

# THE APPLICATION OF TASK-BASED LEARNING (TBL) APPROACH TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' ACADEMIC WRITING SKILL

By:

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## Abstract

In the context of English as a foreign language (EFL) and of English as a second language (ESL), writing might be a very hard language skill for learners to master. To succeed in writing, in presenting their ideas, the students need to equip themselves with at least a number of fundamental abilities such as how to create topic sentence, controlling idea, supporting sentences, concluding sentence, etc. This research was primarily conducted to improve students' academic writing skill through the application of Task-Based Learning (TBL) approach and to find out the students' responses after learning academic writing skill through the application of TBL approach. This research is Classroom Action Research (CAR) which was performed in two cycles. Each cycle consisted of four steps, namely planning, action, observation and reflection. There are 21 students as the subject of the research. The analysis of quantitative data showed that the students' mean score increased continuously from 64,86 in the pretest, 74,71 in the posttest of cycle 1 to 86,14 in the posttest of cycle 2. The analysis of qualitative data showed that the application of TBL approach could increase the students' interest, motivation and involvement in the academic writing classes. It is advisable that teachers or lecturers of English language should try applying TBL approach as one of approaches in order to improve their students' academic writing skill.

**Keywords:** TBL approach; academic writing skill; Classroom Action Research

## 1. INTRODUCTION

There are four language skills which are needed to complete communication. They are listening, speaking, reading, and writing. One of these four language skills which is very crucial and most required in academic field is writing. In all academic situations where writing in English is required, students must be able to present their ideas in a clear, well-organized manner. Bram (2012, p. 114) states that the term writing may be defined as (learners') using written language across or sharing ideas with others, particularly in a one-paragraph composition. As a skill, writing is often taken for granted. But the fact shows that teaching writing is not an easy task because students often face some difficulties to write about what they think in their mind and state it on a piece of paper or on a computer screen.

The students of English Language Education Study Program of Catholic University of Saint Thomas learn the subjects of Writing I-Writing IV. They are equipped with writing skill in order to be able to write in the English language correctly. They are prepared with academic writing skill related to their future career as English teachers. The purposes of mastering academic writing skill are not only to equip themselves in order to be able to complete writing their *Sarjana's* theses but also to prepare themselves to be qualified teachers, writers or researchers.

From the researchers' observation towards the fourth semester students of English Language Education Study Program of Catholic

University of Saint Thomas in the Academic Year of 2017/2018 when they were learning Writing IV subject showed that most of the students sometimes had low expectation of writing so they were not motivated to learn this skill, whereas in fact, writing like any skills can be improved by strong motivation and steady practices.

In the context of English as a foreign language (EFL) and of English as a second language (ESL), writing might be a very challenging language skill for learners to master. Wishon & Burks (1980, p. viii) state that the thoughtful teacher usually faces a dilemma in deciding how much or how little correcting to do on the students' papers. Often, there is a tendency for the teacher to make so many corrections on his/her students' compositions.

The researchers as the team teaching for the subjects of Writing I-Writing IV also experience the same thing. They tend to make so many corrections on the English compositions written by their students. In the present context, the primary focus is on a number of grammatical errors, for instance missing a determiner (as in *\*I want to be teacher of English*, instead of *I want to be a teacher of English*) and no concord/agreement between the subject and the finite verb (as in *\*Her children is studying English now*, instead of *Her children are studying English now*). Unfortunately, when their students read over their English compositions, they generally are unable to identify many of their errors. The writing problems faced by the researchers' students motivate them to find a

probable solution in order to solve them. To succeed in writing, in expressing themselves, the students need then to equip themselves with at least a number of fundamental abilities such as how to use punctuations and construct simple sentences in the target language correctly.

Now, a relevant question to ask is: What can a teacher/lecturer do to encourage his/her students to reduce their writing problems and to improve their academic writing skill? Well, the application of Task-Based Learning (henceforth, TBL) approach might be an alternative (Bram, 2012). TBL approach is a further refinement of Contextual Language Teaching approach, emphasizing the successful completion of tasks as both the organizing feature and the basis for assessment of language instruction. In this learning (teaching) approach, a task to produce a writing product is a key factor. TBL is an approach which offers students material which they have to actively engage in the process of learning teaching in order to achieve a goal or complete a task.

