included question mark, quotation mark and exclamation point (2) graded written exercises improve the students’ mastery of punctuation, (3) the students were interested in learning English punctuation through graded written exercises. The researcher concluded that the use of English punctuation is very difficult for the students particularly in long sentences. Therefore, they have to be trained and use the punctuation in sentences appropriately.

INTRODUCTION

English is one of the important languages in the world because it is a means of international communication. That is why, this language is taught and become a compulsory subject in Indonesian schools either in primary or secondary schools.

Knowing a language is more than to understand, speak, read and write sentences as well as to know how the sentences are used to communicate effectively (Widdowson,1978). However, teaching English as a second or foreign language is necessary to note there are four skills. One of them is writing skill. Writing is considered as the most difficult among the four language skills, namely; listening, speaking and reading.

Punctuation one of the components of writing which is difficult and it is often used incorrectly. Such as the use of period, comma, quotation mark, question mark, exclamation point and capitalization. The most errors found punctuation marks in writing long sentences, quotations and bibliography. Talking about punctuation marks the researcher just emphasizes on the use of period, comma, question marks, quotation marks, exclamation point and capitalization. The reasons why the researcher emphasizes on the use of punctuations are : (1) they are always found in the secondary school texts writing, (2) they are always used by the students in writing, (3) their uses are complex, there are so many students still use them improperly.

Considering the important of English punctuation for the students who want to write, and absorbs unsatisfactory facts about improving the students’ mastery of English punctuation using with graded exercises to overcome the problem of incorrect uses of punctuation in the students’
writing. The main objective of this research is to improve the students' mastery of English punctuation using graded written exercises particularly the third year students of SMP 33 Makassar. There are many factors influenced the students in using English punctuation through graded exercises such as the teachers' teaching and guidance are not enough, the students' interest in learning and doing the exercises is not sufficient, the punctuation is complex which is difficult for the students.

The students' interest in using English punctuation through graded written exercises cannot improve without an effort to find out the way of improving the students' interest in using English punctuation through graded written exercise. Therefore the researcher conducted a research to find out whether graded exercises could improve the students' English punctuation mastery.

Based on the discussion above, the researcher formulated research question ; (1) which punctuations are found difficult by the students?, (2) do graded written exercises improve the students' mastery of punctuation?, (3) are the students interested in learning English punctuation through graded written exercises?.

Based on the problems statements of the objective of the research are ; (1) to know which punctuations are found difficult by the students, (2) to improve the students' mastery of punctuation through graded written exercises and (3) to find out the students' interest in learning English punctuation through graded written exercises.

The result of the research is hoped to be a useful information for other English teachers and the researcher himself, namely to give an alternative teaching technique effectively, particularly for SMP students in using the punctuation.

This research focused on the students' mastery of English punctuation especially the use of period, comma, question mark, quotation mark, exclamation point and capitalization through graded written namely; punctuation is one of components of writing. Many authors have described about it and those descriptions are useful for to have proper understanding of what is meant by punctuation for this reason the researcher put forward some descriptions. The first description that researcher puts forward is the description from Chandrer (1965) in "English Simplified", he states that punctuation is used to clarify sentence structure and meaning, and without punctuation of a writing is difficult to understand, furthermore, the use of punctuation symbols assist the reader to proceed in an intelligent and orderly fashion through the heavy traffic of ideas (1955). This description refers that punctuation is the system of marks used to make writing clear. The second description is sated by Brewton, et al. (1962) in using good English. They said that the punctuation is to show the reader how sentences and part of sentences are related in conversation, a speaker has many resources for showing such relations, for example, a change in expression or in pitch of voice.