The next question to raise might be: What is a task? A task is an activity in which a person engages in order to attain an objective, and which necessitates the use of language (Van den Branden, 2006). In a similar vein, Loschky & Bley-Vroman (1993) say that a task may refer to an activity involving the use of language where participants or learners share information with one another. It should be stressed that in the current context, the focus is on writing tasks carried out by EFL learners to produce compositions which contain as few mistakes as possible. TBL approach is advantageous to the students because it is more student-centered, allows for more meaningful communication, and often provides for practical extra-linguistic skill building. As the tasks are likely to be familiar to the students, they are more likely to be engaged, which may further motivate them in their language learning (Willis, 1996).

This research is important to conduct because if it is not conducted, English teachers or lecturers will not be able to know their students' problems in writing English and how to improve their students' writing skill. If language teachers or lecturers do not know the students' problems in writing English, thus they will not get feedback from their teachers or lecturers in order to improve their academic writing skill. Meanwhile if this research is conducted, it will give some positive impacts. This study will be beneficial for language teachers or lecturers so that they will be able to know how far the students have improvement in their academic writing skill.

The researchers were interested in applying TBL approach in order to improve the students' academic writing skill because some research findings had shown good results of teaching writing skill through TBL approach. The first research was conducted by Marashi & Dadari

(2012) entitled The Impact of Using Task-based Writing on EFL Learners' Writing Performance and Creativity. This research investigated the impact of task-based writing on EFL learners' writing performance and creativity. For this purpose, 56 female intermediate Iranian EFL learners were chosen from a total number of 89 through their performance on a sample piloted PET. Based on the result, the students were randomly assigned to one control and one experimental group with 28 participants in each. Prior to the treatment, students took part in a writing test (part of PET) and the Abedi-Schumacher Creativity Test (ACT) as pretests. Both groups underwent the same amount of teaching and the same writing topics during 18 sessions of treatment. The only difference was that the experimental group was engaged in doing task-based writing activities while the control group was not asked to do any kind of tasks. At the end of the treatment, a writing test (another PET) and the ACT were administered to both groups. The results of the statistical analysis demonstrated that learners benefited significantly from task-based writing in terms of both their writing and creativity.

The second one was conducted by Valli & Priya (2016) entitled Task-Based Approach to Develop the Writing Skills in English of Students at College Level. They stated that the college students need to possess effective writing skills in order to become successful professionals. In the global job market, students with good writing skills are getting recruited at the earliest. The students are expected to write effectively when it comes to report writing, letter writing, conference articles, reviews, and project proposals. They mentioned that Task-based approach is a successful approach to develop students' writing skill at any level. It can keep up the students' interest and help them achieve their goals.

The third one was conducted by Hazaroh (2016) entitled Improving Writing Ability of Grade XII Students at SMA Negeri 1 Majenang Using Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in the Academic Year of 2016/2017. She stated that the use of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) could improve the students' writing ability. It had been statically proven by the increase of the students' mean score from the pretest to the posttest. The students' mean score in the pretest is 63,7. Then in the progress test, it increased to 74,4 and in the posttest it became 79,3. She also stated that TBLT also improved the students' behavior toward the teaching and learning process of writing. The students were more enthusiastic and active in the teaching and learning process of writing. By applying TBLT, the students had more chances to explore their ideas and to choose their own words and the teacher had a lot of more opportunities to develop various activities in the classroom.

Teaching academic writing is not an easy task. Based on the findings of three previous researches elaborated above, how if the researchers apply TBL approach to improve their students' academic writing skill? Will it be effective and successful? Considering the research background, the researchers strongly believe that the application of an appropriate approach can improve students' motivation and interest in learning academic writing skill. If their motivation and interest in the learning teaching processes increase, their academic writing skill will definitely improve. The strong belief made the researchers interested in conducting a research entitled The Application of Task-Based Learning (TBL) Approach to Improve Students' Academic Writing Skill.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Task-Based Learning (TBL) Approach

The recent years have seen a growing interest in Task-Based Learning (TBL) approach, and the role of tasks in second or foreign language acquisition. TBL approach makes learners involved in active mutual work on tasks that are reasonable for them and related to their real life experience (Kawachi, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2000). TBL approach has grown steadily in popularity. TBL approach is an approach which emphasizes the successful completion of tasks as both the organizing feature and the basis for assessment of language instruction.

Based on the theory of TBL approach, a number of positive findings have supported the pedagogical advantages of this approach (Napitupulu, 2012). It is acknowledged that TBL approach is potentially motivating, stimulating, empowering, and challenging. Besides, TBL approach lies at the heart of autonomy in language learning. Concerning writing task features, researchers have argued over some characteristics of tasks such as the amount of time available to learners (Chaudron, 1985), whether the task is completed individually or collaboratively (Oxford, 1997), whether the task is reciprocal or nonreciprocal (Ellis, 1991), and concluded that all these factors affect the process of learning how to write. There are different types of tasks which foster the writing performance of the learners. Yet despite their diversity, task-based writing activities are done with the purpose of producing something, reaching a conclusion, or creating a whole picture of something within a preset framework (Tilfarlioglu & Basaran, 2007, p. 135).

Some supporting researches have shown that a task-based approach offers learners an encouraging way to achieve a range of goals in terms of effective language learning and being responsible for deciding what is to be learned, when, how, in what order, and by what means (Napitupulu, 2012). Therefore, students can work on their own, in small groups, or as a class to

complete a project and share their ideas and real life experiences.

The following are the steps of implementing TBL approach according to Willis (1998):

#### 1. Pre-task

In the pre-task, the teacher will present what will be expected of students in the task phase. Additionally, the teacher may prime the students with key vocabulary or grammatical constructs, although, in "pure" task-based learning lessons, these will be presented as suggestions and the students would be encouraged to use what they are comfortable with in order to complete the task. The instructor may also present a model of task by either doing it themselves or by presenting picture, audio, or video demonstrating the task. The purpose of the pre-task phase is to prepare the students to perform the task in ways that will promote acquisition.

#### 2. Task

During the task phase, the students perform the task, typically in small groups, although that is dependent on the type of activity. And unless the teacher plays a particular role in the task, the teacher's role is typically limited to one of an observer or counselor-thus the reason for it being a more student-centered methodology.

#### 3. Planning

Having completed the task, the students prepare either a written or oral report to present to the class. The instructor takes questions and otherwise simply monitors the students.

#### 4. Report

The students then present this information to the rest of the class. Here the teacher may provide written or oral feedback, as appropriate, and the students observing may do the same.

#### 5. Analysis

Here the focus returns to the teacher who reviews what happened in the task, in regards to language. It may include language forms that the students were using, problems that the students had, and perhaps forms that need to be covered more or were not used enough.

#### 6. Practice

The practice stage may be used to cover material mentioned by the teacher in the analysis stage. It is an opportunity for the teacher to emphasize key language.

Seeing that the task-based instruction is student-centered, the teacher plays an important role in providing support and guidance throughout the learning of writing in and out of the classroom. After the experience of writing a meaningful final product, the students have found themselves more capable of expressing their own ideas in English and evaluating peers' work. Simultaneously, they have gradually developed a sense of dignity and

even mental growth, while improving their own language.

### **Writing: Process and Product**

Writing is a productive skill of the English language which needs to be mastered by the students in learning the English language because they need it for academic purpose. Meyers (2005, p. 2) states that writing is an action, a process of discovering and organizing our ideas, putting them on paper, reshaping and revising them. It means that writing is an activity to write something on paper. Meanwhile, Graham & Perin (2007, p. 9) state that writing is a skill that draws on the use of strategies (such as planning, evaluating, and revising text) to accomplish a variety of goals, such as writing a report or expressing an opinion with the support of evidence. Writing is a process of expressing ideas or feelings on a piece of paper which is started by planning, drafting, evaluating and revising in order to tell and inform someone about something.