Ross and Dotty (1985) say, “Punctuation is one the machines of writing together with capitalization, footnotes, bibliography and abbreviation”. Then, they classify punctuation into thirteen marks: (1) period (.), (2) question marks (?), (3) comma (,), (4) semi colon (;), (5) colon (:), (6) dash (_), (7) exclamation point (!), (8) quotation marks ( "………."), (9) parentheses ( ), (10) brackets ([ ]), (11) ellipsis (...........), (12) apostrophe (’), and (13) underlining (__________).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The method of this research was pre-experimental. It was intended to test the design of one group pre-test and post-test design. A pre-test was administered to all subjects to know their prior knowledge. A post-test was administered to measure the result of the treatment. Chronologically, the students were given pre-test before the treatment. After treatment they were given post-test. The aim of this test was to find out the impact of using punctuation in graded written exercise.

The design of the research is presented below:

Pre-test--------→Treatment------------------>Post-test
01                                    X                                     02
The population of this research was the third year students of SMP 33 Makassar. The number of the population was 160 students that sit in four classes; each class consists of 40 students.

The sample of the research was 40 students that were taken by using cluster random sampling; ten out of forty students of each class were selected randomly to become the sample of the research.

The research has two variables, namely independent variable and dependent variable. The independent variable is the teaching of punctuation through graded written exercises. The dependent variable is the students' mastery of the use of punctuation and their interest toward the use of punctuation through graded written exercises.

In collecting the data the researcher used test and questionnaire. The test examined the ability of the students to use English punctuation and capitalization. The tests were administered before and after the treatment. The questionnaire was used to get data on the students' interest in learning punctuation in graded written exercises; the questionnaire was distributed to the respondents after treatment. The tests consist of three parts; the first part, the students were asked to supply the correct punctuation marks and capitalization. In the second item, the students were asked to choose the correct punctuation and capitalization which consisted of two short paragraphs. The third item, the students were asked to supply the correct punctuation marks and capitalization that consisted of long paragraphs.

If the students put correct punctuation in all the sentences, they would get mark and if they put punctuation incorrectly, they did not get any marks. The tests were done at a time and each students were given 45 minutes to do the tests. After giving pre-test, the students were treated by giving explanation about the use of English punctuation. Such as, period, comma, question mark, quotation mark, capitalization, exclamation point.

After the treatment, the post-test was conducted to find out the improvement of students' mastery of English punctuation by using written graded exercises. The test was the same with the pre-test. Post-test consist of three items. The first item consisted of fifteen simple sentences. The second item was a short paragraph consisted of two paragraphs. And the third item was long paragraph consisted of two long paragraphs. In the three items, the students should put punctuation and capitalization in those sentences correctly. At last, after the last treatment, the questionnaire was distributed to the students to know their interest toward the use of the punctuation in graded written exercises.

The data collected through the test and questionnaire which were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative analysis included descriptive and inferential analysis. Qualitative analysis used the data from the questionnaire that support the findings of the qualitative analysis. The steps undertaken in the quantitative analysis namely ; (1) scoring the students’ answer. In order to know the score of each items, every item got one mark, if the students put one punctuation correctly he/she got one mark and if the students could not put the punctuation correctly he/or she could get any score (0), their obtained score was divided by the highest score then it was multiplied by ten (10). Thus the score of the students was in the range of 0-10. So a student score can be found by dividing the number of correct answer with the highest score the multiplying it with 10, (2) tabulating the score of the students’ pre-test and post-test result, (3) computing the descriptive statistics of the data, including the percentage, means and standard deviations, (4) calculating the means score of the pre-test and the post-test using the mean formula and (5) calculating the value of t-test to test the hypothesis concerning the difference between the pre-test and the post-test.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In general the use of written graded exercises could improve the students’ mastery of punctuation even though it is not significant. However the use of question mark, quotation mark and exclamation point were found most difficult for the students. It can be seen in the result of their pre-test seemed very low comparing with their scores in the post-test. It is proved by the mean score that the students got very lowest scoring on punctuation in the pre-test which is only 2.18 however, the students found most difficult on the use of question mark in the post-test.
showing the lowest score which is only 4.03. After given the students treatment they could improve their punctuation mastery even though their mastery on the use of exclamation point, quotation mark and question mark were not as well as the use of the three punctuation, period, comma and capitalization.