Costas (2002) states that writing is a process and at the same time a product. As a process, writing may involve brainstorming (looking for an idea or topic to write about), drafting, cooling down, editing, revising, and proofreading. Understandably, such a process might be regarded as time and energy-consuming. It is essential then for the teacher of the English language to try to make sure that the learners also realize that their writing engages these two aspects: a process and product. If the teacher succeeds in this attempt, the learners will certainly allocate more effort and energy in their writing activity in order to produce better compositions with reduced or minimum language problems, for example, missing a determiner before an indefinite, countable, singular noun.

Below are some suggested writing processes which can be implemented by EFL/ESL learners. It should be noted that the order of the stages might be flexible, or sometimes be optional. The processes are elaborated as the following:

### **Brainstorming**

Bram (2012, p. 115) states that the term brainstorming may be defined as an activity to quickly suggest various ideas which may later be used as interesting writing topics or themes. When brainstorming, the learners can write down a word, phrase or clause/sentence. It is also possible to write a code, use a symbol or draw a simple picture in this particular writing process.

### **Drafting**

Bram (2012, p. 116) states that in the drafting process, the learners ought to feel free to write down any ideas coming to their mind. The main purpose here is to record the core messages or ideas to share with others. Other potential issues such as correct spelling and better diction (word choice) can later be fixed where necessary, for instance, in the editing phase. It might be useful to

bear in mind that the result of drafting is a draft and not a final writing product yet. As a result, very often, such a draft needs revising, polishing in order to improve it, including minimizing language mistakes.

### **Cooling Down**

Bram (2012, p. 116) states that in the cooling down stage, the learners might want to leave or seemingly forget their temporary writing results (which may be called drafts) for a while to allow them to cool down. Depending on the availability of time and perhaps on the type of writing task, the duration of the cooling down process can also be flexible, ranging from 15 minutes up to several days, for example. It is expected that after cooling down, the learners will reproach their writing with a fresher mind in order to make improvements (where necessary).

### **Editing**

Bram (2012, p. 116) states that in the editing stage, the learners can try to spot writing mistakes or shortcomings such as comma splices (connecting sentences using a comma) and redundant words, and then correct them. An example of a comma splice is *\*My friend is diligent, she studies every day*. This comma splice, which is ungrammatical, can be improved, for instance, by splitting it into two simple sentences: *My friend is diligent. She studies every day*. It is also possible to correct it by replacing the comma with the conjunction *and*: *My friend is diligent and she studies every day*. Next, an example of redundancy is the phrase *in shape* in the sentence *That plate is round in shape*. Notice that in this particular context, the word *round* automatically refers a shape, and therefore, the words or phrase *in shape* is unnecessary. Thus, the redundant phrase should be omitted and the edited sentence will be read: *That plate is round*.

What is given above is in line with Nation's (2009) stance says that editing involves going back over the writing and making changes to its organization, style, grammatical and lexical correctness, and appropriateness.

### **Revising**

Bram (2012, p. 117) states that sometimes revising is also called editing. Both the editing and revising processes aim to improve a writing product, for example, a one-paragraph composition consisting of six sentences. Probably, it may be said that editing generally tackles minor, easier-to-fix problems, whereas revising might deal with relatively more serious, tougher-to-fix issues, such as, to revise sentence constructions (e.g. changing a passive voice into an active voice) and reorder the sequence of sentences in a paragraph. It can be then be concluded that the revising stage may involve a lot of rewriting.

### **Proofreading**

In the present context, proofreading refers to reading carefully a piece of writing in



order to spot possible weaknesses or mistakes, for instance, missing words, misspellings and ungrammatical sentences. Argante (2004) says that the main objective of proofreading is to check for typo graphical mistakes. When proofreading, the learners need to read word by word and if necessary, they can start from the last word (the end of the composition) to the first word (the beginning of the composition).

To proofread (their own writing products) better, the learners might want to pretend that they are reading others' works (Bram, 2012, p. 117). It should be pointed out that the spelling issue is easy to tackle if the learners prepare their writing using the Microsoft Word processor because they can check their spellings and even grammar electronically. In fact, to proofread manually – the author believes – remains a useful, practical skill.

Therefore, to write correctly, the students should have good ability in writing process so that readers are interested in reading their writing and understand the messages clearly. This is in line with Harmer (2004, p. 3) who states that being able to write is a vital skill for speakers of a foreign language as much as for everyone using their own first language. It means that writing is an important skill because it is also the basic skill for students to communicate with others in written form.

### **The Purposes of Writing**

A writer must know what the purposes of his writing in order to make it understandable. O'Malley & Pierce (1996, pp. 137-138) state that there are three purposes of writing that describe the kinds of students' writing. Those are:

#### **1) Informative Writing**

Informative writing helps writers integrate new ideas and examine existing knowledge. Thus, writers can share knowledge and give information, directions, or ideas. The examples of informative writing include describing events or experiences, and developing new ideas or relationships, such as biography about a well-known someone from the writer's life.

#### **2) Expressive/Narrative Writing**

Expressive writing is a personal or imaginative expression in which the writer produces a story or an essay. This type of writing is often used for entertainment, pleasure, discovery as fun writing, such as poems and short play.

#### **3) Persuasive Writing**

In persuasive writing, writers attempt to influence others and initiate action or change. This type of writing includes evaluation of a book, movie, consumer product and controversial issues.

### **The Categories of Writing**

According to Brown (2001, p. 343), there are five major categories of classroom writing performance. They are:

#### **1) Imitative or writing down**

This type is at the beginning level of learning to write. Students will simply write down English letters, words, and possibly sentences in order to learn the conventions of the orthographic code.

#### **2) Intensive or controlled**

This intensive writing typically appears in controlled, written grammar exercises. This type of writing does not allow much creativity on the part of the writer. A controlled writing is to present in which the students have to alter a given structure throughout.

#### **3) Self-writing**

The most salient instance of this category in classroom is note-taking by the students. Diary or journal writing also falls into this category.

#### **4) Display writing**

For all language students, short answer exercises, essay examinations and research reports will involve an element of display. One of the academic skills of ESL students that they need to master is a whole array of display writing techniques.

#### **5) Real writing**

Some classroom writing aims at the genuine communication of messages to an audience in need of those messages.

Carroll, et al (2001, p. 3) state that there are two types of writing. They are:

1) Reflexive writing is from yourself and to yourself. When you write a reflexive writing, you choose what to write, what format to use, and whether to share your writing with others. Because it is for you, this type of writing can be tentative and exploratory.

2) Extensive writing is generated by others and intended for others. With extensive writing, you purposively write something for someone else to read. Therefore, you pay closer attention to conventions, and your writing is less exploratory and more definitive.

### **Components of Writing**

In writing process, the writer can be said successful if his writing contains some assessments of writing. The following are the components of writing based on Heaton (1988, p. 138) are:

#### **1) Content**

Content is about the logical development of ideas. The ideas should be concrete and thoroughly developed. They should address the main idea. The writer must exclude everything irrelevant to main idea to excellent level of content of writing.

#### **2) Organization**

Organization consists of introduction, body, and conclusion. A writer should write his ideas in appropriate manner for a particular purpose with a particular audience in mind, together with the ability to select and organize other relevant information. A writer is expected to demonstrate an

understanding of how texts are structured as a whole piece of writing.

### 3) Vocabulary

Vocabulary is about the style and quality of expression. It is about how the writer uses precise words. The writer should choose the words clearly, do not be ambiguous.

### 4) Language use

Language use is about all the rules of language application used by the writer. It is also about the ability to write correct and appropriate sentences. The writer should write the sentences correctly based on tenses.

### 5) Mechanical skills

Mechanical skills are about the punctuation, spelling, and all of the graphic conventions of the language.

## Academic Writings

A broad definition of academic writing is any writing done to fulfill a requirement of a college or university. Academic writing is also used for publications that are read by teachers and researchers or presented at seminars or conferences. Research proposals, research papers, research articles, conference papers, books, translations, academic journals, theses, dissertations, and essays are included into academic writings. In this research, the researchers applied TBL approach to improve their students' skills in writing English essays. Bailey (2006, p. 8) states that academic writing is for international students studying in colleges and universities where courses are taught in English. Those students who are not native speakers of English often find the written demands of their courses very challenging. In addition to learning English for academic purposes, they need to adopt new conventions of style, referencing and layout.