While the use of period the mean score in the pre-test was 5.09 and in the post-test was 5.35. In other words the students could improve only a little in the use of period. The use of comma in pre-test the students’ mean score was 5.66 and in the post-test the students’ mean score was 6.663. It mean that the students in using comma could increase. The use of question mark in the mean score of the student’s pre-test was 3.83 while the post-test was 4.03. It could seen that 60 % of the students obtained very poor classification in pre-test and only two students got excellent. This indicates that only a few of them could improve their mastery on the use of question mark.

The use quotation mark showed that in pre-test the students got 2.18 and in post-test the students got 4.22. It means that the use of quotation mark was not easy for the students even though they have been given.

Before given treatment 80% of the students got very poor classification but after treatment the use of exclamation mark was improved. The mean score in the pre-test the students got 2.58 and in the post-test the students got 4.75. It means that most of the students could improve their mastery on the use of exclamation mark. The mastery of the students’ scores on the use of capitalization in pre-test was 5.07 and the post-test their scores was 6.65. It means that most of the students could understand the use of capitalization.

Based on the explanation above the researcher could conclude that the mastery of the students’ on the use of the sixth punctuation got high improvement. The improvement they got in the post-test were influenced by their interest toward the use of punctuation and the treatment given on the use of the punctuation as well.

The use of punctuation mark through graded written exercises made the students interested in studying English. It is indicated by the mean score of the students obtained from the questionnaire that is 73.4 that resulted from the total score of the students that is 2939 divided by 40 as the member of the respondents/students and the scores was categorizes as interested.

Since the result of the value (6.83) is greater than the t-table (2.021), then the hypothesis stating there is a significant difference between the mean score of the students’ pre-test and the mean score of the students’ post-test after the treatment of the use of the sixth punctuation through graded written exercises is accepted in other word that graded written exercises were effective to improve the students’ knowledge and the ability in using punctuation.

Having the findings of the research in the previous parts, the researcher pointed out that most of the students found difficult on the use of quotation mark, exclamation mark and question mark of the three punctuations. The students found that the most difficult was the use of quotation mark. This is because the students were untrained to use the punctuation in sentences particularly in long sentences or in a paragraph. On the other hand, from the findings it is found that the students were easy to use the punctuation especially the use of period, comma, and capitalization. However, from the three punctuations the students were easy to use capitalization. Besides that, the students had already master the characteristics of using capitalization. Finally, the students were also easy to use it because they were already given some exercises in the treatment, which was intended to find out their ability on the mastery of the punctuation in sentences either in simple sentences, short paragraphs or long paragraphs.

Based on the findings and the explanation above, where the students found difficult on the use of the three punctuations. In other hand, the students should be given more exercises on the use of quotation mark, question mark and exclamation mark by showing them as many sentences as possible for them to use. This is intended to improve the students’ mastery on the use of that punctuation since they had very low in mastering on the use of them either before the treatment or after the treatment. Lastly, the teachers should be more patient to teach and train the students to use the punctuations well as the teachers should improve the frequency of the teaching of punctuation particularly in writing.
CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings, the conclusions of the research are: (1) the punctuation that were found by the students were question mark, quotation mark and exclamation point, (2) teaching punctuation through the use of graded written exercises in general could improve the students’ mastery in writing. This led to the conclusion that graded written exercises had become a novel way in English language teaching, particularly in writing to improve the students’ mastery on the punctuation namely; period, comma, question mark, quotation mark, exclamation point and capitalization. And (3) teaching punctuation through the use of graded written exercises was interesting to the students. Finally as a conclusion the researcher could conclude that through graded written exercises could keep the students’ interest to study English punctuation.

While the suggestions are; (1) to facilitate the students to learn English especially punctuation and capitalization, English teachers should give practices/exercises in gradable manner from the simplest to the main difficult exercises, (2) English sentences either in short or long paragraphs should be given or shown to the students as many as possible in order to familiarize the students with the punctuation, and (3) to achieve an optimal result regarding to an easy learning English punctuation, the teachers should provide varied exercises to strengthen the students’ learning.

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