Academic writing differs from other types of writing such as journalistic or creative writing. In most forms of academic writing a detached and objective approach is required. An academic argument appeals to logic and provides evidence in support of an intellectual position. It is important to present arguments in logical order and to arrive at conclusions.

## Essay

An essay is a group of paragraphs written about a single topic and a central main idea. It must have at least three paragraphs, but a five-paragraph essay is a common length for academic writing. An essay has three main parts (Zemach & Rumisek, 2005:56). They are:

### 1) The Introduction

This is the first paragraph of an essay. It explains the topic with general ideas. It also has a thesis statement. This is a sentence that gives the main idea. It usually comes at or near the end of the paragraph.

### 2) The Main Body

These are the paragraphs that explain and support the thesis statement and come between the introduction and the conclusion. There must be one or more paragraphs in the main body of an essay.

### 3) The Conclusion

This is the last paragraph of an essay. It summarises or restates the thesis and the supporting ideas of the essay.

The following is the example of an English essay entitled *Positively Proud* written by Theophilia (2014:6-7). This English essay was taken from *Cooking English*, a book which presents a rich compilation of self-expressions and aims to share with readers encouraging and inspiring ideas and stories.

## Positively Proud

by Johanes Abidan Theophilia

One of my friends asked me: Why did you choose the English Language Education Study Program? My parents, my church friends, and my neighbors also asked me the same question. And, I answered their question as follows.

I chose the English Language Education Study Program because when I was in Senior High School, I already wanted to study there because I was good at English lessons. At that time, I could speak English a little bit since Junior High School and I loved English lessons more than other lessons in my school.

And that time, I thought it was a good idea if I took the English Language Education Study Program when I entered a college. I can then increase my English language ability there. I told my idea to my parents and they strongly supported my idea and my dream.

I asked myself: which college should I choose? I searched on the internet to find which college that has a good English language education study program. From the internet, I found that Sanata Dharma University has a better English language education study program than other universities. I asked my mother about it and she said that the English Language Education Study Program in Sanata Dharma University is an excellent choice.

Then, I determined I should be able to enter the English Language Education Study Program of Sanata Dharma University. When the new student application was opened, I submitted my application and I was accepted at Sanata Dharma University. I was very happy because my plans worked smoothly.

And now if people ask me: Are you happy as a student of the English Language Education Study Program of Sanata Dharma University?, I will answer them: Not only happy, but I am very proud and grateful to be an English Language Education Study Program student of Sanata Dharma University

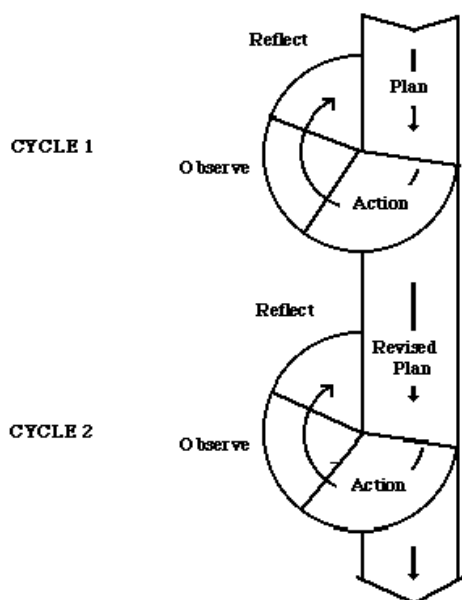
### Research Design

This research is Classroom Action Research (CAR). Burns (2010, p. 2) says that Classroom Action Research is a part of a broad movement that has been going on in education generally for some time. It is related to the ideas of reflective practice and the teacher as researcher. It means that Classroom Action Research is a process of research done by the teacher for repairing and improving the learning in the classroom. Furthermore, McKay (2006, p. 29) says that action research has three major characteristics: it is carried out by practitioners (i.e., classroom teachers), it is collaborative, and it is aimed at changing things. It means that action research can be done by a teacher in a classroom with the help of other teachers to discuss what and how to improve the classroom activities so that the students' achievement will be better.

Action research is different from other more conventional or traditional types research in that it is much focused on individual or small-group professional practice and is not so concerned with making general statement (Wallace, 1998, p. 18).

Kemmis and McTaggart in Burns (2010, p. 7) state that action research typically involves four broad phases in a cycle of research. The four phases in a cycle are: (1) planning, (2) action, (3) observation, and (4) reflection. It can be seen in the figure 3.1

**Figure 3.1 Cyclical Classroom Action Research Model based on Kemmis and McTaggart (in Burns. 2010. p. 9**



The four steps in cycle 1 and cycle 2 are explained as follows:

#### 1) Planning

Planning is the first step of the classroom action research procedure. This activity covers the problem identification. This is the most important step in conducting classroom action research as by knowing the problems, the researchers could find an excellent solution to solve the problems.

#### 2) Action

In this step, the scenario of learning teaching processes of academic writing skill through the application of TBL approach was implemented in the classroom.

#### 3) Observation

Observation was done when the action was being done. In this step, the students' participation and behaviour, and the first researcher's action during the learning teaching processes of academic writing skill were observed by the second researcher who acted as a collaborator in this research. It was done in order to get the actual data and to be used as a reflection to improve the quality of learning teaching processes of academic writing skill through the application of TBL approach.

#### 4) Reflection

The data which were obtained such as the students' writing score, the extent of students' participation and behaviour, and the first researcher's action during the learning teaching processes of academic writing skill through the application of TBL approach were collected and analyzed. In brief, the quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed to assess the students' progress in learning academic writing skill through the application of TBL approach. In this step, the researchers could reflect whether the treatment given to the students could improve their academic writing skill or not.

### The Subject of the Research

The subject of the research are the fourth semester students of English Language Education Study Program of Catholic University of Saint Thomas in the Academic Year of 2017/2018. Catholic University of Saint Thomas is located at Jalan Setia Budi No. 479-F Tanjung Sari, Medan 20132. The numbers of students in that class are 21 students, consisting of 18 female students and 3 male students. There are two reasons why the researchers chose the university as the location of the research. They are: 1) Based on the preliminary observation done by the researchers during teaching the subjects of Writing I-Writing IV, it was found that the students' academic writing skill needs to be improved. 2) Based on the researchers' knowledge, there has never been any research about improving students' academic writing skill through the application of TBL approach conducted at the university.

#### 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings showed that the application of TBL approach could improve students' academic writing skill, particularly writing the English essays. The improvement could be seen from the quantitative data analysis, namely the increasing of the students' mean score in every test of each cycle. The students' mean score in the pretest is 64,86, the posttest of cycle 1 is 74,71, and the posttest of cycle 2 is 86,14.

The qualitative data analysis showed that the learning teaching processes of academic writing skill through the application of TBL approach ran very well. The students were interested in writing English essays. They felt very enjoyable and excited in learning how to write English essays through the application of TBL approach. The result of questionnaire showed that all of the students agreed that if TBL approach was applied to teach them academic writing skill. All these data indicated that the application of TBL approach could improve the students' achievement in writing the English essays successfully.

#### 5. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

To wrap up, the researchers conclude that the application of TBL approach could improve the students' academic writing skill, particularly writing the English essays successfully. The quantitative data analysis, namely the students' mean score increased continuously from 64,86 in the pretest, 74,71 in the posttest of cycle 1, to 86,14 in the posttest of cycle 2. The qualitative data analysis showed that the learning teaching processes of academic writing skill, particularly writing the English essays through the application of TBL approach ran very well. The application of TBL approach could also increase the students' interest, motivation and involvement in the classroom activities.

In line with the conclusions, it is advisable that:

- 1) teachers/lecturers of English language especially whose primary task is to teach writing skill should teach writing by applying TBL approach because this approach can create a pleasant and challenging learning atmosphere so that students feel more motivated and interested in learning writing skill,
- 2) the learners of English are suggested to practise writing more and more. The more they practise writing, the better their writing skill will be. They should be active and enthusiastic in the writing classes and need not to be shy or afraid of making mistakes. They could use TBL approach as one of alternatives to help them improve their academic writing skill, particularly writing the English essays, and
- 3) other writers who are going to conduct much deeper studies on improving students' academic writing skill through the application of TBL

approach; the results of this research are expected to be able to provide them valuable information about how to improve students' academic writing skill through the application of TBL approach.

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